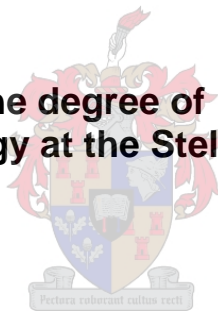


**TRANSFORMING HOPE?  
A THEOLOGICAL–ETHICAL VISION, VIRTUE AND PRACTICE  
FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

**By**

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**Dissertation presented for the degree of Masters of Theology (MTh) in  
Systematic Theology at the Stellenbosch University**



**Promotor: Dr Clint Le Bruyns**

**March 2012**

## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Signature:

Date: 20/2/2012

*“Hope is not a prediction of the future. It is the vision of the present in a state of pregnancy”*

*Erich Fromm*



# “TRANSFORMING HOPE? A THEOLOGICAL–ETHICAL VISION, VIRTUE AND PRACTICE FOR THE COMMON GOOD”

**Selina Hazel Palm** (MTh Systematic Theology)

## **ABSTRACT:**

The aim of this research project is to explore whether there are convincing, contemporary theological traditions within Christianity for conceptualising a socially responsible hope for our current times that can be envisioned, embodied and enacted in our world. It uses a theological-ethical framework of hope as social vision, virtue and practice to unpack the shape of hope systematically. It draws on diverse theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, Albert Nolan, Walter Brueggemann and Flora Keshgegian as well as the Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper to offer multi-denominational and country perspectives on the topic that point towards the social practice of this hope as a central part of the mission of the church in our world today.

This project examines a range of theological arguments for a world transforming Christian hope with concrete this-worldly social implications that is not just about *'pie in the sky when we die'*. It looks for a hope that can balance the demands of an active human responsibility alongside faith in a divine presence that is capable of being incarnated into how we see, are and act as humans in the midst of actual life as it is and not just as an abstract doctrine of belief for another world. It seeks for an ecumenically endorsed hope that can enable us to be active contributors to the wider human projects of social transformation clearly needed at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century enabling us to interpret Christian mission as hope in action within our world.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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To the great theologian of hope – Jürgen Moltmann and his influence on my own faith and practice and that of many others I know to embody a hope that reflects the crucified God for the broken and battered in the world within which we live. Without his work, this reflection on hope would not have been penned.

Finally, to the hundreds of people across the African continent and beyond whom I have had the privilege of meeting whose words and deeds embrace a world-transforming and concrete hope for our times and behind them to the source of endless possibility that stands amidst and beyond all that we can achieve or imagine.

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## INTRODUCTION

“We live in hope as a fish in water or bird in air. It is our atmosphere. Where however do we find a well founded hope which does not desert us and is not merely illusion?”<sup>1</sup>

This research project aims to explore whether Christian hope can provide motivation and grounding for social transformation in our world today as a social asset for our current times. To do this, it unpacks a theological understanding of hope with a specific focus on its relation to social transformation in our world. It question is whether we can still speak meaningfully about this-worldly and social dimensions of Christian hope in the context of our 21<sup>st</sup> century global realities. To answer this question, it draws critically on a number of contemporary theological contributions under the methodological framework of social vision, virtue and practice to conceptualise a socially responsible Christian hope for our times that can be envisioned, embodied and enacted in our world as a core part of the church’s mission as a ‘community of hope’.

At the start of the 21st century, our planet faces a significant range of global challenges and this research project suggests that hope is a necessary ingredient in our efforts towards social transformation. Without the hope that social change for the better is both possible and desirable within our world, there will be little motivation for our costly human engagement in working towards it. This research was inspired by the researcher’s own experiences of hope-in-action in her work in the African continent amongst poor and marginalised communities. It briefly outlines some possible implications for social transformation of this hope and points to the example of the organisation, HOPEHIV for whom the researcher works. The main focus of the research is the theological shape of hope as an important area for systematic reflection as this researcher believes that attitudes to ‘Christian’ hope are diverse and contradictory and strongly influence the practical outworking of hope. The project uses ‘Christian hope’ to mean the shape of human hope that the Christian tradition points towards, as congruent with the hope that characterised the life and words of Jesus<sup>2</sup>.

This research project seeks to offer a well-founded alternative to prevalent, popular, but in the view of the researcher, potentially damaging approaches to ‘Christian’ hope in order to offer a grounded encouragement to Christians seeking a socially responsible form of hope for our world today. It aims to gently challenge Christians who may hold distorted views of hope and also offer a response to those outside Christianity who seek to dismiss Christian hope as unhelpful to social change and mere ‘pie in the sky when we die’.<sup>3</sup> It suggests that the resilience of hope is ‘hardwired’ into our human nature and that all explorations of hope can begin with this empirical experienced human phenomenon. A recent article in *Time* magazine<sup>4</sup> concurs, arguing that the belief that the future will be better than the past and present (the optimism bias) abides in every race, religion and socio-economic bracket. Though collectively we may often become pessimistic about social issues, the article claims that our private hopes remain incredibly resilient. It points out that as human beings, we need to be able to imagine alternative, better realities and to believe that we can achieve them allowing us to engage in mental time travel and construct positive images of possible future scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Human Identity in Christian Faith*. Stanford California: Leyland Junior University.1976, 23.

<sup>2</sup> This research project uses the lens of theology to explore the theme of hope but also seeks to avoid excessive use of formal theological language or categories in order to make the project more accessible to those not from a theological background.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York. Routledge, 1999, 208.

<sup>4</sup> Tali Sharot. “The Optimism Bias”. *Time Magazine*. June 6 2011, 34-39.

## The motivation for my research question

“A Christian understanding of hope can be universal and of potential interest to people of various faiths and without faith”.<sup>5</sup>

The topic of hope was chosen by the researcher due to her work on social development issues in Africa over the last 10 years (particularly with the charity HOPEHIV for the last 6 years). This work has given her the opportunity to meet and work with hundreds of people, both Christians and non-Christians in multiple organisations, working for social transformation around the issue of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the context of this work, the researcher has encountered many practical examples of a concrete hope-in-action that has frequently had significant and powerful ramifications for efforts towards social transformation in suffering communities. This enacted hope has, for many of the people with whom she works, often been deeply rooted in and inspired by a Christian faith that has pointed individuals beyond themselves and into a desire to serve those in need in the present by challenging and transforming damaging social structures and working towards a better justice in our broken world for all those that suffer.

This project attempts to reflect more deeply and systematically on the form of ‘social hope’ that often seems to both stimulate and ground these many hopeful actions and connect it explicitly to the faith tradition and resources of Christianity. This is the faith tradition both most predominant within many African countries, the one to which the researcher herself and many of the partners she works with, is most familiar with and committed to and one of the main religions that has consistently held hope up as a core value within its own tradition. The organisation HOPEHIV has a philosophy grounded in the belief that hope is an important ingredient in the social transformation of our world, especially for those who suffer most within it. For many of its stakeholders, their view of this hope is grounded in Christian faith. This project therefore critically explores the shape of Christian hope to establish to what extent, if at all it can be a potential force or asset for ongoing social transformation in our world today. It seeks to enable Christians to “be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have”<sup>6</sup> in a way that emphasises a social and concrete hope for the world in which we live.

This research does not however intend to suggest that only Christians can manifest forms of authentic hope or that being a Christian somehow automatically makes you a better ‘hoper’ than others. It seeks instead to offer a meaningful contribution to the wider discussion on hope within the public realm today as well as within Christian circles that can articulate more carefully what a Christian theology of hope might offer the wider public debate on hope. It aims to help Christians reconnect more deeply with the hope-filled resources within their tradition and to embody this world-affirming hope both in their own lives and in solidarity with others.

“By writing a meditation on hope which seeks light in Christian principles but tries continually to appeal to reason and common experience, I resist a conviction, strenuously uphold by both radical secularists and by many serious Christians, that a vast chasm divides Christian faith from all non-Christian attitudes”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Glenn Tinder, *The Fabric of Hope*, Atlanta: Scholars Press: 1999, 5.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3:15. All Bible references in this research are taken from the *New International Version Bible*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Tinder, *Fabric of Hope*, 6.



The motivator for my specific research question emerged from a realisation, as I talked to many people about HOPEHIV, that hope in general and Christian hope in particular often meant quite different things. It became apparent that the concept of religious hope could be interpreted in many ways, not all of them conducive to active social transformation or in line with experienced human limits such as finitude or disease. For some people, having hope was connected primarily and ultimately to faith in Jesus Christ. With Jesus, hope was a reality, but without Jesus, there was no real hope. Any approach that did not point explicitly towards this typically otherworldly and often exclusive form of hope in Jesus for salvation as the main dimension of Christian hope were seen as failing in their articulation of hope. For others however, concrete forms of hoping were manifested in simpler human, this-worldly social terms for both them and others; hope for an education, hope for a safe place to live, hope for opportunities, hope for a family with these seen as authentic outworkings of Christian hope for human flourishing in their own right. However these were often framed, especially by formal churches, as secondary at best, and a distraction from more pressing issues of salvation at worst and were often engaged in 'under the radar' by lay Christians in response to the human needs and injustices that they saw around them rather than as a theologically articulated form of 'mission'. Other Christians became disillusioned by the seemingly passive nature of religious hope and embraced secular forms of hope as active this-worldly alternatives. Many embodied some combination of hopes, with a range of human hopes nestling often conflictually amidst more 'religious' hopes for salvation and eternal life. This seeming diversity of attitudes to Christian hope prompted further exploration of what has been termed 'distortions' of Christian hope<sup>8</sup> and in response to these, a search for a theologically credible perspective on hope that can be genuinely embraced by Christians as congruent with both their faith tradition and their desire for a responsible hope with concrete this-worldly social implications.

The researcher noted that many churches struggled to define their identity in relation to other (often secular) movements for social transformation around them. Some took a confrontational approach to all other interventions, believing that they alone had the true hope and that all others were misguided especially any advocating 'secular' approaches involving human autonomy or liberal principles (e.g. human rights)<sup>9</sup>, Others took a more enthusiastic stance, embracing uncritically the fashionable philosophies and ideologies of the day as far more relevant than the theological doctrines of the Christian past. Still others sought to combine an involvement in social transformation with a clear commitment to Christian values, often ending up with an uneasy tension between different ministries where while some were promoting the realisation of hopes for liberation and justice in practical this-worldly ways, others were proclaiming salvation in narrow ways that suggested that human agency or concern with this-world was ultimately futile. Sometimes a specific and exclusive form of 'Christian development' was endorsed in competition with secular development. This project aims to provide a systematic contribution towards a form of this-worldly hoping that can be embraced by churches as an active part of their mandate in our world today. This researcher believes that this is already happening in the practical work of many Christians and has never been fully absent from the church but that it can benefit from a theoretical reinforcement that can influence the theological education of those entering a global world of social challenges with which their lives and churches will inevitably engage.

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<sup>8</sup> This paper draws on 'distortions' of hope presented by N.T Wright and Jürgen Moltmann. This notion of distorted hope is further explored in David Kelsey's recent theological anthropology *Eccentric existence*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2009, 567-602 where he terms sins as distortions of "hopeful existential hows". While this analysis is beyond the scope of this project, he points towards a balance between active and passive hoping which he aligns to the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'.

<sup>9</sup> A number of conversations with faith based organisations in many countries prior to this research showed me that high levels of suspicion of human rights and other seemingly secular approaches to human flourishing is still strong amongst many Christians.

## Project Methodology

In order to explore the relevance of Christian hope to social transformation, the researcher unexpectedly found herself within the area of theology termed 'systematics' rather than in the area of community development initially envisaged. There is an irony to this as many theologians of hope<sup>10</sup> point to the fact that hope itself is an anti-systems concept that only comes into its own when our human systems break down and is most at home in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity. As this research progressed, it also became apparent that hope has a paradoxical character that systematic unpacking can at times struggle to convey. Nevertheless, the researcher has found systematics, with its dual emphasis on dogmatics and ethics, a useful framework to structure this project as it points behind the words that we use to the assumptions that often lie behind our (especially religious) words and helps to reflect critically on the connection between our theories and actions as encouraged by liberation approaches<sup>11</sup>. With a word as overused as hope, a more rigorous analysis can be helpful. It can assist us to reflect on the role that hope has played in the Bible, church and wider Christian tradition and what we can draw from this for our present context. This project uses a vision, virtue, practices framework used by Dirkie Smit<sup>12</sup> as well as a number of other theologians.

This framework raises three important ethical questions:

- 1) What is the good life, what is a good society (vision)
- 2) What is a person of good character (virtue)
- 3) What constitutes responsible action in a particular situation (practice)

This research project applies the above methodological framework to the topic of social hope, unpacking the idea of a hopeful social vision of the common good, exploring the nature of hope as a virtue embodied in the person of good character and finally, looking at how we can practice hope-in-action in a way that is responsible in the light of the particular social situations of our times. This vision-virtue-practice framework provides a useful way of structuring the theme of hope that recognises one of the core insights of systematic theology – that the way in which we think about the concepts we use has concrete relevance to both our ethical character formation and our actions. In this way social transformation themes that may seem to fall more naturally under practical theology are often deeply embedded in systematic assumptions. It also encourages us to seek towards an internal consistency with regard to Christian hope. The sort of hope that we act out in our lives ought, to be authentic, to also be the one that we confess in our beliefs. In this way systematics is used as a method to help us think more clearly about hope but with the system as a means to an end and not as end in itself. In the spirit of the father of modern theologies of hope, Jürgen Moltmann, this research seeks for a theology *of* hope and not merely a theology *about* hope. He terms his works as 'contributions' to a wider ongoing conversation and it is in that spirit that this research contributes its small reflections on hope. This project first explores hope as social vision, picking up on the 'way of seeing' that Christian hope points us towards in Chapter 3, then moves on to unpack hope as a social virtue in Chapter 4, looking at what it means to embody Christian hope in our character and concludes in Chapter 5 by exploring hope as a responsible social practice for our times.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Jacques Ellul. *Hope in time of abandonment*. New York: The Seabury Press. 1977, 174.

<sup>11</sup> Praxis starts its theologising from below, looking first at concrete practices to then inform theological reflection that can lead back into reshaped practice. Pillay, M. Nadar, S. Le Bruyns, C. (eds) *Ragbag Theologies*, Sun Press, 2009, 273. Here, Denise Ackermann, defines praxis as the creative and critically reflective activity through which we make sense of the world.

<sup>12</sup> This framework is attributed to Dirk J Smit, "Reformed Ethics and Economic Justice" *NGTT*. Vol 37, No 3. 1996, 438-455. It was recommended to the researcher for this project by her supervisor, Clint Le Bruyns who has also used this framework in his research.

## Content of Research Project

“Hope empowers us to enter into solidarity with the groaning creation and to persist in the struggle for the renewal of all things”<sup>13</sup>

This research project focuses on hope seen through a Christian lens. It does however seek to ground this in the empirical phenomenon of hope as a human reality and then build its Christian analysis onto this basic ontology of hope drawing not only on theology but also on philosophy. This is a different starting point to some theologians who might start from the initial viewpoint of Biblical revelation and not from mere human experience. This project explicitly argues for Christian hope as a hope that is in *critical solidarity* with many other forms of human hope. In this way it seeks to make its contribution on hope intelligible to those who do not sit within the Christian frame of reference that can inform a wider interdisciplinary debate on the topic.

The project has a specific concentration on hope as a social phenomenon – as social vision, social virtue and social practice. This does not mean to deny that hope has important individual implications as well but that these are not the focus of this project. However the research does suggest that especially from a theological perspective, it is often argued that hope is most authentically experienced as a social reality and not merely an individual one. However this also goes to the heart of more complex questions of the human person and whether at the heart of our selves we are individually constituted or whether we are in fact ‘relational selves’ whose very sense of identity is grounded not merely individually but in relation to others (including the Divine). Whilst this complex subject is primarily beyond the scope of this project, it does offer a potential alternative lens to typically dualistic thinking where we set our own needs, desires and hopes above or against those of other individuals in an inevitable conflict of hopes. The focus on social hope attempts to counter the tendency which the researcher feels abounds in much popular Christian theology today to focus on hope as an individual quality related primarily to personal salvation in the hereafter. The project also concentrates on exploring this-worldly implications of Christian hope and does not explicitly engage with the more speculative questions in relation to hope that can emerge from exploring its post-worldly, post-death dimensions, typically subsumed under the wider category of eschatology. This is not to say that this area of research is not important but that it’s not the focus of this project and has been explored by others in detail.

This project has chosen to draw from multiple theological sources across diverse countries, times and denominational backgrounds rather than to focus merely on one theologian of hope. It is aware that this could open the research project up to charges of excessive breadth and as a result a corresponding lack of focus down on one particular theological strand of argument<sup>14</sup>. However it believes that the emerging ‘congruence of convictions’ around a socially responsible form of Christian hoping increasingly pointed to by a multiplicity of diverse denominational voices is a critical step towards the wider endorsement of this-worldly hoping within the mainstream tradition of Christianity enabling an increasingly united voice. Into a context, which this project will claim is marked by an increasing depletion of social hope in our world, it will be argued that the Christian tradition has a powerful contribution to make to a meaningful vision of hope in our times.

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Migliore, *Faith seeking Understanding*. Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans 1991, 247.

<sup>14</sup> The researcher completed an unpublished research project as part of her Post-Graduate Diploma at the University of Stellenbosch in 2009 focusing on the theology of hope of Jürgen Moltmann. This inspired the fuller exploration of hope as the subject of this research.

Nevertheless if this vision is overly inhibited by internal sparring and academic debate within Christian circles, the wider public space is far less likely to either engage with or respond to the genuine resources within this tradition to the probable detriment of all. This project therefore seeks to present what it feels are strong and compelling theological arguments around hope as vision, virtue and practice drawing on theologians that it feels have clear, if contested, contributions on hope to offer. Inevitably in a project of this size, more is always left out than can be included and there continue to be many theologians of hope whose views have influenced my research and its conclusions whom I have only been able to briefly reference here.

In line with the disciplinary perspective of this project, this research has focused mainly on 20<sup>th</sup> century contributions on hope from systematic theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann (German) and Douglas Hall (Canadian). It has also specifically drawn on what might be termed contextual theologians, also writing systematically but from within a 'liberationist' perspective such as Flora Keshgegian (USA) and Albert Nolan (South African) as well as exploring Christian philosophers on hope, most notably the work of the Catholic, Josef Pieper (German). It references Biblical theologians of hope in order to ensure that its reflections on hope remain true to the main source text of the Christian tradition, drawing on the insights of the American Old Testament scholar and preacher, Walter Brueggemann and the English New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop, N.T Wright. This research project looks at a series of questions in relation to social hope including what Christians hope for, what grounds their hope, what is the horizon of that hope and then to unpack and nurture the virtue of hope. Finally it turns to the need for active practices of hope in our world today in ways that contribute towards the urgent need for social transformation in our world today. According to South Africa theologian Klaus Nürnberger<sup>15</sup>, at the heart of the Christian story lies the claim that what reality ought to be does not equate to what it is. Our experience of this brokenness in our present time is often what inspires a resilient active hope for the possibility of change in the direction of the possible future.

## Hope and Eschatology

"From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope".<sup>16</sup>

The topic of Christian hope sits within the wider area of eschatology which The Oxford English Dictionary defines as "concerned with 'the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell' – none of which are explored in any significant way in this research. This project suggests with Ernst Conradie, that the proliferation of eschatological typologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular has in the main tended to inhibit a clear vision of Christian hope and therefore it explicitly avoids this contested area in its approach. This project therefore does not present any overview of the various eschatological debates that have characterised the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have significant implications for how Christian hope is often conceptualised<sup>17</sup>. Judeo-Christian eschatologies have typically viewed the end times as the wider consummation or 'perfection' of God's creation of the world. According to ancient Hebrew belief, life takes a linear (and not cyclical) path; the world began with God and is constantly headed toward God's final goal for creation. This attitude to eschatology is pointed to in this research by Moltmann who emphasizes its

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<sup>15</sup> Klaus Nürnberger. "Towards a new heaven and a new earth" in *Doing Theology in Context* (eds) John W De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, Maryknoll: Orbis. 1994, 139.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Moltmann. *Theology of Hope*. London: SPCK. 2002, 2.

<sup>17</sup> A detailed overview of the eschatological debates of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular and their implications for Christian hope today can be found in Ernst Conradie, *Hope for the earth: Vistas on a new century*. Eugene: WIPF & Stock. 2005. See especially 118-184.

importance in relation to Christian hope, but is then problematised by Keshgegian for the inevitably linear way in which it often structures our thinking on hope. However the decision to explicitly avoid analysing the area of eschatology should not suggest that eschatological hope, as understood by Moltmann to be the core of Christian faith encompassing everything Christians believe and not merely the traditional last things is not relevant to this project. Moltmann sees eschatological hope as an orientation, a way of understanding the world in the light of the future that is still to come. He and others make a clear link between eschatology and ethics<sup>18</sup> where eschatological symbols express a vision for society as a whole, providing a way of seeing through an ultimate frame of reference that can elicit in us the will to strive towards the eschaton. The aesthetic attraction of these powerful critical symbols can inspire us to live according to the values of God's new creation and call for a transformation of the present world in the light of this vision, acting not as sedative, but a stimulus to earthly action as a present manifestation of what is still to come in full.

This form of eschatological hope is reflected indirectly time and again throughout this research, challenging the tendency of Christianity to relegate eschatological hope merely to end times concepts and instead drawing on the tendency to always go beyond the horizons of what we can see as a trait essential to all forms of true hoping and not merely a separate and 'religious' form of hope. In this way the relationship of hope to transcendence is both pointed to and also questioned. For many theologians of hope, maintaining the transcendent dimension or 'horizon' of hope is critical and in this way they often point to what is termed the 'vertical' or other worldly dimension of hope, challenging attempts to reduce hope merely to a this-worldly phenomenon. This project, by focusing on this-worldly dimensions and impact of Christian hope could be accused of doing this itself. However, it is the contention of this research that the form of theological hope presented here does maintain an eschatological dimension – even while problematising it most clearly within the work of Keshgegian - by pointing at all times towards hope as an inherently transcending concept. As Paul reminds us, the hope of the Christian is a 'hope against hope' that goes beyond all that we can know. He reminds us that 'if it is for this life only that we hope then of all men we are most to be pitied'<sup>19</sup>. This project nevertheless suggests that if our hope is not also for this life, we are also equally in need of challenge as Christians today. To quote the Christian Aid slogan, 'We believe in life before death'. An endlessly deferred hope that merely has implications for the next life and world is, in this view of this research, equally to be pitied for "a hope deferred makes the heart sick but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."<sup>20</sup>

## Hope and Mission

The other main area of theology specifically explored into this research project on hope is that of missiology. This subject is discussed mainly in the final chapter of this research where the researcher explores the idea of hope as a shared social practice within Christianity in order to connect it to the practical dimension of hopeful social action in our world. This section argues that in the light of a needed reframing of mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, hope and the shape we give it, can have a critical role to play in this discussion and in the social practices which may emerge out of it to characterise the church in the coming century. But before we can make a case for the relevance of this research into a theological form of social hoping, this project now begins with the context we face today in order to situate this research question amidst the signs of our times.

<sup>18</sup> See Conradie, *Hope for Earth*, 315-337 where he explores the social impact of eschatological hope as well as other theologians such as Carl Braaten who also explore the links between eschatology and ethics drawing on the thought of Wolfhart Pannenburg in particular.

<sup>19</sup> Corinthians 15:19. NIV.

<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 13:12.

## Chapter One

### THE CRISIS OF HOPE

‘One great characteristic of our times however throughout the world and particularly in South Africa is despair. We live in an age of despair.’<sup>21</sup> “

#### 1.1 An Age of Despair

Jesus counseled his disciples to ‘discern the signs of the times’<sup>22</sup>. In a modern global world very far removed from biblical times, this sort of contextualisation is critical to ensure that the gospel can continue to have life affirming relevance and meaning for those whom it seeks to engage today. As the recent Palestinian Kairos document poignantly asks. ‘How do we make sure the Gospel remains good news for people...a bringer and source of life...and not a harbinger of death’.<sup>23</sup> Reading the ‘signs of the times’ has frequently been co-opted by the Christian right wing apocalyptic movement in the USA as a particular and often vicious way of scapegoating particular people groups (usually homosexuals, Muslims and women who have abortions) as responsible for the social ills of our current world. This research project challenges closed and apocalyptic ways of reading the signs of the times as a theologically suspect, highly damaging and social inflammatory approach. It suggests instead a much more humble project of reading the signs as argued for by the South African theologian Albert Nolan,<sup>24</sup> merely that good theology must be sensitive to and aware of the wider human context within which it sits at any particular time to enable its theologising to engage fully with and respond appropriately to the changing human and non-human needs encountered in our current times as a ‘word’ that is addressed to living humans. The research is not contextual in the more specific sense of being prescriptively committed to serve the interests of a particular human group although it explicitly seeks to be aware of and sensitive to the specific social issues of our times and those most affected by them.

“Notably lacking in the modern world is the quiet confidence that signals hope”.<sup>25</sup> At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the theologian Russel Botman suggests that humans face an ‘unprecedented crisis of hope’.<sup>26</sup> Despite high level of affluence, political and economic stability and technical improvements, it is often in the Northern countries that this crisis of hope can be seen, with increased levels of anxiety, stress and depression. Sobering public realities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (wars, environmental crisis, the nuclear age, multiple genocides, systemic inequality) and the ability to broadcast these realities globally contributes to a sense of significant public hopelessness in society at large. For many this hopelessness is rooted in an increasing scepticism that despite relentless ‘political spin’ there is in fact little real possibility of significant change for the better in our world. ‘Without the real possibility of change, hope is sheer foolishness’.<sup>27</sup> The positive value of hope itself has been challenged with nihilist philosophies eschewing hope altogether and existentialism seeing the historical process as ultimately meaningless and any historical hopes as merely illusory. Hope is variously described as ‘a vice, poisoned gift, a curse on humans, a promise that could not be kept, a beautiful idea bereft of any concrete reality, a folly, an opiate and even as an enemy – the worst of evils’<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Mt 16:3-4. (prt) NIV.

<sup>23</sup> Kairos Palestine: *A Moment of Truth*. 2010, 8. Internet at [www.kairospalestine.ps](http://www.kairospalestine.ps), accessed 07/10/2011.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Nolan. *Hope in an Age of Despair* Maryknoll NY: Orbis: 2009, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Tinder. *Fabric of Hope*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Russel Botman, “Hope as the Coming Reign of God, 70. in Walter Brueggemann, (ed) *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context* Westminster. John Knox Press. 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Erich Fromm. *The Revolution of Hope*. NY: Harper and Row. 1974,123.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Schumacher. *A Philosophy of Hope; Josef Pieper and the contemporary debate on hope*. NY: Fordham Press: 2003, 1.

Writing in the 1990s, the Canadian theologian Douglas Hall<sup>29</sup> explores this crisis of hope in more depth. He suggests that despite the emphasis of Western modernity on the future, many people grapple with a sense of ‘*radical futurelessness*’ where global threats like climate change, over population and nuclear war trigger a high level of anxiety in people about an ongoing human future. This anxiety can easily set off a reactionary focus on both the present experience and the private space which feel more controllable. Hall highlights increased drug use, rampant consumerism and other forms of escapism as symptoms of a withdrawal from and scepticism about the possibilities of improvement in the public realm<sup>30</sup>. He also points out that although many Christians feel it is their duty to be ‘hopeful’, it is in fact hard to find sincere *historical hope* in the modern church. In this way Hall builds on the trenchant 1960’s claim of Jürgen Moltmann, the acknowledged 20<sup>th</sup> century father of a theology of hope, that Christian hope had emigrated from the church to the world & that for the sake of both the world and the church it needed to be reclaimed<sup>31</sup>. Thirty years on, Hall similarly argues that many churches retreat from the world with its array of daunting social problems to instead ‘locate their hopes in inner sanctuaries of spiritual peace or post-historical promises’<sup>32</sup> and that to do so is to abandon Christianity’s significant tradition of worldly hopes. Hall and Moltmann both express a strong theological concern that the Christian tradition of comprehensive worldly hope is being steadily eroded by this tendency. These are two of the voices on which this research will draw in its exploration of Christian hope and its implications for the church in the context of the challenging global social issues of our times.

“It is a crisis of humanity; three quarters of the world live under inhumane conditions, humanity is in such great distress and insecurity that its leaders believe they must keep 30 million men in arms. The church cannot be a stranger to such distress, to such institutionalised injustice; it cannot remain deaf to the cries of the people especially of the humble and the poor.”<sup>33</sup>

The Catholic writer, Anthony Kelly<sup>34</sup> warns that in our times, “Hope seems to be fast becoming a non-renewable resource”. According to many contemporary writers, the prevailing climate of the global world in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is that of despair (literally meaning the negation, diminution or dearth of hope). Hall<sup>35</sup> contrasts the hidden covert despair of “*those who have*” and the open overt despair of “*those who don’t have*” for whom despair is often an unavoidable reality. He suggests that meaninglessness and despair are in fact a key global challenge facing the human condition in our times. He is aware that successful people are likely to find such language exaggerated, as to them such bleak language to describe the world (rather than just pockets of it) seems inappropriate if not ridiculous. He points out however that theologically, despair is not about feeling gloomy, but is instead an underlying spiritual condition - *acedia* (a deadly sin in medieval times) that he sees as heavily repressed in our modern affluent cultures. ‘It masquerades under a guise of wellbeing so persuasive as to deceive even the mask wearer’. Ernst Conradie also reiterates the dangers of this attitude, ‘despair can be a self fulfilling prophecy when it leads people to think that action is futile.’<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Hall *Confessing the Faith*. Fortress Press. 1996, 454-519.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Ellul picks up on this in *Hope in time of abandonment*, 13-14 where his term ‘future-sick’ points to the tendency in many young people to run away from the future and absorb themselves only in the present. ‘They dream but do not hope’.

<sup>31</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 1. See also *Hope for the Church: Moltmann in dialogue with practical theologians*. Abingdon. 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *Confessing*, 455.

<sup>33</sup> Raimon Panikkar, Interview in *The Christian Century* Aug 16 2000. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*. NY Maryknoll: Orbis. 2006, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas Hall, “Despair as Pervasive Ailment” in W. Brueggemann (ed) *Hope for the World*. John Knox Press 2001. 13-20.

<sup>36</sup> Ernst.M. Conradie “Eschatological dimensions of a Theology of Life” in Van Egmond and Van Keulen (Eds.) *Christian Hope in Context Vol 1*. Amsterdam: Meinema. 2001, 163-204.

This suggested scarcity of hope in our times can seem initially hard to comprehend. In the West today many people have a standard of affluence unprecedented in history. Medical and technological achievements within the 20<sup>th</sup> century have both transformed our sense of well being and extended our choices. And yet the optimistic post enlightenment myth of progress that reached its height in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been dealt a sobering blow by the multiple social atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A brief resurgence of optimism in the 1960s coincided with burgeoning secular movements of hope, the disestablishment of the church, and post colonial and human rights liberation movements which rose up to offer new secular forms of social hope, many taking place in response to newly identified and ongoing global social challenges. Forty years on however, much of the social optimism of the 1960s seems like a brief moment of drug-fuelled naiveté. The multiple global threats that characterise the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (nuclear attack, terrorism, political dictators, global poverty and environmental destruction to name only a few) alongside a communications revolution that brings these issues to our doorsteps daily, encourages heightened states of social anxiety.

The myth of technological and industrial progress is increasingly experienced by people at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not as liberating as it has often been in the past but as a trap from which there is no alternative<sup>37</sup>. Many of the most damaging social problems we face globally today seem to be man-made side effects or reactions to our often controlling and progressive technological visions. As a result, many people today are retreating into merely individual hopes for their private lives, abandoning a clear sense of larger social hopes and actively suspicious of ideologies (especially religious ones, increasingly considered only a feature of private life) that seek to influence the wider public space. Many of our social hopes as humans have dwindled and shrunk, first narrowing to the confines of what we felt we had the ability to control and now increasingly anxious about what our need for control can do to our world.

“Our hopes are the measure of our greatness. When they shrink, we ourselves are diminished. The story of American hopes over the last two centuries is one of increasing narrowness...the horizon of hope has shrunk to the scale of self pampering.” Miroslav Volf<sup>38</sup>

This research project does not ground its starting point in an overriding pessimistic view of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or seek to suggest that it has not also had its social successes or movements of genuine social hope. As well as being the century of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and Mugabe – it has also been the century of concrete beacons of historical hope such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jnr and Nelson Mandela. Nevertheless it aims to highlight at its start an increasing concern by contemporary writers that attitudes of genuine social hope are increasingly hard to find at the end of the century. Many historical sources of modern optimism, such as technological progress, development, decolonisation, the fall of apartheid, whilst offering many tangible gains to be celebrated, have also had a more ambiguous side and have failed to offer the all-encompassing solutions that had been hoped for. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we face an increasingly globalised world where pre-modern, modern and post-modern attitudes all co-exist, often in conflictual and power-hungry tension. It is a world radically different from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has been termed the age of social transformation. It is to this idea of the need for social transformation within our global world that we now briefly turn to set the scene for this research project more fully.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Progress and Abyss: Remembrances of the future of the modern world” in William Katerburg and Miroslav Volf (eds) *The Future of Hope*. WB Eerdmans: 2004. 3-26. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Being*, Fortress: 2009, 22-45.

<sup>38</sup> Miroslav Volf, (commenting on Andrew Delbanco’s *The Real American Dream*) in *The Christian Century* August 16-23, 2000,837.



## 1.2 The Need for Social Transformation

“As people of planet earth we can sense how our hitherto different and often conflicting histories are now being woven together. A sense of one world history is not the result merely of a sense of common threat (ecological, economic or political). It is powered also by a new aspiration to a new global common good. It dares to suggest the possibility of a new, truly human future in which past enmities can fall away and millions of the forgotten poor can come to share in the still abundant resources of the earth.”<sup>39</sup>

At the start of the 21st century, humans are aware of the interconnectedness of our world like never before. Tidal waves in Asia have sent earthquakes rushing through New Zealand, the floundering of the euro threatens all our global markets, the reverberations of the economic crisis shake local economies in African rural villages and the lack of consensus at Copenhagen on climate change may have irreversible implications for our planetary survival as a species. Nation state budgets and power often pale into insignificance besides multi-national corporations who control budgets twice the size of some countries. At the same time the world has become a true global village for millions. Villages in Africa compare crop prices on cell phones, former child soldiers in Uganda learn web based computer skills online attached to international universities, news stations offer minute by minute updates on our world and our ability to connect face to face with human beings and their stories on the other side of the world through international plane travel and social networking has become an experienced possibility for millions.

Nevertheless we also enter the 21st century with a heightened awareness of the serious range of challenging social issues our world faces. From the threat of nuclear war and constant violent conflicts, to the HIV pandemic, the terrorist threat and the environmental crisis as well as increased rates of crime and social dislocation in many parts of the world where inequality continues to deepen. We have become less sure that our technological and scientific skills have what it takes to fix these issues. With the collapse of most communist regimes, many poor people experience global capitalism less as a liberatory and freeing system for all than as a dehumanising trap that often seems to perpetuate inequalities from which there is no alternative<sup>40</sup>. These issues can lead to feelings of powerlessness and anxiety which fuel either apocalyptic narratives or a withdrawal from wider social issues into private worlds that feel controllable and humane.

Into this globalised world, there has also been a resurgence of interest in the idea of the common good.<sup>41</sup> Some of this may be countering what is often seen as the excessive individualism of the North, but it also seems to recognise that in this highly interconnected world, some form of global ethic is also in our best interest as a species. The discourse of human rights has in the last 50 years won significant gains in this area, but is still accused by many of being an overly individualistic tool that bears the marks of western imperialism in a way that can undermine wider ethical concerns relating both to the common good and our common future. Theologians such as Kelly, Nolan and Moltmann all point to this increased sense of a one world future as powering a new aspiration towards a global common good. They argue that the eschatological symbol of the Kingdom of God fuelled by the Christian tradition of hope for the world can

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<sup>39</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Moltmann, “Progress and Abyss”, 14-16 explores this downside of global capitalism as experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in more detail.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Journey towards the Common Good*. John Knox Press, 2011 points us toward what he terms a crisis of the common good which he defines as ‘that sense of communal solidarity that binds all in a common destiny’. He warns that those living in anxiety or fear of scarcity have little time for the common good despite the concern with wider questions of human dignity, flourishing and wellbeing that often go beyond individual self interest and with which many of our ethical dilemmas are bound up in our world today.

potentially offer a helpful contribution to this discussion as well as offering a fruitful argument for human engagement and responsibility in wider society. Whilst religious traditions in general and Christianity in particular have at times been seen as framing transformation and hope only in terms of the individual or of being focused merely on other-worldly and extra-historical concerns such as life after death, it is the contention of this research project that this is in fact a severe distortion of authentic Christian hope. Empirically there is evidence that religious traditions have had huge influence over social structures in human history and can contribute significantly towards the human search for the common good in critical solidarity with others. However Christianity's chequered history with the highly ambiguous legacy of colonial mission and many other shameful public acts, encourages us to handle this with care. Miroslav Volf points to ways in which Christian faith often 'malfunctions' in the public arena and the need to avoid this in the future.<sup>42</sup>

There is a growing interest in social transformation as a popular if still illusive term in our times today. It's on the agendas of universities, think tanks, governments, businesses, churches and especially the increasingly large third sector. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is increasingly replacing the language of development and receives support from the secular post-development movement. It challenges outdated notions of developed countries in the North as successful and developing nations in the South as merely playing catch up along the well worn linear path to progress as a contested and possibly obsolete paradigm. Interestingly it has also proved popular in the more evangelical wing of the church who feel that the word 'development' is loaded with secular and humanistic freight and prefer the term social transformation instead. This opens up a potential space for dialogue around this concept by recognising that in our world today there is less consensus around a pre-determined developmental end towards which societies are working as well as an increased awareness of our inability to control the factors that may affect our future. The limits to growth of our planet and the ongoing multiple new social ills besetting most supposedly highly developed nations, the increased vocalising of dissent from the South regarding what they ought to aspire towards as well as an awareness of the close interconnectedness between the affluence of some and the poverty stricken dependence of others are all topics beyond the scope of this research project. However they have in part led to a renewed interest in social transformation, suggesting that our global social processes may need to change to address the complex social challenges we will face as humans in the coming century. If all countries 'develop' in the same way as the West with current population sizes, we will soon find ourselves without a planet. While societies are never static entities, but hybrids continually encountering processes of social change, social transformation often points to deeper, paradigmatic shifts that are sustained long term.

Peter Drucker<sup>43</sup> termed the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as the 'age of social transformation' where he saw huge paradigm shifts taking place across Western societies at an unprecedented rate of change. He points out however that these sorts of sustained changes may still be to come for much of the rest of the world. The word 'transformation' suggests a qualitative and irreversible shift to a new or different level of complexity (we think of the caterpillar to the butterfly, the tadpole to the frog). It denotes a paradigm shift that goes beyond the ongoing daily social changes that we see happening around us and is sustained over time resulting in some sort of shift in collective consciousness where attitudes and values are held in a completely new context often based upon different assumptions and beliefs. In the world of international development which is a

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<sup>42</sup> See Brueggemann, *Journeying towards the Common Good* and Miroslav Volf, *Public Faith: How Christians can serve the Common Good*. Brazos Press. 2011 for two recent theological works on this important theme.

<sup>43</sup> Drucker, Peter "The Age of Social Transformation". Published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1994 Vol 274, No. 5; pages 53-80.

particular interest of this researcher, social transformation encourages a form of development that is participatory, self-reliant and people-centred. According to recent research, development has been plagued by a growing sense of weariness and cynicism and a diminishing sense of hope over the years<sup>44</sup>. Social transformation is seen as an alternative, more holistic approach defined by Groenewald<sup>45</sup> as 'referring to change in human relationships, communities and the living conditions of people. It is the processes of change in the conditions of the lifestyles of people & the qualitative change in the nature & character of human societies'. This includes inter-personal relationships as well as wider socio-political and economic structures and in this way opens up a role that faith movements can often play more clearly than some of the previous ideologies of modern development. Edwards and Sen<sup>46</sup> argue that the kind of change that is promoted by most faiths which encourages moral behaviour and works against injustice can lead to more sustainable social transformation. This project explores Christian hope in the light of an increasing acknowledgement of hope as an important dimension of social development or transformation. In this way it engages in Chapter 5 with the recent suggestion made by Nadine Bowers du Toit<sup>47</sup> that the church can play a role as a potentially transformative agent in society that is 'humbly prophetic,' going beyond the dualistic separation of the secular and the sacred and engaging in wider dialogue with other groups and discourses.

Social changes are often partially determined by our external environment (e.g. the running out of core fossil fuels), but the model also encourages a more agency centred approach where humans seek to be intentionally involved in transforming society to be more in line with jointly desired social and individual ends or goods. It is therefore predicated on the belief that humans hold a level of power and/or responsibility to contribute towards shaping our societies to reach desired ends. The controlling visions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as lived out in many damaging social projects may have left us with a well developed suspicion of all forms of social engineering, but yet the ongoing idea that our societies are at least partially human constructs rather than unchallengeable and universal givens is widely endorsed in the North and is increasingly also becoming accepted in the South. The belief that that humans can actively contribute towards social transformation as agents that interact with our wider environment rather than social change being something that merely happens to us underpins the discipline of social sciences as well as our modern ethos. Many countries have served as examples of conscious transformations of a social type often resulting in reinvigorated and revitalized populations, economic prosperity and restored civic pride<sup>48</sup>. For example the collapse of apartheid, the black civil rights movement, the successful defeat of colonialism are all examples of social transformations where human agency and the mobilising of social hope were key factors for change.

Into this resurgence of interest in social transformation come many voices. Historically many religious figures have played hugely significant roles in historical movements for social transformation. We need only think of King's civil rights campaigns, Tutu's Rainbow Nation, Mandela's fight for reconciliation, Wesley, Wilberforce and Booth's determination to tackle the ordinary working condition of the working classes or the accepted practices of slavery or the moral power of a Gandhi or the Dalai Lama to realise the enormous power for

<sup>44</sup> Nadine Bowers du Toit. "Moving from Development to Social Transformation" in *Religion and Social Development in post-apartheid South Africa* (eds) Swart, I, Rocher, H, Green, S and Erasmus, J. South Africa: Sun Press. 2010, pp261-274.

<sup>45</sup> C. Groenewald. "Social transformation: Between Globalisation and Localisation" *Scriptura* 72 (2000) 18.

<sup>46</sup> M. Edwards and G. Sen. "NGOs, Social change and the Transformation of human relationships: a 21<sup>st</sup> Century civic agenda" *Third World Quarterly* 21. No4 (2000) 610.

<sup>47</sup> Du Toit, *Development*. 269.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Roberts, Mbithi wa Kivilu & Yul Derek Davids (eds) *South African Social Attitudes 2<sup>nd</sup> Report: Reflections on the Age of Hope* South Africa: HRSC Press:2010. See 1-14 Download at [www.hsrcpress.ac.za](http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za) . Accessed 1/3/11

good that faith can and has played within movements for social transformation in our world. However in a pluralistic world, religious involvement in public spaces has also had many equally damaging effects and can quickly become a polarized and contentious space of my truth against yours. In many educational institutions, social transformation has become almost entirely the preserve of the social sciences framework, thereby often leaving deeper questions of human meaning and motivation for social transformation deliberately unarticulated. In response to this perceived marginalisation, religious responses have also often retreated into a ghetto, designing, funding and delivering their own faith-based development approaches to social engagement and transformation often either in isolation from or in direct confrontation with other discourses. Public events like the recent Faith-based Social Transformation Conference<sup>49</sup> where right wing Christians claimed knowledge of a 'God-ordained' blueprint for social transformation that includes wiping out 'social sins' such as abortion, homosexuality and other faiths only perpetuate vocal secular concerns that religious opinions on social transformation are typically extremist and to be feared, condemned and countered. These voices, whilst rarely representing mainstream Christian views on social transformation, tend to attract high profile attention with their extreme and often damagingly polarizing statements.

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is nevertheless also an increased recognition of the need for multidisciplinary input into the complex and multi faceted topic of social transformation. The reality of the emergence of the third sector over the last 40 years with over 70% of non-governmental organisations coming into existence over that time with a specific remit on a wide range of social concerns has huge ramifications for our human social activity and structures of influence for social change. Churches and parachurch organisations form a hugely significant part of this third sector. The reality of the involvement of multiple faith-based organisations on the ground who deliver many of the services related to social transformation as well as the reality of faith as a dimension of human experience for people in the majority of world where the need for social transformation is most urgent would suggest that to exclude theology from the discussion is unhelpful. This project claims that theology can make a significant contribution to social transformation, but that this role is best done in humble dialogue with other disciplines rather than in a religious ghetto that claims an alternative blueprint for Christian social transformation in isolation from other insights. This research seeks to delineate an area of potential theological dialogue around social hope that can be explored alongside other discourses without being collapsed into existing categories.<sup>50</sup>

Increasingly humans are recognising the need for paradigmatic shifts in the way in which we all operate as societies. The legacy of modernity and ideology of 'development' that has characterised much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is looking increasingly shaky as a sustainable strategy for the future. It has failed to deliver the equitable world hoped for and has generated a range of new social challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with which we are required to wrestle. The need for a shared common future has been brought home to our species like never before, symbolised most poignantly by the environmental crisis. At the same time, the willingness of thousands of humans to engage in projects for social transformation is a sign of hope that we are not merely doomed to accept the challenges with which we are presented but can seek to respond creatively.

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<sup>49</sup> Faith Based Social Transformation Conference, 2011. Internet at [http://socialtransformation2011.org/?page\\_id=253](http://socialtransformation2011.org/?page_id=253). Accessed 30/03/2011

<sup>50</sup> One such example of this sort of initiative is the Department for Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape that works on public theology issues emerging out of the World Council of Churches project – looking at issues of economic justice, globalisation and civil society in Southern Africa. Internet at <http://www.uwc.ac.za>. Accessed 10/11/2011

### 1.3 A Multi - disciplinary interest in Hope

“Christians cannot be indifferent to the task of speaking comprehensively to the secular world.”<sup>51</sup>

If it is indeed the case that there has been a rise of despair in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has nevertheless, according to many thinkers, also led to a spirited and multidisciplinary defence of the primacy of hope in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>52</sup> Over the last few decades there has been a resurgence of disciplinary interest in the theme of hope both within and beyond the theological space. Older philosophers of hope e.g. Ernest Bloch<sup>53</sup> and William Lynch<sup>54</sup> were restudied to gain new insights; psychologies of hope gathered momentum in the 1970s with person-centred therapies and post-colonial liberation movements generated new political hopes. This section points briefly to some other disciplines to demonstrate this resurgence of wider interest in hope.

In the area of politics and political oratory, utopian visions of social hope are common currency, most memorably historically in the visionary claims of politicians such as Obama’s ‘audacity of hope’, King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech or Tutu’s ‘rainbow nation’. A 2010 Report on Social Attitudes released in South Africa highlights that shortly after South Africa entered its second decade of democracy, former President Mbeki proclaimed in his annual State of the Nation address that ‘our people are firmly convinced that our country has entered its Age of Hope. They are convinced that we have created the conditions to achieve more rapid progress towards the realisation of their dreams. They are certain that we are indeed a winning nation’<sup>55</sup>. This discourse of hope was also prominent in the popular media with marketing campaigns such as ‘Proudly South African’, ‘Alive with Possibility’, the ‘Homecoming Revolution’ and ‘South Africa: The Good News’. Throughout the first 10 years of democracy, national policy was influenced and the public imagination captivated by a number of hopeful political narratives, including the ‘Rainbow Nation’, the ‘African Renaissance’ and the ‘New Patriotism’. However the report, while noting high levels of optimism, drew attention to the unresolved and manifold challenges that cast a shadow over the ‘Age of Hope’ with a failure to deliver substantively on electoral promises and the expectations they engender in danger of rapidly eroding the hope vested by the vulnerable and socially excluded in the state to address their deprivations, only to be replaced by increased disaffection and despair.

Political theorist Glenn Tinder’s book *Fabric of Hope*<sup>56</sup> picks up this notion of political hope and points out that the state is linked to hope in its concern for universal humanity by being partially responsible for creating a social order for humans in which they can live well. The concept of liberty, in his opinion depends radically on hope, that humans will be good and that those liberated will live as humans ought to live. He points to the church as a social institution with a role to play in generating this human hope for all. Alan Mittleman<sup>57</sup> similarly points to the importance of hope in the democratic systems in our times and calls for a deep and wise hope that can enable us to weather the reality of social failures without giving up hope for political change and retreating into despair and cynicism .

<sup>51</sup> Tinder, *Fabric of Hope*, 7

<sup>52</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy of Hope*. 154.

<sup>53</sup> See Ernest Bloch *The Principle of Hope* MIT Press 1956 [c1995 print] for an analysis of hope that influenced many theologies of hope

<sup>54</sup> See William Lynch, *Images of Hope; Imagination as healer of the hopeless*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

<sup>55</sup> Roberts et al (eds) *South African Social Attitudes 2<sup>nd</sup> Report::Reflections on the age of hope*,1-14.

<sup>56</sup> Tinder, *Fabric of Hope*, 172-182 looks further at this link between the state, liberty and hope.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Mittlemann, *Hope in a democratic age*, Oxford University Press, 2009. Mittleman is Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Jewish theological seminary in New York. He suggests that hope is can be treated with suspicion due to its perceived links to religion.

In the field of health care, there has been continued research around hope as an aid to healing, e.g. nursing research conducted on dying patients undergoing palliative care pointed to two forms of experienced hope (particular and general) as critical for their quality of life<sup>58</sup>. Medical research points to the need to keep hope as an open ended process and not to merely reduce it to 'achievable goals' and continues to emphasise strongly the importance of hope for human wellbeing. Loss of hope in the elderly has been proved to lead to depression<sup>59</sup> and growing levels of anxiety-related medical illnesses across the world also suggest that hope is an important area of practical research in the field of wider human wholeness.

In the field of philosophy, Ernst Bloch's magisterial *The Principle of Hope* influenced many Marxist utopian visions that continue to have significant influence today. However above and beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist projects and the many post-colonial liberation movements that have also utilised these philosophies, we see a wider resurgence of interest in social hope by some of the most prominent post modern thinkers of our day. Jacques Derrida points to what he terms a 'hope without hope', proclaiming according to Smith<sup>60</sup>, a hope for a justice to come in the face of the grossest injustices that must, in his view be 'absolutely undetermined' to safeguard against the damaging hubris of what he sees as particularist hopes such as the Christian form of hoping. Richard Rorty<sup>61</sup> also points to a similar need for social hope. He does not claim (like Derrida) that this hope must be totally undetermined in content, but he insists it must be fully immanentized and any form of transcendence removed.<sup>62</sup> The Polish philosopher, Matustik points to the scarcity of hope in our times and drawing on the Holocaust, suggests that radical evil seeks to annihilate hope and hold humans in bondage to despair. For him hope can help people form 'networks of solidarity working for and waiting on the impossible – a new beginning situated beyond devastating historical situations'. He encourages a hope that is both critical and redemptive, challenging naïve beliefs in progress and embracing paradox.<sup>63</sup>

Hope is also a predominant concern in modern psychology. One of the issues raised by Simon Kwan, a recent writer in this field<sup>64</sup> has been to articulate a concern that the early psychological writings on hope in the 1970-80s have, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gradually eroded a more dialectical and paradoxical approach to hope that involved an active engagement with suffering, despair and problems in favour of a more solutions-orientated approach which specifically aims to eliminate suffering. He cautions strongly against the baptising of hope wholeheartedly into the field of positive psychology which sees hope as a goal directed cognitive process that excludes hopelessness. While Kwan does not negate the many positive contributions of positive psychology and its contribution to human flourishing, he suggests that we must maintain a clear dialectic of despair in our psychological use of the concept of hope if it is to continue to meet the genuine psychological needs of the humans that seek help without being distorted into a cheap hopefulness or mere optimism and in this way points us to the need to probe the concepts of hope we use.

<sup>58</sup> Described in Schumacher, *Philosophy of Hope*, 99-102.

<sup>59</sup> Virpi Pyykko, "There is always a loophole": Published PhD. Nursing Science Dept. University of Turku, Finland Painosalama Oi: 2003. This research explores hope and hopelessness in the elderly or depressive and the importance of nurturing hope for human flourishing.

<sup>60</sup> James Smith. "Determined hope: A phenomenology of Christian Expectation" in Volf, M and Katerburg, W (eds) *Future of Hope*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2004, 200-227.

<sup>61</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope*. 203.

<sup>62</sup> See Smith. *Determined hope*, 200-217 for more unpacking of the possible limitations of Rorty and Derrida's approach to social hope.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Beck Matustik. *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Post secular meditations* Indiana University Press. 2008, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Simon Kwan. "Interrogating Hope: the pastoral theology of hope and positive psychology" in *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 2010 Vol 14, 47-67.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we live in a world dominated by global capitalism and the often seemingly endless pursuit of commodities and an affluent lifestyle. Huge budgets for TV advertising create powerful images of the future that draw us into new desires and then offer us the means by which to satisfy those 'hopes'. The language of hope is increasingly used in corporate marketing both to create a sense of unsatisfied desire but also to give business an ethical face, where corporate social responsibility campaigns are actively drawn into product marketing blurring the distinction between charitable giving and commodity purchasing. While this trend may no doubt have some significant benefits in the funds it generates for social transformation or charitable efforts by 'adding hope to its menu', it also points to an interesting 'commoditisation' of the concept of hope. Kentucky Fried Chicken assures me when I make a fast food purchase that for just R2, I am 'adding hope' to the world<sup>65</sup>, Nedbank remind me that by banking with them and not others, I can 'sow a seed of hope' for the developing world. **FN** While this commercial tendency is far beyond the scope of this research, it raises interesting questions about the increasingly commoditised use of hope in our modern world.

Educational institutions have also begun to pro-actively embrace the language of hope. Stellenbosch University, where the researcher is based, recently adopted a Pedagogy of Hope philosophy with a desire to become a hope-creating university and with a view to making the world a better place<sup>66</sup>. Other theological institutions had taken steps in this direction even earlier, for example Loyola Jesuit College, in Maryland at the inauguration of its new president in 2005 stated that its main task was to educate for hope.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the last 50 years have been characterised by a huge growth in the so-called Third Sector with a proliferation of social institutions working on aid, development and other social issues of our time. This is true not only of the North with a multi-billion pound industry employing thousands who seek to achieve forms of social transformation or poverty alleviation but also in the South where burgeoning community-based organisations often provide one of the only forms of employment in poverty-stricken communities. Most of these organisations claim to offer credible hope of one kind or another to their target groups and their success or perceived success in this area often determines their ability to survive and raise funds.

While this research project is not able to follow up any further the disciplinary areas that have been briefly touched on above and instead focuses on a theological approach to hope in the following chapters, it nevertheless argues that an exploration of the shape of hope can have significant and *interdisciplinary* application in both theory and practice. It suggests that the theological discipline can offer a useful lens that can potentially contribute towards the wider debate on the nature, importance and use of hope. Into the social context of increased despair and a dwindling sense of social hope noted by a wide range of social commentators, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a renewed interest in the theme of hope within multiple disciplines in our times. Many of these manifestations have been accused of promoting a form of 'cheap hope' that ends merely in disappointment and an inability to cope with the depths of the meaninglessness and despair people face by 'ignoring the data of despair'<sup>68</sup>. There is a need for a more rigorous analysis of the theme of hope that can offer an opportunity for theology to contribute its own disciplinary reflections on hope in ways that can both complement and challenge other perspectives.

<sup>65</sup> [www.addhope.co.za](http://www.addhope.co.za).

<sup>66</sup> See Stellenbosch University Pedagogy of Hope Discussion, 2010. One of its concerns is that hope may be trivialised or merely reduced to a feeling of optimism instead of its envisaged functioning as a shared social resource for transformation. Internet at <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/rektor/docs/PedagogyOfHope.pdf> Also <http://thehopeproject.co.za>. Accessed 30/10/2011

<sup>67</sup> See Catherine Kaveny. "Cultivating hope in troubled times" *Catholic News Service*, 2005, 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Hope from Old Sources for a New Century: A Consensus Paper" in Brueggemann (ed) *Hope for the World*, 16.

#### 1.4 A theological exploration of hope

“Christianity is decidedly a religion of hope. Jesus preached less a God above as a God ahead. He sought to call forth hope.”<sup>69</sup>

As an academic discipline, theology seems to be one of the few remaining areas to offer at least in principle the opportunity for humans to reflect on the questions of life’s meaning and to seek knowledge about or at least exploration of the shared and sustained answers that have either developed or been ‘revealed’ within various communal religious traditions (depending on your point of view). In a post-modern age, the idea of certain knowledge about God has fallen into disrepute in many circles. Many university theology departments have mutated into religious studies departments that veer away from the idea of faith as a requirement for understanding. However theology itself has also adapted to the changing times, highlighting that the apophatic tradition in theology has always maintained a level of clear reserve as to the knowability of God. The enduring discipline of theology suggests that to sit within the intellectual framework of a particular religious tradition can continue to offer spaces for wider questions of cosmic and human meaning and purpose (engaged with at an intellectual level) that seem to emerge within all human societies in the forms of human spirituality of one form or another. As long as human beings continue to ask questions of meaning and purpose, it seems that theology will remain a meaningful forum for bigger questions to be raised and their individual and social implications to be explored in the context of varied approaches that religions offer.

Some, especially in the West, have predicted the inevitable demise of religion as new academic disciplines increasingly encroach into many of its historical spaces offering alternative ideologies and frameworks of meaning. However with the large majority of the world population still holding to a belief in a divine presence, rumours of this demise may be overrated. It is still an overwhelming empirical reality that the large majority of our human population today still include the divine in core explanations of their life and world events including some of the most ‘westernized’ nations of all. In reality, religion continues to have a significant impact, both socially and individually on the majority of our human worldviews. In South Africa for example, according to a 2010 survey across multiple racial groups, the church continues to be the social institution that scores higher than all others in terms of trust (over 80% as opposed to the courts and parliament at around 40%)<sup>70</sup>. If we add to this the second concrete reality that the majority of charitable giving and organisations that carry out work in the third sector in our world today continue to be faith based or motivated in one way or another, it seems hard not to draw the conclusion that on a practical level, faith seems to often provide a strong motivator for many people to become practically involved in social transformation across our globe in diverse ways. Even the secular West, according to some philosophers, is entering a post secular phase<sup>71</sup> – with a resurgence of post-modern interest in spirituality especially of the Eastern variants. This suggests that the questions that theology has historically encouraged us to reflect upon – typically questions of meaning, purpose, morality and value – continue to be meaningful questions for human societies today that cannot easily be reduced merely to questions raised within other academic disciplines. If we are seeking an education in hope for our world today, the insights of our long-standing religious traditions may still, at their best, provide us with one of our deepest wells from which to drink.

<sup>69</sup> Tinder, *Fabric of Hope*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Rule and Bongiwe Mncwango. “Christianity in South Africa: theory and practice”, 185-197 in Roberts et al, *Reflections on the Age of Hope* for a detailed overview of the ongoing social impact of Christian beliefs in God worldwide but especially in South Africa.

<sup>71</sup> Matustik, *Scarcity of Hope*, 20.



**Hope – a theological virtue?**

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.”<sup>72</sup>

The Greeks did not consider hope to be a virtue. In ancient society where the fates reigned, hope reflected an arrogant attitude by human beings to the uncertainties of the future of the kind pilloried in Greek tragedy. It was in fact the Christian tradition that initially promoted hope as a virtuous characteristic (alongside faith and love) building on the messianic hopes embodied in Judaism. They were seen as theological virtues, both given by God and finding their true object in God<sup>73</sup>. This is not to suggest that the value of hope cannot also be found in many other traditions, religious and otherwise but it would be fair to say that it is in Christianity that its importance has been most clearly highlighted. Despite this, Christian tradition has often tended to emphasize love and faith over hope in its doctrinal themes and there seems to have been a perennial (though contested) tendency to reduce Christian hope merely to the question of life after death and the beatific vision thereafter, with questions of our hopes within this life often left relatively unconsidered. It has only been in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that more comprehensive theologies of historical hope have come, once again, more urgently to the fore within theological arenas and it therefore seems entirely appropriate that modern reflections on hope can and should seek to draw on Christian theology as a useful resource.<sup>74</sup>

It would nevertheless be fair to say that Christian hope in particular and often religious hope in general has typically been perceived at a popular level (and also at times at a dogmatic level) as the sort of hope that only relates to a set of ‘supernatural’ questions e.g. Where a person goes after they die, where they will be spending eternity, and what is their relationship with the transcendent personal creator of the earth<sup>75</sup>. However this research project will suggest that this is in fact an inaccurate truncation of authentic Christian hope and its this-worldly dimensions if Christianity is to remain internally consistent with its witness to an incarnational suffering and resurrected God who loves the world. It is however undeniable that religious hope does point us towards some of the big existential questions of life including those that transcend our historical circumstances. In this way, it seeks to offer humans a vision of the whole or the bigger picture into which our own purpose and concrete circumstances can be situated or understood. Nevertheless religion often also helps people to grapple with questions of meaning, value and ethics in a practical way for the present day – how should I live now and why? In this way a theological perspective has great power to offer inspiration and motivation for people that whilst not disregarding human reason also draws us beyond rationality into the spiritual dimension of humanity that continues to characterise all human societies speaking to something enduringly present at the heart of humanity’s questions, a desire for meaning.

The relationship between theology and other disciplines over many centuries has historically been strong with many pioneering scientists, mathematicians and philosophers holding to both faith and reason across their academic studies. It has only been more recently that relationships between the emerging secular disciplines and the increasingly contested assumptions of theology have often become more strained with a seeming lack of a shared universe of discourse within which to dialogue. However this research project suggests that themes such as hope – empirically observable and valued within other disciplines and yet

<sup>72</sup> Psalm 23:18. NIV.

<sup>73</sup> This area is picked up further in Chapter 4 of this research project exploring hope as a social virtue.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 2 of this research project or a brief overview of the history of hope in Christian thought.

<sup>75</sup> N.T.Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. London: SPCK, 2007, 20-36 explores this popular perception of Christian hope further.

often rooted in or grounded for many by embodied forms of spirituality can provide useful entry points into what Anthony Kelly terms a ‘hope-generating dialogue’, critical for looking at social issues and the best ways to tackle them. To ignore the church as a significant source of social capital would in the view of this research project be a damaging error for secular disciplines. To see the church as providing the only answer to our social challenges would be an equally damaging starting point for theology to take if it seeks to engage meaningfully with the myriad and diverse worldviews and perspectives that sit outside its own frame of reference. The theme of hope may, according to this research, provide an interdisciplinary bridge for a more humble contribution to this wider discourse. ‘If theology has to become once again a social force in the secular society and university, it has to take into consideration the paradigm shifts that have taken place in contemporary epistemology, and also become dialogical and inter-disciplinary in its approach’.<sup>76</sup>

According to Jürgen Moltmann, the last 50 years have heralded numerous “secular” movements of historical hope in our world – Marxism, human rights, decolonialisation, civil rights, gay rights etc. Churches have often struggled to define their relationship to these movements clearly. Many have actively encouraged the engagement of their churches with these secular movements while others have chosen to define core aspects of their Christian identity explicitly against them (anti-communist, anti-gay, anti-human rights). A damaging strand of Christian eschatology (dispensationalism) has indeed actively encouraged certain Christians to see world problems as God-ordained, promoting an explicit rejection of the world in favour of other-worldly supernatural hopes<sup>77</sup>. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, over forty years after the initial challenge to the church by Moltmann to reclaim its worldly hope, this research project contends that our human need for a well grounded theological vision of worldly hope is even stronger. A recent book by Miroslav Volf<sup>78</sup> highlights that Christians should not retreat into a private faith mentality or reduce their faith into a message that merely soothes individuals or energizes the pursuit of individual success but use the resources of their faith to speak to and serve the common good. This points us again to the importance of Christian engagement with public issues and highlights the claim of this research, that theology has an important contribution to make. Volf is adamant that our role as Christians is not mere accommodation to culture (idle faith) or the total transformation of culture (coercive faith), but creative engagement with the world (critical solidarity).

Ernst Conradie, a South African theologian, suggests that into the context of widespread anxiety and despair at the dawn of a new century, hope is indeed a precious virtue<sup>79</sup>. He argues that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a clear vision of hope is required to face a daunting social agenda and asks where such a vision of hope can be found. Russel Botman<sup>80</sup> claims that the present day crisis of hope forms the crux of the missionary challenge and that the world church faces a new context for ministry today marked by the despair that has depleted people’s ability to hope. This research project seeks to offer a small theological contribution to the large and complex subject of Christian hope that can speak meaningfully to the context of our day by unpacking a theological approach to hope as social vision, virtue and social practice. To do so, it draws deeply on the insights of a number of theologians in a way that can engage critically yet respectfully with insights from other disciplines and religions to counter ways that Christian hope might ‘malfunction’ today.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Arockiadoss, *Theology as a force of Social Change*. Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, India. 2008. Internet at <http://www.fiuc.org/cms/COCTI/Actes%20all/paper%20Prof%20Arockiadoss.pdf> Accessed 15/11/2011

<sup>77</sup> This view is unpacked further later in this chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Miroslav Volf. *Public Faith*, page unknown. Published as this research was in its final stages and therefore beyond its scope.

<sup>79</sup> Conradie, *Eschatological Dimensions*. 164.

<sup>80</sup> Botman “Hope as the coming Reign of God”, 70.

## 1.5 Problematising Christian hope

“Hope is so important for our existence, social and individual, that we must take care not to experience it in a mistaken form and thereby allow it to slip towards hopelessness and despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope”.<sup>81</sup>

This research project suggests that in response to the widespread sense of hopelessness experienced in the last century, diverse and distorted notions of hope have become once again prominent in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. These have taken all sorts of secular appearances but this project focuses only briefly on some ways that these concepts have manifested within the church. The following section describes three potentially ‘distorted’ attitudes to Christian hope that it argues continue to be found in our churches today. Many of them are not new but modern day re-interpretations of attitudes to hope that can be traced back as far as the early church. Obviously any brief categorisation of this kind can be accused of gross oversimplification; but recent theologians on hope<sup>82</sup> have informed the snapshots below where possible.

### **1.5.1 Hope - ‘Souls in Transit’**

According to N.T. Wright,<sup>83</sup> but also pointed to by many other theologians, the most noticeable theological distortion of hope is the creeping in to many churches of an ahistorical, otherworldly hope. In simplified terms this view can be captured by the view that the world is a wicked/damaged place that we need to escape, be saved from or renounce. This is most certainly not a new idea and dates back to the earliest days of the Christian church with the Gnostic heresy influenced by Persian and Greek thought. Its re-emergence in our current times is significant as it tends to lean towards both world denying attitudes and practices.

Theologically, hope for the future of the world is often subsumed under the wider and complicated systematic category of eschatology (end times), a topic often seen as the highly speculative realm of conspiracy theorists, doom-mongers of apocalyptic disaster or purveyors of heavenly bliss which tends to be avoided by most mainstream preachers, leaving the field free for extremist views. The one end of this eschatological spectrum is the apocalyptic approach of the fundamentalists whose hope is in the snatching up of the pure remnant of believers away from an increasingly Godless world that will be (rightly) destroyed. Increased social and ecological problems are seen (and even welcomed) as appropriate punishments or signs of the end times, rather than as human challenges to be faced responsibly and overcome. This extreme view is totally refuted by this project, is common to fundamentalists of all religions and is not discussed any further<sup>84</sup>. However there is also a much more general tendency within many mainstream churches to reduce Christian hope to an other-worldly and post life belief. This more muted version of trans-worldly hope is espoused by many Christians with an increased focus on the afterlife, the inner spiritual journey and the development of a personal relationship with God that focuses attention pre-dominantly on soul saving and eternal life. While these aspects obviously do form a genuine aspect of Christianity, they also have potential to distort our theology. This other-worldly theological emphasis, according to Hall, can contribute towards a mass

<sup>81</sup> Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of Hope* London; Continuum.1992, 3.

<sup>82</sup> See Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* and Hall, *Confessing the faith* for a more detailed analysis of this type of distorted hope

<sup>83</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 100-103.

<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless this distortions ongoing influence on the popular conscience is assured by the huge sales of the Left Behind series as well as books like Hal Lindsey and Carole Carlson’s *The late great planet earth*. Zondervan: 1970.

privatisation of Christian hope to the individual sphere and a reduction of genuine world-centred Biblical hope into individualistic salvation-oriented forms of hope. According to Wright, recent Western thought has overemphasised the individual at the expense of the larger picture of God's creation. Christian hope is still sung, preached and witnessed to but its content has become subtly distorted; 'As long as we see Christian hope in terms of going to heaven or of a salvation that is essentially away from this world, the two questions of the ultimate Christian hope and the possibilities within the world for renewal and transformation will appear unrelated.'<sup>85</sup>

Wright calls this attitude to Christian hope one of '*souls in transit*' and suggests that it ties in with an ancient Greek world view (Platonism) that devalues the material world and sees God as outside history as opposed to what he sees as the genuinely Biblical view. He does not see this as a purely modern or Western phenomenon as it was found right at the roots of the early church in the highly influential Gnostic heresy but he suggests that it is experiencing a present day revival of popularity. Another challenge of this approach to hope is that it tends to be exclusivist where redemption takes on highly individualistic overtones when the main question of faith is "are you saved – meaning are you, John Smith going to heaven when you die".<sup>86</sup> Hall suggests that in fact responsible Christians must enter a strong protest against much current heaven and hell mythology which he sees as containing fundamentally unchristian assumptions and an unduly anthropocentric notion of salvation not supported by either biblical text or theological tradition.<sup>87</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI raises the same question, asking, "How could the idea have developed that Jesus's message is narrowly individualistic and aimed only at each person singly? How did we arrive at this interpretation of the "salvation of the soul" as a flight from responsibility for the whole"<sup>88</sup> For him also, this distorted hope is a way of abandoning the world to its misery and taking refuge in a private form of eternal salvation. For our purposes here, it suffices to say that a theology of hope that focuses on the next life to the exclusion of improving this one and concentrates its attention more on individual hopes than on common hopes is unlikely to engender a world transforming Christian hope as Botman affirms. 'We share a criticism of a missionary endeavour in this world that is essentially an expression of otherworldliness. This divorces the future of the creation from the future of its Creator and destroys hope in the here and now.'<sup>89</sup>

**Implications for social transformation** - At its best, this attitude sees social issues as important but nevertheless fundamentally secondary to the ultimate issues of eternity, 'Desirable as social ameliorations are, working for them must not be substituted for the biblical requirements for salvation'.<sup>90</sup> At its worst, it can actively endorse either a world renouncing fervour or more often an increasingly despairing and apathetic attitude to the problems of the world as secondary to the main concerns of Christians. In this way, Christians become part and parcel of an apathetic attitude that is increasingly prevalent within secular circles in our post modern times.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 206-9 for more on this interesting soteriological question which is also briefly picked up in Chapter 5.

<sup>87</sup> Hall, *Confessing the Faith*. 513.

<sup>88</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter. *Spe Salvi*. 2007: #16. Accessed 03/11/2011.

Internet at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html).

<sup>89</sup> Botman, "Hope as coming reign", 75.

<sup>90</sup> Donald MacGavren as quoted in Bosch. *Transforming Mission*. NY Maryknoll: OrbisBooks. 1991,399.

<sup>91</sup> Harvey Cox. *On not leaving it to the snake*. London: SCM.1968. Here Cox highlights the danger of apathy in our world today here. For an alternative view to this approach, see Bauckham, R & Hart, T *Hope against Hope*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans:1999.129 which claims that liberal theologians are in fact incorrect to claim that an otherworldly attitude to hope always leads to world renouncing behaviours.

### 1.5.2 Hope - the 'Myth of Progress'

At the other end of the church spectrum, there is a modern liberal progressivism at work that, while appearing initially to clearly support a world-transforming Christian hope, when taken to extremes, is in danger of reducing Christian hope to mere shallow worldly optimism. Hall terms this approach - '*cheap hope*', a deliberate play on Bonhoeffer's scathing critique of the theology of cheap grace. He argues that this theology of hope in fact often leads to an uncritical identification of secular visions with Christian hope and involves an overenthusiastic buy in to the myth of evolutionary progress and the progressive redemption of time.<sup>92</sup> In short, it pushes for the realizing of God's Kingdom on earth through human efforts but has over time often become itself a distorted heresy of the original vision by reducing God merely to systems of human progress and losing sight of the Kingdom as a critical symbol standing beyond all systems.

According to Wright, who calls this model evolutionary optimism<sup>93</sup>, the myth of progress has deep roots in our Western Christian history. He charts its origin back to the Renaissance and 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment beliefs in unlimited human improvement marching inevitably towards a future Utopia. This gained momentum in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with continued scientific, industrial, democratic and economic advances perpetuating the belief in a historical acceleration by humans towards a wonderful goal. Many philosophers and scientists e.g. Hegel and Darwin, provided ample theoretical explanations for this world view which was also actively embraced by many Christian theologians with the flourishing of 19<sup>th</sup> century social gospel and convincing syntheses of social evolutionary processes and God's plan (e.g. Teilhard De Chardin). Pope Benedict XVI points out that the nineteenth century held fast to its faith in progress as the new form of human hope, and it considered reason and freedom as the guiding stars to be followed along the path of hope<sup>94</sup>. Despite a rude awakening through many of the devastating events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this modern myth found a new lease of radically secular life in the Marxist project which sought to realise the Kingdom by explicitly rejecting the hereafter and calling for revolution in the here and now. This view continues to encourage us to believe that meaning is built into the historical process itself and that good is somehow inevitably unfolded in history. Hall calls this a form of *realised eschatology* – a view of history in which the goal of the march of time is already built into the process itself, is steadily unfolding beneath our eyes and is visibly good<sup>95</sup>. He sees this attitude is particularly tempting to the New World who often still sees progress as inevitably good and itself as on the cutting edge of that progress. For him however, it collapses the distinction between meaning and history in a way doomed to disappointment as well as the reducing of hope into controlling systems of progress.

The relationship of this myth of progress to Christian hope is complex. Hall suggests that liberal Christianity in particular has a history of seeking to uncritically buttress modernity's religion of progress and that this has often required severe truncation of the Christian hope. For him, the ideology of historical progress is incompatible with the Christian good news of a redemption introduced into time from beyond time's relentless cycle of cause and effect.<sup>96</sup> Wright argues that the secular utopian dream is in fact a distorted and heretical offshoot of the original Christian vision of the Kingdom of God which, in the preaching of Jesus refers, not to a post mortem destiny or our escape from this world into another one, but about God's

<sup>92</sup> Hall, *Confessing the Faith*, 466.

<sup>93</sup> Wright., *Surprised by Hope*, 93.

<sup>94</sup> Benedict, *Spes Salvi*, Section 20.

<sup>95</sup> Hall, *Confessing the Faith*, 457.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 458. Hall's view of Christian hope is nonetheless a contested one as the critique by Flora Keshgegian in Chapter 3 highlights.

sovereign rule coming on earth as it is in heaven<sup>97</sup>. For him, this undoubtedly important Christian vision of the reign of God alongside the perfectibility of humans and a sense of history moving forwards to a fulfilled creation was selectively co-opted instead into a historical system that claimed to produce this inevitably while the concept of a transcendent God of grace was at the same time quietly dropped for a 'Pelagian' model of humans pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and achieving their own salvation.

In contrast to the myth of the intrinsic goodness of historical progress, many theologians instead highlight progress's inherent moral ambiguity. "Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist"<sup>98</sup>. Hall argues that since every human kingdom creates its victims, the Kingdom of God must remain above all the sovereignty of one who identifies with the excluded: and since every political ideology and agenda excludes someone; it must always be a *critical symbol* from which all human systems are judged<sup>99</sup> or else it will become the property of some power elite. Marxism is just one sobering reminder of schemes to bring God's kingdom to earth through merely human efforts often still giving the word 'utopia' a bad name in our times.

Hall and Wright both warn us against the false equation of Christian hope and new world optimism which continues in this decade with the proliferation of '*positive thinking*' movements often harnessed into church teaching with prosperity gospel and faith healing theologies drawing thousands in<sup>100</sup>. The terming of this world view as a myth does not intend to deny it any strengths, to argue that it is inherently false or that no good came or can come from this way of seeing the world. Often it has sought to act as a corrective to the first distortion of hope which could be accused of focusing too much on God's transcendence, by reasserting world engagement. However, it aims to highlight that as a way of describing reality, it has significant theoretical and practical weaknesses, most notably an overly optimistic view of the world and its future that can have an inherent inability to deal with the actual manifestations of evil and despair in the world. In the opinion of many theologians, this view has contributed to a distortion of an authentic Christian understanding of hope which, in the spirit of the paradox of incarnation must seek to maintain a view of hope that holds a creation tension between the immanent and the transcendent, the now and the not yet.

**Implications for social transformation** - At its best, this attitude challenges Christians to engage actively and positively with the world around them, correcting an ongoing tendency to etherealize salvation and reinforcing an incarnational approach that participates in creation fully. At its worst however, it can fail to recognise the intrinsic limitedness of all our human systems and in time falls away from an authentic hope into a naïve and even narrowly utopian optimism that buys into powerful modern myths of progress that can avoid and repress the genuine places of suffering in our world. Hope can thereby be reduced into a controlling and closed ideology of optimism that then fails to help us to handle the inevitable disappointments, tragedies and ambiguities of life that are faced by many in our world today.

<sup>97</sup> Wright. *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Benedict, *Spes Salvi*, Section 22.

<sup>99</sup> Hall, *Confessing the Faith*, 461.

<sup>100</sup> An alternative to this form of 'cheap hope as optimism' set out by Douglas Hall is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this project.

### 1.5.3 Hope - 'God's Exclusive Blueprint'

On the surface this suggested third way of hoping seems promisingly active in regard both to social transformation and world engagement. It seeks to engage Christians vocationally in the world by realising what it often terms 'Kingdom' values whilst also standing critically against many modern ideas proving it's not afraid to challenge what it perceives to be damaging secular myths of progress and improvement. Nevertheless on further analysis, this project suggests that it displays some equally concerning tendencies as the two above distortions of hope. It can be found in an extreme conservative evangelical form in the recent and publically contentious 2011 Harvard Conference on Social Transformation<sup>101</sup>, but also manifests itself in other softer forms, for example in Pope Benedict's 2007 encyclical on hope, *Spees Salvi*, explored critically by Jürgen Moltmann below. The evangelical approach to hope, which has often sought to distinguish itself from the wider ecumenical discourse on hope can also endorse a version of this approach<sup>102</sup>, in the same way that at times more liberal representations of hope can veer towards equating the realisation of Christian hope excessively with secular movements for historical progress as above.

This approach to social hope is characterised foremost by an intention to discover Gods 'blueprint' for social transformation suggesting that we need to embrace a 'Christian' approach to development or transformation that is typically seen as at odds or in competition with all other forms, methods or even goals of secular progress. It uses the language of hope to point to an exclusive form of Christian hope, accessible only to the saved and through the church as the only real answer to the social problems of our world. In this way it is in danger of being both separatist and triumphalist by suggesting that Christians have a hope from which all others are excluded. It is often allied with right wing and politically conservative views, especially in the USA and carries significant political and financial clout especially in its affiliation with conservative religious and political status quos within many developing countries e.g. supporting Uganda's anti-homosexuality legislation. It often draws on apocalyptic and decline narrative language like the otherworldly distortion of hope does but applies this in a this-worldly sense that Christians are called to actively challenge in their lives.

Some of the Harvard Conference 2011 speakers represent one extreme example of this tendency. e.g. Dr. Lance Wallnau, who has had the following to say about why he feels social transformation is necessary: "So you've got your homosexual activity, your abortion activity here, Islam coming in, you've got a financial collapse—all of this, to those of us who are Christians, is an apocalyptic confirmation that when you remove God from public discourse, when you don't line up your thinking with kingdom principles, you inevitably hit an iceberg like the Titanic and you go down<sup>103</sup>. Its highly controversial moral opinions name specific social sins as the reason for social problems, as evils for which society is being "punished" that have led to the moral decay we see around us. They instead offer Christians a black and white universe within which to operate in their work for social transformation which is usually linked to so-called 'bible-based' values. This approach typically defines itself in confrontation with most secular movements especially those for human rights, gay liberation movements, increased gender equality relationship approaches, or a social sciences approach to development as well as affirmation of other religious traditions. These all tend to be pigeon-holed as

<sup>101</sup> Faith-Based Social Transformation Conference. Internet at [http://socialtransformation2011.org/?page\\_id=253](http://socialtransformation2011.org/?page_id=253). Accessed at 11/03/2011. While this is an extreme example, it points to a wider disconnect between faith and non faith dialogues that is critical.

<sup>102</sup> See *The Church's Response to Human Need* (eds) Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 for an example of the Wheaton conference papers which at times reflects a milder tendency in this same direction.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, accessed 11/03/2011. Due to criticism of this conference, statements like this may now have been removed.

unchristian, inherently damaging to the moral fibre of societies and even as the cause of our social problems. However this research project claims that this approach is not only found in fundamentalist form as above but that it also manifests itself in many wider and more subtle forms that nevertheless often seek to identify a model of 'Bible based' transformation as the superior Christian answer over and against all secular models, approaches or goals of transformation. Instead of urging Christians to renounce the world as a whole, followers are encouraged to get actively involved in changing it by denouncing particular secular or other-faith aspects of it and instead supporting typically exclusively Christian approaches instead.

Christians are encouraged to subvert 'worldly practices' such as forms of secular social transformation pointed to above and instead develop alternative social transformation projects often engaged in only by the church (and sometimes only by one's particular denominational brand). This confrontational or deeply suspicious approach towards all other secular efforts for world-transformation usually locates real possibilities for 'God's work' only amongst Christians and by churches and can easily create dangerously polarized attitudes between Christians and non-Christians or even between one church and another who may in fact both be working on similar social concerns. This is not to say that Christians should never challenge or critique specific secular claims. However the a priori assumption that Christianity accesses a better truth than all others who are lost in error and secularism is suggested here to be a problematic one.

Jürgen Moltmann<sup>104</sup> criticises this type of approach to Christian hope by the more traditional wings of the church – both Catholic and Evangelical, arguing that its *rhetoric of hope* in fact often merely shrouds an ongoing traditional form of religious exclusivism that collapses hope back merely into faith in God. He criticises specific characteristics of this hope in relation to Pope Benedict's encyclical<sup>105</sup> which this research project suggests is also often reflected in other evangelical articulations of 'a social hope for transformation'.

Firstly he points out that despite using the language of hope, behind this language sits faith in God through Christ (without Christ we are without hope). This reinforces a traditional and exclusivist approach, that only those who come to know God can have hope, 'Man needs God or has no hope' thereby limiting Christian hope to the faithful and separating them out from those in the world "who have no hope." Moltmann sees this as a statement of exclusion in contradiction to the previous Vatican II statement *in Gaudium et Spes*<sup>106</sup> which begins with the church's deep solidarity with "the entire human family." Instead a stark distinction is created between the believing and the unbelieving or otherwise-believing: where some (the saved) have hope and the others (unbelievers) have no hope. For Moltmann, in this way the distinctive and inclusive character of Christian hope falls away.

Secondly, this approach is often critical of revolutionary efforts seeing them as human attempts to establish a Kingdom of God without God and therefore usually ends up in practice supporting social status quos with a typically inherently conservative morality and often adopting a blanket condemnation of more liberal or

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<sup>104</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Horizons of Hope: A critique of *Spes Salvi*" in *The Christian Century*. Vol 125 .no 10. 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Pope. *Spes Salvi*, 2007.

<sup>106</sup> For further comparison, see 1965 Pope Paul VI encyclical on "*Gaudium and Spes* (Joy and Hope)," as an alternative to Benedict's more recent encyclical which endorses strongly the solidarity of Christians with all people nor with the universal 'God of hope'. Internet at <http://www.catholic.org/index.php/teaching/catholic-social-teaching/encyclicals/854-gaudium-et-spes.html>. Accessed 15/11/2011



secular approaches<sup>107</sup>. Moltmann points to a lack of prophetic hope for the Kingdom in worldly terms in this approach, arguing that the language constantly reverts back to the state of human souls in front of God and their blessedness in eternal life in a form of Gnostic salvation. He argues instead that an authentic theology of hope offers a framework for the deepest solidarity of the church 'with the entire human family' thus enabling a critical analysis of secular approaches without rejecting them outright. For Moltmann, this is a distorted theology of hope. He argues, 'What is missing is the gospel of the kingdom of God that Jesus himself proclaimed. What is missing is the hope of the all-encompassing promise of God who is coming'.<sup>108</sup>

Moltmann suggests that while Benedict appears initially to position himself apologetically in response to complaints that Christian hope is 'individualistic' and claims to see salvation as a 'social reality', he nevertheless moves quickly on to a warning about souls being 'overgrown' as the problem that needs fixing, reiterating change in individuals as primary. While Moltmann, like Benedict, endorses religious practices like prayer as places where hope can be 'practiced', he also points beyond these to the idea of 'seeing' Christ in the poor, sick and imprisoned and that this alert watching is the true setting for the learning of hope for all people regardless of faith. Benedict concludes that a world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope, and in this way pits Christian efforts for change as fundamentally at odds with those in the wider world who may work for a hope for justice without any explicit reference to Jesus or God. This approach to Christian hope can reduce the important role of human agency in working for a better justice by suggesting it reflects both a sinful assertion of independence and a lack of patient faith in God's justice.

**Implications for social transformation** - At its best this approach can provide motivation for the active engagement of Christians in the world with a passion for social transformation and a way of connecting it to their faith values that is meaningful and sees the world as the place where God is working for change and calling Christians to contribute. At its worst, it actively promotes an exclusive approach to Christian hope that collapses it merely into faith in God and takes a confrontational, pessimistic or disinterested attitude to secular/other faith movements working on the same social issues. A powerful political and financial lobby sits behind this approach which sees God as giving a 'blueprint' for transformation that supports existing status quos and conservative values. This counters more subversive movements for social transformation. e.g. President's Bush's massive HIV/AIDS plan refused to give funds to any organisations offering abortions, supporting sex workers or endorsing homosexuality. On a wider level it often creates a dangerously polarized public space around social transformation discourse and the contribution of faith movements towards that discussion that this project explicitly seeks to counter.

<sup>107</sup> This tendency in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been termed the Great Reversal where a conservative backlash against liberalism led to the elimination of almost all issues of social concern from much evangelical fundamentalism. See Du Toit, *Development*, 264-266.

<sup>108</sup> Moltmann, *Horizons of Hope*, 4. In this way he points us back to the Vatican II earlier documents on hope - *Gaudium and Spes*.

## Summary of Distortions of Hope

This first chapter suggests that all of the three above approaches present notions of Christian hope that, whilst no doubt containing some genuine validity and truth, are nevertheless all in danger of distorting an authentic Christian hope for the world. It seeks through this research project to explore an alternative theology of hope that avoids some of the above tendencies without denying that many people who may hold these views nevertheless often contribute significantly towards the realisation of social hope in our world.

It questions the forms of theologising on hope that lie behind these types of distortions as potentially irresponsible in the times in which we live, promoting either a world renouncing form of salvation as a post life escape to heaven, the co-opting of 'Kingdom values' to serve a rigidly moral conservative social agenda that bears little resemblance to many of the deeds or words of the Jesus that they purport to follow or the equally damaging implications of buying uncritically into the mainstream consumerist drive for success, progress and prosperity using a rhetoric of hopeful optimism to avoid the damaging human underbelly on which this seeming progress often rests. It suggests that these are all potentially limiting distortions of authentic Christian hope that then play out further in the visions of hope they encourage, the type of hopeful characters they build and in the end, the sort of hopeful action that they endorse. This research recognises that they all contain elements of Christian hope present in the multi-varied Christian tradition but instead searches for the reclaiming of an alternative and yet persistent strand of theological hoping within history and for our world which can encourage Christians to be actively involved in genuine efforts towards social transformation in critical solidarity with many other allies-in-hope outside the Christian tradition. This research project aligns its thinking most closely with the hope theology of Jürgen Moltmann, pointing to the need for a Christian hope in critical solidarity with others for our world today that can be open to other allies-in-hope.

It is the contention of this research project that an *education in hope*<sup>109</sup> is urgently needed for Christians especially to seek to avoid the ever-present temptations of false hope, distorted hopes, or a holding to a hope that is endlessly deferred or merely held for the wrong things. This research project attempts to contribute in a small way to that education and suggests that the way in which we continue to conceptualise Christian forms of social hope may have significant implications for our lived practice of hope as Christian communities and also for the involvement of Christians in hopeful social transformation in our world today. 'Intellectual brilliance is not the test of today's theology, but its capacity to inspire and motivate people for their faith praxis. Hence, today's academic theology should necessarily lead to the implementation of the Christian social practices.'<sup>110</sup>

This project argues the case for the primacy of authentic Christian hope in the mission of the church as a core site of Christian social practices. It claims that this is also a timely moment to further explore this dimension of social hope in the light of what many theologians from multiple denominations today are calling a wider crisis in modern day Christian mission to which this introductory chapter now briefly turns.

<sup>109</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 3-6 and Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, 72-91.

<sup>110</sup> Arockiadoss, "Theology as a force for social change", 3. This is not to suggest that theory is not relevant in its own right – 'there is nothing so practical as a good idea' Kant reminds us – but to highlight the critical importance of connecting theory and practice, the academy and the church in our theological reflections if our aim is not merely to interpret the world but to also affect it.

## 1.6 Problematising Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

“Old contexts for mission are deeply saturated with ideologies of domination from which we need repentance and emancipation.”<sup>111</sup>

According to Walter Brueggemann<sup>112</sup> it is increasingly apparent to many Christians and non-Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that some old missional assumptions and practices are no longer either credible or productive in the light of today’s context of religious and cultural pluralism as well as increased post-modern thinking. This research project is based on the premise that there is significant consensus around the need to reformulate mission; to recognise that God’s mission is wider than the horizon of the church and to seek to avoid the absolutism and triumphalism of the Christian past as new paradigms are developed that can more appropriately meet the needs of our current age. It suggests that this opportunity to reformulate mission is not to be feared or avoided. Hans Küng points to six paradigm shifts that mission has made in the life of the church in order to enable it to remain both relevant to the times it lives in and ongoing authentic to its witness to the Living God as portrayed in the person of Jesus. He argues that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century we are seeing a new shift towards what he terms the *emerging ecumenical paradigm*.<sup>113</sup> This project seeks to make a contribution to this wider discussion regarding the mission of the church today by exploring the relevance of Christian hope for the social practices of the church in the world today in the third and final chapter.

Brueggemann<sup>114</sup> suggests that many Christians no longer view the aggressive Christianization of the world as a faithful expression of God’s mandate ‘especially in the light of its ambiguous historical legacy and the reality of our fragile pluralistic planet’. Increasingly theologians of many persuasions argue that the mission of 21<sup>st</sup> century church may instead be to confess ‘hope in action’. Douglas Hall<sup>115</sup> draws on the work of Paul Tillich to suggest that humans always face three forms of anxiety – guilt/condemnation, fate/death, meaninglessness /despair. For him, our current times resonate with the latter most of all and yet he suggests however that much Christian mission is still speaking primarily to the anxiety of guilt in their articulation of salvation. Botman<sup>116</sup> reminds us that Christian eschatological hope has often been used to justify apathy in the present, leading to quietism, passivity and paralysis and leading to justified criticism from secular theorists such as Richard Rorty<sup>117</sup> who claims that Christian hope is otherworldly, of no relevance to the present, and is counterproductive to realising hopes in this world. His scathing criticism of religion as ‘*pie in the sky when we die*’ may be a caricature but we must acknowledge that they reflect what many today think of religion, and what, without care, our Christian theology can be in danger of endorsing.

This project does not intend to deny the ongoing need for individual transformation as a core dimension of the mission of the church even if it’s likely that this too, may also require reworking in the light of our current times. However the focus of this research is to argue that social transformation, as discussed below, is also a relevant and important Christian dimension in its own right, and not just as a secondary ‘aid’ to personal evangelism as the true and ultimate goal of all Christian mission as it has often historically been viewed.

<sup>111</sup> Hall, *Despair as Ailment*, 84-86.

<sup>112</sup> Brueggemann (ed), *Hope for the World*, 7.

<sup>113</sup> David Bosch uses these subdivisions in *Transforming Mission* as proposed by Hans Küng. *The Church*. Kent: Burns and Oates. 1968 to point to the current emerging ecumenical paradigm which we increasingly encounter today in mission.

<sup>114</sup> Found in Brueggemann (ed) , *Hope for the World*,15.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid 75.

<sup>117</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope*: 208.

## Revisiting the aim of this research project

This first chapter has set out the context of our times within which this research project is situated, pointing first to the widespread context of despair and anxiety, especially in the global social space, that humans feel and the crisis of social hope that has developed, prompting either apathy or a reduction of hope to the private sphere. It explored the rise in the language and activities of social transformation in our world and briefly unpacked what this term has meant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Into this specific context, it then briefly outlined a resurgence of interest in the phenomenon of hope from multiple disciplines in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century laying the groundwork for the relevance of a theological exploration of hope as a useful contribution to this wider human interest in hope. It highlighted the emergence of some specific and hopeful social movements for change in the secular space and the need for churches to more clearly define their identity in relation to these in order to establish where they can potentially best contribute distinctively to these movements.

It has also presented three examples of stereotypical ways that Christian hope can be or has been potentially 'distorted' – drawing on analysis by a number of theologians. This leads to the value of a more rigorous unpacking of an alternative form of Christian hope that this research project will suggest can maybe avoid some of the dangers of these three approaches. It then points to the wider crisis of mission in our churches today, seeing this as a timely opportunity to reshape an active mission that can be informed by a resilient hope for our world today. It concludes with the opinion that an exploration of a well grounded and concrete theology of hope and its implications for social transformation in our world is merited by the context of our times as laid out in this chapter as well as the prevailing contradictions and debates that continue to exist today in Christianity with regard to both the nature of Christian hope and wider Christian mission.

This research project questions how we can speak meaningfully about hope in the context of these broken world realities and to explore whether there are convincing recent traditions within Christianity for a way of conceptualising a socially responsible religious hope for our current times that can be envisioned, embodied and enacted in our world today. If so, this project then seeks to point towards the social practice of this hope as a central component of the mission of the church for social transformation in our world today.

This project is in 'hopeful' search of a form of Christian hope that has concrete this-worldly social implications and is not just about "*pie in the sky when we die*" as some secular detractors of Christianity have suggested. It seeks for a Christian hope that can balance the demands of an active human responsibility alongside faith in a divine presence and that is capable of being incarnated into how we see, are and act as humans in the midst of life as it is and not just as an abstract doctrine of belief. It looks towards a hope that can enable us to be active contributors to the wider human projects of social transformation clearly needed at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that can receive inter-denominational or wider ecumenical endorsement by Christians coming from many traditions, pointing to the increasing 'convergence of convictions'<sup>118</sup> around the need for all Christians to be working for social transformation and embodying an active hope for our world. Like Biezeveld, it is in search of a 'hope in the midst of actual life'.<sup>119</sup> It is to an introduction of this hope that Chapter 2 now turns.

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<sup>118</sup> Du Toit, *Development*, 266.

<sup>119</sup> K.E Biezeveld "Hope in the midst of actual life" in *Christian Hope in Context II*. Van Heulen and Van Egmond (eds). Meinema: 2001. 33-45.

## Chapter Two INTRODUCING HOPE

“God created all things complete; man however he created in hope.” Rabbinical commentary. <sup>120</sup>

“Hope is a universal characteristic of human existence from the cradle to the grave.” Ernest Bloch. <sup>121</sup>

### 2.1 The Phenomenon of Hope

In Greek mythology, the story of Pandora’s box best encapsulates the inherent ambiguities in our human attitude to hope. When Pandora releases all the evils into the world and slams the lid shut in horror, the tiny voice that squeaks out – “*Let me out, I am hope*” to which she responds by releasing it, has been interpreted differently from the very day the story was originally told. Many of the original interpreters of the myth <sup>122</sup> claim that it was the one good thing in the box, a human weapon and comfort against all the other ills, others <sup>123</sup> argue instead that ironically it was in fact the worst evil on the box, because it deludes humans into a refusal of the realities of the present by believing that things can improve. This debate on the positive value or otherwise of hope continues into the modern world today where Spinoza, Pascal and Freud for example dismiss hope as variously negative, deceitful, infantile and/or illusionary. <sup>124</sup>

In the 1994 film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, <sup>125</sup> Morgan Freeman plays Red, a prisoner serving life who tells Andy, a new life prisoner “Hope is a dangerous thing”. It is dangerous because it has the power and the ability to fundamentally shape how we perceive and act in the present, based on what we believe about what is possible for the future. Despite this warning, Andy continues to hope – an ability endorsed by philosophers and theologians of many traditions through the ages as an intrinsic and fundamental aspect of our humanity. In the film, this belief that hope is a good thing is actualised. This research project theologically explores this claim through the lens of theology, that hope is a good thing that we need to nurture. It suggests that Pandora was right to recognise it as an essentially *social asset* as we seek to tackle and live with the many “ills” that threaten our world today. However it also bears in mind Red’s warning – that hope is dangerous. Many movements in our world have drawn on our undeniable need for hope, especially in the last century. We only need to think of suicide bombers, buoyed by a hope for Paradise, the Inquisition forcing people to confess to unbelievably religious hopes and communist regimes built on a faith in worldly utopias to realise that the legacy of hope in our world is highly ambiguous. What grounds our hopes may in fact be a critical ingredient in the nature of its effects. This research project specifically explores a Christian approach to hope whilst recognising that the theme of hope could also no doubt be fruitfully explored through other lenses.

“Hope is a mode of existence, not just a series of hopes for things. It is openness and preparedness. Conversely to despair does not mean to bury a couple of hopes but to surrender our openness and our self.

Hope is the most important constituent of human life. Man hopes as long as he lives and is alive in a uniquely human way only as long as he can hope. Men die when they get the impression that their lives have become hopeless.” <sup>126</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Quoted by J. Moltmann in *The Experiment Hope*, SCM Press. 1975, 27.

<sup>121</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 10.

<sup>122</sup> Story retold by E. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 72 NY; Mentor, 1969.

<sup>123</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Greek Myths*, 143 refers to “Deceitful hope and her lies”. The Folio Society, 1996.

<sup>124</sup> See Moltmann. *Theology of Hope*. 12 for one example of this. Other philosophers are quoted at different points in his work.

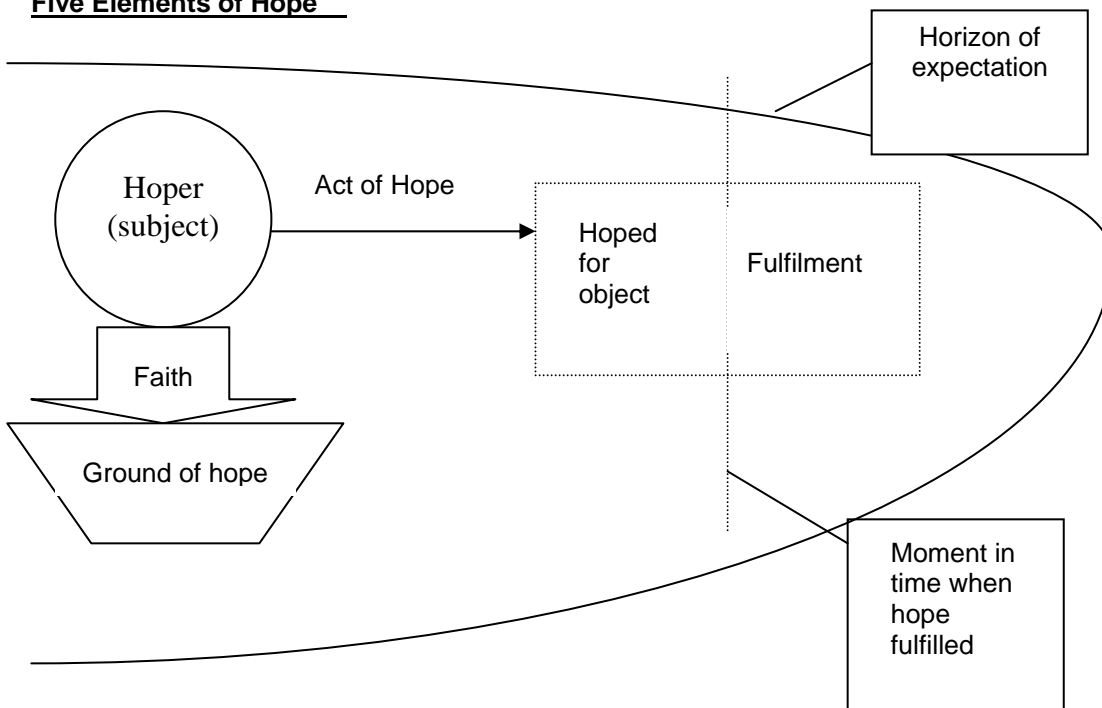
<sup>125</sup> *The Shawshank Redemption*. 1994. Castle Rock Entertainment.

<sup>126</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment*, 20 and *Human Identity*, 23.

The roots of the word hope relate back to the Old English word *hopian* – to wish or look forward to and has sometimes been linked to the word ‘hop’ – to leap forwards. The Indonesian word for hope means looking “through the horizons to what is beyond”<sup>127</sup> while the Akan word for hope, ‘anisado’ literally means ‘to set the eyes on’. For the African theologian Antwi<sup>128</sup>, this suggests that hope leads everything else, because it sees what will be. Finally, the German philosopher Josef Pieper links the Latin word for hope (*spes*) to the word ‘pes’ – meaning foot. He suggests, as this research explores further in Chapter 4, that hope is a virtue related to our human travel through time and in this way he considers hope as a ‘way of being’ intrinsic to the human condition. This project’s theological exploration of hope is also based on an understanding of hope as an empirical and observable human phenomenon across multiple faiths & cultures.

‘Hope can be empirically encountered and understood, it is an aspect of human psyche that we experience as a phenomenon’<sup>129</sup>. According to James Smith, hope is a mode of consciousness and a particular way of intending the future that can be phenomenologically analysed. He points to its intentionality; hope is hope for something and cannot be completely indeterminate and still have meaning. For him it also requires a horizon to give it context and he breaks hope down into five interrelated elements as the diagram below depicts.

**Five Elements of Hope**<sup>130</sup>



- 1) **A Hoper** – a human subject who is the one who hopes.
- 2) **An Object hoped for** – an expected perceived good – this cannot be completely indeterminate.
- 3) **An Act of hope** – requires intentional consciousness on the part of the hoper to hope.
- 4) **Ground of hope** – either within or outside hoper and distinguishes hope from mere wishful thinking or illusion. People relate to the ground of hope via some ‘faith’ in the broad non-religious sense of this word.
- 5) **Fulfilment of hope** – hope wants fulfilment to be realised and has a horizon within which it conceptualises this. There is an element of contingency. Hope is not a guarantee, even if it is characterized by confidence.

<sup>127</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life*. Fortress Press:1997. 40.

<sup>128</sup> Antwi, “Christian hope: Challenges for 21<sup>ST</sup> Century Africa” in *Christian Hope in Context Vol II* Van Heulen and Van Egmond (eds). Meinema: 2001. 104-109.

<sup>129</sup> Josef Pieper, *Hope and History*. San Francisco; Ignatius Press:1967.19 (c1994 print).

<sup>130</sup> This diagram and further analysis can be found in more detail in Smith, “Determined Hope”, 210.

For Smith, all these elements are required in order for the phenomenon of hope to be present. The specific areas of the object, ground and horizon of Christian hope are picked up further in chapter 3 of this project.

According to the Australian theologian Anthony Kelly<sup>131</sup>, hope is characterised by a number of features. He points out that hope differs from optimism as it often emerges out of suffering when our systems break down as a way for us to operate in a world of unpredictability. He sees hope as a mode of living and acting that goes beyond merely wishing and can therefore be characterised as a virtue, giving us the capacity to act well and inspiring action. For Kelly, hope acts to bring into the limitations of the present some anticipation of what it envisages and yet maintains an openness to what is beyond our control, operating in the mode of possibility not certainty and drawing on our imaginative resources. In this way hope points to the self-transcending dynamism of our human existence and our desire for meaning that encompasses the spiritual dimension of the human person and he sees hope itself as a transcending phenomenon.

Kelly argues in the tradition of many other philosophers and theologians of hope that hope is a social reality and not merely an individual one. For him hope for self then expands to hope for others making hope a social virtue as the Pandora's box myth above also suggests. Kelly claims that for hope to be maintained by individuals, it needs to be sustained by a helping community and points to the church as a possible community of hope. He argues that hope thrives on mutual assistance, cooperation and compassion and introduces a note of humour and irony into the human situation enabling us to counter temptations to despair

“Hope arises and grows in the midst of inexplicable suffering, inevitable death and humiliating failure, meaningless, guilt and fear in all its forms... It is ever up against evil...It offers no complacent, passive preview of things ...It claims that in Christ something radically hopeful has already happened...But it takes none of the darkness or waiting out of our hope.”<sup>132</sup>

He calls for an inter-hope dialogue in our world today where all can play a part in the ecology of a global human culture and we need to be united in looking forward to a *hoped for future* that we hold in common. In this way he sits in the tradition of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann explored later in this project who suggests that hope enables us first to see differently and that this translates to us acting differently. Many of these ideas on the nature of hope will be unpacked further as this research progresses.

### **An education in hope**

“A major theological and cultural project must be to relearn the forgotten language of hope or to infuse the jaded language of hope with new vitality.”<sup>133</sup>

The German philosopher Ernest Bloch in his magisterial work, *The Principle of Hope*<sup>134</sup> argues that hope has to be learned, because only then would it not be an illusionary wish, but a grounded expectation. Bloch starts by looking at the everyday consciousness of humans. He marks aspects within that which point at a better life and therefore sees hope as deeply rooted in human consciousness. The impulse to work for better conditions of life for him originates from being discontent with the present situation so that the will comes up

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<sup>131</sup> Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology*. 1-17. This book was unfortunately not reviewed in this project due to space but is highly recommended

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 13-14.

<sup>133</sup> Katerburg, W and Volf, M (eds) *Future of Hope*, Introduction px

<sup>134</sup> Bloch, *Principle*, 100. This magisterial work was a strong and abiding influence on Moltmann's development of theology of hope

to negate and to change it. 'Can we learn to hope' ponders Moltmann in his *Mediation on Hope*<sup>135</sup>. 'I think we can', he concludes, 'we learn to hope when we say yes to the future. We experience the power of hope when we have to fight against our apathy of soul'. What plunges us into disaster, as the church father Chrysostom wisely said, is not so much our sins as our despair. This research project seeks to explore and analyse our concept of Christian hope in the belief that we can learn to hope in better ways as humans for our world.

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."<sup>136</sup>

This paper seeks to contribute towards an education in a Christian understanding of hope that is situated within and sensitive to the wider dialogue on hope within and outside Christian circles. Both Paulo Freire and Walter Brueggemann point to the need for an education in hope and highlight that Jews and Christians are a people of hope only if they are not alienated from and ignorant of their tradition<sup>137</sup>. However the form of hope that this project aims to unpack is a hope in solidarity with the phenomenon of hope as a basic and universal human quality rather than an exclusive gift offered only to the select religious few from which many others are excluded. While Christianity obviously offers its own unique insight to bear on the topic of hope and it is these insights that are engaged with primarily in this theological project, this research builds those insights onto an anthropological perspective of hope as first and foremost an inclusive and human phenomenon.

Christians are not the only people of hope. Hope lives in all and is for all. The Christian hope for the universal Kingdom of God needs verification. It also needs comparison with non-Christian visions of human history or with other conceptions of hope. Christian hope by no means rejects other projects of fulfilling humanities hopes for a future worthy of human persons but it does however point to a revelatory horizon that can open our eyes to a unique surplus based on a divine promise. In this way there is a need for dialogue between religious and secular hope.<sup>138</sup>

## 2.2 The History of Christian Hope

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."<sup>139</sup>

Hope is acknowledged by Christians as one of the three theological virtues, and given clear emphasis by Paul who states, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Spirit. (Rom.15:13). "For everything that was written in the past was written to each us so that through endurance and the encouragement of scriptures we might have hope' (Rom 15:4). According to Pope Benedict<sup>140</sup>, Hope is a key word in Biblical faith and in several passages the words "faith" and "hope" seem closely linked. Christians are to be ready to give an answer concerning the reason for their hope (Peter 3:15). For many, faith is seen as the primary virtue with love following and hope as a lagging third<sup>141</sup> or hope is merely collapsed into faith thereby losing any characteristics in its own right.

<sup>135</sup> Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, 38-42.

<sup>136</sup> Romans 15:4. *NIV*.

<sup>137</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 3-6 and Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, 72-91.

<sup>138</sup> Waclaw Hryniewicz, *The Challenge of our Hope*. Polish Philosophical studies VII. Council for Research in Values & Philosophy 2007.

<sup>139</sup> Hebrews 6:19. *NIV*.

<sup>140</sup> Benedict, *Spes Salvi*, 2007. Thus the "fullness of faith" (Heb 10:22) is linked to "the confession of our hope without wavering".

<sup>141</sup> Botman, "Hope for the Coming Reign" suggests that hope still remains the neglected third in the triad, 81.



Hope can easily become one of those overused words like 'nice' or 'good' that can easily lose any sense of its true meaning. In our complex modern world, Christian hope especially can be in danger of becoming one of those abstract words that sometimes bears little relation to the reality of people's everyday lives. 'Preachers may lazily spew out bland churchy words that do not respect the victories and defeats that people endure.'<sup>142</sup> Hope can become reduced or distorted merely into a final passive option that people resort to only once they have exhausted all active options which in reality is ironically a form of hopelessness (e.g. 'There's nothing left for us to do but hope') This project suggests instead that Christian hope needs to regain its concrete and active grounding in God's own words of hope for our world. Without this, our own words of hope can become disconnected, distorted and even trite. For the Canadian theologian Douglas Hall, in a time where anti-world apocalyptic cults are on the rise, the church has an urgent need to offer a meaningful communicable eschatology that can provide an alternative to both anti-world apocalypticism but also old forms of liberal progressivism. For him, a theology of 'costly hope'(explored in Chapter 4 of this project) can enable us to live under the tyranny of time freely and joyfully but also to avoid forms of realised eschatology which quickly harden into ideology e.g. American myths of progress. This project recognises that by undertaking an exploration of Christian hope for the world, it is entering into a deeply rooted historical conversation on this topic within which this small piece of research is situated. The next section therefore briefly charts the wider historical tradition of Christian hope with a focus on the social this-worldly dimensions of hope that is the particular emphasis of this research project. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"<sup>143</sup>.

"Christian hope is understood as having a special quality compared to the hopes of others. But this cannot be forced on others. We must be open to the possibility that others may have a similar interpretation of hope. Finally we must bear in mind that the Source of Hope is God who reveals both to Christians and non Christians"<sup>144</sup>

According to the recent book on hope<sup>145</sup> by Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar Tom Wright, what many Christians often actually hope for is often to leave this wicked world and go to heaven when they die. This populist view of Christian hope, he argues, is both biblically wrong and practically damaging in the here and now. Obviously to unpack the history of centuries of reflection on Christian hope in any credible detail is far beyond the scope of this project. However as Alasdair Macintyre points out, as explored later in this research, to enact a social practice or to embody a virtue is also to recognise that it comes with a particular historical tradition and to seek to shape one's own perspective in some way in the light of that tradition. In acknowledgement of that long existing tradition with regard to the theory and practice of Christian hope, this section briefly sketches a few of the historical features of the ways in which Christian hope has been understood drawing mainly on a useful short book on the topic by Brian Hebblethwaite.<sup>146</sup>

Hebblethwaite begins by pointing to the form of hope he sees emerging out of the Christian scriptures. He suggests (as is picked up by Moltmann in the next chapter of this research project) that the Israelite tradition

<sup>142</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor. *When God is Silent*. Cambridge: MA. 1998 107. Also see Hall, *Confessing*, 464.

<sup>143</sup> Jeremiah 29:11 NIV.

<sup>144</sup> A Yewangoe, "Christian Hope in Context - an Indonesian Perspective" in Van Egmond and Van Keulen (eds) *Christian Hope in Context II*. Maimena: 2001: 185.

<sup>145</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 206.

<sup>146</sup> This entire section draws for its material on Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1985. For a far more detailed exploration of this complex history of Christian hope, Ernst Conradie's *Hope for the Earth* is highly recommended.

which forms the backdrop to both the life and teachings of Jesus and to the development of Christianity held to a clear this-worldly and historical messianic hope as a people with a strong prophetic tradition that called both Israel and the wider society to account for its social actions, speaking words of both judgment and hope about the future in order to stimulate concrete change in social behaviour in the present. In the later part of the Old Testament when Israel were in exile, a more apocalyptic form of hope also developed, possibly influenced by other contemporary religions of the day, that increasingly universalised hope beyond Israel alone and also began symbolically to point to possible fulfilments that sat beyond human history. In the New Testament, the idea of the 'Kingdom of God' further developed by Jesus, sits very close to the heart of that historical and messianic hope of Israel but also radicalises it further, throwing it open to those who would typically have been excluded by the religious establishment and conveying a sense of the Kingdom, not only as a future still to come but as a social reality to be experienced in some way by people now. The synoptic gospels point to this sort of historical hope in the world but in John's later Gospel the tone shifts to emphasise eternal life in line with a more Gnostic attitude towards salvation showing that from day one the tension between a hope for another life and historical hopes for this world was apparent<sup>147</sup>.

The gradual spiritualising of what had originally been a this-worldly and socially embodied hope for change into a more transcendent hope for escape to another world continued to exist alongside the realities of a state church with a wide array of formal social practices and huge normative powers over everyday life. Sects and movements that emerged in response to this institutionalisation did hark back to more vibrant and subversive eschatological hopes with clearer this-worldly application but they tended to remain minority voices against the weight of the institutionalised and established church that often supported rather than critiqued the status quo around them unlike the original figure of Jesus.

Hebblethwaite then moves forward to look at the Reformation and Enlightenment period. For him it was here that a broader hope for God's future shifted most clearly into a post-life and other-worldly belief in immortality as human knowledge seemed to step into many of the areas of needed worldly improvement. The church increasingly become more conservative (though opposing sects still continued to emerge) with little significant application of many church doctrines in the here and now. Luther's strong emphasis on the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms provided a theological endorsement for a Protestant withdrawal from the wider sphere of socio-political activism that continues to exert influence today. (although has also been actively and practically challenged by many breakaway denominations e.g. Methodists and The Salvation Army).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century however worldly hope returned with a vengeance in many philosophies with the idealism of Hegel, the contributions of Schliermacher, who took an anti-supernatural/transcendental approach to religion and focused instead on a strong this-worldly emphasis, and a Kantian inspired progressive ethical realisation of the Kingdom of God also picked up by Marxist philosophers such as Ernst Bloch. Theology responded to these developments of the time with the emergence of what became known as the Social Gospel – propounded most clearly by figures such as Walter Rauschenbusch amongst many others. Some 19<sup>th</sup> century religious philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard sought to take an alternative approach that engaged with existentialist philosophies of the time but refused to identify God's rule fully with worldly phenomenon like the social gospel often more uncritically did. At the same time, powerful secular

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<sup>147</sup> See Brueggeman, *Hope within History*, 7-25 for more on this tension.

eschatological and origin visions were emerging on the scene as significant and compelling mainstream alternatives to traditional Christian teachings embodied in the teachings of Darwin and Marx in particular<sup>148</sup>. This optimistic 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal progressive theological optimism was rudely shattered by WWI and the booming call for a neo-orthodox theology by Karl Barth that developed a dialectical theology reemphasising the transcendence of God. He nevertheless maintained the need for a strong social edge with this-worldly implications for Christianity despite his critique of the 19<sup>th</sup> century forms that it had taken<sup>149</sup>. The ongoing social atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to batter the gospel of liberal progressivism and an evangelical backlash to the idea of the progressive realisation of Kingdom of God emerged in the 1930s with the Great Reversal where almost all issues of social concerns were eliminated from fundamentalist circles<sup>150</sup>.

At the same time the 20<sup>th</sup> Century began to recover the language of eschatology for the modern church with a proliferation of typologies and debates around the nature and role of the eschatological vision for Christians with strong contributions from many theologians but in particular the post WWII works of Moltmann and Pannenberg. However this project does not explore the wider complex area of eschatology in relation to hope. It believes this has already been done in great detail elsewhere and agrees with Conradie that, 'This myriad of (eschatological) approaches, conflicts, and typologies tends to inhibit a clear and inspiring vision of hope in an age of anxiety and despair. It has obscured the meaning of basic concepts like the eschaton or eschatology. It has also led to a paradoxical tension between hope, the central theme of any Christian eschatology, and eschatological reflection itself. We do not know what we hope, only that we hope or, even worse, that to hope is important'.<sup>151</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been characterised by a strong tension between the evangelical and ecumenical wings of the church specifically in relation to Christian hope. While this debate is picked up towards the end of this research in relation to mission, it is important to acknowledge at the start of this project that this research contribution enters onto a stage that continues to remain polarised within Christian thinking. This project does not claim to offer a neutral space to adjudicate those views, but believes that a more detailed unpacking of the concept of hope may contribute in some way towards greater clarity within the debate itself.

The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 was seen as a significant step forwards in ecumenical dialogue on topics such as hope. One meeting in particular of note was the Faith and Order commission in India (1978) which focused on exploring hope and coined the powerful phrase 'hope as the resistance movement against fatalism'<sup>152</sup>. Nevertheless the ongoing tension between the ecumenical and evangelical wings of church in relation both to the nature of Christian hope (this-worldly or next) and its emphasis (focused on personal transformation or social structures) has been highlighted by Bosch as fuelled fundamentally by differences in the theological understanding of both sin and salvation<sup>153</sup>. The Ecumenical

<sup>148</sup> This project does not suggest that these 'secular' approaches cannot often be successfully reconciled into a creative synthesis with faith, just that at the time they emerged they presented a challenge to many of the more traditional ways of conceptualising Christianity

<sup>149</sup> Karl Barth's dialectic theology is clearly appropriated and developed further by Moltmann who was one of his students. See John Reist, "Commencement, Continuation, Consummation: Karl Barth's theology of hope". *Evangelical Quarterly* 87: 3. 195 – 214.

<sup>150</sup> Du Toit, *Development*, 264.

<sup>151</sup> Conradie, *Hope for the Earth*, 15. For a thorough and detailed exploration of the range of differing eschatological approaches and their specific relevance to hope, see this book which this project has decided not to reproduce here but feels is an excellent summary.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Botman, "Hope as the Coming Reign", 73.

<sup>153</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 395 points to this tension. Social gospel has been criticised for underplaying the realities of sin and repentance and focusing excessively on good works rather than grace. Evangelicals on the other hand can focus on otherworldly realities seeing sin as merely individualistic and salvation as only addressing the spiritual dimension of life. Both of these can, in the view of this researcher and other theologians, distort authentic Christian hope.

movement tended towards couching salvation pre-dominantly in this-worldly terms such as human dignity, economic justice, solidarity and hope. Evangelical Christians continued to resist what they saw as the excessive focus on this-world of the ecumenical dialogue on hope and developed their own process to explore questions on hope and mission that retained an explicit sense of eschatological hope.<sup>154</sup>

The powerful impact of liberation theology in 1960s and 70s had a significant impact over time on many wider theological frameworks with a call for revolution challenging the development approaches of the time and also raising clearly the need for both hopes for consummation and hopes for liberation. Mostert points out that the question of the relation between the ultimate eschatological hope of Christians and their proximate historical hopes has also been a controversial one in the more recent relationships between the older churches of the North and the newer churches of the South. He points to the 1954 WCC Evanston assembly under the theme – *Christ, The Hope of the World* to highlight the profound differences in the way Christian hope was understood at this conference. “For some this hope was essentially eschatological, otherworldly. Others wanted to interpret Christian hope as a powerful dynamic shaping history and society. Many theologians from the newer churches deplored the division of reality into two worlds or histories, the one created through human decision and action and the other as God’s action in relation to the kingdom of God. Against such dualism, they saw a single history which was both God’s history and human history and the need for a common articulation of hope.”<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless by the early 1980s, Du Toit and others suggest that a gradual ‘convergence of convictions’ was beginning to emerge in this arena around the importance of a hope for social transformation. Evangelicals at Lausanne ‘74 and Wheaton ‘84 emphasised the importance of the church not only meeting human needs but also pressing for social transformation. Ecumenicals at the same time pointed to the need to proclaim the promise of the kingdom alongside their social actions. This conciliatory direction from both sides is promising in its increased acceptance of the social and this-worldly implications of Christian hope, but it remains an open question as to how deep this seeming consensus actually runs. The 2000 Campbell Seminar on Hope for the World explored later in this research project demonstrates the continued debate on this topic.

The question as to whether Christian hope is to be understood exclusively – as something only available to Christians, or inclusively as something that gives hope to all the world seems to be an important one. For Yewangoe<sup>156</sup> – this is fundamentally also a question we must answer with regard to Christ. For him Christ is the expression of God’s solidarity with the world and must therefore be understood inclusively as one who cares for others. For him genuine hope is therefore a hope in solidarity with others so the message which Christians are called to carry to the world about the hope which is in them is not to be an exclusive message as if we are the holders of genuine hope while others are not. If we believe that the message of hope is God’s message, then we must also believe that God is able to raise hope in the hearts of everybody, Christians as well as non-Christians and that this humility on the part of Christians to accept that God is also working on ‘the other side’ can enable Christians to take full part on every struggle, making hope present in various fields outside the theological space and in action with others. This research project endorses this

<sup>154</sup> This took place at conferences in Lausanne ‘74, Wheaton ‘84, Manila in ‘89, Thailand in ‘04 and Cape Town in 2010.

<sup>155</sup> Christian Mostert, “Hope as ultimate and proximate” in *Christian Hope in Context I*. (eds) Van Egmond and Van Kuelen, 240

<sup>156</sup> Yewangoe, “Indonesian Perspective”, 180-182.

approach in the analysis of hope which follows whilst acknowledging that it would be strongly contested by many who sit on the more evangelical side of the ongoing debate on Christian hope.

Hebblethwaite summarises his analysis by pointing out that Christian hope down the centuries has struggled to establish the relationship between hope for our historical future and what he terms our 'ultimate future'<sup>157</sup>. He argues that it has only really been in the last two centuries that these two hopes have begun to be more clearly balanced with an increasing awareness of the 'sanctification of the world' as an important dimension of Christian hope. This research project draws on a number of recent theologians who emphasise this dimension explicitly in their theological approach. In the view of this researcher, most of these theologians are building, either wittingly or unwittingly on the great insights of Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope for the world articulated powerfully first in the 1960s and still continuing to speak to us today whilst also over that time influencing a generation of theological practitioners to explore hope in new ways.

This project introduces hope as a good thing and an essentially social asset for our times. It sets up the coming theological exploration of hope onto an empirical framework of the phenomenon of hope – suggesting that hope has an analytical structure that can help us think more clearly about hope. Hope is seen as a mode of being and acting, and not merely wishing enabling it to be characterised as a virtue that in some way points us beyond reality into the realm of possibility. It points out that hope often emerges most strongly out of situations of suffering and defeat and, in the light of the social challenges of our times, calls for the need for an education in hope – especially for Christians where distorted forms of hope proliferate. The chapter briefly unpacks the history of Christian Hope – pointing to an ongoing tension between this-worldly forms of hoping and ultimate hopes for eternal life, heaven or salvation. Religious hope has time and again become spiritualised and then been challenged. This contested view on hope continues in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a continuing divide between evangelical and ecumenical approaches to authentic Christian hope.

### 2.3 A responsible Christian hope for our times

"Christian hope is a protest statement, a form of resistance and defiance, instigated by an unacceptable present. It is both a 'negation of the negative' and an anticipation of the positive."<sup>158</sup> In our troubled and anxious world at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are in "dire need of a clear vision of hope to help us face a daunting social agenda including increasing poverty, ethnic and religious conflict, environmental degradation and AIDS"<sup>159</sup> Conradie suggests that the task of formulating a clear and intelligible vision of hope is formidable but that religious traditions, including Christianity, have an important role in fostering such a spirit of hope. According to many writing today including NT Wright, in the popular imagination, Christian hope today is still predominantly regarded as a hope for life beyond death. This is evident in grave inscriptions, "in memoriam" notices, and in the popular interest in near-death experiences. Heaven is often pictured as a beautiful holiday resort where we will meet our loved ones again. He challenges this view of Christian hope strongly and this research project aims to present an alternative to this hope with a focus on social and this-worldly dimensions of hope as a counter to how it has often been popularly portrayed.

<sup>157</sup> See Mostert, *Ultimate and Proximate hope* for a full discussion of the contested relationship between ultimate and proximate hopes.

<sup>158</sup> Conradie, *Hope for Earth* (quoting Moltmann), 26.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

The feminist theologian Sharon Welch<sup>160</sup> asks the question, 'What does it mean to work for social transformation in the face of so much suffering and evil. How can we sustain hope?' She points us to hope as a key ingredient in efforts for social transformation as well as suggesting that it may be here that theologians have something unique to offer the wider public debate. This project brings together the question of Christian hope in the specific light of this question of social transformation as we face a world in significant need. It is searching for a socially responsible form of Christian hope that can both speak and act meaningfully in our times.<sup>161</sup>

How does hope gets its vision, its shape, its confidence? How does it managed to be renewed day after day, against all hope. Is it enough to say that we are simply creatures of hope...for those who understand their world and human experience in relation to God, no account of hope would be adequate if it did not see hope itself in relation to God. For God is understood as the ground of hope, the giver and sustainer of hope and the one who will finally justify all hope for the world.<sup>162</sup>

This project explicitly situates itself within perspective informed by the insights of liberation theology and sits at odds with those who consider liberation theology to be outdated. By liberation theology it means a form of theology which wants to be defined by the confrontation with injustice and oppression in the world-situation which continues to exist today<sup>163</sup>. The project systematically unpacks the topic of Christian hope over three chapters using the three fold structural framework of vision, virtue and practice.<sup>164</sup> It chooses to embrace a plurality of views in each chapter to follow to reflect in its own approach the principle of dialogue and heterodoxy that openly recognises difference and, at times, ambiguity as a good thing in our explorations of hope. This avoids a monological approach that can at times tend to reduce or repress important tensions.

**Hope as social vision** explores Christian hope as a 'way of seeing'. This is unpacked by exploring the ground of hope with the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann, the object of hope with the South African Catholic liberation theologian Albert Nolan and the horizon of hope with the American feminist theologian, Flora Keshgegian set within a framework of an 'optics of hope' imagined by Doede and Hughes.

**Hope as social virtue** explores hope as a 'way of being'. It looks at the tradition of virtue theory in Greek and medieval thought in conversation with Stanley Hauerwas and unpacks hope as a social virtue through the work of the Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper and the Canadian Reformed theologian Douglas Hall. It then points briefly to some possible habits that can nurture humbler ways of hoping with Flora Keshgegian.

**Hope as social practice** points to hope as a 'way of doing'. The church is explored as an important site for shared social practices of authentic social hope for our world. Practicing hope in the mission of the church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is then unpacked further by drawing on Tom Wright's suggestion of a 'hope shaped mission' and the call for mission as hope-in-action by Christians today made by the Campbell Seminar participants.

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<sup>160</sup> Sharon Welch. *A feminist ethic of risk*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1.

<sup>161</sup> See Moltmann, *Experiment*, 187 for another reference to the need for a responsible theological hope in our times.

<sup>162</sup> Mostert, "Hope as Ultimate and Proximate". 233.

<sup>163</sup> Biezeveld, "Hope in the Midst of Actual Life", 35.

<sup>164</sup> Framework attributed to Smit. 'Economic Justice'. 1996.

## 2.4 A concrete, context-specific hope – the example of HOPEHIV<sup>165</sup>

The researcher's motivation to find credible ways to speak about hope 'in the midst of actual life' came from her work with HOPEHIV which is a small UK-based charity set up in 2000 by Christians whose faith inspired them to take action for change in response to an encounter between one man, Phil Wall and a baby girl called Zodwa orphaned by HIV/AIDS in South Africa. This encounter led first to the hope of personal adoption, and when that original hope was disappointed, to a deeper hope emerging out of that initial disappointment. Phil's own story then inspired hundreds of other people to take £10 notes away (as a gift) and use their given skills and talents to turn them into £100 or £1000 donations to help more children orphaned by AIDS in Africa. In this way HOPEHIV drew on the potential of hundreds of people in the North to use their individually limited yet collectively powerful human actions to imagine and embody possibilities to generate resources. The power of social entrepreneurship was used to challenge people's thinking and offered a creative and engaging alternative to an increasingly apathetic fundraising climate in the North. It was a dangerous opportunity that took a risk where thousands of pounds was given away in the hope that it would multiply and return. Ten years on, HOPEHIV continues to flourish and challenge individuals and communities in the UK with a hopeful vision of Africa's possibilities, offering real ways to embody that hopefulness by joining together and turning their creative skills into action to enable concrete acts of hope to be supported for over 50,000 children a year in 10 countries across Africa. It has chosen not to identify as a faith-based organisation recognising that it is allied with a range of people of hope from many traditions.

HOPEHIV's 'hope shaped' vision was and is to help children and young people orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV across Africa to reach their potential as human beings and become agents of change within their wider society. It actively sought from day one to explicitly counter the endless negative, hopeless and passive images and concepts that characterised most of the fundraising for African children at that time and often generated a sense of charity fatigue and powerlessness<sup>166</sup>. Instead a relational approach generates respectful empathy with local champions of hope in Africa itself who were often marginalised in large scale aid efforts but were dreaming dreams for responding to the needs of orphaned children around them in a community-based way that could, with some small flexible help, become a reality. HOPEHIV's approach is to find and nurture local 'champions of hope' situated in diverse contexts of deep need. Spending time in the field, the African team looks for signs of hope within local communities with deep needs where individuals or small community groups are starting to resist or challenge current practices with regard to orphans and are seeking to respond. Instead of developing its own 'top-down' programs, HOPEHIV develops long term 'bottom-up' relationships of hope with people in projects characterised by mutuality, honest dialogue and a focus on empowerment grounded in the concrete diversity and reality of Africa. It holds to the belief that those who could often be merely seen as victims, could also, with support become real agents of change themselves and in this way, embody a concrete and powerful hope for others in similar situations. Former street children running programs, gang leaders as sports leaders, orphaned girls as committee chairs, vulnerable schoolchildren as reporters of abuse and local volunteers as teachers and carers all emerged as bearers of hope for others out of these programs. This organisation's approach to hope will be returned to briefly in the conclusion of this research project in the light of the insights gained.

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<sup>165</sup> Other concrete examples of this sort of hope manifested in action can be found in Conradie, *Hope for the Earth*, 218-223 including an excellent summary of the Christian hope of the anti-apartheid era. See [www.hopehiv.org](http://www.hopehiv.org) for more details of this UK based organisation.

<sup>166</sup> See the recent book by Johannes Malherbe, *Saved by the Lion? Stories of African children encountering outsiders*. Childnet. 2011 that critically explores the damage that this way of depicting vulnerable African children has often caused.

## Chapter Three

### HOPE AS SOCIAL VISION: A way of seeing

“To be human is to be thrown into time and caught between a past which defines us and a future which we can only wait for or anticipate”<sup>167</sup>

This chapter aims to explore what it means to have a hopeful vision – to see the world through the lens of Christian hope and to unpack in further detail the suggested ground, object and horizon of this hope by drawing on the writings of a number of diverse contemporary theological writers.

#### 3.1 What is vision?

‘There is no change without dream, there is no dream without hope.’<sup>168</sup>

All human beings have a *Weltanschauung* - a comprehensive way of perceiving the world around us and our relation to it that affects both how and what we see. It is the lens by which we ‘see’ everything else. One of the things that differentiates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, according to theologians such as Moltmann and Alves<sup>169</sup> is our ability to be open to our environment and to both shape and be shaped by it in terms of our response – rather than merely by our instincts. We remain open to our environment and it to us as we interact with it to create human history. Many things shape our world view; nurture, genetics, experiences – a complex area far beyond the scope of this research project. However we then bring this lens not only to bear on our present circumstances, but because we are creatures who self consciously inhabit time, we inevitably bring it to bear also on our way of ‘envisioning’ the possible futures ahead of us. Vision means not only sight in the present but also anticipation of what is possibly to come in the future. This human vision is however a double edged sword. The visions of the future which we are capable of imagining as humans can have real impact on our actions in the present and are therefore dangerously powerful things – they have the potential to throw us into despair, to reduce us to passive fatalism in the present, justify terrible violence as means towards better ends or even encourage irresponsibility by positing miraculous solutions to our future challenges. The visions we hold of our future and whether they are visions that are hopeful or not can have real consequences for our actions and attitudes in the present day which will likely affect that same future in some way. We cannot avoid holding an attitude to our future; but not all attitudes we can take to the future ahead of us are realistic or hopeful ones and not all hopes that we may hold are life enhancing. This project argues for holding to a hopeful vision for our world that is life enhancing for all.

This section of the research project will present what Doede and Hughes term an ‘*optics of hope*’<sup>170</sup> – a way of seeing that is hopeful and open to the future and the possibilities it contains, in contrast to ways of seeing that tend towards viewing the world as a closed system. It seeks to go beyond the vague notion that to be hopeful is a good thing and to delineate more clearly the kind of lens or vision that Christian hope offers us. It does not aim to offer a system for how to hope, in fact it suggests that this very idea runs counter to the

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<sup>167</sup> Volf and Katerburg. *Future of Hope*, 60.

<sup>168</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*. 77.

<sup>169</sup> See Alves, *Theology of human hope*, 1 or Moltmann, *Experiment*. Defines hope as an experiment with God, oneself and history. 182

<sup>170</sup> Doede, R and Hughes, P. “Wounded vision & the optics of hope” in *Future of Hope*, (ed) Volf, M and Katerburg, 182. This interesting essay encourages us to use visibility to generate hope and to imagine redemptive and communal counter-visions grounded in transcendence that can challenge the assertive, wounding gaze so predominant in our world today. Recommended for further reading.



nature of hope but it seeks to point to ways in which our hope can nevertheless be grounded in a sense of a trusting relationship with the God of hope and also to explore the objects toward which Christian hope should be directed if it is to align authentically with the image of God presented most fully in the person of Jesus<sup>171</sup>. It suggests that in order for healthy social visions to flourish in our increasingly globalised world, we urgently need a well grounded sense of social hope for both our human family and the non-human creation on which all life depends. It draws on selected Christian theologians who have engaged systematically with the topic of hope to offer relevant social visions by which we can view the many challenges of our world.

It is important at this stage to carefully distinguish vision from ideology as the two can easily be confused. Both include sets of ideas that embody a way of seeing things and tend to be purposive in action terms as a way of seeking change not merely understanding it. There is a significant difference between a person who wholeheartedly embraces a particular religious vision as their chosen worldview and lives this out fully amongst others as an authentic lifestyle and the person who seeks to impose this vision ideologically as the only and final truth onto all others within society that s/he meets. Visionaries can inspire us, even if we do not always share their belief systems. Ideologues tend to seek to stifle, assimilate and control other views in the name of their version of the truth. Social vision is thereby quickly reduced to social engineering. While visions, especially social or religious visions have often in practice sadly hardened into controlling visions or closed ideologies socially imposed down in a way that stifles dissent, one of the key themes of this research is that an authentic vision of hope can help guard against this tendency by always encouraging us to think outside the system, reject absolutist frames and consider alternative possibilities. An example of this is the protest vision of Marx articulated against the oppression he saw around him which then hardened into the system of Marxism as a social response and then into the implemented ideology of communism as the only solution. It is the contention of this project that hopeful visions should instead always seek to retain an openness to the future. In this way the very nature of a hopeful liberatory vision ought to mitigate against our visions of what could be possible becoming merely the new tool of oppression with a controlling ideology of what must happen. Hope, to be hope, should enable us to continually remain open to the future in all our responses and the provisional and limited nature of what we can know in and of ourselves. Ellul<sup>172</sup> caustically reminds us that hope itself is fundamentally anti-system – involving a living openness to the new that lies beyond what we can control. While theologies and philosophies of hope are often to be rejoiced in as pointers calling humanity back to a living hope – we must also be careful not to kill hope by subjecting it to the sort of objectifying controlling analysis that will destroy its very nature. Hopeful visions can offer us imaginative ways of seeing everything in the light of what it could be. According to the Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch on whom much inspiration for a 20<sup>th</sup> century theology of hope was drawn critically by Moltmann;

“Hope manifests itself as the dream of the novum - the new, It animates all the efforts of freedom to bring a new society into being. As a hunger for the not yet, it keeps history moving. The restless imagination of hope calls into question the status quo. In doing so, it inspires an awareness of hidden possibilities within the situation. It brings into being what is waiting to be realised. Hope is an active and realistic anticipation of new forms of just society”<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> The researcher recognises that phrases such as ‘trusting relationship’, ‘objects’ and ‘image of God’ are all contested and complex concepts in our world today with theologians often articulating what these mean to them in various diverse ways

<sup>172</sup> Ellul. *Hope in time of abandonment*. 174-5

<sup>173</sup> Bloch quoted in Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 5

## What are social visions?

Humans are inherently social creatures. Though theoretically capable of existing alone for much of our lives, we typically form social groupings and also bring to these our own ideas of how they should be ordered, often strongly influenced by the cultures within which we are nurtured. It is not just that we shape or chose our social visions, but that then those social visions shape both us and our world in return. This is true not only of our current societies but also the visions of the future societies we nurture of what is possible and where we are headed to. Social visions are typically situated within historical time and relate to the historical future. While religions have also sometimes posited social visions that relate only to extra-historical beliefs, in general most social visions have tended to be constructed predominantly within the horizons of this world and provide images of the future perceived to be possible of at least partial realisation in this life and world.

The word Utopia, coined in More's 16<sup>th</sup> century novel of that name has traditionally been used to describe the human search for a ideal or perfect community or society. However the multiple authoritarian utopias of the 19th and 20th centuries have left us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a pervasive intellectual and emotional distaste for utopian thinking. It conjures up in our minds dehumanised images of regimented societies, centralised planning and a nation of robots as well as the disastrous justification of atrocities in the present in the service of a greater future good<sup>174</sup>. However More's coining of the original term in his novel was deliberately ironic and playful – something which has been lost in many later translations. Derived from two Greek words: Eutopia (meaning 'good place') and Outopia (meaning 'no place'), the word – much like the virtue of hope in the Greek myth, is designed to point to either the greatest human folly – or the greatest human hope.<sup>175</sup>

The positive legacy of utopian thinking and its vision of a *good place* seems to have often taken a back seat in the dominant definitions of utopia today where it is usually seen as a bad word - an imaginary land of perfection that recedes constantly in front of us and leads to unrealistic and impractical schemes of well intentioned reform typically doomed to failure. Many theologians have also shied away from language that could be seen as utopian – giving ongoing credence to the belief that all utopian thinking is both 'once and for all' fantasies and damaging to any sort of concrete progress. However utopian language continues to exert strong and meaningful visions for change in our modern times – we think of Luther King's vision of the beloved community, of Tutu's rainbow nation, of Mandela's vision of a reconciled nation, of Wilberforce's campaign against slavery. Utopian visions of a good or better place can fuel the living dreams of poets, prophets and social transformers to speak into our present realities and, rather than merely distracting us from concrete incremental gains, can inspire and point us beyond current realities towards future possibility.

The dangers of utopian thinking are nevertheless clear to anyone with even a passing familiarity with recent history. We live in a world justifiably suspicious of any claims to perfection but also increasingly sceptical and wary of any concrete possibilities for real improvement. Maybe we need to reframe our understanding of utopia for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seeking not the imaginary no-place of More's island that can turn quickly into the

<sup>174</sup> Communism, Nazism and Apartheid are just three examples of grand social visions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that should lead us to approach social visions with suspicion. In fact the French existentialist writer Jacques Ellul says we live in an era where suspicion is king and that in fact, this often mitigates against hope. See Ellul, *Hope in an Age of Abandonment*, 48.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted by Lewis Mumford in *The Story of Utopias*, 1922. 26-40. This entertaining narrative points to the difference between utopias of escape (typically idealist) and utopias of reconstruction (typically pragmatic). Interestingly he suggests that Christianity has historically swung between the two in its emphasis throughout history but encourages us that we do not need to abandon the real world in order to engage with possible world and that in fact history shows us that it is out of those possible worlds that our real world emerges.

dystopia portrayed in novels such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but instead looking for real possibilities that can inspire us to move towards *Eutopos* – the good place. Moltmann suggests that we must avoid 'abstract utopias' in favour of 'concrete ones' and in this way challenge closed forms of fatalistic and dystopian narratives that can create despair in our world today e.g. narratives of environmental catastrophe, or even unbridled capitalism with its side effects of economic unsustainability, scarcity and poverty.<sup>176</sup>

This research project is specifically concerned with the social vision offered by Christian hope and the question as to whether Christianity can indeed contribute towards meaningful social visions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and potentially critically dialogue with other social visions of our times (e.g. pre modern fatalism, post modern apathy, and other closed versions of the future such as the optimistic progressivism narrative, the apocalyptic decline narrative<sup>177</sup> etc). Some theologians may challenge the very idea of seeking to delineate out any overarching social vision in a religion that is so multivariied and has mutated historically in so many ways. Post-modernism and global pluralism have justly made us suspicious of grand narrative claims or single solutions. Nevertheless this research suggests that there is an increasing level of ecumenical consensus within Christianity – often articulated as a 'Kingdom of God' ethic that can ground and offer objects for our hopes in a way that continues to be relevant to our human needs today. This may indeed form what might be termed an overlapping cross-cultural consensus amongst Christians from multiple denominational perspectives gaining support not from a top down imposition of control but from a bottom up recognition of its concrete human validity in multiple local contexts. This research project also seeks to counter claims from post-modern philosophers such as Derrida and Rorty<sup>178</sup> who advocate for social hope but see religious hope as inherently damaging rather than as a genuine source for 'this-worldly' good action.

Some theologians may see this project as seeking to justify Christianity's relevance merely by showing how it is able to be a useful tool in goals which the secular world has decided are useful. I see it as the opposite – that the ongoing relevance and truth of the tradition to which Christians continue to witness is in fact borne out by its ongoing relevant contribution to the issues of the day that face all human beings.

South African theologian Klaus Nürnburger<sup>179</sup> argues that Christian witness revolves fundamentally around the idea that what reality is does not correspond with what reality ought to be and that set within those ancient times and places, it offers us all a redemptive vision of comprehensive wellbeing for creation that needs to evolve and develop in time as human needs change (from tribe to nation to world). For him, this vision can enable us to *protest* against what currently is in our world in the name of what could be. He argues that Christians today, to be authentic to that witness, most fully articulated in the person of Jesus and the good news of the gospel as a vision of hope for those who suffer, must continue to seek out redemptive social visions that can speak meaningfully into the time and place within which we are situated.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Moltmann, *On Human Being*, 42 defines utopias as sketches of a desired future situation which in comparison with the present situation are more worthy of humans, more worth living and freer. He draws on Bloch for the insights about abstract and concrete utopias. For him abstract utopias are mere castles in the air fantasies with no chance of realisation. Concrete utopias on the other hand relate the desired future to the specific contradictions and sufferings of the present so that they can be overcome. They deal with objectively real possibilities – uncovering the future with which Moltmann argues our present is already pregnant.

<sup>177</sup> See Johnson, "Contrary Hopes, Evangelical Christianity & the Decline Narrative" in Volf and Katerburg (eds) *Future of Hope*, 27-48.

<sup>178</sup> See Smith, "Determined Hope" in Volf and Katerburg (eds) *Future of Hope* that engage with texts from these two philosophers.

<sup>179</sup> Nürnburger, *Biblical Theology in Outline*, 6.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 180 Also see De Gruchy "Salvation as humanisation and healing" in Hart and Thimell (Eds.) *Christ in our place: the humanity of God in Christ for the reconciliation of the world*. DP Allison Park; Pickwick 1989, 32-47.

## The Dwindling of Social Hope

“To confront our despair in such societies requires embracing another system of meaning, an alternative vision of the good with which to fill the emptiness that is left by the ending of our modern vision of optimism from which meaning has departed”.<sup>181</sup>

This research project sees the dwindling or scarcity of social hope in our current times and the lack of a shared hopeful social vision as explored in Chapter 1 as cause for significant concern. It seeks to bring selected Christian writings to bear on the question of establishing a well grounded social hope that can continue to speak meaningfully to humans today in the midst of the social challenges surrounding them. It aims to set this contribution into a space sensitive to the criticisms levelled by influential philosophers, psychologists and scientists that religious hopes have been a damaging influence within society. They claim that the hope they have often promoted has been a world-denying hope with negative consequences for human progress towards social transformation in this world and we are better off to discard it altogether. It is a ‘*repentant refutation*’<sup>182</sup> in that it acknowledges wholeheartedly that religious hopes, especially those of the dominant Judeo-Christian paradigm as allied to Western powers have often contributed to world denying actions, passive, fatalistic attitudes and irresponsible behaviours in our world utilising metaphors of control over others and our wider environment. But it is in the end a refutation of the argument that Christian hope is merely Rorty’s ‘*pie in the sky when we die*’ or Marx’s ‘*opium of the masses*’, worthy of consignment to the dustbin with the other failed ideologies of history that we have outgrown. It seeks instead to offer an authentic vision of world transforming hope sitting at the heart of Christianity to which theologians and practitioners down the years have paid costly homage with their words and lives, which continues to inspire countless humans to play an active part in social transformation today.

While the 19<sup>th</sup> century heralded high optimism about social progress with a social gospel to match, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise and fall of many huge and some well intentioned social projects, many with terrible human costs and consequences. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we often turn away from grand utopian solutions of an overarching social vision for all towards a recognition of pluralism. Utopian ways of seeing have often been unmasked by post-colonialism as tools of oppressive and self interested ideologies by those in power, imposed on others. And yet at the same time, in an increasingly globalised world, we are forced as human beings to see the interconnectedness of our actions and their impact. The environmental crisis and the current economic downturn are just two signs of this interdependency. It seems we have a common interconnected future as humans and need to find common shared values that can help us to navigate that world together. Hope and the visions it spurs can be both influential and dangerous as the multiple disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remind us. In the light of this danger, there is surely ground for suggesting we should seek to put all social visions away as an arrogant attempt at control and focus only on ourselves, the present moment and living for today. Indeed, much of contemporary culture seems to have lost its ability to sustain a significant social hope, there is a clear lack of shared world narratives and much hope has narrowed to self. Christianity also seems to be in danger of losing any concrete sense of social hope for our world in favour of a privatised or other-worldly hope leading some theologians to seek to reclaim the Christian tradition of worldly hope as a core feature of Christian thinking and action today.

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<sup>181</sup> Hall, “Pervasive Ailment”, 90.

<sup>182</sup> I owe this phrase to Klaus Nürnberger used in a presentation in July 2011 at the Theological Society of South Africa conference.

### 3.2 Hope as Vision

“Hope allows one to breathe in contrast to despair’s suffocation.” Søren Kierkegaard

For the 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian philosopher, Kierkegaard<sup>183</sup>, humans are passional creatures, attracted or repulsed by visions of what is possible and hope for him is a critical and visceral part of what makes all of us tick as human creatures. He grounds hope in the ability all people have to see possibilities for themselves including envisioning a future as a reflection of our most fundamental self-identity as humans. For him we are selves in the process of becoming with both an expansive pole of what could be tapping into our imagination of what we dread or desire held in tension with the finite and necessary pole of our self reality (our limited givenness). The human journey of becoming needs to maintain the dialectic between what is and what could be in a way that integrates the self realistically. We can lose our balance in this journey either by settling for less than what we could be (loss of possibility) or never fully dealing with our given limits (loss of reality). For him this is also a God given process as we become most fully ourselves in the light of who God is, founding our human anthropology in relationship to God<sup>184</sup> as well as others. Similarly Hannah Arendt locates a capacity for hope in an aspect of the human condition she calls ‘natality’.<sup>185</sup> For her, each human birth represents something radically new. In birth we enter into the world as a unique, irreplaceable individual who can initiate things seen and recognised by the wider community, not existing merely as instinctual member of a species. This possibility of initiating the new enables our human future to be open, not fixed, fatalistic or instinctive but with a level of free-will to affect and shape our shared environment.

This chapter endorses this view of hope as a universal human characteristic as suggested by the two above thinkers, held by all and not the special preserve of either the religious or the rationally educated. It follows in the footsteps of religious philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Pieper who also explore hope from this human perspective, whilst recognising that Christianity also frames hope as a *theological* virtue – and in some sense a gift that is ‘God-given’ rather than something that we can merely create of our own efforts.

One of the ways in which Christians witness to a vision that is larger than just their own worldview is by rooting their way of seeing within the bigger story of the Divine Vision. This is of course a dangerous project. To claim any sort of “birds eye view’ of the whole through enlisting God into the picture can easily become merely an excuse for exalting our human personal opinions and prejudices to the status of absolute and unquestioned objective truth. And yet all humans inevitably root their ways of seeing within historical trajectories that are bigger than themselves including philosophical assumptions that guide our attitudes and behaviours. This is not only peculiar to people of religious faith. The Bible testifies to the overriding conviction expressed both mythically and historically that God sees creation as fundamentally good and yet also continually directs a critical gaze on oppressive worldly structures and acts to liberate those who suffer in the world as a result of injustice. This vision develops gradually through the Judeo-Christian story, moving from a particular people outwards to the whole world, enabling its followers to trust in a God of liberatory hope even when times seem to suggest there is little to hope for. These hopes continue to expand, pointing both towards and beyond concrete historical fulfilments and disappointments and thereby expressing the surplus of hope that always points beyond what currently is to what could be.

<sup>183</sup> Gouwens.,D. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 153.

<sup>184</sup> For further recent reflections on this wider theme of human anthropology, see David Kelsey *Eccentric Existence*.

<sup>185</sup> Billings, “Natality & Advent; Arendt and Moltmann on Hope and Politics” in Volf and Katerburg (ed) *Future of Hope*.

This chapter of the research project explores Christian hope as social vision. It suggests that vision usually precedes action and that *how we see* is often the first critical step towards who we become and what we do in our world. If our vision is off-centre, our response is likely to follow. This chapter uses three contemporary theologians to demonstrate the rationale for Christians to witness first to a liberating vision for all creation grounded in the goodness of the world and God's love for it as a first step towards any responsible efforts of social transformation. The South African theologian Klaus Nürnburger suggests that, "only those who see creation with the eyes of God can take responsibility for the whole."<sup>186</sup> He points to the need for a *redemptive vision* for our times rather than a fixed body of moral rules. This kind of hopeful seeing also has an ongoingly critical dimension in society as it can call attention to blind spots in the vision of the status quo and show up entrenched social injustices that we often no longer see by continually reminding us of the image of God present in all human beings. Moltmann suggests that authentic hope has its roots in suffering, and a vision that is open and sensitive to see those who suffer in the present as Jesus did is often then the very place where hope for an alternative reality can emerge. A reading of the Bible through the many eyes of those who see it as a potentially liberatory text points us towards the reality that the divine vision celebrates creation's goodness and yet situates its hopeful gaze on the needs of those that suffer and are marginalised in our world. Those who claim to follow this God can embody the divine vision by *seeing otherwise* and *imagining differently* in the suffering places in our world, with significant implications for social transformation.

For Christians, Doede and Hughes suggests this 'divine way of seeing' is most fully incarnated in the historical person of Jesus – whose vision brought those on the margins of society and religion into the foreground in contradiction to the disapproving gaze of the religious people of his time. He had a loving gaze that included all those who felt most excluded. His vision of this world enabled him to challenge, for all time, those who claimed that their religious beliefs or practices gave them special access to God's presence. His overriding commitment to the Kingdom of God was not only proclaimed throughout his life but also acted out in concrete deeds in ways that have been acknowledged and respected by people of multiple traditions around the world. For Christians, their way of seeing is based on the belief that in Jesus, who God is for us all is most fully revealed. This incarnational approach is at the heart of what it means to be a 'Christ-ian' (or little Christ). Jesus drew on a Judaic historical tradition that saw God as the liberator, the one who gives hope, cares about justice and has compassion. But he challenged the exclusiveness and rigidity of aspects of that tradition and in so doing, threw open this liberatory vision of God for all human beings.

Christians make the powerful claim that human beings bear God's image and that the whole world bears the imprint of God's redemptive love. In a world filled with so much suffering, death and imperfection, this claim can seem naïve. However Doede<sup>187</sup> suggests that it is because we are bearers of God's image that we are capable of what he terms an *alethetic* seeing – a hopeful gaze which has the potential to enlarge our humanity and seeks to eradicate social oppression wherever it is found. Post-structural critique has made us far more aware at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century how certain 'ways of seeing' can easily be imposed by those with power onto others who are less powerful. We must beware of turning the vision of hope that Christianity can inspire into a controlling and potentially trite absolutist optimism that can fail to acknowledge the reality of despair that many people feel. According to Doede, an *alethetic gaze* instead offers a humbled vision that

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<sup>186</sup> Nürnburger, *Biblical Theology*, 181.

<sup>187</sup> Doede and Hughes. "Wounded Vision", 185.

seeks to be open to and enriched by the transcendence of others. Participating in the divine vision can free us from what he terms the disfiguring assertive gaze that can so quickly become either ego or ideology and instead reshapes our intentions, helping us instead to feel the world with our eyes, discern the humanity in others and not be blind to its call on our own humanness.<sup>188</sup>

What vision of hope does Christianity offer us? This research project suggests that Christian hopes that focus merely on the individual or on world renouncing activities are in fact, whilst still common today, damaging distortions of authentic Christian hope. The debate on Christian hope has raged throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often polarized between the first and third worlds, the conservative and the liberals and has been the theme of a number of high profile conferences over that time<sup>189</sup>. Wolterstorff<sup>190</sup> argues that there are in fact two types of authentic Christian hope – a hope for consummation (beyond history and brought about by God) and hope for liberatory justice (within history and involving humans). The exact relationship between these two hopes, if indeed he is correct – has exercised many theological minds and fostered much dissent. However he argues (as does Moltmann) that we should beware of collapsing these hopes into each other and that each has a distinct role to play. This project concentrates mainly on the second of these hopes as an authentic dimension of Christian hope increasingly recognised by both liberals and conservatives with significant social implications for our world today. It also offers fruitful opportunities for dialogue with other disciplines and faiths. Christianity encourages us to be people of vision shaped by the divine vision. This influences how we see ourselves but also affects the social visions we have for our world.

The Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann warns us that as Christians we are often tempted to split hope and history. ‘As a result we hold to a religious hope that is detached from the realities of the historical process or we participate in a history which ends in despair because the process itself yields no lasting victories for the participants’. For him, this split which yields both a historyless hope and a hopeless history is a betrayal of biblical faith. Instead he claims that biblical hope is relentlessly historical and history cunningly hope-filled.<sup>191</sup> This vision of hope can enable us to see the future differently and to live the present in the light of that possible future in a way that gives us a redemptive vision for our world that participates in the divine loving gaze and has implications for the here and now. While we must always be aware of the tendency for our hopeful visions to harden into controlling ideologies, we also recognise that we need hopeful social visions.

“Hope is not for the self alone but is directed, like love to one’s neighbour. It is deeply social in its implications.” Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. p186.

<sup>189</sup> This has been briefly overviewed in Chapter 1 of this project.

<sup>190</sup> Wolterstorff, N. “Seeking Justice in Hope” in Volf and Katerburg (eds) *Future of Hope*, 77-100.

<sup>191</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, Westminster, John Knox Press: 1987, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Thinker*, 50.

### 3.3 Hope as Social Vision

“There can be no hope which does not constitute itself through and for a ‘we’ – all hope is at bottom choral.”  
 Gabriel Marcel<sup>193</sup>

In our increasingly secularized and individualised world today, we can tend to narrow hope down only to its individual implications and even see our own hopes as at odds with the hopes of others in an inevitable conflict of hopes. Christian hope has succumbed at times to this tendency – reducing hope merely to the privatised sphere or prioritising the hopes of some over others. To see hope as a dimension of the human person is not however to reduce it to only an individualistic concept. This research project suggests instead that authentic Christian hope is deeply social in its implications, grounded in a God of all people and for the purposes of this analysis, chooses to focus on the social dimensions of hope. It does not deny that hope also has important implications for personal transformation directly but this is not this project’s focus.

The next part of this research presents a brief overview of the German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s vision of hope to explore what theologically grounds our social hopes as Christians. It then moves on to explore the South African Catholic theologian Albert Nolan’s recently articulated vision of social hope – with an emphasis on the object of our hope and then finally ends with a more critical look at an alternative social vision of hope through the writings of the American theologian – Flora Keshgegian with a focus on the horizon of our hopes. The aim of this section of the research is to demonstrate an increasing ecumenical consensus around the reclaiming of a tradition of Christian worldly hope whilst to also highlight some differences and questions raised in the dialogue in order to present multifaceted visions of hope.

#### 3.3.1 What grounds our hope – An exploration with Jürgen Moltmann

‘We live in hope as a fish in water or bird in air. It is our atmosphere. Where however do we find a well founded hope which does not desert us and is not merely illusion?’<sup>194</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of hope burst onto the theological scene in 1965 in line with the optimistic mood of the times. Moltmann’s concern with the phenomenon of hope was rooted in his own suffering experiences in a prisoner of war camp where ‘*hope rubbed itself raw on the barbed wire of a prison camp*’.<sup>195</sup> Moltmann’s overriding contribution was to interpret Christian faith in its totality as essentially hope for the future of human beings and this world. He wanted to avoid the twin perils of either a historyless hope or a hopeless history and grounded his theology of Christian historical hope in the promise of the God of the exodus, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and the openness of the future to come. As Christians he claimed we are called to participate in a hope for the world that originates not with us but with God. Moltmann saw the Bible as the revolutionary and subversive book of God’s hope offering a hope that speaks to the hopeless, downtrodden and oppressed of the world not the optimists, rulers and successful. For him, hope forms the internal motor for all of Christian theology and not merely the epilogue of the last things. In this way he sought to reclaim eschatology in a credible and meaningful way in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and challenges

<sup>193</sup> Marcel, G. *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press:1973,143.

<sup>194</sup> Moltmann. *Human Identity in Christian Faith*, 23.

<sup>195</sup> This overview draws on Richard Bauckham. *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. London:T&T Clark. 1995 (2006 printing).



Christianity as a whole ‘to carry before it the torch of hope and it kindle its fire in lazy humanity’.<sup>196</sup> He called the church back to what he saw as the core of the gospel message of hope which he claimed had all but emigrated from the church to be found more clearly in secular movements of hope than in the church which had then retreated into individualistic and otherworldly forms of religious hope. Against these trends, he called passionately for the reclaiming of a Christian social hope that was historical and this-worldly.

Moltmann’s unique early strength was his detailed modern articulation of a theological grounding of this hope within Christian doctrines and symbols. This development of a vision and ethic of Christian hope concentrated on the theological grounding that can motivate people into active involvement in social transformation and the development of a responsible hope. He grounded this conviction in an interpretation of biblical promissory history that has significant implications for our understanding of Christian mission in the world today. Since the original publication of *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann has devoted an entire career to theological contributions and has lost none of his passion for hope in his subsequent systemic reflections on Christian topics such as the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom, the Trinity and most famously, the Crucified God. In a recent 2004 essay<sup>197</sup> he continues to call for a more sober, humble vision of hope that can form bridges across the abyss of the crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not fundamentally different to previous hopes but wiser, more cautious hopes that count the cost and tread a path between arrogant presumption and despair.

Moltmann’s own roots in the Protestant reformed tradition are clear in his emphasis on a theology of the cross and the sovereignty of God over all spheres of life as is his passion for reconceptualising theology in a way that makes it relevant to the times. His work also sits in active conversation with the theologians and philosophers of his time, most notably Barth, Bloch and Bultmann. His contribution over the last 40 years has influenced a whole new generation of theologians and movements (including liberation theology) which continue to build in creative and critical ways on his theology of hope. While his arguments remain contested by some, the legacy of his ‘contribution’ to a theology of hope is undoubted. While some may consign the theology of hope to a brief optimistic period in the 1970s that is now outdated, others argue that it can outlive the age in which it was generated to speak meaningfully to us today.<sup>198</sup> For Moltmann, hope involves us in an exploration of historical time within which we live our existence as humans. In as much as hope is always for something not yet realised, it points us inevitably towards the future. Instead of using spatial metaphors to describe a transcendent God who hovers eternally above our human reality, Moltmann suggests a time-based metaphor, depicting God as the one who is coming; the sovereign of the future who pulls all historical time towards the divine goal of consummation. This concept is not unique to Moltmann but for him more than any other single theologian, hope is primary. “The distinctive contribution of Christian faith is the hope it engenders in the midst of the ambiguous and even hopeless circumstances that plague human existence.”<sup>199</sup>

Moltmann’s confident reclaiming of hope as the core of theology was also intended to act as a critique of the lack of hope for the world that he saw in the modern church of his day. He claimed provocatively that hope was often more likely to be found in secular movements for historical change and progress than in the

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<sup>196</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*. 46. His most recent work, *An Ethic of Hope* is to be published in 2012 in English though in the opinion of the researcher Moltmann’s entire career has been concerned with developing a theology of hope with ethical implications

<sup>197</sup> Moltmann, “*Progress and Abyss*”, 2004

<sup>198</sup> See Richard Bauckham’s Preface to Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*, SCM Press 2001 as an example of this

<sup>199</sup> Jürgen Moltmann. *Hope for the Church*. Abingdon: Nashville: 1979, 10

institutional church which increasingly retreated into the reductive individual expectation of an other-worldly life after death. At the same time he criticised secular movements for historical change for being cut off from their living source in the God of Hope. He sought to restore to the church its hope for the future of the world by *repositioning* the Christian's ultimate hope for God's new creation within the possibilities of social and political change. For Moltmann our ultimate hope as Christians is *simultaneously* a historical hope for the world as a place where God is present and where God acts to redeem and consummate, not to destroy. In this way he refused to separate Christian hope into ultimate eschatological ones and proximate worldly ones. He insists that they are two sides of the same coin, indivisible and equal. He grounds his theology of hope in three main concepts<sup>200</sup> which this section now briefly unpacks:

- 1) The Judaic God of the Promise – looking to the biblical image of a God of historical hope
- 2) The Cross and Resurrection – exploring the meaning of the Christ event for hope in the world
- 3) History and Mission – exploring the future still to come in the light of God's character and promise

### **The Divine Promise**

Interestingly Moltmann begins his analysis of hope in the past by exploring the Jewish roots of Christian faith. For Moltmann this original divine promise where God makes a historical covenant with his people through Abraham is where the scene is set for all that follows. For him it represents a shift in human perception of God away from the mythical cycle of repetition and return common to the Canaanites<sup>201</sup> and instead towards a historical hope calling people to a journey within time towards a promised future. Instead of being an epiphanic religion that revealed a static eternal condition, this was a religion of hope that called its followers into a new way of living directed by a messianic hope for the future. The promise aroused unrest in its listeners and they became incongruous with the unacceptable present around them as they stepped out towards the desired future. This represented a significant shift in the role of religion which up till that point had typically reinforced and sanctioned the current status quo. As Abraham leaves his roots to seek the promised land through the power of hope, God also becomes a nomad in the story, on the move with his people. Moltmann uses this symbol to point to the wayfaring but historical character of hope itself – actively journeying through time towards the desired future.

The stories that formed the Old Testament became histories of remembered hope, as stories of historical liberation were passed from generation to generation sustaining the community in present hard times. For Moltmann, because Jews and Christians both hope in a God who loves the world and seeks to engage with and redeem it, history itself becomes meaningful as the place of encounter with God. God is understood not as an abstract concept but through the remembered history of the past which can then lead to hope for the history that is still to come. This concept is incredibly valuable in our world today where historical hope is hard to find and also resonates with traditional communities such as those on the African continent where I live whose treasured stories of the past can often provide the material for a strong sense of hopeful grounding in the present.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> This entire section is based on Moltmann's thesis as unpacked in detail in his book *Theology of Hope*.

<sup>201</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. NY: Pantheon, 1954 for further reflections on this concept.

<sup>202</sup> See John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford. Heinemann;1990 for more on the importance of the past in constructing meaning in African philosophy.

For Moltmann, the promise is a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist, a pledge that sets men's hearts on a future in which the fulfilling of that promise is to be expected<sup>203</sup>. Because it is a divine promise, its possibilities are not always confined to what may seem possible within the present. It is on this promise that Moltmann claims the religious hopes of both Christians and Jews can be founded and all that follows on as a result needs to be interpreted in its light. Those who believe in God's promises are able to live in the present in ways orientated towards God's future fulfilment of them. He reminds us that we live in the "between times" of the utterance and the fulfilment of the promise. While Moltmann sees that this promise had a range of partial fulfilments and disappointments within history, he points out that these do not liquidate the promise but are seen as partial confirmations of what is yet to come.

Moltmann reminds us that the Jewish tradition was an earthy, this-worldly tradition given to a people living under poverty and oppression. To be a Jew was to live in relation to God in a particular way here and now in the world and to participate in the shared history and destiny of that people under God. It was to witness to the promissory history of God as the one who will change the future for those who suffer in the present. There is little hint of an other-worldly hope or an afterlife focus in Judaism. Jews expected their God to act in history in concrete ways and to call them into action in a responsible way as a people within history. For them, today's decision to trust in God's summoning voice whose glory would one day fill all lands was a decision pregnant with historical future<sup>204</sup>. Hope in the coming God also allowed the possibility of accepting historic suffering without being annihilated by it and gave them orientation in time by pointing in a constant direction to the Kingdom of God as the goal and fulfilment of all history. For Moltmann the profound expression of hope articulated by Judaism at times of great disappointment and peril prefigures the nature of Christian hope as a 'hope against hope'. In contrast to both 'apocalyptic' Persian views of a negative world end and an elite snatched away and 'teleological' Greek views that saw the future as immutably fixed, this Old Testament prophetic approach offered an alternative perspective through the open field of human hope and responsibility and a future humans are called to create in accordance with our hopes and memories.<sup>205</sup>

### The Cross and Resurrection

Moltmann tells us, "there is no true theology of hope that is not first of all a theology of the cross".<sup>206</sup> He sees Jesus as the true man, the fulfilment of the hope of God for God's own image in creation. "He is the man of the future, my hope when I have lost hope in myself, my hope when because of man's inhumanity to man, I have lost hope in my world. He has anticipated the future for which it is worthwhile to live & suffer."<sup>207</sup> For Moltmann, in Jesus, God identifies with this world's historical reality and its most negative aspects (John 3:16) throwing open the promise made to the Jews to the whole world. Although Moltmann focuses predominantly on the cross and resurrection, he also highlights the need for continuity between the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Christ. Like many other scholars, Moltmann sees the thrust of Jesus', life and message as the Kingdom of God defined, not as another place (e.g. heaven) but as a future in which God is finally and completely present, in which humans receive their freedom from God and in which all of

<sup>203</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*, 49.

<sup>204</sup> Obviously this belief in a historical future as a chosen people can bring its own challenges as the ongoing Israeli/Palestine conflict demonstrates. See Kwok Pui-Lan (ed) *Hope Abundant*, NY:Orbis; 2010,123-137 for an insightful chapter from the Palestine view.

<sup>205</sup> Cox, *Not Leaving it*, 36.

<sup>206</sup> Quoted by Douglas Meeks in Foreword to Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*, xv.

<sup>207</sup> J. Moltmann, *Human Identity*, 16.

the misery of the creation is overcome.<sup>208</sup> For Moltmann, Jesus's life ministry in both word and deed is *proleptic*, a form of eschatological anticipation doing today what will come in full tomorrow – an anticipator in person of the coming of God and the liberation of a bound humanity<sup>209</sup>. In this way he both inaugurates the Kingdom and points to what it will be like. Jesus clearly offers the hope of this kingdom with its obviously worldly dimensions (healing, feeding, comfort, freedom) to the poor, hopeless and unjust in the world, challenging the status quo and for Moltmann, all those who claim to follow him are called to do the same<sup>210</sup>. Moltmann binds the theology of hope to the cross with a dialectic 'negation of the negation', where the ultimate enemy (death) is faced, endured and overcome by God, allowing for the possibility of a hope against hope that can fully engage with despair and the pain of history. He decries a cheap optimism that runs too quickly to the triumph of Easter Sunday and a strong God without fully engaging with the cross and the experiences of failure, weakness and suffering which it reflects. In so doing, we can easily reject the Crucified God<sup>211</sup> that sits at the heart of Christianity and thus fail to identify and hope with those who despair.

By holding to a dialectical theology of hope in the tradition of his teacher Karl Barth<sup>212</sup> Moltmann avoids the danger of a shallow incremental program of mere historical improvement towards the Kingdom that can be assimilated into the superficial optimism of the successful. Instead, his theology recognises the damagingly dark side of progress. He highlights the need to side with the victims of history through the cross to prevent the theology of hope from becoming merely a theological gloss on the optimistic progressiveness of the modern age. For him, it is the victims in history who hope for the world to be different and Christian hope is only authentic when it is expressed in solidarity with them (because God identifies with them and Christian hope is in God). Living out authentic Christian hope involves this dialectical tension that avoids the closed ideologies of optimism or pessimism. He distinguishes between true and illusionary hope by pointing to their relationship with suffering, "Illusionary hope lives in another world of happiness, success and power. This world does not want to see reality as it is or the sufferings of others. It is blinded by its own dreams – insensitive and cold. True hope on the other hand opens humans up to experience all the realities of life, leading us more deeply into both life's suffering and its happiness."<sup>213</sup> For Moltmann, Christian faith is the hope born of the cross for all who live in its shadow. "The history of human suffering is at the same time our history of hope".<sup>214</sup> For Moltmann, in the resurrection, God embodies his promise to all humanity and gives us ground for an enacted hope that will one day be fulfilled in all creation. Moltmann carefully distinguishes this resurrection hope from a form of 'self-realizing eschatology' where human activity alone makes the future, by founding the future firmly on God's faithfulness and historical actions in Christ.<sup>215</sup> Yet he warns that we must not turn the resurrection into an escape from history but as a source of courage to enter fully into history. Humans are called to represent the image of the crucified creator and demonstrate God's hope in the world in solidarity with those who suffer to transform it in the direction of the promised future.

<sup>208</sup> Klaus Nürnberger also points to this vision of the Kingdom, of God as "God's redemptive vision for the world which envisages the comprehensive wellbeing of God's creation", see *Biblical Theology in Outline*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2004, 178.

<sup>209</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*, 56. This eschatological concept of prolepsis has been most fully developed by Wolfhart Pannenberg but is beyond the scope of this paper. A modern articulation of it can be found in Ted Peters, *God – the Future*. Fortress Press. 2000.

<sup>210</sup> Although this research project steers away from detailed discussions of eschatology, this approach by Moltmann comes closest to the endorsing some form of 'collaborative eschatology', a phrase used by John D Crossan and quoted by Wright, *Surprised*, 57.

<sup>211</sup> See Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London SCM Press, 1973 for further exploration of this link which is vital to Moltmann's theology

<sup>212</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*. (London: SCM: 1949) 154, Barth claimed, "The man who does not know what death is, does not know what resurrection is" – a concept built on by Moltmann even though Barth was critical of Moltmann's initial theology of hope.

<sup>213</sup> Moltmann, *Human Identity*, 24. See also Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, SCM Press. 24-27.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* 3. He ties this to our need to reclaim the 'pathic man' in relation to the "pathic God" as co-sufferers and co-hopers in our world.

<sup>215</sup> "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

## History as Mission

“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, instead we anticipate the future in the present”.<sup>216</sup>

Moltmann suggests that our *vision* of what reality could be, ought to be and is promised to be can inspire our actions in the present to *anticipate* that desired future. For him, the divine Judiac promise and the Christ events within history lead naturally towards the notion of one humanity with a common shared future. He points here towards the Christian tradition of an eschatological consummation of all things on earth. Moltmann sees the world as an open system with humans as co-creators with their responsibility ordained by God in what he terms the great ‘*experiment of hope*’.<sup>217</sup> Hope always operates within the mode of possibility but Moltmann points out that there are real and unreal possibilities and that we need to avoid escaping into unreal utopias but instead seek out concrete utopias.<sup>218</sup> For him, to live in hope is to live experimentally entailing a genuine risk of disappointment (the future is not fixed but is promised). God’s promise elicits our human response which can contribute towards transforming the future through our actions of responsible hope in the present in line with the promise. Our vision of the possible future enables us to both act in and criticise the present creating a willingness to sacrifice in the present to move towards a better future.

Moltmann links divine and human actions through his concept of the Spirit<sup>219</sup>, avoiding a cut and dried distinction between them by seeing God as acting through human action in a way in our world that enables God to be active in the present through human action but not fully sovereign. Humans are called to bridge the gap between the now and not yet within history with the idea of *anticipations*.<sup>220</sup> Moltmann retains an ‘ever-receding eschatological horizon of hope’ where he refuses to identify any human system with God’s reign but claims this horizon can spur us onto social transformation in this world. Eschatological goals provide a transcendent reference point from which we can critically evaluate human systems. He calls us to live with insecurity – avoiding the temptations of closed ideologies and drawing on hope as a key ingredient to help negotiate the open future of our world. “Hope keeps man’s insecure openness alive and frees man from the barriers which he builds to shut out and isolate himself from suffering. It opens man to the new possibilities of the future.”<sup>221</sup> For Moltmann, the Christian mission field is indeed the world but rather than proclaiming a message of saving souls for an ethereal heaven after we die. He challenges us to reclaim a world-transforming hope both in the present and for the future that reflects God’s own commitment to the renewal of this world. He calls all people to be reborn into a responsible and brave hope by searching out the real possibilities that exist in the world in the direction of God’s promised future. For Israel, their hope began as a hope for the land of God but for Christians, eschatological hope is directed not towards a better land but towards a better future for all countries. Instead of migrating from land to land, Moltmann believes we are called continually to migrate through history into the future in a way that changes both us and the circumstances around us and anticipates the future reign of God.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>216</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*. 52. Here Moltmann suggests that we engage in the opposite of futurology – the science of extrapolating the future from the present by looking to God’s promised future and then living in the present in the light of that promise.

<sup>217</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment*, 20.

<sup>218</sup> See Moltmann, *On Human Being*, 42-43 and *Experiment* for more on utopias which he claims can be world denying or transforming

<sup>219</sup> See Moltmann, *Church in the power of the Spirit*, 24-47 and *The Source of Life* for more on Moltmann’s pneumatology

<sup>220</sup> See Pannenburg, *Systematic Theology Vol III* or works by Ted Peters or Carl Braaten who also develop Pannenburg’s insights.

<sup>221</sup> Moltmann. *Human Identity*. 5.

<sup>222</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope*. 59. This insight has ramifications for the Israel/Palestine conflict beyond the scope of this project.

### **3.3.2 The Object of Christian Hope - an exploration with Albert Nolan**

Albert Nolan is a contextual South African theologian and Dominican priest who starts his theological reflections specifically from the perspective of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In his most recent collection of essays – entitled *Hope in an Age of Despair*, he and colleague Stan Muyebe identify despair as the great characteristic of our current times and stress that theology must rise to the challenge to speak meaningfully into those times. They trace thematic reflections on Christian hope, drawing on Nolan's work over the last 25 years. I use this to present a brief contemporary and contextual aspect to the theology of hope in the present day that resonates with the same themes of hope articulated by Moltmann 40 years earlier in order to focus on the specific question of what is the object of our hope as Christians.

Nolan's life and work have stood in the prophetic tradition through huge social transformations within South Africa. His stated concern is to recover the gospel as a message of hope for those who are sinned against. In this way he reflects a form of contextual liberation theology that seeks to theologise from below in the belief that this was the position that Jesus took. In his 2009 response to a Dominican award recognising his lifetime contribution to theology in South Africa, he chose to speak on the theme of hope – arguing that one of the key questions we must ask as Christians is what we are hoping for. He suggests that we live in an age of despair partly because we tend to build our hope on shaky foundations, but also because many of us have hoped for the wrong things. He believes that Christian hope needs to better align with the sort of hope that Jesus himself embodied and raises four points. 1) God as the basis of our hope, 2) The common good as the object of our hope, 3) The value of an attitude of hopefulness, 4) Acting hopefully in our world.<sup>223</sup>

Nolan grounds our human hope strongly in God and God's trustworthiness. This enables him (like Moltmann) to hold to a Biblical 'hope against hope' where even when worldly signs of hope seem thin, we can still have hope. He points to an increasing despondency in both church institutions and in the wider South Africa in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century but sees this as a genuine opportunity for a reclaiming of a more authentic Christian hope. He is forthright about the fact that for many people in today's world, God is dead, irrelevant or a meaningless concept and suggests that Christians need to find ways to reframe what it means to hope in a God who is a co-sufferer in our world today. He points us to the need to hold a hopeful attitude towards that which we cannot control by modelling an attitude of genuine hopefulness for the world that can nevertheless grapple honestly and authentically with despair. He suggests that in a world sceptical about dogma, the language and practices of contemplation that can help generate a spirit of hopefulness are needed more than ever to help people ground their spirituality. He points out that while Jesus is a powerful symbol of our hope – especially in the resurrection – the ultimate ground of our hope sits behind this in the God that Jesus pointed both towards and related to directly in his life.

Hope, as we observed in the previous chapter, needs to have an object of some kind – even if it also maintains a level of openness or surplus that always 'goes beyond.' For Nolan, the content of the Christian form of social vision that we are called to hope for is the coming of God's kingdom, God's reign on earth. In this way he initially seems to be merely repeating the hope for ultimate eschatological consummation that is pointed to by many Christian thinkers. However he unpacks this phrase in a way that this research project

<sup>223</sup> Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair*, 5-12. This entire section draws on the essays in this book for its Nolan-related content.

suggests offers new food for thought and potential fruitful dialogue with other traditions. Nolan astutely points out that many people today may see the idea of God's will or reign as arbitrary and therefore oppressive if opposed on others. Others are quick to jump in with their own opinions on exactly what God's will is. This problem is also raised by New Testament scholar. Tom Wright who comments – "Kingdom of God theology has often been a flag of convenience under which all sorts of ships have sailed"<sup>224</sup>. The long history of Christian imposition onto others in the name of 'God's will' gives genuine credence to this suspicion. Nolan suggests instead that what God wills is always *the common good* which is an inclusive human vision of that which is best for the whole of creation that can be held up to scrutiny and has clear this-worldly implications. The object of Christian hope, for Nolan, is therefore the common good.<sup>225</sup> All hopes in the past which have failed to seek this for all creation have to that extent, failed to reflect God's will and reflected self or group serving interests. Nolan does not pit these interests intrinsically against the common good but suggests that they are inter-related. We are not required to miraculously turn into creatures without self interest, but to broaden our understanding of self interest to include the importance of wider goods to our lives.<sup>226</sup>

Nolan instead calls us to live in the belief that there is a place beyond our seemingly conflicting hopes – where what is best for one does not have to conflict with what is best for another. He accepts that this requires a significant shift in our thinking away from self centred thinking. He suggests that to live in conformity with God's will is to always be prepared to act in the service of the common good in the faith that this will in the end, be best for me as well. Kelly affirms this too, suggesting that to exist as a person is to be in relation to others ...sharing and breathing a common culture, each one lives through others...we cannot escape the responsibility of living for others in the promotion of the common good.<sup>227</sup> For Nolan, Christian hope as the hope that Jesus taught means relying on God's work in all things – "relying on the goodness of the great unfolding of the universe of which we are a part and to which we can contribute".

The strength of Nolan's argument here is that he provides clear explanatory content to a theological lens on Christian hope that can nevertheless potentially dialogue with other disciplines in the common search for a global ethic. The common good is something recognised by a multiplicity of perspectives and it can evolve and be informed by scientific and technological discoveries about ourselves and our world in terms of what makes us flourish and what damages us as individuals and societies. It also enables us to potentially bridge the divide between God's action and human action if we can see God at work in the world in efforts for the common good. As we align our efforts with this, God is able to work in some way through human action and we become small but active witnesses to this larger reality. Nolan's argument reflects the constant themes of prophetic hope in the Bible as does Moltmann which seeks to always push away from the tendency to reduce religious hope into something private, spiritual or otherworldly. Prophetic hope is always social, historical, this worldly, political, economic. This interpretation is backed up by biblical scholars such as Walter Brueggemann who claims that the dream of God and the hope of Israel are both for the establishment of a new social order which will embody peace, justice, freedom, equity and wellbeing.

<sup>224</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. 216.

<sup>225</sup> Nolan, *Hope in an age of despair*, 7. Some evangelical theologians may dispute this strongly as losing a sense of transcendence

<sup>226</sup> Klaus Nürnberger suggests that human self-interest is valid but not when it becomes an ultimate value. He helpfully distinguishes between human self-interest and the more reductionist notion of the interests of the individual. Nürnberger, *Biblical Theology*, 234.

<sup>227</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology*, 119 His book suggests that we are called not just to co-exist but to pro-exist for others in responsible relationship.

This vision of Christian hope motivated the church's involvement in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa – most strongly embodied in the vision of Desmond Tutu. According to an overview of this hope by South African theologian Ernst Conradie, this hope pointed to the vision of a new eschatological community of diverse people reconciled with one another in Christ. Its reality in the here and now formed a point of departure for the critique of apartheid. Christian hope was understood here as hope for a victory over the forces of evil, injustice, oppression and tyranny and remained thoroughly this-worldly – with a clear avoidance of the more typical traditional hope for life beyond death or going to heaven one day. Salvation was understood as a concrete historical reality with the use of eschatological symbols as evocative symbols of the coming of God's kingdom in our world. This assurance of liberation is based on the assurance of God's presence. For the Christians of the anti-apartheid movement, their hope was for a God at work in our world, turning hopeless and evil situations to good so that God's kingdom may come and God's will may be done on earth (as it is in heaven). Goodness and justice will therefore triumph in the end and tyranny and oppression will not last forever with the churches called to become God's partners in this.

This hope announces and yearns for a kind of society that would be different from the present one, speaking about a vision of a new society and emphasising that the reign of God is not simply a way of speaking about the next world but is for this world, even if it also builds on something that also fulfils and transcends all human expectations. This vision of Christian hope understands the theme of liberation from oppression in thoroughly this-worldly terms and manifested in concrete earthly changes. Salvation from sin does not imply an escape from this miserable world but a call for a transforming of social structures as well as personal lives in order to bring good news where hope does not operate as a tranquilizing instrument. Whilst the gospel of the Kingdom contains more than only these limited historical victories, they are adamant that it does not contain less than them. They ground this defiant hope of a radical liberation in the gift that Christ offers to the world. This understands life in terms of the human response to the hope of divine promises which liberate humankind from the limits imposed by the existing structures of this world and enables humanity to think and behave according to the possibilities which God's future holds out to them.<sup>228</sup>

For Nolan the implications of this world-affirming shape of hope are clear. As Christians, we can hold to a 'hope against hope' which does not only rely only on current signs of hope in our world but is based on God. This hope should be directed towards the common good – a social order that seeks to work for increased justice, peace and freedom in all places and witnesses to this as an authentic possibility in the context of the social challenges of our times. Nolan points out that it is not enough to exude a general aura of hopefulness but that we are also called to act hopefully in the world. He offers some specific pointers towards the sort of better world we should be working towards by highlighting to what he terms 'gospel values' and the overarching concern for justice in the bible that should enable us to work to put right what is wrong in our world by challenging structures of sin. In true liberation style, his focus here are areas of consumerism, greed, environmental destruction – tying in with many contemporary issues of eco-justice in our world. Nolan warns us to be wary of forms of Christian hope that defer fulfilment into the next life. He points to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah buying land when exile was expected as an example of a concrete practice of public hope.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>228</sup> See Conradie, *Hope for the earth*, 218-226 for a fuller exploration of the anti-apartheid struggle hope summarised briefly here.

<sup>229</sup> Nolan, *Hope in Age of Despair*, 101-111 Chapter on Gospel values. Practices of Hope are picked up in Chapter 5.



A vision of the common good and a new social order can easily be dismissed as utopian. However as this research has already suggested, Christians may need to reclaim this contested word if they are to speak persuasively and inspiringly of future possibilities of liberating justice. Utopian visions can function as a protest or critique of what is in the name of what could be. Paul Ricoeur suggests that, “They allow us to imagine a no-place... and offer us an exterior glance on our reality. The fantasy of alternatives offers a formidable contestation of what currently is”.<sup>230</sup> However we must also guard against falling into illusionary utopias and require a disciplined hope<sup>231</sup> that avoids either wish fulfilment (abstract illusions) or ideology (concrete idolatry) in order to articulate a concrete hope that is neither presumptuous nor empty.

To summarize Nolan’s contribution to this research project, he grounds human hope in God as its transcendent source enabling it to be a ‘hope against hope’ that remains even when there seem to be no signs of hope in our present world. He gives this Christian hope content by using the symbol of the Kingdom of God but concretizes this in a way helpful for wider dialogue by highlighting that this is the common good. He calls us to a prophetic and active hope where we collaborate with God to work towards the social transformation of what is in the name of what could be. For Nolan a genuine theological vision of hope enables Christians to live with a concrete attitude of hopefulness for the world and to act hopefully in the world with concrete ways of being and doing that denounce injustice but also announce justice in both word and deed. These possible ways of being and doing are explored further in chapter 4 and 5 of this project.

### 3.3.3 The Horizon of Hope – an exploration with Flora Keshigian<sup>232</sup>

Christian hope has sometimes been accused of deferring all fulfilment to a post-death horizon and of creating the sort of grand narrative that increasingly ceases to ring true in our post-modern times.<sup>233</sup> This final section of Chapter 3 offers a critique by the feminist theologian Flora Keshghegian of some of the basic assumptions on which many theologies of hope often rest and is based on her prize-winning 2005 book, *Time for Hope*. The inclusion of this more critical approach seeks to point towards the multiple possibilities for constructive and critical engagement on the topic of hope within the theological sector itself. While the thought of both Moltmann and Nolan is situated within a paradigm that points to God as an extra-historical transcendent entity whose promise forms the basis or foundation for our hope, the below exploration seeks to explicitly problematise transcendence, immortality or a guaranteed happy ending as essential to a meaningful notion of Christian hope. Keshghegian instead offers us a more humble social vision of hope that picks up on a number of criticisms levelled at Christian hope by recent post-modern thinkers. This research suggests her critique is an important one to consider if Christian hope is to dialogue in the wider public sphere. It briefly presents five dimensions of her approach<sup>234</sup> that she suggests can help us hold to a more humble hopeful vision in our lives: Seeing time differently, accepting finitude, challenging transcendence, an ethic of risk and reconceptualising eschatological transformation.

<sup>230</sup> Katerburg, William “History, hope and the future of time” 68 in *Future of Hope* (eds) Volf and Katerberg quoting Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures of Ideology and Utopia* NY. Columbia, 1968), 16-17.

<sup>231</sup> Wolterstorff, “Seeking Justice in Hope” in *Future of Hope*, 77-100 points to the need for our hope to be both humble and confident. This article influenced my thinking in its focus on both a hope for justice and a hope for consummation. He focuses on exploring the sort of hope that working for justice within our world requires and this article is recommended for further reading.

<sup>232</sup> This whole section draws on content in Flora Keshghegian, *Time for Hope: Practices for living in today’s world*. NY: Continuum. 2006

<sup>233</sup> See criticisms in this vein by pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, *Philosophy* and post modern philosopher Jacques Derrida.

<sup>234</sup> These five dimensions are drawn from the researcher’s own reading of Keshghegian’s *Time for Hope* in order to highlight its key challenges to some of the dominant ways of conceptualising theologies of hope. See especially 18-187.

**Seeing time differently** – Keshgegian, like many others, sees hope as a virtue connected to the reality of our inhabitation of time as humans and therefore points out that how we view time itself influences how we conceptualise hope. She is critical of both grand hopes & utopian end-claims and argues that a western, linear and progressive notion of historical time can increasingly fail to ring true for many people today as the Western modernity myth is increasingly challenged by post-modern thinking. She suggests that we need to explore alternative notions of time that can inform a more sober vision of hope for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. and argues that in today's society, the central Judeo-Christian affirmation that God acts purposively within history to bring about '*his will*', thereby providing an overall telos, divine comedy or happy ending to human history which is 'guaranteed' is potentially a dangerous product of what she terms 'once & for all' thinking<sup>235</sup>. She argues that these sort of 'utopian' claims can often in practice lead to the sense that our human actions in the present do not really count (i.e. the future is fixed by God and therefore our human actions do not change anything in a fundamental sense). She suggests instead that we need to "relearn the contours of hope for today to inhabit time differently"<sup>236</sup> and look instead for smaller 'hope generating' narratives that can eschew our human tendency to seek total solutions. In this way she claims that we will better honour both the complexity and the limits of life. She criticises both 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal Christianity and 20<sup>th</sup> century liberation theology as often succumbing to the temptation to buy into a linear model of time where paradise is being progressively regained in history. However she does not argue for a return to the ongoingly popular evangelical model where belief in a trans-historical intervention from outside by an omnipotent God as the end goal of all history also seems to negate the validity of any human efforts within history towards improvement. She instead points towards a form of social hoping that does not rely on a '*guaranteed happy end*' for its energy but draws on feminist theologians such as Welch and Ruether to offer a more cyclical notion of time. Here a vision of hope points us towards meaningful values that can both centre us in the present and accompany us on our journey into the future even if our destination is ultimately unknown. For Keshgegian, to see the world as a 'divine comedy' where all will be redeemed in the end is often to deny or repress experiences we encounter of the tragic, limited and ambiguous nature of life.<sup>237</sup>

**Accepting Finitude** - Keshigian cautions us to be wary of horizons of hope that always postpone fulfilment into another sphere, a criticism of religious hope that has been also made by many secular commentators<sup>238</sup>. She suggests that traditional eschatology often refuses to accept the reality of human finitude when maybe actually it needs to acknowledge it. Finitude and death have often been seen traditionally in church doctrine as a punishment for original sin with Jesus and eternal life presented predominantly as the 'answer' to that fear of finitude. Many feminist theologians have instead explored death in a more holistic eco-centred way as a natural part of the cycle of life, drawing on personal experiences of new birth. For them, the reality of limited space in our world requires death, not as a punishment of sin as has often been claimed by theologians, but as an intrinsic part of creation's own renewal. Keshgegian suggests that the hope claims of eternal life and immortality that are typical of much religion but especially Christianity may in fact reflect a damaging refusal to accept human finitude and the limits that are a natural part of all created life.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 157. See also Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy* and Nolan, "The eschatology of the Kairos Document", *Missionalia*. 5 2 for further explorations of alternative ways of conceptualising time.

<sup>237</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology*, 151 points also to the 'possibility of eschatological tragedy' in order to avoid freedom being mere make-believe.

<sup>238</sup> See Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope*, 203-235. See Keshgegian's brief exploration of post-modernism in *Time for Hope*, 66-68.

<sup>239</sup> Conradie, *Hope for the Earth*, 336 offers a critique suggesting that Christian hope can offer a solution to our predicament of finitude.

Many women's theological voices increasingly argue for *agnosticism* in the face of death buoyed by trust in a relationship with a God of Love, rather than holding to absolutist doctrines about our post-death future that can increasingly fail to ring true, bring genuine comfort or even speak meaningfully into our modern times. While this dimension of Christian hope i.e. hope for individual eternal life is not the focus of this chapter, it is worth noting that absolutist statements about either the future of our world or our post-death future need to be treated with caution. That which is certain no longer requires hope. (as Chapter 4 will analyse further). However most theological writers on hope researched in this project continue to see the death–transcending dimensions of Christianity (symbolised most powerfully by resurrection) and the wider eschatological hope for a new creation as promised by God as an important horizon to maintain in a way that can fuel and drive rather than replace hope for change in the here and now. Keshgegian's acknowledgement that death may be a necessary cost of the privilege of life may however help Christians avoid a triumphalist approach to resurrection that is too quick to deny the reality of our experienced finitude as humans and our lack of any certain knowledge about the future beyond this significant horizon. In this critique, she is not alone. Nürnberger comments that, "Eschatology – the biblical promise of a new heaven and earth – has lost its plausibility in modern times. A new fulfilled life after death seems to be as unlikely as the transformation of reality as a whole into a world void of evil, injustice, suffering and death. There is a shift away from apocalyptic eschatology"<sup>240</sup>. He sees the biblical promises as symbolic ways of reassuring people that God's intentions for them are good in the here and now. For him, the Bible narrative extrapolates that reality to both beginning and end in mythical form to help us witness in the present to what reality ought to be, emboldened by the divine vision. However, this should not require us to continue to hold uncritically to factual beliefs about the beginning and end of the world that may no longer resonate with common human understandings.

**Challenging Transcendence** - Keshgegian questions whether we should continue to hold to a transcendent horizon of hope outside history that guides and grounds our human journey as Christians. Many theologians of hope still respond strongly in the affirmative to this question.<sup>241</sup> However the holding to a concept of extra-historical transcendence is no longer an uncontested theological position. Keshgegian points to feminist theologians who choose to let go of a transcendence outside history (in the way that God has traditionally often been defined in Christianity) and to embrace finitude as part of the human condition but nevertheless still remain hopeful<sup>242</sup>. She argues that Jesus held up the idea of God as immanent and discoverable in the ordinary and the human but that the institutional church constantly pushes away from this radical idea and in doing so, often splits off the transcendent dimension of hope, emphasising transcendence over immanence, splitting space and time and frequently rejecting finitude as a result. She calls instead for a more *incarnational* position with transcendence reframed within our human history and experience.<sup>243</sup> She sees social transformation itself with its refusal to accept how things are as a form of 'horizontal' transcendence where people go beyond what is currently existing and develop new possibilities.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>240</sup> Nürnberger, *Biblical theology*, 206.

<sup>241</sup> See Rubem Alves, Jurgen Moltmann, Ernst Conradie and Richard Bauckham to name a few contemporary writers on hope.

<sup>242</sup> See Welch, *A feminist ethic of risk*. Minneapolis; Fortress, 1990 and Rosemary Ruether, *To change the world: Christology and social criticism*. NY; Crossroad, 1981 for more on this, both explored critically in term of this area of hope in Keshgegian *Time for Hope*, 84-95.

<sup>243</sup> For an alternative way of reconceptualising transcendence, see Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*, 26-63 pointing to the need for a "horizontal transcendence" pointing to a God who faithfully awaits us beyond the end of history. They see transcendence as the sole guarantor of ultimate meaning, purpose and genuine hope and claim only the end furnishes us with an object of hope. This complex debate on the nature of transcendence is beyond the scope of this project to explore in any detail but merits further research

<sup>244</sup> Biezeveld, "Hope Amidst Actual Life", 42 also picks up on this same point – suggesting the need to challenge the idea of a God outside this world which can end up creating double world thinking which typically leads to the devaluation of this current world.

Moltmann<sup>245</sup> argues for the maintaining of the dialectic of the ‘great hope’ for resurrection and ‘little hopes’ for future better times and in this way his view stands in tension with Keshgegian. However Keshgegian’s critique of how we can engage with transcendence in a way that also takes incarnation more seriously seems an important one. While the transcendent may indeed exist, it can only really be experienced by humans in immanent terms through our lived experience. The Jesuit writer, William Lynch<sup>246</sup> sees hope itself as a form of transcendence describing it as ‘a constant decision to move into the future, a bid to transcend the present with its perceived limits and difficulties, to imagine a way out of that which threatens to engulf or imprison us into a brighter or better alternative and insists on expanding the perceived horizon of possibility’.

I find Keshgegian’s critique especially useful for considering the question as to the horizon of our Christian hope. If our expectation as Christians is merely or even predominantly that our hopes may be fulfilled in a post-life heaven, then this will significantly reduce what we hope for in this life (as Marx caustically pointed out). However most theologians argue for some sort of dialectical approach to the horizon of hope. The nature of the relationship between hopes for consummation and liberation<sup>247</sup> or between the transcendent hope grounded in God and the immanent hopes grounded in human experience seems likely to be one of the key questions facing a credible theology of hope in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Billings,<sup>248</sup> argues that they can be reconciled in an incarnational approach where divine and human come together and unite, breaking apart the dichotomy or dualism of either/or in relation to the paradox of human and divine action and helping us to continue to look beyond human horizons whilst maintaining hope within those horizons. But for Keshgegian, this approach may not go far enough and her critique challenges our core image of God as overall controller:

“The living god is known in and through the process of living. This is a god of improvisation, an abundant energy, powerful and ever moving. This god is ground of our hope. The monarchical god reigning in heaven so often portrayed as the object and ground of our hope is not adequate for the vision of life we need today. Nor is a god made in our image of a loving parent granting our every desire – able to provide the hope needed. The god of life, ground of hope, speaks forcefully out of the whirlwind. God’s power for life makes resurrection happen – not person but relation.”<sup>249</sup>

### **An ethic of risk**

“We can rely neither on God nor ourselves to guarantee a utopian future. We are however called to do our best, along with others, to sustain life” says Sharon Welch whom Keshgegian draws on to contrast what she terms an ethic of control with an ethic of risk and solidarity.<sup>250</sup> She suggests there are no *guarantees* of decisive social improvements in the near future or even in our lifetime and that theologies of hope that seem to promise this may not withstand disappointments when hoped for changes do not materialise. However she argues that no guarantee should be required for us to still choose to *resist in hope* by imagining a world different to the present, developing strategies of resistance & finding ways of sustaining each other in the struggle for justice. She lets go of the concept of a transcendent, omnipotent God outside the system whose

<sup>245</sup> Moltmann, *Progress and Abyss*, 19.

<sup>246</sup> Lynch, *Images of Hope*, 50.

<sup>247</sup> See Wolterstorff “Seeking Justice”, 77-100.

<sup>248</sup> Billings, “Nativity or Advent”, 145.

<sup>249</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 221.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* 86-89. This section draws on Welch *A feminist ethic of risk*. See 123-180 in particular.

promise forms the guarantee for our actions in the world. In fact she suggests that utopian thinking of this, and other kinds, are often actually about control and having absolute power over others, framed ideologically in terms of the good. Even when this idea is connected not to human power but to divine power, she again challenges the notion of a sovereign God who holds absolute power. She suggests that as Christians we may need to relinquish our absolutes to allow us to live in an alternative space of the 'beloved community that celebrates limits, contingency and ambiguity with no-one to offer us a guaranteed future'<sup>251</sup>. In this way she urges us to relinquish all forms of 'power over' and instead work in solidarity towards mutually transformative relationships and interactions. She argues that while all our social responses are inevitably temporal and partial (rather than part of a linear path towards a predetermined higher end set in advance by God) they are nevertheless still both meaningful and needed. She uses the playful image of God as a jazz improviser rather than omnipotent controller as a more meaningful image for our post modern times. In this way she suggests that an interactive space emerges between divine and human action where there is potential and possibility but no absolute givens. Here she sees a critical place for the vision of hope around crafting meaningful values for the journey as opposed to hope for a utopian end-goal. To give a concrete example, to engage in war for the sake of peace as an end goal in this philosophy is to create a disconnect between means and ends that cannot be justified. But to embody the hope for peace through peaceful actions in the present that offer alternative ways of being and doing, even if the goal of peace is beyond our control to achieve in full, is nevertheless a concrete and authentic contribution towards social transformation. To hope means to engage hour by hour with life in a way that our deeds express that for which we hope<sup>252</sup>

### Reconceptualising Eschatological Social Transformation

Finally Keshgegian draws on the work of feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether who argues that social change is about 'conversion to the centre' rather than to the end, providing a clear contrast to the Moltmannian approach that focuses strongly on the eschatological hope of the end. She suggests instead that our motivation for social transformation can come more from centring ourselves on core values (peace, justice, equality etc) rather than succumbing to '*once and for all*' thinking about the future. "Once and for all thinking privileges the end over the means, it turns visions into utopias, transforms imagination into wish fulfilment and hope into the eternal embodiment of desire. It ends up devaluing history and time."<sup>253</sup> She argues that society is in fact in need of constant correction as new forms of injustice and victims will continue to emerge and that we need to hold to hopes for the possibilities of improvement and ongoing changes – rather than to a hope for a 'one-off transformation' that she feels Christian eschatological language often encourages. In this way she does not assume an overarching 'telos' or indeed even a future time when new beginnings will not be needed but instead sees God in the journey itself. Welch also makes this point, arguing that constant correction should not be seen as a sign of the failure of social transformation but as an inevitable part of life. Women's work in relation to transformation has often been daily, repetitious tasks that are never completed – turning ingredients into meals eaten, dirt into cleanness that dirties again, materials into clothes that wear out, children into adults who have new children. It seems that this lived experience

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. For more on this topic see Welch, *A Feminist ethic of risk*, 160-2 which also points to the idea of selves constituted by relation.

<sup>252</sup> Ackermann, "Time to Hope" in *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa*. No 81. Dec 1992, 67.

<sup>253</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 78.

may bring a different and important slant to bear on the issue of social transformation.<sup>254</sup> It challenges eschatological language which may sometimes focus our attention strongly on the hope for a one off or trans-historical transformation and is unwittingly in danger of making our incremental gains within history seem ultimately meaningless. She points instead to a theology where responsible action does not mean the certain achievement of desired ends but the creation of a matrix in which further actions are possible; the creation of the conditions of possibility for desired changes. This highlights the possible longer term impact of partial successes e.g. offering anticipations on a small scale can enlarge people's imagination and offer glimpses of other social structures enabling human action to contribute to the Kingdom of God in humble ways yet avoiding 'once and for all' solutions.

Keshgegian's social vision highlights the danger of an ethic of control and our tendency to seek out one off total solutions. Instead of this she calls for an ethic of risk and solidarity that recognises partial successes and eschews any absolute guarantees.<sup>255</sup> She offers a critical theology of liberation where sustaining efforts towards social transformation requires an everyday focus on contributing towards a better world rather than being distracted by utopian perfect worlds that can lead to new forms of tyranny in the name of the good (as seen in myriad forms in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). She challenges us to re-engage with the problematic issue of human finitude and to be wary of the ongoing and triumphalist tendency of religion to explain finitude away in ways that can fail to ring true in our times<sup>256</sup>. She problematises a linear approach to time in the West as often at the expense of other alternative metaphors of time that can help us become more critical of time-bound notions of incremental success and progress. Finally she calls for a redefining of transcendence within a theology of immanence and introduces the notion of worldly housekeeping as an ongoing task of social transformation. She sees hope as a social habit that honours both time and place in an incarnational way that can help us inhabit time differently and point us into the world of praxis.<sup>257</sup>

### **3.4 A summary of Hope as social vision and its implications for social transformation**

This chapter has suggested that Christians are called into hope as a 'way of seeing' our world as a form of human vision that while inevitably limited and partial can be deliberately aligned with a wider divine vision of the common good. This offers a humanizing, alethic gaze on both our world and on others, seeing things not only as they are, but also as they could be and remaining constantly open to the good possibilities of the new that is still to come. All three theologians portrayed point to the need for our vision, if it is to be hopeful, to hold a genuine openness to the future in direct contrast to closed controlling ideologies that seek to fix the future for either good or ill. In different ways they all point firmly to the need for a vision of hope towards the social challenges with which our world confronts us to enable us to see beyond the reality of what is to the possibilities of what could be. This vision of hope requires our response as human beings and is not a vision which excludes our human actions as ultimately futile. Seeing through the lens of hope can help us to recognise the existing good in our creation as well as that which is broken and in this way to be inspired to contribute responsibly to redeem, renew and restore this common goodness as humans in humble

<sup>254</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 415. However Moltmann believes that our human efforts within history for transformation are meaningful and do count in an ultimate sense without removing faith in a wider eschatological transformation— so his views stand in tension here.

<sup>255</sup> This idea is picked up by Pieper in the next section where he sees hope as at odds with a rhetoric of absolute certainty and needing to retain a level of agnosticism with regard to the future.

<sup>256</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 77 suggests that promises of eternal life function to resolve the ambiguities of history.

<sup>257</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 90-92. This aspect is picked up more fully in Chapter 5 of this project on hope as social practice.

partnership with the divine. A social vision of hope offers an alternative attitude to our common future in the world than that of fatalism, apathy and despair. It also sits in contradiction to attitudes of control, certainty and presumption as a way of living authentically in time with all the uncertainties & limits of knowledge and space that this entails. It asks us to imagine concrete utopias of how our world can be better.

This chapter has reflected on what can anchor our Christian hope for the world through Moltmann who points to the promise of a transcendent God to journey with his creation within history towards a this-worldly liberation and calls us to respond. He differentiates hope from a mere optimistic sense of progress by grounding its reality in the dialectical paradox of the cross and resurrection, acknowledging that true hope emerges out of the darkest places on our planets as a hope in solidarity with those who suffer under the present. He suggests that any vision that fails to engage authentically with this suffering world is not an authentic form of hope. He calls us as Christians to demonstrate God's own redemptive commitment to the world incarnated in Jesus to anticipate the wider redemptive future which is yet to come. We can find a responsible way of living in insecurity in the light of an eschatological horizon to our hope that acknowledges that the world is transformable in the direction of the promised future but nevertheless continues to 'go beyond' all human realisations. He argues that our hope must remain open to the active realisation of the concrete possibilities of the new with which reality is laden in all times and places.

The chapter then explored the object of Christian hope with Nolan, highlighting the importance of what Christians actually hope for as critical and pointing to the image of the Kingdom of God central to the vision of Jesus. Nolan crystallises this object of hope more concretely for our world today as the idea of the 'common good' grounded in a God who wants the best for all of creation and that calls Christians into a way of seeing that is hopeful and leads to active concrete acts of hope in our world. This is a key point on which much of the rest of the project depends and to which other theologians also point throughout.

The chapter ended by problematising some concepts on which theologies of hope often rely in order to explore the horizon of our social hope as Christians. This is especially relevant because Christian hope has often been seen mainly as a transcendent hope for life after death or another world with few real this-worldly implications. Keshgegian challenges an overemphasis on time as linear, a form of transcendence that fails to fully engage with an incarnational God and the way in which transformation is often conceptualised as a one off end goal. She instead offers a more humble Christian narrative of this-worldly hope on which to ground our journey into the unknown future that recognises limits, rejects guaranteed blueprints for change and learns to improvise and imagine creatively within the messy and ambiguous realm of possibility. She reminds us that hope is not a system or a controlling vision and that there is no God ordained blueprint for the future for us to roll out if we truly seek to hold to a hopeful vision. Instead for her, hope maintains a risky openness to the continual possibility of the new good. This enables us to see social transformation as a journey in partnership with the divine which is inspired by the possibilities with which our reality is laden which can allow us to turn a critical eye on our present without becoming either cynical or despairing.

"The messiness of life in history does not fit into the neat packages that once and for all thinking and its corollary, dualism demands. And these neat packages, in the name of hope, choke hope."<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Keshgegian. *Time for Hope*, 78.

The theological vision of social hope for our world unpacked in this chapter has implications for social transformation as it sits strongly at odds with commonly held attitudes of fatalism that suggest the world is fixed and cannot be changed for the better as well as beliefs that claim it will be perfected regardless of our actions or lack thereof. It endorses the basic premise of social transformation that human action can contribute towards social change for the better. It seeks to imagine and explore new ways of seeing in line with a creative divine vision that does new things and that encourages human creativity. It supports human agency and responsibility with its tradition of a God in history who calls people and requires an active human response, lived out in social terms. This offers Christians a strong theological mandate for this-worldly involvement in the area of social transformation towards common goods in the light of a wider redemptive vision for our whole world. It insists that if we are to hold to transcendent hopes beyond death and world that this transcendence should strengthen our immanent commitment to the world rather than replacing it.

Nevertheless this Christian vision of hope also challenges us to eschew the temptations of total solutions, ideologies or guarantees and remain open to uncertainty, refusing to reduce hope merely to finding ways of controlling the future. The history of modern development and some existing forms of social transformation can easily tend towards forms of social engineering in the name of a greater good that are then imposed on others. Development has often succumbed to this sort of solutions-based approach by seeking to find that magic button that will transform 'backward' countries once and for all. Hopeful visions ought to mitigate against this controlling tendency in social transformation and retain a clear level of humility in their approach.

A Christian hopeful vision points us not, as one might expect, to the places of progress and optimism within our world, but paradoxically towards the places where the victims of many of our existing systems inhabit and encounter of darkness and despair. If we do not start here in our work for social transformation, our vision of hope will fail to be in solidarity with God's vision of the common good for all that requires a critique of the present. But this same vision can also give us the confidence to enter these dark places and seek the suffering God who is already there. Without this reminder, our visions of hope can become trite, meeting the same fate as the 19<sup>th</sup> century social gospel by merely becoming a theological gloss on secular myths of progress and failing to offer critical alternatives in the present to what is, in the name of what could be. Many in our world have ceased to believe in the possibility of a common good for all. Our world can seem so fractured into 'haves' and 'have nots' that frequently the hopes of one seem to inevitably be at the expense of the hopes of another. A hopeful vision seeks to point us beyond this to the vision of the Kingdom where the good for all is a real possibility. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reclaiming a hopeful sense of our shared future is a significant contribution which Christian hope can make in our world where social hope is a dwindling resource.

“A vision of Hope offers standing ground outside the system from which the system can be evaluated, critiqued and perhaps changed. Hopeless people eventually conform but hope filled people are not as dependent or contained. Hope is an immense human act which reminds us that no system of power or knowledge can finally grasp what is true – and offers an alternative reality as the substance of hope. Hope makes it possible not to submit – even if defiance is not successful.”<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Bruggemann, *Hope within History*, 81



## Chapter 4

### HOPE AS SOCIAL VIRTUE: A WAY OF BEING

“Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive. If life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired.”<sup>260</sup>

This chapter aims to build on a hopeful vision as a ‘way of seeing’ presented in Chapter 3 by drilling down further into the nature of hope. It draws on the ancient Christian notion of hope as a virtue in order to explore some of the assumptions and ideas that stand behind our use of the word ‘hope’ and what it can mean to seek to embody hope into our ‘way of being’. To do so, it draws first on the wider insights of virtue theory and then applies this to the virtue of hope in conversation with the Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper, the theologian Douglas Hall. It then concludes with a few further insights from the theologian Flora Keshgegian around embodying concrete habits that can help us nurture more humble ways of hoping in our lives.

#### **4.1 What is virtue?**

The idea of virtue and the virtues is an ancient notion formulated most comprehensively by the Greek traditions of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>261</sup> Aristotle saw virtue as possessed by the person of good character. Whilst he then broke down the idea of virtue into a range of different ‘virtues’ – he nevertheless saw virtue as unitary and in some way indivisible – (like the modern notion of human rights today) and that the virtuous ‘man’ possesses all the various virtues held together in his person as part of his journey towards The Good Life, ‘Eudaimonia’; a vision of human flourishing as the appropriate aim of a proper human life. For him, virtues aided humans in the pursuit of this end by building them into the kind of characters that would then act rightly in the concrete situations that they encountered. Plato developed the four cardinal virtues<sup>262</sup> while Aristotle pointed to “The Golden Mean” with each virtue as a balance between two extremes (or vices).<sup>263</sup> Both Aristotle and Plato<sup>264</sup> saw virtues fundamentally as a social good, with our relationships and communal life forming a key part of the end goal of the good life of human flourishing together as opposed to the development of virtues as a quest or an aide to securing merely individual goods. They both pointed towards the idea of an overarching *telos* where the deepest cause for things is sought not in their beginning but in their end, their purpose to which they aspire. In tension with the transcendent and often abstract emphasis of Plato on the Ideal Good, Aristotle instead emphasised the immanent, dynamic and changing concrete nature of human existence, moving from an imperfect condition towards achievement of full maturity. For the first time the idea of moving deliberately as a person over time from potentiality to actuality was engaged with as opposed to a more static existence lived amongst the forces of Fate. In this way, the seeds were sown for emphasising the possibility of real concrete change in the world that grew in time to typify the Western modern project. Greek thinkers all posited a supreme form as the ultimate cause. However, Aristotle looked concretely for actual good persons and good actions in varying human contexts and suggested that absolute knowledge was not possible for humans to attain in the ethical realm.

<sup>260</sup> Erik, H Erikson. Internet at <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/193624>. Accessed 30/10/11

<sup>261</sup> Note that the concept of virtue finds reference in other philosophical traditions e.g. Hinduism, Stoicism, Confucianism, Buddhism etc. An ancient anonymous Chinese saying claims “Hope is like sugar in tea, even when there is only a little of it, it sweetens everything”.

<sup>262</sup> The original cardinal virtues according to Plato and adopted by the medieval church were courage, temperance, justice & prudence.

<sup>263</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford University Press. 2009.

<sup>264</sup> This section draws on Richard Tarnus *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Pimlico 1996, 3-70 for this summary of Greek thought.

## The 'Theological' Virtues

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love."<sup>265</sup>

The ancient Jewish tradition also developed ideas around virtue that were both similar and different to that of the Greeks. Ideas of virtue and righteousness were seen as ways of being which pleased God and led to good actions towards others and were especially common in the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament. Here they are, as in the Greek world, intrinsically connected to life within a concrete community. Nevertheless the Jewish tradition was founded more strongly on the idea of both revelation and narrative history than that of Greek philosophical reason. The core virtue for the Jews was active trust in a liberatory God who acted dynamically within human history. This gave them an "overriding sense of moral urgency, of ultimate fate being decided by present human actions, of the individual's direct accountability to the all seeing and all just God leading to denunciation of an unjust society, contempt for hollow secular success and the prophetic call for moral regeneration"<sup>266</sup> in a way that the philosophies of Greece rarely emphasised.

This tradition of 'messianic hope'<sup>267</sup> in a revolutionary and liberatory God who feels, acts and suffers within history alongside his community of oppressed and marginalised people that emerges from the Jewish tradition and is then swept up into concrete historical narrative form in Christianity sits in significant tension with the Unmoved Mover of philosophical reflection from Greek tradition whose ethics in general often supported the existing status quo of the city state and its rulers rather than speaking to an oppressed and frequently stigmatised political minority. Ironically, it is nevertheless Christianity and not Judaism who is historically credited with adding the three "theological" virtues of hope, faith and love to Plato's list of four cardinal virtues and Aristotle's much longer list. The Apostle Paul first took the steps to give hope virtuous status in the Scriptures, possibly by adopting the respected ethical language of the times and subverting it with the addition of these new concepts – none of which would have been well regarded by the Greeks of the time. Hope would have been seen as an illusionary attempt to escape one's predestined fate in the world.

The synthesis of Greek and Biblical concepts continues to vex theologians today – some of whom view it with a usually qualified approval and others who see it as a heretical distortion. Pride, for example, was often a core Greek virtue, while humility, its seeming opposite, was often depicted as a Christian virtue. However the influence that this synthesis has had on church doctrine, history and everyday belief has been highly significant in the development of the modern Western worldview. St Augustine, one of the great thinkers and developers of Early Church doctrine was strongly influenced by both Greek and Christian ideas and famously wrestled with ways to draw them together theologically in a meaningful way. However the theological master of the virtues only emerged in medieval times where the powerful syncretism of Jewish and Greek/Roman thought came, in the medieval work of Thomas Aquinas, to characterise the virtue tradition within Western Christianity. It still has significant implications for an analysis of virtues today especially those traditionally perceived as 'Christian' such as that of hope.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13. *NIV*

<sup>266</sup> Tarnus, *Passion of the Western Mind*, 95

<sup>267</sup> Rabbi Hillel, one of the most famous commentators on the Torah at the time of Jesus poses three questions to the Jewish people. The third says - *did you hope for the Messiah?* In this way he points to messianic hope as a core and active aspect of Judaic identity. This Messianic hope in the promise has been explored in Chapter 3 with Moltmann and also related to practicing hope in Chapter 5

<sup>268</sup> This project has not explored hope's relation to the theological virtues of love and faith due to space. Josef Pieper analyses this.

**The role of Thomas Aquinas in Virtue theory**

“Aquinas would forge a worldview that dramatically epitomised the high middle ages turning of Western thought on its axis to a new direction of which the modern mind would be the heir and trustee.”<sup>269</sup>

In the history of the Western Christian church no-one did more to synthesise the Greek thought of Aristotle with the Judeo-Christian worldview than the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas in his search to grapple with questions of faith and reason, nature and grace, church and world in his times. His influential synthesis of these two worldviews has been credited with making a significant contribution towards the philosophical grounding of Western modern thinking<sup>270</sup>.

Aquinas argued that in order to reach their supernatural or ultimate ends, humans were intended by God to pass through immanent or natural good ends in order to fully realise their humanity. This enabled Aquinas to be positive about autonomy as a valuable part of the human condition rather than merely dismissing it as wilful pride or sinful independence. Because of this, the contemporary writer Jean Porter suggests that Aquinas can help us to recover a cogent account of human goodness and virtue today from what she terms ‘the chaos of our contemporary moral discourse’.<sup>271</sup> Aquinas stressed the value of this-worldly knowledge and experiences and provided a complex synthesis of both the transcendent thought of Plato and the immanent search of Aristotle, infusing both with the narrative revelation offered by Christianity. He drew on ancient traditions that saw the wellbeing of individuals and the community as mutually interdependent and offered the insight that no individual is able to live a humanly good life apart from the sustaining structure of the community. But at the same time, he understood the good of the community in a nuanced way for his time in that a community that fundamentally violates the well being of its members thereby destroys its own common good. He warns that that the community cannot sacrifice its members to the common good though it can ask them to make voluntary sacrifices themselves. His theory of human goodness whereby humans act for the overall good as they see it in a way not merely related to moral goods but a more comprehensive notion of ‘the good’ points us back to Aristotle’s insight that humans seek towards their own perfection defined as a full actuality of existence in accordance with one’s potential as a member of a given species. In this way, he is also able to equate the true good of the individual and the community in such a way that the highest natural good for the individual also consists of participation in a just community.

For Aquinas, the theological virtues nevertheless differed from the natural or cardinal virtues in a number of ways. Firstly, the correct object of these virtues was God with the ultimate end or telos of humans to be found in the mysterious symbol of the beatific vision. Secondly these virtues were not seen as attainable by human effort alone but in some mysterious way as the gift of God to humans as part of their salvation and as a result of grace. Hope in particular was seen by Aquinas as the theological expectation of receiving from God which enabled people not to give up or to despair even in difficult times. While the cardinal virtues were good in themselves – e.g. Justice, the theological virtues could be misdirected and thereby become vices – one could hope for, have faith in or love the wrong objects and therefore distort virtues into vice. Hoping for the right things, as we have explored with Nolan in Chapter 3, was also therefore a concern for Aquinas too.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 179.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. 179. Aquinas also drew on the work of St Augustine and the Stoic tradition

<sup>271</sup> Jean Porter *The Recovery of Virtue: the Relevance of Aquinas for Christian ethics*. London: SPCK. 1994, 54,174-177.

**Is Virtue theory still relevant today?**

“We need to act in ways in the modern world that are in line with who we are.”<sup>272</sup>

The notion of virtue as something to be prized gradually fell out of fashion in post Enlightenment modern times in the West, often scorned as a tradition bound predominantly by class and sex prejudices<sup>273</sup>. Many of the concepts of Greek virtues stand at odds with ethics in our modern times. E.g. What constitutes a virtuous woman or the acceptance of all sorts of tragedies as simply the punishing hand of the divine would often be challenged today. However, modern proponents of virtue ethics continue to set the human being into a concrete community of relationships within which the self is formed, an idea in tension with many modern tendencies to define the self, its goals and even its ethical decisions predominantly in individualistic and abstract terms. This chapter explores the virtue of hope within this tradition which has seen a significant renaissance of interest in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with modern day proponents such as Alasdair MacIntyre.<sup>274</sup> Some see it as a third alternative to the two main forms of moral theories of deontological and teleological ethics. Others suggest that it presents a more nuanced way of capturing aspects that exist partially within the other traditions. Theorists like Martha Nussbaum and Amartyr Sen<sup>275</sup> used insights from virtue ethics to formulate new ways of exploring modern development thinking in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that centred on the development of a person within a community in life enhancing ways and focusing on concrete capabilities.

Modern virtue theory holds to core values or moral axioms expressed more concretely as character traits. It also allows for a level of subjectivity or context to be brought into the application of those axioms allowing for some consideration of the effects of the decision in the particular situation and for the future. It seeks to embed questions of morality within a concrete community ethos rather than seeking to formulate abstract ethical principles in a way that is often unrelated to specific community norms and values. For MacIntyre, specific communities engage ethically because they care about some overarching end or ‘telos’ creating social traditions that ground ethics in a wider human narrative. Humans live their lives both individually and in relationships in the light of a possible shared image of the future (as Chapter 3 explored) and the narrative of any one life forms part of an wider interlocking set of shared narratives.<sup>276</sup> Virtue theory differs from merely moral rules by embracing a wide range of possible human responses to situations that could all qualify as virtuous allowing multiple responses to be considered legitimate and offering some level of situational judgement essential in our post modern pluralistic world where multiple contexts shape our ethical dilemmas. This enables the person of good character to consider the context of a situation. e.g. a rich man encountering a beggar could offer him money, take him out for a meal or offer him work in return for payment – all of which could be considered virtuous responses but also allow individual judgement. In this way virtue ethics helps us to reconnect being and doing, formation and action in our ethical decisions whereby good acts proceed out of the good character of the person. In our world today there is increasingly a concern about the loss of shared moral values which has manifested itself in the search for a global common good.<sup>277</sup>

<sup>272</sup> MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue, Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 187-88.

<sup>273</sup> Tarnus, *Passion of Western Mind*, 200.

<sup>274</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre is probably one of the best known modern communitarian ethicists with a focus on virtue theory. His theories have been widely influential though are of course contested. His concept of social practices is discussed briefly in Chapter 5 of this research.

<sup>275</sup> See Amartyr Sen and Martha Nussbaum *The Quality of Life*, [Oxford University Press](http://www.oxforduniversitypress.com), 1993. Together they founded the Human Development & Capability Association in 2003 promoting the "capabilities approach" to development based on an Aristotelian frame.

<sup>276</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 201.

<sup>277</sup> See aforementioned recently published books on Christianity and the Common Good by Miroslav Volf and Walter Brueggemann.

## **Stanley Hauerwas – Reclaiming Virtue theory today**

“Hope after all is a virtue, perhaps the most political virtue in our times. The most profound alternative to Christian hope we believe to be a kind of stoicism that supports as well as is produced by the politics of liberalism...that presupposes a metaphysics incompatible with the Christian claim that our existence is bounded not by fate but by God’s providential care.”<sup>278</sup>

In the Christian world Stanley Hauerwas is one of the most well-known proponents of virtue ethics and its meaningful engagement with Christian ethics today, building on the work of both Aquinas and MacIntyre. He criticises the content of Greek virtues in the light of Christian revelation e.g. the tendency in Greek thought to emphasis self sufficiency and friendship amongst equals rather than Christianity which points to interdependency and reaching out to those who are different. For him, “Where Greeks prioritise *arête* (excellence) Christians prioritise *caritas*.”<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, he argues that the *process* of virtue ethics offers a coherent theory relevant to our society today that can, in his view, be ‘thickened’ by the narrative structure that Christianity offers.<sup>280</sup> He seeks to frame what it means to be human and cultivate habits of the heart in the light of the ultimate Christian goal of the good life defined as communion with both God and neighbour.

This research project does not endorse the wider approach taken by Hauerwas to theological ethics overall and remains unconvinced by some of his more strident arguments against modern liberalism or the danger of seeing Jesus as a pattern for more universal moral claims. Nevertheless it recognises that he offers a well-respected late 20<sup>th</sup> Century framework around the use of virtue ethics for theological reflection and action. This research supports his view that theology and ethics can be fruitfully linked and that theology should not merely be reduced to ethics or uncritically accept all modern ways of talking about ethics. It also points to the need to match religious belief with behaviour in terms of concrete action. His reclaiming of a narrative tradition like MacIntyre, such as the one offered by Christianity, can offer a meaningful way for humans to re-engage with questions of ethics that has often been lost. He argues that the church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic and points to the church as an alternative community called to witness to God’s time and vision in the virtues it embodies and its social practices. (explored in Chapter 5)

Hauerwas’s approach to the virtues has been subject to various criticisms. The theologian James Gustafson suggests that the idea of *telos* that remains strong in the theories of Hauerwas and MacIntyre (as well as many other modern eschatological theologians) is outdated. He argues instead that in the light of modern science, neither the general Christian hope for an eschatological renewal of all things nor Aquinas’s belief that all creatures are orientated towards an ultimate fulfilment can be sustained.<sup>281</sup> Gustafson also criticises the exclusivity of Hauerwas’s ethics, claiming that ‘Hauerwas’s God is the tribal god of a minority of the earth’s population’ and because of this, his ethics therefore forfeits any relevance to a wider society that does not hold to his specific form of Christian beliefs<sup>282</sup> Nevertheless this project feels his framework provides a useful and credible introductory framework to this project’s exploration of hope as a virtue.

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<sup>278</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches. *Christians among the Virtues, theological conversations with ancient and modern ethics*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 1997, pxii on which this section primarily draws for its outline.

<sup>279</sup> This subject is explored further in Hauerwas, *Christians amongst the Virtues* which builds critically on the thought of MacIntyre.

<sup>280</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 171.

<sup>281</sup> James Gustafson quoted in Porter, *Recovery of Virtue*, 53.

<sup>282</sup> Porter, *Recovery of Virtue*, 30.

## What is a social virtue?

“Virtues are specific skills required to live faithfully according to a tradition’s understanding of the moral project in which its adherents participate”<sup>283</sup>

The majority of virtue theorists through the ages still remain true to Aristotle’s notion of the virtues as shared or social goods – leading towards a view of the good life that is essentially social in orientation – rather than merely individualistic. In fact it seems that this more ancient notion of ethical reflection grounded in a concrete community within which individuals are indissolubly and historically situated is one of the reasons that Hauerwas and MacIntyre, both Christians, are drawn to this form of ethical reasoning – in contrast to many modern day discussions of ethics that proceed from a more Cartesian, abstract and individualistic point of reference. Virtues have historically been seen as social assets, linked to a particular way of constructing the human person – in relation both to others within a concrete community and to some form of ultimate or overarching common good for all (*telos*). So while virtues are indeed primarily held by individuals rather than societies, communities can also become engines of hope or harbingers of fatalism at a social level that then has a significant effect on the individual formation of character within those societies.

This research project suggests that to remain true to the tradition of virtue ethics is to see virtues as social assets that point towards a common or shared human good and explores the virtue of hope specifically within this framework –claiming that philosophies of hope (as the particular virtue under discussion here) that in fact distort it into either an individual virtue or one that merely points towards an individual good only is in fact to distort the very nature and role of the virtues. Nussbaum highlights that human beings are those that ‘live-with’ and that our lives are characterised by fragile interdependence rather than by autonomous self sufficiency as the modern project can suggest<sup>284</sup>. Obviously this can lead to a naive romanticism of community that bears little resemblance to the reality of frequently oppressive and exclusive group structures in our world. However at its best, it points us towards a reality that as humans we flourish within social networks that allow us to develop individual potential and autonomy alongside care for others.<sup>285</sup>

There seems to me to be an inevitable and enduring tension between human individuals and the wider community that is highlighted in virtue ethics. Aquinas’s self determining person of character clearly suggests a level of individualism but at the same time, it is clear that this character is also formed within a community. It may be one of the greatest strengths of virtue ethics that it holds these human realities together in historical and concrete tension – seeking to avoid the excessive individualism plaguing modern Western societies to the detriment of all whilst also remaining critical of the sort of global communities that continue to stamp harshly on individual potential, damage individual well being and repress individual achievement in the false name of distorted communal goods. As Aquinas reminds us; ‘We are oriented towards a wider good; not just towards individual goods – but also the common good of our community.’<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of character: towards a constructive Christian social ethic*. Indiana: Notre Dame Press.1981,115.

<sup>284</sup> Nussbaum points to the idea of the fragility of the good – explored further in Hauerwas, *Community*, 28-30.

<sup>285</sup> Denise Ackermann, *Ragbag Theologies* quotes MacMurray’s definition of lived existence as ‘a community of persons-in-relation,269.

<sup>286</sup> Quoted from, Summa Theologie in Porter, *Recovery of Virtue*, 50.

## **4.2 Christian Hope as a Social Virtue**

“Without denying that there may be non-religious accounts of hope and patience, Jews and Christians have been the people that have stressed the particular importance of these virtues. For they are the people formed by the conviction that our existence is bounded by a power that is good and faithful. Moreover they are people with a deep stake in history.”<sup>287</sup>

This section of my research project now explores the theme of hope as a specific virtue in the awareness of the above wider framework. Aquinas himself defines hope as one of the four important human passions that form part of our movement towards a ‘future good which is arduous but possible to obtain’<sup>288</sup>. He saw hope as a habit that can ground good acts of the human person. This section draws predominantly for its analysis of hope on the thought of Josef Pieper, a German Catholic moral philosopher writing in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1930’s Pieper built critically on Aquinas to undertake a fuller exploration of all three theological virtues. Since then many theologians of hope have drawn on his works and a recent book explores his overarching philosophy of hope as articulated in Pieper’s writings over his lifetime and not merely in his works on hope.<sup>289</sup>

Pieper explicitly offers what he terms a trans-rational perspective, that seeks to engage meaningfully with rational thought without reducing reality to this dimension only. He therefore engages with a theological dimension to hope whilst still connecting it polyphonically to a wider philosophical analysis of hope. It is the view held in this research project that theological ways of seeing can be respected by those who do not necessarily hold to Christian premises or beliefs. In this approach, it sits closer to the view of Porter who suggests that there are standards for evaluating Christian ethics that are not purely internal to the Christian tradition enabling us to engage in real conversation with others, than that of Hauerwas whose work suggests that Christian ethics can only be meaningfully evaluated within Christian frames of reference.

Pieper’s analysis revolves around two types of hope - natural and fundamental. He points out that whilst pre-modern thought often combined both of these hopes in the embrace of a single transcendent living source of hope (the divine source - God), in modern times where our world is increasingly desecralised, we have tended to increasingly divorce these two forms of hoping. This split, according to him, has led in mainstream Western society to an over-reliance on natural hope alone which, when it fails, can lead us quickly to a despairing backlash that our hope seems powerless to overcome. He argues that we need to reclaim a deeper sense of *fundamental* hope for our world today. In this way he calls for hope to maintain its ‘religious’ dimension and not to be reduced merely into natural hopes but for the two hopes to maintain a meaningful dialogue and not become severed from each other.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Hauerwas. *Community of Character*, 28.

<sup>288</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica II-II*, q17, art 1.

<sup>289</sup> This section draws primarily on the excellent recent study on Pieper’s approach to hope by Bernard Schumacher, *A Philosophy of Hope: Josef Pieper and the contemporary debate on hope* (translated by D. C. Schindler). Fordham University Press. 2003.

<sup>290</sup> Whilst acknowledging his important insights, Pieper is also critical of philosophers on hope like Ernest Bloch – writing at the same time for losing the transcendent dimension of hope and reducing it merely to what Pieper terms natural hope. Moltmann points theologically to these two types as great hopes and little hopes claiming they are two sides of the same coin in a similar way to Pieper.

#### **4.2.1 Unpacking the Virtue of Hope with Josef Pieper**

“I do not understand human existence & the struggle needed to improve it apart from hope & dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is hope that has lost its bearings & become a distortion of that need”.<sup>291</sup>

Pieper draws on Aquinas as well as modern existentialists (e.g. Sartre) to depict humans as “*homo viator*” – on a journey through time of becoming as opposed to being one who has already arrived. This journey (for Pieper) is towards God as both the divine source and end of all things. While Aquinas framed the object of that journey in the popular medieval language of the time as the ‘beatific vision’, this is unpacked by Pieper as meaning the supreme or ultimate good – that towards which the human strives with all of their being – symbolised for him by a state of perfect harmony and rest in God. In this way Pieper’s language resonates with that of Nolan in the previous chapter, connecting the divine with our human notions of supreme or common good. For Pieper, hope is the appropriate human virtue to accompany us on that journey through time towards this ultimate good, where the journey contains both a negative aspect (the absence of complete fulfilment) and a positive dimension (an orientation towards potential fulfilment). In this way humans operate within the category of possibility and hope is the virtue that can help us exist meaningfully within time.

However Pieper stresses that hope should enable humans to also remain open to a non-temporal dimension of time (termed as transcendence) and not be reduced only to our hopes within history. He points out that we hope for that which we lack but that we think we can possibly gain. Pieper ties hope into our *ontological state of being*, suggesting that as humans we can turn away or towards fulfilment (but that we have a natural orientation towards it). For both Aquinas and Pieper the meaning of existence is found in the *possibility* of journeying successfully towards human fulfilment (but not however to fall into the comfortableness of a certainty with regard to already possessing it). For them, man is in the process of becoming with a journey undertaken in time living within an ontology of not-yet-being. Pieper sees the answer to the human existential situation as hope (the proper virtue of the *not yet*) but does not remove this hope merely to another world. He interprets history itself as opportunity which, while situated within limits, is neither fatalistically determined nor entirely controllable by human action and therefore requires hope. Like Moltmann, he sees the future as an open system in which human and divine interaction connect in creative ways.

Pieper draws on existentialism for the concept of humans being on a journey in which s/he is gradually becoming but he also criticises existentialism for typically denying any concept of a life or consummation beyond time that he believes the hope of Christianity also points us towards. While the existentialist often also sees the historical process as devoid of all ultimate meaning – Pieper challenges this. For him, life in time is a pilgrimage within time towards life beyond time<sup>292</sup>. Hope for him is the virtue that enables us to have a steadfast orientation within life towards the realisation of our potentiality and he distinguishes clearly between hopes (plural) and hope (singular). ‘There is a difference between multiple hopes for things that may be disappointed and being a person who hopes, where the hoping transcends all particular objects and points beyond what we know’<sup>293</sup>

<sup>291</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 2.

<sup>292</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997. Chapter on Hope.

<sup>293</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment*, 20. Hope is not about having a series of hopes but is about *being* in hope as a primal mode of existence. It is openness and preparedness. Man hopes as long as he lives and is alive in a uniquely human way only as long as he can hope.



## Natural Hope

“Hope is something that can be empirically encountered and understood.”<sup>294</sup>

Hope, according to Pieper is characterised by:

- A minimum of certitude – possession of the object hoped for must be possible or conceivable
- Directed towards a perceived good – ontologically not morally – ie is desirable to the person hoping
- Being hard to obtain – demands some level of either effort or gift – to be realised – not just easy
- Level of uncertainty as to if it will take place - lying in some way beyond the control of the one who hopes or beyond a event guaranteed to happen e.g. sunset may be desired but is not hoped for

Pieper defines the act of hope as ‘a free action undertaken for the realisation or the possession of a freely chosen good and as the mainspring of human existence’. For Pieper, we can speak of hope only when what we are expecting is in our own view, good. The concept of the good is to be understood broadly here in the tradition of Aristotle – good weather, good timing, etc and not only in a more narrowly moral sense. It is important to Pieper to keep this breadth in our understanding of the good and not to collapse good merely into the moral which can easily in modern times reduce human decisions to the calculations of mere practical efficiency. For him, beauty, love and truth are significant goods too – in their own right and not merely to the extent to which they may or may not make us morally good.

Hope signifies in its original sense all that one longs for and is therefore connected to our desires.<sup>295</sup> We do not hope for things that we can just achieve easily or that are inevitable - there is always an element of uncertainty or lack of control over the objects of our hope as well as usually some level of ‘cost’ – we do not hope for things that we can obtain easily ourselves with no effort. But there must at the same time be some level of confidence as to its possibility for hope to be able to emerge even if it’s a small chance as we do not hope for things that we know to be completely impossible.<sup>296</sup> For Pieper, human existence is in large part a tissue of hopes which arise again and again over the years and fundamental hope is an inherently transcending concept that constantly mutates in search of new possibilities. Hope for him is always an intentional movement towards some sort of object even if this object is defined in deliberately vague terms.<sup>297</sup> He credits hope with a measure of patience – it can involve an expectant waiting for the good that is still to come as it recognises that we cannot program hope and make it certain or control it for it to remain hope proper. Hope, as Jacques Ellul<sup>298</sup> also reminds us often comes into its own in situations where the systems we construct break down and we do not have control. For Pieper, the uncertainty of the human condition cannot be eliminated, it can only be overcome through the principle of hope.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 19. It is in this book that Pieper usefully explores links between faith, hope and love.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>296</sup> Of course some Christians feel that to suggest that anything is ever impossible is to doubt God but in the experience of the researcher rarely live out their daily human daily actions in actual practical accordance with this stated belief.

<sup>297</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 97. In this way he critiques suggestions made by post modern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida that hope should be completely undetermined. See Smith, “Determined Hope’ 200-227 in *Future of Hope* for more detail on this topic.

<sup>298</sup> Ellul, *Hope in a time of abandonment*, 174.

<sup>299</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 48.

## Fundamental Hope

“All our natural hopes tend towards fulfilments that are like vague mirrorings and foreshadowings of eternal life. The virtue of hope can direct and order our natural hopes by binding them to the final not yet.”<sup>300</sup>

Pieper articulates a clear difference between natural and fundamental forms of hope. For him, fundamental hope is singular – and arises when a *limit situation* is faced. This invisible force comes into play *after* natural despair has been encountered and struggled with and is not experienced instead of it. Fundamental hope is something that emerges from the depths of our being only once our ordinary hopes have been annihilated and forms a 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension of hope that in essence transcends<sup>301</sup> the initial objects of the first. For Pieper the ultimate object of this hope is unchanging - beatitude, happiness, actualisation, salvation (in the anthropological sense of being whole and complete). He says that we hunger for this object as humans, symbolically portrayed individualistically as ‘the beatific vision’ and socially as the Kingdom of God. This is the hope which for him grounds our natural hopes for all other objects. He claims that this fundamental hope is also an experienced empirical (though trans-rational) human phenomenon as people in all cultures claim to experience the transcendent in different ways. He points to hospice patients confronting inevitable death but also many other sorts of limit-situation where the object of initial hope (for a healthy baby, for a new job, for a happy marriage) is disappointed, and despair results.<sup>302</sup> Out of that despair can often then emerge a new form of hope; a resurrection hope so to speak (often symbolised in religious myths and claims for a hope for life after death or eschatological fulfilment beyond time). Bloch terms this the ‘negation of the negations of our original hope’ while St Paul, centuries earlier, talks of a ‘hope against hope’. Pieper sees this form of hope as related more to a way of being than a mode of having – with the broad view of our wellbeing and self realisation in the future as its more indeterminate goal opening us to new ways of fulfilments. For Pieper it is actually vain to call something hope if it merely fails a person who finds him or herself in a limit situation. For him, all our concrete, natural hopes while valued and valid in their own right, if disappointed, still have the chance to turn towards this broader hope as a ‘hope against hope’ that acknowledges the possible negation of our natural hopes but points nevertheless to a possible new beginning beyond this horizon of defeat. Whilst these new beginnings can emerge within time and history, Pieper explicitly continues to point to the possibility of a fulfilment outside time for our most fundamental expression of hope as that which can centre and ground all our other hopes.

Pieper’s analysis of natural and fundamental hope highlights one of the biggest tensions in a theology of hope – between transcendence and immanence.<sup>303</sup> He argues for keeping the *trans-rational dimension of human existence* in the discussion without thereby giving up all claim to rationality either. He calls us to choose between a transcendence without transcendence (Bloch), the temporality of existence (existentialists such as Camus and Sartre) or his own approach of *transcendence with transcendence* allowing for an openness to the transhistorical and atemporal dimension of reality without allowing this to deny the significant importance of the reality of an immanent hope both within and for history.

<sup>300</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 123. See extended discussion here on the relationship between ordinary and fundamental hope, 97-120.

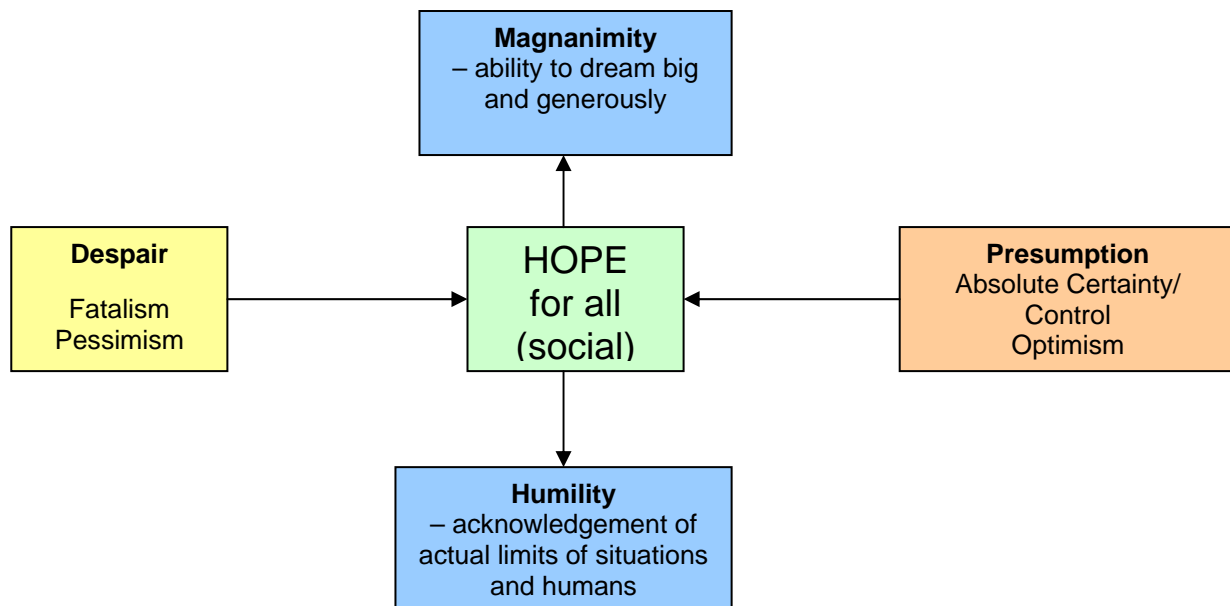
<sup>301</sup> Or ‘goes beyond’ as the etymology of the Indonesian word for hope suggests – referred to in Chapter 2.

<sup>302</sup> For detailed examples of this sort of hope experienced as an empirical phenomenon see Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 99-101.

<sup>303</sup> While this tension is critical to a theology of hope in my view, it is unpacked in greater depth by Ernst Conradie in his excellent book – *Hope for the Earth* especially pp 293-4, an approach that was not explicitly explored in this research project due to lack of space.

## Hope as an alternative to both certainty and despair

“There are two things that kill the soul – Despair and false hope”<sup>304</sup>



The diagram above was designed by the researcher and seeks to depict Pieper's analysis of hope as a virtue, in true Aristotelian fashion by situating it between two opposing vices.<sup>305</sup> He, like Aquinas, challenges us to see the way of hope as an *alternative* to both certainty (that which is certain does not require hope) and despair. He unpacks hope by contrasting it with its opposites - *despair* and *presumption* seen by Pieper as both forms of hopelessness. Despair is characterised as the anticipation of non-fulfilment and presumption as the anticipation of complete fulfilment (often framed in theological terms as realised eschatology).

**Presumption** - For Pieper if eternal life is seen as already given or achieved – hope is thereby destroyed . He argues that ‘the peaceful certainty of possession is but a fraudulent imitation of true hope’, whether it’s a Pelagian certainty of our own efforts to control everything or a triumphant certainty in God’s already accomplished salvation on our individual or corporate behalf. Pieper instead encourages us to avoid an escape into a false certainty that has often characterised religious ideologies despite the cautious words of most of their original founders and instead to learn to live with the ultimate existential uncertainty of salvation/liberation as a project ongoingly underway. He suggests that the virtue of hope can enable us to span a middle road of *pilgrim existence* – living in the dialectic, paradoxical tension of ‘now and not yet’ as a way to traverse the uncertainties of life with some level of responsibility for our actions and their effects.

“The moment an element of absolute certainty enters in, hope disappears...The philosophy of hope implies the rejection of absolute knowledge.”<sup>306</sup>

<sup>304</sup> St Augustine. *Sermons* 87:8.

<sup>305</sup> Pieper sees our hope as grounded in God’s character which is certain, but because humans can turn away from that promised fulfilment – the end is still uncertain. This has significant implications for absolutist doctrines of the church with regard to the future.

<sup>306</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 66 and 87.

**Despair** – Pieper distinguishes between natural despair, encountered when hopes are initially disappointed and what he terms *fundamental despair*, often epitomised by many secular existentialist movements. While he sees the dialectic between natural hope and natural despair as essential for the formation of fundamental hope, he describes fundamental despair as one of the most dangerous human attitudes – as he believes that our self realisation as humans is intrinsically linked to hope<sup>307</sup> The root of this despair for him is the medieval word *acedia*<sup>308</sup> (translated not as laziness but as sadness – inactivity, depression, discouragement – an inability to rest in God). He actually suggests some of the workaholicism of our modern age may in fact be driven by this inability to rest in God. Hope for him requires an act of embracing possibility and risking defeat which also brings its own demands to bear on humans, that they can also seek to reject as it comes with its own obligations and responsibilities. For him, ‘acedia’ is the signature of an age that in despair can seek to shake off its obligations of being and deny its true self. But he suggests that this despair can be overcome by magnanimity (vision) if it is carefully allied to humility as the virtues that can help us to maintain a sense of concrete hope even in the face of genuine limits.

### **Hope – holding together the virtues of Magnanimity and Humility**

Pieper links hope to the two other virtues of *magnanimity* which he argues is the aspiration of the human spirit to great things and the courage to seek out these greater possibilities and become worthy of them, and *humility*,<sup>309</sup> acknowledging the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between God and humans and therefore not seeking to be like God and in control of all things but instead recognising the limits of human nature and of possibilities within our world too. Interestingly in this way he takes a different approach to Hauerwas who is critical of the virtue of magnanimity as prideful and self centred, and points to the Christian virtue of humility as an alternative and opposing virtue. Pieper instead holds the two in tension in relation to hope, in a similar way to Kierkegaard’s two poles of the self – the one that dreams and the one that acknowledges limits.<sup>310</sup> Different religious traditions have tended on a more social level to often pull hope in one direction or the other. For example, some forms of Pentecostal prosperity gospel encourage the dreaming of triumphalist big dreams in their congregations but can lose sight of the Jesus who humbled himself into humanity and end up with a cheap or false version of hope, while forms of traditional Catholicism can over-emphasise the sinful and limited nature of human beings, losing sight of the sense of the positive possibilities within ourselves ending up with a sense of passive despair and resignation.

Pieper, in his analysis of hope as a social virtue, points (like Moltmann at the level of vision) to its dialectical reality by depicting it as the holding together of creative and opposing tensions within the self as it journeys through time. It potentially applies to communities of people as well with humility operating in tandem with social fatalism and despair and commonly found in pre-modern societies where human agency is seen as quite limited and magnanimity, operating often in tandem with presumptive social control and optimism as more commonly found in the New World. For Pieper these both form distortions of true hope.

<sup>307</sup> In this he is joined by the Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in his work *Sickness unto Death*. London: Penguin, 1989.

<sup>308</sup> This theme is explored in detail by Kathleen Norris in *Acedia and me: A marriage, monks and a writer's life* Riverhead: 2008. Her analysis of acedia points to its burden not just on individuals but on whole societies and that the “restless boredom, frantic escapism, commitment phobia, and enervating despair that we struggle with today are the ancient demon of acedia in modern dress.”

<sup>309</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 107.

<sup>310</sup> Donald Capps *The Depleted Self*, Fortress Press: 1993. 30. This points to the expansive and the depleted self as two opposing components of the self in the developing young child that have to be integrated successfully for the development of a healthy adult self.

## Summary of Pieper's analysis

Pieper's reflections on hope as a virtue rest on a wider anthropology and ontology mainly beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>311</sup> He reflects an openness to what is still to come and the possibilities yet to be realised enabling him to overcome the metaphysics of despair. It's useful to remember that he was speaking into a time of profound uncertainty as to the human future (post WWII with the anti-hope of nuclear power and the context of a despairing Germany). His analysis sees hope as dialectic, holding together opposing tensions of essence and existence, natural and fundamental hope, this world and the next as a way to live uncertainly within time whilst acting to make a difference to our world in the here and now and for the future. He seeks a hope not merely for individual destiny but in relation to the future of all humankind without falling into the 19th century social gospel error of believing that we can progressively perfect it by our own efforts alone.

Pieper points us to a hope at the heart of history that, whilst continuing to allow for the possibility of catastrophe, can transfigure even the worst we may face. He observes that our historical activity should not become paralysed by the possibilities of catastrophe but should continue to transform the world. He is opposed to the opinion that all those who still affirm the existence of something beyond merely "wallow in a bed of idleness waiting with arms crossed for the new Jerusalem which will be handed to humanity with no effort". He challenges both an activism that would reduce all things merely to a historical immanence (eg Bloch) as well as an escapist hope into a cozy afterworld accompanied by a refusal to get involved in and struggle for the transformation of the world. Instead his analysis of the virtue of Christian hope leads him to claim that the Kingdom of God does not bypass this earth as inessential but actually redeems it and realises itself in the midst of this historical world. 'Not one iota of what is good in earthly history will be futile or lost. Wherever true human communion is realised or even just longed for, this universal table community whether one knows and likes it or not is being prepared. In all pursuits where the realisation of fraternity between men is understood & pursued as the thing hoped for, there exists a link to the elementary hope of Christianity.'<sup>312</sup>

Pieper sees true hope as having a fundamentally social dimension, but that the moment and content of the fulfilment of our hope will always elude our human grasp.<sup>313</sup> He concludes by seeing hope as both gift and praxis (or task). Like Moltmann, Pieper points out that sometimes non-Christians put Christians to shame with the passion of their hope and argues for the stronger recognition of common social concerns by all Christians. However he also argues that true human hope always pushes beyond history, remaining ever open to fulfilments that can surpass every preconceived human notion or horizon.<sup>314</sup> Pieper successfully avoids both the optimism of progress and the pessimism of decline or annihilation, opting instead for a 'philosophy of hope stripped of illusion'. This research project claims that his detailed analysis continues to be pertinent over 50 years later. It now briefly points to more recent writings by the theologian Douglas Hall on the need for a costly hope that it feels also complements this philosophical tradition of Pieper.

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<sup>311</sup> His ontology of not-yet-being ultimately rests on a metaphysics of love and creation allowing him to affirm that beings will continue to exist because they are loved into being by their Creator and will not return to nothing. This enables him to undermine the metaphysics of despair, Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 231.

<sup>312</sup> Pieper, *Hope and History*, 110.

<sup>313</sup> Schumacher, *Philosophy*, 235.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*, 119. For some Christians, the theological virtue of hope is only granted to those who have faith in Jesus. While at times, Pieper's words can suggest this where he sees the theological virtues pulling us into a communion with a being who draw us beyond ourselves, he also expresses hope as wired into our God given nature as human beings as a gift to us all. He points not to an exclusive hope for the few but a generous hope for the many in our world today that nevertheless must strive to remain an authentic hope that avoids the multiple distortions of hopelessness.

#### 4.2.2 Confessing a 'costly' hope with Douglas Hall

"Christian hope is hope against hope – it knows and dialogues with its antithesis, despair." Hall<sup>315</sup>

Douglas Hall is a Canadian Protestant theologian writing primarily into a North American context at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He terms this context an *officially optimistic society*, a product of both Enlightenment modernity and the powerful myth of progress that still defines so much American self identity today. This project builds on Pieper's analysis with some short reflections from Hall because it believes he offers a similar contemporary approach to hope as a virtue situated between the closed ideologies of optimism and pessimism. For Hall, while affluent societies increasingly struggle against hopelessness in the form of 'covert despair' with an increased critique of the modern myth of progress, he believes that many middle class and New World societies (and churches) still cling to a relentless optimism. He scathingly terms this shallow hopefulness "a conditioned reflex of the well off."<sup>316</sup> For him, this often actually hides a deep sense of hopeless despair and a growing feeling that real social change is impossible. Hall sees this as far from the sort of deep costly hope offered by Christianity and calls us to avoid the false equation of Christian hope and new world optimism by becoming more mature in our understanding of Biblical hope. He points out that leaders in our world sense the tendencies towards despair in their societies and as a result are often under big pressure to always be optimistic. Hall argues that positive thinking is often used as an excuse to insulate people from engaging in sobering discourse with anything which negates optimism and thereby actually functions repressively in many of our modern societies today.<sup>317</sup>

For Hall the theological virtues of faith, hope and love all describe a dialogue with their antithesis and in this way they do not eliminate the negative, but engage with it. He sees hope however as the most difficult of all theological categories to preserve from cooptation by the desperately optimistic. For him, the greatest disservice theologians can do for people today is to cater to their need for instant hope as if it's a commodity that can be accessed on demand without a journey into despair. He terms 'cheap hope' as the American version of Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace' and as equally in need of resounding critique. For Hall, we often try to answer our problems, especially the social ones without exposing ourselves to them as real problems that may require deep seated social repentance, metanoia and change. Instead we look for the (technological) quick fix and are reluctant to go further into the depths of the questions themselves. In this way, our optimism is defensive and often acts repressively, reducing God merely to either historical process or our own control. We want our Easter Sunday without the reality of the cross of Good Friday. He argues like Pieper does with fundamental hope, that Christian hope is always '*hope against hope*', a costly hope that knows and dialogues with despair and that this hope that emerges out of the struggle with despair is in fact the very opposite of a cheap hopefulness that neglects the data of despair and ignores or represses worldly negations. For Hall an authentic 'hope against hope' will resist the too quickly hopeful spirit because it will recognise the lack of truth in it. "As credulity is the enemy of faith and sentimentality the enemy of love, so is obsessive hopefulness the enemy of hope."<sup>318</sup> This analysis of the virtue of hope relates back to the core themes of Moltmann's theological vision of hope which he also grounds in the parable of Cross and Resurrection (explored in Chapter 3). Hall points out that the dialectical relationship between meaning and

<sup>315</sup> Hall, *Confessing*, 459. This section is based primarily on the section on hope in *Confessing*, 453-500.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*, 466.

<sup>317</sup> This resonates with the earlier insight of Keshgegian that in the name of hope, our approaches can choke hope.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid*, 466. This hope is pilloried by Voltaire in *Candide* as 'the mania of maintaining that everything is well when we are wretched'.

history should keep us sceptical of all ideologies of progress. Nevertheless for him, Biblical faith insists that God has the good destiny of the world at heart and that God's Spirit is at work within history mending and redeeming the world, enabling negative events to become sites of new birth & meaning. In this way both he and Pieper affirm a *divine providential movement within history*, rather than a progressive fixed or guaranteed plan, calling people to a responsible hope for the historical future still to come. Hall reminds us that Christians possess no absolutes where the future is concerned and in fact our commitment to the virtue of hope should lead us to distrust them.<sup>319</sup>

“Suffering is the mother of Hope” says the Brazilian theologian, Rubem Alves.<sup>320</sup> For Hall (as for Moltmann), unless hope truly apprehends the pain of the negative, it cannot be realistic and liberating in our damaged world today. The negative challenge posed by the suffering present is what makes hope concrete and adds the power of resistance to the power of its visions to inspire. Hall<sup>321</sup> suggests it is just because the poor in our world often cannot avoid confrontation with the pathos of their condition that remarkable expressions of hope are frequently found there, demonstrating the biblical dialectic of hope and despair –where authentic hope arises out of the crucible of hopelessness as a hope against hope. If we hold to this fundamental hope, we can avoid the temptation to repress the many negations of worldly/natural hope that we see around us and instead can continue to hold to a hope for the ever-present possibility of the negation of those negations. For Hall, profound expressions of historical hope require exposure to the depths of concrete despair and hopelessness. Without a belief in this paradoxical hope embodied in action, Christians can easily find themselves retreating away from the parts of life and the world that seem to threaten their initial sense of natural hope in order to repress the challenges of despair. And yet by so doing, they unwittingly avoid exposure and engagement with the reality of a hope that is only discovered in the struggle, beyond despair and on the other side of the cross.<sup>322</sup>

Christians sometimes point to Easter to suggest that resurrection has been achieved and that because we live on the other side of Easter, we are already fully triumphant. However this collapses the distinction between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’.<sup>323</sup> The resurrection of Jesus points us forward to the open possibility of resurrection for all things. But we live in a creation still under the shadow of the cross as anyone with even a passing exposure to the victims of our present times becomes uncomfortably aware of. Hall’s reflections on confessing hope reminds us that any authentic theology of hope must be tied to a theology of the cross and capable of engaging credibly with despair. In this way the theology of hope can avoid some of the perceived weaknesses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century social gospel approach. He sees this as a radically counter-cultural way of confessing hope – a hope grounded in a gospel of cross and resurrection, and solidarity for those who suffer that can offer meaning in the face of despair at the many worldly negations of life and empower us seek out and align our efforts with the signs of new life and possibility that can emerge out of these dark realities.

<sup>319</sup> For Hall, the Bible is also conspicuously silent on what happens to people beyond death, spawning a wide realm of fantasy for much popular Christian mythology. He eschews the tendency towards absolutism in these areas as often anti-Christian and a distraction.

<sup>320</sup> Rubem Alves, *A theology of Human Hope*, New York: Corpus Books.1969115.

<sup>321</sup> Hall, “Despair as Ailment”, 91 drawing on Romans 4:18. NIV.

<sup>322</sup> Hall, *Confessing*, 482-7. Here Hall stands, like Moltmann in the dialectical tradition of Karl Barth who claimed “those who do not know what death is cannot know what resurrection is either” *Dogmatics in Outline*.

<sup>323</sup> Ernest Conradie’s *Hope for the Earth* identifies 3 characteristics of Christian hope; a critique of the negative present, anticipation of the promise, and a life of responsibility. He sees one of the core features of an authentic approach to Christian hope as the maintaining of core eschatological tensions in a dialectical relationship: 1) Already and not yet of gods promise, 2) Continuity and discontinuity between this life and the next, 3) Immanence and transcendence. If this dialectic is not maintained in relation to hope, he claims, it will collapse into either triumphalism or resignation depending on one’s position of power in world or into utopian fantasy or escapism.

### 4.2.3 Nurturing the Virtue of Hope with Flora Keshgegian

“There is such a thing as an ecology of hope. There are environments in which it flourishes and others in which it dies.”<sup>324</sup>

The tradition of virtue theory explored so far suggests that hope as a virtue needs to be carefully cultivated and nurtured within our characters. While this has at times stood in tension with Christian views that claim we can do nothing to achieve our moral betterment, increasingly many theologians have recognised the need for an ‘education in hope’ that can help us to develop habits within which hope can flourish as a virtue.

With this in mind this chapter concludes its analysis of hope as a virtue by pointing to specific habits that it suggests can help to better nurture the virtue of hope. For this, it draws predominantly on the feminist theologian Flora Keshgegian introduced in Chapter 3 of this project. These suggested ‘habits’ are not, in the view of this project, exclusively restricted to those who are Christian believers or people of religious faith. While as a theological writer she obviously feels that these authentically reflect a way of being in the world that Christians can fully endorse, she nevertheless frames her ways of nurturing hope in wider human terms. This resonates with the aim of this research project which is to articulate a form of hope that draws clear inspiration from Christian narrative, doctrines and history, but also seeks to also speak meaningfully to hope as an experienced human phenomenon that is not restricted merely to those of Christian faith.

Keshgegian is justifiably wary of giving us any fixed or neat templates to be followed in our journeys of hope in line with her concern that our neat packages of hope will in the name of hope, choke hope. She also seeks to maintain a clear provisionality with regard to both the content of hope or its given outcomes. However she nevertheless briefly outlines five habits that can contribute, in her view, towards nurturing hope, offering ways for humans to counter or correct what she sees as potentially damaging ways of narrating both time and hope that she feels need to be challenged in our times (explored in Chapter 3). She points out that these concrete habits are for the current time and place within which she is situated rather than eternal givens and suggests that they can help us in small ways to inhabit time and space differently at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For her, our Christian ways of hoping in the last two centuries have often been damagingly distorted into myths of linear progress with no limits towards a Kingdom to be brought in once and for all by a transcendent monarchical God. She suggests instead that these can be ‘tools for improvisation’ to help us nurture a more humble hope in and for our world today.<sup>325</sup>

#### 1) Honouring Time

Keshgegian urges us to be mindful to the present time and to pay attention to it properly. In this suggestion she joins with a wide range of theologians discussed in this research project including Moltmann, Hall, Nolan and Hauerwas. They all highlight in different ways the importance of our human attitude to time as Christians in order to stay true to our belief that the time we inhabit is not our time alone, but in fact is God’s time in which we participate together. Pieper earlier highlighted that hope is the virtue most relevant to the reality of our shared human existence bounded by both time and finitude where we are continually travelling ‘on the

<sup>324</sup> Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 4.

<sup>325</sup> Keshgegian. *Time for Hope*, 191.



way'. This idea resonates with the point made at the start of this research project about recognising the present signs of the times in which we live. It encourages us to embrace the historical particularity of our circumstances, one of the defining features of ancient Jewish life in contrast to the many mythical and abstract world views that were prevalent around them at the time. To focus mindfully and attentively on the present according to Keshgegian is not the same as to reduce our worldview to only our present circumstances or to deny that we must also look at both the past and the future in our human consideration of time but it serves to remind us that we can look at both the past and future only from our limited present day perspective. We are not asked to disregard the linear or chronological nature of time as the main way in which time is experienced by us humans but to understand at the same time that this is but one perspective on time.<sup>326</sup> It is one that has, in our current modern times in the West, often created damage through a dominant western narrative of time which is often imposed on other traditions without awareness of other meaningful ways of approaching time. This has been brought home to me concretely through travelling in the African continent, especially to rural areas where the sense of time is far more event based and cyclical, challenging and at times, severely humbling my Western assumptions with regard to the truth of time. Keshgegian reminds us that time is merely a human construct and should not entrap us within its metaphors as she feels the modern western over-emphasis on linear progressive time has sometimes done. Many eschatological visions of hope encourage us to focus on the future as a way of inhabiting the present differently. However for Keshgegian this future vision must be held in tension at all times with an awareness of our present realities if we are not to succumb to the temptation to lose sight of the present in our relentless drive towards the future. When this happens, the cries of the victims in the present situation often go unheard. The Christian tradition and its rituals can encourage us to remember the past and situate our present within that, offering us a narrative way of situating ourselves within time; past, present and future, as individuals and also as communities who add their own unique contribution into the wider stream of time.

Keshgegian encourages us to take time out of our busy schedules. She points to the many forms of spirituality becoming increasingly popular in the West and continuing to be recognised in other cultures such as yoga, mediation and pilgrimage.<sup>327</sup> She suggests that agrarian and pre-modern cultures often observed this ebb and flow of time more naturally, living in time with the seasons and sunrises but in our modern world, those natural slow down spaces are increasingly lost as we develop the technological ability to operate round the clock. Keshgegian points out that it is often only when we slow down that we are able to more fully recognise ourselves as beings-in-time and that we need to pro-actively build in habits where we choose to slow down or even stop. For her, these moments help us to engage in practices of thankfulness and appreciation for what is around us in our present that can easily be lost or missed in our attempts to control our time. This way of treating time differently also reflects the attitude of trusting hope that Pieper points to and avoids the perils of an overly controlling modern attitude to time so common in our Blackberry-dictated West. Equally it does not fall back into a pre-modern fatalism that struggles to see any alternative to our present reality and therefore grants it tyrannous reign over our hopes and dreams.

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<sup>326</sup> For further explorations in depth on this topic, see J. Moltmann *God in Creation*. SCM Press:1985. Nolan and Hall both unpack ways of exploring time in relation to chronos, kairos and eschaton in ways that are unfortunately beyond the scope of this research project. John Mbiti also explores the African notion of time in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford. Heinemann; 1990.

<sup>327</sup> She points to the Buddhist writer Thich Nhat Hanh for more on this in *Peace is every step* NY; Bantam Books. 1991.

Brueggemann<sup>328</sup> points to the reclaiming of the Sabbath as a specific habit that can help us engage with time differently. Many traditions of prayer also point us into the attentive space of God's time as gift.

Keshgegian also encourages us to remember the past and points to the role of memory in relation to hope. This was particularly emphasised in the Jewish tradition where narratives of both hope and suffering were ritually remembered each year. Keshgegian points out that it is always easier for us to remember good memories but she points us beyond mere nostalgia to pay attention to the bad things of the past too. Remembering the past, like imagining the future, can also be a way of avoiding the tyranny of the present. History is typically written by the winners and can deliberately exclude the narrative of its victims. Brueggemann also suggests that remembering alternative histories can be a liberating experience for people even if those histories are traumatic or painful. He points to a refusal to repress pain in both the past and the present as a critical way to give meaning to our human suffering and defeats e.g. war memorials. Psychologists in the last few centuries have also increasingly shown human beings the danger of repressing past traumas and the power that this repressed past can continue to have on our present if pain is hidden.

For Brueggemann, the prophetic tradition in Judaism offered the articulation of repressed pain on behalf of people without a voice to allow a place for loss and grief and mourning. He points out that as humans we experience many types of loss through our lives. Modern Western culture often shies away from giving the time needed to grieve or unpack trauma and instead we are called to quickly look forwards and move on in the name of a shallow optimism. Without this remembering of the negative, hope easily loses its vital dialectic with pain and despair that Hall suggested is a cornerstone of authentic hope. It can then fall into the trap of mere positive thinking, with a false or cheap hope that seeks quick-fix solutions without authentically engaging with the tragic realities of genuine loss and pain.

In the annual Sedar meal celebrated by Jews around the world for hundreds of years, the liberatory events of the exodus story are remembered collectively. Recently in celebrating this meal, I became aware that built into the liturgy itself is a ritual moment of grief and mourning for the Egyptians who died in each one of the plagues. This symbolises a recognition that what was experienced as a liberation from slavery for the Jews was at the same time experienced as death and destruction by other human beings also made in the image of God. In this way an ongoing witness to the victims of the past even those seen as enemies in the very midst of liberation and celebration can remind us today not to be closed to the cries of possible victims in and of our present day and to seek to honour their humanity. Honouring time can help us to develop 'ways of hoping' that can subvert our human tendency to control time through linear planning and make it belong to us in a way that can smother the uncertainty required by true hope. It enables us to embrace a more flexible attitude that reminds us that we sit within God's time and encourages us to draw on both the past and the future to give hope in the present for multiple possibilities.

"Memories of past hopes lead to a momentary liberation from the power of current events and to a critical confrontation with them. There is no hope for a new future without these memories."<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Brueggemann writes on this theme of reclaiming the Sabbath. See "The Sabbath Voice of the Evangel: Against death, denial and despair" in *Mandate to Difference*, John Knox Press. 2007.41-49 and "The Totalising Context of Production and Consumption" in *Hope for the World*, 55-59. Pieper and Moltmann write on the importance of a theology of leisure but this is beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>329</sup> Moltmann, *Human Identity*,10.

## 2) Paying attention to space and concrete existence

An emphasis on concrete existence is foundational for the Judeo-Christian tradition. God's creation marks the very start of time and space and we are therefore as both human and non-human creation located within space. We are our bodies and our bodies are always placed in space. But what does this have to do with hope? Keshgegian claims that some of our typical ways of hoping as Christians have been distorted by wider trends within Christianity that we need to 'unlearn'. This affirmation challenges Gnostic attitudes that have plagued religion in general and Christianity in particular by seeking to reduce the essence of human beings to something unlimited by the body, creating a disembodied soul that can escape the constraints of space. She seeks instead to reconnect the idea of hope firmly back towards our reality as embodied beings who have limits with which we must authentically engage. The Christian tradition of incarnation can help us here where space and time both core components of human existence, entered into and respected by God-self in the embodied historical person of Jesus. In this way Judeo-Christian values should recognise and affirm particularity and concreteness within their hopes.

Recognising space also points us to the inevitable constraints of space. Space is a limited commodity in our world. If this space is mine, it is then typically unavailable to others. To invite someone into your space and to share space is an act of both vulnerability and trust. Keshgegian suggests that awareness of space reminds us to acknowledge limits - that our human bodies themselves are limited in what they can achieve (how fast we can run, what makes us vulnerable etc) and so is the space and resources available on our earth. Increasingly as our world becomes smaller and more global as well as more highly populated and interconnected we increasingly realise that we inhabit a shared space as a human race and may need to adjust our behaviour accordingly if we want to ensure that space remains habitable for all in the future.

For Keshgegian, this acknowledgement of the real limitedness of space (and resources) can encourage us to practice setting limits in the present and to reject theories and practices of unlimited expansion, greed or growth common to myths of progress which, despite critical voices, still fuel Western consumerism and capitalism. She argues that we need to get better at both setting limits and sensing sufficiency (learning to stop when we have had enough rather than always seeking more). She points to this as a critical habit not only on an individual level but also at group and societal levels too if hope is not merely to be reduced to what Moltmann terms 'utopias of affluence' that are inevitably limited only to the few and constructed on the backs of the many who lack. While this practice may seem initially unrelated to hope, Keshgegian suggests that this approach can reclaim a deeper sense of hope connected instead to our real human needs and is not merely ongoing wish fulfilment of artificial desires, dictated to by consumerist propaganda and increasingly unconnected to either our actual needs or the common good. She suggests that redirecting our desires away from always wanting more can be hard and suggests withdrawing from external stimuli as a way of helping us realise that we can in fact survive and flourish with less and in so doing can reduce our 'footprint' of the space our lives take up and the encroaching of the impact of our life on the lives of others (literally some people in the world live amidst the rubbish of others excessively wasteful lives) enabling our hopes to be held in balance with the hopes of others within a shared space. The need for courageous voices that can work towards this reality is seen most painfully in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine over contested space with the anxiety about who it belongs to generating significant fear and anger in many

lives today. Felix Wilfred<sup>330</sup> echoes this same idea with his suggested 'hope-generating praxis' encouraging emptiness as a way to counter prevalent notions of prosperity, the drive for ever increasing consumerism so common in our modern day culture and even in our churches today with a turn towards for what is often termed 'prosperity' gospel prevalent amongst some of the fastest growing church movements in the world. This seems curiously at odds with the lifestyle of the figure at the heart of Christian faith or indeed the emphasis on the common good for all that this project suggests should characterise our hopes.

Keshgegian encourages the cultivation of patience as a habit integral to hope and connects this habit to space rather than merely to time. She points out that patience is also about recognising and accepting our human limits and finitude. We do not have the ability to fully control our environment as humans and this is where the need for hope enters in. She highlights that we are always situated in a concrete space enabling us to only ever have a partial vision of things but from which we often arrogantly seek to view the whole. This situatedness within both space and time<sup>331</sup> requires us to be patient and accept the limited nature of what we can know or control. In this way she points to the provisional nature of all human perspectives with no absolute place beyond our particular location from which to stand, and that this can encourage a humility in our hope that, while allowing some confidence, must refute absolute certainty.

### 3) Imagining creatively

"Hope is fostered by the practice of magic, by play and by utopian imagination that will transform everything for the good. These alternative practices also function as forms of resistance to the totality of the overpowering system and its logic."<sup>332</sup>

Keshgegian claims that without the human capacity to imagine, it would be difficult if not impossible to speak of hope. However she also suggests that for many of us, our imaginations have often been constricted and even culturally colonised in ways that can make it difficult for us to imagine alternative ways of being or doing. She points to tradition as one force that often seeks to keep us tied to what currently is or has been rather than looking to what might be. Capitalism can be another, offering us pre-constructed and ready-made images to literally buy into with our socio-political and economic systems often experienced as entrapping not liberating for many as both consumers and producers. As a result of these myriad pressures, Keshgegian claims our imaginations have atrophied and are in need of exercise and training. Brueggemann also points to this with his work on the prophetic imagination, highlighting what an essential element imagination is in the Bible – with words full of God's desires and yearning for the new. When we dream we channel our passion into form and expression, connecting our desires with our imagination. Our dreams of change and transformation often grow out of our discontent with the present. Being able to envision change in our circumstances and to imagine a different and better life are fundamental to being able to hope (while

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<sup>330</sup> These hope generating practices which resonate with Keshgegian's suggestions can be explored further in Felix Wilfred. *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope: At the dawn of the new Millennium*. Delhi: ISPCK. 2000.

<sup>331</sup> These habits are also explored by Ted Peters in his book *Sin; Radical Evil in Soul and Society* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1994 where he points to time and space and our attitude to them. He unpacks sin as our human attempt to wrest both time and space from others out of a fear of scarcity or from greed. In this way we fail to remember that we sit in the bigger picture of God's time and space within which our individual contribution plays its part, and we seek to see our little part as the whole picture – demonstrating a lack of patient trust in the wider whole of which we are a part.

<sup>332</sup> Alves, Rubem. *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity and the Rebirth of Culture* NY: Harper & Row. 1972,72. Lynch, *Hope & Hopelessness* and Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope* are just two others that emphasise the critical role of imagination in hope.

those who are over-sated on present affluence don't need to hope for change and can be out of touch with the wider world's hopes for change). Hope not only imagines the correcting of injustices and wrongs but it also brings into conception what has never existed before, initiating birth process of the new.

Often it is the visionary poets, artists and revolutionaries in our cultures who lead the way in our imagining. Nevertheless Keshgegian suggests that we are all capable of using our imaginations and that this is, in fact, a core part of being human that we must all nurture as a capacity to see beyond the immediate and to envision what is not yet in existence as fundamental to our fullness of life. Time and space, the two previous habits mentioned, are also essential blocks for the development of creative thinking. The person who is busy, anxious, cramped and preoccupied all the time can rarely step into the liberating space of positive imagining and can instead be trapped in negative imagining about the future. What we imagine, dream and desire will shape our hopes. We will then seek to actualise and to realise the content of what we hope for.

However, Keshgegian warns us that we must be wary of judging the success of our dreaming by their actual realisation or outcomes. She warns that this can quickly lead to disappointment if we believe we can always achieve whatever we dream for as this idea is dangerously at odds with the limited control we have over our wider world. She suggests instead that devotion is the appropriate outcome of our dreaming, that which we dream for, we will be prepared to devote our times and energies towards even if the outcomes we desire may not always materialise. This form of imagining within an acceptance of limited control is part of hope.

Felix Wilfred suggests that in a modern world where people's humanity is often reduced to the roles of consumers and producers for the mill of capitalist enterprise, the ability to offer creative alternative ways of being human can indeed be a liberating and hope generating praxis. For him, this imagining can help build social capital and flourishing for many in ways that can avoid making wealth the idol to be worshipped in that way that much of our society focuses on, to the exclusion of those without wealth or work.

“Religious hope has often been misperceived as essentially quietist and other worldly which robs us of the will to struggle against various ills in this world. Our capacity to move forwards, to transcend the givenness of the present is closely tied to our capacity to speak the future into existence, to fashion an imagined tomorrow and to bring it to expression.”<sup>333</sup>

#### 4) Participating in inter-relation

For Keshgegian, as for many other theological writers included in this project - hope is a social habit, not simply a personal or spiritual one – especially if our practices of hope are to produce social change. There is an assumption of interconnectedness between humans demonstrated throughout this research project. It is also increasingly recognised in our wider world that we all exist within a web of relations and draw our identity in some irreducible way from these relationships. In this way, we need support from others to nurture hope and we need to also support them. Brueggemann and Nolan both suggest that Christians are called to become 'hope-bearers' for others who may struggle to have hope on their own.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Bauckham, *Hope against Hope*, 55.

<sup>334</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for World*, 9. Nolan, *Hope in Age of Despair*. This area is explored further in Chapter 5.

Wilfred points to positive appreciation of other human beings as his third hope generating praxis. He suggests that to reinforce a sense of hopefulness about the goodness of being human is critical in our modern day societies where this notion can often feel undermined – both socially and by religions. This idea relates back to the aforementioned theory of Aquinas with regard to the need to reclaim a theory of human goodness and this is one of the ways in which we can be important bearers of hope for one another. Keshgegian encourages us to actively cultivate the habit of *'being-in-relation'* and through this to re-examine the high value often given to autonomy especially in modern Western societies. For her, an explicit awareness of the ways in which our selves are constructed in relation to others can lead to gratitude for those other people and also help us to reframe our sense of God as an I-thou relationship that at its best helps us to constitute our true sense of self in relation to all that is.<sup>335</sup> She points us to reciprocity as a dynamic of mutuality that can characterise our lives for which she uses the theological term 'perichosis' but which the African word, 'ubuntu', also encourages. It suggests that we are defined by our relationships to each other and calls us to a generosity in relation to others whereby we eschew our innate fearfulness about scarcity and seek to embody a sense of abundance for all, manifested as a willingness to share and treat others with generosity by accepting them for who they are rather than merely seeking to control or change them. This decentring of self involves a shift of perspective away from the individual self as the centre of the universe, not merely in pursuit of a selflessness that represses the self's genuine needs but as a habit that can encourage the self to instead become reinforced in a different way through the many attachments and hopeful connections it forms to others.<sup>336</sup>

Keshgegian stresses the importance of seeking to be in right relation to all others as she suggests this both minimises the harm we can do to those others and enables us to be more fully present to both them and the world in its freedom as it is rather than merely seeking to dictate or control it. Wilfred goes even further than Keshgegian in this respect and points not just to relation with any others but specifically to relation to marginalised and suffering others<sup>337</sup>. He and William Lynch both point to 'solidarity with the excluded' as a final hope-generating praxis reflecting an inclusive gospel that pushes us beyond merely the relationships which reinforce our own view of the world into those which can challenge and at times even undermine it.

## 5) Living in wild wonder

Keshgegian suggests that in our modern world, we increasingly inhabit disenchanted times as an inevitable by-product of modern ways of thinking and its tendency towards controlling techniques. Whilst a return to pre-modern superstition is both unlikely and unwise and the gains which have been made in many areas due to modernism are to be welcomed and celebrated, they do have their downsides. She (along with others such as Brueggemann, Pieper and Ellul) suggest that an overemphasis on technique and certain rational ways of knowing have potentially led us into distorted forms of hope which need to be countered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She suggests that in post modern ways of thinking, we are again encountering a desire to re-enchance our universe, to step away from metaphors of control and to experience mystery through numinous experiences and rituals that can ground us in a sense of perspective and humility. Keshgegian suggests that

<sup>335</sup> This is a core theme of Kierkegaard and is also picked up in the recent systematic work by Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*. 2010.

<sup>336</sup> Feminist theologians have been highly critical of this tendency of women especially to lose their 'self' in others and deny their own self interest. The notion of the common good presented in this paper argues that self interest and common interest are not fundamentally at odds as dualistic thinking suggests but that when self interest is exalted to an absolute value, it becomes distorted.

<sup>337</sup> The way in which we construct (and penalise) the 'Other' who is different from us is the subject of much sociological study.

engaging with wider nature and our own existence within nature can serve to confront us with both the rawness and wildness (i.e. the uncontrollability of life) and with its wondrousness. She connects this sense of awe to our experience of the divine as it evokes a sense of wonder and mystery and encourages us to live in the habit/at of wild wonder. She points to meaningful rituals that can offer us experiences of transcendence and communion that keep mystery alive and in this way also offer a context for improvisation and release of our creative energy. She also points out that exposing ourselves to situations that inspire us to attitudes of awe and mystery can also fill us with a sense of humility and perspective, giving us a sense of place and size – and helping us to relinquish our mythical illusions of total control. In the midst of nature, we can be active participants but not the director and this can help us to situate our human contribution into its rightful place.

This project has only been able to point briefly to these suggestions for nurturing the sort of hope Keshgegian feels can encourage us to situate our way of hoping within a concrete awareness of space and time and the limits that bind these realities. Nevertheless it contends that these can help us to keep a clear sense of perspective with regard to our interconnected place in the world through both our relationships with others and with the wider world in a way that points to the mystery of life that lies fundamentally beyond our control. She reminds us that hope thrives on the use of our imaginations where we can link our desires to genuinely new possibilities in enabling and liberating ways. Habits such as those discussed above can also lead to hope generating dialogue and shared practices, forging relationships of solidarity with people across multiple boundaries and help us bear in mind the constant danger seen in history for our human hopes to become expansionist, controlling and in this way to ironically 'choke hope'.

#### **4.3 Summary of hope as a social virtue and its implications for social transformation**

"The most urgent task of a Catholic college - and especially of a Jesuit college in our time and place - is to nurture the virtue of hope in each and every person living and working in its midst and to serve as a beacon of hope to the broader community."<sup>338</sup>

The many creative tensions of the paradox of hope unpacked in this chapter by Pieper seek to deepen our understanding of the virtue of hope through both a theological and philosophical lens and help sketch out the character of hope as embodied in human persons who seek to hold attitudes of authentic social hope for the world. The distinction between natural and fundamental hopes can help us better understand the paradox of a 'hope against hope' and see hope as a way for us to live within the uncertainty of time.

Holding the tension between big dreams and the humility required to deal with harsh realities is, in the opinion of this researcher a critical virtue to develop especially for those working in efforts for social transformation. This avoids both a slide into unrealistic dreams that can fail to deal with the concrete limits of the situations faced but also refuses to merely become fatalistically accepting of all limits as unchangeable and inevitable. We need instead to connect to real possibilities within history and avoid merely abstract utopias that bear little relation to concrete realities. Transformation efforts can often be over-ambitious and then quickly topple over into despair when the grand results 'hoped for' fail to materialise leading to giving up. Cultivating the resilient virtue of fundamental hope that sits beyond our natural hopes can point us

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<sup>338</sup> Speech by Kaverny, Cathleen, M. "Cultivating Hope in troubled times." Catholic News Service. 2005.

towards concrete and incremental gains that also look to the long term and can withstand disappointment. Likewise the tension between despair and presumption is equally important. Societies in need of transformation can tend towards a strong fatalism of acceptance, while societies that seek to transform others are often driven by a culture of control and often presumptuous notions of achievement. This can lead to a disconnect between cultures especially in international development. A more resilient hope could be a potential unifying alternative within the realities of uncertainty without paralysing action on either side.

According to Hall, people who embody authentic Christian hope will often ironically seek out not the places of success in our world to nurture their hope but instead the suffering corners of the world, engaging with those who despair, holding to a theology of the cross and expecting this to be where God's hope for resurrection life is made manifest. This tendency maintains an 'costly' approach to the virtue of hope – requiring it to be concrete, context specific and grounded in human historical realities to avoid a collapse into cheap hopefulness, avoiding the closed ideologies of optimism and pessimism and their accompanying characteristics of triumphalism or fatalism. It will maintain an openness to the transcendent that sits beyond all possible horizons helping us to transcend our present realities including our self-realities in the name of what could be possible without merely succumbing to escapist forms of hope that are world-evading. In the world of social transformation where disappointments are many, this is critical and can also enable us to continue to look for and celebrate with all signs of new life and new beginnings in our world.

A costly 'hope against hope' can encourage us to look for redemptive signs in the hard places in our world and to avoid the conflation of hope merely with optimism and success. Authentic Christian hope enables us to admit to and embody weakness and failure as part and parcel of life and our world and not repress it. It enables us to face situations of limit or death with a social hope that is not merely lost when disappointed.

Keshgegian calls us to embody more humble forms of incarnational hoping for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that seek to nurture a clear awareness of the concrete time and place that we inhabit as well as nurturing habits of imagination, inter-relation or solidarity with others. Keeping the virtue of hope concrete and alert to our actual times and places, rather than hovering above our lived realities in abstract ideals can help us to ground our embodiment of hope in the here and now. Building lived relationships, especially in solidarity with the excluded, can form a cornerstone for nurturing social hopes within communities. Nurturing hope for ourselves must, in the project of social transformation extend to nurturing hope in others, developing their imaginations and concrete relationships within a particular space and time rather than stifling them with existing blueprints that can unwittingly crush emerging forms of hope.

To live in the creative tension that Pieper's analysis of the virtue of hope, Hall's symbol of the cross and resurrection and Keshgegian's incarnational ethic of risk all point to is hard. We struggle not to collapse this open 'hope against hope' into the closed ideologies of either optimism or pessimism especially on a social scale where the issues seem so complex and ambiguous. However a maintaining of these tensions is what can keep our ability to hope in its most fundamental sense authentic, and able to step beyond inevitable disappointments we will face along the way. If our hopes could not be disappointed, then they would not be hope. We must remain alert to the danger of claiming certitude and closing off the future from a meaningful conceptualisation of an interplay of human and divine activity needed for a socially responsible hope today.



## Chapter 5

### HOPE AS SOCIAL PRACTICE: A WAY OF DOING

“Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence.” Lin Yutang<sup>339</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to provide a third and final aspect to the analysis of hope already completed which has explored firstly a vision of hope as a ‘way of seeing’ and then unpacked this in more depth with what it means to embody hope as a virtue - a habitual way of being. This chapter concludes this three-fold framework by examining hope as a Christian social practice with a view to better understanding what it means to act hopefully in our world today. It seeks to give a theological grounding to hope as a specific social practice of the church and to help Christians to see social practices of world affirming hope as a critical part of their faith mission. To do so it draws on the suggestions of N.T. Wright for a ‘hope-shaped mission for the church’ presented in his book *Surprised by Hope*. It also explores the insights of the Campbell Seminar – an annual global seminar hosted by Columbia Theological Seminary drawing specifically on the seminar held in 2000 entitled *Mission as Hope-in-Action*.<sup>340</sup> These contributions are inset within a framework of Christian Social Practices developed by Bass and Dykstra as part of the initiative *Practicing Our Faith*.<sup>341</sup>

#### 5.1 What are social practices?

“Go deep into a practice, and you will find doctrines and beliefs woven into its very being, but these don’t always have to come first, either chronologically or pedagogically.”<sup>342</sup>

In social theory, the word ‘practices’ is a term for human action in society. It often points to action that is repeated enabling it to become standardised or rules based which differentiates it from mere human behaviour. It points to concrete ways of doing as opposed to abstract ways of thinking. Social practice theory seeks to integrate the individual with the surrounding environment, context and culture relative to the actions and practices of the individual. It interprets the meaning of social activity in a number of different environments to understand what drives the nature of human activity, especially when that activity becomes routinized or even ritualized. It emphasizes person-to-person exchange, interaction, or participation in relationship to their surroundings as the primary material of social practice. It also implies social holism in that it claims that humans are dependent on our interaction with other persons within a social community.

Alisdair MacIntyre is one theorist who has built a moral system based on Social Practice theory.<sup>343</sup> For him, both what we do and what we believe emerge out of habits of character that, for him, are shaped by our encounter with God and the world. He connects practices directly to his concept of virtue pointing out that virtue requires ‘embodiment in practice’.<sup>344</sup> Practices are carried out with reference to one’s relationship with

<sup>339</sup> Internet at [http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Lin\\_Yutang/](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Lin_Yutang/). Accessed 11/10/2011

<sup>340</sup> This project draws both on the Consensus Paper of this Seminar as well as selected contributions from the participating theologians papers published as a collection entitled *Hope for the World: Mission in a global context* edited by Walter Brueggemann.

<sup>341</sup> Internet at <http://www.practicingourfaith.org> for more information on this initiative which promotes Christian social practices today.

<sup>342</sup> Bass and Dykstra, “Christian Practices”, 10. This project is based on this view that vision, virtue and practice intertwine in reality.

<sup>343</sup> Philosophers such as Rorty are interested in what moral schemes effect in terms of concrete habits of action. He is impatient with grand schemes and ideal systems e.g. religion/human rights that he feels often seek abstract solutions at the expense of concrete practice.

<sup>344</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191 defines a virtue as, “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”

other practitioners according to shared common standards.<sup>345</sup> In this sense, living out shared virtues in relationship with a community is a dynamic process which is never completed. He defines social practices as, “any coherent and complex form of socially-established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partially definitive of that form of activity – with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended”<sup>346</sup>. This complex definition points us to the realisation of internal social goods through shared activity. Social practices are distinguished from social behaviour by normative attitudes – where *sanctions* mark the difference between behaviour and practices<sup>347</sup>. For MacIntyre, humans are given to social practice in the same way they are given to language – distinguishing excellence in practices and distilling this into virtues.<sup>348</sup>

Nell Beecker<sup>349</sup> suggests that MacIntyre’s notion of ‘telos as a certain kind of life’ can be seen as ‘parallel to the Christian life in which the people of God are journeying toward God’s heavenly reign (telos) in the sense that they embody the way of this reign which is learned as they journey together. They are a particular people—God’s people—embodying a particular way of life. The virtues of the Christian tradition are made visible and embodied in the community’s practices. Such practices will not always look the same however because they are carried out in relationship with the Christian community in different times and places.’

For the purposes of this chapter, the researcher uses a definition of Christian social practice inspired by MacIntyre but developed by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra as part of The Valparaiso Project entitled Practising our Faith which was set up in 1997 to help people live Christian faith in contemporary times.<sup>350</sup>

“Christian social practices are the things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs, in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”

Bass and Dykstra suggest that in the light of this definition, Christian social practices exhibit a number of shared characteristics. These characteristics are briefly summarised below in four main points and offer a guiding frame for this researcher’s wider exploration of the kind of hope suggested in previous chapter as a practice. They will be returned to at the end of the chapter. They are drawn from a recent book<sup>351</sup> where Bass and Dykstra unpack the specific Christian social practice of ‘hospitality to strangers’ using an expanded version of this framework to which we now briefly turn.

<sup>345</sup> See Von Krogh, G., Haefliger S, Spaeth, S., Wallin M.W. (2012). “Carrots and Rainbows: Motivation and Social Practice in Open Source Software Development”. *MIS Quarterly*, forthcoming for a fascinating exploration of the social practices of open source software.

<sup>346</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.175.

<sup>347</sup> Social practices are the smallest meaningful social activities based on collective attitudes (like mutual belief). For many theorists, the study of social practices is important because they are to a great extent habitual, in contrast to the fully rational deliberative actions considered by decision and game theory. The units constituted by social practices are a basic ingredient of the social institutions which govern our social world.. Internet at <http://www.lrz.de/~ua352bm/webserver/webdata/socprac.html>. Accessed 30/10/2011

<sup>348</sup> Tuomela, Raimo. *The Philosophy of Social Practices: A Collective Acceptance View*. Cambridge University Press. 2007.50. explains social practices in terms of the interlocking mental states of the agents; showing how social practices (e.g. customs and traditions) are the ‘building blocks of society’; showing how social institutions are constructed from these building blocks as established, interconnected sets of social practices with a special new social status. See also his most recent book, *The Philosophy of sociality: The shared point of view*. Oxford University press. 2010 where he explores the power of ‘we-attitudes for social action and the group actions and social institutions that they make possible.

<sup>349</sup> Nell Becker. Sweden. Book review of A. MacIntyre *After Virtue*. Pub: Boston University School of Practical theology. Internet at <http://www.bu.edu/cpt/resources/book-reviews/after-virtue-by-aldasair-macintyre/>. Accessed 11/11/2011.

<sup>350</sup> Definition found in Dorothy, C Bass and Craig Dykstra ‘Christian Practices and Congregational Education in Faith’ in *Churches: The Local Church and the Structures of Change* (ed) Michael Warren. Portland, OR: Pastoral Press of Oregon Catholic Press, 2000, 4. The idea of “practices” has received much attention from philosophers and social scientists in recent years. Bass bases her use of the term loosely on Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue*:187-188. Denise Ackermann in Pillay, M, Nadar, S, Le Bruyns. C (eds) *Ragbag Theologies: Essays in honour of Denise M Ackermann*. Sun Press. 2009, 273 defines Christian social practices similarly as ‘cooperative and meaningful activities that address human needs and that people do together’.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 4-6, See book above for the full exploration of hospitality to strangers as a Christian social practice.

1) Christian Practices are social and historical activities people do with and for one another over time. Practices of contemporary congregations are intricately and mysteriously linked to the practices of communities long ago enabling corporate social action to extend beyond the span of any one life or the particularity of one set of circumstances. At the same time, they are also oriented toward the future. A vital and authentic practice is concrete and particular in the here-and-now, made up of many seemingly small gestures, words, images and objects, taking fresh form daily as it subtly adapts to circumstances.<sup>352</sup> Our practice of hope will need to be communal, a concrete hope for one another that sits within a wider tradition.

2) Christian practices are not abstract obligations, rules, or ideas; rather, they are patterns of living that are full of meaning. They involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing: they are activities imbued with thinking about God. Participation in these practices is how we come to such knowledge and awareness. Christian tradition makes normative claims about what truths shape our practice and mark its enactments as theologically and ethically sound. Each practice carries *particular convictions about what is good and true*, embodying convictions in physical, down-to-earth forms. Often it is ritual that makes these connections manifest, crystallizing the meaning of the practice and holding it in normative form for all to contemplate and enter, renewed. The practice of hope must therefore authentically connect to insights of Christian hope that are theologically and ethically sound for our tradition and times and find ways to ritualise this where possible.

3) Christian practices involve us in God's activities in the world. They are human activities in and through which people cooperate with God in doing what needs to be done, given the fact of our humanness. Practices pursue the good, involving us in life patterns that reflect God's grace, love and hope. In these things, people share in the practices of God, who has honored the human body, embraced death and rested, calling creation good. Participating in practices shapes people in certain ways, developing in them habits, virtues and capacities of mind and spirit. Our practices can be empowered by the practice in the life of Jesus. The practice of hope will need to be an active one, connecting with God's hope for our world to reflect the image of God in ways congruent with the person and hopes of Jesus and the best of the Christian tradition.

4) Christian practices address and are congruent with fundamental human needs and conditions and matter deeply to human well being. In practices a basic often inarticulate understanding of the human condition finds its fitting response in concrete practical human acts. The practice of hope will need to meet genuine needs for human wellbeing in our time and is pertinent to the question of what we hope for as Christians.

For Bass and Dykstra, to act with and for other people over time in response to fundamental human needs and in the light of God's active presence is to have a way of life and not merely a life style. It can draw on the wisdom and testimony of past generations while also being alert to the urgent needs of contemporary people. Nevertheless they warn us that any given practice can become so distorted that its outcome becomes evil rather than good. Both the world in which we live and we ourselves are broken, fragile, and torn by violence and fear. Christian practices are not immune from distortion and neglect, becoming death-dealing rather than life-giving. They encourage us to engage critically in our thinking about hope, as this project has aimed to help us to do, to prevent distorted or even death-dealing practices emerging.

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<sup>352</sup> The particular elements that compose it will change from time to time and place to place; some of them have yet to be imagined. And yet they are recognizably appropriate to and part of a discernible, historical Christian practice. For Bass, Christian practices resist those features of contemporaneous cultural practices that are not congruent with human well-being; but at the same time, practices that are explicitly identified as Christian practices often overlap and merge with good activities arising from other traditions.

## 5.2 Hope as a Practice (a way of doing)

“What matters in the long run however, is not only that we are hopeful, but that we act hopefully. The most valuable contribution a Christian can make in our age of despair is to continue because of our faith, to act hopefully and in that way to be an encouragement to those who have lost all hope.”<sup>353</sup>

For the Christian, to live in hope is not merely to be hopeful but also to act hopefully. Many theologians have suggested that ‘practices’ are critical for the nurturing of characters and communities of hope. The insights developed through the exploration of hope as vision and virtue pointed towards the primacy of an orientation to the world and its transformation in accordance with the good purposes of God for the common good. This is critical if our hope is not to reduce religious hope merely to an other-worldly salvation offered by a transcendent God who stands outside history, but instead wrestle with the paradox of a God who embodies an incarnational active hope within both history and human action. The following section will explore hope as a social practice or a ‘way of doing’ in the light of the above framework of Christian practices.

First it looks at hope as a *social and historical practice* that goes beyond the individual in both time and space in the Christian social community of the church<sup>354</sup> but also requires specificity in the concrete here and now by exploring the church as a site of social practices, and its possible role as ‘community of hope’. Churches today can align and contribute to that historical tradition and nurture the ground for future hopes. Secondly this chapter explores the changing role of mission in the church today as a key opportunity for reshaping and enacting practices of social hope. It uses N.T. Wright’s call for a “hope shaped mission” for the church to reflect on the normative claims regarding the nature of Christian hope that sit behind our enactment of hope as practice and make it theologically and ethically sound. It crystallises some implications for the practice of hope in mission in line with the shape of Christian hope that this project has unpacked. Finally, it looks at how our practice of hope invites us to be involved in cooperative activity in our world today so that we participate in the practices of God to pursue the common good for all. This involves a particular way of seeing divine and human action as working together in the present as well as the ability to be empowered in our practice of hope by the example of Jesus’s own hopes. This section draws on the insights of the Campbell Seminar who advocate for a hope-in action by God in the world in which we are called to actively and concretely participate in ways that enact a costly hope that can speak relevantly into our times. It makes this explicit with the suggestion by Brueggemann for us to resist, reform and imagine alternatives in order for the church to be freed to become a ‘hope-bearing, hope generating servant people in our world’.

The chapter concludes by reinforcing the importance of practicing authentic hope to speak meaningfully into the current times within which we are situated which typically value actions over words, and lived authenticity over truth propositions. It suggests that the social practice of hope can address and is deeply congruent with our current human condition (see Chapter 1) and that the Christian tradition of hope can offer a fitting response to our human need for a hope for our world that is critical to meaningfully enact in our despairing times. This chapter has focused on ‘mission’ in relation to the Christian practice of hope.<sup>355</sup>

<sup>353</sup> Nolan, *Hope in Age of Despair*, 12.

<sup>354</sup> This project recognises that Christian communities may exist that do not identify with formal church structures, For this project ‘church’ is used to point to the communal journey of Christians together as a core and normative site of social engagement and practice.

<sup>355</sup> If worldly hope as outlined in this project was accepted as a core practice of the church’s mission, this also has implications for many other aspects of church life that would merit further research but are beyond the scope of this paper

### 5.3 Hope as a social practice

“Hope is nurtured, fed and shaped by habits which in turn grow out of and are formed by practices. Habits are ways of being and acting that because of repetition and reinforcement, because of practice, have become part of who we are. They are characteristic of us and in that sense, define us”.<sup>356</sup>

Many world religions have defined themselves more as a set of shared practices than as a set of beliefs.<sup>357</sup> It has been a peculiar characteristic of Christian theology that it has historically veered more abstractly into a religion of doctrine rather than one of practice (possibly due to its early institutional establishment as a state religion). However, Jewish messianic hope had clear this-worldly and social justice orientated implications that Jesus continued to draw on with his pronouncement and embodiment of the Kingdom which he threw open to those who had been previously excluded to participate in. Resurrection hope in Christ became a radical way for Christians to potentially reconceptualise this messianic hope and incarnate it more fully and universally in our world. This research project has already suggested that hope is social in its very nature. To claim that hope is a social practice is to argue that it is an activity that happens between people in relation or interaction with each other i.e. it is not merely an individual act of hoping for self alone but, as Marcel suggested earlier, is choral and interdependent.<sup>358</sup> We hope not only for ourselves but also for others and for wider common hopes whose fulfilment also influences our individual wellbeing. This chapter will argue that this social way of practicing hope is congruent with both the founder of Christianity and the early church.

The preceding chapters have argued that the Christian vision and virtue of hope, grounded in the divine way of seeing and directed towards the common good for all creation as that for which God hopes and works towards, is a *social* vision and virtue. It challenges forms of hope that merely pits one person's individual desires against another's in an inevitably dualistic way and it also therefore sees people as fundamentally constituted in relation to others and not just as isolated thinking beings, but as persons-in-relationship as social practice theory encourages. The Divine call to us and our mutual belief in this Divine Being reflected in the character and actions of Jesus is a normative call towards enacting a community-in-hope that journeys within time and space as a witness in practice to the God of hope's ongoing presence in our world and a community that can be bearers of social hope for one another on the journey.

There is a danger that a vision and virtue of social hope can merely remain abstract. The 'common good' can seem a mere universalised pipe-dream amidst the concrete complexities of everyday decision-making. One is reminded of the trite wish of all beauty queens for 'world peace'. This final chapter explores what it might mean to enact a this-worldly hope concretely in our Christian communities today and moves on to look at the first characteristic of a practice as "social and historical", situated in a past tradition and yet part of an ongoing dynamic process as it adapts to the times. It will suggest that an active hope with this-worldly implications for the common good and not merely the good of the powerful was, is and should continue to be a social practice of the church. It argues that the very notion of alternative and subversive social practices of hope lie very close to the heart of the early church and its social fellowship on which we can draw to make the case for an enacting of this-worldly hope for the common good as a core social practice in our times.

<sup>356</sup> Keshgegian, *Time for Hope*, 189. This section draws on p188-214.

<sup>357</sup> For example Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism. The Jewish roots from which Christianity emerged were strongly embedded in social practice as the exploration of the early church showed. However much of this often subversive social practice was lost or went underground when Christianity became the state religion under Constantine in 300AD.

<sup>358</sup> Marcel, *Homo Viator, Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*. Indiana: St Augustine Press. 2010 on the communal nature of hope.

### 5.3.1 The church as a 'community of hope'<sup>359</sup>

"As the bearers of such practices, congregations are places where Christian people, as individuals and as communities, can take on the patterns of a way of life that chooses life."<sup>360</sup>

In *The Origins of Christian Morality*, New Testament scholar Wayne Meeks examines early Christian congregations as communities of shared practices. Practices, he argues, shaped and reinforced the moral sensibilities of the earliest Christians and defined the tensions they experienced in daily life beyond their communities. Upon entering the church, Christians took up a set of specific communal activities that taught them the way of life they were entering. As witnessed to in the Book of Acts, this new fellowship seemed to manifest alternative social behaviours that stimulated wider community attention. E.g. eating together, women in leadership, sharing of possessions. The post-Easter fellowship of the disciples of Jesus became the first community of Christians. Even though for many years, they would still be defined as a sect of Judaism, the powerful claim that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah or 'Christ' had inaugurated the Jewish vision of the hoped for Kingdom of God and invited all to participate, irrespective of gender, race or religion was a radical social statement fueled by eschatological hope from the start. The gradual inclusion of Gentiles, foreigners and 'sinners' in their midst and the contentious decision that Gentiles did not need to observe core Jewish practices such as food rules or circumcision in order to join the new fellowship of believers irrevocably changed the face of this small sect of Judaism.

Hans Küng notes that 'for the first Christians, their experience of God in the risen Christ was a communal experience and not an individual one.'<sup>361</sup> In this way they continued in the social tradition of Judaism, where God's call was not merely to a person but an invitation to a people to become the people of God and journey together in a different form of community.<sup>362</sup> While faith was often rooted in personal experience of the risen Christ (Thomas, Mary, Paul etc), the outworking of that experience was immediately communal moving towards inclusiveness (a huge shift for a religion that for generations defined its identity exclusively). In this way the early church was defined not primarily by individual practice but by social practice.

The initially small sect of Jesus followers held to the belief that the promises given to Israel, had in the person of Jesus, been universalised – thrown open to all humans to participate in. In the act of the resurrection, that which had been promised to the Jews had been 'inaugurated' and made real by God in the person of the risen Jesus. The early church reframed the venerable Old Testament title of the 'ekklesia or people of God' a concept sitting at the very heart of Judaism. This union between God and his people was based on the free historical activity of God in the history of his people.<sup>363</sup> This splitting of this powerful metaphor from a particular racial community was groundbreaking and led to charges of blasphemy from the Jewish establishment. Its concrete implications for the emerging community took many years to fully

<sup>359</sup> This section uses the helpful overview by Harold Le Roux, *Church and Mission* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster 2011 for this reflection and also draws on Hans Küng, *The Church*, Kent: Burns & Oates: 1968 and David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* NY: Maryknoll: Orbis 1991.

<sup>360</sup> Bass and Dykstra, *Christian Practices*, 7.

<sup>361</sup> Küng, *The Church*, 107-150 explores this whole idea of the Church as the people of God.

<sup>362</sup> This idea of Christianity as calling a people not just a person resonates with many contemporary African communities who still embrace pre-modern ways of thinking. E.g. Vincent Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered*. SCM Press; 2001, charting his mission to the Masai – where they decided for Jesus as a community – an act which challenged his individualistic western interpretation of conversion

<sup>363</sup> Moltmann points to this in his unpacking of the idea of the divine promise – as already summarised in Chapter 3 of this project.

manifest. Nevertheless it was often the normative social rituals and behaviours (practices) that emerged from this new understanding that then triggered theological developments. Changing the Jewish Shabbat into The Lord's Supper (an eschatological inclusive meal of people invited to share in the reign of God) raised the question of whether Jews were to disobey core food rules of Israel and sit together with sinners; communal prayer and teaching engaged a multiplicity of viewpoints outside the Jewish assumptions of reality, and most radically baptism replaced the more visible sign of circumcision as the initiation sign of entry into a new community/fellowship/covenant. It was a bold step for the young church to reapply words of messianic hope spoken to Israel to the lived reality of the inclusive community of this new fellowship in the world. For Küng, if the church is the people of God, inspired by the eschatological hope of the Spirit,

“It is impossible to see the origins of the church in individual believing Christians. This misconception reduces the church to an agglomeration of pious individuals. But the essential difference of the Christian message, when compared to other oriental religions of redemption of the time is that its aim is not the salvation of the individual alone, and the freeing of the individual soul from suffering, sin and death. The essential part of the Christian message is the idea of salvation for the whole community of people, of which the individual is a member. The individual never stands alone, but always within the community.”<sup>364</sup>

Küng does not intend this statement to deny individual human decision and clearly rejects a supernatural church poised above the real decisions of human beings. For him, the church is called into being by God, but it requires the assent of human decisions to become realised. It is also not a static and supra-historical phenomenon which exists undisturbed by earthly space and historical time. For Küng, as for many others, the church is always and everywhere a living people in all that they do, gathered together from the peoples of this world and journeying through the midst of time – essentially en-route, on a journey, a pilgrimage – pitching its tents while looking constantly for new horizons – renewing and continuing that journey through history – not a church of fear but a church of hope directed towards the consummation of the world by God. This also enables Küng to criticise the clericalisation of the church and the splitting of sacred and secular worlds and to reassert active participation in the universal church of all Christians in all that they do.

This chapter supports Küng's idea of church as a 'community of people on the move in social hope' that reflect a different way of relating to each other in the here and now that remembers the hope of the past, embodies God's hope in the present and also anticipates the direction of the hoped-for future. As we move on to look at the church's mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's worth noting that the first visible signs of the early church were the inclusive social practices of this new community and its differences to the other community practices around it.<sup>365</sup> This is relevant to the discussion of mission that will follow in this chapter as it is important to note that from the start, the early Christian fellowship witnessed socially to the hope they found in Jesus through discussing, imagining and embodying socially alternative practices in a way that critically engaged with and challenged the political and social systems around them.

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<sup>364</sup> Küng, *The Church*, 127.

<sup>365</sup> The disciples carried out activities in common; eating, praying, teaching but most radically, holding possessions in common so that all had enough and distribution was made to any who had need. The concepts of conversion and proclamation of the gospel seem to emerge out of these initial social practices witnessed by the wider community causing them to marvel and question. Within a few pages of Acts, money has been offered to the disciples for these abilities (the commoditisation of religious hope existed right from the start). The wider witness to Christ that began to spread into new lands was in fact the result of a historical tragedy – the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD which caused the inhabitants including Christians to flee, taking their faith to other parts of the empire. The most famous witnesses were the apostles, most notably Paul, often pointed to as an example for the development of modern mission.

“The eschatological spirit had been bestowed on them, they had been given hope, based on the fact that the Messiah had really come, of the future consummation of the reign of God.” Küng<sup>366</sup>

Over time of course as the expectation of the imminent return of Christ was diminished, the church became institutionalised,<sup>367</sup> leadership become increasingly formalised and within a few hundred years Christianity was adopted as the state religion, taking on many existing marks of status, wealth and power and becoming very different to the early church which had brimmed with (possibly unsustainable) eschatological hope. Nevertheless movements of resistance in both church and secular history continued to offer alternatives to mainstream institutions and drew on powerful utopian symbols of eschatological hope (e.g. Joachim di Fiore, monastic orders, Marxism etc). Nolan<sup>368</sup> suggests that in institutional Christianity, nothing has been so watered down as the socio-economic aspects of Jesus’s teaching and the early church’s social practices as they are at odds with our mainstream society.

Harold Le Roux in his useful recent summary of the church and mission draws on the work of Pierson to remind us that from the 4<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, almost all missionaries were monks and brought about significant *social transformation* in their roles with dozens of monastic movements emerging as a challenge to the power and privilege represented by the institutional church.<sup>369</sup> It is only in our modern and more specialised times that the theological split between social transformative acts and the preaching of the gospel has become at times quite wide, often through the divide between liberal and conservative theologies. Le Roux points to Dulles’ four models of the church (institutional, proclamation, body of Christ, transformational). This chapter suggests that the latter connects best to a socially responsible hope with this-worldly dimensions.

“The transformational or servant model has a focus on addressing economic, social and political issues. Its centre is not so much on the church itself but on the world and its problems. In this model the church should follow its Lord in carrying its cross and helping people where they hurt rather than on accentuating privilege and power. So the primary task of the church is not to keep its institutions intact or enjoy warm fellowship but to work on behalf of the poor and oppose forms of oppression and injustice.”<sup>370</sup>

To summarise this brief diversion into the social history of the church, the relevance of a this-worldly hope for social transformation as a practice for the church today can find clear support in its exploration of the early Christian church and the social nature of the hope enacted in concrete ways over time and passed down in stories of remembered hope and liberation. For Christian hope to maintain its vitality in our congregations today, it needs to be concrete and particular in the needs of the present in a way that also remains authentic to its significant tradition of subversive social hope and refuses a privatised collapse.<sup>371</sup>

<sup>366</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 109.

<sup>367</sup> For a more detailed description of this process see the brief overview of this history of Christian hope in Chapter 1 of this project.

<sup>368</sup> Nolan, *Hope in age of despair*, 104.

<sup>369</sup> Further exploration of Pierson’s ideas can be found in Winter and Hawthorne (eds) *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* Pasadena, CA, William Carey library, 1999, 267.

<sup>370</sup> Le Roux, *Church and Mission*, 97. An exploration of how the shared social practices analysed by Bass and the implications for the social institution of the church as outworked in these four different models of Dulles and applied to the practice of hope would be an interesting area of further research but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>371</sup> See Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 12 and 211 where he discusses the need for a theology of church as the ‘community of hope’.



### 5.3.2 A Hope-shaped Mission for the church <sup>372</sup>

“Many Christians today are working with members of many different communities of practice to address fundamental human needs or to resist the cultural, economic and social forces that leave fundamental human needs unmet. They move from one context of practice to another, like amphibians, though perhaps not conscious that they are doing so. Congregations are the settings where people look for the resources to bridge these contexts – the places where they hope to learn about life-giving patterns of life suited to the multiple complex contexts in which they now live”.<sup>373</sup>

If we are to practice hope systematically in our churches then this must be grounded in the way we conceptualise the church’s mission in order to enact consistent and concrete practices of hope in our world that reflect the presence of the God of hope in ways that are theologically and ethically sound. Bass warns us that our practices can become distorted, neglected and even ‘death dealing’ and this chapter will suggest that in a number of ways this has at times been the case with our practice of Christian hope. The remainder of this section explores this changing context in mission itself and its relation to hope, and then moves on to draw on the contributions of Wright who calls for a ‘hope-shaped mission’ for the church today and then finally on the insights of the Campbell Seminar scholars for ‘mission as hope-in-action’.

Sources concur that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the global Christian community increasingly faces a crisis in its theology of mission. Social practices of Christian communities around the world suggest that many of them are engaged with a strong practical witness to a socially transformative and incarnational hope in their particular contexts. However missiological theory can lag behind – sometimes holding to and teaching paradigms of triumphalist mission and Christian hope that are increasingly questioned as outdated in their thinking by the reality of the social practices of mission that begun to characterise the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the light of the level of despair in our world, this chapter argues that there is an urgent need for mission to reclaim its tradition of worldly yet costly hope to prevent Christian hope being distorted in practice and to continue to speak meaningfully into our current times.<sup>374</sup>

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a clear ecumenical consensus had emerged that the church faced a distinctively new context for mission. This context was characterised by a shift toward post-modernity with cultural and religious pluralism as an experienced global reality, post-colonial attitudes and liberation movements, increased secularism in the West as well as an increased movement away from corporate church structures towards a ‘missional church’ concept which understood evangelical witness more broadly in terms of the Kingdom of God.<sup>375</sup> The significant increase of the practical and global sphere of human development and poverty reduction with its own history of failures and lessons learned is, in the opinion of this researcher, a social phenomenon that must be taken into account, not least because a huge part of this movement includes faith-based organisations. The Indian theologian Ken Gnanakan also convincingly argues that any exploration of mission today must also take into consideration the resurgence of religious fundamentalism – with its arrogant and strident ‘crusader’ claims to absolute truth often leading to damaging public acts of

<sup>372</sup> This entire section draws on the insights of Le Roux, *The Church and Mission* especially drawing on references to Bosch and Küng.

<sup>373</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993, 109.

<sup>374</sup> Key Christian conferences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have however engaged significantly with this topic of Christian hope.

<sup>375</sup> See Johnson, quoted in Le Roux, *Church and Mission*. 25.

terror in our world<sup>376</sup>. In the light of this dangerous global reality, Gnanakan calls urgently for condemnation and arrogance to be removed from all proclamation as untrue to the Christian message and for demonstration of the peaceful message of the Kingdom to take precedence over proclamation. The serious question of whether all mission fosters intrinsically outdated and patronisingly damaging practices is also being increasingly raised both within and outside religious frameworks. Le Roux points to an alternative model for mission that seeks to be in genuine solidarity with those beyond the Christian faith entailing receiving and giving in a spirit of dialogue and mutual discovery of truth, and thereby potentially avoiding the allegations of superiority and arrogance often still associated with western missionaries<sup>377</sup>.

Le Roux draws on Küng to argue that the history of mission can be seen in terms of a number of paradigms over history and that we live now in at the start of what Küng terms the *emerging ecumenical paradigm* that is replacing the modern enlightenment paradigm. He points out that periods of transition between paradigms were often agonising and contested and require looking both at what is relevant in our historical times and yet also continue to be faithful to the heart of the Christian message. He highlights a number of social factors that he feels that Christian mission must address to be relevant in our current age.<sup>378</sup>

- Liberation struggles (including theological) from the stranglehold of the West's dominant position
- Unjust global structures of oppression/exploitation/poverty being challenged as never before
- Increasing disenchantment with Western technology, development and progress narratives
- Clear awareness of a shrinking globe with finite resources – and our power to destroy it
- Recognition of increased pluralism of religion with Christianity not typically seen as the only true faith

While this chapter does not offer any detailed overview of the recent history of missiological debate, it recognises that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the topic of mission came to the fore with the 1910 conference in Edinburgh leading to three major movements – the International Missionary Counsel (1921), the World Conference on Faith and Order (1927) and most famously, the World Council of Churches (1948) that have then continued to hold a range of global meetings in the late 20th century – with both Christian hope and Christian mission clearly on the agenda. One meeting in particular of note was the Faith and Order commission in India (1978) which focused specifically on exploring hope and coined the powerful phrase 'hope as the resistance movement against fatalism'.<sup>379</sup> Evangelical Christians explored similar questions at the Lausanne 1974 conference leading to Manila in 1989, Thailand in 2004 and Cape Town in 2010.

Bevans,<sup>380</sup> writing from a Catholic perspective, points out that over this century the crusading spirit of mission has become both less popular and less optimistic. While he continues to point to the primacy of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, he also highlights justice as the second most important aspect in mission. Vatican II also reinforced a more liberal approach to mission; recognising the presence of the Spirit at work outside the church, encouraging an increased openness to other religious views and repenting of the conflating of

<sup>376</sup> Quoted in Le Roux, *Church and Mission*.73. As I write this, a Norwegian Christian fundamentalist recently gunned down 76 young people at a socialist labour camp citing the need for people with belief to take action, demonstrating the ongoing reality of this danger

<sup>377</sup> This alternative, more inclusive and dialogical model is articulated by Paul Knitter *No Other Name* NY Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999 but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project although it sits within the same strand of thinking in its approach to mission.

<sup>378</sup> These factors come from the work of David Bosch *Transforming Mission* as summarised in Le Roux. *Church and Mission* 60.

<sup>379</sup> Botman, "Hope as coming Reign", 73.

<sup>380</sup> Summarized in Le Roux, *Church and Mission*, 65.

western culture with Christianity and the automatic disparaging of non-western cultural practices.<sup>381</sup> A broader understanding of mission is also emphasised in the Church of England General Synod (1996) who saw the key marks of mission as proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, responding to human need by loving service, seeking to transform unjust structures of society and striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and the life of the earth, alongside maintaining the more traditionally narrow idea of mission as the conversion, teaching and nurturing of new believers. The number of people signing up to be missionaries in the traditional sense of the word has dropped significantly in the West. However, short term 'missions' are steadily increasing with thousands of young people travelling with some this-worldly justice dimension.<sup>382</sup>

The South African missiologist David Bosch believed that our crisis in mission is influenced also by a crisis in what is meant by 'salvation'. He reflects critically on this Christian term and how it has changed over the years and sees a recent move from a purely personal salvation to a broader understanding of the term. He is explicitly critical of movements such as the church growth movement who emphasise only the vertical nature of salvation (i.e. between self and God) with only the effects of this salvation issuing in the horizontal dimension; "Desirable as social ameliorations are, working for them must not be substituted for the biblical requirements for salvation."<sup>383</sup> Historically the evangelical movement, whilst generally supportive of the need for social transformation has often seen the contribution of Christianity and the church as primarily towards individual transformation with implications as to the way hope is constructed. This involves a belief that individual transformation will automatically mean change within societies. Maggay comments that in fact this is not always true. Often there are larger complex forces at work that keep people in bondage to poverty requiring, in his view, Christian mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to seek to address issues of social transformation directly and not just through individual transformation.<sup>384</sup> Bosch argues instead that "in a world in which people are dependent on each other and every individual exists within a web of inter-human relationships, it is totally untenable to limit salvation to the individual and his or her personal relationship with God."<sup>385</sup> In this way he sees our horizontal relationships and our concern for humaneness merely not as an effect or result of our salvation, but much more critically as a part of that salvation.<sup>386</sup> At the same time Bosch refuses to collapse salvation completely into individual and social wellbeing, arguing that liberationist understandings of salvation can tend to do this and may thereby end up promising too much by implying that all injustice, poverty and oppression can be removed.

For him, the Christian gospel is not identical with the agenda of modern liberation movements, but the two are significantly overlapping concepts which require Christians to broaden their notion of salvation to include this-worldly action as a critical part of being co-workers<sup>387</sup> with a God who battles injustice, oppression and bondage through history. 'Those who know God will one day wipe away all tears will not accept with resignation the tears of those who suffer and are oppressed now. Anyone who knows that one day there will be no more disease can and must actively anticipate the conquest of disease in individual and society now.'

<sup>381</sup> John Paul II himself radically asked "Is missionary work among Christians still relevant. Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission?" *Redemptoris Missio*, Pretoria; Southern Africa Bishops Conference, 1991, #4.

<sup>382</sup> This type of mission has undoubted problems but at its heart it reflects a desire to engage meaningfully in social transformation.

<sup>383</sup> Don McGavren quoted in Le Roux *Church and Mission*, 75.

<sup>384</sup> Quoted in Le Roux However the insights of Chapter 4 may also have implications for the formation of new disciples in terms of cultivating and forming in them a spirit of social hope but developing this is beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>385</sup> Bosch. *Transforming Mission*, 399.

<sup>386</sup> This sits much closer to many African theological understandings of sin and salvation which explicitly involve a horizontal dimension in relation to the neighbour.

<sup>387</sup> 1 Cor:3:9. This concept of mission as strongly endorsing this-worldly action that is meaningful to God is key to this project.

For all this has to do with salvation.<sup>388</sup> He reinforces this idea of practices of hope for social transformation in the direction of justice, peace and equity as being a crucial part of the gospel itself and not merely a desirable add on that bears no real relation to salvation by quoting the Latin American theologian Orlando Costas to point out that narrow views of salvation like those criticised in this chapter leave us merely with:

“A conscience soothing Jesus with an unscandalous cross, an otherworldly kingdom, a private, inwardly limited spirit, a pocket God, a spiritualised bible and an escapist church. Its goal is a happy, comfortable and successful life, obtainable through the forgiveness of an abstract sinfulness by faith in an unhistorical Christ”.<sup>389</sup>

For Bosch, authentic mission is instead quite simply ‘the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus...looking for a future which seems impossible. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community for the sake of the world’<sup>390</sup>. He frames the church’s mission (connected to the ‘*missio deo*’) as Action-In-Hope i.e. seeing it as fundamentally proleptic; pointing towards a reality which is still to come in the future and anticipating that consummation in our anticipatory acts here in the present. His shape of hope therefore still remains fundamentally connected pre-dominantly to faith in God’s future acts of consummation. In this way, he provides us with a useful stepping off point to consider first N.T. Wright’s suggestion of the need for a ‘hope shaped mission’ for the church and then the 2000 Campbell Seminar scholars more radical views on mission as ‘hope in action’, who suggest that we must be wary of reducing action-in-hope only into the future. Instead we must see God as acting hopefully in the present and calling us to participate in the here and now.

“As long as we see salvation in terms of going to heaven when we die – the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of saving souls for that future. But when we see salvation as the New Testament sees it, in terms of Gods promised new heaven and new earth and our promised resurrection to share in that new reality then the main work of the church here and now demands to be rethought.”<sup>391</sup>

N.T.Wright, the Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, offers a similarly ‘thick’ definition of salvation to Bosch with a critique of individualist notions of evangelism and a suggested reframing of the mission of the church. He points out that today’s church is often urged to regard mission as the central and shaping dynamic of its life as a ‘mission shaped church’. But Wright, like Bosch, argues that we must also reshape our ideas of mission itself and explicitly avoid dualistic thinking around a split level universe where evangelism is about saving souls for a timeless eternity whilst others work for justice and hope in the present world. For Wright, if we want a mission shaped church, we must ensure that we have a ‘*hope shaped mission*’<sup>392</sup> Wright supports this research project’s overarching contention that the way in which Christian hope is conceptualised (vision) has a critical impact on how Christian character is formed (virtue) and the church’s mission to the world is carried out (practice). For him, a theology of hope provides a lens that enables us to critically rethink practices of mission and evangelism and the normative claims that sit behind them about salvation. In this way he offers a fruitful contribution to the ongoing debate between Christians

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<sup>388</sup> Le Roux, *Church and Mission*.

<sup>389</sup> Quoted in Le Roux, *Church and Mission*, 84.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 48. Bosch draws on a quote by Hering for this statement that can be found in Le Roux.

<sup>391</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. 209.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid 206.

who emphasise evangelism and saving souls and those who work for social transformation in our present world. Wright's call for "*hope shaped mission*" is a way for Christians to think and act creatively with regard to the role of the church in our modern world especially in the light of the aforementioned crisis of hope. In distinction to narrow views of mission as personal evangelism only, Wright argues that the gospel is in fact the much wider social good news of the renewal of our whole world by its Creator to form a home for God and his people to live together and the inauguration of that reality through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus who invites us as individuals to participate in this social renewal. Salvation, (or rescue) as Wright terms it – is something that needs to happens to us but only as a step on the way to become part of God's bigger plan for the world. Here he addresses the core question that connects mission and hope– what are we saved for rather than - what are we saved from? If the Christian's main hope is for 'salvation' as is still commonly believed, then whether we define that concept in world-denying or world-affirming ways has huge consequences for our practice of responsible hope in the here and now. Wright argues that many people who eschew human action and claim that God is the only one who can build the Kingdom use this as a way of hiding from human responsibility whilst looking pious and humble.<sup>393</sup> He distinguishes between anticipating the Kingdom in concrete acts which do not build in vain<sup>394</sup> and will in some way last into the new creation and the idea of humans being in control of ushering in a perfect world. He sees this 'already but not yet' paradox as an inaugurated eschatology embodied now in anticipation of a future still to come.

For him, the church is called to both announce and to anticipate this renewal. He is quick to point out that this announcement of victory in the midst of death and suffering would seem quite ridiculous unless the church is both clearly and publically acting on issues that begin to make that new world a reality (e.g. justice, debt relief, community development etc.). For Wright this sort of committed action is critical for the church's claims about new resurrection hope to be credible in any way to those outside the church. Without these works, any words of 'good news' are likely to sound hollow and trite. He points to Jesus as an example of this credibility of word and deed; he saved people from sickness and death at the same time as he talked about a salvation beyond the immediate into the ultimate future.

"Jesus was doing close up in the present what he was promising long term in the future...rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present that renewal of creation that is God's ultimate purpose and so that they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project itself."<sup>395</sup>

This view is also endorsed by other recent writings on missionary thinking for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century especially, but not only, those of many liberation theologians who, in contrast to the evangelical criticism often made of them, still generally maintain a vertical dimension to liberation but held in creative tension with the horizontal dimension.<sup>396</sup> In this way they sought to correct a perceived distortion by the established church to a narrow salvation that served the interests of those in positions of socio-economic power. Instead they spoke more compellingly of a hope in which the every day hopes of ordinary people, especially those who were poor and oppressed, were part and parcel of God's renewing action and advocated this more holistic approach as an authentic following of the God to which Jesus's life and witness pointed in our world.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. 218.

<sup>394</sup> 1 Cor. 15:58.

<sup>395</sup> Wright. *Surprised by Hope*. 204.

<sup>396</sup> For examples of these sorts of liberation thinkers see Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff or Rubem Alves.

“Wellness and wholeness are a real necessity and a real possibility. The Christian faith, being incarnational, is seen at its best when in contact with people at their most acute perception of life and reality. Significant time and energy of Jesus’ ministry was spent in contact with people expressing different levels of pain, needs and abandonment. Wherever he went he was surrounded by people in need and to them he gave special attention and time. By touching people and proclaiming them into wellness, he made the face of mission very clear.”<sup>397</sup>

Wright’s critical exploration of distortions of Christian hope including individualistic evangelistic hope, uncritical endorsement of secular myths of progress and world renouncing forms of salvation, was explored briefly in Chapter 2. They lay the ground for the more holistic approach to mission that is in line with a broader concept of salvation as *shalom*.<sup>398</sup> He, like others presented in this project, forthrightly challenges forms of Christian hope that fail to hold in tension both a consummation outside history and also liberation within history. His grounding of hope in the resurrection seeks to ensure that Christian hope is not reduced merely to the secular myth of inevitable progress and can continue to be nurtured by a unique Christian tradition that balances immanence and transcendence. He argues that a proper grasp of the future hope held out to us in Christ leads us to a vision of the present hope which is the basis for all Christian mission.

“To hope for a better future in this world for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, the abused, the paranoid the downtrodden and despairing is not something else – something extra tacked onto ‘the gospel’ as an afterthought. And to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God’s ultimate future into God’s urgent present, is not a distraction from the task of mission and evangelism in the present. It is a central, essential and life giving part of it.”<sup>399</sup>

For Wright<sup>400</sup> practising hope in the day to day life of the church is critical. He points out that our wider society already has a clear sense that things are wrong, unjust and broken and that the church has to find meaningful ways to respond to this anxiety and to foster authentic hope on any and every level as a central part of the gospel. For him the church becomes a place where the gospel hope is lived and brought into reality afresh for each place and generation – a hope shaped mission to reclaim space, time and matter. When that hope overflows into speech, those words then have depth, content and lived reality to its listeners. He suggests three concrete ways for the church to practice hope for the common good in our world:

**1) Working for Justice-** For Wright the major task in our generation is the massive economic imbalance of the current world. He calls all Christians to be actively involved in present acts of hope that contribute to the building of God’s kingdom of justice, equity and peace, at whatever level is appropriate in our lives.

<sup>397</sup> Valdir Steuerrnagel. Quoted in Walls and Ross (eds) *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*: (NY Maryknoll, Orbis, 2008); 66. We can see a similar tendency at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the African continent with an explosive growth in African Indigenous Churches that fuse traditional cultural practices (connecting to the everyday realities, hopes, anxieties and concerns of this life) with religious symbols to offer a more holistic hope with concrete implications for this life as well as the next. While this area clearly has its distortions of hope prevalent in aspects of ‘prosperity gospel’ and can endorse of oppressive practices e.g. with regard to women and children, its popular appeal seems to suggest that an other-worldly religious hope that fails to connect with this-worldly hopes and fears is too narrow to be fully embraced as an adequate life worldview by many human beings today. This is developed further in the article “The prosperity message in the eschatology of some new charismatic churches’ Allan Anderson, *Missionalia* 15, 2, 72-82.

<sup>398</sup> De Gruchy John. “Salvation as humanisation and healing” in Hart and Thimell (Eds.) *Christ in our place: the humanity of God in Christ for the reconciliation of the world*, DP Allison Park; Pickwick 1989, 32-47.

<sup>399</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 204.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid*, 242.

**2) Celebrating and Nurturing Beauty** – Wright suggests that the Easter (resurrection) hope points us to the wider goodness of creation and God's redemption of it beyond merely moral goods. In this way he points back to the older Greek ideas of the 'good',<sup>401</sup> seeing hope also as an aesthetic value that celebrates beauty and truth as genuine ways of nurturing our ability to hope and rediscovering our prophetic imaginations.

**3) Announcing the Gospel** – Wright points to the ongoing importance of the personal call of the gospel – but sees the 'traditional framework of a heaven and hell expectation and convincing people that its time they considered the heaven option and grabbed it while they had the chance' as a seriously lopsided view of the gospel.<sup>402</sup> He calls instead for the church to announce that God's new world has begun, a proclamation of hope for the world that is only authentic if the church can reflect it concretely in their actions in the present.

Wright is convinced that a theology that sees the business of church as merely saving souls is "a radical distortion of Christian hope which endorses a quietism that leaves the world exactly as it is and allows evil to proceed unchecked".<sup>403</sup> His arguments contribute significantly to this project's case for hope as a critical ingredient for social transformation in the world and his recommendation of a 'hope shaped mission' has the potential to speak to liberals and conservatives with a uniting voice. He argues that practicing this form of hope can set us free 'both from the self driven energy that imagines it has to build God's kingdom all by itself and the despair that supposes it can't do anything until Jesus comes again.'<sup>404</sup>

This research project suggests that Wright offers a powerful contribution to the current discussion on Christian hope by robustly pointing us away from any sort of conceptualisation of salvation as an escape from the world and reframing evangelism holistically through the lens of a social good news with clear this-worldly social implications. He calls Christians to speak to the wider hopelessness in society today by their actions that can anticipate the wider reality still to come in collaboration with other allies but to also maintain a proviso about what humans can achieve on their own – enabling a critique of mere ideologies of incremental progress. However this researcher feels that one of the weaknesses of Wright's approach is that his focus on resurrection at times seems to lead him away from the rigorous ongoing dialectic with biblical despair that is critical (according to other theologians of Hope explored in this project) if it is not to unwittingly become a cheap hope that can struggle to speak meaningfully into genuine moments of failure. He also continues to press strongly for a *certainty* to our hope as Christians with regard to what is to come that is at times in danger of reflecting a damaging presumption of the part of the church that it knows the answers to the future. This tendency has been challenged in Chapter 3 by Pieper's analysis of hope.

With these specific weaknesses in mind, this project concludes its exploration of hope as social practice by summarising the contribution of Brueggemann in dialogue with other Campbell Seminar scholars who argue for a more radical reframing of the shared practice of social hope embodied in mission as '*hope in action*'.

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<sup>401</sup> While Plato points to Truth, Beauty and Love as components of the Ideal Good. Aristotle points to human flourishing as the overall goal which connects more closely to the notion of the common good suggested in this project though in a more anthropomorphic way.

<sup>402</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. 237.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid*. 156.

### 5.3.3 Participating in the Practices of God – Mission as Hope-in-Action

“Interventions for liberation are essential aspects of discipleship and should also be constitutive aspects of the mission of the church as they were modelled by Jesus. If the church is to avoid a spiritualised sense of reality which deals with life at a non-historical level, it raises the question as to if the gospel we preach has the flavour of justice about it.”<sup>405</sup>

This final section of this research project draws on the 2000 Campbell Seminar contributions published in 2001 as *Mission as Hope in Action: Mission in a global context*. It suggests that this approach comes closest to enacting the ‘shape of Christian hope’ presented throughout the preceding chapters of this research. The consensus paper that emerged from this seminar unanimously stated that “old contexts for mission are deeply saturated with ideologies of domination from which we need repentance and emancipation”.<sup>406</sup> While this statement does not disregard the undoubted fruit which has come from many historical missionary endeavours, it clearly points to the already discussed crisis in mission that faces Christianity today.<sup>407</sup> For the global participants of the Seminar, including Douglas Hall, and Walter Brueggemann whose other work has been drawn on in its own right in preceding chapters of this research, it is increasingly apparent to many Christians and non-Christians that some old missional assumptions and practices are no longer either credible or productive. This project agrees with this premise while acknowledging that it is a contested one in Christian circles today. It suggests nonetheless that there is significant Christian consensus around the need to reformulate mission; to recognise that God’s mission is wider than the horizon of the church and to seek to avoid the absolutism and triumphalism of the Christian past as new paradigms are developed that appropriately meet the needs of our current age and the religious pluralism which defines it. It suggests that the idea of ‘mission as hope in action’ may provide some practical assistance in pointing a possible way forwards in this time of paradigmatic change that has implications for the practice of hope. The Campbell Seminar consensus paper points to this new context for ministry and suggests that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by a despair commonly shared by both ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. While this failure of hope marks communities in diverse ways, it is suggested this is a critical challenge to which the church must respond.

According to Brueggemann many Christians no longer view the aggressive Christianization of the world as a faithful expression of God’s mandate “especially in the light of its ambiguous historical legacy and the reality of our fragile pluralistic planet”.<sup>408</sup> Increasingly theologians of many persuasions argue that the mission of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church may instead be to confess *hope in action*. Hall draws on the work of Paul Tillich to suggest that while humans always face multiple forms of anxiety,<sup>409</sup> our 21<sup>st</sup> century epoch resonates with the anxiety of meaninglessness and despair most of all. He suggests that much Christian mission theology is however still speaking primarily to the anxiety of guilt in their soteriologies which can lead to a disconnect between context and message that is damaging for all concerned. In this way, this seminar reinforces the points raised by Wright on salvation and the need for a ‘hope shaped mission’ to clearly problematise potentially damaging constructions of Christian mission, salvation and hope.

<sup>405</sup> Valdir Steurhagel, Quoted in Le Roux, *Church and Mission*, 88.

<sup>406</sup> Collected as a set of papers in Brueggemann, W (ed) *Hope for the World*. 2001, 7. The seminar which took place in 2000 drew together theologians from many global contexts at Columbia Theological Seminary to reflect on the role of hope in mission today.

<sup>407</sup> See Le Roux, *The Church and Mission*. for a longer unpacking of this mission crisis based on the theology of David Bosch as well as a useful summary of other writers who also argue for the need for a new paradigm of mission, 55-95.

<sup>408</sup> Brueggemann, (ed) *Hope for World*, 15.

<sup>409</sup> Paul Tillich points to Guilt/Condemnation, Fate/Death and Meaninglessness/Despair presented by Hall “Despair as Ailment” 84.



An eschatological hope for the consummation of all things brought about by a Divine Being can and has been used to justify human apathy in the present world, leading to quietism, passivity, paralysis and even functioning as a narcotic of the people<sup>410</sup> in relation to pressing social needs. It has led to justified criticism from secular theorists such as Rorty<sup>411</sup> who claim that Christian hope is otherworldly, of no relevance to the present, and frequently counterproductive to realising social hopes in this world. This project instead draws consistently on theologians who clearly refute this form of religious hope and argue instead for its active and social engagement in and for the world, inspired by a deeply rooted yet alternative shape of Christian hope.

The majority of the Campbell Seminar scholars<sup>412</sup> go further than Wright does in both acknowledging and challenging what they see as deep-rooted tendencies towards triumphalism and absolutism within the church itself and in calling more wholeheartedly for a response that is prepared to step outside the church to find God's activity in the wider world. In this way they challenges the idea of the church as the main or only place where God is witnessed to or resides, "God is wherever the work of justice, freedom and enlightenment is being done,....where people bravely bear witness to the truth, the initiative for the work and the power for that work comes from the Spirit. Mission is less to do with whether Jesus is named and more to do with whether the purposes of the living god – whom Christians know through Jesus, are being served."<sup>413</sup> This is often where the dialogue between eschatological religious hope and more human this-worldly hopes has broken down and even split into two different faith-dialogues. This research project does not claim to resolve that longstanding disagreement satisfactorily but seeks to bring a level of clarity to the issues by its more detailed unpacking of hope. It does seem apparent that the church, regardless of the way in which it sees its own role in the world, has a clear tradition, grounded in the behaviour of Jesus, of recognising the work of God in unlikely places<sup>414</sup>. This is actively endorsed in the chapter's approach to hope-in-action.

According to the Campbell Seminar scholars,<sup>415</sup> 'hope as an evangelical antidote to despair must not be practiced triumphally, but with an ecclesial sense of vulnerability. Pluralism positions the church and its narrative of hope without an absolutist claim that is inherently triumphalist but to be an ally in hope with other believers and those of goodwill outside every believing community'. If it is true that our world faces an ever deepening crisis of hope, our churches may have a significant opportunity to redefine mission to reflect the gospel in ways that can speak meaningfully to our times. Instead of seeing the ongoing displacement of the church from a position of ecclesial triumph and power as a defeat as do many conservative Christians, the Campbell scholars see it instead as a liberating opportunity 'to free the church for a generous agency in the world as a hope-bearing, hope generating servant community that is open to many allies'. In the words of Brueggemann it can become "a hope-filled church that can resist, reform and offer alternatives."<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Botman, *Hope for World*, 75.

<sup>411</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope*, 208.

<sup>412</sup> See Consensus Paper in Brueggemann (ed) *Hope for the World*, 7.

<sup>413</sup> Adams, *Hope for World*. 64. This sort of claim has often been treated with high suspicion by the evangelical wing of the church. If Jesus is merely a sort of code-word for a wider truth that can be embodied in places in the world even when Jesus is not explicitly named, then isn't the particularity of the Christian tradition then lost amidst a more generic form of abstract goodness that hovers above all specific religious claims. A theologian like Hauerwas would tend to see this as a damaging distortion of Christian hope.

<sup>414</sup> See Paul Knitter, *No other name* NY Maryknoll: Orbis:1999 for a more detailed analysis of approaches to the particularity of Jesus.

<sup>415</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for World*, 7.

<sup>416</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for World*, 157.

Like Moltmann, the Campbell scholars hold together the notions of human possibility and divine possibility in a theology of the Spirit<sup>417</sup> where the creative possibilities of the human spirit are grounded in the divine source of all creation. By refusing to slip into dualistic thinking, they enable human acts to exist meaningfully within the wider idea of God's activity in the world rather than in opposition to it.<sup>418</sup> For them, authentic Christian hope must be *concrete, embodied, and context specific* if it is not to hang nebulously over our lived realities. To reflect the incarnational ethos of Christianity, it must drive towards particularity in its outworking.

The Campbell Seminar scholars remain keenly aware of the propensity of all religion (including Christianity) to relegate the object of hope to a realm beyond this life. While these scholars do not deny the transcendent dimension of Christian hope, they nevertheless strongly insist upon the *primacy* of its world orientation and the need for hope to be embodied and enacted in this world. They refuse to let the distractions of an otherworldly hope destroy any sense of a hope in the here and now and are duly critical of forms of Christianity that can seem to do this. In this way they stand in the tradition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who pointed to the difference between the myth of redemption and the hope of redemption, arguing that the myth has real meaning only after death, whilst hope has concrete implications in our present day world. Inadvertently, according to Niles, the myth allows death to draw the boundary for Christian hope to be realised and frames redemption as only for one's post death soul.<sup>419</sup> Bonhoeffer, in his final letters before his execution reminds us that "the difference between the Christian hope as resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his own life on earth in a wholly new way."<sup>420</sup>

According to this approach, while Christians should not expect to perfect the world, they do hope to change it and this claim emanates in a call for ethically concrete behaviour and practices whose object is to implement God's love for the world and its creatures in the search for a better justice. For Christians, the hope for resurrection points us to a belief in the surplus of hope and that beyond the worst that death and the forces of destruction can do is the best that God can do which gives ground (but not certainty) to our hopes even beyond the limit of death. In this way, they point to the need for hope to remain hope and not to become sight, ideology, inevitability or finality – but to remain ever open to the new. But when this possibility of 'surplus' merely becomes an excuse to evade the active hope that is needed for our present times, hope itself becomes distorted. In this the Campbell scholars clearly support the findings of this research on hope in the previous chapters. Unlike Wright they are more careful about depicting the church as the vehicle of God's plan of transformation, but more humbly as merely one of the possible vehicles. This subtle distinction has significant implications as to the way in which ongoing dialogue with other faiths and positions is carried out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "Enacting and confessing hope in action requires participation in the harsh realities of daily existence to ensure a responsible, this-worldly mission in relation to the many social issues of our day."<sup>421</sup> In the south where Christianity is growing, churches face the formidable task of living up to mission as hope-in-action – confessing hope in contexts of depressing suffering, hardening poverty, disease pandemics, simmering ethno-religious conflicts and the legacy of colonialism.

<sup>417</sup> See Joanna Adams, "Hope as the intractable resolve of the Spirit" in *Hope for World* and also Moltmann *Church in the Power of the Spirit* for more detailed reflection on this important area.

<sup>418</sup> This approach aligns with the shape of hope presented in this project especially in the analysis of Flora Keshgegian.

<sup>419</sup> Niles, D "A common hope is always context specific" in Brueggemann (ed) *Hope for World*, 107.

<sup>420</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. *Letters and papers from Prison*. NY Macmillian 1971. pp336-337.

<sup>421</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for the world*, 21.

“When the scientist works with conscience to find a cure for cancer we see God’s mission as hope in action, when people call for the forgiveness of debt in third world countries we see God’s mission as hope in action, when an investor in America conducts business as if the children in Africa are her own, we see God’s mission in action. When a Cuban doctor goes to the villages of South Africa to reduce infant mortality we see hope in action, when a person in sub Saharan Africa is trained to care for people living with HIV/AIDS we see God’s mission as hope in action, when a church opens its heart to the homeless, when subjugated cultures find their way back into the church, when communities opt for reconciliation instead of civil war we see God’s mission in action. I know you may want to stop me here saying, these things are already happening. I answer – precisely – my argument as well.”<sup>422</sup>

Botman<sup>423</sup> points to the difference between the notion of mission as hope-in-action articulated by Campbell scholars such as Hall and Brueggemann and the older call by Bosch for mission as action-in-hope. For Bosch, our actions in the present are really only anticipations of what is still only to come in the future and from God. However for the Campbell scholars, their confession of hope is an active one in the present, based on God’s activities in the here and now within which we, as part of God’s creation actively participate. In this way it is not a passive confessing of events that are still to come and for which we are merely expected to wait patiently, but an active confession of hope-in-action i.e. God acting concretely in our world today through us.<sup>424</sup>

Brueggemann, like Wright, also flags economic injustice as the biggest overarching social issue of our times and suggests that in the light of this, we urgently need to find ways as Christians to challenge as a distortion the increasing individualism of Christian hope in the West and its increasing exportation globally as a form of mission that fits in with the totalising nature of this dominant system. He suggests we need to point to both non-productivity and non-consumption as important human values in order to ensure that the many in our world who are unemployed or are not able to be meaningful consumers can nevertheless find a dignified and hopeful human space to exist with alternative forms of flourishing recognised. He continues to point to the intrinsically social or choral nature of authentic Christian hope for the world and all who inhabit it. ‘Mutuality not individuality lies at the heart of the Christian promise for this world and the world to come’.<sup>425</sup>

For the Campbell scholars, Christian hope clearly includes a hope within history. They suggest that our overall task as a Christian community as we enter into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is “to imagine with all our creativity what the hope of God looks like in the variety of our global contexts and to hold that vision before the world as invitation.”<sup>426</sup> Brueggemann claims that in the light of this hopeful vision we are enabled in the present to resist, reform, and imagine/embody alternatives as concrete ways of manifesting hope-in-action as Christians in our world. These ways of practising hope socially are the final piece explored in this chapter.

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<sup>422</sup> Botman. “Hope as coming reign”. 80.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>424</sup> See Kairos Palestine *A Moment of Truth*, 11 for an example of this view of the Church’s mission that is called to announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries.

<sup>425</sup> Brueggemann, “Totalizing context” 55-59.

<sup>426</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for World*, 105.

## 1) Practicing Hope as Resistance<sup>427</sup>

“Hope is resistance. It actively resists the void of hopelessness by embracing suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance character. Hope is to be lived. Hope like faith involves action. Inactive hoping in the belief that all will turn out well is the best possible formula for ensuring that the worst will happen, we have to make our hopes become reality.”<sup>428</sup>

But what are we to resist in hope as Christians? In line with his previous analysis of a theology of hope which was outlined in Chapter 3, Moltmann calls us to resist the ‘latest hopelessness of the utopia of the status quo’.<sup>429</sup> For him, this is a restricted utopia based on exclusion. It’s a utopia for those in a good position that is fundamentally unsustainable for all and which by its affluent existence also arouses undue expectations in the poverty stricken peoples of the world where people in misery are eager to live in the way advertised globally on TV. Instead he encourages us to retrieve the Christian roots of the utopia of justice in our confession of hope which resonated clearly with Nolan’s call for Christians to seek the common good. The utopia or ‘ou-topos’ that our mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should point to is neither the utopia of the status quo or the utopia of a transcendent other-worldly paradise but instead the hopeful vision presented in Chapter 3 of a better world in which human and non-human creation can thrive sustainably together as symbolised by the religious symbol of the ‘Kingdom of God’. Our hopeful actions are called to point towards this vision for the common good in a way that acts for the concrete realisation of that for which we hope, without believing that our resistance alone can either solve present challenges or control the future.

Brueggeman targets his approach in the same direction but with even clearer concrete suggestions, calling us specifically to resist the ‘totalization consumption ethos of our day with its unrestrained pursuit of commodity and power at odds with the Christian vision of shalom’.<sup>430</sup> He points both to the history of civil disobedience in traditions such as the Quakers and Anabaptists that have often gone hand in hand with alternative movements of eschatological hope but also encourages us towards much smaller social ways of resisting the economic absolutism around us which seeks to push all reality into serving its economic ends. He suggests as a concrete example that reclaiming the tradition of the Sabbath can be one way to help us step out of the consumer-producer cycle. So can the use of globalisation to create interconnectedness and global solidarity with the victims of progress in our world today in the hope that in understanding and empathizing with that articulated pain, new hopes for what can be done differently will emerge out of these crucifying experiences. Brueggemann does not deny that global capitalism has many goods to offer our world. Nevertheless, the hope that he points us to enact is one that refuses to submit to the totalizing tendencies of any human system in the light of the critical symbol of the Kingdom and enables us to engage in denunciation and resistance of its concrete damaging practices when they impinge on the common good. Moltmann concurs, warning us that the practical responsibility of Christian hope has not become easier in recent years but claiming that ‘the practice of hope becomes concretely stronger in suffering than in action and will have to be proved in resistance’.<sup>431</sup>

<sup>427</sup> See also Conradie, *Eschatological Dimensions*, 174 which also draw on this concept of hope as resistance. The Kairos Palestine Document, *A Moment of Truth*, 9 says that ‘hope means not giving in to evil, but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it’.

<sup>428</sup> Ackermann, D, “A time to hope”. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 67.

<sup>429</sup> Ofelia Ortega “Revolutionary Hope in the Church after Christendom” in Brueggemann, *Hope for World*. 132-4 informs this section.

<sup>430</sup> Brueggemann. “The Totalizing Context”, 55-59.

<sup>431</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment*, 189.

## 2) Practicing Hope as Reformation

One of the criticisms levelled at liberation theologies of the 1970s was that the only social solution it offered to complex situations of oppression was revolution. A hope which can only denounce or resist is undoubtedly called for at times, but will have limited use for many of the complex and multifaceted issues facing our world today. While the toppling of oppressive dictators regimes are still for most, cause for celebration as is the gradual waning of the power of the last African dictators that emerged in post colonial times, we are more aware than ever that many revolutionary movements for liberation can end up as oppressive as the previous regimes. This is especially the case at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where attempts to identify and remove 'the enemy' at a macro level can result merely in the mass scapegoating of one or another people group. Countries that have experienced significant moments of social transformation through resistance or revolution, such as South Africa – the country where the researcher lives, face in post-apartheid times the different task of maintaining hope without a clear common enemy against which to struggle. The single issue of apartheid provided a common goal for communal resistance and revolution for many years. In the light of its fall however maintaining an active hope required a new strategy of reformation, working for concrete incremental changes in a way that enables those previously disadvantaged to become the responsible authors of their own hope-filled futures and change widely accepted yet damaging social practices.

The compelling vision of the reconciled rainbow nation gave a powerful initial vision of hope to South Africa and to the wider world in the 1990s. Yet 20 years on, unless concrete small acts of hope can begin to build real sustainable change in the lived situations that many people continue to face in South Africa, that social hope is in severe danger of waning and turning instead towards a damaging and apathetic despair and fatalism where corruption, inefficiency, mediocre systems of health and education and crime and sexual violence fuelled by despair and unemployment become not only more prevalent, but also worryingly more accepted as just the way it is.<sup>432</sup> This form of hoping requires Christians to be engaged with wider questions of public theology, to refuse to retreat into a ghetto and to engage openly with the messiness of our world.

Sustaining acts of reformation over time in our world require a form of resilient hope that is patient yet determined. For Brueggemann,<sup>433</sup> reformation as a form of hopeful action means creating political will at all levels for needed changes in the direction of a better future, securing political and economic resources for community building and fostering engagement with the public sector by the church, and not merely a quiet retreat into ecclesial matters. This is not in any sense to advocate for a return to the old days of a state established and formally powerful church but as the Campbell scholars point out to instead "free the church for its prophetic role in relation to the many social, economic and political systems of which we are all a part to call them to more fully and responsibly conform to their more generous impulses'. The ongoing work of the third sector (within which the researcher's own work with HOPEHIV sits) in its many areas of advocacy, improvements to service delivery and capacity building are all essentially efforts in a myriad of small but concrete ways to reform our society, to identify in solidarity with those who are often the victims of its existing systems and to also seek to go beyond accepted ways of doing that may fail to deliver the needed results to challenge and reform these systems to better meet our human and non-human needs.

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<sup>432</sup> See Roberts, "Reflections on Age of Hope" for more on this topic.

<sup>433</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for the World*, 156.

### 3) Practicing Hope as Imagining and Emboding Alternatives

“We hope for one another – the other’s gaze can be healing because the other may see in me and my circumstances possibilities and potentialities that I cannot see for myself. Your gaze can initiate me into my own possibilities of self transcendence and development, bringing hope to me, who might be someone who could find no reason to hope for him/herself.”<sup>434</sup>

For Kelly,<sup>435</sup> Jesus’s imagination was centred on the gracious power of God to give life where death had reigned before and he imagined the world otherwise. He suggests Christian hope draws its character from the creative imagination of Jesus himself with his followers invited to enter into his way of imagining God, themselves and the world. ‘Imagination is transformative, the ability to imagine is what makes and keeps us human...it works within the unfinished business of our lives and opens it to other forgotten dimensions’. Brueggemann suggests that we can be hope-bearers for each other and that God stands in solidarity as a bearer of hope for the least in our society, with a dynamic image of God as one who runs from the centre to the periphery, thereby turning the seeming periphery into the new centre. For him, if Christians want to find God in our world today as followers of Jesus, we must as communities and individuals go to the ‘periphery’ in our particular contexts and stand there in hope.<sup>436</sup> By doing this we develop alternative ways of both being and doing that are meaningful and effective from this perspective with those not served by the current systems<sup>437</sup> An environment of humaneness is cultivated between people that while not always directly confronting powerful macro-systems, offers viable and humane alternatives that affect the lives of those who can thrive within them. Kelly suggests “when hope works for a God-defined future, it contests the economy of competition and greed. The psychotic mindset of economic rationalism is confronted by another possibility, the divine economy of gift and giving. This generosity of giving...anticipates the community of eternal life.”<sup>438</sup>

History has also shown us that in time these minority movements can transform and influence mainstream practices in a larger way congruent with metaphors of the Kingdom as yeast, salt and light.<sup>439</sup> The environmental movement increasingly calls for this sort of concrete embodiment of ways to live differently with models like the Centre for Alternative Technology and The Eden Project in the UK generating a form of hope in themselves but also offering imaginative alternatives to some of our current damaging human habits that have potential application at a macro-level. Brueggemann reminds us that the seeming hopelessness of the data should never rule out a different possibility and that the central affirmation of the Judeo-Christian story depicted in a myriad of micro-stories is that God can shatter the known world to bring about new historical possibilities, both individual and social. Humans are invited to express the new social possibilities of community transformation in terms of the neediest and to listen to the call God has made for us to re-enter into the pain of the world and the possibility for renewal and salvation. “Hope looks beyond frozen alternatives to refresh the human condition with a culture of the alternative.”<sup>440</sup>

<sup>434</sup> Doede and Hughes, “Wounded Vision”, 184.

<sup>435</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology*, 184. This ties in with Keshgegian’s call in Chapter 4 for developing our imaginations to nurture hope.

<sup>436</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope for World*, 9. He suggests that hope has a revolutionary function, it keeps the present arrangements open and provisional and reminds us not to absolutise the present. In this way a failure to hope can be more likely amongst the affluent for whom the present system works well, *Hope within History*, 80.

<sup>437</sup> E.g. local economic co-operatives like the Grameen Bank in India offer small loans to poor women turned down by formal banks.

<sup>438</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology*, 213.

<sup>439</sup> E.g. the fair-trade chocolate movement started as merely a minority alternative for the few but has in time been adopted by mainstream chocolate producers, improving concrete working conditions for thousands for the long term.

<sup>440</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology*, 184 and 214.

#### 5.4 Summary of hope as social practice and its implications for social transformation

“Hope is not an individualistic spirituality but a communal life. The God of hope is the focus of the shared hope of the pilgrim people of God. For the church is the milieu that nourishes and supports the praxis of hope...without this communal, historical dimension hope would be a flimsy, individualistic posture. The ecclesial community... must cultivate a culture of hope”<sup>441</sup>

This chapter has sought to concretise hope as a Christian social practice for our times. The main site of social practice engaged with here has been the church. It has used the idea of Christian social practice formulated by Bass to frame an exploration of the church as a ‘community of hope’, called to enact a hope shaped mission for our times that can critically challenge distorted practices of hoping incongruent with the theological shape of Christian hope outlined earlier in this research. It draws on insights from Bosch and Wright to highlight the need to reconceptualise the hope that we practice in our mission. It concludes with some suggestions for practicing hope in active ways with a participation in God’s hope-in-action in our world through resistance, reformation and imagining alternatives in solidarity with the hopeless in our world.

To qualify as a social practice, hope must show that it meets a genuine human need. This project feels that this has been demonstrated at the start of this project and has not reiterated those arguments here. In a context where worldly sources of hope seem to be increasingly depleted and many people struggle against an overriding sense of meaninglessness and despair especially in relation to the bigger issues and questions of public life, there is an urgent need for our practiced hope as Christians to be life affirming and not death-dealing. We must ensure that what we hope for is aligned with God’s purposes for the world which s/he loves and seek humbly yet persistently towards a vision of abundant life for all.

However, if our hope is to be more than just a mere universalised, trite slogan for a ‘perfect world’ it needs concretisation in a myriad of specific practices within time and space. This chapter suggests that Christian communities have a significant opportunity to reconceptualise mission and some of its key symbols in ways that can both speak prophetically and act hopefully in the face of the concrete challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Wright’s ‘hope shaped mission’ encourages us to ensure that the hope we articulate in our mission activities remains an authentic Christian hope directed towards concrete efforts for social transformation in our world. He seeks to avoid ways of conceptualising hope that distort this focus away from engagement in the world in the name of a damaging dualism that polarizes human and divine action and endorses a form of apathy. The idea of ‘hope-in action’ offers concrete manifestations of hopeful action, working with other allies in hope to engage in shared action and dialogue without the absolutism that has often characterised the church.

“Educators need to think how to lead people beyond a reliance on ‘random acts of kindness’ into shared patterns of life informed by the deepest insights of our tradition, and how to lead people beyond privatized spiritualities into more thoughtful participation in God’s activity in the world. Reflecting together on the shared activities we call Christian practices can help us learn from the spirituality of historic Christian faith even while we walk the unfamiliar path that lies ahead, through the surprising realities of each new context.”<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 211.

<sup>442</sup> Bass and Dystra, quoting from “On the Way” in *Christian Practices*, 20.

This chapter has explored the enactment of social hope as a shared Christian practice with an active hope for social transformation seen as a core part of the gospel and the mission of the church – rather than as an optional extra. To return briefly to the framework outlined at the start of this chapter, we conclude that hope for social transformation can and should be seen as a critical social practice within the church today.

A Christian practice needs to embody normative standards that demonstrate excellence in practice and congruity with the best in its tradition. Some ways in which the Christian hope has been damagingly conceptualised have therefore been critically questioned. In the light of the view of a practice as participation in the practices of God, the chapter challenges views that hold human and divine action as opposites, thereby endorsing a passive form of hoping that actually mitigates against human actions for change. Instead it offers a vision of hope-in-action that aligns with divine possibilities for social change in our world and work for their concrete realisation, seeing God's mission as broader than that of the church and supporting wider engagement by the church with other stakeholders around issues of social transformation. This challenges exclusivist attitudes by churches who are unwilling to see or nurture seeds of hope in unexpected places as genuine expressions of God's hope for the world and calls instead for an active, humble yet critical solidarity with other 'allies in hope'. The transformationalist model of the church encourages a servant approach that allows it to acknowledge vulnerability and weakness and not strive always for strength and power. In this way the church can be freed from a triumphalist absolutism that can prevent genuine engagement with the harsh realities of the world around them. Instead it can take steps to reflect more authentically the incarnated suffering God who loves the world and seeks to redeem it.

To explicitly ground our actions of hope in the hopeful mission of a God seen as active in our world today can provide ongoing motivation for many seeking to find meaningful human ways to contribute without being overwhelmed or burnt out by the size of the social issues which we face together as a planet. Practicing this hope can set us free "both from the self driven energy that imagines it has to build God's kingdom all by itself and the despair that supposes it can't do anything until Jesus comes again".<sup>443</sup> This section does not claim that practices of hope alone will achieve social transformation. It does however suggest that this sort of hope is an important and necessary ingredient for Christian engagement in social transformation that can both provide motivation for and contribute towards its effective outworking. In the view of this researcher, Christian hope, correctly articulated, is a shared social practice that can motivate and empower thousands of Christians around the world to enact an active yet humble hope that avoids absolutism and triumphalism and yet has concrete and practical implications towards a better justice and a common good for all in our world.

"Christian practices are not activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us, and through us to the world. . . . In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God."<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*.156.

<sup>444</sup> Bass and Dykstra, *Practicing our Faith*, 10.



## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

“The character of hope is like a baby beginning to walk. It is in the practicing that we learn, we will gain confidence in hope as we enter more deeply into the practices of hope. Hope emerges out of the process of hoping, shaped by practices and nurtured by habits”. Dorothee Solle<sup>445</sup>

This research project has explored the question as to whether a well grounded theology of Christian hope can be a meaningful resource in our world today in relation to the issue of social transformation. It was inspired by the researcher’s own experience of concrete practices of Christian hope-in-action that have, in the opinion of the researcher, contributed towards significant and positive socially transformative impact. These sorts of this-worldly manifestations are no doubt manifold globally but often seem to take a back seat to dominant and populist notions of Christian hope as otherworldly and concerned primarily with a salvation beyond this life to a place beyond this world and usually for a select few. The struggle hope of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and (in the view of this researcher) the hope-centred approach of HOPEHIV are two concrete and historical embodiments of an alternative form of Christian hoping that is primarily this-world orientated and yet inspired by a theology of hope that this research aimed to unpack.

In Chapter 1, this research project set out the current social context within which this research question is explored. It pointed to the increasing loss of hope prevalent in our world today at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century despite a clear need for social transformation in the light of many pressing contemporary concerns. The chapter pointed at the same time to a renewed multi-disciplinary interest in the theme of hope and suggested the need for a meaningful theological contribution to this conversation despite the awareness that within Christianity, the theme of hope has often also been polarized forming a source of internal conflict. It briefly pointed to a number of ‘distorted forms’ of Christian hope suggesting these may be irresponsible and damaging in our world today and highlighted the current crisis in mission that has characterised the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It suggested this offers an opportunity to reframe mission to better reflect authentic Christian hope.

In the light of this wider context, Chapters 2-5 then explored and unpacked the nature of an authentic Christian social hope for this world using the overarching framework of hope as social vision, social virtue and social practice to structure and develop a theological understanding of hope that begins with how we might see the world hopefully and concludes with how we can develop this form of hoping as a Christian social practice in our churches. This structure is common within theological ethics where how we see, what we embody and how we act are all closely interrelated concepts. This paper does not intend to suggest, by using this structure that this movement is always top down – i.e. we start with seeing, then move to being and then finally reach down to doing. In fact, it believes that often, in true liberation theology style, we often start with practice. Our small concrete acts of hope in response to the reality with which we are presented can be what forms our characters and leads us into a new way of seeing the whole. Alternatively, the formation of our character through nurturing social virtues may radiate outwards both into our ways of seeing and into our actions. This project argues for an integrated theology of hope, where the sort of hope we confess as Christians is continuous with the hope we embody and the hope we practice in our world today.

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<sup>445</sup> Quoted by Keshgejian, *Time for Hope*, 189.

This research project has focused primarily on the detailed unpacking of the concept of hope in order to more clearly understand its shape if it is to remain both authentically hope and grounded in the wider Christian tradition. While the hope that has been presented and explored through this project has been a social hope – with specific relevance for this-worldly transformation, detailed implications of what that social transformation might look like have are beyond the scope of this project and some provisional suggestion have merely been pointed to briefly at the end of each chapter. The role of hope has been made concrete through the example of HOPEHIV which will be returned to in this conclusion in the light of the findings. The project left untouched the questions of individual hopes or the need for personal transformation as beyond the scope of this project as well as the complex issue of multiple eschatological theories, while pointing to eschatology as a dimension of all Christian thinking that can potentially inform a vision of our future that has active implications for our present as endorsed (by Moltmann) yet also problematised (by Keshgegian).

This chapter points only briefly below to the conclusions of the preceding chapters since these have been summarised as the research has progressed. It then moves to sum up some core overarching features of the shape of hope that have resonated throughout the vision, virtue, practice framework used in order to draw out the specific *theological* contribution that this research makes and how this differs from the distorted forms of hoping briefly presented at the start of the project. It finally reflects on the initial research question and points to its challenge to the church as a ‘community of hope’ for the future. It ends with a brief consideration of the relevance of the insights of this project to HOPEHIV as a concrete example in a specific time and place and points to a few areas of further research that could be usefully explored further.

**Hope as social vision** – This chapter encouraged Christians to view the world through an ‘optics of hope’ and suggests that the divine vision offers us a hopeful gaze with which to view reality in a way that sees it as laden with possibility. In this way our hope can be grounded in a sense of divine promise that calls forth a human response in a experimental and risky approach. The role of human agency is acknowledged in collaboration with divine action in turning possibilities into reality. The social symbol of the Kingdom of God reframed as the Beloved Community is posited as the authentic object of Christian hope pointing us towards the common good for all in a way that engages in solidarity with the suffering in our world as a ‘hope against hope’ Historical tendencies within Christian hope towards linear thinking, once and for all solutions and transcendent metaphors that endlessly defer concrete realisation and can fail to accept human limits are explored as potential pitfalls. Instead we are encouraged towards a humble vision of risky hope that maintains a primary orientation towards the world and its open future without losing its imaginative ‘surplus’.

**Hope as social virtue** – This chapter unpacked hope as the proper virtue of the not-yet – an ontology of being that accompanies humans on their journey of uncertainty through time. It enables us to live with an openness to the future without retreating into the closed ideologies of optimism or pessimism. It challenges us to avoid either fatalistic despair or controlling presumption for an insecure openness to real possibilities. It points behind our natural hopes to a ‘hope against hope’ that emerges out of an encounter with defeat or failure and unpacks this costly and counter-cultural hope with reference to the symbol of the cross to point us to the critical link between hope and suffering in Christianity. It concludes by encouraging habits that can nurture a more humble hope, grounded in time, space and others as well as connecting to the possibilities of the universe we inhabit through practices of wonder and imagination.

**Hope as social practice** – This chapter urges Christians to see hope as a concrete shared social practice for the church today that is clearly centred on the world in a transformational way and is open to other allies in hope. It points to our human practices as a participation in the practices of the Divine source in our world and endorses an imperative for Christian involvement in a myriad of hopeful social actions in our world today. This enacts a ‘hope shaped’ mission that authentically reflects to the world-transforming shape of hope unpacked in this project. In this way we can seek to avoid the triumphalism, exclusivism and absolutism that has characterised much mission in the past. It points to resistance, reformation and embodiment of alternatives as ways of practicing this form of social hope for and in our world and calls us to be concrete hope-bearers for others in recognition of the choral nature of God’s hope.

## 6.1 Summarising the paradoxical shape of hope

“Hope is to human consciousness what breathing is to the living organism. It is not however wishful optimism – hope is always at its best when it has faced the temptation to despair. Hope acts prophetically – it contests any closed vision of human existence in the name of an ultimate mystery.”<sup>446</sup>

This research concludes that for Christians, hope can indeed be grounded in the storied promise of a God who is committed to history and the redemptive mending of this world and will not abandon either it or us, but will remain faithful. This promise is however not a guarantee but an invitation to us to participate actively with our lives and words in this bigger Divine vision. “The Christian refuses to surrender hope and become cynical about the future of the world because of the belief that it is God’s world.”<sup>447</sup> To have grounds for hope in the world is to have a level of confidence that our human hope will not be in vain. However, hope is a human attribute common to all, regardless of our belief or otherwise in a personal deity. To ground our social hope in a religious tradition can be a genuine way to nurture hope’s deep foundations in our lives and ‘to have faith in the goodness of the unfolding universe of which we are a part’, but we must be aware that no form of hope, religious or otherwise, offers us any guarantee about the future. The virtue of hope requires us to live within the vulnerability and ambiguity that this often engenders as we maintain a level of uncertainty about the future as that which is outside our full control. Nolan and Keshgegian both caution Christians about grounding an ability to hope merely back into a God source when trying to communicate intelligibly to those outside the Christian tradition for whom the symbol of ‘God’ is frequently no longer meaningful. They both offer some ways to articulate this source of our hope inclusively in our times using the wider traditions of spirituality to point towards immanent human experiences that may resonate more appropriately for many people today than the metaphor of a transcendent and benevolent divine deity demanding our attention.

“Hope is so near the heart of the meaning of God that, like love, it can stand for it. At least it is a way in for those for whom the word ‘God’ does not have much meaning any longer. It is that which refuses to allow us to give up or sell out. Such ‘hope against hope’ may not require the word ‘God’ but it may nevertheless be his Word or the word for Him – the indication that his reality is involved.”<sup>448</sup>

<sup>446</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*. 29

<sup>447</sup> John De Gruchy, quoted in Conradie, *Hope for the earth*, 225

<sup>448</sup> John A Robinson. *In the end God*, Harper Collins. 1968, 7. Obvious this is a radical statement with which many may disagree but in our increasingly secular times, the idea of Hope itself as continuing to have transcendent meaning for many non-believers is a valid one

This project suggests that often Christians have simply hoped for the wrong things and then been duly disappointed. For Christian hope to be authentic in the view of the theologians explored in this research, its hopes must align and point towards the critical symbol of the Kingdom of God, unpacked in this project by Nolan as the common good for all creation. Hall reminds us that this symbol must always remain free from being wholly identified with any human system enabling us to act in critical solidarity within history but providing us with a vision that can help us critique our times.<sup>449</sup> This research project concludes that, as many others in this project have argued, authentic Christian hope holds together significant paradoxical tensions which if not carefully balanced can lead to distortions in Christian hope that then become evident precisely in the social impact of such hope. Three of the creative tensions that have been unpacked more fully in the project are briefly summarised below but of course could all benefit from further specific research:

- 1) A Hope against Hope - the dialectic of Cross and Resurrection
- 2) An Incarnational Hope - the dialectic of Immanence and Transcendence
- 3) Hope as the Mode of Possibility - avoiding optimistic certainty or pessimistic despair

### 1) A 'hope against hope' –the dialectic of Cross and Resurrection

“God turns towards the very places from which humans tend to turn away.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>450</sup>

In the cross, we meet the limits of all human being and doing. A terrible hopelessness in the disciples points to a deep meaninglessness that has to be understood and embraced first before any true meaning of resurrection can emerge. The act of ‘hoping against hope’ that this research suggests is essential to Christian hope emerges from genuine struggles with despair<sup>451</sup> and according to the theologians of hope explored in this project such as Moltmann and Hall in particular it cannot avoid this dialectic without falling into a cheap or false hope. Christian hope is not merely or even predominantly an individualised post-death hope for another world, but it is a post-death hope in that it must take seriously the defeats and little deaths which humans suffer daily in our world. This research claims that genuine words of resurrection can only emerge from a critical solidarity with the pain of those who suffer today under an unacceptable present. In a continent where mission can be characterised by an arrogant tendency to see ‘us’ as bringers of God’s hope to ‘them’, the idea of hope as already present in all communities through the existing presence of the suffering God challenges this. Instead it calls Christians to be situated alongside the God of hope in solidarity with the suffering of others and to participate in careful listening, watching and working towards redemptive visions.<sup>452</sup> Christians can seek to leapfrog over experiences of suffering and failure in our world to the desired experiences of resurrection and new life. Practicing a theology of costly hope refuses to allow this.

“Hope shows its endurance by occupying the most hopeless point in our particular worlds. It moves in solidarity with all those furthest from hope, its special companions are the casualties in the dominant success story of any given culture.”<sup>453</sup>

<sup>449</sup> Hall is clear that the Kingdom is clearly incompatible with many concrete things e.g. tyranny, gross economic disparity, degradation of earth and human beings because of skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, violence, war, slavery, ethnic cleansing, indifference to those in need, personal greed and acquisitiveness – without us having to define in full its exact form. *Confessing*, 462.

<sup>450</sup> Quoted in Walls and Ross (ed). *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008, 71.

<sup>451</sup> While Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Job may never be the most popular books in the Bible, their presence points to this reality and we forget their deep insights into the unanswerable human realities of despair at our peril.

<sup>452</sup> Botman, *Hope as the Coming Reign*. 76.

<sup>453</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 219.

Moltmann and Hall call us back to a dialectic approach to the cross and resurrection that challenges popular distortions of religious triumphalism and ‘cheap’ hope. Both interestingly speak into a modern Western context to remind those cultures of the cross which is so quick to be denied. Ironically in the context where I work on the suffering continent of Africa, the reverse can apply. People and communities live daily with the reality of the failures, powerlessness and defeats of the cross in their midst. They can need reminding of the possibility of the new resurrection life of a hope against hope beyond the experienced tyranny of the suffering present that to be able to believe that suffering will not have the last word. An authentic hope can help people not to fall prey to the claims of prosperity gospel-mongers who merely promise an endlessly deferred hope in a world yet to come as an escapist sedative or a seductive utopia of affluence for a chosen few. The careful maintaining of this dialectic that does not collapse into triumphalist realised eschatology on the one hand or passive fatalism and ever-deferred fulfilment on the other is critical for our forms of social hoping for our world to remain grounded in the Crucified and Risen God of the best of our Christian tradition.

## **2) An Incarnational Hope - the dialectic of Immanence and Transcendence**

Moltmann asks, ‘How are progress and resurrection related? How can the transcendent hope of God be joined with the immanent hopes of men and women’<sup>454</sup> The relationship between immanence and transcendence and the forms of hoping that bear these names seems to be at the heart of many modern theological articulations of hope and this project does not claim to offer any solution to its complexity. All the theologians explored in this research project have engaged in different ways with the tensions between these forms of hoping. Some, like Pieper use words such as natural and fundamental, others use ultimate and proximate hopes, others talk about a form of horizontal transcendence. Most theologians presented in this research however are united by a desire to maintain this dialectical tension in some sort of meaningful way and to highlight to the role that religion can play in pointing us towards symbols of transcendence as representations of unknowable and uncontrollable mystery that point beyond ourselves and the horizons that we can see. At the same time, all equally maintain a strong this-worldly incarnational approach to hope that has concrete and primary implications for the here and now. This raises the question of the horizon of our Christian hope that has been most strongly problematised in this research by Flora Keshgegian as a representative of wider feminist thought on this topic. The tendency of much religious hope often seems to be to defer fulfilment or realisation into another world or dimension with promises of eternal life functioning to resolve the ambiguities of the existing present. While this is understandable, it can unwittingly reduce the ability that religion has to speak meaningfully into the present time and needs acknowledgement and continual vigilance. Conradie and Hall amongst others point to the need to maintain the dialectic of the ‘already but not yet’ where the Kingdom has clear social content in relation to this world but simultaneously points in hope towards the possibility of horizons beyond all human limits (e.g. death).

Transcendence has often been spiritualised to point to ‘world-transcending’ approaches that can without care easily collapse into ‘world-denying’ attitudes at the expense of the concerns of this present world. However the reduction of forms of hope to purely materialist or immanent hopes has also seemed equally doomed to distortion or failure e.g. the myth of progress and the collapse of Marxist ideology. The quality of

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<sup>454</sup> Moltmann, *Progress and Abyss*, 19. Moltmann encourages us to find God in the concrete and yet at the same time to know that everything concrete is transcended by God, *On Human Being*, 45.

hope and the surplus that comes with it to push beyond all horizons that we can imagine, point us towards hope itself as an inherently transcending phenomenon. Some theologians give a strong emphasis to the need for transcendence not to be lost in the discussion on hope.<sup>455</sup> Hall sees the reign of god as a reality that is already inaugurated and incarnated. He refuses to internalise or spiritualise the kingdom (as transcendent visions can tend towards) to avoid its powerful social and political overtones. But he also warns us that we need to avoid reducing it to merely a political system (like Marxism) and that we must keep it free to be a 'mysterious vantage point of truth, justice and courage from which every human system and regime may be viewed and assessed.'<sup>456</sup> Nevertheless feminist theologians like Keshgegian remind us to be wary of allowing the transcendent dimension to dominate or take priority over the immanent side of hope. Even within her reconceptualisation of transcendence<sup>457</sup>, she still points to our human need to honour the complexity of life that transcends our own control and individuality, in acts of awe and wonder at the mystery of life and our ability to imaginatively transcend the conditions of our present in our movements for social transformation in the present in order that our worldly housekeeping may remain strong.

Christianity has often tended to go quickly to the transcendent dimension of hope in its analysis, maybe because we still perceive God to be fundamentally transcendent and religion as mainly concerned with the things of the soul or spirit. This can lead to a damaging over-emphasis on transcendent realities e.g. life after death as a way of countering what we perceive to be merely immanent visions in our secular world. However in doing this, a sense of incarnational hope can be lost in a way that is at odds with the lived reality of the person of Jesus and Christian claims about his embodiment of the divine in our world. To be authentic to the vision of hope held by Jesus and in Jesus, we need to reconceptualise transcendence in a world-orientated way that avoids historical dualisms of world and spirit, divine and human. 'The incarnational character of Christian hope becomes a constant appeal for its realisation in the here and now. It differs from theoretical speculations because it always conveys a clear imperative to be put into practice.'<sup>458</sup>

### 3) Embodying the Mode of Possibility - Avoiding Presumption or Despair

Pieper's analysis of hope as well as Moltmann's insistence on the openness to the new of the future remind us that hope is the proper virtue of our human journey of uncertainty within time and space. We live amidst many closed ideologies that offer seeming escapes from the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty of our lives within time. The virtue of hope offers an alternative perspective as a humble yet visionary way of inhabiting time authentically, in recognition of all the uncertainties that this brings without falling into the closed ideologies of either optimism or pessimism. It looks for and works towards the possibilities of the good in the realities with which we are presented. Christians, no less than any others however, can hold to no absolutes about the future and in fact as Pieper warns us must resist the 'vices' of both presumption and fundamental despair in favour of the path of hope which remains open to the possibilities of the present.

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<sup>455</sup> E.g. Conradie and Bauckham both highlight it as one of the most important characteristics. Tillich talks of the bond between transcendent and immanent utopias- a God not involved in historical events or a Kingdom that is mere historical progress both fail us. Moltmann, *On Human Being*, 107 calls for a 'transcendence that humanizes' and an immanence that does not allow either tyranny or resignation recognising that Christianity often escapes into a distorted form of transcendence that either deifies humans or one that alienates him/her and this comes closest to the personal perspective of the researcher. This area needs further research in my view.

<sup>456</sup> Hall, *Confessing*, 461.

<sup>457</sup> Keshgegian draws on the theology of immanence of Sharon Welch here found in more detail in *A feminist ethic of risk*, 153-190.

<sup>458</sup> Hryniewicz, *Challenge of our Hope*. 10. This book offers an excellent exploration of the importance of Christian hope in our pluralistic world from an Orthodox perspective pointing, like Schumacher also does, to its paradox as both god given gift and human task.

This virtue enables us to challenge fatalistic pessimistic attitudes and actions common in our world today especially in traditional or pre-modern communities such as those in many parts of Africa. However it equally encourages us to challenge controlling myths of progress that enforce optimism as ideology as Hall castigates the new world for doing. The virtue of Hope instead allows us to engage critically with the reality of human despair and failure in a way that the ideology of optimism often seeks to repress. Nevertheless, unlike pessimism, it seeks out genuine signs of new possibility that we can work towards to encourage responsible human action that is open to alternative social ways of seeing, being and doing in the world that can lead to a better good for all. Hope cannot provide us any guarantees or certainties and still remain hope for it is a way of living in risk that allows us to avoid the closed ideologies that seek instead to control the future rather than remaining open to it. 'However confident and courageous hope might be, it has to move forwards without any controlling vision of what is to come... It is presumptuous to want too much light too soon – a failure in patience... Hope offers no detailed knowledge of the future but it imagines the future out of the present experience of what is already given.'<sup>459</sup>

### **Avoiding Distorted Hope**

This project set out three suggested types of distorted Christian hope at its start. Below, it briefly returns to these to see if the approach outlined in this project can avoid the distortions into which it suggested they fall.

#### **Distortion 1: Souls in transit.**

The first common distortion of hope was one which rejects significant involvement or engagement in the world and cultivates instead an inner spiritual journey with God as the true reality and in this way splits hope and history. The approach researched here rejects the dualism inherent in a soul/body split that this approach to hope requires and instead offers a radically incarnational hope that is social in its very construction of both human and Christian identity. It reframes the central notion of what salvation means for us by drawing on the roots of the Christian tradition in ways that make the holding to a form of individualised and narrow world renouncing salvation for the next life, increasingly unconvincing in the light of the clear Christian tradition of worldly hope. The passive fatalism that this sort of distorted hope often merely endorses is rejected in favour of a holistic approach to human and divine action that calls us to be active improvisory participants in God's purposeful work towards a redemptive renewal of the world in the name of the common good but without making the arrogant claims that of ourselves we are able to control and perfect it.

#### **Distortion 2: Myth of Progress.**

The second distortion of hope engages with the world but tends to collapse any distinction between meaning and history, leading us to a belief that our hopes can be progressively realised within history by the historical process itself. This conflates hope with a sense of mere optimism that can easily blind us to the darker side of history's victims and failures or even encourage us to repress these experiences in favour of a cheap hope. Instead the approach researched maintains a clear dialectic with despair and suffering through the symbol of the cross. It also ensures that the Kingdom remains a critical symbol and is never conflated merely with a specific human system or fully realised by our efforts – but always stands beyond our partial realisations. It seeks to keep the openness of hope alive and refuse to reduce it to a controlling or absolutist vision of control by allowing the transcending nature of hope to continue to arise and offer something new.

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<sup>459</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 54.

### Distortion 3: Exclusive Blueprint Hope

The third distortion of hope tends to collapse hope back into faith, offering a particular way of socially transforming the world exclusively for those who become Christians. This is usually in line with a form of conservative morality which stands in confrontation to other efforts for social transformation. It suggests that those who believe in the God of Jesus have a special blueprint for acts of social change that in reality tends to often reduce into issues of personal morality and individual transformation. Instead the approach of this research argues that Christian hope should be articulated in solidarity with wider human hopes and seeks to take an inclusive approach towards other sources of hope for social transformation as fellow travellers. It warns us to be wary of the absolutism and triumphalism that has characterised so much of church mission and hope with its blueprints for action<sup>460</sup> and instead for the church to see itself more humbly and vulnerably as only one of the ways in which God may work for social change in the world in critical solidarity with many other allies in hope.

## 6.2 Practising hope theologically

“Hope is where the transformation begins; without it, a society cannot take its first steps toward reconstructing its self-identity as a society of tolerance and coexistence.”<sup>461</sup>

It is the contention of this research project that engaging in efforts for social transformation requires a certain kind of hope within history. This project has aimed to demonstrate that the Christian tradition can offer significant theological resources towards inspiring that hope for our world in a way that can add a useful contribution towards the wider debate on hope and also provide motivation and grounding for Christians from within their tradition for a more active world engagement and a renewed social hope as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Below, three explicitly *theological* symbols are highlighted which this research has pointed to,

**The Kingdom of God**– This offers Christians a symbol from within their tradition that points towards a global shared vision of the future common good. Visions of the future, especially religious ones, must always be alert to the danger of becoming a controlling ideology, but it seems that to be inspired and motivated towards actions for social transformation at a deep level, we continue to need symbols that can help us to envisage and articulate a vision of what might be possible. This symbol stands beyond all human systems or manifestations – enabling it to act critically in our midst. Metaphors of royalty and kingdoms often fail to resonate today, and a more appropriate metaphor today might be the Beloved Community. Many individuals struggle to maintain a sense of social hope and retreat into merely privatised hopes. Instead of encouraging this trend, Christianity can instead use rich symbols such as this from deep within their traditions to provide a concrete way for social hopes for history to be re-nurtured within communities of shared social practice. Moltmann encourages us to unashamedly reclaim a tradition of concrete utopian thinking as indispensable for the freedom and humanity of mankind.<sup>462</sup>

<sup>460</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, 77 suggests that Biblical hope dreams large dreams about the powerful purposes of God but that they are not designs, blueprints or programs and to make them such is to deny God’s free governance over the future.

<sup>461</sup> Gobodo-Madikizela P *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2003, 126.

<sup>462</sup> Moltmann, *On Human Being*, 43. These concrete utopias push us beyond the real prospects of success but without losing touch with the reality of the present. He warns us not to allow the kingdom of God to merely become a symbol for the developments and progress of mankind or to escape into an otherworldly kingdom but to always and ever offer an ‘alternative’ that maintains a creative tension between the possible and the impossible.



**The Cross and Resurrection** – This symbol points Christians to the most fundamental dimension of the hope they hold. It points to the dialectical or paradoxical nature of hope in a way grounded in both story and symbol and reminds us that hope often emerges most strongly out of suffering and limit situations as a ‘hope against hope’ that can wrestle with despair. It is only this costly hope that can survive the death of our modern optimism and progress myths and help arrest a backlash into nihilistic despair. This sort of hope enables us to look honestly at the places of genuine suffering and darkness in our world as places from which new possibilities and life can emerge. It challenges attitudes of both despair and presumption and instead points to the uncertain path of hope in time as one that must be lived within the paradox of suffering.

**The Incarnation** – The powerful symbol of an incarnated God who is a co-sufferer within our world has powerful implications for our ability to hope for good things for our world. It aligns us with the redemptive purposes of a loving God who engages with and is committed in love to our world and in whose mission we can be active participants practising hope in action. The incarnation can be seen as an outworking of the divine promise to journey with humans into history in a way that brings liberation. It offers a way for us to avoid dualistic approaches that split world and spirit, life and post life, divine and human action and calls us to be hands and feet enacting the purposes of a loving God of hope within the limits of the realities we find.

### 6.3 A challenge to the Church as a community of hope

“Christian hope is neither promethean nor quietist. It neither attempts what can only come from God nor neglects what is humanely possible. Sustained by the hope of everything from God, it attempts what is possible within the limits of each present. We exercise our responsibility within its properly human limits and instead of aspiring disastrously to total control, we trust God.”<sup>463</sup>

This project started its research in the light of the challenge to the contemporary Christian church by theologians of hope such as Moltmann, Nolan and Hall to reclaim its tradition of worldly hoping and embody a historical hope. It suggests that in the context of our human times where social hope is dwindling, there is a genuine opportunity for the reclaiming of an authentic form of Christian hope that could speak powerfully and meaningfully into our current social context – but that the shape of that hope needed careful construction if it was not merely to fall into the distortions of a cheap hopefulness. It argued that the Christian tradition provided significant resources that could inspire and motivate Christians towards a this-worldly hoping and it has been this form of hope that has been unpacked and analysed in this research.

This research project concludes that the form of hope presented in this project offers the church a potentially significant role in our times as a community of people on the move through time in social hope with socially subversive power to resist, reform and imagine and embody alternatives to the realities with which we are confronted in the name of what could be, grounded in the divine source of endless possibility.<sup>464</sup> Its explorations of theologies of hope have pointed most strongly towards the model of church typically termed ‘transformationalist’ where the church defines itself as a servant with a primary orientation towards the world. This reflects an incarnational God’s abiding and loving commitment to and solidarity with the world but also a critical gaze on the structures and actions within it that continue to oppress and damage our lived reality as

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<sup>463</sup> Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*, 43.

<sup>464</sup> This phrase is attributed to Søren Kierkegaard. See Gouwens, *Kierkegaard*, 50.

human and non-human creation. In this way the church is freed for a hope-bearing prophetic servanthood not through escapist, abstract or world-renouncing utopian schemes, but through concrete participation in the dark realities in our world to embody the core symbols of Christian hope in meaningful and contemporary ways in our world. It is called to witness in both word and deed to an incarnational divine presence that requires our human hands to create new possibilities with a vision of the beloved community that endlessly seeks the common good for all pointing us towards better ways of living together, made concrete in our particular time and place. Most critically, the symbol of cross and resurrection enables us to be unafraid to enter in solidarity to the darkest places of our world in the confidence that Gods presence is already there generating new possibilities and signs of life for those whose hope may be worn thin. "Hope must gently insist that no-one be left out of the unending human search for our common good."<sup>465</sup>

If the church is to represent the authentic hope of its founder and tradition of worldly hope as explored in this research, it will however often need to be better at acknowledging failure, defeat and despair as significant yet often repressed human realities of our times. It will need to be able to dialogue with these in an authentic way that does not reject them in the name of a too quickly cheerful trite 'hopefulness' and yet is able to seek for and nurture all signs of new and resurrection life. The church, if it is to live in authentic Christian hope, will need to give up its tendencies to absolutism in its credal propositions, its endless forms of exclusivity in its hope that often enforce controlling ideologies of salvation for its followers and its presumptive certainties about what is yet to come. It will have to choose to journey in solidarity with the rest of the human race into an unknown future that we cannot control but towards which we can contribute as part of a greater whole. It will have to seek to bridge the dualisms of world and spirit, body and soul, hope and history and reinterpret its religious metaphors of transcendence, salvation and sin in ways that speak meaningfully into a world that has grown sceptical of their relevance to life. It will be called to embody hope not predominantly with words but as a 'world shaping energy' in concrete acts of social hope inspired and motivated by the divine Source of hope, enabling us to avoid the self driven energy that believes it has to solve everything but also eschewing the self fulfilling despair that says we can do nothing. Instead it will seek in all times and all places to make a hopeful concrete contribution as part of the bigger whole of which the church is a part. In this way our actions will become words of hope and our words will reflect and overflow from our actions.

"The challenge however remains for the church to embody and appropriate its identity as a transformative agent in society...to be humbly prophetic in the current challenging times. Both dialogue and engagement with the rest of the civil society become crucial... It may require the establishment of new partnerships, which will draw in different sectors of society and which will in turn bring their own challenges. Partnerships which will call on the church not only to have a distinct conception of her identity as the Body of Christ, but also to abandon the dualistic separation between the secular and the sacred that keeps it from being open to wider dialogue beyond the confines of theology."<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 214.

<sup>466</sup> Du Toit, "Development", 269.

#### 6.4 HOPEHIV – A concrete example of hope for our times

“We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.” Martin Luther King Jnr<sup>467</sup>

I consider HOPEHIV to be a small yet concrete example of the principle of ‘*hope in action*’ explored in this research. It manifests this ‘hope shaped mission’ both in the West by challenging the sense of resigned apathy that many feel in relation to Africa and the possibilities of genuine change there by encouraging them to use their talents to generate needed resources and to connect into concrete stories of real social change for the better. At the same time, it seeks to journey alongside those on the African continent whose lack of resources often lead to a survival-based fatalism in the present where the weakest bear the brunt of scarcity. This hope is taken explicitly into suffering social contexts where large numbers of orphaned children are becoming accepted outsiders in ways contrary to traditional African practices of extended family care and as a result are often socially excluded from the most basic needs of life. It seeks to reinforce the core principle of the hope explored above that insists that no-one is to be left out of our search for the common good and in this spirit offers a different way of seeing, being and doing for those marginalised in their societies. Much development aid has failed to be effective longer term possibly because of its tendency to ‘import hope’ in Western-sized packets, ignoring the wealth of local knowledge and motivation stored and needing hope-filled nurture within communities. HOPEHIV seeks to avoid this by funding local initiatives and pushing back responsibility for social change to the local context where it can be concretely situated within wider norms and traditions embraced and endorsed as good by the communities themselves.

HOPEHIV draws deep roots from the tradition of Christian hope from which the organisation emerged and which for many of its staff and stakeholders continues to be a significant motivation today. Nevertheless it seeks at all times to embody both internally and externally an inclusive vision of hope-within-history that those who stand outside the Christian tradition can fully endorse. It does not seek to find hope only in religious organisations but works across partners of all faiths or none as genuine allies in a world transforming hope. In this the belief that many Christians involved with HOPEHIV hold to is that ‘God’s hope is embodied where God’s purposes are done’ is lived out in a practical and open way.

**VISION:** HOPEHIV’s vision is to enable orphaned and vulnerable children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa to develop their full potential and build foundations for the future. It seeks to embody a way of seeing them that reflects the paradoxical nature of hope shown in previous chapters, by engaging explicitly with suffering places in our world and with those often depicted merely as passive and helpless victims in new ways by using the lens of possibility and potential as an alternative and imaginative paradigm to nurture and equip them and those around them as agents of social change and in time, hope-bearers for others. HOPEHIV seeks to encourage communities towards a hopeful social vision where the current concrete challenges faced by orphans are not seen as immutable and where communities are invited to seek out new opportunities for change in search of a common good for all and not just the strong. This approach does not seek to deny the reality of the challenges orphans will always face, but looks always for a hopeful response to be made by those closest to the children themselves, developing a sense of hope in typically fatalistic communities that concrete social change is possible and that they can be an active part of this

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<sup>467</sup> King Jnr, Martin. L. *The words of Martin Luther King Jnr*. NY: Newmarket Press. 2008:25.

change. In this way the significant fatalism and natural despair that often exists in relation to orphans in Africa (that's just how it is) by pointing people towards the possibilities of real historical change for the better for the most marginalised. One of HOPEHIV's core principles is an openness to innovation, to being surprised by our partners and the new ideas they may try. In this way, we seek to reflect a hope that is open to the new, and does not impose a pre-determined controlling vision onto others. Instead it seeks to journey together with those who suffer, listening to them as they travel and responding together to emerging events.

**VIRTUE:** HOPEHIV's approach is to identify local partners and communities who have visions of alternative social possibility and to assist them to nurture and develop the models and responses that will work in the concrete time and place within which they are situated. This avoids a controlling 'top down' vision being imposed from outside that can easily harden into fixed ideology and instead take risks to seeks out existing seeds of hope within the suffering situation that can participate in God's existing actions therein. It recognises local communities as having dreams and assets that need to be listened and then responded to in order to generate hope from below rather than importing 'once and for all' solutions from outside.

HOPEHIV aims to embody the virtue of hope in its 'way of being' as an organisation in its solidarity with both its beneficiaries and its local partners. Many donor organisations from the West operate with a high level of control and can easily start to make presumptions about the future that are then held up as absolute standards by which actual projects succeed or fail. HOPEHIV seeks to relinquish this kind of absolute control, and remain open to the process of dialogue, recognising that this may mean that we will be disappointed at times when hoped-for results do not materialise but still seeking an ethic of risk and improvisation in line with our emphasis on innovation. This requires accepting a level of failure and despair as an inevitable part of the road of hope, and seeking to listen and learn from it rather than merely rejecting it. Our partners often point to the ongoing repression of failure in development by funders in our times that mitigates against honest dialogue and cultivates unreal expectations on all sides leading to a cheap hope.

HOPEHIV seeks to avoid 'one size fits all' generic solutions and to remain aware of the concrete time and place within which meaningful responses of hope are situated by physically spending quality time with communities and beneficiaries and embodying inter-relation with our partners – listening and dialoguing honestly with their challenges and then seeking a common hope-in-action together as equal contributors.

**PRACTICE:** HOPEHIV seeks to practice hope and nurture the practice of hope in others by engaging in programs that see people as the most important social resource available and by explicitly interconnecting individual and social goods at community level. This asks people to be willing to help each other in concrete situations as part of wider human flourishing as a whole, endorsing a community centred approach to human responses where we believe that together we are stronger. This involves an ethic of risk because it relies on the goodwill of others to actively contribute towards a better world in mutual responsibility. Actions such as resistance, reformation and imagining alternatives concretize how HOPEHIV's work enacts hope as practice.

**Resistance** to common but damaging socio-cultural practices in relation to orphans is often the first step that communities mobilise around e.g. early marriages, domestic servanthood, lack of education etc. Individual champions of hope spotted by HOPEHIV have often responded to a seen injustice in the present and developed a vision for possible social change emerging from that resistance to the current reality. The first step in the partnership therefore often involves some sort of basic sensitization - equipping those affected to

find a voice and share their pain within communities leading to a wider challenge of and resistance to current realities that an initial lone voice may have been the first to spark but that cannot be effected alone.

**Reformation** often emerges longer term out of initial resistance, driving change over a period of time, mobilising political will and allowing communities to come up with locally owned solutions in order to reform current practices so that they no longer deprive the neediest. This process could take significant time as on a wider level it was also encouraging communities to think hopefully, rather than merely taking fatalistic attitudes to orphans which was initially common i.e. if I am an orphan, I will not be able to go to school. Helping communities to see what local action they can take to change these socially-constructed realities to bring about the changes they feel will work takes time but in the process, hope for what small human actions can achieve is generated, countering a dependency that overseas aid has perpetuated.

**Embodying alternative models of action** at community level so others can look and learn has been found to be a core part of generating hope over our last 10 years of practice as HOPEHIV and one that emerged organically as a seeming by-product of successful programs. This often changes ways of seeing first, leading to new ways of being and then in time, alternative orphan practices emerge<sup>468</sup>. Communities that learn how to embody hope in collaboration with those who suffer in their midst then continue to be empowered with an active hope to meet ongoing challenges that goes far beyond their initial relationship with HOPEHIV and enable them in time to become hope-bearers to other local communities who are still trapped in fatalism. Facilitating knowledge exchange visits between partners are one of the informal ways which HOPEHIV enables this to take place in a concrete way that has borne amazing results.

HOPEHIV's long term aim is to stimulate sustainable ways of acting hopefully by African communities trapped by fatalistic ways of thinking about orphans, without resorting to developmental tendencies to control programs from the top down. These often import hope in from outside in often inappropriate ways with Western style orphanages, big capital builds or high cost technological projects which often crush or undermine smaller indigenous hope-generating narratives already at work within the situation itself. HOPEHIV feels that it has succeeded when local communities say 'we helped our orphans ourselves', and can see and respond hopefully themselves in the future to ongoing difficult situations that they will often continue to face with regard to orphaned children.

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<sup>468</sup> E.g. a child rights club program, where communities first listen to children's experiences of abuse and learn to see orphans differently, allows this unacceptable present to instigate changes over time in how communities treat and behave with regard to children. This change in seeing filters down into concrete long term actions e.g. teachers choosing not to use corporal punishment. The emergence of clubs that began by sensitizing orphans themselves has now led to a much wider community driven process with functioning structures for handling child abuse locally, monitored by children as active participants and sustained as hopeful responses. Welch points to an epistemology of solidarity that affirms the context's particularity & calls us to accountability, *Ethic of Risk*, 139

## Lessons learned for my work at HOPEHIV

This research has encouraged me to take certain things back into my work with HOPEHIV. It has suggested that when we encounter failures/limits or defeats, we must be careful not to repress or penalise these realities. Even when working in a suffering context, it can still be easy to run from or avoid things that seem to not be working, to be failing or have reached their limits. Instead a theology of hope can help us to acknowledge these 'cross' moments in painful solidarity with others and not be too quick to walk away until it has been seen whether new life can emerge from those limit moments. However at the same time, an end or death in one place can also enable new possibility to emerge elsewhere and there is a need for funders and partners to also accept finitude and loss within what we do as a part and parcel of our shared life.

As a Western donor, HOPEHIV must be especially wary of exporting hope as a 'commodity' from the outside and unwittingly creating dependency on forms of false hope by asking people to buy into our often inaccurate vision of hope for them. Instead we must seek out emerging visions of hope from within the communities themselves and then nurture it actively and appropriately. These manifestations of hope form a critical part of social transformation and can be nurtured in ways which can help people's imagination for possible change to be nurtured and thereby generate an ongoing matrix for social changes. Although strategic approaches are of course important, we must remain ever cautious of entering communities with 'controlling visions' and instead should stay open to the new, to being surprised or to things taking a different course that might be expected. Sustainable social change can be slow to start as there is a need to let people voice their pain first. Challenging the present is often the first step towards imagining differently – but this can take time.

HOPEHIV, like many development organisations, can fall prey to the desire to seek overarching "once and for all" solutions. Keshgegian's critique encourages me to seek smaller hope generating narratives that may often emerge out of hopeful actions on the part of the victims and those who seem to be powerless as the people with whom God often stands than in the places of success and power. A hope-based approach to transformation seeks to nurture ongoing small scale responses that will endure and adapt over time, empowering many of the most vulnerable to make a social contribution that can announce and embody alternative realities amidst existing fatalism and avoid the 'cheap hope' of overly grand and unreal claims.

Finally this research has taught me that HOPEHIV can only make a small contribution to the huge scale and complexity of our deeply rooted social problems. Remaining grounded in the divine source of all hope can free those whose Christian faith undergirds their journey from the self driven energy that tells us that we must achieve everything ourselves and can lead to activist burnout for all involved in issues of social change and human suffering. A hope that we can make a meaningful and concrete contribution towards change for the better can help counter the despair and apathy that can result when things fail. Maintaining a sense of balance between divine and human action can help Christians stay connected to the source of their hope in order for their efforts in this work of social transformation to remain alive and responsive, nurturing a resilient hope that can weather inevitable disappointments and yet continue to seek out signs of new life.

## 6.5 Answering the Research Question

This research project used a theological lens to explore whether there was a specific tradition of Christian hope that could contribute towards human efforts for ongoing social transformation within our world today. It concludes that there is a significant and credible reservoir of theological hope for transformation within our world grounded deeply within the wider and ecumenical Christian tradition, that can orientate and inspire our ways of seeing, being and acting in hope with implications for social transformation today. It claims that an authentic re-claiming of this Christian tradition of worldly hope offers a timely social asset for many in our world for whom the Christian narrative continues to be meaningful and is worthy of nurture in our current times which are characterised by a dwindling social hope. This project therefore refutes claims from outside Christianity that genuine Christian hope is an inevitable liability in relation to social improvement. Nevertheless it acknowledges that this hope easily becomes distorted and requires a humble vigilance that remains open to a critical dialogue with other allies in hope. Many popular narratives of Christian hope often bear little resemblance to the form of hoping that this project has unpacked. The need for theologians and church leaders to construct resilient, social forms of costly and prophetic hoping in the visions presented, the virtues nurtured and the practices endorsed and enacted that draw on respected theological symbols such as the incarnation, the cross and resurrection and the vision of the beloved community is urgent. An education in an ethic of worldly hope seems, in these socially challenging times, to be an important task to which this research has contributed by delineating the shape of Christian hope as vision, virtue and practice.

Christian hope can help us imagine alternative social possibilities towards which we can work as humans in partnership with the divine and by which we can be inspired, cultivating attitudes of costly hopefulness that maintain an openness to the uncertainties and ambiguities of our existence and are embodied in concrete hopeful practices in our world. These can help us to rethink mission today seeing churches as sites of shared social hopeful practices amidst many 'engines of despair'. But to be freed to be hope bearers in our world, Christians and churches may need to relinquish many of their tendencies towards control, certainty and absolutism to enter into the realities of a despairing world with its victims, defeats and failures. In this way, a theology of hope presents a challenge to the churches to embody a costly hope that can engage meaningfully with the social despair of our times. This can be seen as not a crisis but an opportunity which respects the unique identity of the church and the particularity of the Christian story, but also engages relevantly and inclusively in critical solidarity with other allies of hope to resist, reform and imagine concrete alternatives in and for our world today.

"The idea that hope alone will transform the world and action undertaken in that kind of naivete is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope in the struggle to improve the world – as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone or a purely scientific approach is a frivolous illusion...the essential thing is this, that hope as an ontological need demands an anchoring in practice. Hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness. That is why there is no hope in sheer hopefulness. The hoped for is not attained by dint of raw hoping. Just to hope is to hope in vain. My hope is necessary but it is not enough. Alone it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly...we need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water."<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 2.

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