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Theological Studies
72 (2011)

• HOPE AND THE CHURCH: A TRILOGY •

How can Christian hope transform ecclesial life and in turn illumine contemporary culture? The articles by Richard Lennan and Dominic Doyle address this question from different perspectives. Lennan develops and spells out the implications of an ecclesiology based on the church as a sacrament of hope. Doyle examines the nature of hope with particular attention to Aquinas's view, finding resources therein to reflect critically about the clergy sexual abuse crisis, the "trauma of modernity," and contemporary ecclesiology's focus on the local church. Responding to these articles, James McEvoy reflects on their authors' views of hope in order to address an issue raised by Doyle. Earlier versions of Lennan's and Doyle's articles were presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America at a session entitled "Hope: The Church's Prophetic Challenge."

THE CHURCH AS A SACRAMENT OF HOPE

RICHARD LENNAN

HOPE" AND "THE CHURCH" have not been regular companions of late. In the wake of the ongoing tragedy that is the clergy sexual abuse crisis, it is likely that the two have appeared in the same sentence only when the preposition connecting them was "for"—"Can there be hope *for* the church?" For a myriad of people, Catholics no less than members of the wider civic and ecclesial communities, the rupturing of trust constitutive of the abuse crisis has had a profoundly deleterious impact on the church's capacity to represent "good news." The generosity and compassion of individual Christians might continue to shine, but the "institution" and those perceived as its *nomenklatura* remain enshrouded in suspicion. In this context, what value can there be in referring to the church in relation to hope, particularly in describing the church as a "sacrament of hope"?

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The contention of this article is that the invocation of hope, far from applying a benign veneer to the church, a veneer behind which injustices remain unaddressed and dysfunctional practices continue, challenges all the members of the church to radical discipleship. Since hope is an element of the church's apostolic mandate (1Pt 3:15), the ongoing appropriation of hope can help refocus the church's evangelical purpose and shape its presence in the world. Claiming the church as a "sacrament of hope" will not, of course, necessarily open the way for popular approbation of the church, but a church whose members live the implications of being such a sacrament might well be good news, even for those who no longer expect integrity from the church.

In every age of the church's life, the call to embody hope has been addressed to a flawed people. That fact does not license mediocrity, much less the criminality that precipitated the abuse crisis, but it does remind us that living as people of hope, living as people called to holiness, cannot be reserved for a time when we will have accomplished some mythical perfection. Holiness in the church is always paradoxical: it is the holiness of those who know their sinfulness and need for conversion.

Highlighting the link between hope and holiness does not mean that the former promotes an insipid piety. Rather, as I will argue, hope fuels the awareness of our need for conversion while also encouraging us to continue on the path of discipleship. To the degree that the abuse crisis reveals failures to allow our common call to discipleship to shape relationships within the church, particularly the exercise of leadership, the collective reappropriation of hope can contribute to the renewal of the ecclesial communion for the sake of our shared mission.

As for the notion of the church as a "sacrament of hope," it can claim the Second Vatican Council as both its foundation and inspiration. Indeed, the council not only begins its detailed analysis of the church with the concept of sacrament, but it also, and most famously, showcases hope as one of the two elements constitutive of the church's relationship with, and mission within, the wider world.[1] In addition, the council, although not employing the term "sacrament of hope," speaks explicitly of the church's relation to hope. It does so, significantly, in considering all the baptized, not just the members of the hierarchy, as sharers in Christ's prophetic office.

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[1] *Lumen gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, begins with the description of the church as "a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity"; the opening phrase of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, identifies the followers of Christ as sharing in the "joys and hopes" of all people. All references to the documents of Vatican II come from Norman Tanner (ed.) *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2 (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990).

In highlighting the particular role of the laity in regard to hope, the council employs the exterior and interior orientations normally applied to sacramentality:

> The laity show that they are children of the promise if strong in faith and hope they make full use of the present moment. . . . This hope, however, is not to be hidden in the depths of their hearts. It has to be expressed through the structures of secular life, through their continual conversion and their struggle "against the world rulers of the present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Eph 6:12).[2]

At the heart of the council's treatment of the church and hope is the Holy Spirit. Via two complementary portrayals, one focused on the church and the other on humanity at large, the council identifies the Spirit as agent of the eschatological fulfillment of God's revelation in Christ. First, the Holy Spirit is the means by which the church, "equipped with the gifts of its founder . . . receives the mission of announcing the kingdom of Christ and of God and of inaugurating it among all peoples," an endowment and mission that form the church as "the seed and the beginning of the kingdom on earth."[3] Second, the Spirit, as the council states in the final words of its final document, inspires all people with the gift of hope, orienting us to "being eventually received into peace and supreme happiness in the homeland which is radiant with the glory of God."[4]

Beyond texts from the council, extrapolations from the methodology of Vatican II also buttress the link between hope and the church. Thus, drawing a line through the council's reference to the church as a "sheepfold," "the estate or field of God," "God's building," and "our mother," all of which are images grounded in Christ, who is the gate of the sheepfold, the source of fruitfulness for all that grows in the field, the cornerstone of the building, and the spotless lamb who is the spouse of the church, it is possible to claim that the church is a "sacrament of hope" since Christ and the Spirit, the foundations of the church, are also the foundations of both sacramentality and hope.[5]

So far, so good; and yet. . . .

While it might be theologically defensible to claim a nexus between the church and hope, and even to couch this connection in terms of sacramentality, there is room to wonder whether defense of such a thesis requires the gilding of more than a single lily. Three lines of possible critique come easily to the fore.

First, it could be objected that "hope," the citations from *Gaudium et spes* not withstanding, is inadequate to the task of focusing both reform within the church and the church's prophetic mission in the world. That refutation could make its case on several grounds: the vagueness of "hope," particularly if it functions as a synonym for a facile optimism; its apparent individualistic dynamic, which would offer little support for the communal life that is inseparable from any authentic interpretation of both the church's worship and its mission; and the exclusively eschatological overtones common to many construals of hope, construals that, because they are future-oriented, prescind from the present, are apolitical, and therefore incapable of promoting the church's engagement with sources of suffering that contradict the gospel.

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[2] *Lumen gentium* no. 35.

[3] Ibid. no. 5.

[4] *Gaudium et spes* no. 93.

[5] *Lumen gentium* no. 6.

Second, a critique of a different order might question whether the adoption of "sacrament of hope" offers us anything other than yet another idealized metaphor for the church, one that might be evocative, but lacks both measurable content and practical application. Viewed through such a lens, "sacrament of hope" could hinder efforts to articulate the church's mission in the complex reality of a postmodern, multifaith, and globalized world.

Third, it takes only minimal research to discover that Vatican II was far from consistent in connecting the mission of the church and hope. In its discussion of the impact that the church could have on the world, for example, the council claims that any positive influence would be the product "of an effective living of faith and love"; hope is noticeably missing from that recipe.[6] In other words, so this critique could run, since Vatican II, as the burgeoning scholarship on the council makes clear, was not a seamless event whose every idea was integrated both within and across documents, it is excessive to claim that the council envisaged the church as a sacrament of hope.

The third objection is, in many ways, the easiest to neutralize. This can be done by distinguishing between a "black letter" approach to the council, an approach that would allow nothing to be claimed as derived from Vatican II unless the council itself explicated the particular idea exhaustively, and a creative reception of the council that seeks to interpret its documents faithfully in the context of present needs and questions.[7] The latter allows for the possibility that reception will go beyond the specific formulations of the council's texts.

The first two objections are more substantial, so the article will dialogue with them as it seeks to illustrate the ways in which a focus on hope can sharpen an appreciation of the church's identity and mission. To make that case, the immediate requirement is to generate a theology of hope, which is the necessary background for an analysis of the relationship between hope and the church's sacramentality.

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[6] *Gaudium et spes* no. 42.

[7] For a helpful discussion of hermeneutical principles involved in the reception of Vatican II, see Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004).

A THEOLOGY OF HOPE

It is possible to approach hope as a natural virtue, one that arises from confidence in human creativity and from the record of human achievement. The emphasis in this section, however, is on hope as an expression of the "supernatural." The theology of hope developed here, a systematic theology that could be furthered by an extended engagement with biblical insights, focuses on what is specific to hope understood as a response to God's self-communication in Jesus Christ.

Theological hope "has God as its primary object, and in particular our right relationship with God and eternal life. It looks forward to the full coming of God's kingdom. And it has as its basis God's person and promises . . . as well as the paschal mystery."[8] Since hope thus embodies the central elements of Christian faith, it is possible to argue, as Jürgen Moltmann does at the beginning of his ground-breaking *Theology of Hope*, that "Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present."[9]

This transformative engagement with the present distinguishes Christian hope from optimism, which can be merely an anodyne looking-on-the-bright-side. Optimism relies on "the logic of a predictable universe," on the belief that our talents equip us sufficiently to meet every contingency.[10] Accordingly, the borders of optimism are coterminous with our capacity to think positively, a capacity that can wane in the face of harrowing need. A "church" arising from that foundation could be little more than the collective of those resolved to keep smiling, come what may—a resolution that would not necessarily forge complex bonds between its adherents. Such a collective would not require divine revelation as its foundation or grace as its sustenance, nor would it understand itself as already overtaken by an eschatological fulfillment not of its own making, one that promotes engagement even with those needs that exceed our capacity to effect change.

Although optimism, its limitations not withstanding, will normally be preferable to pessimism and despair, which share with optimism a confinement within human capacities, but differ from the former in their negative assessment of those capacities, it is one-dimensional compared with the fertility of hope.[11] Thus, the characteristics of theological hope not only transcend confidence in our ability to construct a satisfying environment; they are even free of the requirement that the world and its history be benign. Indeed, hope, far from being synonymous with positive thinking about one's present circumstances, "stirs when the secure system shows signs of breaking down," when we are no longer able to maintain even the pretence of being able to regulate life comprehensively.[12]

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[8] Daniel Harrington, *What Are We Hoping For?: New Testament Images* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2006) vii.

[9] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967) 16.

[10] Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006) 5.

[11] Dermot Lane defines despair as constituted by the predominance of "elements of emptiness and futility" (*Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* [New York: Paulist, 1996] 60). Similarly, Paul Crowley refers to it as the sense "that

Hope, argues Karl Rahner, can sustain us even in the midst of our reversals; since hope has its source in God, it leads us out of the self we can manipulate into the God whom we cannot control.[13] Hope, therefore, is not self-assertion but a response to God's presence, a motive for ongoing conversion to God, and an existential and permanent feature of humanity's relationship to God: "Where hope is achieved as the radical self-submission to the absolute uncontrollable, there alone do we truly understand what, or better, who God is. [God] is that which of its very existence empowers us to make the radical self-commitment to the absolute uncontrollable in the act of knowledge and love."[14] Hope, therefore, is inseparable both from trust in God and from acceptance of the fact that God is for us never less than mystery. Hope will "remain" (1 Cor 13:13) because we will always be distinct from God, while always being defined by our relationship with God. The persistence of hope beyond history reminds us that even when we "see" God in heaven, God will be, in the striking phrase of Gabriel Daly, "beatifically incomprehensible."[15]

Although thus inseparable from relationship to God's mystery, hope is neither vague nor merely an expression of a generic theism. Instead, hope derives its "shape" from trust in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and especially from Christ's paschal mystery. Hope, then, expresses the conviction that, through Christ as the source of the "absolute future," "the one and single history of the world as a whole can no longer fail, even though the question of how the personal history of the individual will turn out remains open, and belongs to the absolute future of God."[16] Trust in God's

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there's no alternative to what is happening, no resources to call on" (*Unwanted Wisdom: Suffering, the Cross, and Hope* [New York: Continuum, 2005] 41).

[12] Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* 5

[13] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Hope," *Theological Investigations* (hereafter *TI*)10 (New York: Crossroad, 1973) 242–59, at 249.

[14] Ibid. 251.

[15] Gabriel Daly, *Creation and Redemption* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989) 26. See also Rahner's suggestion that, in the beatific vision, God's incomprehensibility will be "the very object of our blissful love" ("The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," *TI* 4 [New York: Crossroad, 1982] 36–73, at 41).

[16] Karl Rahner, "The Quest for Approaches Leading to an Understanding of the Mystery of the God-Man Jesus," *TI* 13 (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 195–200, at 200.

commitment to us revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ frees us to risk involvement with the world we cannot control. In short, hope, far from being escapist, is an invitation to participate more fully in the "risk-laden journey" of life.[17]

The foundation that Christian hope has in Christ underscores the connection between faith and hope. The self-surrender that hope involves would be less than human if it were simply handing ourselves over to what we believed to be a void, a surrender into "sheer nothingness."[18] Instead, hope builds on faith in Jesus Christ as the self-communication of God. Faith and hope are not to be juxtaposed, but viewed as interdependent: "Hope without faith would be blind. It would not know who it was trusting or what it was hoping for. Yet faith without hope would be closed in on itself. It would tend to imagine the future looking like a mere repetition or copy of the present."[19]

Seen thus in relationship to the mystery of God revealed through Jesus Christ, authentically theological hope is neither provisional (hope is what we cling to until we achieve our desired goal) nor a last resort (hope is what we invoke when all else has failed). Hope, therefore, "is not simply the attitude of one who is weak and at the same time hungering for a fulfillment that is yet to be achieved, but rather the courage to commit oneself in thought and deed to the incomprehensible and the uncontrollable which permeates our existence, and, as the future to which it is open, sustains it."[20]

Since hope relies on the God revealed in Jesus Christ, it can be a source of comfort. Simultaneously, however, it is also a source of challenge, since in knowing ourselves as loved unconditionally in Christ, we know also that we are called to conversion, to the transformation by the Spirit of Christ that expresses itself in discipleship. In both dimensions, hope echoes the operation of grace in our lives. David Tracy's description of grace can help clarify why this is so:

> Grace comes as both gift and threat. As gift, grace can turn one completely around (*conversio*) into a transformed life of freedom. Yet grace also comes as a threat by casting a harsh light upon what we have done to ourselves and our willingness to destroy any reality, even Ultimate Reality, if we cannot master it. Grace is a word Christians use to name this extraordinary process: a power erupting in one's life as a gift revealing that Ultimate Reality can be trusted as the God who is Pure, Unbounded Love; a power interrupting our constant temptations to delude

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[17] Faith and Order Commission, "A Common Account of Hope" (1978), in *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, ed. Günther Gassmann (Geneva: WCC, 1993) 161–68, at 166.

[18] Rahner, "Mystery of the God-Man Jesus" 199.

[19] Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* 17.

[20] Rahner, "On the Theology of Hope" 259.

ourselves at a level more fundamental than any conscious error; a power gradually but really transforming old habits.[21]

Hope, as a response to grace, a response to the God who differs from our ideas about God, is a space of freedom from the demands of both self-protection and the craving to master the universe.[22] Accordingly, the paradigmatic embodiment of hope, as Nicholas Lash suggests, is neither the "sunshine" of optimism nor the "Stygian gloom" of pessimism, but the willingness to remain watchful and attentive for the God who is always greater: "[Hope] is less eloquent than either optimism or despair (both of which, knowing the outcome, confidently complete the story). Sometimes in silence, sometimes in more articulate agony or Job-like anger, the mood of the discourse of Christian hope is less that of assertion than request: its form is prayer."[23]

Although Lash's stress on the contemplative dimension of hope contributes positively to the development of a theology of hope, a comprehensive approach to this topic needs also to highlight the "active" dimension of hope; that is, to underscore how hope, as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ, shapes our engagement with the world and its history. This latter dimension is well expressed in "A Common Account of Hope," which the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches published in 1978.

In its document, the Commission argues that reception of Christ's proclamation of the coming of God's reign not only "sustains us with its vision of tomorrow," but it also gives us the certainty that "we can here and now be co-workers with God in pointing to [God's] rule."[24] Humanity's response to the God who is faithful to creation, who will accomplish the restoration of rights for all those who are oppressed, evokes and nurtures the conviction that our efforts to achieve justice and human rights will not be in vain: "When, following Christ, we fight against evil, we do so not only in the hope for more human happiness; we do it also in the hope that oppressors will repent and be oppressors no longer, and that all will turn to God in faith and together receive the blessing that [God] wills for them."[25] Moltmann likewise emphasizes that discipleship of Christ, which embodies our response to the in-breaking of God's reign, "becomes the antithesis and contradiction of a godless and god-forsaken world."[26] Authentic Christian hope, therefore, since it drives our endeavors against all that masks the life-giving love of God, is neither narrowly "other-worldly" nor apolitical.

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[21] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM, 1987) 73.

[22] For the distinction between God and our ideas about God, see Ingolf Dalferth, "'I DETERMINE WHAT GOD IS!': Theology in the Age of 'Cafeteria Religion,'" *Theology Today* 57 (2000) 5–23, at 22.

[23] Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and End of "Religion"* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996) 229.

[24] Faith and Order Commission, "A Common Account of Hope" 163.

[25] Ibid.

As such, hope can be understood as inextricably linked with love, the third leg of the triad—faith, hope, and love—that can act as shorthand for the dynamics of Christian discipleship. Above, I examined the relationship between faith and hope, identifying how faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ provides a particular shape to hope and how hope opens faith to the future. What, then, of the relationship between hope and love?

Anthony Kelly suggests a mutuality between hope and love: love saves hope from being stunted and self-centered, while hope preserves love from the atrophy that would follow without the orientation to the finality of revelation that hope provides.[27] Support for this claim of mutuality, for the freedom that hope creates for the operation of love, comes from Moltmann, who argues that trust in the God of hope makes possible agapaic love: "love to the non-existent, love to the unlike, the unworthy, the worthless, to the lost, the transient and the dead; a love that can take upon it the annihilating effects of pain and renunciation because it receives its power from hope of a *creatio ex nihilo*."[28]

A further illustration of both the mutuality between hope and love and the commitment to working for a changed world that results from that mutuality appears in Pope Benedict XVI's *Spe salvi*. The pope's particular concern is twofold: (1) the purification of love to ensure that it does not degenerate into something that ceases to give life—"our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and working for the world's future either tire us or turn into fanaticism"—and (2) the possibility of endurance in love in the face of difficult circumstances—"small-scale failures or [a] breakdown in matters of historic importance." He locates the resolution of these dilemmas in the relationship between hope and love:

> Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and persevere. . . . We can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future.[29]

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[26] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 222.

[27] Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* 17–18.

[28] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 32.

[29] Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi* (2007) no. 35; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html (accessed February 24, 2011). Charles Taylor, without providing a detailed analysis of hope, also argues that only authentic love can sustain the effort to

Although the emphasis thus far has been on the ways hope can make a difference in the world, the approach taken and the authors cited might be challenged as "utopian" and, therefore, unlikely to bear fruit in reality. It is certainly true that visionary analyses need to be tested in the context of sociopolitical realities, but is it not true that designating them as "utopian" suffices to justify their immediate dismissal. In support of the visionary approach, it is possible to cite political and liberation theologians who reject the pejorative connotations of "utopian," which equate the term with exercises in escapism, and who emphasize that utopian visions can be a catalyst for efforts to overcome injustices. Thus, Gustavo Gutiérrez claims:

> Utopia necessarily means a denunciation of the existing order. Its deficiencies are to a large extent the reason for the emergence of a utopia. The repudiation of a dehumanizing situation is an unavoidable aspect of utopia. . . . But utopia is also an annunciation, an annunciation of what is not yet, but will be; it is the forecast of a different order of things, a new society. It is the field of creative imagination which proposes the alternative values to those rejected.[30]

In other words, the imaginative construal of a future in which injustice and oppression no longer reign supreme can express a refusal to concede the last word to "suffering, evil, and death," rather than an inability to face the impaired present.[31] Seen in this light, hope is neither naïveté nor the denial of negativity, but a challenge to what is destructive and an act of solidarity with those who suffer.[32] In such hope, in the "utopian" rejection of injustice, Gutiérrez identifies not an ephemeral feeling, but a means to encounter God: "If utopia humanizes economic, social, and political liberation, this humanness—in the light of the Gospel—reveals God."[33]

Hope, therefore, perhaps especially in its utopian manifestation, is both authentically human and expressly Christian. The latter is so because, as Moltmann argues, Christ offers "not only a consolation *in* suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise *against* suffering."[34] Jon Sobrino goes even further, suggesting that the specific concern of Christian hope is justice, and that it is "victims" who must always be the primary subjects of that hope. Accordingly, for Sobrino, "the hope that has to be rebuilt now is

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serve others; see his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University, 2007) 690–703.

[30] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 136.

[31] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 19.

[32] Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive* 59.

[33] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 139.

[34] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 21, emphasis original.

not just any hope but *hope in the power of God over the injustice that produces victims*."[35]

Recognition of the link between hope and justice appears also in Benedict XVI's *Spe salvi*, where it is identified as an aspect of God's eschatological judgment:

> The judgment of God is hope both because it is justice and because it is grace. If it were merely grace, making all earthly things cease to matter, God would still owe us an answer to the question about justice—the crucial question we ask of history and of God. If it were merely justice, in the end it could bring only fear to us all.[36]

Sobrino, however, focuses less on the eschatological dimension of hope than on its implications for a commitment to justice for victims in the present. He reaches this point via his analogy between the death of Jesus and the suffering of the poor, which leads him to interpret the resurrection as the source of hope for victims. Consequently, Sobrino argues that we can share in the hope that derives from Jesus' resurrection only "to the extent that we participate, analogously, in the life and death of victims."[37] Thus, when Sobrino refers to the need for the "de-centering" of hope, his aim is to replace an understanding of the resurrection as personal survival after death with a commitment to hope as praxis: "not only are hope and praxis not opposed, they in some way require or can require each other. Hope arises from love, and where there is hope, love is produced."[38] Gutiérrez, similarly, connects utopia and praxis: "If utopia does not lead to action in the present, it is an evasion of reality."[39]

The political dimensions of hope that Gutiérrez and Sobrino stress are also prominent in the work of Johann Baptist Metz. For Metz, authentic Christian hope does not bypass the world, is "not a flight *out* of the world, but a flight *with* the world 'forward' . . . a flight out of that self-made world which masters its present and lives solely out of its present and whose 'time' is always here."[40] Following Christ, then, implies not a denunciation of the world, but "a crucified hope for the world."[41] That hope not only affirms the world as loved by God; it also works against the self-sufficiency that rejects God and damages others. In short, Christian discipleship expresses itself in kenotic love.

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[35] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001) 42, emphasis original.

[36] Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi* no. 47.

[37] Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 43.

[38] Ibid. 46; see also Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive* 66.

[39] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 136.

[40] Johannes Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Seabury, 1969) 92, emphasis original.

[41] Ibid. 93.

The social and political implications of hope, implications derived from hope's relationship to faith in Jesus Christ and to kenotic-agapaic love, point to the communal dimension of hope, which is the final building-block of this theology of hope.

As a response to God's self-communication in Christ, hope is distinct from self-help; hope always involves "the other." Thus, Crowley contends that coming to hope is inseparable from receiving an offer from outside ourselves.[42] Hope expresses the recognition that we depend on one another, that we are called to solidarity with one another. Hope, then, underpins human communion.

As will be developed below, this link of hope and "the other" is central to both the existence of the church as a community of believers and the church's mission: what members of the Christian community have received is what they are to offer to others. As a community of hope that has its source in "the other" who is God, the church comes about through hearing the proclamation of Jesus Christ, which can come only from another, and from the gift of the Spirit, which also comes from outside ourselves.[43]

While despair is born of isolation, hope grows in response to what others provide. This connection to others is essential to the flourishing of our humanity—"what is most personal in [us] occurs not in the *privatissimum* of monadic subjectivity but in love."[44] Our communion with one another can promote the patience that enables us to face the questions and difficulties we encounter in society, while also freeing us to move beyond the demand that solutions to every challenge be immediately available.[45]

Our encounters with "the exterior world of other persons" help sustain hope by nurturing our imagination to consider possibilities we might otherwise have neglected, and by feeding our memories.[46] The hope derived from shared memories, especially those connected to common values and goals, can express itself in courageous engagement with challenges and threats. In the context of Christian hope, the role of memory is intimately connected to the community's relationship to Jesus Christ. Indeed, Metz famously speaks of the "dangerous memory" of Jesus.[47] Metz's analysis, which resonates well with Tracy's description of grace as gift and threat, stresses that a primary task of the Christian community is to remember and narrate with a "practical intent" the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[48] Authentic remembering of Jesus, even when it becomes formalized in doctrine—"formulas for remembering one of humanity's repressed, unrequited, subversive, and dangerous memories"—is not a refuge from the realities of life, but a stimulus to call into question the injustices of the present, injustices that obscure God's future.[49]

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[42] Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom* 54.

[43] See Bernard Lonergan's identification of these foundations for the church in his *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 361.

[44] Johann Baptist Metz, "Unbelief as a Theological Problem," *Concilium* 6 (1965) 32–42, at 38.

[45] See Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* 9–10.

[46] Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive* 64–65.

[47] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. and ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007) 169–85.

Since the remembering of Jesus, no less than the action that is to follow from it, is integral to the identity and purpose of the church, it is time to turn to a theology of the church. In doing so, my goal is to articulate the ecclesial implications of the theology of hope that I have just developed; in particular, what follows will test the contribution to the church's mission that can flow from portraying the church as a sacrament of hope.

HOPE, SACRAMENTALITY, AND THE PILGRIM CHURCH

The Christian tradition identifies the revelation of God in Christ, and particularly the ongoing presence of that revelation through the Holy Spirit, as the source of the church. This, as Karl Rahner notes, is not simply a matter of historical succession, but of sacramentality: "Where the universal and permanent descent of grace into the world reaches the historical stage of irreversibility, there is the Church, there are the sacraments."[50] Through the Holy Spirit, concludes Rahner, the church comes into being as "the social accessibility of the historico-sacramental permanent presence of the salvation reality of Christ."[51]

While Rahner's formulation succinctly summarizes sacramental ecclesiology, the details of that ecclesiology require elaboration. More specifically, it is important to explore how sacramentality is related to hope and to the church's mission in the world, as well as inquiring into its implications for relationships within the church.

The strength of sacramental ecclesiology, a strength evident in the quotes from Rahner, is that it enunciates unequivocally the church's relationship to God's revelation in Christ and the Spirit. Indeed, Vatican II's sacramental approach stressed that "no mean analogy" exists between Jesus as the incarnate word of God and the church's social structure as an expression of the Spirit.[52]

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[48] Ibid. 194.

[49] Ibid. 184.

[50] Karl Rahner, "Faith and Sacrament," *TI* 23 (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 181–88, at 188.

[51] Karl Rahner, "Priestly Existence," *TI* 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 239–62, at 248.

[52] *Lumen gentium* no. 8.

Such claims, however, can also engender a hermeneutic of suspicion toward sacramental ecclesiology: Doesn't it make the church a timeless ideal rather than a historical reality? Doesn't it imply that the church, rather than the kingdom, is God's primary concern? Isn't it a claim for the church's perfection, an expression of "narcissistic aestheticism," which obscures the distance between the church and God?[53] Doesn't it contradict our experience of a flawed and fallible church? Doesn't it lead to the divinization of those in authority, leaving the rest of us condemned to passivity?

Accordingly, if sacramental ecclesiology is to inform and shape our practice, if it is to nurture our hope for the church, then it needs to be presented in ways that elucidate its contributions and deconstruct its possible distortions, while also challenging the hegemony of suspicion toward institutional expressions of the church. While those are not insignificant tasks, one contemporary approach that seeks to hold them in tension is that of Louis-Marie Chauvet. In what follows I interweave four elements of Chauvet's approach and supplement them with insights from other authors to explicate sacramental ecclesiology and highlight the relationship between hope and the church's sacramentality.

First, Chauvet argues that as a sacrament constituted by the Spirit, the church is the only guaranteed means of access to Jesus as crucified and risen. Chauvet recognizes that the church thus stands as a challenge to those seeking an unmediated or exclusively private relationship to Christ—"the faith requires a *renunciation of a direct line*, one could say a Gnostic line, to Jesus Christ."[54] In stark terms, he claims that to seek the risen Jesus without reference to the church is to seek a "corpse," since Christ lives now, through the Spirit, only in his body that is the church.[55] Membership in the church, acceptance of its interpretative word as the means of encounter with the risen Christ, is thus an expression of hope, a handing oneself over to what is not the product of one's own initiative.

Through its proclamation of the word, celebration of the sacraments, and ethical action, all of which derive from the Spirit, the church acts as a source of encounter with Christ.[56] Since it is brought into being by Christ and the Spirit, the church is, in the felicitous expression of Juan Luis

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[53] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image, 1978) 78.

[54] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine E. Beaumont (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995) 172, emphasis original.

[55] Ibid. 173.

[56] Ibid. 163–64

Segundo, "an undreamed of possibility for love," as the sole purpose of its existence is to be a sacrament of encounter with Christ.[57]

Chauvet's second principle is perhaps the most immediately confronting, particularly today: a consequence of the sacramental reality of the church, of the fact that it is not possible to bypass the church for a more direct relationship with Christ, is that the institutional dimension of the church cannot be ignored as irrelevant to the Spirit's purposes. Thus:

> the recognition of the institutional Church as the "fundamental sacrament" of the reign always requires a conversion—either because believers, too comfortably ensconced in the institution, forget that it is *only* a sacrament and overlook the distance between it and Christ or because their critical suspicions towards the institution result in their not seeing that it *is* indeed a sacrament.[58]

Clearly, our relationship to the church's institutional dimension is a primary venue for the practice of hope, since it is here that we experience in a particular way the imperfections of the church. While the weakness of institutions and the failures of those who administer them loom large in the present moment of the church's history, there is also a need to consider what institutions contribute. That contribution is well stated by Terrence Tilley: "Institutional authorities give the community members the tools to work with, to coach them in their practices, and to discern what constitutes good practice in the school of discipleship that is the local community. . . . Institutional authorities, especially bishops and theologians, serve the bearers of the tradition, the participants in the community."[59]

On the other hand, it is also important to emphasize that the triumph of hope in regard to the church's structures and institutions does not reveal itself in passivity or unquestioning obedience, nor is the acceptance of sacramentality irreconcilable with the existence of a properly critical spirit. In addition, affirmation of the sacramental reality of the church does not imply the impossibility of reform; indeed, it can require that reform in order that the sacramental "sign" might be more transparent to the Spirit. Acknowledging the need for reform for the sake of faithfulness and effective witness to the gospel in changing contexts thus becomes inseparable from accepting that the church's sacramental reality requires an institutional expression.[60]

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[57] Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) 82–83. For an illustration of how Segundo's insight could shape an ecclesiology, see Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church: The Challenges of Catholic Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 2004) 52–86.

[58] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 186, emphasis original.

[59] Terrence Tilley, "Communication in Handing on the Faith," in *Handing on the Faith: The Church's Mission and Challenge*, ed. Robert Imbelli (New York: Herder & Herder, 2006) 150–71, at 163.

An authentic relationship to the sacramental reality of the church will require a range of demanding activities: self-criticism, dialogue, and cooperation with those from whom we differ. Those activities enable a greater sense of unity within any one church, but are also, as the Faith and Order Commission notes, central to convergence between the divided Christian churches no less than between all people of faith.[61]

The third principle that can be drawn from Chauvet recognizes the need for the church to be constantly alert to the danger posed by various "necrotic" temptations that seek "to capture Christ in our ideological nets or in the ruses of our desire."[62] What is common to those temptations, what constitutes them as death-dealing for the church, is that they are tantamount to claiming ownership of the grace that is proper to sacramental encounters—"killing the presence of the absence of the Risen One, erasing his radical otherness."[63] The particular temptations on which Chauvet focuses are: treating religious knowledge as a way to assert control over "the unmanageability of the Spirit"; using ritual as "magic," as a way to achieve an effect we desire without having to face the consequences for our inner life of a genuine encounter with God; and using good works "to obtain leverage" over God.[64]

Chauvet's analysis reminds us that the efficacy of grace in the individual members of the church, in their common life, and in the structures that support their life and mission is not guaranteed. Grace does not function mechanistically; as a result, the members of the church never outgrow the requirement that they remain open to conversion, which is itself both a stimulus of the Spirit and an irreducible dimension of faithfulness to the Spirit. Indeed, as Rahner argues, the existence of the church as a sacrament does not mean that its members have no work to do:

> If the Church can never end up outside the truth of Christ, does that also mean that the Church proclaims this truth with that strength, with that topicality and always newly appropriated form which would make it salutary and which one might long for? Is it really always and clearly the case that by transforming this truth, by opening it into the infinity of God . . . that the Church allows it to become most intimately connected with all the boundless, wild, confusing, and yet so glorious chaos of perceptions, questions, notions, intellectual conquests, unfathomable perplexities, which we call the "world picture", the world view of modern humanity? Is not the permanence of the Gospel message in the Church often purchased (contrary

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[60] On this point see Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1978) 32–35.

[61] Faith and Order Commission, "A Common Account of Hope" 167.

[62] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 173.

[63] Ibid. 174.

[64] Ibid.

> to the meaning of Gospel truth) at the price of guarding fearfully against exposing ourselves to this "chaos" (out of which the world of tomorrow will be born) or, at best, by meeting it purely defensively, trying merely to preserve what we have?[65]

Chauvet's fourth and final principle is the richest in terms of its potential for clarifying the implications of the church as a sacrament of hope: the church "radicalizes the vacancy of the place of God. To accept its mediation is to agree that this vacancy will never be filled."[66] Since the church, even as sacrament, is not the proprietor of grace, since it symbolizes rather than controls God's reign, since it does not determine where God's Spirit operates, members of the church can never validly act as a gated community that rejoices to be unlike the rest of creation. Indeed, the more members of the church become sensitive to the dynamics of grace at work in their own community, the more they become able to recognize that same grace at work beyond themselves.

The conviction that the hope that nurtures Christians also provides a platform for relating to every other expression of hope is well captured by Ladislas Boros:

> Christians feel a sense of solidarity with every sort of hope. They see a brother [and sister] in everyone who uses the language of hope. A Christian can go about with a gentle smile amongst [people] who reflect their single great dreams in the daydreams of everyday life, in cut-price sales, in pamphleteering and dressing up, in Utopias and wish-fulfillment entertainment, and in everything that men have ever contrived in art and philosophy; and [the Christian] might well think that in the depth of their soul these people are Christians, and that they are dreaming, often without knowing it, of the resurrection and ascension, of a completely "saved" world, and of heaven. The idea of heaven is the legacy of the most radical and most central hope. Heaven is the central and innermost significance of everything that [humanity] has ever hoped.[67]

Boros's analysis, written as it was in the 1960s, might perhaps fall foul of the suspicion often directed today toward efforts to identify "anonymous" forms of the Spirit's presence in the world beyond the church.[68] Nonetheless, his approach can stand as a challenge to consider whether and how the church, at every level, functions as a sacrament of hope. More particularly, Boros reminds us that the church represents not an exclusive community of the saved, but a sacrament of the life that God offers to all people: “[the church] is the community with and in the world that acknowledges and celebrates what is true of the whole world, although the whole world does not know it. It is the sacrament of what the world really is and what it will be when the world is transformed by God into God’s kingdom.”[69] Since the church is thus related to all manifestations of God’s kingdom, part of the church’s mission in regard to the kingdom is, as John Fuellenbach memorably expresses it, “‘to sniff it out,’ raise people’s awareness of it, and celebrate it where it makes itself present.”[70]

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[65] Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Notes on 'Ecclesiological Piety,'" *TI* 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 336–65, at 339.

[66] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 178.

[67] Ladislas Boros, *God Is With Us*, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 129.

[68] For a defence of efforts to articulate a positive relationship between the church and the wider world, see James McEvoy, "Church and World at the Second Vatican Council: The Significance of *Gaudium et Spes*," *Pacifica* 19 (2006) 37–57; and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Cosmopolitanism of Roman Catholic Theology and the Challenge of Cultural Particularity," *Horizons* 35 (2008) 298–320.

Another avenue that leads from Chauvet’s emphasis on the church’s radical dependence on the Spirit is that members of the church need to remain open to conversion, because their hope is intimately related to faith in the eschatological fullness of life in Christ. In other words, authentic ecclesial faith, while valuing the revelation of the Spirit in the past and the present, recognizes that the fullness of the church’s faith is still to come: “We come from a beginning that we ourselves did not initiate. We plod along like pilgrims on a road whose end disappears in the incomprehensibility and freedom of God; we are stretched between heaven and earth, and we have neither the right nor the possibility of giving up either one.”[71] As sacrament, then, the church lives in relationship to the “not yet . . . but already” reality of God’s kingdom.

This focus on the future affects how memory functions in the church. As I have indicated above, there is a link between hope and memory, a link inseparable from the existence of a community of memory. Thus, Constance Fitzgerald identifies the church as “a people of memory. Central to our Christian identity is the memory of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; as Church we understand our authenticity as historically derived and see ourselves as guardians of a sacred tradition we dare not forget.”[72] Memory for Christians, then, as we saw above in reviewing Metz’s notion of “the dangerous memory of Jesus,” is not simply recall of the past, but is the basis for both present trust in God’s unconditional love, revealed in Jesus Christ and transmitted by Holy Spirit through history, and for action in the world to manifest that same love. Such trust is, as I have argued throughout, the sine qua non of hope.

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[69] Michael Himes, “The Church and the World in Conversation: The City of God and ‘Interurban’ Dialogue,” *New Theology Review* 18 (2005) 27–35, at 34.

[70] John Fuellenbach, “The Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God,” in *The Convergence of Theology*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Stephen T. Davis, foreword George Carey (New York: Paulist, 2001) 221–37, at 237.

[71] Karl Rahner, “Utopia and Reality: Christian Existence Caught between the Ideal and the Real,” *TI* 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 26–37, at 32–33.

[72] Constance Fitzgerald, “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory,” *CTSA Proceedings* 64 (2009) at 21–42, at 23.

Fitzgerald, however, also identifies ways in which memory can undermine hope. This happens when memory "blocks the coming of God in love toward us" by leaving us anchored to either past achievements or past disappointments and sufferings.[73] The memory of past achievements can deceive us into thinking that salvation depends on us rather than on God, that God could offer us nothing that exceeds our own accomplishments. On the other hand, the memory of past disappointments and sufferings can either fuel a desire for revenge or leave us convinced that there can be no recovery from what has damaged us.

As an alternative to the concentration on our self evident in both our sense of achievement and disappointment, Fitzgerald, drawing on John of the Cross, connects hope with the experience of "the dark night," when "we are being dispossessed of the autonomous self, our achieved selfhood put together over a lifetime."[74] In the context of loss that the dark night represents, "it is hope that opens up the possibility of being possessed by the infinite, unimaginable, incomprehensible Mystery of love that is so close."[75] This hope is synonymous with the willingness to struggle against necrotic temptations and to settle for nothing less than God.

Fitzgerald's analysis of hope has implications not only for the identity of the church but also for the church's relationship to history. It reminds us that the church's sacramental identity is inseparable from its status as a pilgrim people longing for the fullness of life in God.[76] In the present, therefore, the church can be authentic only if it remains open to movement beyond successes and failures, only if it accepts the limits of memory no less than its value. Accordingly, "the truest history of the Church . . . would be the history of the saints . . . of all those in whom there has really taken place this miracle of pneumatic existence as the discovery of grace-given individuality in a selfless opening of the innermost kernel of the person's being towards God and so towards all spiritual persons."[77]

A church of such saints would be open to its need for conversion, for the constant reappropriation of what gives it life, so that it might fulfill its mission of witnessing to hope in the world. Just as the use of "earthy" elements in sacramental liturgy reminds us that the world in which we live is both graced and in need of redemption, so too the sacramental reality of the church points to both the operation of the Spirit within the Christian community and the need of that community—its individual members, office-holders, as well as its groups and structures—for conversion when it obscures the action of the Spirit.[78] The insistence on the need for conversion is not a denial of sacramentality, but the expression of it; conversion witnesses to the fact that the holiness of the church is not a synonym for perfection, but for recognition of dependence on God. Authenticity in the church, therefore, no less than the appropriation of hope, requires a refusal to call an end to our pilgrimage.

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[73] Ibid. 24.

[74] Ibid. 31.

[75] Ibid. 32.

[76] The notion of the church as a people on pilgrimage to their eschatological fulfilment in Christ is the theme of *Lumen gentium*'s chap. 7.

[77] Karl Rahner, "On the Significance in Redemptive History of the Individual Member of the Church," in *Mission and Grace* 1 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963) 114–71, at 139.

The reception of tradition provides an example of how the identity of the church as a pilgrim community raises questions for practices within the church. Viewed through the lens of eschatology, tradition is not simply the triumph of the past, but a stimulus for movement, for continuing the pilgrimage to God. Since the Spirit is the source of the dynamism of tradition, faithfulness to the Spirit mandates attention to the manifold voices that can express the Spirit. This, in turns, speaks to the need for a commitment to the ongoing reception and re-reception of tradition; this requires "recontextualising" definitions of faith, forms of worship, and practices to respond to the questions and needs of present-day believers.[79]

A thoroughgoing appreciation of the church's sacramentality, however, entails not simply openness to the dynamism of the Spirit, but a recognition that this dynamism cannot be divorced from the church's particularity, from the beliefs and practices that the Christian community accepts as formative of its identity as a Christian community. In other words, it is not possible to grasp the *res* of the sacrament independently of the *sacramentum*.[80] This means, among other things, accepting the "givenness" of Christian faith, of the fact that reality, within the church no less than elsewhere, "is not infinitely malleable to human fantasies and preferences, to the dangerous and destructive dreams of egotism."[81]

Since, however, even "givenness" is subject to interpretation, tension is likely to be an irreducible quality of the ecclesial community. When those tensions focus on the role of authority in the church or on the degree to which definitions of faith are binding, then, as we know well, they can become threats to communion within the church. While the invocation of the church as "a sacrament of hope" offers no magic resolutions of those difficulties, some points already made about both “sacrament” and “hope” offer fruitful prospects, particularly the need to hold together *sacramentum* and *res*, as well as recognition of the gap between the church’s sacramental identity and the God of whom it is a sacrament, which links with hope as surrender to the God whom we do not control. Since hope differs from optimism, it understands that the consolation of God’s presence, as witnessed to in the Bible, “does not remove us to a mythical realm of tensionless harmony and questionless reconciliation with ourselves.”[82]

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[78] For this understanding of the elements of the church's sacramental liturgy, see Kevin Irwin, "A Sacramental World—Sacramentality as the Primary Language for Sacraments," *Worship* 76 (2002) 197–211, esp. 204–5.

[79] For the idea of "recontextualising" tradition see Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003) 22–23.

[80] See Chauvet, *Sacrament and Symbol* 182.

[81] Nicholas Lash, "Authors, Authority, and Authorization," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church: Theory and Practice*, ed. Bernard Hoose (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) 59–71, at 67.

HOPE AND THE CHURCH’S MISSION

Chauvet’s analysis of the church’s sacramentality is valuable for the ways it demonstrates that the church’s sacramental identity is a stimulus for ongoing conversion, which can be both a source and an expression of hope. What remains to be done in this exposition of sacramental ecclesiology is to elaborate further on how the church’s engagement with history can express its vocation to be a sacrament of hope for the world. Unless the emphasis on hope promotes engagement with social ills, then not only does “hope” seem insipid, but the concept of “a sacrament of hope” becomes meaningless, since any sacrament must be, in Rahner’s terms, “an exhibitive word”: it must be able not simply to talk about its subject, but to make it present.[83]

At the heart of the imagery that the Gospels use to describe the source of hope for both our present and future is the metaphor of “the kingdom” or “the reign” of God. Since it is God’s reign, it is the exclusive product of God’s initiative—“the Kingdom is a gracious gift from God, who comes with unconditional love to seek out humankind and to offer ultimate salvation to all. . . . It is a gift from God which people can only receive in gratitude and awe.”[84] Since the church is not the source of God’s reign, the authenticity of the church and its witness to hope depends on its commitment to seek fulfillment in nothing other than that reign.

Maintaining a focus on the relationship between Christian hope and God’s kingdom can free hope from possible distortions. Most particularly, it frees it from the danger of equating the kingdom with our accomplishments. Thus, Gutiérrez reminds us that living in hope requires that we keep sight of the kingdom as belonging exclusively to God: “Christian hope opens us, in an attitude of spiritual childhood, to the gift of the future promised by God. It keeps us from any confusion of the Kingdom with any one historical stage, from any idolatry towards unavoidably ambiguous human achievement, from any absolutizing of revolution."[85]

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[82] Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1998) 68.

[83] Karl Rahner, “What Is a Sacrament?,” *TI* 14 (New York: Crossroad, 1976) 135–48, at 140–44.

[84] John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 97.

Nonetheless, as Metz argues, the church has a "critical liberating task" in relation to the world, a task that belongs to the community of faith as a whole, not simply to the individuals within it.[86] Indeed, it is in its vocation to embody this hope that Metz locates the church's *raison d'être*: "The primordial design of the church is rooted not on the basis of observances, or of subordination, or notions of office; but rather because of the hope that is given to us and which no one can hope for him- or herself alone. This is the basic outline for the *vita communis*, without which the eschatological hope of Christians does not exist."[87] The church, then, witnesses to the kingdom to the degree that it embodies that hope.

Metz identifies two conditions that the church must fulfill if it is to be a source of liberating freedom in society. First, Christians need to be aware of the influences shaping the social situation in which they operate; without this awareness, they will be unable to present faith in the form of hope.[88] While Metz acknowledges that the history of the church in Europe in the modern period has been marked by its failure to engage with key social movements and ideas, part of his own hope for the future is for new ways of thinking and acting within the church, ways that would enable the correction of previous imbalances in the church's relationship with history.[89]

Second, Metz argues that the church can be a place of "critical freedom" in society only if that same condition characterizes the inner life of the church itself.[90] Here again, however, he acknowledges the gap between the desired and the actual, since the church experiences a "catastrophic lack" of this critical freedom.[91] What Metz endorses is a church shaped by the people who compose it, a church that does not fear conflict, and a church that accepts that the Christian task in the world is not to promote a vision of life as "an apotheosis of sheer banality," but to enable "men and women to go through other people's suffering by virtue of their own capacity to suffer, and precisely in this way to draw near to the *mysterium* of

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[85] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 139.

[86] Metz, *Theology of the World* 114–15; on the responsibility to act as "critics of society," a responsibility that all members of the church share, see also Karl Rahner, "The Function of the Church as a Critic of Society," *TI* 12 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 229–49.

[87] Metz, *A Passion for God* 164.

[88] Metz, *Theology of the World* 141–47; see also his *Faith in History and Society* 23.

[89] Metz, *Theology of the World* 117.

[90] Metz, *Faith in History and Society* 94.

[91] Ibid. 95.

[Christ's] Passion."[92] A church fulfilling those conditions would truly be "the public bearer of a dangerous memory in the systems of social life."[93]

In highlighting the link between the church and service to the reign of God, whose fulfillment is in the future, it is important to underscore that the focus on the coming fullness of that reign does not sacrifice the present for the future, making us insensitive to the needs of the present. To demonstrate why that is so, it is necessary to refocus attention on the dynamics of Christian eschatology.

Just as today's theology of creation understands "creation" not as something that God does merely "in the beginning," but as a way of phrasing God's relationship to the meaning, purpose, and destiny of all that is, so too recent thinking in eschatology portrays that topic as other than an exclusive concentration on "the end."[94] Indeed, contemporary theology understands the eschaton in relation to a process of fulfillment intimately connected, as I have emphasized above, with the reign of God in history. Eschatology, therefore, has a broader ambit than "what is beyond death and history."[95] In short, faithfulness to the unfolding of God's kingdom in the present is as much an issue of eschatology as are death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

A church grounded in eschatological hope will certainly be one concerned with the future, both immediate and ultimate, but it will also be one that connects that future with the unfolding of the present. The members of such a church will recognize its orientation to the future, a recognition expressed in John Zizioulas's contention that "the Spirit brings the charismata from the future, from the eschata, as new events," but they will also understand that those gifts are for the sake of the present, not for its negation.[96] A church grounded in a nuanced eschatology will acknowledge that hope is not a rejection of the present but, as Moltmann stresses, the happiness of the present.[97]

Although ecclesial hope does not require a disregard of the present, it is nonetheless true that hope tends to "stand in contradiction to the reality that can at present be experienced."[98] Hope acknowledges the "sorrows and anxieties" in the present, but also does not limit reality to them.[99]

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[92] Ibid. 134.

[93] Ibid. 169.

[94] For a recent presentation of the broader strands of "creation," see Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

[95] Monika Hellwig, "Eschatology," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2 vols., ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 2:347–72, at 350.

[96] John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006) 296.

[97] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 32.

[98] Ibid. 18.

[99] *Gaudium et spes* no. 1.

Consequently, those who hope “do not seek to bear the train of reality, but to carry the torch before it.”[100] Doing so requires, as Crowley argues, imagination, which empowers hope to see not only what is but also what might be.[101] Grounded in the incarnation, in the Jesus who embraced the whole of what it means to be human, including the suffering and death inseparable from that reality, and in the promise embodied in the resurrection of Jesus, authentic faith helps people to “live in waiting, in ambiguity, in something less than the full light of day.”[102] Far from being escapist, authentic hope enables “obedience to what horrifies” as this is part of the journey to the freedom of the truth.[103]

Accordingly, the church’s hope, shaped by its discipleship of the crucified and risen Jesus, is what enables it to be faithful to the realities of the present, to see those realities without denying either suffering or possibility. This hope includes being faithful to the forms of “death-like birth” to which the church is summoned in its own history.[104] Clearly, in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, we, as church, are living through such a moment, a moment when authenticity in faith requires that “the oh-so-certain discourse about God collapses into helpless discourse with God.”[105] This is a moment when hope manifests itself in both the willingness to acknowledge painful truths and the imagination that strives to develop different possibilities for the future, not as a refutation of the living tradition, but as a creative reappropriation of it.

In short, only a church that understands and lives out of both the gift and limitations of its sacramentality, that deepens its reliance on the Spirit by confronting its necrotic temptations, will be able to embody hope for the world. Only such a church will be able to evoke an affirmative answer to the question that Walter Kasper poses:

> Do people still perceive the church as a symbol of hope? . . . The church can be a sacrament of hope only if it succeeds in voicing its hope clearly and unequivocally for all to hear, if it avoids succumbing to dread of the future, and if it does not fall victim to a pale and paltry form of popular humanism lacking the decisive salt of Christian faith. The world does not need a duplication of its hope; still less does it need a duplication of its despair.[106]

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[100] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 18.

[101] Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom* 45–49.

[102] Ibid. 55.

[103] Ibid. 61.

[104] Ibid. 61.

[105] Metz, *A Passion for God* 28.

[106] Walter Kasper, “Individual Salvation and Eschatological Consummation,” in *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology*, ed. John Galvin (New York: Paulist, 1994) 7–24, at 21.

"SACRAMENT OF HOPE" AND METHOD IN CONTEMPORARY ECCLESIOLOGY

My final task is to take up an issue that was foreshadowed at the beginning of the article: to examine the legitimacy of constructing an ecclesiology via the application of a metaphor such as "sacrament of hope."

Dissatisfaction with the use of metaphors in ecclesiology has become more prominent in contemporary writing on the church. As I will argue, much of the current critique has its basis in methodological issues, but there is a broader strand that begins with secular theologies of the second half of the 20th century, theologies that rejected what they regarded as exalted claims for the church. Gerard Mannion, who charts the evolution of postmodern ecclesiologies over the last few decades, argues that these secular theologies acknowledged that the church "serves social and spiritual functions and meets particular positive needs" but also demanded that "superioristic, transcendental and, for some, even sacramental claims in any literal, as opposed to figurative or existential, sense must be jettisoned by the church for more humanistic, social and ethical priorities."[107]

Not surprisingly, the portrayal of the church in exclusively functional terms itself produced a reaction, one that tends to be interwoven with various aspects of the "culture wars" and so highlights the religious specificity of the church. The latter emphasis, however, is in danger of producing a "church" that, in Mannion's view, is "idealized in so normative a fashion that it becomes ever more distanced from 'the world' and hence from God's creation."[108]

From a different perspective, dissatisfaction with ecclesial metaphors rests on the conviction that such metaphors are not only inadequate to the task of helping the Christian community meet the challenges that confront it, but are also incapable of responding to the gap between the church they portray and the reality, especially the flaws, of the church as it is. Thus, Neil Ormerod asserts that most ecclesiologies are idealized models of the church: "They describe a Church that we would all want to belong to. But when we look at the Church as an historical concrete reality we may wonder about the discrepancy between the idealized form and the historical facts."[109] Similarly, Brian Flanagan, who finds in the use of metaphors an echo of the efforts of neo-Scholastic theologians "to capture an understanding of the church in a single, easily-referenced volume *De Ecclesia*," regards the metaphors as being "too idealistic, disconnected from the church we actually experience, providing widely diverging views of what the church 'should' look like."[110] In the same vein, Nicholas Healy criticizes the failure of idealized visions of the church to provide a mechanism that explains the role of the Holy Spirit when churches are boring, unfaithful, or when they distort the gospel.[111]

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[107] Gerard Mannion, "Postmodern Ecclesiologies," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church,* ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2008) 127–52, at 132; see also Stanley Grenz, "Ecclesiology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (New York: Cambridge University, 2003) 252–68.

[108] Mannion, "Postmodern Ecclesiologies" 135.

As an alternative to the use of metaphors, the critics advocate a more systematic approach to ecclesiology that would not share the perceived weaknesses of the metaphors. This alternative approach is lauded for its capacity to deliver clarity via "a more methodically controlled exploration" that would connect what is said of the church "to other theological doctrines and questions, and to non-theological theoretical discourse."[112] Above all, the advocates of a primarily systematic approach locate its value in the fact that it can draw from the social sciences to help understand concepts such as "structure," "identity," "authority," and "change," thereby underscoring that the church cannot and does not operate in isolation from the "outside" world.[113]

In defense of metaphors, it is important to note that their use is particularly compatible with locating the church in relation to the mystery of God; this means that they are never less than an attempt to grapple with the place of the church in relation to faith. From this perspective, the plurality of metaphors, no less than the element of "fuzziness" or imprecision that attends them, need not be a matter for lament. Indeed, those features can serve as a reminder of mystery, of the fact that God—and the church that derives from God—exceeds, as was noted above, all language about God, be that language metaphorical or systematic. If "God" is indeed "an almost ridiculously exhausting and demanding word," then the plurality of metaphors can be one indication that, mutatis mutandis, "the church" shares in that attribute.[114]

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[109] Neil Ormerod, "The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 3–30, at 5; see also his "Recent Ecclesiology: A Survey," *Pacifica* 21 (2008) 57–67.

[110] Brian Flanagan, "The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Theology," *Horizons* 35 (2008) 32–53, at 47.

[111] Nicholas Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003) 287–308, at 295.

[112] Flanagan, "Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors" 48.

[113] Ormerod, "Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology" 11–12.

[114] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 51.

An exclusive emphasis on the systematic approach might challenge some of the "messiness" of the church, but it might also do less than full justice to "the confessional, convictional, linguistic character of faith," which is not always reconcilable with neatness.[115] Similarly, if it were possible to satisfy exhaustively Healy's desire for an approach to the Holy Spirit that removes all the ambiguity surrounding the Spirit's presence and action, we would no longer be dealing with the God on whose self-revelation we are dependent.[116] This is not an argument to provide license for theological obfuscation, or to justify resistance to dialogue with the social sciences, but it is an affirmation of theology's link to God's irreducible mystery.

It could be argued that metaphors in ecclesiology function in a way that parallels the role that the parables play in Christian life as a whole: they challenge, they evoke a sense of what is possible even if not yet realized, and they address questions to present practices. It would, of course, be naïve to claim that the parables eliminate the need for doctrines, moral reasoning, or theological discourse. On the other hand, the parables do plunge us into an experience of God's self-communication not always evident in our extended discourses.

What positive contributions can be claimed for the particular emphasis on the church's relationship to both sacramentality and hope? First, sacramentality and hope are grounded in the experience of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Second, they contain a stimulus for all in the church to be self-critical, an exercise that can be extended to all offices and programs at every level of the church. Third, they furnish a vision for the church's positive engagement with present suffering, while also remaining focused on the "not yet" of God's reign.

Those contributions do not imply that an ecclesiology focused on the church as "sacrament of hope" can assert a priority over all other ways of thinking about the church. Indeed, my article has acknowledged the irreducible dependence of hope on theologies of faith, love, and eschatology, as well as on, among other constructions, Chauvet's "presence of the absent one," Metz's "dangerous memory," and Segundo's "undreamed of possibility for love." To that list could be added the compatibility between hope and, for example, "boldness," which is required if members of the church are to live out their mission in the ways detailed by liberation theologians.[117]

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[115] Bradford Hinze, "Critical Issues in Roger Haight's Historical Ecclesiology," in *Comparative Ecclesiology: Critical Investigations*, ed. Gerard Mannion (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008) 41–53, at 49.

[116] For the "hiddeness" of the Spirit see John Thiel, "Responsibility to the Spirit: Authority in the Catholic Tradition," *New Theology Review* 8 (1995) 53–68.

[117] For an argument that advocates strongly for the importance of boldness, see Karl Rahner, "Parresia (Boldness)," *TI* 7 (New York: Seabury, 1977) 260–67.

In addition, the analysis of “sacrament of hope” has highlighted the limits of the term. True, the need for a self-critical spirit could have found a source in a sociologically based profile of the church, but “sacrament of hope” contains within it an understanding of why and how such self-criticism is a dimension of Christian discipleship. True too that “sacrament of hope,” like any other metaphor, could be subject to multiple interpretations that might not only differ from one another, but perhaps even be in conflict with one another.[118] Surely, however, the possibility of such conflict is not peculiar to the use of metaphors. That human beings, within as much as beyond the church, are capable of ideological stances that lead them to fractured relationships is less an indictment of the limits of ecclesial metaphors than a reminder of our need for hope. That hope, founded in God, is central to the church’s sacramentality, and is to constitute the church’s witness in the world.

The use of metaphors need not imply rejection of the importance of systematic reflection, as the foregoing analysis of “sacrament of hope” has sought to demonstrate. Indeed, an authentically “catholic” ecclesiology will see the wisdom in both approaches: in systematic understandings of issues such as “authority,” an understanding derived in dialogue with the social sciences, but also in the capacity of the “poetry” of metaphors to expand our vision and fuel our imagination, which is, as I have argued, essential for hope.

Metaphors, perhaps more than any other approach to the church, capture what Mannion terms the “aspirational” dimension of ecclesiology, the fact that reflection on the church will always be “charged with eschatology and hope” as the church “sees its mission as being bound-up with trying to build that ideal community of justice and righteousness which Christians refer to as the Kingdom of God.”[119] In this way, again, metaphors highlight mystery: they confront us with the challenge to allow ourselves to be encompassed by “the exitless and unsignposted freedom of God.”[120]

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[118] Flanagan, “Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors” 47.

[119] Gerard Mannion, “Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: A New Paradigm for the Roman Catholic Church?,” *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004) 304–28, at 305.

[120] Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1979) 30.