

*The Hope of Glory*  
A Theology of Redemption

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*When we on that final journey go  
That Christ is for us preparing,  
We'll gather in song, our hearts aglow,  
All joy of the heavens sharing,  
And there will join God's endless praise,  
With angels and saints adoring.*

—N. F. S. Grundtvig

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## Preface

This book is a study in what since the nineteenth century Christian theologians have typically called eschatology, though I think its theme is probably more clearly communicated using the term that I have used in the subtitle: redemption, by which I mean God's comprehensive and definitive vindication of creation from the power of evil.<sup>1</sup> Because I argue that the hope of redemption is centered on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose resurrection from the dead defines our future as well as his, this book is also a sequel to my earlier *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of Incarnation*.<sup>2</sup> And insofar as that book was itself something of a sequel to *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, the present volume can be seen as the conclusion to a three-part project.<sup>3</sup>

And yet though the topics of creation, incarnation, and redemption covered in these books correspond to the three main episodes in the Christian account of God's dealings with the world (the divine "economy," or in more modern parlance, "salvation history"), the focus of each is too narrow, and the material covered in them thus far too selective, for the ensemble to constitute anything like a "systematic theology." The three books are better understood as a sequence of case studies, each of which explores a particular problem within a much larger doctrinal complex. In the first my concern was to explain the meaning of the Christian claim that God creates from nothing; in the second to defend the classical confession of Jesus as one person in two natures; and in this book to make sense of Paul's characterization of "the mystery of Christ among you" as "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).<sup>4</sup>

In pursuing this aim, I will make every effort to keep the use of jargon (theological and otherwise) to a minimum, though I will continue my practice of

1. Although the term "eschatology" was coined in the seventeenth century, it did not come into general use among theologians until rather later. Earlier theological convention in the West (dating to the fifteenth century) was to treat these topics under the rubric *De novissimis*. See Sigurd Hjelde, *Das Eschaton und die Eschata: Eine Studie über Sprachgebrauch und Sprachverwirrung in protestantischer Theologie von der Orthodoxie bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1987), 37; and Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 8–9. The identification of eschatology with redemption derives from Karl Barth, who intended the final volume—planned but unwritten—of his *Church Dogmatics* to bear the title, *The Doctrine of Redemption*.

2. Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019).

3. Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

4. My translation. The NRSV's and NRSVue's "Christ in you" obscures the fact that the Greek text uses the second-person plural pronoun *hymin*; I have translated the preposition *en* as "among" in order to bring out the point that Paul is not speaking of Christ living inside individual Christians, but rather in the midst of the gathered community of faith (cf. Matt. 18:20; Luke 17:21).

selectively drawing on traditional Christian doctrinal formulations where I judge that the risks of obfuscation that come with the use of technical vocabulary are offset by gains in conceptual clarity. My driving interest is to address what I see as the inherent tension between “hope” on the one hand and “glory” on the other that can appear to make talk of a “hope of glory” a contradiction. The tension I perceive is this: as much as it may be the case that (as Paul taught) “hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom. 8:24; cf. 2 Cor. 5:7), hope must nevertheless have some connection with the present in order to qualify as hope, rather than simply wishful thinking. And yet for Christians glory has no such connection, since it refers to the displacement of the corruption and mortality intrinsic to life now by the incorruption and immortality of the resurrection—a displacement that neither does nor can have any ground in our present existence just because it comes upon us as an utterly gracious gift rather than either a natural development or a merited reward (1 Cor. 15:50–53).<sup>5</sup>

Nor is this attempt to reconcile the themes of hope and glory simply a conceptual or semantic puzzle. It is rather deeply bound up with the reality of human life in this world. For the Christian proclamation of glory as the object of hope is rooted in the recognition that the human experience of mortality is not neutral or indifferent but shot through with injustice, brutality, pain, and want. To hope for glory is to hold that these soul-crushing realities are not the last word for our existence, so that when faced with them “we do not lose heart” but trust instead that they are “producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure” (2 Cor. 4:16–17).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, in the aftermath of two world wars, the Holocaust, and the unleashing of atomic weaponry, theologians in Europe and North America sought to expand reflection on Christian hope to include the form of human life within history as well as the promise of eternal glory beyond it.<sup>6</sup> Christian hope, it was argued, is not rightly deferred either to an otherworldly existence on the far side of death or a supernaturally transformed creation at the end of time, but looks for the transformation of the conditions of life here and now. These theologies of hope generated considerable excitement in academic circles, and yet early on James Cone raised the complaint that they were “influenced too much by German and American philosophical discourse on hope and too little by the actual bearers of hope in our social existence.”<sup>7</sup>

5. Frederic Jameson has argued that this tension is also endemic to secular utopian thinking, which struggles between visions of utopia that are simply projections of the cultural situation of the writer (and her public) on the one hand, and a recognition that the transition to a truly novel social situation is by reason of its very novelty indescribable. See Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), Part One; cf. 289, where he argues that science fiction as a genre serves “to bring home . . . our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself: and this, not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners.”

6. The seminal work in this genre was Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung. Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1964); ET: *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967). See pp. 3–6 below for a more detailed discussion of this text.

7. Cone continues that if would-be theologians of hope “continue their talk about hope primarily in relation to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, Moltmann, and Pannenberg, while ignoring the hope disclosed in the songs and tales of black slaves, then we can only conclude that white theology’s hope is a reason for despair on the part of the oppressed and thus alien to the gospel of Jesus.” James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 127.

Cone's point was simple: however putatively this-worldly its focus, theological talk about hope will provide only false consolation unless it takes its bearings from those who bear the brunt of worldly affliction. For theologians located in North America, he insisted, this means that "there can be no talk of hope in the Christian sense unless it is talk about the freedom of black, red, and brown people."<sup>8</sup>

Cone's warning has lost none of its pungency since it was first written half a century ago, especially as I reflect on it from the perspective of my own privileged background. Even if Paul's experience of hunger, thirst, flogging, beating, stoning, imprisonment, and shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:23–27), culminating (according to tradition) in his martyrdom under Nero, lend existential weight to his words when he insists that earthly afflictions are only "slight" and "momentary" in comparison with the glory to come, how can such assurances be echoed with any credibility by me—a well-established white, male scholar who has never known want or debilitating disease but whose life, to the contrary, has been blessed in immeasurable ways, not least in the companionship of a wise and understanding spouse, together with whom I have shared the inestimable privilege of seeing our two daughters grow to healthy and confident adulthood? Even my sins, many (not to mention shameful and embarrassing) though they are, have not aroused public scandal or led to widespread alienation of family or friends. On what basis then can I possibly speak about hope to those whose paths have been beset by experiences of deprivation, humiliation, and pain that I cannot imagine?

The plain truth is that I can't, at least not in a way that will provide any advance guarantee that my speaking will avoid either presumption or absurdity. And yet avoiding the topic is not an option, because it is not permitted for the Christian theologian (whatever that theologian's personal circumstances) to remain silent on the question of hope, given that Scripture enjoins the faithful always to be "ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

But if I can't avoid the suspicion that any account of hope I might provide will be compromised by the all-too-limited prospects of my own experience, I can try to mitigate this risk by attending to the voices of those who have suffered in ways that I have not. Given the many very different forms that suffering can take, this effort cannot take the form of explicit engagement with all the particular experiences of suffering that will be known to the readers of this book. It can mean no more than to try to ensure that articulation of the Christian conviction that it is right to hope even in the face of the most extreme forms of suffering, and thus that such suffering is not the final word to be spoken over any human life, does not entail—ever—forgetfulness of suffering. Indeed, it seems to me that this principle is the essential truth in Luther's theology of the cross: that the revelation of God in the crucified Jesus means that no talk about God can be credible that ignores or bypasses the fact of earthly suffering. In this context, the work of Black and womanist theologians, especially James Cone and Delores Williams, has been particularly important for my own theological formation. Although I address their thinking explicitly only in the final

8. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 128.

chapter—because it is there that the tensions associated with my articulation of the content of Christian hope come to a head—their common insistence that the measure of good theology is its capacity to bring good news to the poor and marginalized has informed my thinking throughout, calling me always to remember experiences different than my own in the face of the temptation—ever-present for an author whose whiteness is inseparable from a presumption of mastery—to provide too tidy an account of the Christian hope.

Whatever success I may have in achieving this goal, I owe to the wisdom of many people—teachers and colleagues like Cone and Williams, of course, but also students, family, friends, pastors, and others—who have influenced me for the good in ways of which I am all too often unaware. One set of debts I can readily acknowledge, however, is to the people at Westminster John Knox Press, especially Bob Ratcliff, who commissioned the text; Bridgett Green, who reviewed the entire manuscript, which is much the better for her editorial suggestions; Dan Braden, Julie Tonini, and all the other production staff whose efforts, both known and unknown to me, have brought this book to print. I am also grateful to Dean Doug Sweeney and the faculty of the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, whose gracious invitation to give the Reformation Heritage Lectures in 2023 gave me the opportunity to present much of the material in chapters 5 and 6 before an engaged and probing audience. But my deepest thanks go to my colleagues at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, who have provided a home for dogmatic reflection like no other I have experienced in over a quarter century in theological education: one where I find myself pressed to attend to the demands of voices all too frequently ignored by an institutional ethos that at every point connects formation for church leadership with attention to context. While I have been aware of Candler's unique character as an institution of theological education since I was first hired in 2005, it is only since my return after five (in their own right wonderful) years in Cambridge that I have come to appreciate fully the indispensability of this community of learning for whatever integrity my own work—on this topic in particular—may possess. I am profoundly grateful for it.

*Candler School of Theology*

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*The Feast of St. Philip and St. James*



# Introduction

## *The Problem of Hope*

For what do Christians hope? That is the fundamental question of Christian eschatology, or the doctrine of “the last things” (*ta eschata* in Greek), and at one level, the Christian tradition offers pretty clear answers. Christians hope for the return of the Lord Jesus, the coming of God’s kingdom, and the life of the world to come. In short, the Christian hope is a “hope of sharing the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). But what do these phrases mean concretely? Over the last century or so, in response to the worry that traditional interpretations of Christian hope failed to take seriously God’s concern for human life in this world, two different ways of approaching this question emerged within Western academic theology, each with its own characteristic problems. The first, exemplified by the social gospel movement and by political and liberation theologies, risks historical reduction, in which Christian hope is focused on the possibilities for the transformation of the conditions of human existence in this world. The second, reflected in mid-twentieth-century kerygmatic theologies as well as more recent forms of postliberalism, tends toward ahistorical abstraction, in which hope is largely decoupled from future expectation and is instead reinterpreted in terms of a transformed quality of life in the present, whether in the form of the existential freedom secured by the individual’s decision for faith or the pursuit of virtue in the community of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Although each of these alternatives has very able exponents who seek to avoid the one-sided simplifications I have just described, neither has much to say about glory. Indeed, it is striking that in the debates between these two approaches over the past century (in which the progressive optimism of the social gospel gave way to the professed realism of dialectical theologies, only for the latter to be charged with their own form of socioeconomic naiveté by liberationists, who, in their turn, were accused by postliberals of reducing the gospel to a secular political program, and so on), the eschatological topics associated with glory—the Parousia, resurrection, and eternal life—have tended to drift to the margins and thus effectively surrendered to proponents of those otherworldly interpretations of Christian hope that were the stimulus for the formulation of these modern alternatives in the first place. Yet the fact that these otherworldly perspectives, far from having been displaced, dominate popular expressions of Christian faith across the globe (not least among the Pentecostal

1. These two perspectives correspond roughly with what Markus Mühling characterizes as eschatologies “from ahead” and “from above,” respectively. See Markus Mühling, *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Eschatology*, trans. Jennifer Adams-Maßmann and David Andrew Gilland (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015 [2007]), 14–22.

churches that represent the fastest-growing branch of contemporary Christianity) show that such surrender is a mistake. For the end of Christian hope, to which the traditional creedal and biblical symbols relating to “the last things” point, is ineluctably a “hope of *glory*” (Col. 1:27; cf. Rom. 5:2; Titus 2:13) and thus rightly and necessarily “otherworldly,” in that glory—which properly and finally belongs to God alone—exceeds every possibility and potential of life in this world. Consequently, for all the objections that must (and in the following pages will) be raised against the eschatological vision on display in the *Left Behind* series and similar books,<sup>2</sup> insofar as such texts testify to a refusal to give up the hope of glory, they challenge those of us who swim in the waters of mainline academic theology to answer the question “What then are *we* to say about these things?” (Rom. 8:31).

### The Tension between Hope and Glory

But it is one thing to register the need for such an answer and quite another to provide one that is credible. For the impulses giving rise to the eschatologies that I have rather cavalierly accused of “historical reduction” and “ahistorical abstraction” remain compelling. Thanks to the insights of the natural sciences, we have a level of knowledge about the structure, history, and destiny of the physical universe that renders literalistic interpretations of topics like a new heaven and earth, in which death, suffering, and pain will be no more, difficult to accept, since they seem flatly inconsistent with our best understanding of how the world is put together. For as much as Christians are called to join Paul in affirming that “hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom. 8:24), nevertheless a hope that is completely divorced from what can be “seen”—that is, from some relation to present experience—seems better described as wishful thinking or even delusion. I can hope for a cure for cancer, the end of poverty, even a female pope. But it seems a misuse of the word to speak of a hope that I will acquire the powers of Superman, that the sun will turn blue, or that two plus two will someday equal five.<sup>3</sup>

In short, to the degree that the life in glory for which Christians hope lacks grounding in present experience, it is inconsistent with the basic character of hope, which is fundamentally a matter of anticipation, in which that for which we hope, while not reducible to extrapolation of worldly processes, is sufficiently rooted in what we know of the world and our place in it to motivate activity consistent with its future realization (see especially 2 Cor. 3:12; cf. 1 Cor. 9:10; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 6:11).<sup>4</sup> If the object of my hope is completely

2. *Left Behind* includes sixteen books (named for the first in the series: *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*), all written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, and published between 1995 and 2007. Reflecting one version of the kind of otherworldly eschatological vision discussed in detail in the first section of chapter 1 below, the series has commanded a wide readership among conservative Protestants in particular and has given rise to a separate series intended for a teenage audience (*Left Behind: The Kids*), as well as to film adaptations and video games.

3. “It is just crazy, clearly, to be hopeful . . . about an outcome one believes has literally no chance of occurring or that one believes is certain to occur.” Adrienne Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 51.

4. Vincent Lloyd summarizes the founding insights of Black theology along just these lines as a rejection of the “reduction of hope to either a plan for the future or a desire for an improbable but fantasized

discontinuous with what I experience now, then its fulfillment bears no intrinsic relationship whatsoever to anything I do or neglect to do now. To be sure, the glory for which one hopes may be conceived as a reward for certain sorts of behavior in this life, but to the extent that glory is understood to supervene on rather than to emerge from worldly possibilities, this connection will invariably appear arbitrary: a collection of admissions criteria to be fulfilled in the present that could be expanded, contracted, or even radically transformed, without any implications for the character of the life to come.

These considerations suggest that the “hope of glory” is almost oxymoronic, since the this-worldly demands of hope are simply incompatible with the otherworldly character of glory. Indeed, the difficulty of thinking hope and glory together provides a plausible explanation for the tendency in much twentieth-century eschatology to opt for either a hope without glory (by way of a this-worldly focus on strategies for ameliorating the human condition) or glory that is decoupled from hope (in which there is a transformed vision of the world but little expectation that its essential character can be changed within the confines of history). These alternatives take concrete form in probably the two most influential treatments of hope and glory written since the Second World War: Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* (1964) and Hans Urs von Balthasar’s multivolume *The Glory of the Lord* (1961–1969), respectively, in both of which one topic is treated in almost complete disregard of the other.<sup>5</sup>

The subject of glory is all but absent from *Theology of Hope*: the word itself appears only a handful of times and is nowhere the subject of sustained analysis or reflection. Nor is this omission surprising when it is recognized that Moltmann’s explicit aim in this book was to develop an eschatology that is “forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present” over against otherworldly alternatives.<sup>6</sup> He sees this need as all the more urgent given that neither the much-celebrated rediscovery of the eschatological character of Jesus’ teaching by Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer at the turn of the twentieth century nor the stress on eschatology in the dialectical theology of subsequent decades led to a renewed emphasis on the theological significance of earthly history as the context for the realization of God’s kingdom. Instead, eschatology was interpreted merely as a sign of the strangeness of Jesus’ proclamation, in which the promise of the kingdom was decoupled from life in the world and deployed instead as a transcendental

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future,” on the grounds that neither of these perspectives “captures hope as a disposition or virtue . . . a way of responding to dire circumstances, without despair. Such a virtue necessarily finds expression in concrete, worldly terms: desires for *this* and *that*, obtainable through *these* channels.” Vincent Lloyd, *Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 134. For resolutely secular defenses of the same point, see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1954–1959]), and Martin, *How We Hope*.

5. This is not to say that either author is unaware of the need for a balance between the two dimensions of eschatology, only that neither succeeds in striking it. Balthasar, for example, has written, “Man must give himself completely in two directions: the horizontal ‘forward’ and the vertical ‘upward.’ And this should be accomplished in such a way that each direction does not hinder the other but, on the contrary, furthers it.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen*, trans. Michael Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 33.

6. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967 [1965]), 16. From the side of biblical scholarship, N. T. Wright has also defended the resolutely this-worldly character of biblical eschatology in his book *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of the Christian Hope* (London: Grove, 1999).

principle for the critique of all worldly politics.<sup>7</sup> While this approach performed the service of discrediting those forms of Christianity that simply identified God's will with any worldly political order, it also painted human history as essentially hopeless. Over against this position, Moltmann insisted that Christian hope entails attention to history as the arena where human beings are called by God to realize new possibilities for life in this world.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Balthasar's account of glory, with its emphasis on theology's grounding in the discernment of form—specifically the form of “the indivisible God-man,” Jesus Christ—results in an emphasis on the vision of the risen Lord's glory now rather than on any expectation of future transformation of the conditions of life in this world.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, Balthasar is clear that the revelation of God's glory in Christ is completed only eschatologically, when the form that is Christ will have taken every creature up into itself; but his focus is on the present, defending Christ's status as the form of God's glory by showing how he can and should be understood as the unifying center of all human experience, gathering together the disparate threads of nature and history into a single, focused frame.<sup>10</sup> Because this attention to form leads to the prioritization of sight as central to the perception and analysis of theological truth,<sup>11</sup> faith and love are the theological virtues that take center stage, with hope rarely coming into focus as an object of extended reflection.<sup>12</sup>

7. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 37–40.

8. “A missionary exposition of the biblical witness to man's history and mission will therefore agree with the existentialist interpretation in enquiring about the new possibilities which entered the world through Israel and Christianity. It, too, will have to present these past existential possibilities as possibilities of the present understanding of existence. But it will interpret these existential possibilities as new possibilities for man's future. It will not interpret the phenomena of history on the ground of the possibilities of human existence, but on the contrary, it will interpret the new possibilities of human existence on the basis of the ‘phenomenon’ of God's promise and mission and of the ‘phenomenon’ of the resurrection and future of Christ. It will be able to open up to man today new possibilities, prospects and goals through its exposition of that event which paves the way for the eschatological future.” Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 287–88.

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, vol. 1 of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982 [1961]), 437.

10. This focus on the present is partly a function of Balthasar's concern to defend the possibility of the *theologia gloriae* against Protestant critiques: “For Protestantism beauty remains eschatological; but if the *eschaton* which is Christ has appeared in the midst of history, and if the rays of his resurrection already begin to brighten that history, then we should be permitted to speak of Christian beauty even here below.” (Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 659; cf. the critique of Luther on 57–58).

11. “Jesus is the Word, the Image, the Expression and Exegesis of God. . . . He is what he expresses—namely God. . . . How greatly therefore the power of sight is demanded and presupposed at the point of origin.” Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 29. This emphasis on sight is partly intended to counter the Protestant emphasis on faith and hearing (following Rom. 10:17) as precluding the possibility of present vision (see *ibid.*, 333; cf. 120, 200–201). And although he also states that “we do not need to argue over whether precedence goes to hearing or seeing,” he effectively subverts that claim by adding that “hearing must be assigned particularly to imitative faith, while . . . seeing is more properly assigned to archetypal faith. . . . Furthermore, within the archetypal experience we can assign hearing . . . predominantly to the Old Testament, and seeing . . . predominantly to the New” (*ibid.*, 309–10).

12. The English translation of *Herrlichkeit* runs to seven volumes and over 3,500 pages (the German original is in three, with the third in two parts). In the programmatic first volume, *Seeing the Form*, there are only a few, widely scattered references to hope, and even where it is mentioned the theological accent falls on present experience more than anticipation of the future. Thus, even where hope does come into discussion (at the end of each of the last two volumes of the English translation), it is largely by way of warning: in the first case indicting the messianic hope of postexilic Israel as one of several abortive “attempts to force the glory of God into the open” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology: The Old Covenant*, vol. 6 of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Brian McNeil and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991 [1967]), 303); and in the second in connection with the rejection of all “political theology” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology: The New Covenant*, vol. 7 of *The*

Importantly, the one-sidedness of both Moltmann's theology of hope and Balthasar's theology of glory can be understood as motivated by sound theological concerns. For although neither thinker comments directly on his decision to treat one topic in comparative disregard of the other, both clearly wish to stress God's love for this creation in all its quotidian concreteness in opposition to theologies with a more subjective or otherworldly focus.<sup>13</sup> Both their respective strategies may thus be understood as acknowledging that while hope and glory are both integral to Christian faith, each has an inherent tendency to turn theological attention away from life in this world, albeit in different ways. In the case of hope, the risk of displacement is temporal (or "horizontal"): from the present to the future; while for glory it is rather spatial (or "vertical"): from the ambiguities of earth "below" to the heavenly realm "above" where God is ever visible.<sup>14</sup> By choosing hope or glory as the focus of attention, each theologian runs the risk of a displacement of eschatological discourse along either the "horizontal" or "vertical" axis but is thereby enabled to give full attention to the dimension they choose. Thus, by exploring hope without much reference to glory, Moltmann maintains a horizon for Christian faith and practice that, while resolutely forward looking, remains firmly bound to the possibilities and promise of this-worldly historical existence. Likewise, although Balthasar's focus on glory pulls attention "upward" to the exalted Christ, his intent is to provide a comprehensive vision of the world as experienced here and now.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the trade-offs involved in the work of both theologians raises the question of whether the attempt to provide an integrated account of the "hope of glory" will not invariably give rise to an eschatology that fails to take seriously God's commitment to the flourishing of the present world, owing to the expectation of its (more or less imminent) replacement by a new creation that is utterly discontinuous with that which we now inhabit. In other words, linking hope (which points away from the present to the future) to glory (which points away from earthly possibility to heavenly reality) threatens a double displacement that risks evacuating the present of any genuine significance for

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*Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Brian McNeil [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989, [1969]], 502). Of course, *Herrlichkeit* is not Balthasar's last word on eschatology; but even in *The Last Act*, the final volume of his five-volume *Theo-Drama*, his emphasis is from the beginning on the realized dimension of Christian eschatology: "the New Testament no longer envisages the idea of a self-unfolding of horizontal theo-dramas; there is only a vertical theo-drama in which every moment of time . . . is directly related to the exalted Lord." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Last Act*, vol. 5 of *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998 [1983]), 48.

13. In this context—and in keeping with the fact that both projects date from the 1960s and the heyday of kerygmatic theology—both Balthasar and Moltmann frequently define their own positions over against that of Bultmann and his school, which they associate with a deprecation of interest in the objective conditions of human life in time and space (viz., history) in favor of an emphasis on faith as a purely subjective decision (viz., "historicity" as a condition of personal responsibility). See, e.g., Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 124: "The 'glory' of Christian transfiguration is in no way less resplendent than the transfiguring glory of worldly beauty, but the fact is that the glory of Christ unites splendour and radiance with solid reality."

14. Here and in what follows, unless otherwise stated "heaven" is reserved for the created but invisible realm, beyond space and time, where God's glory is eternally visible, while "earth" and "earthly" refer to the whole visible realm of time and space (and not simply to planet Earth). This usage is intended to reflect that of the Nicene Creed, in which the phrase "heaven and earth" functions as a summary description of everything that God created, both "seen and unseen."

15. See also his interpretation of the transfiguration as a demonstration "that the Son of Man's form in his humiliation is a function of his glorified form . . . and not primarily an anticipation of the eschatological manner of existence after the Resurrection" (Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 670).

life with God in a way that is impossible to square with Jesus' dedication to the healing and renewal of creation.<sup>16</sup> For if the glory for which Christians hope is utterly beyond the experience of life in this world, then this world seems to be reduced to little more than a purgatorial prelude to another that sits uneasily with the divine declaration that heaven and earth and all that is in them are "very good" (Gen. 1:31).<sup>17</sup>

To reject these alternatives as inadequate to Christian confession means accepting the challenge of finding a way to think hope and glory together. Here, as in all matters of Christian teaching, theology finds its proper point of orientation in the life of Jesus—all the more so because Paul equates "the hope of glory" with "Christ among you" (Col. 1:27). And because it is only possible to speak of Christ—who was crucified, dead, and buried—among us insofar as he has been raised from the dead, it follows that the resurrection will prove crucial for assessing the significance of Jesus for Christian hope. Certainly Paul, in proclaiming Jesus to be "the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20), seems to hold that Jesus' resurrection provides the template for the destiny of all those whose life he came to share. Finding a way to think hope and glory together thus entails clarifying what it means to say that God raised Jesus from the dead, since death seemingly marks the end of all hope, and yet for Jesus it became the occasion for him to be "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9).

### Resolving the Tension: The Resurrection

In the quest to understand what resurrection entails, it must first of all be distinguished from resuscitation. The latter refers to the restoration of a dead person to earthly life, examples of which are recorded not only in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., 2 Kings 4:32–37; John 11:1–44) but also in many other

16. "When immortality is thought of simply as grace . . . then it takes flight into the realm of the miraculous and loses its claim on the serious attention of thinking people." Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988 [1977]), 154.

17. In this context, it is necessary to say something about Giorgio Agamben's view that divine glory is merely a cover for what is ultimately empty, rather like the fire and smoke distracting from the nonentity behind the curtain in the film *The Wizard of Oz*. Agamben argues that to posit glory as an intrinsic property of God implies that God is inherently "inoperative." This essential divine inactivity implies that there is nothing to say about God, in the face of which "glory" is introduced as that which "must cover with its splendor the unaccountable figure of divine inoperativity." Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011 [2007]), 163; cf. 224, where he goes on to ask, "Why must God be continually praised, even if the theologians . . . never tire of assuring us that he has no need of it? Does the distinction between internal [intrinsic] and external [ascribed] glory . . . really constitute a sufficient explanation? Does it not rather betray the attempt . . . to hide something that it would be too embarrassing to leave unexplained?" Leaving aside the considerable difficulties with Agamben's historical account of the relation between "theology" and "economy" in patristic Trinitarian theology, the fundamental problem with his analysis is his inability to conceive of creation as gift, insisting rather that if God is conceived as existing apart from the world, it must follow that God is "foreign" to it, and that the world must therefore be understood as "extraneous" (140)—the product of an arbitrary act of will that, being groundless, is essentially empty—and therefore in need of being covered over or concealed by the ascription of glory. That a God who is love might freely (yet, precisely because God is love, non-arbitrarily) choose to share that love externally by bringing creatures into being evidently fails to occur to him.



religious traditions and, for that matter, in the annals of modern medicine. Those who are merely resuscitated, however, will eventually die again and for good: in being “raised,” they have been granted only a temporary reprieve. By contrast, “Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9; cf. Luke 20:36).

This difference between resurrection and resuscitation means that Jesus’ rising from the dead cannot be understood as just one more (albeit extraordinary) event in his life story, alongside his birth, baptism, trial, and the like.<sup>18</sup> Such an interpretation would vitiate the Christian confession that Jesus (as the one in whom, according to Col. 2:9, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”) is the definitive revelation of God’s will for creation. For if Jesus were to continue to live—that is, to experience and respond to events—on the far side of Easter in the same way that he did during the period from his birth through his death, then we could no longer be confident that the divine will for our salvation revealed in Jesus’ earthly lifespan was final or definitive. If in his risen state Jesus continued to develop as a character via interactions with various features of his environment (even if on a higher, heavenly plane), what guarantee would we have that one of these postmortem events would not disclose that God’s favor was in fact less expansive than suggested by Jesus’ life on earth? In order for this possibility to be excluded—as it must be if the gospel that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” is indeed to be regarded as “sure and worthy of full acceptance” (1 Tim. 1:15)—resurrection must not be confused with a return to or resumption of earthly life, but must rather be understood as the divine vindication of that life in its entirety, from Jesus’ birth to his death. To confess Jesus as risen therefore means to acknowledge that his death marks the absolute and definitive boundary to his life story, so that the mode of Jesus’ life after Easter is quite different from that which he experienced between Christmas and Good Friday: from his birth to his death Jesus lived out his identity as the Son in time; in the resurrection, he lives eternally just as the person whose life is bounded by his birth from Mary at one end and his crucifixion under Pilate at the other. It follows that if Jesus is the one from whom we take our eschatological bearings, then the content of Christian hope is not to be conceived as an otherworldly sequel to the life we live here and now, but rather as the eternal affirmation of our lives as they have been lived on earth.

Hope is thus anchored in our life now because it is just this life’s vindication, even though the fact that hope pertains to the *whole* of this life also means that it cannot be realized in this world but only on the far side of death, as that which marks the end of this life. So far, so good—but only so far. For it does not take much reflection to realize that serious questions arise when this christological template of postmortem vindication is applied to human beings in general. It is, after all, one thing to speak of the eternal affirmation of Jesus’ earthly life, since he is without sin (Heb. 4:15). But what sense can be made of the claim that God would affirm the life of any human being *other* than Jesus, “since all have

18. The Sadducees’ query to Jesus about the postmortem status of the woman who married seven brothers in succession suggests that they understood the idea of resurrection in just this sense (Matt. 22:23–28 and pars.). See pp. 114–15 below for further discussion of this point.

sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23; cf. 1 John 1:18)?<sup>19</sup> Is it really good news to hear that lives marked by selfishness, vanity, faithlessness, or greed—let alone those whose record includes torture, rape, or murder—will be received into eternal glory?

Of course, this problem was known to Israel long before the coming of Jesus, as shown by the psalmist's question, "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" (Ps. 130:3). When human life is considered in itself, with reference to what an individual has done or failed to do, there can be no possibility of vindication: because everyone has sinned, no one can stand. Nor is this judgment arbitrary, as though this universal condemnation derived from God having set absurd or impossible criteria for human beings to meet. Quite the contrary, the essential mystery of sin is that there is no accounting for it on these or any other terms, because for a creature to sin is to turn from God and thereby—since God is the sole ground of every creature's being—to cut itself off from the very power that secures its existence. In bringing us into being, God wills that we should stand; but in committing sin (where "sin" refers to any action or inaction by which we turn from God's will for us) we reject the only power by which we *can* stand.

Yet however great the mystery of sin may be, Scripture teaches that the mystery of love, whereby God refuses to allow that creatures' fate should be defined by their failures, is greater still. "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" But, the psalmist continues, "there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered" (Ps. 130:3–4). Forgiveness is God's declaration that what the sinful creature has done or failed to do is not decisive for its relationship with God. Importantly, in making this declaration, God does not undo what has been done: the fact of sin remains part of the creature's history; but in forgiving the sin God declares that the creature's being is not reducible to its history, so that the lives of sinners may be affirmed without thereby affirming their sin. In other words, through the forgiveness of sin, our lives are redeemed.

Here, too, the resurrection remains central, for according to Scripture it is only on the basis of the news that Jesus has risen from the dead that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47; cf. Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Col. 1:14). This is not because Jesus' death somehow makes forgiveness possible by satisfying some divine requirement that mercy be purchased at the price of some compensatory quantity of punishment. Leaving aside the fact that even in human practice to forgive is precisely to *forgo* the demand for punishment, the Gospels are full of stories of Jesus forgiving people's sin without the evangelists offering any account of Jesus satisfying any moral, legal, or cultic requirements as a condition of his doing so.

The link between incarnation and the gospel of forgiveness therefore needs to be conceived in different terms. As already noted, in sin we turn away from God, undermining the very conditions of our existence (since God is the only condition of our existence) in a way that invariably leads to our destruction. In taking flesh, God checks this process by uniting God's own life, which cannot

19. Catholics will, of course, hold Mary of Nazareth to be one further exception to this truth, but this does not affect the basic point being made.



be destroyed, to ours. The result is that our life, too, is now reconstituted in such a way as to be unable to be held by death. Nor is this just a future hope. The gospel is not that Jesus has gone on to a life in glory that the rest of us will share some day, but that because Jesus has been glorified our lives have *already* been transformed:

[W]e are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for the one who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, everything has become new! (2 Cor. 5:14–17, alt.)

In light of Jesus' resurrection, no one is any longer to be regarded "from a human point of view"—that is, according to the potentials and possibilities of their earthly lives.<sup>20</sup> For because it is true of the risen Jesus that "the life he lives, he lives to God" (Rom. 6:10; cf. 2 Cor. 13:4), so no human life is to be considered apart from God. We, too, are to be regarded as sharing Jesus' risen life, because (as Paul goes on to inform the Corinthians), in him "God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation"—that is, the gospel of forgiveness of sins—"to us" (2 Cor. 5:19). The life that is consummated in resurrection is already active in us now by virtue of the baptism through which we, experiencing our dying to sin in anticipation of our dying in the body, likewise begin to experience renewed life with God prior to the general resurrection: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).<sup>21</sup>

### Resurrection's Form: Persons and Natures

But how does the resurrection make it possible for mere words—even if they are God's words of forgiveness—to change the human situation so radically? It is, after all, one thing to recognize the capacity of a well-placed word to sustain the weary in a time of weakness (Isa. 50:4) but quite another to argue that a word has the capacity to secure our lives in the face of death. To answer this question, it is necessary to take a slight detour through the technicalities of Christian teaching about Jesus' person in order to recognize the connection between Jesus' rising from the dead and the confession that he is at once fully divine and fully human. In the classic form adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, this teaching turns on the conceptual distinction between *person*

20. This Greek of 2 Cor. 5:16 translated in the NRSVue as "from a human point of view" is *kata sarka*—literally "according to the flesh," to which the implicit alternative is *kata pneuma*, or "according to the Spirit." The point is to contrast what God is doing with that which appears either real or possible on the basis of creaturely considerations (cf. Matt. 19:26 and pars.).

21. "Thinking of who we are after baptism is analogous to thinking about who we will be after the resurrection: still ourselves, particularly and recognizably so, though metamorphosed. . . . The self at baptism isn't just analogous to the resurrected self—the self at baptism approximates the self upon resurrection." Lauren Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 112.

(or hypostasis) and *nature*, according to which Jesus is confessed to be just *one* person but with *two* (viz., divine and human) natures, as follows:

the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person and hypostasis. He is not split or divided into two persons, but he is one and the same only begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The claim that the divine and human natures were united in Jesus “without confusion or change” means, on the one hand, that God did not cease to be God in taking flesh and, on the other, that the flesh that God took was perfectly ordinary, so that with respect to his humanity Jesus, like every other human being, was dependent on a vast network of creaturely structures and processes, both physical and social, to sustain his earthly life. This ordinariness was recognized by Jesus’ contemporaries and, indeed, was what made his claims to authority so puzzling to them (see, e.g., Mark 6:3; John 1:46; 8:57): with respect to his human nature, he was indeed like us “in every respect” (Heb. 2:17).<sup>23</sup>

This insistence that the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus did not violate the integrity of either nature means that the incarnation does not entail any change in the fundamental relationship between God as Creator and the world as created: even in the person of Jesus, the natures of Creator and creature remain distinct, so that considered as a human being, Jesus is no more divine than you or I. The crucial difference between Jesus and other human beings has to do with that other crucial category in the Chalcedonian definition: his person, or “hypostasis,” meaning his identity, or *who* he is. All human beings are “hypostases” in this Chalcedonian sense of the term (that is, every individual human being is *someone* in addition to being *something*), but only in the case of Jesus, Christians claim, is the someone in question God; that is, only in his case can a human being be said to have (or, more accurately, to be) a *divine* hypostasis, so that Jesus is rightly identified as none other than the eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity.<sup>24</sup> This means that while it is no more true of Jesus than of me or you that when he eats a piece of bread, for example, God is the immediate ground of that action (since as Creator God is the necessary and

22. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., ed. Heinrich Denzinger, Peter Hünemann, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) [hereafter DH], §301–02; translation slightly altered.

23. Although Jesus also performed miracles, the fact that he himself attributed this capacity to God’s Spirit (Matt. 12:28; cf. John 3:34) implies that the “mechanics” (if you will) of his teaching and miracles were no different than that of the prophets who preceded him or his disciples who would come after (see John 14:12)—and thus implies no qualification of the judgment that his humanity was perfectly ordinary. Similarly, Jesus’ virginal conception does not in any fundamental sense qualify the ordinariness of the humanity thereby conceived (nor is it in any sense an ontologically necessary corollary of his being the Word incarnate, which, as discussed below, is a function of his hypostasis rather than his human nature).

24. When I characterize my explication of the term “hypostasis” as Chalcedonian, I do not mean to suggest that the word was understood in this sense when it was used in the definition of 451. Instead, my interpretation reflects the more precise meaning the word came to have as the result of further clarification by theologians who sought to defend the Chalcedonian definition over the subsequent 250 years (most especially in the first half of the sixth century).

sufficient condition of every creaturely happening), in the case of Jesus alone can it be said that God is also the actor. To say that Jesus is the Word made flesh is thus to say that when Jesus eats, talks, or breathes, the one eating, talking, and breathing is God: whatever Jesus does, God does—and that is not true of any other human being.

Now, this feature of Jesus' existence carries with it certain further implications. All other human beings come into being as (human) hypostases together with their (human) natures, such that we become someone just in coming to be something (viz., a human being). In other words, it is just because I have been born a human being that I also subsist as a human hypostasis. The structure of the earthly life of human beings is thus one in which the nature sustains the hypostasis, meaning that human beings subsist as persons by virtue of their being human, that is, because "humanity" names a kind of nature that in being individuated is also "personalized."<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Jesus' identity as the eternal Word means that the relation between hypostasis and human nature is different in his case. Because his hypostasis is divine, his hypostatic status as someone is not contingent upon his having a human nature as yours or mine is. Rather, because the Word subsists eternally as a hypostasis of the divine nature, and thus independently of incarnation, Jesus' hypostasis may be said to "preexist" his humanity in a way that is not true of any other human being.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, while the Word who has taken flesh lives his incarnate life in Roman Palestine by means of the same processes of respiration, digestion, and so forth characteristic of the nature he shares with all other human beings, the Word is not dependent on that nature and its processes in the same way as the hypostases of other human beings are. Rather, because Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, he is the one human being for whom it is the case that his hypostasis subsists (viz., in the divine nature) prior to his humanity.<sup>27</sup>

It is this feature of Jesus' ontology that distinguishes him from a "mere human being" (what the Greek fathers called a *psilos anthrōpos*), in spite of the ordinariness of his humanity. And it is also this feature which ensures that death—the cessation of those biological functions that sustain a living creature in active relation with its external environment—affects Jesus differently

25. Importantly, this is not to say that the nature *causes* the hypostasis, for that would imply that the hypostasis were a part or attribute of the nature (that is, some *thing*—one property of the nature alongside others) rather than the identity of the one who instantiates the nature. One might say that my nature "causes" me to have brown hair, two arms, the capacity to reason, even to exhibit particular personality traits; but it does not cause me to be Ian. In other words, I am the hypostasis I am as the one who has this particular body, with this personality, will, intellect, and so forth; but because (as Christians will want to confess) my identity as this particular hypostasis persists in spite of the most radical changes to any of these features, it cannot be derived from any of them. Thus, although my hypostasis has no existence apart from my nature (since it is a hypostasis at all only as it is a hypostasis of that nature), it cannot be derived from any individual feature or set of features of that nature.

26. I put "preexist" in quotation marks because although it is impossible to talk about the incarnation except in terms that connote temporal sequence (e.g., "took flesh," "became incarnate," etc.), the fact that the Word's taking flesh is not an evolution in the life of the Word (which, as eternal, does not subsist in temporal sequence), but simply the projection of an eternal reality into time, makes the use of temporal modifiers misleading.

27. That is the force of the Scholastic doctrine of "anhypostasia," according to which Jesus' human nature has no existence (i.e., is "anhypostatic") except as hypostatized by the divine Word. See pp. 139–42 below for a discussion of how it is possible to speak of human hypostases being upheld by God—though not properly subsisting—apart from actively hypostatizing a human nature.

than other human beings. For every other human being, death's destruction of human nature (traditionally described as the separation of soul and body) claims the hypostasis as well, which cannot subsist apart from the nature that sustains it.<sup>28</sup> To be sure, for Jesus, too, the death of his human nature also entails the death of his hypostasis: that is just what it means to confess (in line with the vindication of the theopaschite formula at the Second Council of Constantinople) that one of the Trinity died on the cross;<sup>29</sup> but precisely because Jesus, as the Word of God, *is* one of the Trinity, his hypostasis is also inseparable from the immortal divine nature, with the result that the process of death works itself out differently in his case. Unlike the rest of us, after Jesus dies in his humanity, he is also and necessarily raised again from the dead in that same humanity, "because it was impossible for him" as the eternal Word who eternally hypostatizes the divine nature "to be held in [death's] power" (Acts 2:24). Because the inherent immortality of the divine nature means that the hypostasis of the Word cannot be held by death, the human nature to which that hypostasis has bound itself in taking flesh cannot be held by death either. That is just what it means for Jesus to be raised from the dead: to live anew before God as the Word *incarnate*—that is, with a human nature and therefore as a human being.

As already noted, this mode of life is different from a mere return to earthly life, although the Bible does not give much information about the characteristics of resurrected existence. According to Paul, it entails the acquisition of a "spiritual" body in place of our current "psychic" (i.e., soul-animated) one (1 Cor. 15:44), but this information is of limited value, since Paul does not give any detail about what a "spiritual body" is. The resurrection narratives in the Gospels give a mixed picture: on the one hand, a spiritual body seemingly has some sort of substantial reality (since John 21:4, 9–13, for example, depicts Jesus cooking and serving breakfast); on the other, it also has the very un-substantial properties of being able to pass through closed doors (John 20:19, 26) and to vanish from sight (Luke 24:30–31). While there seems little point in trying to work out the biophysics of all this, the upshot is clearly that a spiritual body lives in a manner that is qualitatively different from human bodies on the hither side of death.

This difference can be described in Chalcedonian language in terms of a shift in the relation between nature and hypostasis. Again, so long as Jesus lived an earthly life, his hypostasis, like that of every human being, was sustained through the operation of his human nature, and thus by the mediation of the same sorts of physical interactions on which all living organisms depend. Since such interactions are subject to disruptions (for example, by the withholding of food or the infliction of injury) that render creatures vulnerable to death, the claim that after Easter "death no longer has dominion over" Jesus means that his resurrected human nature is no longer threatened by such disruptions; it is free from them because it now subsists not by its own power, but rather by the

28. If death is understood as the separation of the soul from the body, the hypostasis continues to subsist in the soul (since it is precisely the soul of somebody or other); but in a state of separation from the body, neither the soul nor the hypostasis can be said to be fully alive prior to its being reunited to the body in the resurrection. See the discussion in chapter 6 below.

29. "If anyone does not confess that he who was crucified in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, is true God, Lord of glory and one of the Holy Trinity, let him be anathema." DH §432.

power of the divine hypostasis, which cannot be held by death and with which Jesus' human nature has been united. In short, whereas during his earthly life as a human being the incarnate Word's human nature sustained his hypostasis, in the resurrection it is the hypostasis that sustains his human nature. Thus, while the risen Jesus remains human, with a "spiritual body" that maintains enough of the characteristics of his earthly body (most especially, his wounds) to be recognized precisely as the body of Jesus, that body now subsists independently of the network of physical causes that sustained it prior to Good Friday.

This independence is manifest during the forty days after Easter in the risen Jesus' ability to vanish and appear spontaneously, but it is established definitively in his ascension to the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; 1 Pet. 3:22), for the point of the ascension is precisely to affirm that Jesus continues to subsist humanly (that is, as a psychosomatic whole rather than as an angel or other form of disembodied spirit), but that he does so "in heaven"—that is, outside of the network of interdependence that marks creatures' existence in time and space. As risen and ascended, Jesus occupies a "place" in the presence of God that is outside of created space: the place of glory. Of course, as the eternal Word Jesus is always in the Father's presence in his divine nature (for he is God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit); but by virtue of having taken flesh, died, risen, and ascended, he now lives before the Father according to his human nature as well. Again, he does not do this by any power of his human nature, but rather by virtue of his hypostatic identity as the Word. That is why Jesus is no longer to be regarded "from a human point of view," that is, as defined by the constraints of his earthly existence in first-century Palestine.

### Resurrection's Content: Living by God's Word

This rather long christological detour provides a framework allowing us to address the question of how the hope of glory can rest on God's word of forgiveness. Again, the hope of glory is, according to Paul, none other than Christ among us (Col. 1:27). In the period between Christ's ascension and return, Christ is among us in the message of forgiveness that comes to us through word and sacrament, and through this message the human nature of the sinner, too, comes to be sustained through her hypostasis rather than the other way round. After all, forgiveness—that which affirms the lives of sinners apart from their sin—is spoken to the hypostasis, since it is the person (i.e., Mary or Peter or Ian) not the nature that is forgiven. Unlike Jesus, our hypostases are not divine; but because our hypostases have been claimed by the Word in the face of the judgment that would otherwise rightly fall on us, it becomes true for us as well that our natures are sustained by our hypostases—which is simply to say that we live by the power of God's word of forgiveness rather than by any power of our own.<sup>30</sup> Prior to the resurrection this promise of life before God is not fully

30. One might draw a parallel here with Thomas Aquinas's way of contrasting how humans know in this life and in glory: in glory they know things immediately ("from above," we might say) through direct vision of the eternal ideas in the divine mind, whereas in history they know things only via abstraction from sensory perception of particular objects ("from below"). See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.78–84, 60 vols., Blackfriars ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1964–1981).

realized. We do not live in glory yet: we remain on earth, where Christ is hidden from our sight until his return; but the life of glory is nevertheless anticipated now as we receive the gospel of forgiveness, which declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God shown forth in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:39).

The Bible teaches that human beings live not “by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4 and par.; cf. Deut. 8:3). To receive the gospel of the forgiveness of sins is to experience, incompletely but genuinely, what it means to live by God’s word alone. For to hear this word is to know that one’s identity is not defined by one’s past actions, but solely and definitively by God’s word of grace. That is why none of us is to be regarded “from a human point of view”: not because we have ceased to be human, but because our humanity is no longer defined by the possibilities and limits of existence in space and time, but rather by the power of God’s word. As creatures we were, of course, already products of this Word, through whom we and all things were made (John 1:3); but in Jesus Christ that Word is now spoken to us personally, calling us to rest on its power alone rather than on any of the various created realities on which we might otherwise be tempted to rely.<sup>31</sup> To confess that we live “not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” is thus simply to acknowledge that in the last analysis our lives are not secured by our natural powers, but by God who, in addressing us as persons, upholds our natures as well.<sup>32</sup>

It is on these grounds that it becomes possible to think hope and glory together without contradiction, because the glory for which Christians hope, while not in any sense reducible to what can be seen now, or to what can be grasped by extrapolation from present experience, nevertheless has an anchor in that experience. For the object of this hope is just the risen life of Jesus: a life that is both fully human and, having overcome death, is secure in its humanity against every conceivable threat. And while we are not yet risen, we experience something of that eschatological vindication now when and as we receive Jesus’ word of forgiveness, which gives us the assurance of a life sustained by grace from above rather than by our efforts from below. For when it is known that a person’s life is finally secured by the word of pardon and adoption that comes to them from God in Christ rather than by what they have done or failed to do, then it becomes impossible to regard anyone “from a human point of view.”

Fine words—and fine words butter no parsnips. How in practice do we honor the demand to regard no one “from a human point of view” while still remaining attentive to the concrete realities of human sin and suffering here and

31. Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90: 640B-C): “the righteous man will not be in a ‘place’ [*thesin*] describable in terms of ‘where’ at all, having by grace received God himself as his ‘place’ instead of any spatial ‘where’ [*hyper to pou*]. . . . For God does not admit of ‘where’; he is unquestionably beyond all ‘where.’ In him will be the sure foundation of all who are saved.” Cited in Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 142; translation altered.

32. Cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 110: “In short, there is an approximation to the hypostatic union that the world enjoys through grace, most particularly after the world’s death, when it transpires that, like Christ, the only life or existence we have is in and through God. . . . When the fire of our own lives grows cold, we come to burn with God’s own flame.”



now? What prevents the assurance of God's favor from turning into complacency before the ongoing injustices that blight the existence of the vast majority of the world's human population—as well as threatening the extinction of vast numbers of nonhuman organisms? And—perhaps most seriously of all—how does a focus on forgiveness as the heart of the gospel avoid a construal of the Christian message that speaks far better news to those who have perpetrated injustice than to those who have suffered its effects, thereby betraying Jesus' identification of the gospel with good news to the poor in particular (Matt. 11:5 and par.; Luke 4:18)?

The balance of this book will attempt to address these questions by exploring more fully how the reality of life lived now in the light of the gospel is to be related to the hope of eschatological glory to come. The argument falls into two parts, focused on the topics of hope and glory, respectively. Part 1 begins with an examination of false hope (chapter 1), which takes the contrasting forms of otherworldly fantasy on the one hand, and Promethean efforts to control the future on the other, both of which so focus attention on what is to come that they fail to recognize the degree to which the experience of present pain casts doubt on the credibility of any promise of future flourishing. I then turn to the refusal of hope (chapter 2) found among those whose appreciation for the depth of pain in this life leads them to dismiss the promise of a redeeming God as neither credible nor desirable, before going on to show how the person and work of Jesus provide a basis for a hope in which confidence in God's saving power keeps faith with those who suffer now (chapter 3). After an interlude in which I explore the inherent limitations of eschatological speech (chapter 4), part 2 examines the glory that is the final object of Christian hope from three different perspectives: first, the confession of Jesus' return and the Last Judgment (chapter 5); second, the transformation of the individual that centers on the doctrine of bodily resurrection (chapter 6); and third, the transformation of the cosmos implied by the biblical promise of a new heaven and a new earth (chapter 7). The book then concludes with a reflection on the possibility of a theology of glory that sits within rather than against a theology of the cross.

Throughout the course of this argument, I aim to show that because the accounts of hope and glory at the heart of the Christian doctrine of redemption are firmly rooted in the present realities of created existence, a dogmatic account of the redeemed life should never lead to the turning of theological attention away from the travails of this world and its creatures. In the book's first part I do this by linking *hope*, with its risk of "horizontal" displacement of attention from the present to the future, with the experience of *suffering* in the here and now. Tethering talk of future hope to present suffering serves to guard against glibness. This sort of safeguard, it is important to stress, does not make it possible to talk about hope in the presence of burning children (to talk about *anything* in the presence of burning children is to have misdiagnosed what the situation demands). Its aim is rather the more modest one of ensuring that talk of forgiveness does not have the effect of licensing forgetfulness. Along similar lines, I seek in part 2 to keep the promise of eschatological *glory*, with its risk of "vertical" displacement of attention upward from earth to heaven, bound to *corporeality*, or embodiment, as a defining and irrevocable feature of human being. Associating glory with the fate of bodies serves to check the temptation

to interpret redemption as an escape from the world: because to have a body—whether earthly or spiritual—is to be in relation to other bodies, to proclaim the resurrection of the body is to affirm that the life of one is inseparable from the life of all and thus from the fate of the whole creation.<sup>33</sup>

Finally (and with the details to be developed further in what follows), it must be stressed that to confess that the glory for which Christians hope is beyond every possibility of life in this world does not mean that there is anything illegitimate about seeking to realize in this world whatever possibilities for righteousness are available to us here and now. Quite the contrary, the biblical command to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile” on the grounds that “in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7) applies to us now just as much as it did when spoken to the Israelites in Babylon. And yet the specification that the city whose welfare we are to seek is identified as a place of exile serves as a permanent reminder that “here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14). Again, this conviction must not be taken as an excuse for dismissing the significance of life in the present, but rather as encouragement not to lose heart when (as inevitably happens) our efforts toward improving the welfare of our earthly habitation fall short. It should, in short, be taken as a reminder that the shape of the church’s hope is not finally determined by our discernment of what may prove possible in the present. For however much the discernment of such possibilities is crucial to Christians’ day-to-day efforts to be faithful witnesses to the kingdom, from a human point of view the hope of glory is not a “possibility” at all. But this is precisely why we are instructed not to regard anything from a human point of view: not because we have license to ignore the realities of the present in the smug or desperate expectation that it will all be wiped away and miraculously replaced by some faultless facsimile, but rather out of the conviction (which, because it is founded in Jesus, is neither smug nor desperate) that because the kingdom has already dawned in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we may discern even now, in our lives and the lives of those around us, the lineaments of glory and proclaim in wonder, “Look, everything has become new!”

33. Linking glory with corporeality reflects the etymology of the Hebrew *kābōd*, which refers to weight or heaviness, in contrast to the Greek *doxa*, which is more suggestive of external appearance. (Cf. Paul’s reference to the promise of “an eternal *weight* of glory” in 2 Cor. 4:17.)