Introduction

> Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the church, and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.[1]

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

As I sat feeling miserable, inadequate, and utterly alienated, I began to notice who else was sitting at the back of the church. Charlotte was a regular at worship, and her life was shaped by far more suffering than mine. She had been a successful ballet dancer, wife, and mother, before she

1. Eph 3:20–21; 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, 102.

was consumed by schizophrenia. She had lost her vocation, her home, and her family. She had great difficulty establishing and sustaining relationships, and she was frequently not able to receive the occasional gestures of welcome and offers of help from church members and the available community resources. She seemed to find some slight continuity of identity and community on the edges of Sunday eucharist and weekday evening prayer, participating silently or sometimes with contributions the rest of us could not understand. I doubted that Charlotte heard words of accessible hope that day. If she could make a difference in her life and the world by rallying some hopeful enthusiasm, she would have done so years ago.

A dozen years later, the baby in my lap at the back of the church was a teenager being confirmed. Confirmands and their families from several other nearby congregations had joined the congregation of our parish church (in a different state from the one above) for this annual Confirmation service. The confirmands were chiefly upper-class, suburban youths. The families carried cameras and jockeyed for pew positions with a good view of their sons in blue blazers and ties and their daughters in lovely dresses.

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

As a life-long Episcopalian who has spent many years in seminary communities, I have heard hundreds of sermons. The two sermons I

mention here represent much of what I have heard from the pulpit about hope, and I have often wondered about the emphasis on hope for present and near future improvements in life as we know it, brought about by human determination and effort. Surely there must be more to theological hope. Surely those who cannot themselves muster upbeat, life-changing hope should have access to a hope not limited by the circumstances of a broken and limited world. Isn't there something more possible in the hope of the Gospel?

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

The theological movement that counters a heavenly hope with a more earthly-oriented hope swings on a pendulum to the opposite side of the hope it opposes. On-the-ground hope rescues theological hope from one extreme but risks settling on another extreme. At points of extremity, alternate accounts of hope fade from view, and an integrated, less-dualistic account of hope seems less possible. In the process, reconciliation among those who are divided falls from the realms of current and eschatological hope.

The Anglican Communion currently struggles with painful conflicts within its international body. While it has historically aimed for unity in the midst of differences and strife, present issues and present members seem particularly resistant to compromise. Hope for reconciliation is in short supply. Agreements and arguments alike reveal few explicit references to any uniquely Christian accounts of hope. The Anglican Communion resembles more a couple who has decided on divorce than a couple who has begun counseling in order to restore a broken marriage. Whether or not these are the only outcomes remains to be seen.

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

I am not here offering strategies of hope to the Anglican Communion, to the Episcopal Church in the United States, or to any other specific community looking to Christian theology for guidance about hope. Instead, I am encouraging theologians to continue critical and creative examinations of the hope they teach, promote, and presuppose; I am recommending that those examinations include a reconsideration of dismissed traditional doctrine and a readiness to consider current discourses not traditionally consulted for input on theological hope.

The length and breadth of Christian teaching might be pictured as a wide and deep river. Within this river flows Christian tradition. Christians throughout the ages discuss, debate, and teach collective wisdoms of Christianity, and they mark specifics with buoys: "Don't stray too far toward these rocks"; "Watch out for those eddies." On some points of faith and practice, many Christians share the same assessments of the markers within which Christian doctrine thrives most faithfully. On other points, differing communities of Christians disagree greatly about which route through the rapids is wisest. And, at still other points, Christians may mark certain rough waters as sites where differing currents of Christian tradition meet in passionate and as-yet-unresolved conflict; and yet, this conflict persists within the breadth of the wide streams of Christian thought. Despite some shifts over time and some conflicts within time about how to mark the river, for the most part, a bird's-eye view of Christianity's theological nautical map reveals a recognizable route. Some of the edges vary, and some streams branch off in radically distinct directions, but there is a route on this map that almost all Christians identify as the territory in the river within which Christian theology lives. Streams that lie entirely outside the buoys are more difficult to recognize as Christian

tradition. Geological features outside the river and weather may contribute to the flow and vitality of the river.[2]

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

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

To make this argument, I will first sketch a rough picture of Moltmannian hope. Then I will propose some challenges and additions to that

2. As Richard King helpfully observed in a personal conversation, the image of the river of Christian tradition has a number of limitations. It does not, for example, illustrate the extent to which Christianity interacts and overlaps with, and separates from, other bodies of water (and the rest of the landscape). I wholeheartedly agree that this image has only a narrow range of applicability, and I am eager to receive recommendations—geographical or otherwise—for alternative metaphors.

discourse, in order to clarify and enrich resources of hope for the church and its mission. For the purposes of this project, I will direct my arguments and observations toward Christian theologians in the United States, especially those who are invested in the theology of hope.

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