



## In Search of a Vision of Hope for a New Century<1>

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### Introduction

[1] In a context of widespread anxiety and despair at the dawn of a new century, hope is a precious virtue indeed. In the new century, a clear vision of hope will be required to face a daunting social agenda, including increasing poverty, ethnic and religious conflict, environmental degradation and Aids. The task of formulating a clear and intelligible vision of hope is formidable! Religious traditions, including Christianity, have an important role in fostering such a spirit of hope.

[2] This paper defends the proposal that something of the vision of hope may be attained in Christian theology on the basis of a recognition that eschatology has traditionally responded to three distinct aspects of the human predicament:

1. the predicament of the effects of sin in the many manifestations of evil in the world;
2. the predicament of (human) finitude (in time); and
3. the predicament of the limitations of human power and knowledge (in space).

[3] This observation is used to develop a "road map" for Christian eschatology with a view to the new century. This road map indicates some important eschatological tensions regarding the content and the social impact of Christian hope. This paper provides the background for a subsequent contribution in which the content of a particular vision of hope, i.e. hope for the earth will be formulated. A few allusions to ecological dimensions of Christian hope will therefore be made, where appropriate.

### The Need for a Clear and Intelligible Vision of Christian Hope

[4] In the nineteenth century eschatology became a "pale reflection of the social ideals of a secularized European society" (Braaten 1985: 343). Ernst Troeltsch commented just before World War I that: "The eschatological bureau is closed these days" (Braaten 1985: 343).

[5] By contrast, in the twentieth century, eschatology became the "storm center" of theology (Von Balthasar). It moved from a "perfectly harmless chapter at the end of Christian dogmatics" to the center stage of theological reflection (Barth 1933: 500). The twentieth century became, as James Orr predicted, the age of eschatology (see Runia: 105). The whole of Christian theology became penetrated by eschatology since the eschaton was understood not so much in terms of the "End" but in terms of God's presence.<2> Eschatology is therefore not one element of Christianity; hope is the medium of Christian faith as such.<3> Hence eschatology cannot be one specific part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook "is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole church" (Moltmann 1967: 16). This turn to eschatology became at the same time the key to the renewal of the whole of Christian theology in the twentieth century.<4> *Fides quarens intellectum* may become *Spes quarens intellectum* and *credo ut intellegam* may become *spero ut intellegam* (see Moltmann 1967: 33).

[6] Given this shift, it is hardly surprising that eschatology has become a disparate and often confusing discipline. This is reflected in the numerous schools of eschatology that have emerged during the course of this century<5> -

1. the "consistent" eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer;
2. the "transcendental" eschatology of the early Barth, Brunner and Althaus;
3. the "existential" eschatology of Bultmann and Tillich;
4. the salvation history approach of Cullmann in debate with Dodd and Schweitzer;
5. the "futurist" eschatology of Moltmann, Sauter and Pannenberg;
6. the evolutionist eschatology of Teilhard and his followers;
7. the contributions of process theologians;
8. the prophetic approaches of liberation, black, feminist and ecological theologies;
9. the millennialist, dispensationalist and apocalyptic views of popular authors like Hal Lindsay and numerous others.

[7] The diffuse notions of Christian hope have induced almost every recent author on eschatology to search for a typology and criteria to guide one through the myriad of schools and approaches.<6> In each typology, different criteria and line(s) of demarcation are identified to classify different eschatologies, e.g.:

- eschatological / apocalyptic forms of hope;
- this-worldly (world-affirming) / other-worldly (world-denying) forms of hope;
- the continuity / discontinuity between earth and heaven, this life and the next;
- realized / futurist eschatology;
- evolutionary / revolutionary hope;
- vertical / horizontal dimensions of hope;
- the doctrine of the "last things" (*eschata*) / of Jesus as the Eschatos;
- escapist / liberating forms of hope;
- personal, historical or cosmic dimensions of hope;
- an emphasis on the things that are hoped for (physics) / on the phenomenon of hope itself (anthropology);
- an emphasis on the cross / on the resurrection of Christ.

[8] This myriad of approaches, conflicts, and typologies tends to inhibit a clear and inspiring vision of hope in an age of anxiety and despair. It has obscured the meaning of basic concepts like the eschaton or eschatology. It has also led to a paradoxical tension between hope, the central theme of any Christian eschatology, and eschatological reflection itself. We do not know what we hope, only that we hope or, even worse, that to hope is important. Curiously, the orientation towards the future, which prevails in the Western world, has given birth to nihilism. By contrast, many traditionalist communities in Africa (with a strong sense of rootedness in the past) are often characterized by a vibrant sense of hope. "Perhaps it is time to admit", Carl Braaten comments, "as in the story about the emperor's new clothes, that for all the talk about eschatology . . . the theological mind has denuded itself of any symbols of the future that can inspire hope and action" (Braaten 1972: 52). Tragically, this leaves room for the over-confident apostles of technological progress, or for apocalyptic prophets of doom, to dominate the market by producing visions that inspire hope or install anxiety and despair.

[9] The task of formulating a clear and intelligible vision of hope for the earth is truly daunting! To attain something of this vision, a "road map" for Christian eschatology will be developed in the sections below on the basis of the thesis that was stated in the introduction above.

### **Three Aspects of the Human Predicament**

[10] In an instructive essay on eschatology, Klaus Nürnberger explains the "inner logic" of Christian hope in the following way:

At the root of eschatology lies the common human awareness that what reality is does not

correspond to what reality ought to be. Such an awareness emerges and grows in times of suffering and need . . . The orientation of faith towards the future was instigated by an unacceptable present (139-40).

[11] Indeed, hope as the anticipation of a new and different future is born from experiences of suffering and thus has its *Sitz im Leben* among the suffering and oppressed (Moltmann; see also Galilea). Hope is born from the subversive memory of suffering (Metz). In his analysis, Nürnberger suggests injustice, suffering, death and despair as examples of such experiences of an unacceptable present (139). However, I would like to add that these predicaments are not quite similar.

[12] At least *three distinct aspects of the (human) predicament*<sup><7></sup> *can be identified to which Christian eschatology has traditionally responded.*<sup><8></sup>

[13] I. A first aspect of the human predicament is the effects of sin in the form of the many manifestations of evil in the world: injustice, oppression, enslavement, hatred, alienation, conflict, corruption, destruction, degradation, cruelty, induced suffering, and untimely death.<sup><9></sup>

[14] These effects of sin may be the result of one's own sins, e.g. on your body, your family, your community, your immediate environment. It can also be manifested in the form of "being sinned against" (Moltmann 1996: 90). People often endure suffering as a result of sins directly inflicted on them by other individuals or groups. The consequences of structural violence are often even more serious. This is produced by the cumulative effects of insensitive decisions, unsustainable habits, and dangerous practices. It leads to societal structures which are unjust because they are used to enforce domination, exploitation and alienation. Within these structures violence is practiced not directly and personally, but indirectly through laws, customs and institutions. Through these structures violence is legitimated (Moltmann 1996: 95). Structural evil manifests itself, to name only a few examples, in the global problems of patriarchal oppression, economic exploitation and injustice, impoverishment, ethnic and religious conflict, and environmental degradation.

[15] The seriousness of the predicament of evil can be estimated in very different ways. Through the centuries the pendulum has swung to and fro between optimists and pessimists. Some believe in the essential goodness of the human person (and of the natural order), while others (most notably the Pauline, Augustinian and reformed traditions) radicalize an assessment of the effect of sin through the notions of "original sin" and the "total depravity" of humanity. Yet others opt for a (Manichaist) dualism between the forces of good and evil. Some believe that human problems are simply the result of ignorance and that education, scientific progress, technological innovation, economic growth and a democratic order will ultimately ensure a better future. Others, often the victims of these very processes, realize the pervasiveness of evil lurking beneath its many manifestations in the world.

[16] The predicament of the effects of sin has an obvious ecological dimension which is manifested in the ecological crisis itself. More specifically, it is manifested in environmental injustice: the devastating effects of the material greed of some on both the environment and on other human beings.

[17] II. A second aspect of the human predicament is the various dimensions of temporal finitude: the limitations posed by our existence in time. We are mortal. We are nothing but dust; grass which withers away and dies (Gen 3: 19; Ps 90: 5-6; Isa 40: 6-7). We live for seventy or eighty years and these pass by in quick succession (Ps 90: 10).

[18] Several dimensions of temporal finitude can be identified. The most obvious manifestation of finitude is the possibility of death that we have to confront throughout our lives. Death is, of course, also experienced by all other living organisms. Moreover, the biological sciences have helped us to appreciate the finitude of whole species and not only of individual specimens. This also applies to the human species itself. We are nothing more than a brief episode in the cosmic and planetary drama.<sup><10></sup> Mountains, rivers, oceans, and whole continents are exposed to the arrow of time. The earth, the solar system, whole galaxies and the universe itself are finite (for a more detailed analysis, see Conradie forthcoming). The experience of finitude is not limited to human beings; it has cosmic dimensions.<sup><11></sup>

[19] While life endures amidst the always imminent threat of death, the predicament of finitude is experienced as the problem of transitoriness. Transitoriness always implies a sense of loss - of every precious moment and each opportunity just gone by. It also applies to the cycles of weeks and seasons, the passing of each Christmas and each birthday celebration. This awareness of transitoriness is exemplified precisely by experiences of "kairotic time" where time "seems to stand still" - in celebrations of the liturgy, in myths and rituals, or in a walk through the forest on a day of rest (Conradie 1996).

[20] The predicament of finitude (in time) is addressed in Western philosophy in terms of the classic problem of coming to terms with change (transience). It is radicalized in numerous religious traditions where it provides the stimulus behind the ultimate quest to transcend the boundaries of time itself. It manifests itself most visibly in the quest for immortality or life beyond death.

[21] The predicament of temporal finitude has various ecological dimensions which is manifested, e.g. in the extinction of species, the loss of biodiversity, and the limited lifespan of the human species, ecosystems, the earth and possibly the universe itself.

[22] III. A third aspect of the human predicament is our inability to transcend the limitations to human knowledge and power set by our bodily rootedness (in space).

[23] We experience restrictions to the spatial territory on which we are able to exert influence. These restrictions are imposed on us by our bodily rootedness. There are limitations to human power. We may extend our physical power and control through political authority, organized labor and improved technologies, but such power finally remains limited. Unlike God, we are not omnipotent. Likewise, human knowledge remains limited due to the spatial restrictions of our bodiliness. We may extend the frontiers of knowledge through the wisdom accumulated in human history, through cooperative research projects and advanced information technologies, but such knowledge remains limited. Unlike God, we are not omniscient.

[24] Human wisdom may be born from an acceptance of these restrictions. However, such an acceptance also leads to a sense of anxiety. This is not only a fear of what may happen to me in future. It is a more vague fear of the unknown, of powers beyond my locus of control.<12> In ordinary life we experience such anxiety in protecting the space we inhabit, our own homes, institutions, countries, etc. (see Peters 1994: 35f).

[25] The pursuit of philosophy, history, the arts, the sciences and technology have been to transcend the limitations of knowledge (and power) as far as possible. This quest is radicalized in numerous religious traditions to gain insight into the ultimate mysteries of the cosmos. The aspiration of neo-Platonism, and many exponents of the mystical tradition, is to transcend these spatial limitations in order to attain, if for one fleeting moment, a vision of the One, in the *visio Dei beatifica*. In a Christian context the predicament of human limitedness in space is often manifested in the search for reliable knowledge of God.

[26] The quest for human knowledge and power also has important ecological dimensions. This is manifested in the desacralization of nature (through deist notions of God, coupled with a positivist notion of science) and the devastating effects of technocracy within the context of industrial capitalism.

## **Christian Hope as a Response**

[27] *This analysis of the three (human) predicaments may help to illuminate an important structural difference between Christian soteriology and eschatology, between the content of faith and of hope. While soteriology has traditionally focused on salvation from sin, Christian eschatology has traditionally responded to all three aspects of the human predicament. <13>*

[28] I. In the Biblical roots of Christianity, hope is predominantly expressed as a hope for salvation from sin, liberation from oppression and an ultimate victory over evil. Christian hope is a protest statement, a form of resistance and defiance, instigated by an unacceptable present (Nürnberger). It is both a "negation of the negative" and an anticipation of the positive (Moltmann 1979: 125).<14> The latter dimension of Christian hope is born from the promises of God.<15> It discerns the provisional fulfillment of these promises in history (the history of Israel, the life, ministry, cross and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, and the work of the Spirit in the church, in the world and in the cosmos). It thus expresses a trust in God to fulfill these promises anew.

[29] This trust is expressed in powerful visions of a future with God, where justice and peace will prevail "on earth as it is in heaven." This is epitomized by the vision of *shalom* in the prophetic tradition and in the New Testament proclamation of the coming kingdom of God.

[30] II. The scope of Christian hope has often been extrapolated from its soteriological core to incorporate a response to the predicament of temporal finitude.

[31] Since the Persian era, the hope in the Jewish-Christian tradition often included the promise of life beyond death. The hope for the resurrection of the dead on a personal level was paralleled in the historical imagery of Jewish apocalypticism which expected a new dispensation beyond the final judgment and annihilation of the present one. Beyond the "End of the World" a new earth will come into being. In this way, the cosmic dimensions of evil and cosmic finitude were integrated with one another.

[32] The expectation of life beyond death was radically transformed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the resurrection, Christ conquered not only the power of sin and evil, but also death itself. The victory of Christ over death became the foundation of Christian hope. In the theology of Paul, salvation from sin necessarily implied victory over death (the wage of sin). Subsequently, Christian hope anticipated salvation from sin and victory over death simultaneously. In the popular imagination (probably since the medieval period), Christian hope is often almost exclusively understood as the hope for life beyond death.

[33] This hope for life beyond death is expressed in personal images such as the resurrection of the body, in historical images such as the parousia of Christ, the Last Judgment, a millennium of peace and a new Jerusalem, and in the cosmic image of the expectation of a new earth.

[34] III. The scope of Christian hope has sometimes been extrapolated even further to incorporate a response to the predicament of human limitedness (in space), i.e. the limits of human knowledge and power. This is usually expressed in the hope that reliable knowledge of God will become possible in the presence of God.

[35] In the presence of an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God, the limitations of human knowledge and power can be transcended. The hope and yearning of many is therefore to come into the presence of God. In the mystical traditions of Christianity, this is expressed in the quest for the beatific vision. In this dispensation we may only see in a mirror dimly, but in a next dispensation we will comprehend fully (1 Cor 13: 12). We will see God face to face. The pure of heart are called happy because they will indeed see God (Mat 5: 8)! When Christ comes and everything is revealed, we shall see Christ as he really is (1 John 3: 2).<16>

[36] This aspect of Christian hope became more prominent due to the influence of neo-Platonic philosophy and Gnosticism on Christianity.<17> In this process, the distinction between humanity and God became an ontological separation. It is assumed that the alienation of human beings from the presence of God is due to ignorance and not to sin. What would heal the rift is infinite knowing, a merging of the human and divine into a single union of intellect (Peters 1992: 320).<18> Christian hope thus became the quest for the knowledge of God which had to follow the neo-Platonic route of transcending the material world to attain the ultimate *visio Dei*.

[37] At least since the medieval period responses to all three predicaments were integrated with one another. The Christian hope was understood as "going to heaven one day." <19> This implied, first, an escape from the material world, the earth and a transcending of the ontological separation between God and humanity to reunite the soul with God. Second, the predicament of human finitude is finally overcome in heaven where the immortal soul enjoys everlasting life in the presence of God. In the medieval synthesis, the immortal soul is to be reunited with the body (through the resurrection of the body) if only in a very vague sense. The finitude of history and the earth itself is acknowledged and resolved through an apocalyptic and very graphic vision of the "end of time" when both evil and death will finally be conquered. Third, heaven also provides a final escape from the miseries and suffering of earthly existence (the predicament of sin). It confers a just reward for those who were sinned against, who have suffered injustice and oppression. At the same time, evil is finally exposed.

[38] Such an eschatological synthesis cannot be avoided - despite the obvious dangers of a quest for immortality <20> or for human knowledge and power.<21> An adequate Christian eschatology should, to my mind, indeed respond to all three these predicaments and has to provide some degree of integration.<22> Nevertheless, I would like to argue that a conflation of these predicaments often leads to some confusion in Christian eschatology, often obscuring its soteriological core.

[39] Christian eschatology should guard against a departure from its roots in soteriology. Formulated more precisely, the predicament of sin and evil has a kerygmatic and noetic priority for eschatology (we live and know only from within this sinful world). At the same time, the predicament of finitude in space and time has an ontic priority for eschatology (it has to clarify who the God is who promises victory over evil and how this God relates to the world).

## Typical Eschatological Tensions

[40] A typical eschatological tension can be identified in each of these responses to the (human) predicament. An exclusive emphasis on one pole within this tension can easily lead to a distortion of Christian hope.

[41] I. Christian hope for salvation from sin, liberation from oppression and victory over evil *maintains a typical tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the fulfillment of God's promises.*

[42] The tension between promise and fulfillment, between the "already" and the "not yet" of salvation from sin, became the focus of the classic debate between "consistent" (Schweitzer), "realized" (Dodd) and "inaugurated" (Cullmann, Kreck) eschatology. Moltmann observes that this expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise in the future history of salvation conceives of eschatology in terms of linear time (1996: 6f).

[43] In the early "transcendental" eschatology of Barth, Bultmann and Althaus, the qualitative difference between God and the world was portrayed as a judgment of the world (the predicament of sin). However, the focus of this form of eschatology was, somewhat surprisingly, not on salvation from sin but on the relationship between eternity and time itself (a response to the predicament of human limitations in space).<23> Moltmann observes that eschatology is thus transposed into eternity. Eternity becomes simultaneous to all times and history is swallowed up in the eschaton(1996: 13f).

[44] In the "futurist" eschatology of the early Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Metz, the need for an eschatological consummation of all things in the context of global suffering, was again emphasized. This was done by retrieving the key function of the biblical notion of promise.

[45] In his *Theology of Hope* Moltmann argued that Christian theology has been far too preoccupied with the problem of God's revelation and the true knowledge of God. Far too little attention has been given to the category of promise. According to Moltmann, God is revealed in the form of promise and in the history that is marked by this promise (1967: 42).<24> God is present not in an "epiphany of eternal presence" but in the "apocalypse of the promised future" (Moltmann 1967: 57). Like Barth, Moltmann viewed the word of promise as a contradiction of the present reality.<25> But against Barth's claim that the eschatological future will be an "unveiling" of that which was decisively accomplished by Christ through the cross and resurrection, Moltmann argues that Christian hope expects something new from him, something that has not yet happened before (1967: 228-9). The future of the risen Lord involves not merely a noetic expectation of the unveiling of something that was hidden, but also the fulfilling of something that was promised and guaranteed by the resurrection event (1967: 88). Moltmann therefore stresses the theme of openness to the future.

[46] A concern for history and the future is of special importance in the work of Pannenberg. In *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, he introduces the notion of the "ontological priority of the future," which develops the relation between creation and God in terms of the future rather than the present. God is the future of the world, pulling the universe from the future.<26> The present is an effect of the future; the future is not caused by the past and the present (1969: 54).<27> The future has an imperative claim upon the present, alerting all people to the urgency and exclusiveness of seeking first the Kingdom of God. In this way one may obtain a glimpse of God's glory. In the work of Jesus, and in the resurrection especially, the Kingdom is already present (1998: 545). The presence of Jesus Christ is the basis of the expectation of the Christian community for the consummation that is yet to come. However, for Pannenberg, God is revealed not only in the history of salvation but also in universal history. Although God was revealed in history, particularly in Jesus Christ, this revelation remains provisional. Only on the Last Day will God be revealed as the Lord of all history. On this day God's judgment on society, which is already revealed proleptically in Jesus Christ, will become fully evident. In this way Pannenberg maintains a strong emphasis on the historical future.

[47] Metz also objected to the non-historical, metaphysical style of eschatology in Roman Catholic theology. He urges a functional relation to the future instead of an archaic relation to the past. A Christian eschatology should provide a basis for the critique of ideologies and social structures that become absolutized and totalitarian. This is born from the challenging, dangerous and subversive memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This memory becomes liberative when it is not simply expressed in empty tautologies, but spelled out in the context of absolutized power structures. In such contexts, the Christian *memoria* recalls the God of the passion of Jesus Christ as the subject and meaning of history as a whole. The Christian remembrance of suffering thus becomes an anticipatory memory; it contains the anticipation of a future given to the suffering, the hopeless, the oppressed, the victims of this

earth (1972: 124-131). Thus human history remains open for its ultimate future with God.

[48] The predicament of evil and sin became even more prominent in the eschatology of prophetic theologies (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology and some ecological theologies). In these theologies there is a very strong reaction against escapist, otherworldly forms of hope. Instead, the focus shifts to an analysis of the present context and the need for a historical transformation of the conditions of life here and now. The emphasis in these eschatologies is on a prophetic vision for the future, a vision of a free, non-oppressive, non-sexist, non-racist, participatory, sustainable society. Christian hope is focused on the foreseeable future here on earth. The future will bring something qualitatively new; present experiences of sin, injustice and evil will not have the final word. The biblical vision of the eschatological kingdom of God is defined as a situation of freedom from oppression and social injustice. As a real utopia, the kingdom is always ahead of us in the form of a shifting horizon, and functions as a continuous challenge for us to transcend and overcome the oppressive structures of the present order (Nürnberg: 146). It inspires people to commit themselves in solidarity with the oppressed and to work for justice, peace and environmental sustainability here on earth. This vision of the imminent future thus has strong ethical implications.

[49] II. Christian hope for life beyond death *maintains a typical tension between the continuity and discontinuity of this life and the life to come, my present body and my resurrected body, the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem, this earth and the new earth.*

[50] The continuity between creation and eschaton is vital in order to ensure that the content of hope is indeed applicable to the one who hopes. At the same time, a clear discontinuity is crucial to ensure that what is hoped for will indeed be new and not merely a continuation of the present. This tension between continuity and discontinuity is exceptionally difficult to maintain. There are long-standing debates on the question as to how the relation between creation and eschaton should be formulated and imagined. Let us look briefly at some approaches to the predicament of finitude before returning to this tension between continuity and discontinuity.

[51] In the popular imagination, Christian hope is predominantly regarded as a hope for life beyond death. This is evident in grave inscriptions, in "in memoriam" notices, and in the popular interest portrayed in near-death experiences. Heaven is often pictured as a beautiful holiday resort where we will meet our loved ones once again (see McDannell and Lang (1988: 311f). The focus of numerous orthodox, evangelical, millennialist, Adventist, and dispensationalist works on eschatology remains almost exclusively on the predicament of human finitude (and not on sin).

[52] The crudely realistic interpretation of "reportorial" eschatology (see Berkouwer 1972: 246f) has prompted many theologians to emphasize the metaphorical nature of classic Christian eschatological symbols.<28> The language used in eschatological assertions should not be understood as detailed predictions of the future based on divine revelation. We cannot *know* the future in the same way that we may remember the past and experience the present. We can only anticipate the future by relying on the images of memory and the powers of the imagination. In language about the future, the familiar logic of every-day language is stretched beyond its limits. Such language therefore cannot be understood in terms of literal descriptions of the future.<29> According to purely metaphorical interpretations, eschatological symbols provide illuminating, inspiring visions for human self-actualization. However, they are precisely *human* constructions and not descriptions of reality based on a privileged knowledge of the future.<30>

[53] A concern with the predicament of finitude returns in the "futurist" eschatologies of Moltmann, Pannenberg, Metz and Sauter. This is born from the realization that the biblical categories of time and history were neglected in a "transcendental" notion of the eschaton as a thunderflash of eternity requiring a decision in the here-and-now.<31> Instead, the focus shifts to the problem of suffering and the pervasiveness of evil in society. Especially in the work of Moltmann, the concern is not only with the suffering which results from the effects of sin in the world. It is acknowledged that suffering forms an integral part of God's good creation. This is the result of the temporal finitude of creation which necessarily implies suffering and death. Both Moltmann and Pannenberg therefore develop a notion of the eschaton that can address the effects of evil and temporal finitude at the same time. The eschaton has to be new both in relation to a history of sin and to the created order itself. This can only be done on the basis of a new understanding of the relation between time and eternity, between God and the world. This requires a response to the predicament of the limitations of human knowledge and power.

[54] The predicament of temporal finitude returns as the very focus of attention in three recent approaches to eschatology, <32> i.e. those of Teilhard and his followers, process theology (Cobb and Griffin; Suchocki: 163f), and the recent dialogue between theology and the sciences (Drees; Russell

1994, 1997; Worthing). In all these (often related, but also diverse) approaches there is a new interest in the eschaton as End, as manifested in the finitude of human life, all living species, the earth and the universe itself.

[55] Let us now return to the continuity and the discontinuity between creation and eschaton which is manifested in any eschatological response to the predicament of (human) finitude. How, then, should this continuity and discontinuity be conceptualized and imagined?

[56] Arnold van Ruler strongly recommends the use of the term *recreatio* instead of *nova creatio* to explain the relationship between creation and eschaton (1969: 168, 1971: 222). He argues that the latter term cannot do justice to the concern that it is this earth, this life, this body that will be saved. The new earth is not a different earth, but this earth, the old earth, radically renewed, no longer broken through sin (1969: 225, 1971: 223, 1972: 29). Without this assurance, any promise of salvation will remain empty. A completely new creation is regarded by Van Ruler as an anabaptist denial of the earthly. By contrast, the term *recreatio* suggests continuity and discontinuity as long as the "re" and the "creatio" are equally emphasized.<33>

[57] Hendrikus Berkhof uses the notion of "extrapolation" to indicate that the Christian hope for the future implies a continuation and consummation and glorification of earlier experiences of God's faithfulness to God's promises.<34> It is this earthly existence that is transformed in the eschaton. This life therefore has eternal significance. Salvation does not imply an escape from this world, but an eschatological renewal of this world (38). To describe this event, Berkhof prefers the concept *transformatio* instead of either *nova creatio* or *recreatio*.

[58] Karl Rahner introduced the similar notion of "transposition" to explain the continuity between salvation and eschaton. Rahner argues that knowledge of the eschaton is not a supplementary (and thus potentially discontinuous) piece of information added to our present knowledge of salvation in Christ. Knowledge of the eschaton is confined to what may be derived from present eschatological experiences. The source of eschatological assertions is present experiences of God's salvation in Christ. Christian eschatology thus ultimately remains Christology; it describes the beginning, continuation and completed end of the work of Christ. The eschaton is the transposition of these experiences into the guise of fulfillment towards the end of time. Rahner regards eschatology as an extrapolation from the present into the future, while he denounces apocalypticism as an interpolation of the future into the present.

[59] These notions of extrapolation (Van Ruler, Berkhof) and transposition (Rahner) were severely criticized by Moltmann. He argues that the notion of extrapolation fails to account for the newness of the eschaton compared to creation (1979: 41f). Such extrapolations do not anticipate a new future, but only extend the old present into the future. This results in a conservative imposition of present conditions on the future (1972: 91). Instead, Moltmann explicitly uses the concept *nova creatio* to characterize the newness of the eschaton: "What is new announces itself in the judgment of what is old. It does not emerge from the old; it makes the old obsolete. It is not simply the old in a new form. It is also a new creation" (1996: 27). According to him, this *novum* is surprising; it could never have been expected. It evokes astonishment and transforms everything that it touches. However, Moltmann adds, the eschaton is not without analogy: "What is eschatologically new, *itself creates its own continuity*, since it does not annihilate the old but gathers it up and creates it anew. It is not that another creation takes the place of this one: 'this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality' (1 Cor 15: 53)" (1996: 29; emphasis mine). The coming God is not a new God, but the God who is faithful to creation.

[60] Moltmann's position was equally criticized, for example by Van Ruler (1972: 102-118), Berkhof, Gilkey, Schuurman and Bouma-Prediger. According to these criticisms, Moltmann fails to distinguish adequately between the predicaments of sin and finitude; between the fall and the goodness of the created order (Schuurman 1987: 66). The creation in time itself is fundamentally faulted due to its bondage to transience (*Knechtschaft unter die Vergänglichkeit*) (Moltmann 1985: 69). Only a radically new creation can provide a solution to such faultedness (Bouma-Prediger: 89). The eschaton therefore requires an annihilation of the created order.<35> This results in an inability to appreciate the continuity between God's good creation and the eschaton.

[61] The line of demarcation between Moltmann and his critics seems to be whether it is accepted that suffering and death is an integral part of God's good creation. Moltmann (and behind him Barth) argues that creation always had a "shadow side". Nature was never really a paradise but only the promise thereof (see Haught 1993: 112f). Temporal finitude necessarily implies immense suffering and death which is not merely the result of sin.<36> The predicament of finitude that is a characteristic of the frail, temporal



creation, has to be overcome through the new creation of all things for eternal life (1996: 78). Moltmann therefore requires a notion of the eschaton that can address the effects of evil and of temporal finitude at the same time. The eschaton cannot be merely a restoration of the original good creation. Moltmann's overwhelming emphasis on discontinuity is therefore born from a desire to protect the radical newness of the eschaton.

[62] However, what is radically new also becomes difficult to conceptualize. Indeed, how should the new creation be imagined? How does the very possibility of a *novum* emerge in the first place? Obviously, such a possibility may theologically be related to God who "calls into being the things that are not" (Rom 4: 17). This calls for further reflection on who this God is, how God's transcendence should be understood and how a transcendent God acts in and beyond this world to introduce a *novum*. The eschatological significance of God's transcendence is the theme of the section below.

[63] An acknowledgment of the radical finitude of creation poses equally severe problems in conceptualizing any form of continuity between creation and eschaton. An affirmation of continuity cannot simply be postulated; it requires an account of the nature of this continuity.<37> The eschaton can scarcely be understood in a materialistic sense as a transformed continuation of this body, this earth, this universe (contra Van Ruler). The question therefore remains: Does the continuity exist *only* within God and on the basis of God's faithfulness (e.g. in the form of God's "memory") or should this continuity also be understood in creaturely categories. In other words: In what way does the Christian hope in Jesus as the Eschatos also imply hope for the eschata? Indeed, how should the Christological continuity between the cross of Jesus and the resurrected Christ, sitting "at the right hand of the Father," be understood?<38> If the continuity between creation and eschaton ultimately rests *only* in God, in God's existence beyond space or time, this allows for a far more radical sense of discontinuity but it does not seem to provide the same degree of consolation in the face of imminent death.

[64] III. The scope of Christian eschatology has been broadened even further to address the limitations of human power and knowledge. This hope is expressed as the desire for true knowledge of God, to be in the presence of an omnipotent and omniscient God. This hope accounts for the typical eschatological *tension between what is revealed and what is hidden, between the immanent and the transcendent, between God and the world, between the dimensions of time and of eternity.*

[65] The more evolutionistic, this-worldly view of the kingdom of God which characterized the previous century in Europe was put into question by the catastrophic events of the early twentieth century. In the "dialectical" eschatology of the early Barth, Brunner, Althaus, Tillich and Bultmann, the kingdom was portrayed as a more transcendent, triumphant interruption of history. Barth interpreted the radically new and imminent kingdom described by Schweitzer not so much as something new and imminent but as something qualitatively *different* from human expectations.<39>

[66] This shift required a notion of the eschaton which was no longer based on temporal categories (the end of history) but on God's existence in the realm of eternity. For Barth, the eschaton is not something distant, temporally remote, but extremely close to us. It brings us, from moment to moment, onto the edge of eternity (1933: 314). Jesus Christ is in this sense the bare mathematic point where time and eternity meet (Braaten 1985: 343). Traditional eschatological symbols have, also for Barth, nothing to do with real events which Christians may expect to happen in the future: "They are dimensions of a transcendental eschatological Word that descends vertically from the alpine heights of eternity, never taking shape incarnationally in the horizontal categories of history, past, present and future" (Braaten (1985: 343).

[67] Although Barth, Althaus and Tillich in later years adapted their positions to incorporate a horizontal and not only a vertical dimension of the eschaton, dialectic eschatology is often criticized for being strangely a-historical. If all is focussed on the eschatological "now"; the future disappears behind the horizon (Runia: 109).<40> The future only has noetic significance. It will bring fuller knowledge of what has already been revealed in Jesus Christ.<41> It is not concerned with a call for new things to happen. It only yearns for a final unveiling of what is now still hidden (Braaten 1985: 343; Berkouwer 1972: 147f).<42> Eschatology is trapped in an eternalized present experience.<43>

[68] In response to this one-sided form of eschatology, theologians like Moltmann and Pannenberg (especially in their earlier work) shifted their attention to the eschatological significance of the future.<44> We have already noted that this shift coincided with a response to the reality of suffering. In response to this reality of suffering, Moltmann's theology of hope emphasizes the possibility of a *novum* while Pannenberg defends the ontological priority of the future. In both cases the not-yet receives a certain priority over the present to show that suffering does not have the final word.

[69] The need to defend the possibility of a novum in the face of suffering (both as a result of sin and of temporal finitude) leads Moltmann and Pannenberg to an exploration of the *future*, instead of the eternal *presence*, as a new paradigm of transcendence (see especially Moltmann (1979: 1-17). Transcendence is thus understood with the help of especially two categories: openness and attraction. The present is open to the future. The future may contain new possibilities, not yet recognised in present experiences. In this way the future "transcends" the present. Furthermore the new possibilities that the future may yield also exert a certain attraction on the present. We are pulled towards the future, not only pushed from the past.

[70] Several theologians have adopted this transcendence of the future over the present as a paradigm to understand God's transcendence. God's transcendence is conceived as the absolute power of the future. God comes to us not 'from above' but 'from ahead' (Braaten 1969: 68). God is not above, but ahead (Moltmann). God is the power of the future impinging on the presence (Pannenberg 1969: 61). God comes to us from God's own future.<45> Out of the future God pushes forward into the present. God is the power coming to us from the future, unifying the world (Pannenberg 1969: 61). God is the world's future (Peters). God is pulling the world towards the future (Peters 1978: 153). God's being is still in the process of coming to be (process theology). God as our future is a magnet drawing us from the stability of the present into an unknown future which ultimately is God himself (Hayes: 26). Evolution demands that we think of God not as "up above", but "up ahead", as the "transcendent future horizon that brings an entire universe to the fulfillment anticipated by Christian hope. God is less Alpha than Omega" (Haught 1998: 2).<46>

[71] Haught concludes that a new "metaphysics of the future" is therefore required:

A metaphysics of the future is quite simply the philosophical expression of the religious intuition that the present and the past in some sense receive their being from out of the future. From this perspective, the past and the present are in some sense only deficiently real. . . . But, the "future" is always faithfully arriving at the green edge of each moment, holding at least the potential for new being. A religion of hope and promise will interpret ultimate reality - or God - as coming toward the present, and as creating the world from the sphere of the future "not-yet" (1998: 3).

[72] The use of temporal instead of spatial categories to understand God's transcendence is clearly attractive. Its appeal is related to its dynamic thrust; it cannot acquiesce in the status quo or in an idealized past epoch (see Haught 1998: 4). However, the use of temporal categories remains insufficient to fathom God's transcendence. It often results in an all too restricted notion of eternity as the locus of God's presence. Clayton observes that to prioritize the future in any consistent manner, "is to give up viewing God as 'a being' - indeed even as 'being' at all! On this view, God must be sheer becoming, essential openness, the indeterminate lure to creativity" (Clayton: 16).

[73] A new interest in the notion of "eternity" becomes noticable in the mature work of both Moltmann and Pannenberg. In this notion of eternity, the earlier criticism against a Barthian eternal presence is maintained. The eschaton is not equated with an eternal presence which can only stand in contrast to time and leads to an annihilation of time. History is not swallowed up completely in the eschaton. Instead, history itself and therefore also the future finds room within God's eternal existence as a dimension of eternity.

[74] In his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg locates the eschaton beyond the end of history in God's eternality. He develops a sophisticated notion of eternity and argues that God's being in eternity encompasses all times (past, present and future). This allows God to come to us, so to speak from the future, while at the same time conceiving God as complete and already existing (Pannenberg 1991: 408f; see Clayton: 16). Although God's eternity is complete, it is still future for us. God's eternity and our future coincide in the eschaton (see Trost: 21).

[75] In *The Coming of God*, Moltmann maintains that Christian hope is ultimately a trust in Godself. This requires a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between time and eternity which Moltmann discusses in several of his recent works (see, especially, 1985: 104-157; 1996: 267-319). Moltmann develops the patristic notion of the *aeon* or *aevum* to distinguish between God's absolute eternity and the relative eternity of the new creation beyond space and time (1996: 282). Creation will not be taken up into God's absolute eternity. Instead, there will be an eschatological transition of the temporal creation into aeonic time and space (i.e. where the transitoriness of time will be transcended) (1996: 279f). On this basis Moltmann finds room to speak of God's Shekinah, God's indwelling in the new creation, the coming of God to creation (*adventus*), instead of creation simply being taken up into God's presence. He suggests that a mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) of the world in God, and of God in the world, will come into being in the eschaton (1996: 307).

[76] At the other side of the spectrum, a number of eschatologies, in which the immanence of God is emphasized almost exclusively, have recently become more prominent. These eschatologies look for a more promising future within the material history of the cosmos itself. In these radically immanent, pantheist or even pantheist eschatologies, the source of hope is not primarily linked to God's transcendence, but to the material aspects of creation.

[77] An emphasis on God's immanence is of special importance in the work of Teilhard de Chardin and his followers, as well as in process theology (and often in combination). Process theology radically shifts the locus for our hope; the ultimate meaning of the world is not to be found in its future, but in its ongoing contribution to the life of God. The ultimate horizon of hope is situated, not at the end of history, but in the present experience of God (Ford: 136).

[78] This emphasis on God's immanence does not necessarily imply a denial of God's transcendence. However, the source of hope is not primarily located in the transcendence of God. To argue that there is indeed hope for the future, this hope must be rooted in the material aspects of creation which exists in a bipolar relationship with God. However, if and when this world itself comes to an end (the predicament of finitude) the only source of hope that remains, is to be taken up in the eternity of God. This emphasizes, once again, the importance of maintaining some notion of God's transcendence (see Worthing: 198).

### **The Social Impact of Christian Hope**

[79] The eschatological tensions that were discussed in the previous section are not only evident in the content of Christian hope but also in its social impact. *An inability to maintain these eschatological tensions will lead to distortions in Christian hope which become evident precisely in the social impact of such hope.*

[82] I. Hope for the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation from sin, and victory over evil, is characterized by a critique of the present (a negation of the negative) and the anticipation of a promised novum. It thus leads to *inspiration*, expectation and resistance, but also to patience and perseverance.

[83] This hope is distorted by an exclusive emphasis on the already of God's salvation, leading to either *triumphalism* or *resignation* (depending on one's present position of power). A denial of the possibility of something new will soon lead to *despair*. By contrast, an exclusive emphasis on the "not-yet" of God's salvation may degenerate into wishful thinking or *utopian fantasies*.

[84] II. Hope for life beyond death is characterized by a life of *preparation*. The significance of every moment of this life is reinterpreted within the context of the dimensions of eternity.

[85] This hope is distorted by an exclusive emphasis on the discontinuity between this life and the next. This may easily degenerate into a form of *escapism* from an unacceptable present. By contrast, an exclusive emphasis on the continuity between this life and the next may again lead to either *triumphalism* or *resignation* (depending on one's present position of power). A denial of life beyond death may encourage a spirit of *hedonism* and *consumerism*.

[86] III. Hope for being in the presence of God is characterized by a life of *responsibility*. To express this in typically reformed language: An appropriate response to God's gracious presence is a life of *gratitude*.

[87] This hope is distorted by an exclusive emphasis on God's immanence, implying the need to rely on material forces and innate human abilities for the future. Again, this may encourage either *triumphalism* (activism) or *resignation*. By contrast, an exclusive emphasis on God's transcendence may encourage a spirit of *quietism* which expects everything from God without taking responsibility for immanent human power and knowledge.

[88] In each case the eschatological tension should not imply a levelling of this tension. Instead, it requires a dialectic where both poles are given their full weight.

[89] \* A full acknowledgment of the "not yet" is necessary precisely to provide inspiration to resist the present forces of evil.

[90] \* A full acknowledgment of the discontinuity of the hereafter is important to put the present

life into a broader perspective and thus to encourage a commitment towards this life.

[91] \* A full recognition of God's transcendence is important in order to acknowledge and to accept responsibility for both the limitations and the potential of human power and knowledge.

## An Eschatological Road Map

[92] The fruitfulness of this eschatological "road map" will have to prove itself by serving as an appropriate strategy to formulate a concrete Christian vision of hope. For a proposed vision of hope for the earth, based on this road map, the diagram below may provide a point of departure.

Three predicaments	The effects of sin	Finitude in time	Finitude in space
	Evil, injustice, etc	Death, transitoriness	Limited knowledge and power
<b>Ecological impact</b>	The ecological crisis	Extinction of species	Deism in theology
<b>Dimensions of despair</b>	Eco-injustice	Limited life span of ecosystems & earth	Positivism in science. deism in theology, Technocracy, industrialism
<b>Christian hope</b>	Salvation from sin; Liberation from injustice; Victory over evil	Life beyond death - Personal, historical & cosmoc dimensions	The presence of an omniscient, omnipotent God
<b>Biblical images</b>	Shalom; The Kingdom of God Final Judgement	Resurrection of dead Parousia of Christ New earth	Ascension, Sabbath, Temple Beatific vision
<b>Eschatological tensions</b>	Already / not yet Promise / fulfillment	Continuity/Discontinuity body / resurrected body this life / Eternal life this earth / the new earth	Immanence / transcendence world / God space-time / eternity
<b>Social impact</b>	triumphalism or resignation critical inspiration utopian fantasy	hedonism, consumerism or resignation preparation escapism	activism or resignation  responsibility quietism
<b>Hope for the earth/ Resurrection hope</b>	Life amidst death sustainable community Justice, peace and the integrity of creation; Theology of Life	Life beyond death God's loving memory; A cosmic pilgrimage A homecoming banquet	Eternal life Being in God God's Shekinah
<b>Prophetic reminders Cross of Christ</b>	Unsustainability Judgement on evil	Suffering & death as inevitable	Accepting human limitations

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