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Restoring hope in the present for congregations in the context of prolonged numerical decline

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RESTORING HOPE IN THE PRESENT FOR CONGREGATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF PROLONGED NUMERICAL DECLINE

by

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Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:13-35 New Revised Standard Version

DEDICATION

My wife, who is also a Pastor, and I have often commented that there is perhaps no other vocation in which we would get to know so many interesting, colorful, wonderful people.

It is to these saints of God, these builders laying stones for God's already and coming reign, that I dedicate this work.

May their hope be complete.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my wife, Rev. Amy Slater, for support in countless ways. In addition to her encouragement and love, it also strikes me as invaluable to have a seminary-trained spouse who knows you deeply, always available to help refine ideas, tell me when I'm wrong, and to proofread not only for typos but for content as well. I would not be who I am, let alone where I am, without her and I am profoundly grateful.

I also thank my children: Ricky, 7, and Sam, 5. They may not realize it, but a significant portion of my research and even more of the D.Min. coursework was done with them in my lap—more of a help than they'll ever know!

At Boston University, I cannot state strongly enough my thankfulness for Dr. Daryl Ireland. It is simply impossible to imagine a better advisor. He helped me navigate not only my own thoughts but also various approval and revision processes in the school. He is a brilliant scholar who also has a gift for teaching that kind of thought—how would I be here without him? Much the same can be said of Dr. Eileen Daily, who also deserves my thanks. Dr. Chris Schlauch and Rev. Dr. Gail Cafferata provided conversations along the way that helped focus my thinking, as did the professors of just about every course. Finally, I'll give final billing to Dean Mary Elizabeth More. Her course in transformative leadership was brilliant, but more than that she provided me with an example of what it looks like to be both scholarly and a person of deep faith.

My D.Min. Cohort bonded from the first day of the first class and whatever I have worth sharing in this thesis was formed in that crucible. We have become a family even

though separated by continents. Among them I especially lift up Sr. Linda Ferrington, RSC, a friend and accountability partner. Her encouragement has come at times when it was desperately needed. Perhaps we are not as opposite as once thought.

My congregation, First United Methodist Church, and others that I've been blessed to know are the true inspiration for this project. FUMC especially deserves my thanks for support in my doctoral work. They even granted me an extended leave to help write this project, a time that proved even more valuable than I thought it would. They also provided a connection to the Kansas Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star who provided a scholarship for a portion of this journey when funding sources proved few.

Much of my writing was done in Great Bend, Kansas, at the Heartland Center for Spirituality, a ministry of the Dominican Sisters of Peace. I have gotten to know them well over the years, but that spiritually nurturing environment enabled the "meat and potatoes" of this project to be written. I am especially appreciative to Sr. Renee Dreiling, OP and Sr. Jolene Geier, OP for conversation during that time that pushed me and to my Spiritual Director, Dr. Phil St. Romain.

I say the following with a deeper understanding than ever before: all of these people and many more give me great hope.

RESTORING HOPE IN THE PRESENT

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OF PROLONGED NUMERICAL DECLINE

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ABSTRACT

This project is a practical theological investigation into a congregation which has experienced remarkable and prolonged numeric decline. The author observes that while ultimate hope in God's future remains, practical hope in the present has diminished. The project brings previously underutilized resources on the psychology of hope into conversation with a Christian theology of hope, including what forces work against hope and what conditions allow it to grow. It then offers practical strategies to restore a wholistic operative theology of hope in the congregation or others like it, thus allowing them to more fully live out Christian life and ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

"The most serious objection to a theology of hope springs not from presumption or despair, for these two basic attitudes of human existence presuppose hope, but the objection to hope arises from the religion of humble acquiescence in the present."[1]

- Jürgen Moltmann

The great theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann and his diagnosis of hopelessness as acquiescence to the present, is the animating force behind this thesis. Through it I finally named something I have observed in my congregation, in congregations I have previously served, and in others like them: they have lost hope.

But to say it so simply is simply not accurate, as the hopelessness is more complex and nuanced than those four words can hold. I have seen some churches that apologize as soon as you step in the door: "Well, we used to be a lot better." "These pews used to be full." "Well, we haven't closed the doors yet." For most congregations, however, the hopelessness is more subtle. Their belief in God is often strong. Multiple 90-year-olds have told me how they see their impending death as a blessing—and one can tell from their tone of voice that they mean it in a deeply spiritual sense, with hope of resurrection. Yet almost in the same breath they lament the state of church and tell stories

[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, First Fortress Press Edition ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 26.

of what it was like when they were younger, stories that clearly imply how much better it was.

Moltmann tells us that despair is not the opposite of hope, for if one despairs they can still envision what things should be like. Rather, the opposite of hope is "humble acquiescence in the present." Or in my words, a disempowered acceptance that, ho-hum, here we are and it's not going to change. Moltmann calls this humble acquiescence to the present a "religion", implying that, whatever it is, such hopelessness is something other than the Christian faith. Given that Jesus and the apostles spoke about the reign of God in the twofold manner of "already but not yet," it is as though some hang on to belief in God's future, "not yet" reign while tacitly giving up hope in the "already" reality in which they presently live.

My thesis is that the hopelessness I have observed, complex and nuanced though it be, is indeed something apart from a full, Christian faith. The field of psychology has done a great deal of research on hope, research that has rarely been brought into the church.[2] After further examining my context, I will bring this body of hope research into conversation with N. T. Wright, a biblical theologian whose work on hope offers a bridge between what I will call "ultimate" matters, such as what happens when we die, and "practical" matters such as the state of this world and of our lived existence. I will show that "ultimate hope," properly understood, leads naturally to an equally strong sense of

[2] Simon S. M. Kwan, "Interrogating "Hope" – Pastoral Theology of Hope and Positive Psychology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 14, no. 1 (2010): 47-67. This article does a brief literature review of three possible sources of pastoral hope psychology, one of which is Snyder.

"practical hope." I will then return to my context to offer practical solutions for restoring a full, integrated, Christian hope.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis is a work of practical theology, in that the theological question both arises from a real-world problem and returns to it with practical suggestions for implementation. In that regard, it will be structured based on the work of Richard R. Osmer.[3] Osmer divides the process of practical theology into four tasks.[4] First, the *descriptive-empirical* task is about information gathering and asks what is going on. Second, the *interpretive* task draws on resources such as psychology and sociology to better understand why the observed things are occurring. Third, the *normative* task delves into theology to ask what ought to be going on, to form a picture of what the problematic context would look like if everything were as it should be. Finally, the *pragmatic* task returns to the context to ask how we might respond, influencing the context to draw closer to the vision formed in the normative task. Later in his book, Osmer describes these four tasks as, in order, "priestly listening," "sagely wisdom," "prophetic discernment," and "servant leadership."[5] As I am writing this thesis as part of a Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership program, it is notable that Osmer more

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[3] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing), 2008.

[4] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

[5] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 28-29.

completely refers to the fourth task as "a form of *transforming leadership*, grounded in a spirituality, of servant leadership."[6]

I will make two adaptations to Osmer's schema in structuring this work. First, as "hope" is a concept whose precise definition is often elusive, I will devote Chapter One to start defining it even before I begin the descriptive-empirical task. While it will be impossible to fully define hope without the theology I will develop later as part of the normative task, an exploration of the psychology of hope will provide a baseline understanding of the concept. Specifically, I will propose a two-part framework for illuminating hope in a more nuanced manner: "practical hope," hope relating to goals we may reasonably achieve during this lived existence, and "ultimate hope," a concept which relates to ideas beyond our lives and means, yet which is hope nonetheless. Understanding the psychology and drawing distinctions such as this one will not only prove useful in exploring context but will also guard against softening and broadening our concept of hope, something I have found is a constant risk.

Chapter Two will contain the second of my adaptations: a commingling of the descriptive-empirical and interpretive tasks. Osmer himself asserts that the four tasks often cycle back on themselves, describing them more as a "spiral."[7] I have indeed found this to be the case, especially with regard to the first two tasks. The context of hopelessness could be approached in several ways. For instance, one might do empirical measurements of hope or try to correlate existing data with psychological instruments.

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[6] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 29. Italics mine.

[7] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 11.

My approach, however, will focus on larger cultural forces and narratives that propagate hopelessness. As a result, I will back up my own anecdotal observations with research into societal and cultural forces which lead to hopelessness. Or, more colloquially, I will assert that in the face of such clear and definable forces, who *wouldn't* be prone to hopelessness? However, I will show that the hopelessness I observe is primarily a *practical* hopelessness, far more so than it is an *ultimate* hopelessness.

In Chapter Three I will undertake the normative task, bringing the psychology of hope in Chapter One into conversation with theology. This will finally bring us to a full, comprehensive understanding of Christian hope. I will show that a full, Christian hope *must* be an *integrated* hope, combining matters both practical and ultimate. Chapter Four, then, will be a return to context for the pragmatic task in which I draw upon adult transformative learning theory to offer three avenues for igniting a more complete hope in my context. I will end with a summary, tools for evaluation, and suggestions for next steps.

CHAPTER ONE:

DEFINING HOPE

The word "hope" is often used loosely even by those who otherwise use language with great precision.[8] "Hoping" is often used synonymously with "wishing," for instance, yet surely "hope" refers to something deeper and more profound. Other times, "hope" is used as an umbrella term to bind together concepts that are scarcely related otherwise. Christian writers are especially prone to this, as the phrase "Christian Hope" can easily encompass the entire religion.[9] A simple search for the word hope produces little of use from any library database, forcing research to rely instead on references in well constructed bibliographies to find relevant materials.

Add to that, then, that even properly understood the concept of "hope" is somewhat indistinct, referring to a future that has not yet come to pass. In this regard, many have casually attempted to equate "hope" with "optimism" or even "joy." Václav Havel, a political dissident before becoming the first President of the Czech Republic, felt compelled to write an essay from his experience on this very fact, before determining that hope is, in the end, an "orientation of the spirit":

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[8] Todd B. Kashdan, "Hope: Influencing the Largest Terrain of Health and Well-Being for the Greatest Number of People," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xix. Indeed, Donald Capps, whom I will draw upon later in the project, also comments on this. Donald Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 52.

[9] One example is a volume from the 1954 Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The volume explains that the title was chosen to encompass the entire work of the various ecumenical committees that produced the varied reports contained within it. World Council of Churches Assembly 1954 Evanston, Ill, *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church: Six Ecumenical Surveys and the Report of the Assembly* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), vi.

> Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It's not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.[10]

To this we may further add the complications of theology. For, while it is rarely useful to use "hope" loosely to encompass the whole of Christianity, such a move is not without a certain type of accuracy! Indeed, Jurgen Moltmann's approach to theology essentially argues that hope must not be at the end of theology but at its beginning, thus allowing hope be foundational to the entirety of our understanding of God.

Hope: Practical and Ultimate

All of these things are good, but they are scarcely useful for an undertaking such as this thesis, attempting to restore hope where it has been lost in congregations. For my purposes, I will divide hope into two components. The first is "practical hope." While all hope is future-oriented, by practical hope I mean hope in the things we can understand and to which we can reasonably expect to arrive in our lifetimes. In other words, by practical hope I mean hope in the present life: hope that I can help my children become thriving adults; hope that I can do some good in my work as a Pastor; and hope that I can finish this doctoral thesis in support of it all.

My second division is "ultimate hope." By this I am referring to things beyond the tangible, such as finding meaning not only in life but in death. This is the kind of hope

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[10] Václav Havel, "Never Hope Against Hope," *Esquire*, October, 1993.

that undergirds theology and that grounds Havel's experience of hope described above, formed while he lay at the bottom of a sewer expecting to die.

For my purposes I will define "hope" by drawing upon two primary sources, one from the field of psychology and one from theology, though the two will be enriched by secondary sources and especially by their interaction with each other. The field of psychology has a robust understanding of hope. Research in the field has been conducted by many and indeed I will draw upon several from their ranks. But at the center is C. R. Snyder, who can easily be called the father of hope psychology. Snyder's theory, however, addresses only practical hope by my definition. Therefore I will enrich it by drawing upon a few other voices that provide a natural extension. Later, during Osmer's Normative Task, we will turn to the Biblical theologian N.T. Wright to show that a fully-formed Christian eschatological hope must contain both the practical and the ultimate.

I have chosen to separate the psychological and theological components of hope into separate parts of this thesis. The reason is that the psychological component provides a necessary structure for analyzing the context I wish to address. The theology, on the other hand, more naturally fits in Osmer's Normative Task, as we move from contextual analysis to describing hope as it *ought* to be.

And so I begin, however incompletely, by providing hope with the structure it needs in order to be discussed robustly and will arrive at a final articulation of Christian hope in Chapter 3. In this chapter I will develop the hope psychology championed by C. R. Snyder to define practical hope and enrich it with the work of Viktor Frankl to define ultimate hope. I will end by briefly reviewing an alternative but complimentary pastoral

psychology of hope from Donald Capps. His work will provide contrast as well as pastoral suggestions as my thesis progresses.

Practical Hope

Snyder's Formula of Hope

Snyder's conception of hope was refined over the course of his career and of those who have followed him and has thus reached a state of great eloquence. One of his successors writes, "The reason this formula is elegant is that such a small number of hope-related concepts are needed to capture a complex psychological phenomena that is implicit or explicit in nearly every facet of well-being."[11] It is as follows:

Hope = Agency Thoughts + Pathways Thoughts

This concept began with more complexity. Snyder himself cites two early definitions that are worth sharing here. The first is, "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)."[12] In the same year he also described hope as, "a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally-derived sense of successful agency (goal-

[11] Kashdan, "Hope: Influencing the Largest Terrain of Health and Well-Being for the Greatest Number of People," xviii.

[12] [12] C. R. Snyder, "Hypothesis: There Is Hope," in *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications*, ed. C. R. Snyder (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 8.

directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals.)"[13] These definitions reveal that goals are an important part of Snyder's psychology of hope. However, goals are a second-order concern as they are only significant in what they tell us about a person's agency and pathways.

It is important to understand exactly what Snyder means by these various terms. Snyder quotes Samuel Coleridge with respect to goals and hopes, saying "Hope without an object cannot live."[14] Therefore, any structure by which hope is to be defined must have such an object. A goal, then, is something that provides a desired vision of the future toward which we may move. A person with no goals, explicit or implicit, can have no hope because they have nothing in the future on which to focus.

With that said, hope may then be defined by how we relate to our goals. By "pathways," Snyder refers to the routes one can envision to reach desired goals. Without such pathways, hope cannot exist. For example, if I wished to be an astronaut and walk on the moon, I may have hope, however tiny, because it has been done before and I could conceive of a route through NASA or, perhaps, a private enterprise to get there. But if I said I wanted to personally visit a planet in another solar system, whose distance cannot be traversed within many lifetimes by our current understanding of scientific laws, the lack of any conceivable way of getting there prevents me from having hope in that goal no matter how motivated I am to get there.

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[13] Snyder, "Hypothesis: There Is Hope," 8. The original sources for these definitions are cited.

[14] Snyder, "Hypothesis: There Is Hope," 9.

That motivation, then, is the second component of hope: agency. Snyder writes, "Agency is the motivational component to propel people along their imagined routes to goals."[15] In other words, we must feel a sense of empowerment that allows us to walk along the pathways we have envisioned. I may think it would be interesting to walk on the moon, and I may be able to envision a pathway to get there, say, through private enterprise, but I simply do not want it badly enough to raise the billions of dollars it would take to actually do it. Therefore, with pathways but no agency, I have no real hope of walking on the moon.

So, agency and pathways are the primary aspects of hope, though goals are a secondary factor that informs them. Another factor worth considering is the idea of barriers.[16] Life is complex and often our pursuits encounter the unexpected. How then do we handle it when we encounter a barrier on the pathway to our goal? A person with weak hope may be able to envision only one pathway, and so a barrier marks the end of their hope. Or, alternatively, a person with minimal agency might be able to envision many pathways but, once a barrier is encountered, decide to give up as the barrier is not worth overcoming. This demonstrates that a strong, robust hope by Snyder's conception is one that contains both the ability to envision many pathways and that has enough agency to overcome even significant obstacles.

Before moving on, I would like to add one further piece of clarity and utility to Snyder's formula. While most of his work was academic, in 1994 Snyder wrote a popular

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[15] Snyder, "Hypothesis: There Is Hope," 10.

[16] Snyder, "Hypothesis: There Is Hope," 10.

book to help bring his concepts to the masses.[17] While the book closely conforms to his scholarly work, indeed even the chapter structure is similar to his scholarly *Handbook of Hope*, this one is written in lay language. The way he articulates "agency" and "pathways" for general consumption is helpful for teaching hope: willpower and waypower.[18]

Measuring Hope

How, then, is hope to be measured? Snyder and his colleagues developed and tested a number of psychological instruments to measure hope in various stages of life.[19] These instruments provide questions which are useful as tools for analyzing and predicting the presence or absence of hope. What's more, the hypotheses upon which the instruments are built also provides insight. For instance, based on research that showed the importance of "here and now" hope, participants are instructed to "adopt a 'here and now' set" in responding.[20] This affirms my equating of Snyder's theory with my concept of practical hope.

The questions used by these instruments seem quite straightforward, but to those informed by Snyder's theory their aim is clear. For instance, one asks, "How motivated

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[17] C. R. Snyder, *Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There From Here* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

[18] Snyder, *Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There From Here*, 6-10.

[19] Shane J. Lopez, Roseanne Ciarlelli, Lisa Coffman, Marion Stone, and Lisa Wyatt, "Diagnosing for Strengths: On Measuring Hope Building Blocks," in *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications*, ed. C. R. Snyder (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 57-85.

[20] Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, and Wyatt, "Diagnosing for Strengths: On Measuring Hope Building Blocks," 58 and 67.

are you to work toward a desired outcome?" Obviously, this is searching for an assessment of agency. Another question, "If the original pathway to your goal doesn't work, how easy is it for you to make other plans to reach that same goal?" is inquiring about pathways.[21]

In Appendix A I will reproduce two of the tools resulting from this research, a list of questions useful for interviewing for hope as well as the "Adult Dispositional Hope Scale Items and Directions for Administering and Scoring." While these tools were designed as a tool for therapists in assessing hope in their patients, they will help me later as I move to contextual analysis and toward restoring hope in congregations.

Restoring Hope

Snyder's theory of hope leads to an equally elegant process for the restoration of hope when it has been lost: the use of techniques that increase pathway and agency thinking. I will again stress that though this sounds simple, perhaps even simplistic, the techniques of hope therapy have been rigorously researched and found not only to increase measured hope but also decrease symptoms of depression, anxiety, and increase self-reported well-being.[22] In a clinical setting, a therapist might evaluate a person's level of pathway and agency thinking and then turn to the following means to address it.[23]

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[21] Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, and Wyatt, "Diagnosing for Strengths: On Measuring Hope Building Blocks," 70.

[22] Jennifer S. Cheavens and Madison M. Guter, "Hope Therapy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 137-138.

[23] Cheavens and Guter, "Hope Therapy," 135.

In terms of pathways, we turn to the secondary factor of goals. If pathway thinking is weak, hope therapy might begin with a goal and then determine multiple paths to get to that goal. These pathways might then be strengthened by analyzing each pathway for its potential for success and, conversely, challenges. Another technique might be a simple pro and con list to evaluate a path.

Agency thinking is somewhat less straight forward as our motivations are less tangible than are our paths to a goal. Chavens and Guter suggest cognitive-behavioral tactics such as self-talk (changing one's inner conversation to phrases like "I believe I can do this.")[24] They further suggest increasing self-care as well as managing the level of challenge in one's goals so that one can remain encouraged despite barriers.

With regard to both agency and pathways, and with relevance to the theological task to come, research has also shown a link between hope therapy and values.[25] In short, this research suggests that when our goals are aligned with our values, we are more likely to have high levels of agency and pathways thinking. If one values relationships over material goods, for instance, that person would have an easier time building hope in their family and social life than in their job.

Hope Bonding & Hope Reminding

Two more techniques from the research will prove valuable to my task of restoring hope in churches. The first is "hope bonding." Remembering that research on

[24] Cheavens and Guter, "Hope Therapy," 135.

[25] Cheavens and Guter, "Hope Therapy," 135.

Snyder's theory has mostly played out in clinical settings, hope bonding refers to the relationship of the client to the therapist.[26] This goes deeper than the therapist modeling a belief that the therapeutic process can indeed improve the life of the client, though it does include that. Hope bonding suggests that when every aspect of the therapeutic relationship is healthy, it is natural for the process to become a hopeful one in terms of agency and pathways. In fact, Lopez, et al., even go so far as to say, "A hopeful therapeutic relationship is necessary and perhaps sufficient to yield cognitive change and increased hope."[27]

A final technique I will name here is "hope reminding." Lopez, et al., say that, "Hope reminding can be conceived as a feedback loop for the therapeutic hope process."[28] This process involves finding hopeful stories from a person's past and re-telling them. Doing so grows a sense of agency especially as one is reminded how hope was warranted in goals that have already reached their completion. With relevance for our coming theological task, "narrative hope finding" is a process by which we discover "the strands of hope that run throughout our lives,"[29] so that we may then allow them to give us hope for our future.

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[26] Shane J. Lopez, R. Keith Floyd, Jon C. Ulven, and C. R. Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," in *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications*, ed. C. R. Snyder (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 135-136.

[27] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 136.

[28] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 143.

[29] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 128.

Deteriorating Hope

While the purpose of this thesis is to discuss the restoration of hope, a discussion of how hope deteriorates is also warranted, especially as I examine the context of hopelessness. What happens when goals are repeatedly blocked, when pathways and agency are removed? Though everyone experiences disappointment differently, research has shown that there are distinct, definable stages that are generally true even if some experience them differently.[30] Those stages, in order, are *rage*, *despair*, and *apathy*.

The first common response to blocked pathways and agency is often *rage*. Anger is so common of a response that Snyder himself, along with Alicia Rodriguez-Hanley, name the very existence of the term "road rage" as an example.[31] Drivers are nearly always goal directed, headed toward a destination. When that destination is blocked, especially repeatedly, by other drivers, the initial reaction is quite often rage. While strong emotions such as rage often lead to irrational decision making, this is still an early stage on the road to true hopelessness as the situation is still well within the bounds of a person's resiliency, i.e. they still feel empowered to reach their goal and know how to get there. In the case of road rage, one is still on the road to the destination, even if they are frustrated by the pace.

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[30] Alicia Rodriguez-Hanley and C. R. Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," in *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications*, ed. C. R. Snyder (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 40-42.

[31] Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," 41.

Following rage, the next step for many on the road to hopelessness is *despair*. Despair tends to set in along with an "overwhelming sense of futility,"[32] say if progress toward a goal is blocked repeatedly. It is important to note, however, that the very nature of despair implies that a person is still focused on the goal—how could one despair unless a goal was still in sight? Yet, it is not hard to see how despair is indicative of a failure of agency and/or pathways. Whereas a person with rage is angry but still knows how to move forward, a person with despair can still see the goal but is blocked by a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

The final step on the journey to hopelessness, then, is *apathy*. At this point the goal is seen as impossible and thus all desire to pursue it ceases. One simply no longer cares about making progress toward it, for what would the point be in that? As Snyder and Rodriguez-Hanley write, "This is a vegetative, uncaring state that can last indeterminably, stifling one's continued development and often causing concern on the part of loved ones."[33] They go on to say that such apathy is often accompanied by a loss of joy and potential contributions to society.

These final two stages, despair and apathy, are further supported by the Moltmann quotation at the beginning of this thesis. He wrote in 1967, and thus foreshadowed the research by Snyder, et al. Indeed, while it is tempting to think that despair is the opposite of hope, the "bottom floor" is actually apathy, ceasing to be concerned with the goal any longer.

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[32] Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," 41-42.

[33] Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," 42.

It bears repeating that these stages are a generalization, any given situation may manifest differently. For instance, vulnerable persons may be especially prone to apathy after only a single failure, assuming that any future attempt will be no better.[34] Perceived goal difficulty can affect this, too, as it is easier to accept a given failure for a goal understood as truly monumental than it is for something that one thinks will be easy.[35]

Snyder's Theory In Community

Snyder's theory is written and researched for individuals. It stands to reason, though, that the theory would have implications for community as well. For one thing, hope tends to spread. Lopez, et al., citing studies to back up the thought, write, "Being a hopeful helper is very important in conducting hope therapy. We believe that hope begets hope, and that the transfer of helper hope to the client is plausible and quite likely."[36]

Snyder ends his *Handbook of Hope* with a chapter extending his work to communal systems.[37] His thrust builds upon the above concept that hope begets hope, suggesting an emphasis on goals that promote hope in society. Thus, by increasing the number of hopeful individuals we have also increased the hope in society as a whole. Snyder and Feldman name goals such as caring for others, developing products and

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[34] Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," 42.

[35] Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder, "The Demise of Hope: On Losing Positive Thinking," 42.

[36] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 127.

[37] C. R. Snyder and David B. Feldman, "Hope for the Many: An Empowering Social Agenda," in *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications*, ed. C. R. Snyder (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 389-412.

research, safety for all, etc.[38] Conversely, this means deemphasizing goals that promote only the individual, goals such as wealth or individual achievement.

One example of this hopeful communal thinking stands out, what Snyder and Feldman call "Mindful Aging."[39] First, there is good simply in promoting the hope of the elderly by increasing their own sense of goals, agency, and pathways rather than simply waiting to die. However, more to the point of this section, younger members of society can readily see the elderly and know at an intuitive level that they, too, will one day be old. If they can see old age as a hope-filled thing in others, then it increases the chance that they, too, will be able to envision pathways and have a sense of agency about their own future. Thus all of society flexes its "hope muscle" and becomes more hopeful.

For the sake of my work with congregations, then, several points may be learned. First, it is indeed possible for a system of many people to have hope. Snyder and Feldman write, "Thus, we reject the view that hope is merely another individual-differences construct aimed only at aiding individuals in the pursuits of their personal goals."[40] Second, the hope of the individuals that make up the congregation matters as they are a part of the whole. Finally, the concept that hope begets hope will prove useful for restoring hope in congregational settings.

Ultimate Hope

[38] Snyder and Feldman, "Hope for the Many: An Empowering Social Agenda," 391.

[39] Snyder and Feldman, "Hope for the Many: An Empowering Social Agenda," 395-396.

[40] Snyder and Feldman, "Hope for the Many: An Empowering Social Agenda," 389.

While Snyder's conception of hope is elegant and remarkably insightful for hope in this life, it breaks down rather quickly when one turns to "ultimate" matters. It cannot stand, for instance, against Havel's assertion above that hope is "not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." When one extends hope to Christian theology, Snyder's equation shows again that its limit has been reached. If hope is agency plus pathways, then what are we to make of salvation, where the agency can belong to none other than God and the pathway to that salvation is a free gift? Technically Snyder's theory holds if we trust in God alone for agency and pathways, but surely there is a more robust way of talking about hope beyond this concrete life, speaking instead of "ultimate hope."[41]

As I said in this chapter's introduction, hope cannot fully be defined in the Christian context without theology. For this thesis, however, it makes more sense to save theological development for Chapter 3 where I will undertake Osmer's Normative Task, describing the way things ought to be. In it I will show theologically that Christian hope must be an integration of both the practical and the ultimate. For now, let me begin by describing ultimate hope in more psychological terms, providing a framework for the discussion to come.

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[41] Indeed, even Snyder himself acknowledges that his definition of hope is "based on a reciprocally-derived sense of *successful agency* (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)." (Italics mine.) C. R. Snyder, Cheri Harris, John R. Anderson, Sharon A. Holleran, Lori M. Irving, Sandra T. Simon, Lauren Yoshinobu, June Gibb, Charyl Langelle, and Pat Harney, "The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60, no. 4 (1991): 571.

A Bridge from Snyder

In the most recent volume on hope psychology, Feldman, Balaraman, and Anderson write that meaning is a "close cousin" of hope as Snyder conceives of it.[42] Indeed, the connection between the two has even been empirically shown to have an "impressive average correlation of .67."[43] Feldman, et al. invoke a quote from Freidrich Nietzsche who said, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." From the perspective of Snyder's theory, they argue, this quotation may be readily applied to goal-setting. In other words, if our goals are aligned well with our values, then we have a reason for living and our life has meaning.

Feldman, et al. define meaning as including "people's ability to make sense of, and find patterns and significance in, life events."[44] They elaborate on four theories with regard to meaning and purpose in life that serve to further develop this idea. One clear example comes from Terror Management Theory. In this theory, "Culture prevents the terror of our inevitable demise by creating a sense of order, structure, and meaning, all of which possess the power to symbolically eclipse death."[45] If an artist creates a great work,

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[42] David B. Feldman, Meenakshi Balaraman, and Craig Anderson, "Hope and Meaning-in-Life: Points of Contact Between Hope Therapy and Existentialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher, Matthew W. and Shane J. Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 341.

[43] David B. Feldman, "The Meaning of Hope and Vice Versa: Goal-Directed Thinking and the Construction of a Meaningful Life," in *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*, ed. Joshua A. Hicks and Clay Routledge (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 143.

[44] Feldman, Balaraman, and Anderson, "Hope and Meaning-in-Life: Points of Contact Between Hope Therapy and Existentialism," 341.

[45] Feldman, Balaraman, and Anderson, "Hope and Meaning-in-Life: Points of Contact Between Hope Therapy and Existentialism," 342.

for example, then the work may outlive the artist—the hope of this, then, gives meaning to the life of any artist beyond simply their current actions.

More to my purpose, though, is Viktor Frankl and Logotherapy. The summary provided by Feldman, et al. of Frankl's work is that "people find meaning through acting on three types of values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal."[46] I will turn shortly to a further development of Frankl's ideas. Through the lens of Snyder, though, this is essentially saying that meaning may be found through goals such as creating (say, a work of art), experiencing, or even through the choosing of our attitude—a choice that can be made even when all other agency and pathways are absent.

I will argue, though, that while Frankl is careful to keep his work distinct from religion, there is a subtle but significant distinction in his work from Snyder's. While Snyder generally assumes that our agency and pathways are toward a concrete earthly goal, Frankl's understanding is able to generate agency and pathways—and therefore hope—from outside of it, in ways that transcend any expectation of actually fulfilling those goals.[47] It is to Frankl that I now turn to expand my idea of hope into the "ultimate."

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[46] Feldman, Balaraman, and Anderson, "Hope and Meaning-in-Life: Points of Contact Between Hope Therapy and Existentialism," 342.

[47] Feldman would probably push back against my notion of "ultimate hope" as he is quite adamant that "hope," limited to Snyder's definition, is quite distinct from "meaning," saying that the two are linked only by the shared concept of goals. Such a disagreement would be largely rhetorical, however, as I am expanding my definition of hope beyond that of Snyder. Using my language, I would agree that practical hope and ultimate hope are distinct though closely related concepts, or to borrow Feldman's own language from above, "close cousins." Feldman, "The Meaning of Hope and Vice Versa: Goal-Directed Thinking and the Construction of a Meaningful Life."

A Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl's theory cannot be separated from the circumstance in which it found its first verification: his experience as a Jew in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.[48] Frankl had conceived of the idea of Logotherapy and had developed it into an initial manuscript when he was taken into custody. The manuscript was lost, yet what he witnessed and experienced during those torturous years proved what he had written in dramatic fashion: that meaning is indeed a significant factor in our life. Indeed, in extreme cases it is the difference between our continuing life and our submission to death.

Frankl's thinking is grounded in an anthropology that there is truth and substance to human beings beyond simple biology. He tells, for instance, the story of a boy who struggles with the meaning of life following a science teacher who said that humanity is nothing but "a process of oxidation, of combustion." Frankl praises the boy for correctly grasping "the truth that man exists on a different plane of being from, say, a candle that stands on the table and burns down until it sputters out."[49]

Frankl defines his understanding of human existence by three factors: *spirituality*, *freedom*, and *responsibility*.[50] He offers little definition for *spirituality* other than that is

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[48] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

[49] Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, 1986), 27.

[50] Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, xxiv-xxvi.

irreducible and therefore "cannot be explained by something not spiritual."[51] Crucially however, spirituality is dependent on the body *but also transcends it*. By "*freedom*," Frankl means the power to choose. This includes, as we shall see, the power to choose one's attitude even in an otherwise hopeless environment. Finally, every person bears *responsibility* to their own conscience if to nothing else.

Frankl goes on to name three types of values that lead to meaning in life, *creative*, *experiential*, and *attitudinal* values. These values and the meaning that follows are not entirely different than the Terror Management Theory ideas above. But Frankl's schema is more robust for enhancing my idea of ultimate hope especially due to the third value, attitudinal, and therefore warrants elaboration. The first, *creative* value, is similar to my above example of a painter: an individual creates something and has now introduced value where there was none before, thus generating meaning for life. *Experiential* value, then, is quite literally finding value in experience. One might find value and thus meaning by exploring a National Park or by listening to a symphony. Finally, *attitudinal* values "are actualized through the attitude one takes toward one's life."[52] Crucially, this ability to choose one's attitude even when one loses the agency to create or even to experience as Frankl did in the concentration camp speaks to the very nature of human existence.

This concept of attitudinal value as a route to meaning is illustrated well by a story Frankl tells from the concentration camp. There was a time when he met a man and a woman, both of whom were nearing the point of suicide because they expected no more

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[51] Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, xxiv.

[52] Feldman, Balaraman, and Anderson, "Hope and Meaning-in-Life: Points of Contact Between Hope Therapy and Existentialism," 342.

from life. Frankl writes, “I asked both my fellow prisoners whether the question was really what we expected from life. Was it not, rather, what life was expecting from us?”[53] The woman had a child who had left the country and was waiting for her; the man had a series of books he had not yet finished.

A cursory application of Snyder might agree that indeed this man and this woman had no cause for hope since the extreme circumstance of the concentration camp had removed all agency and pathways from them. Even in the face of worthy goals, the reuniting with a child and the completing of books, the inability to see a path to that end let alone the agency to follow it undoubtedly led to the hopelessness they felt. But to Frankl’s Logotherapy, using the language of his anthropology, they still had the freedom to choose their attitude toward their unfortunate circumstance. Even though they could no longer see a pathway to their goals, still they had a responsibility—to the woman’s child, to the man’s writing—and to their consciences.

Snyder could still be employed to explain their new-found hope: one could say that their goal had become not the child or the writing but rather the choice of attitude to which agency and pathway could be generated internally. Yet it is also clear that their newfound agency and pathways are being generated not by the actual circumstances of their life but rather by something that transcends it, in this case the completion of a larger goal that is beyond their life circumstances to actualize. Their sense of agency and pathways, their hope, could still be found not only in their responsibility and their freedom to choose, but also in their spirituality, as indeed this meaning—this hope—

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[53] Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, xvii.

transcended their meager and tortured bodily existence. In short, their hope was not "practical," but rather was concerned with things more "ultimate" than simply their own lives.

An Alternative Psychology of Hope

Through Snyder, enriched by Frankl, I have now developed robust psychological understandings of practical and ultimate hope. These understandings will form the basis for this thesis. They are not, however, the only ways to understand hope. Before leaving the topic of defining hope, I will offer one different, but complimentary understanding. While secondary, I will return to it in each chapter as its pastoral nature will continue to enrich both the conversation itself as well as my eventual offerings of practical solutions in pastoral contexts.

Donald Capps offers an alternative psychology of hope, or more precisely, a pastoral psychology of hope.[54] Unlike Snyder and his colleagues, who write from the perspective of clinical psychology and offer empirically researched ideas, Capps argues that a focus on hope is what sets pastoral practitioners apart from fields like clinical psychology and aims to offer affirmation and further tools for use in ministering to individuals.[55] I have chosen Snyder for the foundation of this project because I think it is helpful to break hope into constituent elements, such as his agency and pathways, or my

[54] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*.

[55] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 1.

practical and ultimate hope. Capps' view, however, while focusing on individuals rather than congregational systems, is capable of offering a complimentary viewpoint. I will describe the basis of his understanding here, but in each chapter I will return to Capps for further elaboration.

While Capps does engage Snyder in his work, his primary sources in psychology are Erik Erikson and Paul Pruyser. To Erikson, hope is a foundational, if not *the* foundational, human strength.[56] He says that it begins in infancy and defines hope as "the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes, in spite of the dark urges and rages which mark the beginning of existence."[57] At least two items are of note in this definition. First, the phrase "enduring belief" makes it clear that hope continues to influence us throughout life. Second, it is significant that he includes threats alongside of hope.

Pruyser's primary addition to this is his schema that our desire for basic wishes follows a sequence: 1) waiting, 2) anticipation, 3) pining, and 4) hoping.[58] To illustrate with a trivial example, let us say we are hungry and have ordered a pizza to be delivered. We begin by waiting patiently, knowing that it will take time. We get excited at the anticipation of our hunger being fulfilled. But, that excitement causes us to focus on our hunger which causes us to pine—or become angry in extreme cases. Finally, we broaden our view to something larger, remembering that the pizza will eventually come if only because the delivery person needs to earn a living, and so we hope.

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[56] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 29-30.

[57] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 30.

[58] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 34.

Note how different this schema is from Snyder. It is goal oriented, but rather than focus on our ability to reach the goal or the ways we can get there, it instead situates hope as precisely that about which we can only trust others. Capps is in line neither with my sense of practical hope (goals attainable within our lived existence) or ultimate hope (goals outside our lived existence.) Rather, I would characterize Capps' understanding as relating to those things over which we have limited control. If anything, he relates more to Snyder's idea of resiliency with regards to blocked goals than to anything else, or in Capps' terms, continuing to hope despite the obstacle. This is affirmed as Capps describes the experience of hoping, including "the perception that what is wanted will happen" and "hoping as unexplainable."[59] It is a far cry from Snyder's agency and pathways—perhaps also true, but far less practical!

Despite this disconnect from my purposes, however, many of Capps' conclusions especially with regard to the experience of hope are still applicable. For instance, he observes that the things we hope for are often psychological projections, i.e. our ideas ascribed to someone or something else.[60] For instance, the biblical hope for an end to violence and death,[61] regardless of their theological significance, is also a projection of our own desire for an end to such things. Capps notes that "hopes are inherently risky"[62] as they involve giving oneself to something that is uncertain. Such observations, equally

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[59] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 52-64.

[60] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 64-65.

[61] Isaiah 11, Revelation 21

[62] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 75.

valid in Snyder's understanding, eventually lead to a deeper exploration of what can threaten our sense of hope, foreshadowed in Erikson's definition, and of what can strengthen it. These will be explored in their appropriate place as we move forward.

Summary

I have shown that hope may be separated into two useful categories. The first, "practical hope," may be elegantly understood as agency, our perceived ability to act, plus pathways, our ability to envision a means toward a goal. If we feel we have the power to achieve an end and know how to get there, then indeed we have hope. The second, "ultimate hope," regards goals whose foci lie beyond our bodily existence. In this case agency and pathways are still present, yet they often transcend our own ability and are able to find root even for a goal that by its very nature will not see completion in this life.

Hope and Mission

One final observation on hope, both practical and ultimate, as I have here described it: hope is directly related to mission. Mission can be defined, secularly, as, "a strongly felt aim, ambition, or calling."[63] If practical hope is a sense of agency and pathways toward a goal, then by definition there is a drive felt toward that goal. If ultimate hope is when the agency and pathways come from outside this bodily existence,

[63] "Definition of mission in English by Oxford Dictionaries," accessed November 8, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mission.

then there must also be a sense of ultimate mission—in this case toward something larger than ourselves. In short, to hope means not simply to live, but to live *for* something. To hope means to have a sense of mission and, in the case of ultimate hope, to have a sense of purpose that is larger than ourself.

With this sense of mission, it is now easy to see at least one way practical and ultimate hope are related to Christian hope. Indeed, Viktor Frankl, despite his efforts to keep religion separate from Logotherapy, notes the connection between meaning and mission for the religious especially. He writes, "Life is a task. The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission. This means that he is also aware of the taskmaster, the source of his mission. For thousands of years that source has been called God."[64]

I will arrive at Christian hope in Chapter 3, when I bring these ideas into conversation with theology. Before I can do that, however, I must use the conceptual tools laid out in this chapter to examine a context in which hope may be lost: congregations experiencing prolonged numeric decline.

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[64] Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, xxi.

CHAPTER TWO:

DESCRIPTIVE-EMPIRICAL & INTERPRETIVE TASKS

Now that I have established a baseline understanding of hope, at least in the non-theological sense, preparations have been laid to enter into a rich discussion of the context out of which I am writing. In it, we will see how hope and hopelessness are influenced by outside sources. Namely, my congregation and others like it are influenced by the effects of *rural decline*, by their own *congregational decline*, and the larger *metanarrative in the denomination* resulting from decline. This list of three influences is hardly comprehensive, yet it does leave one with the sense that a struggle with hopelessness is inevitable for anyone subjected to them. However, those influences' primary impact is on practical hope, to the exclusion of ultimate.

Hutchinson and First United Methodist Church

First, we turn to Hutchinson and Kansas, the location for my observations. Kansas' only major metropolitan area is Kansas City, which is in the northeast corner of the state. Wichita and Topeka might be classified as mid-size cities, but the rest of the state is rural. The state is geographically large, larger, in fact, than many who don't live here realize. For instance a drive from Baxter Springs to St. Francis, in opposite corners of the state, would take eight hours, the vast majority of it at full speed in open country. Much of rural life is rural indeed—with small populations of only a few hundred that are unable to support necessary amenities on their own. It is not uncommon to get your hair

cut in your own community yet have to drive half an hour to the nearest small grocery store or far further for a doctor or more significant shopping or services.

Within this rural context are communities that function as hubs—Hutchinson is one of these hubs. Hutchinson is only a forty five minute drive outside of Wichita, a much larger community. Yet with a population of 42,080 in the 2010 census,[65] it is able to support larger business and entertainment. In short, if a rural resident in a radius of an hour or more needs a doctor, a movie, or a Wal-Mart, they come to Hutchinson. Hutchinson is also something of a convention and tourism center, hosting the State Fair and multiple national sports tournaments for the National Junior College Athletic Association.

In my experience, two particular forces drive people to actually move from their rural communities into Hutchinson. The first is opportunity. As agriculture technology advances, it takes fewer farmers to farm more land. As a result, young people do not have the same level of opportunity in their home towns as their parents had, let alone their grandparents. More will be said on this shortly. Secondly, rural residents who need better access to medical care often find it easier to move into Hutchinson to reduce hassle and drive time to doctor's appointments and to allow for faster emergency access should it become necessary.

Within Hutchinson is the congregation of which I am Pastor, First United Methodist Church. As the oldest Methodist church in Hutchinson, dating to 1872, the

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[65] "American FactFinder," United States Census Bureau, accessed November 8, 2018, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml. For Hutchinson city, Kansas.

congregation was founded nearly as soon as the area was settled, amidst the struggle of frontier life in every way. As the legend is told, the building of its first sanctuary was actually cancelled for fear a grasshopper plague would stunt the progress of the whole area. It was only because of the defiant Pastor that the mortar was still mixed amidst the cloud of vermin—the grasshoppers were literally cemented into church's foundation.[66] That pastor would later write that, "In two months membership has increased from thirty to eighty, and a Sunday School with seventy-five members."[67]

As Hutchinson grew rapidly, so did the congregation. Numerical records are spotty from the early days, yet the picture that emerges is clear: First Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was then called, was huge. Growing pains had to have been a challenge as records in the church archive show that the Sunday school average attendance was over 400 even before the large 1907 building was built. At its peak in the early 1920s, membership was over 2,000 and Sunday school enrollment, a better measure of engagement, was over 1,900 with average attendance over 1,000.[68] (The City of Hutchinson's population in the 1920 census was 23,298, or a little over half its present size.)[69]

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[66] Maurice Updegrove, *Saddlebags to Satellites: Communicating God's Love for 125 Years A History of First United Methodist Church Hutchinson, KS* (Hutchinson, KS: First United Methodist Church Hutchinson, KS, 1997), 4-6

[67] Updegrove, *Saddlebags to Satellites: Communicating God's Love for 125 Years A History of First United Methodist Church Hutchinson, KS*, 6.

[68] *Official Minutes of the Forty-First Annual Session of the Southwest Kansas Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1923.

[69] United States. Bureau of the Census. *Fourteenth Census of U.S., Taken in Year 1920 Volume I. Population, 1920: Number and Distribution of Inhabitants.*, 1920.

Many times in its early history especially, First Methodist Episcopal sent members to start new congregations. In 1922, as Hutchinson's population was growing to the north, First sent "nearly 500 members" to start a new congregation, Trinity, seventeen blocks up Main Street.[70] This was seen as a deeply missional act, as the Bishop called it, "the most wonderful field of opportunity he knows anywhere in the wide sweep of Methodism. In determining to occupy this field, is not Old First still following, as in the past, the leading spirit of God?"[71] Despite the sending of so many members, First remained the largest congregation in its conference. However, as Hutchinson moved north, and as downtown Hutchinson declined and became increasingly impoverished, First's numbers also declined.

In the 1950s, the era remembered most fondly by today's members, an education building was added. Sunday school attendance numbers at the time averaged around 700, worship attendance, an even better measure of engagement that appears for the first time in records during this era, reached as high as 876 in the fourth quarter of 1955, according to a record book found in the church's archives. In 1972, FUMC, faced with an aging facility, built a new sanctuary. According to the documents of the time, it was designed to seat 550 to as many as 675 with overflow seating and had two choir lofts to accommodate all of the musicians. While surprisingly few documents remain from that day, a recent incident allowed early access to time capsules that were installed at that time. Among the

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[70] Updegrove, *Saddlebags to Satellites: Communicating God's Love for 125 Years A History of First United Methodist Church Hutchinson, KS*, 88.

[71] Updegrove, *Saddlebags to Satellites: Communicating God's Love for 125 Years A History of First United Methodist Church Hutchinson, KS*, 87.

treasures briefly enjoyed was a recording of the 1972 building's dedication service. In it, Bishop Ernest T. Dixon, Jr. compares FUMC to other churches who choose to abandon their original locations to move out to the suburbs in hopes of reaching more people. Instead, he praises the church for remaining downtown to minister to the "users of drugs" and "those alcoholics who are always somewhere moving in the inner city and needing someplace to where they can go in an effort to find themselves."[72] Today, worship attendance is around 160, split among two services that are swallowed up by the huge, grand sanctuary.

Factors Contributing to Hopelessness

Having established my context of Kansas, of Hutchinson, and of First United Methodist Church, I will now turn to examine three factors that are major contributing forces to the nuanced sense of hopelessness I observe there. Those factors are a larger context of rural decline, numerical decline within the congregation itself, and metanarrative established by denominational forces.

Rural Decline

Rural decline is indisputable in most, if not all, of rural Kansas. Robert Wuthnow reports that "the period from 1950 to 1980… witnessed the sharpest decline in total number of farms in the state's history: from 135,000 to 75,000, a loss of 60,000 farms, or

[72] Ernest T. Dixon, Jr., "Sail on! Sail on! Sail on and on!" December 3, 1972, First United Methodist Church, Hutchinson, KS.

44.4 percent of the total within three decades."[73] This loss can largely be blamed on advances in farming technology.[74]

But despite the measurable reality, *perception* of rural decline is what matters most for its effects on hopelessness. Of that there is also ample evidence. On September 24, 2018, during the process of writing this thesis, *The Hutchinson News* published an article entitled, "Decade-long effort to open Grand Avenue Market nearing fruition."[75] At first, this article is a happy one, speaking of a new store in the rural southwest Kansas town of Plains. It was opened through an impressive collaboration between the government and a nonprofit agency that raised cash and pledges to make it happen. Yet, predictably for any regular reader of Kansas news, the larger narrative of rural decline quickly appears. One resident is quoted with respect to having a new grocery store: "We've seen what it's like to not have one. We see that we're losing other businesses and we're losing our elderly because it's not safe for them to drive [on the highway] to the grocery store… We've seen the trends and just know if we don't do something about it, Plains is not going to be on the map anymore."[76] This is quickly followed by a reminder of recent changes in the school system that were needed to attract teachers from further away.

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[73] Robert Wuthnow, "Depopulation and Rural Churches in Kansas, 1950-1980," *Great Plains Research* 15, no. 2 (2005): 120. Wuthnow notes that while this period saw the fastest decline, the decline has continued in more recent times.

[74] Wuthnow, "Depopulation and Rural Churches in Kansas, 1950-1980," 121.

[75] John Green, "Decade-Long Effort to Open Grand Avenue Market Nearing Fruition," *The Hutchinson News*, September 24, 2018.

[76] Green, "Decade-Long Effort to Open Grand Avenue Market Nearing Fruition."

What is at risk for rural communities, however, goes beyond even the livelihood of their town and its presence on a map. Jennifer Sherman and Rayna Sage wrote a paper on rural schools in the wake of economic collapse in the forest industry in Golden Valley, California.[77] In particular, they look at the one of the major aspects of rural decline I alluded to above where young people are forced to leave the community for lack of vocational opportunity. Interestingly, they describe a system of social and moral capital in rural communities. Put in simpler terms, some families are seen as "good, hard-working families" while others are not. As Sherman and Sage put it, "School administrators and teachers frequently provide strong influences in the form of encouragement and attention for those children who are perceived as having potential to succeed in their educational careers."[78]

Without making a moral judgement on this aspect of rural life, Sherman and Sage's observation is a small but quantifiable way of showing that rural decline is also about the loss of a social structure and even loss of self-identity for those well established in it. It is about much more than homemade pie crusts and coffee at the filling station. If an older couple, long established in their rural community, moves into Hutchinson to be closer to doctors, it also means giving up their social and moral status, status that was likely passed on to them by their parents or grandparents. It also means that their community has one less "good family" and that they are to blame for it. Sherman and

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[77] Jennifer Sherman and Rayna Sage, "Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools, Brain-Drain, and Community Survival in the Wake of Economic Collapse," *Journal of Research in Rural Education,* 26, no. 11 (2011): 1–14.

[78] Sherman and Sage, "Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools, Brain-Drain, and Community Survival in the Wake of Economic Collapse," 3.

Sage show that this societal change, connected for them to the public schools, matters: "A surprising number of respondents seemed to know the exact enrollments of the town's grade school and high school, and to connect these numbers back to the population loss due to out-migration following the forest industry decline."[79]

It is my experience that many, if not most, Hutchinsonians remain connected to their rural roots. Even second generation residents speak of their family's roots. Newspaper articles like the one referenced above are common and they are often talked about. The ones who move to Hutchinson may not know their hometown's exact school enrollment any more (although some probably do), but they remain keenly aware of the phenomenon as a whole.

Congregational Numeric Decline

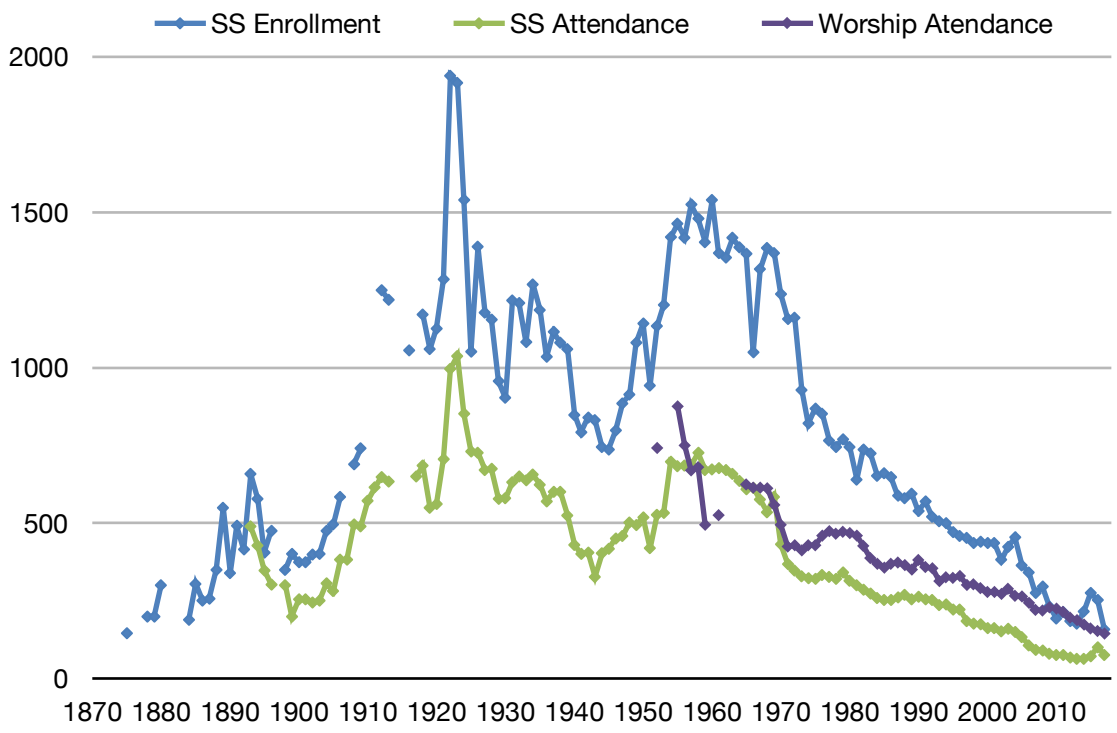
As is apparent from my early sketch of FUMC's history, its numeric rise and decline are striking even against the backdrop of the larger context of mainline decline. While many churches complain about decline since the 1960s, FUMC's decline stretches back, arguably, to 1923, and the amount of decline is striking indeed. Quantifying this decline is difficult as the best metric for describing the congregation's size changes for different eras. For instance, worship attendance was not tracked during the church's peak in the 1920s. From the records, the most closely watched metric during that time was Sunday School enrollment and attendance. More recent times make it clear that far fewer

[79] Sherman and Sage, "Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools, Brain-Drain, and Community Survival in the Wake of Economic Collapse," 6.

members attend Sunday School than attend worship. My most recent observations show that with the ease of travel and families spread out across the country, even worship attendance no longer captures the active size of the congregation as it once did.[80] Where these metrics "hand off" to one another is both difficult to determine and beyond the scope of this analysis.

For my purposes, the following chart tells the story well. It displays three factors: Total Sunday School Enrollment, Sunday School Average Attendance, and Worship Average Attendance once that metric becomes available. The sources for the data are primarily Annual Conference Journals, though the worship numbers are augmented by a few earlier reports found in FUMC's archives before such numbers were officially reported.

[80] Full Church Membership is not a reliable indicator for a number of reasons, including that it doesn't capture non-professed members and since it is rarely kept "clean" as congregation members come and go from the community.



Sunday School Enrollment, Attendance, and Worship Attendance Data for First United Methodist Church, Hutchinson, Kansas (full data in Appendix B)

As can be seen, the church's numeric peak came in 1922. At the time, Sunday School enrollment was an astounding 1,940 with average attendance of 1,038. 1923 is when nearly 500 members were sent to start Trinity UMC, thus the sharp drop. Other churches were also started during that era, no doubt accounting for other drops. By and large, numbers decline from 1923 until 1947 when Sunday School enrollment bottoms out at 737. A post World War II surge then posts numbers to a new peak of 1,525 in 1957, exactly 10 years later. With only an occasional brief reversal, numbers have declined since then with the most notable downward trend seen in late 1960s to early 1970s. During this period Sunday School enrollment dropped by a staggering 100 per year with Sunday School average attendance dropping by a corresponding amount.

While the church still has some members whose memories stretch back nearly to the 1923 peak, significantly more members remember the post-war surge in the 1950s and even more lived through the consistent decline that followed. Worship attendance is easily the most visible indicator of a church's size as, though there may be multiple services, it is the closest any congregation comes to having every active person in the room at the same time. One must ask, what is the psychological impact of watching a church decline from a worship attendance in the 800s in 1955 to the 100s today, a trend that was experienced little by little over 60 years?

Later in this thesis I will turn to Jack Mezirow and his theory of adult transformative learning to form practical solutions. But it is worth developing the first part of his theory now as it helps to answer the question about the psychological impact of prolonged decline. Mezirow refers to our limited, pre-formed understandings as "meaning perspectives." He writes that, "uncritically assimilated habits of expectation or meaning perspectives serve as schemes and as perceptual and interpretive codes in the construal of meaning…"[81] In other words, if we allow the world to form us without critical reflection on that formation, "habits of expectation" are formed that later shape how we interpret our experience and, more to our larger topic, what we expect the future to hold. Mezirow and his successors enumerate six types of "habits of mind" that are distinct, if overlapping.[82] At least two of them come into play for our purpose here: sociolinguistic and psychological. Sociolinguistic habits of mind involve "social norms,

[81] Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 4.

[82] Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning,* 3rd ed. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 1994), 19. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

cultural expectations, and the way we use language."[83] Patricia Cranton gives a poignant example, "Growing up in a culture in which women's roles are clearly defined as submissive shape our habits of mind about how women should behave."[84] It is not difficult to imagine how uncritically assimilated patterns of people leaving church would lead to a habit of expectation. After experiencing such a prolonged, slow-motion loss of church members, a habit of mind would surely be formed that expects the pattern to continue. Phrases might be used such as "Well, so-and-so hasn't been here in a few weeks, they're probably not coming back either," become signals of engrained sociolinguistic habits.

The second type of Mezirow's habits of mind, to note, is psychological. This one relates to people's self-concept as well as feelings like anxiety and fear. Cranton's example here is of "Someone whose parents had very high expectations of achievement in school" might "develop a perspective that includes great motivation to achieve or possibly a sense of guilt about never being able to achieve enough."[85] In congregational decline, then, remember that any loss involves grief. Someone leaving a church involves a sense of failure, as does a lack of new members to replace those who have died. A habit of mind here, formed over decades of decline, would lead to a sense of low self-worth for a congregation and its members, a sense that we are not good enough to retain or draw members. Shame, which will be further discussed in the next section, is also a likely

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[83] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 20.

[84] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 20.

[85] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 20.

outcome of this habit of mind. It is also worth pointing out that my example at the end of the previous paragraph overlaps these two types of habits of mind as it involves both sociolinguistic and psychological in that it is an expression of fear.

We have established that practical hope is present whenever there are both agency and pathways toward a given goal. How, then, do Mezirow's habits of expectation inform this? The habits of mind described in this section play into both agency and pathways. For instance, repeated, failed attempts to grow a congregation's membership would over time erode the number of pathways a congregation is able to visualize, even if they manage to escape the apathy that so often comes with a loss of hope. Even more poignant, as the slow drip of membership loss in a congregation becomes a psychological habit of mind, quietly convincing the congregation that it is not only a failure but always will be, then not only are pathways difficult to imagine but agency seems impossible as congregation members lose their ability to see, let alone reach for, any alternative to yet more decline.

One illuminative question to ask of FUMC's data is to count how many years saw fewer people than the year before. While admittedly crude, this question is an attempt to ask how often church members saw fewer people in the pews than the year before, thereby potentially contributing to an uncritically formed habit of mind. Since 1962, the year the post-war surge began to decline, 42 years have seen fewer people participating while only 14 years have seen either level or an increase.[86] The increases are also far

[86] I arrived at these numbers by using Sunday School Average Attendance and then switching to Worship Average Attendance in 1970, the year that the latter metric began to diverge from the former. The raw data is provided in Appendix B.

more modest than the decreases. Again since 1962, there have been 21 years that declined more than 5% and only 5 that increased by at least 5%. While most congregation members around today remember this period, the picture is nearly as stark when the post-war surge is included. Since the 1923 peak, 33 years have seen decline over 5% while only 9 have increased by at least 5%. It is not difficult to see how such patterns would form expectation in congregation members watching this change happen week by week over the course of decades.

In chapter four I will further develop Mezirow's transformative learning theory to show how one goes about moving beyond one's malformed habits of expectation. For now, though, it is enough that this theory shows just how plausible it is that prolonged numeric decline in a congregation could lead to practical hopelessness.

Denominational Metanarrative

The third item on my list of factors contributing to hopelessness at FUMC is the denominational metanarrative. There is certainly no debate on the fact that the United Methodist Church, like many subsets of Christianity in America, has declined in numbers for decades. This has led, perhaps predictably, to the denominational hierarchy lamenting the decline and calling for its reversal. I was surprised in my research to learn that the narrative of decline appears to have started very early. In 1971, renowned Wesley scholar Albert Outler was invited to give a lecture on evangelism. Even at this early date, when denominational decline was only just beginning, he opens his evangelism lecture

with disparaging comments about the present state of the church. He says it is an opportunity to "appeal to the mind and heart of another great evangelist, John Wesley, and to claim for ourselves whatever is still living and pertinent in his life and work that, in an earlier age, stirred yet another great faltering, demoralized church (like ours today) to unexpected renewal."[87] He continues, "One of the commonplace rituals in church meetings of all sorts nowadays is a vivid requiem for these raddled times and the church's dire perils."[88]

That narrative has continued to the present day. On the softer, more subtle side of things, much of the modern rhetoric is around "church renewal." Anthony B. Robinson writes as his very first words of introduction, "Do we need yet another book on renewal and change in the mainline church? In recent years a kind of cottage industry has developed, turning out literature, workbooks, and conferences on the mainline church and what to do for it, about it, or with it."[89] While Robinson goes on to affirm that some of the literature has been helpful (noting that he chose the word "some" and not "most,") the mere existence of such a body of work betrays a perception that the church is in need of renewing. While no doubt many such books begin with an affirmation of what God is

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[87] Albert Cook Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Tidings, 1971), 10. From the context of this quote it is clear that Outler is referring here to evangelistic renewal, a concept slightly more specific than what is often meant today. For the purposes of my argument, however, it is equally demoralizing.

[88] Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 12.

[89] Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

doing, the overwhelming implication is that the church is "broken" and that we need to do something to "fix" it.

On the less subtle side of things, some of the articles that are written with regard to denominational decline are flat out alarmist. Mark Tooley, the president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy, says, "Methodism in the U.S. has lost membership every year since 1964--more than 4.5 million members. There is nothing in its U.S. policies that can or will reverse the decline in the near future."[90] An article in *Good News*, the magazine of the prominent conservative United Methodist caucus group, speaks of the United Methodist Women sub-organization: "Over the last nine years, The United Methodist Church has lost an average of 249 congregations per year… At the same time, UMW has lost an average of 543 congregations per year that no longer have an active UMW unit – twice as fast a decline… This is a flashing neon sign that something is terribly wrong." Adding, "At the current rate, UMW would disappear by the year 2034."[91] Another article speaks of the broader denominational structures, "By 2050, the connection will have collapsed."[92]

While I choose such statements because of their extreme nature, such alarmist talk is present within United Methodist leadership. In my own experience of fifteen years as a United Methodist Pastor, I can say that not a single Annual Conference has passed that

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[90] "Methodist Church Continues Slow Death Spiral Thanks To Liberal Policies," Prophecy News Watch accessed October 17, 2018, http://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent_news_id=327.

[91] Thomas Lambrecht, "UMW Decline Continues," Good News, December 11, 2017. https://goodnewsmag.org/2017/12/umw-decline-continues/.

[92] Hahn, Heather, "Economist: Church in crisis but hope remains", United Methodist News Service, May 20, 2015, https://www.umnews.org/en/news/economist-united-methodist-church-in-crisis.

did not include an accounting of how much numbers have declined, usually with a special emphasis on the number of Professions of Faith, i.e. new Christians as opposed to membership transfers. Some of these moments, delivered in front of thousands of clergy and lay representatives from Kansas and Nebraska, routinely lament the count of how many churches reported zero Professions of Faith that year. (Later in this chapter I will share how Capps names *shame* as one of the great threats to hope.) In more extreme moments, such statements, while often well-intentioned, have even risen to the alarmist level of the quotes above.

Summary

We have seen how the context of Hutchinson, Kansas First United Methodist Church includes at least three factors that reasonably contribute to hopelessness. Rural decline is a major upheaval in social structure and rootedness for many, due to economic circumstances that couldn't possibly be controlled by those affected. FUMC has itself experienced not only decline, but massive, rapid decline stretched out for a longer period of time than most churches. And through it all, denominational rhetoric has not only driven the point home but at times added an alarmist flair.

Threats to Hope

A part of Capps' alternative theory bears elaboration now as it further illuminates the hopelessness I describe. As foreshadowed in Erikson's definition in Chapter 1, hope is something that exists in spite of contrary forces. So what are these things that can

threaten hope? Capps names "three attitudes that, once internalized and well established, pose an especially powerful threat to the maintenance of a hopeful attitude toward life."[93] These three threats are despair, apathy, and shame.

Capps defines *despair* as "the perception that what is wanted will not happen."[94] In other words, angst based on the perception that your hope is pointless. This despair often manifests in "disgust for the world around us," but it is also directed inward at our own selves.[95] It often leads to depression, as Capps writes, "The major causes of depression are hopelessness and unresolved grief, both of which create the sense of a blocked future.[96]

Negative views of one's skill, loyalty, and long-term goals can lead to "a 'downward spiral' when we realize that our plans of action are no longer effective for meeting our goals, and yet we still cling to them."[97] One reason is a "tendency to persist in behavior that was previously rewarded long after rewards are no longer forthcoming."[98] A focus on long-term goals also makes us more likely to ignore negative feedback with regard to short-term goals. Therefore, he argues, "a basic cause of depressive

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[93] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 98.

[94] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 100.

[95] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 100-101.

[96] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 101.

[97] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 102.

[98] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 103.

hopelessness is the tendency to focus on long-term goals to the neglect of short-term and more immediately realizable goals."[99]

The connection is readily made to congregational life as I describe it. The individuals and congregations I describe have come to focus on the long-term goal of heaven after repeated struggles in this world. Capps' conception of despair brilliantly predicts the result of this reliance on ultimate hope at a time when practical matters become increasingly difficult: a clinging to previously rewarded behavior that no longer works. This is perhaps most evidenced in the denominational metanarrative, such as the abundance of church renewal literature, wherein the same ideas are produced and promoted again and again. (I am reminded of Robinson's statement earlier that *some* of that literature is helpful implying that most of it is not.) Capps predicts that this despair is manifest in depression and disgust.

The second threat to hope, then, is *apathy*. Simply, this is a lack of care for what is happening "around us, to us, or within us."[100] A good example of this is the process of weaning in infancy. Something that is good is withdrawn "for reasons that seem altogether appropriate and without malice."[101] The result can go two directions. One is that the world is seen as hostile as that which was once good now seems an affront. The other reaction is to assume that the good thing is simply no longer to be found, no matter how much one searches for it. In this case, one may either take up a new method of

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[99] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 104.

[100] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 107.

[101] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 109.

searching or "give up the active search for the good object and live by cherishing in memory the goodness one once knew."[102]

Again, this is readily applied to my context. After decades of decline, perceived as the loss of a good thing "for reasons that seem altogether appropriate," there is a tendency to instead cherish the memory and tacitly assume it will never be that way again—without considering other visions of what God may have in store for the future. To be sure, experience has shown me that some experience the perceived loss as an affront but nearly all pine for better days past even while they give up any serious hope of regaining it. Capps again resonates with ultimate and practical hope when he says, "Confidence that long-term desires have already been met leads to the devaluation of life in the here and now, as reflected in the neglect of 'the livelihood of the body.' Immediate and short-term desires have no real significance."[103]

Finally, the third threat is *shame*. This returns to hope as self-projection, a core idea of Capps' theory. Since our hopes originate in our selves, when our hopes are dashed, "We may feel exposed, an easy target for the ridicule or derision of others… We may feel utterly stupid for having entertained such a hope, and the disappointment we feel may translate into a total, pervasive sense of worthlessness."[104] Because we have invested ourselves in our hopes far more deeply than in some surface-level wish, the impact of a dashed or misplaced hope is deeply personal.

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[102] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 110.

[103] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 112.

[104] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 123.

To defend against shame, there are several defensive strategies one might take. The first is to strive for power. This is about gaining control over our self and our situation. One common way for power to be sought is by shaming others.[105] In a congregational context, this might be criticizing other churches, particularly churches that are perceived as successful. Capps argues, "It is very difficult for hope to survive in this context, for hope flourishes where there is possibility, not the certainty that derives from exercising total or absolute control over one's environment."[106] Striving for perfection is also a defensive strategy, and for similar reasons.[107] We tend to think that if we only do better, our goals may be achieved and our shame will go away. Shame is also prone to amnesia as we try to dissociate ourselves from that which shamed us.[108]

Shame is more difficult to observe than the other threats in my context, at least without an empirical study that is beyond the scope of this project. Yet, shame is also a dominant outcome of all three contextual factors I have described. For rural decline, one example is potential shame for having abandoned one's rural home town to move to Hutchinson. Congregational decline bears with it the weekly suggestion that the congregation is not good enough or is not favored enough by God to keep or attract members. I have already mentioned the focus on numbers by denominational leadership that often bears the tone of shame, perhaps such moments are themselves a striving for

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[105] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*,129.

[106] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 129.

[107] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 130.

[108] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 131.

power and perfection as the leaders also feel shame. Despite the difficulty of empirical measurement, I can affirm anecdotally that shame in decline is rampant in both my congregation, congregations like it, and in myself.

To end on a word of hope, I will relay that Capps goes on to name three allies of hope that counteract these threats. I will examine them as part of the normative task in Chapter 3. For now, however, I will pass on Capps' reminder that those who have lost hope and then recovered it often relate that "it was in their struggle against one of hope's adversaries that they came to a more mature understanding of hope and a deeper appreciation of its role in their lives. So, despair, apathy, and shame are not absolute evils. They are often themes by which hope…is enabled to grow and mature."[109]

Practical Hope vs. Ultimate Hope In Context

The hopelessness bred by the above factors is decidedly a *practical* hopelessness. The societal pressures of rural decline, the experience of congregational decline, and the denominational rhetoric of renewal speak primarily to this world. They could have little if any influence on, say, an ultimate matter such as belief in heaven. In fact, evidence suggests that ultimate hope is indeed still existent. For instance, Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that 80% of Mainline Protestants believe in heaven.[110] Furthermore, one look at any obituary page in The Hutchinson News will reveal that the vast majority of funerals are presided over by clergy. This also implies that

[109] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 98-99.

[110] "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics, and Statistics," Pew Research Center, accessed October 17, 2018, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-heaven/.

at a moment of life transition and grief, the importance of religion (i.e., ultimate matters) remains prominent.[111]

As further evidence of ultimate hope on a larger scale, perhaps more along the scale of the denominational metanarrative, I lift up the observations of Phyllis Tickle, an academic, author, and founder of the *Publisher's Weekly* religion section. She was brought in to Publisher's Weekly because of a phenomenon in the publishing industry. Religion as a category for publishers grew during the 1980s, but by 1992 "was approaching triple-digit annual growth."[112] She goes on to describe a hunger for religious literature during the same period churches such as mine were experiencing numeric decline. This suggests a desire, a longing, even a hope for the ultimate.

Summary

And so I arrive at a more in depth description of my context. We have seen that the hopelessness I observe at Hutchinson, Kansas First United Methodist Church and others like it has a number of contributing forces. Among them are the psychological effects of rural decline, especially with regard to social and societal changes resulting from it, the numerical decline of the congregation itself, and the metanarrative of the denomination. These three effects are supported robustly by Capps' three threats to hope: despair, apathy, and shame. These forces together create a darkly fertile soil for

[111] Admittedly tradition could also be a reason for most funerals involving clergy. Yet, my experience as a Pastor makes it clear that church members look for ultimate hope at times of death and even secular family members are more open to ultimate matters.

[112] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 9.

hopelessness—at least for *practical* hopelessness. Yet, despite it all, there is evidence that ultimate hope remains strong.

CHAPTER THREE:

NORMATIVE TASK

What does a healthy, integrated, Christian hope look like? To answer this question, it is finally time to bring Snyder's agency and pathways and my practical and ultimate hope into conversation with theology. My primary conversation partner will be N.T. Wright as his work, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*,[113] has similar aims to my own. I believe that his approach as a biblical theologian will also make his work more accessible in a congregational setting such as my own. Perhaps surprisingly, Wright bases his argument on the doctrine of *bodily* resurrection: if bodily resurrection is true, and if God is creating not only a new heaven but also a new earth, then it retroactively asserts value on the present life and world and therefore has implications for how we view and participate in them. Or to express it using my terms, if ultimate hope is understood correctly it will inescapably "spill over" into practical hope. Once we have built an integrated theology of Christian hope, I will once again bring Donald Capps into the conversation. His voice will not only enhance my description of hope as it ought to be, but also help bridge toward concrete solutions in the following chapter.

Surprised By Hope

[113] N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

N.T. Wright says that two questions give shape to his book: "What are we waiting for? And what are we going to do about it in the meantime?" Indeed, these two questions already foreshadow a distinction similar to the one I draw between ultimate and practical hope. While his book is not explicitly a work of practical theology, it both begins and ends with context. Wright asserts that,

> Most people, in my experience—including many Christians—don't know what the ultimate Christian hope really is. Most people—again, sadly, including many Christians—don't expect Christians to have much to say about hope within the present world.[114]

By way of exploring what the New Testament authors and early Christians believed about Christian hope, Wright offers reforms for the operational beliefs of many modern Christians. Finally, he shows how these reforms lead ultimately to an inescapable emphasis on this-worldly mission.

The Resurrection of the Body

Wright's argument revolves around a concept enshrined in the Apostle's Creed which is poorly understood, let alone actively lived, by many Christians today: "[I believe in] the resurrection of the body." Indeed, Adam Hamilton, a prominent United Methodist pastor from my own state wrote a book on the creed and says of this phrase, "I must admit I'm a bit perplexed by it. I believe in the resurrection of the soul, that after death we live on. But the resurrection of the body is more challenging to understand."[115]

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[114] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, xi.

[115] Adam Hamilton, *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 157. Interestingly, in a footnote to this question, Hamilton refers readers to N.T. Wright's *Surprised By Hope*.

Surely some of this hesitancy comes from our era of modern science, as Hamilton goes on to describe a camera that was placed inside what is thought to be Paul's tomb. "…after two thousand years, only small bone fragments remained. So is it really these bodies that are resurrected?"[116] Yet, to return to Wright's argument, biblical accounts show the resurrected Jesus with a distinct physicality.[117] In Luke, Jesus eats fish on the beach[118] and in John he invites Thomas to touch his wounds.[119]

Wright details historical arguments about the historicity and accuracy of such accounts of the bodily resurrection. He also examines the Jewish and pagan origins of the idea and the ways resurrection belief mutated over time.[120] Yet in the end, he shows convincingly that the early Christian hope that is attested to in our canonical scripture is a hope for bodily resurrection. In fact, what is attested to is a two-step process wherein an interim period of bodily death will eventually be replaced with new bodily life.[121] For instance, Jesus says to the criminal on the cross, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."[122] As Wright himself summarizes it, "the early Christians hold firmly to a two-step belief about the future: first death and whatever lies immediately beyond;

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[116] Hamilton, *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why*, 157.

[117] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 55-56.

[118] Luke 24:41-43

[119] John 20:24-31

[120] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 35-40.

[121] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 36.

[122] John 23:43

second, a new bodily existence in a newly remade world."[123] Only a handful of verses later we discover that indeed "Paradise" was not Jesus' final destination.[124] Later in the book, Wright offers a contemporary metaphor borrowed from John Polkinghorne, with only slight apology for lack of nuance: "God will download our software onto his hardware until the time when he gives us new hardware to run the software again."[125]

Myths of Hope

To come to grips with the implications of this two-stage post-death hope canonized in our scripture and creed, Wright moves to examine God's ultimate purpose. In other words, if we want to understand the resurrection of the body, it will help to understand why God would institute such a system. He begins by arguing against two common myths that stand in the way of such biblical hope. These myths "are sometimes confused with the Christian hope, and indeed both make use of some elements of the Christian hope in telling their grand stories. But neither comes anywhere near the picture we have in the New Testament and, in flashes, in the Old."[126]

The first of these myths Wright calls "evolutionary optimism" or, more simply, the "myth of progress."[127] This is the myth that humanity is constantly growing, marching

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[123] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 41.

[124] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 41.

[125] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 163.

[126] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 81.

[127] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 81.

forward toward an ultimate utopia where all prosper. Wright notes the push this myth received in the European Renaissance and Enlightenment and points out its prevalence among today's politicians. Charles Darwin is one significant figure in Western thought whose ideas appear to give this myth some scientific validity, as it is a small leap to say that if all creatures are evolving into something greater, then that includes the human project as well.[128] Indeed, naturalist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin built upon the theory of evolution to suggest that the world was being "animated and drawn up towards God."[129]

Wright's objection to this myth is that it cannot deal with evil. How does one handle the question of evil if humanity is supposedly marching always upward? How does the idea of evolutionary progress explain "world war, drug crime, Auschwitz, apartheid, child pornography, and the other interesting sidelines that evolution has thrown up for our entertainment in the twentieth century?"[130] Wright argues that it simply cannot deal with it. In fact, he writes, "when I say 'deal with,' I don't just mean intellectually, though that is true as well: I mean in practice. It can't develop a strategy that actually addresses the severe problems of evil in the world."[131]

Ultimately, Wright's objection to the myth of progress is that it relies too heavily on human agency to the neglect of God's. He writes, "This utopian dream is in fact a

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[128] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 83.

[129] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 84.

[130] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 85.

[131] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 85.

parody of the Christian vision. The kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world come together to produce a vision of history moving forward toward its goal, a goal that will emerge from within rather than being a new gift from elsewhere."[132]

With respect to Wright's wisdom, this is one place where I would push back. While the idea of progress can indeed be taken too far, I believe there is indeed room for it to handle evil. Just because one takes three steps forward followed by two steps backward does not mean progress has not been made. I also believe that the idea of progress can be understood in such a way that God's agency is primary, working alongside humanity. Perhaps it even offers a strategy in which, as co-creators, we have a responsibility to help progress along by eliminating evil, and by striving to lessen those steps backward, but that God's grace keeps pushing us forward regardless. Martin Luther King, Jr. is famous for quoting Theodore Parker: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."[133] I will concede to Wright, however, that this idea bears the risk he names and is all too often taken to the unchristian extreme as he describes.

The second myth originates with Plato, specifically his idea that there is a separation between the philosophical mind and the world of matter, the latter of which was but an illusion. To Plato, "It wasn't just evil that was wrong with the word; it was change and decay, the transitoriness of matter."[134] Brought into Christianity, this idea

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[132] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 82.

[133] "'Where Do We Go From Here?,' Address Delivered at the Eleventh Annual SCLC Convention," Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed December 22, 2018. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention.

[134] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 88.

becomes that we are meant for something better than this temporary world and that we will one day leave behind our material selves. Gnosticism is the early manifestation of this in Christianity which, of course, was ultimately dismissed as theologically unsound.

Obviously, the modern manifestation of this is the idea of going to heaven when you die. As Wright points out, "A good many Christian hymns and poems wander off unthinkingly in the direction of Gnosticism. The 'just passing through' spirituality… though it has some affinities with classical Christianity, encourages precisely a Gnostic attitude."[135] Yet, it is not difficult to find in scripture how the material world not only matters to God now but will continue to. Wright names Romans 8:18-25 and Revelation 21-22—it is not only a "new heaven" that God is making but also a "new earth."[136] I would add to that list Jesus himself—his incarnation is a blessing of the material world and his return to it post-resurrection shows the steadfastness of that blessing.

Fundamental Structures of Hope

Now that we have established the myths of what God is doing in the world, we turn to God's actual purposes or, as Wright calls them, the "fundamental structures of hope," which he then explores in scriptural context.[137] I would like to frame this intellectual move in terms of my own idea of ultimate hope. In my conception, ultimate

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[135] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 90.

[136] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 90.

[137] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 93-97.

hope consists of both agency and pathways, but agency and pathways that originate from outside ourselves and from outside of our lived experience. It is a significant—and apt—move of Wright to refer to God's purposes as "fundamental structures of hope" or, as I would put it, fundamental structures of ultimate hope. Because we believe in and trust both God's promises and God's immanence, we therefore affirm that God has the agency to bring God's purposes to fruition even if God's pathways remain largely mysterious from our perspective. God's purposes are, therefore, the deepest source of our ultimate hope.

Wright's first fundamental structure of hope is the *goodness of creation*. Wright notes the significance of the fact that first century Christianity did not give in to the many pressures of the time to view the world as less than good. Instead, creation is viewed as "an act of love, of affirming the goodness of the other."[138] God's purposes can be seen in that creation was designed "to *reflect* God, both to reflect God back to God in worship and to reflect God into the rest of creation in stewardship."[139] Crucially to Wright, however, is that creation is also distinct from God—creation is neither divine in itself nor contained within God. Without this distinction, there is no way to address the problem of evil.

Following that, the second fundamental structure of hope is the *nature of evil*. Evil points to God's purposes because of what it is *not*. Evil is real, but it is not created by God. Evil is something other than God and distinct from God, a definition that is only

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[138] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 94.

[139] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 94. Italics original.

partial as indeed the same can be said for God's good creation. Most crucially, evil is not defined as being transient, as indeed much of creation is designed to point "from the world *as it is* to the world *as it is meant one day to be*," which by definition requires transience.[140] Rather, evil is defined by "the rebellious idolatry by which humans worship and honor elements of the natural world rather than the God who made them."[141] Such rebellion leads to a perversion of good, natural death into something more akin to exile as evil separates us from the goodness of God and creation. In short, evil is that which separates us from God's purposes and therefore has the capacity to separate us from ultimate hope.

God's plan of redemption is the third fundamental structure of hope. From a biblical theology viewpoint, this begins with Israel as a means of redemption and, ultimately, the life, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. Because creation is a work of love and goodness, redemption is not foreign to it. Further, because evil is not a material or "created" reality, redemption does not mean the destruction of any created reality. This is an argument against the idea that bodily death releases a "saved" soul. Instead, especially considering Jesus' bodily resurrection, redemption is part of God's plan for our wholly integrated selves, including both spirit and body. "The slavery consists, rather, in sin, redemption from which must ultimately involve not just goodness of soul or spirit but a newly embodied life."[142]

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[140] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 95. Italics original.

[141] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 95.

[142] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 96.

Redemption of Bodies

We can now see how, for Wright, bodily resurrection is intimately related to God's purposes and therefore our hope. In his own words,

> My proposition is that the traditional picture of people going to either heaven or hell as a one-stage postmortem journey (with or without the option of some kind of purgatory or continuing journey as an intermediate stage) represents a serious distortion and diminution of the Christian hope. Bodily resurrection is not just one odd bit of that hope. It is the element that gives shape and meaning to the rest of the story we tell about God's ultimate purposes.[143]

Given the centrality of bodily redemption and resurrection, Wright spends more time exploring where these ideas come from and what they mean. Indeed, as this concept seems foreign to many modern Christians, as Wright is fond of pointing out, it will behoove our normative task to do likewise.

Biblically, the idea of bodily resurrection and of a two-stage journey is not only supported but perhaps inarguably so. In Jesus' journey, we see him tell the criminal, "*Today* you will be with me in paradise."[144] Then, after three days, begins physically appearing to the disciples as previously mentioned. Later comes the biblical account of the Ascension, in which we now have Jesus, still fully human, now in a "thoroughly embodied risen state," in heaven.[145]

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[143] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 148.

[144] Luke 23:43. Italics mine. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 150.

[145] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 111.

Paul speaks less of the two-step process, but is quite clear on multiple occasions with regard to redemption of the body. In the eighth chapter of Romans when he says, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved."[146] In Philippians he writes, "[Christ] will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory."[147]

Wright asserts that whenever the word "resurrection" appears in scripture, it is referring to "a new bodily life *after* whatever state of existence one might enter immediately upon death. It was, in other words, life *after* life after death."[148] "Heaven" is not a reference to afterlife but rather to God—"'riches in heaven' simply means 'riches in God's presence.'"[149] Another scriptural misconception in our perhaps overly-Platonic age comes from Paul's language of a "spiritual body." When Paul speaks of resurrection at length in 1 Corinthians 15, the Greek he uses for a resurrected "spiritual body" does not refer to a body that is somehow non physical. Of this, Wright argues that "the technical arguments are overwhelming and conclusive." The Greek for a "spiritual body" describes "not *the material out of which things are made* but *the power or energy that animates*

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[146] Romans 8:22-24a

[147] Philippians 3:21a

[148] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 151. Italics original.

[149] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 151.

them."[150] Or, more eloquently in Wright's words, "Dust we are and to dust we shall return. But God can do new things with dust."[151]

Wright spends some time exploring various suggestions about what we might suppose the resurrection body to be, along with questions of who, where, what, why, when, and how.[152] Much of this is speculation, however, and while valuable adds little to our purposes here. What is clear, however, is that to Wright, Revelation's new heaven *and new earth*[153] are pointless without the resurrection of the body as understood by the witness of the early church. Therefore, without the resurrection of the body, our hope is hopelessly incomplete.

Hope In Practice: Salvation and the Kingdom of God

If bodily resurrection is true as our canon and creed say, and if it is indeed an integral part of Christian hope, then what do we make of it? What difference does it make for life today? Surely such a hope means more than merely correcting our songs, liturgies, and teachings to more closely communicate the biblical teaching about death

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[150] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 157. Italics original. Indeed, I did much the writing for this project at a Dominican motherhouse and retreat center in Great Bend, Kansas. While attending mass one day I was struck by the priest's declaration that the cup would become our "spiritual drink." While I have different views on transubstantiation as a United Methodist, it is still less of a stretch one might at first suppose to hold together the realities of spirituality and physicality.

[151] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 158.

[152] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 159-163.

[153] Revelation 21

and beyond.[154] Indeed, writes Wright, "a proper grasp of the (surprising) *future* hope held out to us in Jesus Christ leads directly and, to many people, equally surprisingly, to a vision of the *present* hope that is the basis of all Christian mission."[155] If bodily resurrection is true, then it retroactively asserts value on the present bodily life, because God will one day raise it to new life. That means our actions here and now do indeed store up treasure in heaven, preparing for God's future. As Wright puts it, "What you *do* in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—*will last into God's future.*"[156]

Wright points out that this is, in fact, a rethinking of the very meaning of salvation.[157] Salvation cannot be simply salvation from death, for if such transience is a part of creation, surely we need no saving from it. Nor can salvation be our disembodied souls spending eternity in heaven, of "going home" as it is put in many songs, for such ignores the value God has placed not only in the "new earth" but its present state as well. Instead, salvation must include the redemption of this life as well, of God's future reaching into God's present. As Wright says, "Life after death, it seems, can be a serious

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[154] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 189.

[155] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 191. Italics original.

[156] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 193. Italics original.

[157] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 194-201.

distraction not only from the ultimate life *after* life after death, but also from life *before death*."[158]

What we are talking about, then, is the reign of God.[159] Wright's understanding begins with Israel, called to be "*a light to the Gentiles*," "*in order that humans might be his rescuing stewards over creation*."[160] Indeed, this is why Israel and humanity are rescued in the Hebrew Bible. The reign of God itself is announced in passages such as Isaiah 52:7-12, and is clearly "the hope of Israel."[161] Jesus prepared his followers not for heaven, but for "something that was happening in and on this earth, through his work, then through his death and resurrection, and then through the Spirit-led work to which they would be called."[162]

In describing the reign of God, Wright begins with two caveats. First, God is the one building God's reign, not us. But, since we are made in God's image, God's reign is "reflected into his world *through* his human creatures."[163] Second, the present anticipation of God's reign is distinct from the final version that only God can create.[164] Yet, the work

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[158] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 198. Italics original.

[159] Wright uses the phrases "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably, but for this project I am choosing to use the gender neutral "reign of God." Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 201.

[160] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 202. Italics original.

[161] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 201.

[162] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 203.

[163] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 207. Italics original.

[164] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 208.

we do is still building "*for* the kingdom."[165] To illustrate this nuanced distinction, Wright employs the metaphor of a stonemason who is part of the building of a great cathedral:

> The architect already drew up the plans and passed on instructions to the team of masons as to which stones need carving in what way. The foreman distributes these tasks among the team. One shapes stones for a particular tower or turret; another carves the delicate pattern that breaks up the otherwise forbidding straight lines; another works on gargoyles or coats of arms; another is making statues of saints, martyrs, kings, or queens. … They may not have seen the complete architect's drawing of the whole building with their bit identified in its proper place. They may not live, either, to see the completed building with their work at last where it belongs. But they trust the architect that the work they have done in following instructions will not be wasted. They are not, themselves, building the cathedral, but they are building *for* the cathedral…[166]

Wright then explores three concepts that, although hardly comprehensive, capture something of what the reign of God looks like in practice. The first is *justice*, by which he means "the intention of God," "to set the whole world right."[167] Yet this is much more than simply caring "for the wounded as best we can while we wait for a different kind of salvation altogether."[168] Rather, our place in living between Jesus' bodily resurrection in the past and God's new world in the future is to actively reflect God's intention for what the world *should* and *will* look like. Note that this stance is quite different when one understands ones' self as actively building for God's present and future reign rather than one who is biding time until it all passes away—a cathedral builder who took the second

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[165] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 208. Italics original.

[166] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 210. Italics original.

[167] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 213.

[168] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 213.

stance, to invoke Wright's metaphor, would do poor work indeed and probably not very much of it!

Second, the reign of God is characterized by *beauty*. Wright goes so far as to say that, "Beauty matters, dare I say, almost as much as spirituality and justice."[169] This call grows out of creation itself and God's call to humanity to be stewards of it. This is not just about nature, however, but we also "celebrate a beautiful world through the production of artifacts that are themselves beautiful."[170] Finally, the third mark of our engagement in the reign of God is *evangelism*. Simply put, if we are joining in the work of new creation, "then at the center of the picture stands the personal call of the gospel of Jesus to every child, woman, and man."[171] This follows from the assumption that the reign of God is setting the world right by God's intentions. However, to think of evangelism as it is often thought of, perhaps of saying the "sinner's prayer" or of efforts to make a church more "welcoming," is too shallow. Rather, the announcement of God's reign and the invitation to it can only stand if such things are already evident in the life of a church. In Wright's words, if a church is "actively involved in seeking justice… and if it's cheerfully celebrating God's good creation… in art and music and if, in addition, its own internal life gives every sign that a new creation is indeed happening, generating a new type of community,"[172] then such an invitation is a different and more natural matter.

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[169] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 222.

[170] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 223.

[171] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 225.

[172] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 228.

Before we move to Wright's final section on resourcing the church, I would like to underscore these practical implications once more. As we speak of ultimate and practical hope, what we see in Wright's theology is ultimate hope breaking into the present. It is about a future—the creation of a new heaven and a new earth—whose agency and pathways are so far beyond our lived existence as to humble us. But it is also about how God, through incarnation and resurrection, *brings* that transcendent agency and pathways *into* our present lives in such a way as to make that hope practical and accessible, while still remaining connected and integrated with God's *ultimate* goal, which remains beyond us. Phrased like this, it is perhaps unavoidable that at times the work each of us is given to do would feel so small as to be insignificant at best, perhaps even counterproductive at worst. Yet, Wright invokes 1 Corinthians 15:58 to remind us that, "in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

> What you do in the Lord *is not in vain.* You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Sprit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into

> the new creation that God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God.[173]

Reshaping the Church

Wright ends by exploring what this theology means for its practical expression in the church. Not surprisingly for a biblical theologian, he begins by exploring scriptural roots. He systematically examines each gospel, noting that the idea that Jesus' resurrection is the proof of life after death or a future life in heaven is simply not found.[174] Instead, the biblical witness is that Jesus' resurrection proves that the work Jesus did for the reign of God and the work to which he calls us is true and valid. Writing specifically of Matthew, yet in harmony with his assessment of each gospel, Wright observes, "resurrection doesn't mean *escaping from* the world; it means *mission to* the world based on Jesus's *lordship over* the world.[175]

Wright argues based on the gospels that Jesus is calling us to a new epistemology which Wright calls an "epistemology of love."[176] Postmodernity has demonstrated that our old epistemology of subject and object is an illusion and that goals of detached objectivity are illusions. Instead, "What we are called to, and what in the resurrection we are equipped for, is a knowing in which we are involved as subjects *but as self-giving, not*

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[173] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 208. Italics original.

[174] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 234.

[175] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 235. Italics original.

[176] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 239.

as self-seeking, subjects: in other words, a knowing that is a form of love."[177] As an example he offers Thomas, seeking hard knowledge of seeing the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes. Yet upon his encounter with the risen Jesus, his need for full understanding melts quickly and is transformed into an act of self giving as he proclaims, "My Lord and my God!"[178]

Paul continues these themes, but Wright does see at least one additional point that argues against the dualism of heaven and earth that he so often sees in today's world. After examining several of Paul's passages with regards to resurrection and cosmic things, Wright concludes that "in the Bible heaven and earth are made for each other. They are twin interlocking spheres of God's single created reality. You really understand earth only when you are equally familiar with heaven. You really know God and share his life only when you understand that he is the creator and lover of earth…"[179] The goal of the Christian, then, is to live in this cosmology that we have seen in Jesus, to live a life that is grounded in an integrated heaven and earth.[180]

From here the implications, at least theoretically, are obvious, especially as one strives to know God through self-giving love. (I would also mention that Paul's integrated cosmos points us toward an integrated hope—just as earth and heaven should

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[177] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 239. Italics original.

[178] John 20:24-29

[179] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 250-251.

[180] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 252.

meet in every Christian, so must practical and ultimate hope!) Wright begins his own suggestions with a reformation of our celebration of Easter.[181] In addition to the obvious point of reforming Easter's message to better celebrate and teach the resurrection of the body and its implications for this world, he also points out the common imbalance between the seriousness with which the entire season of Lent is taken versus the all-too-common lack of truly celebrating Easter past the day itself. He combines the two thoughts in one eloquent sentence: "if Lent is a time to give things up, Easter ought to be a time to take things up."[182]

Beyond that, the church should offer the world a re-thinking of space, time, and matter.[183] If we are living hope properly, then places, times, and things associated with faith should not be seen as "a retreat for the world" as they often are, but rather as "a bridgehead into the world."[184] He lifts up the Celtic idea of "thin places," where the veil between heaven and earth becomes thin indeed.[185] Properly practiced, anything associated with Christianity ought to be a thin place, or perhaps a thin time or object, that also has a sense of heaven breaking imminently into the world. It is no surprise that this leads to a resurrection understanding of mission as the reign of God is taken out by God's people—not merely to provide relief or even to save souls, but to spread the coming reality of the

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[181] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 255-257.

[182] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 257.

[183] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 257-264.

[184] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 260.

[185] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 259.

new earth into this one.[186] Wright also examines spirituality in light of the fullness of hope as he describes it. Prayer is not merely intercessory, but also a posture of openness to the "beauty, joy, and power of the world around us."[187] But most potently is Paul's great poem on love in 1 Corinthians 13, so often read along with wedding vows and hung on walls as a reminder and inspiration. As Wright puts it, "The point of 1 Corinthians 13 is that love is not our duty; it is our destiny… It is the resurrection life, and the resurrected Jesus calls us to begin living it with him and for him right now."[188]

Allies of Hope

With Wright's theology of hope in mind, I return to Capps and his thoughts on threats to hope. I ended that section with a hopeful quotation in which Capps reminded us that despair, apathy, and shame, the threats to hope, are not inherently bad, as they are also the proving ground wherein our hope becomes mature. I have shown that my context is surrounded by forces that challenge hope, indeed threats that are unavoidable. That leads to an additional question for the normative task: what is a healthy response to that which threatens our hope? Capps does offer a few practical suggestions to directly combat the threats, such as confession as an antidote to shame.[189] A more robust answer is

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[186] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 264-270.

[187] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 276.

[188] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 288.

[189] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 134.

to be found, however, in his three allies of hope, which are *trust*, *patience*, and *modesty*.[190] These three postures not only stand against the threats of hope, they also provide a fertile ground for hope to grow.

The relationship between *trust* and hope is not difficult to see. In fact, Capps uses the word "hope" in his definition of trust: "a confident expectation, anticipation, or hope for the future."[191] He later adds, "[trust] is a tacit belief in the reliability of the other, a belief that requires little conscious thought or reflection, as it is based on the way things are."[192] Capps goes to lengths in this phrase to note that such trust requires no thought and is hardly even worth speaking, it simply is. Everyone knows that the sun rises in the east every morning, as we have all experienced every day of our life. Who would think to vocalize that the same is true on a cloudy day? We simply trust. Trust is a choice, however. As a child grows, they increasingly choose to trust their parents. A parent must make a larger choice when they entrust their child to a school and teacher. Trust arises out of fear—without fear of something undesirable happening, there would be no need for trust.[193] That is what makes trust necessary for hope, because "it relativizes our fears, enabling us to risk ourselves to an uncertain future."[194] Indeed, this same trait makes trust

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[190] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 137-138.

[191] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 138.

[192] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 139.

[193] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 142.

[194] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 145.

the antidote to despair, the first threat to hope, as despair is but a manifestation of our fears that a desired future will not occur.

"If trust provides the necessary conditions for hope," Capps writes, "*patience* is concerned with keeping hopes alive."[195] This also is readily apparent, as most of what may be hoped for takes time to achieve and therefore patience is the posture that weathers the time. The concept of frustration comes into play here, as the frustration we feel when a hoped-for thing does not happen as soon as we would like is what causes us to need patience.[196] This, in turn, becomes the answer to apathy, the second of hope's threats. Rather than slide into not caring, it is patience that keeps hope alive.[197]

Finally, the third ally of hope is *modesty*. If patience keeps hope alive, then modesty is what permits us to move on from failed hopes. In Chapter 2 I showed the role of shame, how hope requires great personal investment, therefore a failed hope is an affront to our very self, to the core of our being. This also comes from an inflated sense of that which we hope for, a sense that contains more of our self-projection than we are usually aware. Therefore, Capps argues, "The modesty (or chastity) and humility in hoping arise from the fact that hopes are not predictions, nor are they assertions of rights. Also, they are about possibilities, not certainties."[198] Later, he comments on the fact that our hopes are often dependent on that which is out of our control: "To be ashamed by the

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[195] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 148.

[196] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 151.

[197] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 153-154.

[198] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 155.

failure of our hopes is to claim greater power to direct the course of our lives than we actually possess."[199] Lastly, it is important to note that this does not require us to have smaller hopes. Rather, it helps us have a better sense of self as we engage with them.[200]

To summarize, trust provides a foundation for hope to flourish, patience keeps hope alive, and modesty gives us a healthy sense of self in relation to our hope. I will point out that Capps is referring primarily to what I am calling practical hope. The same principles apply to ultimate hope, however. For instance, we trust in God's promises and we must have patience as most will not happen during this life. Modesty takes on a slightly different character, as it is not so much to protect us from the failure of God's promises, but that the need for a healthy sense of self in relation to them most certainly remains.

Conclusion: Integrated Hope: Practical and Ultimate, Already and Not Yet

N. T. Wright has shown what a robust, integrated, Christian hope looks like. Jesus' life work followed by his bodily resurrection, along with the impending promise of *both* a new heaven *and* a new earth, show that what happens in the present world matters to God. Indeed, the work we do is never in vain as it is a participation in the work of creation God is doing even now as heaven breaks into earth, spreading God's reign to all places. One cannot hope in the future without hoping in the present, one cannot have ultimate hope without practical. Just as the church is called to be a bridgehead of the

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[199] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 157.

[200] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 161.

heavenly life into the world, so must the church be a bridgehead for ultimate hope to infect practical hope.

Capps adds that trust, patience, and modesty are three of the factors that create a fertile ground for that hope to grow and flourish. Trust in God and in God's promises is a baseline foundation for Christian hope and must be maintained. If a specific hope for the spreading of God's reign takes longer than we would like, it is patience that gets us through. And if we place our practical hope in the wrong ideas, in desires that are more projections of ourselves than of God, then it is modesty that helps us grow better practical hopes. But in any life or congregation where hope is thriving, these three factors are likely to be present.

CHAPTER FOUR:

PRAGMATIC TASK

And so finally I turn to ask: with a robust understanding of the hopelessness in my context and with a grand vision of what hope should look like, what may be done about the distance between the two? Many suggestions could be offered for restoring hope in congregations. Indeed, to the attentive pastor many opportunities would present themselves in ultra-specific contexts such as conversations or meetings where a lack of agency or pathways is observed. However, I will offer three avenues for the restoration of integrated, embodied hope that grow out of my research.

Before I do, however, a word is warranted about the nature of the hope that is to be rebuilt. All of my contextual factors are aspects of decline, be it the decline of rural life, the actual numerical decline of my congregation, or the reaction to decline from the denomination. It would be natural for one steeped in these contextual forces to implicitly assume that practical hope means their reversal—hope for more people in the pews, for example. But this is far too small a view of hope. I would not rule out that numbers might improve, especially given that Wright named evangelism as one of the natural outpourings of a fully functioning hope. That said, the ideas I offer here are to help a congregation restore their sense of practical hope *within* a climate of decline, a much different idea indeed than reversing that climate. It is perhaps more likely that the hope to be discovered looks less like the church in numerical days of yore and more like something new entirely, say using its small size to adapt more quickly to a larger culture

that is changing ever more rapidly. What that hope ultimately looks like, however, is not for me to say, except to rule out a narrow, single minded focus on pew-filling.

With that significant caveat in mind, I will now turn to finding practical solutions for the hopelessness I have observed. I will begin by doing a brief review of adult transformative learning literature, including Mezirow's answer to malformed habits of expectation as I described in Chapter Two. I will then offer three avenues for restoring hope particular to this context. The first is the simplest, yet I believe the most significant: *the pastor must be an agent of hope*. The second avenue is more broad: *emancipatory learning*. Third, I will offer a specific suggestion for giving a congregation an *experience* of hope, one that intentionally ties practical hope to ultimate hope even as it intentionally ties hope to mission in the spirit of Wright.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is defined as "the process by which people examine problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change."[201] While we are encouraged to learn on our own as we grow, we tend to be rewarded for an understanding that is in line with our culture's way of understanding—this limits our ability to learn beyond this

[201] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 27.

understanding.[202] As a result, transformative learning happens when we are able to discover new perspectives beyond those patterns.[203]

In Chapter Two I showed how Mezirow's ideas around intentionally assimilated habits of mind help us understand how a congregation member might experience prolonged numeric decline: after decades of observing the pews a little more empty each week, without intentional reflection the conclusions they would draw would quite naturally lead to practical hopelessness. I am drawn to this theory in part because of how well it incorporates the contextual aspects I named in Chapter Two. But now I return to Mezirow to ask how what was learned unintentionally may be transformed into something better.

Intentional Learning

If the problem is the *unintentional* assimilation of habits of mind, then the solution is *intentional* learning. Drawing upon Jürgen Habermas, Mezirow distinguishes between three types of learning.[204] The first two are distinct, while the third involves more critical reflection with implication for the other two. Most adult learning involves all three,[205] and so I will give a brief review of each, but the third will be key for my purposes. The first, *instrumental learning*, is the ability to manipulate and control one's

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[202] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 1.

[203] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 3.

[204] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 72.

[205] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 89.

environment, including people. It always involves the observable, and begins with a prediction. Mezirow's example is of golfing: if I hold the club differently, will the ball land closer to the hole? We then learn from the observed result.[206]

Communicative learning is "learning to understand what others mean and to make ourselves understood as we attempt to share ideas through speech, the written word, plays, moving pictures, television, and art."[207] This form of learning is quite distinct from instrumental in that it involves social and societal norms. For instance, the way one's culture uses language can make differences both subtle and significant in such communication. Concepts such as idioms and unspoken rules of etiquette shape how we understand the world around us—certainly a different phenomenon than manipulating a golf ball. What we learn to be acceptable and "normal" cannot be understood empirically, instead we must rely on tradition, authority, and consensus.[208]

Finally, and more to the purposes of this project, *emancipatory learning* "is what impels us, through reflection, to identify and challenge distorted meaning perspectives."[209] It results from critical self-reflection. The source of the name "emancipatory" is key, as this type of learning frees us from unintentional and often unseen factors that limit us. In the context of my study of congregational hopelessness, the implication of Mezirow's description should be immediately apparent:

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[206] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 73-74.

[207] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 75.

[208] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 76.

[209] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 87.

> The emancipation in emancipatory learning is emancipation from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, or environmental forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control. These forces include the misconceptions, ideologies, and psychological distortions in prior learning that produce or perpetuate unexamined relations of dependence.[210]

I am arguing that the effects of rural decline, congregational numeric decline, and denominational metanarrative have become forces that implicitly limit the ability of FUMC and congregations like it to experience the fullness of God's hope, specifically practical hope. The perception of decline in each of these contextual factors is not a misconception—indeed, numeric decline is easily observed. Rather, the assumption that the reversal of decline, that filling the pews once again, is the only definition of success and faithfulness is a "psychological distortion," to use the words of the above quote. As a result emancipatory learning is needed to challenge that distorted meaning perspective and to widen our view of God's work among us.

Transformation theory argues that there are four forms in which this kind of learning may occur.[211] The first, *learning through meaning schemes,* is an elaboration on our existing frames of reference and is insufficient for my purposes. Second is *learning new meaning schemes.* This form is inappropriate for my purposes as new frames of reference do not necessarily counteract old, mal-formed ones. The third form of transformative learning moves closer: *learning through transformation of meaning schemes*.[212] In this form, we reflect on our assumptions to find points of view that have

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[210] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 87.

[211] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 93.

[212] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 94.

become dysfunctional. In response, we develop new ways of thinking and of perceiving the world.

The fourth form of transformative learning, however, fits my needs well: *learning through perspective transformation.*[213] Mezirow writes that we become "aware, through reflection and critique, of specific presuppositions upon which a distorted or incomplete meaning perspective is based and then [transform] that perspective through a reorganization of meaning."[214] This happens when we have experiences that challenge our expectations in our current frame of reference. As a result, the only way we can make meaning of the experience is by redefining the problem.[215]

The obvious question to ask at this point, then, is how can we foster experiences that prompt congregations to reconsider their assumptions about decline, be it the congregations' own decline or even the influencing factor of rural decline? Then, following that, how can we facilitate the forming of new meaning perspectives that are more in line with hope as described in Chapter 3? I will turn to these questions shortly, but first more must be said about the process of reflection itself.

Reflection

Mezirow invokes John Dewey's definition of reflection: "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the

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[213] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 94.

[214] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 94.

[215] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 94.

grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends."[216] Mezirow expands on this to go beyond mere problem solving, as we also reflect on "the strategies and the procedures of problem solving."[217] More to my point, we also reflect on "similarities and differences between what we are currently experiencing and prior learning."[218] From this we look for patterns, make generalizations, and generally "extend meaning beyond the data as given."[219] These three types of reflection are known as content, process, and premise reflection, respectively.

Of the three, premise reflection best suits my needs. Mezirow argues that, "Premise reflection is the dynamic by which our belief systems—meaning perspectives—become transformed."[220] In other words, it is through reflection on why a given experience does not fit with our expectations and existing systems of meaning that there is potential to be freed from the ways our old meaning perspectives limit us.

Patricia Cranton, another prominent voice in transformative learning theory, reminds us that transformative learning cannot be forced upon someone, it must always be their choice.[221] That said, there are practical ways we can encourage the process and create opportunity. One is through asking good *questions*. Good questions are specific,

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[216] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 100.

[217] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 104.

[218] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 104-105.

[219] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 105.

[220] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 111.

[221] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 105.

move from the particular to the general, and are conversational, among other traits.[222] Beyond that, though, questions can also be designed to encourage the above types of reflection. A content reflection question, for instance, "might raise learner awareness of assumption or beliefs."[223] A process reflection question might go deeper, asking about where a person's perspective might be coming from. Premise reflection questions examine the very foundations of our perspectives.[224] To build on one of Cranton's examples, a content question might be, "Are you afraid of spiders?" For process we might ask, "Why are you afraid of spiders?" And for premise, "Why does it matter that you are afraid of spiders?" or "How does this limit or constrain your life?"[225]

Critical incidents may also be used to foster reflection.[226] In critical incident reflection, a person might be asked to recall an incident in their life that stands out, be it seen as a good moment or a bad moment. Then, more questions are asked to help the person interpret the incident. This can encompass any level of reflection, as the questions asked could be aimed at content, process, or premise. For instance, a church member might be asked to think of a moment when it felt like God was present. Follow up questions could range from details of the event (content), to how they knew God was

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[222] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 107.

[223] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 108.

[224] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 109.

[225] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 109.

[226] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 117.

present (process), all the way to a premise question such as, "What does your choice of this memory say about who God is and how God is calling us today?"

Finally, another way to foster reflection is through *experiential learning*. This theory, while included in Cranton's list, was developed by David A. Kolb in his book by the same name.[227] To Kolb, it is crucial that learning is understood as a process. He argues, "Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience."[228] Resonant with Mezirow, Kolb also argues that learning occurs when we resolve conflicts within our way of understanding the world.[229] More practically, however, he envisions experiential learning as an ongoing cycle. This cycle begins with "concrete experience," proceeds to "reflective observation" of that which was experienced, continues to "abstract conceptualization" wherein we derive more generalized meaning from our reflections, and finally to "active experimentation" as we engage our new meaning perspectives with the world.[230] This, of course, generates new concrete experience which begins the cycle again.

Cranton offers practical suggestions for encouraging the cycle of experiential learning.[231] Most basically, it is important simply to offer time for critical discourse both

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[227] David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development,* 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Experience Based Learning Systems, Inc., 2015). All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

[228] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 37.

[229] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 40.

[230] Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 68.

[231] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 116-117.

before and after a planned experience. In the midst of such discussion, the facilitator can emphasize "discrepancies between people's perceptions of the experience and theoretical positions."[232] Beyond that, journaling can be encouraged. One might even plan a new experience designed to allow active experimentation upon the insights gained.

Cranton also names three different roles that may be played by the "educator," in this case meaning the Pastor or other transformational leader.[233] These roles are specifically named with regards to emancipatory learning. The first is *reformist*, where the leader helps people "exercise their own power" to prompt change. Second, as a *colearner*, the leader may be intentional about their own discovery process while learning with the people. Third, the leader may be a *provocateur*, who "challenges, stimulates, and provokes critical thinking."[234] Each of these are valid and helpful for any leader to decide based on what is needed in a given moment of development.

Summary

Through the lens of transformative learning, I have shown how hopelessness at FUMC and congregations like it was formed through the lack of critical reflection upon the experiences of rural decline, congregational decline, and denominational metanarrative. With this established, transformative learning theory now allows us to

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[232] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 116.

[233] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 82-83.

[234] Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 83.

offer further suggestions for how misguided assumptions about the meaning of decline, made unintentionally from these experiences, might be improved upon.

First Avenue: The Pastor as Agent of Hope

The first avenue I will suggest for restoring practical hope in a congregational setting is simple to state, if not to enact, and I believe it to be the most important: the Pastor must be hopeful. This suggestion arises out of sound clinical research. A quote from Chapter 1 bears repeating: Shane Lopez et al., writing as a colleague of Snyder using hope in clinical practice, argues that "A hopeful therapeutic relationship is necessary and perhaps even sufficient to yield cognitive change and increased hope."[235] These are strong words: in a therapeutic relationship where hope therapy is called for, by definition the one bringing the hope must be the therapist—and such hope is not only *necessary,* but perhaps *sufficient.* They go on to say, "Assuming that hope begets hope, and that hope inherently is an interactive process… hopeful relationships (friendships as well as employer-employee, coach-athlete, teacher-student relationships) enhance hope."[236] This idea is also supported by Capps who entitled his book *Agents of Hope* due to the pastor's role in being the bearer and restorer of hope. He writes, invoking once again the allies of hope, that "pastors can exemplify these life-attitudes of trust, patience, and modesty in their personal and professional lives and thereby represent them to the

[235] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 136.

[236] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 136-137.

congregation as not only worthy of being cultivated for their own sakes but also as necessary to the maintenance of a hopeful orientation to life."[237]

Since the problem as I've described it is a deficient practical hope, this means the Pastor must believe, deep in their heart and gut, that God is active in the congregation and that God will most definitely achieve God's purposes in their midst. Such a phenomenon is not entirely different than when a parent has such confidence in their child's future success that the child cannot help but believe it to be true as well. This might be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy, but in the case of a congregation I have shown it to be rooted in God's larger, ultimate promises, part of a healthy, complete, robust theological hope. How might such a hope be expressed by the Pastor? Themes for teaching and preaching could include stories of God working in the wilderness, both Biblical and in the congregation's own past, reminders of how God works even when unseen, and stating a belief that such work is happening even now. Such practical hope could be stated overtly, but it need not be. In broader practice, such a deeply held belief would come out in every question, in every suggestion, in every prayer, and in every sermon. Confidence in God's work in the present, therefore, is as much an attitude as it is a prescription for action, an attitude that becomes contagious as hope begets hope. This could be said of any prominent figure in the congregation, of course, and the more hopeful people the better. But the Pastor is the one most likely to begin the process of spreading hope and is, in most cases, the leader whose level of influence and opportunity are most aligned to what I have described. Given the interconnection between future and present hope, it therefore

[237] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 163.

becomes crucial for clergy to intentionally maintain their own sense of hope, both practical and ultimate.

However, by my very premise, a pastor in a practically hopeless congregation is in a poor environment for the maintenance of hope. Lopez, et al. stress the importance of a client surrounding themselves with others who have hope, of people who believe in them and their future, as opposed to relationships "based on pity parties."[238] Yet such a pastor is by definition of their ministry of hope constantly surrounded by relationships that are all too often pity parties of practical hopelessness. Furthermore, the pastor is the one who is most exposed to and influenced by the denominational metanarrative, which so often reinforces despair and shame, thereby threatening the hope of the pastor even more than the congregation. To put it in Mezirow's terms, a pastor who experiences these forces uncritically and unintentionally will form habits of expectation that prevent them from being the agent of hope that is needed for the congregation.

Given the importance of the pastor's hope, I offer three specific suggestions for hope's maintenance. First, *self care* is of the utmost importance. Pastors today are bombarded with resources on self-care, but I wish to highlight specifically how it relates to the maintenance of hope. Capps' allies of hope, trust, patience, and modesty, all relate ultimate matters to practical by way of self-understanding. As a pastor it is easy to think that everything is up to you, especially since many of the practical matters from choosing the hymns to even keeping the air conditioning running *are* up to you. Yet maintaining a robust spiritual life outside of the church helps maintain healthy sense of self with

[238] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 137.

relation to ministry. Yes, preaching the sermons may be up to the pastor, but it is *God's* church, not the pastor's. This modesty helps us to trust God in the things we cannot control, and the practice of maintaining it teaches us patience. It reminds us that if God is present and working anywhere, as we see in the resurrection, then God is working here and now in our church. God is working along side of us and even in spite of us when necessary—and we may *hope* in it.[239]

Second, I recommend pastors view the preaching of *funerals* as an intentional practice of hope. One of the many realities of a numerically declining congregation is an abundance of funerals. Funerals are times that are filled with pain and grief, oftentimes following the suffering of sickness and death. They are emotionally draining. They interrupt life not only for the family, but for the pastor and church as well, and they rarely seem to come at times one might choose. Yet funerals are an opportunity to preach resurrection—and I mean "resurrection" in the fullest, bodily sense of the world à la Wright. Words must be chosen more carefully at a funeral than anywhere else and it is a rare funeral sermon indeed that would call for a theological exposition of a two-step resurrection process. Yet the preparation of a funeral service, hearing and then telling the story of God's practical work throughout a person's life and then relating it to our

[239] Much has been written about clergy self-care and it is too big of a topic to explore deeply here. I will, however, offer four potential starting points for more learning in this area: Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Jason Byassee, *Faithful and Fractured: Responding to the Clergy Health* Crisis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), especially chapter 6 on the role of positive emotions. John B. Morse, "Pastoral Self-Care: Maintaining a Balance to Serve Others: A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experience of Church-Based Clergy" (PhD diss., Colorado State University, 2011). T. Scott Bledsoe, and Kimberly A. Setterlund, "Thriving in Ministry: Exploring the Support Systems and Self-Care Practices of Experienced Pastors," in *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 28, no. 1 (2015): 48–66. Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley, *The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002).

ultimate hope, can be a reminder and experience for the *pastor* of God's resurrection hope, both ultimate and practical. Such opportunities to experience and preach should not be taken for granted, especially since the most inopportune times for a funeral might be when we need that hope the most.

Finally, the pastor must live fully within their denominational setting and yet *recognize the metanarrative for what it is*. Indeed, the latest call for a renewal of evangelism in our churches based on the most recent church renewal book must be experienced not with shame and pity, but with grace and compassion. The hopeful pastor must see such things as natural reactions to a rapidly changing world and as an understandable prelude to God doing something new, different, and as yet unseen. To Capps shame is combated by a sense of modesty, a healthier sense of self. I see the threats to hope in my own reactions to such calls, especially the perfectionism and desire for control that he says follow shame. Yet a healthier sense of myself in relation to God and the world might allow me to reflect God's grace to others who are facing a similar struggle in the face of what they cannot control and therefore to have compassion for them. Such an attitude might itself be an in-breaking of the reign of God through every pastor who embodies it.

Based on my research, I believe the hope of the pastor to be the single most important factor in restoring practical hope in a congregation. The effects of hope begetting hope are strong and the pastor is in a position for that hope to spread most widely. As individual members of the congregation, leaders in particular, begin to regain their practical hope, others will have an easier time regaining their own practical hope

due to the growing influence of hopeful attitudes. The "pity party" mentality will become less and less common and instead hope for the church and the world will spread all the faster. But I also believe that such pastors must be intentional about maintaining their own hope, especially since their ministry involves, by definition, being surrounded by hope's threats.

Second Avenue: Emancipatory Learning

While I believe the pastor's hope is the most important aspect by far, there are also steps to be taken that not only teach a more holistic, integrated Christian hope but, more subversively, cultivate the ground in which that hope may grow. My second avenue is significantly broader in scope, seeking to foster emancipatory learning in the congregation. Specifically I will focus on doing so through intentional transformative learning, the reframing of time, and fostering the allies of hope.

Intentional Transformative Learning

I have shown that while the various forces around congregational life lead to a lack of practical hope, ultimate hope remains. Granted this hope may be shallow at times, perhaps a belief only in heaven, but it is at least enough to offer a "foothold." Snyder's conception of hope is nuanced enough to allow a sort of partial hope in which agency and pathways may develop in different measures. As a result, the teaching of hope need not start from scratch, but rather build upon the aspects that are already present. The same may be said of practical and ultimate hope—since ultimate hope is strong in my context

while practical hope is not, we need not "reinvent the wheel" but are better served by building upon the ultimate hope that is present. Bodily resurrection is a concept that links ultimate matters with practical ones, as N. T. Wright has shown that heaven and earth are intimately and intricately linked through it. It may, therefore, be an inroads to build upon the hope that remains.

Beyond that, though, bodily resurrection, despite being orthodox enough to be preserved in the Apostle's Creed, is a doctrine that shocks modern sensibilities. Indeed, in Chapter Three I quoted Adam Hamilton, a Pastor in my own region, speaking of his own discomfort with the idea. But this very fact is of benefit, as it means the concept has the potential to cause a group of people to reevaluate their perspective à la Mezirow and, following that, to allow an opportunity for perspective transformation. In simpler terms, by considering bodily resurrection, congregants might also reconsider that which follows from it, namely the nature of God's work in this world.

What's more, the doctrine of bodily resurrection is easily taught from scripture through means of stories such as Jesus eating fish with his disciples,[240] Thomas touching his wounds,[241] or the ascension.[242] Since the doctrine of bodily resurrection as I describe it in Chapter Three is poorly understood in our modern world, this teaching would likely have to originate with the pastor. One option might be a sermon series, particularly during the season of Easter as Wright suggests. The scriptures each week could focus on

[240] Luke 24:41-43

[241] John 20:24-31

[242] Acts 1:6-11

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances with special emphasis on their physicality and how they lead to this-worldly mission. For instance, Jesus eating fish is followed shortly by his command to Peter to "Feed my sheep."[243] Preaching could also come from the epistles or any of the examples given by Wright.

I would suggest building such a series around a metaphor such as Wright's cathedral builder, showing how everything we do for God's reign plays a very real part in building something that is much bigger than we can even imagine. This metaphor has many advantages. For one, it is a very physical and "earthy" thought, to lay a stone. More than that, though, it is capable of both invoking "heaven when we die" ultimate hope while also enriching it and disrupting it to connect to practical hope. For instance, the preacher could say, "We lay these stones of good work to help build God's new earth—can you even imagine what it will look like? I, for one, can't wait for the day I have a resurrection body like Jesus', to see it completed. But for now what an honor it is to lay as many 'stones' as I can!"

Once these ideas take root I would expect them to spread naturally. After all, it is not difficult to see the this-worldly, "stone laying" emphasis in all of the New Testament. But the importance of a healthy understanding of bodily resurrection, tailored to the modern world, cannot be understated. The pastor and all who teach such things should make a special emphasis to remind people that Jesus not only appears in the flesh but

[243] John 21:15-19

says we will be like him[244]—the work we do is first and foremost for God, but we are also *personally* invested in it.

Informed by Mezirow, though, there is another aspect that must be present in all attempts to teach the bodily resurrection as a way to disrupt meaning patterns: the fostering of critical reflection. Sermons, devotionals, lessons, etc. *must* be crafted to allow as much reflection as possible. In a small group setting, questions can be posed about what we think happens when we die and how we came to that belief. Such questions, based on the transformative learning reflection concepts in the previous section, can then lead to a premise reflection such as, "How does your belief in life after death affect your attitude toward this world?" Paired with the above scriptures, such questioning could lead to truly transformative learning. Obviously, such reflection is more difficult with the one-sided nature of preaching, yet even in sermonic settings questions can still be asked and stories told that foster similar inner monologue in the listener.

But will this really change hopeless attitudes with regards to decline? As Wright has shown and I have built upon, a shift in meaning perspective to include the bodily resurrection leads to a better understanding of mission in the world to which Jesus himself returned. In this understanding, the church and every Christian becomes a bridgehead, a staging ground and building up point, for heaven breaking into earth.[245] With such a frame of reference, congregational decline would begin to seem irrelevant, or

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[244] 1 John 3:2

[245] Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 260.

at least differently relevant. For instance, while one will always care about numbers for reasons such as sustaining the church's ministry, one might begin to put far more weight on how God calls us even in the midst of decline.

The Reframing of Time

A second aspect of emancipatory learning more directly addresses the contextual factors leading to hopelessness: the reframing of time. A significant part of transformative learning is the kind of self-reflection that leads one to examine one's existing perspectives of meaning. Hope and time are inherently related—our hopes for the future are shaped by our past. Therefore, our conceptions of both future and past can have an effect on our hope in the present. In the last section we applied that to our operative theology of resurrection; Capps now proposes we do so with the very contextual experiences that have led us here through the reframing of time.[246]

Capps appeals to the midrashic tradition on revising the past, referring to the "legends, stories, and parables that were developed in response to Judaism's need to apply the written law (Torah) to new conditions and circumstances of life."[247] The result is that a new picture is painted of past times, one that is no less true but substantially useful for modern times. One example of this is repentance, as God's grace rectifies a sinful past. Capps quotes Mordichai Rotenberg to say that our past is "cognitively and emotionally elevated and transformed into personal assets via the process of

[246] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 165-176.

[247] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 173.

reinterpretation."[248] This idea is also closely related with the idea of "hope reminding" in Snyder's theory, the process of reminding a person of hopeful stories from their past;[249] Capps is taking this a step further by suggesting the reframing of such stories to emphasize the hope even further.

One way this might be applied in a congregation is to focus on telling stories of good that was done in the midst of numeric decline. For instance, at FUMC I could invoke the sermon preached at the 1972 building's dedication service wherein the Bishop acknowledged the church's decision to stay downtown to minister to the needy, unlike churches who move to the suburbs to draw more people. Another example is the church's funeral ministry: amidst the many, many deaths resulting from the passing of its much larger past, the church has become very good at it. They understand deeply what families are going through and the sense of presence and care at events such as funeral dinners is especially poignant. This should be lifted up often and praised as God's activity even in the midst of loss.

This is the area where rural decline's erosion of hope may also be counteracted. FUMC is in a unique position of being in the middle. Hutchinson is a still a small town by outside standards, and it receives some who move away from their rural community. But it is also something of a bridge between those communities and larger cities such as Wichita or Kansas City. One option might be for FUMC to form a relationship with a rural church for mutual support—note that I do not use the word "adopt," as that would

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[248] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 173.

[249] Lopez, Floyd, Ulven, and Snyder, "Hope Therapy: Helping Clients Build a House of Hope," 143-144.

imply one-directional care taking. Such a supportive relationship might acknowledge the reality of rural decline while also providing opportunity to soften the blow. Another idea would be to intentionally tell stories of members' children who have left the community. It is my experience that such "exports" take with them the small town spirit and live with a different attitude wherever they end up. With intentional storytelling, their journey could be seen as that of a "small town missionary," not leading to the death of small town culture but rather giving the best parts of it new life in new places.

For the future, Capps suggests "future visioning," or imagining what it will look like when the problem is resolved.[250] For one thing, this method prevents us from dwelling in the past where the problem originated. It makes the assumption that "we can have a different future from the one our present difficulties and problems would predict, and that we can take personal responsibility for effecting this alternative outcome."[251]

Two words of warning are immediately necessary here. For one thing, care must be taken to draw the distinction between practical and ultimate hope. For ultimate hope, our envisioned future might be bodily resurrection, or perhaps also the vision of a new heaven and new earth. This is most certainly helpful, but let us not forget that practical hope is what needs to be addressed here. Therefore we must also envision a future we can expect to achieve in our lifetimes, such as a church actively engaged in worship and mission as a bridgehead of heaven on earth. Second, this leadership technique should be saved for when such a practical future can be envisioned in a healthy manner, probably

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[250] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 167.

[251] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 169.

after work has been done with teaching bodily resurrection and with reframing the past. If the congregation were asked too early what a perfect future would like, they may not reply "bridgehead of heaven on earth" but rather "filling the empty pews—"a counterproductive vision indeed.

Fostering the Allies of Hope

As a third aspect of this avenue, I suggest something tangential to emancipatory learning but that will help sustain it: intentionally fostering the allies of hope. I have shown that the threats to hope, which will remain in abundance beyond our control, may be counteracted by the allies of hope. Trust provides the conditions for hope, patience keeps hope alive, and modesty permits us to move on when misplaced hopes fail. So as we work on challenging our malformed meaning perspectives to rebuild hope, what may be done to encourage these allies?

Fortunately, these three themes are in abundance in the Christian tradition, they just need to be drawn upon and intentionally applied. A preacher, teacher, or worship planner with these three themes in mind will find them nearly everywhere. A focus could be on God's promises and faithfulness, past and future, to build trust. Examples of this are numerous, for instance songs such as "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." Patience is a natural fit with much of scripture, though it is not often named as such. Examples include the Disciples on Holy Saturday, the epistles addressing the parousia crisis, or perhaps wilderness or exile in the Hebrew Bible. I would also suggest Habakkuk 2:3, a personal favorite: "For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does

not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay." Modesty is another theme that can be addressed even without using the word by teaching God's imminence. Examples include God's monologue to Job asserting his almightiness,[252] or the many times Peter attempts the opposite of modesty in the gospels. With intentionality of leadership, a church and its members could be champions for these concepts which guard against a loss of hope.

These three themes need not be connected with hope directly in order to have the desired influence. Instead, like fertilizer that disappears into the soil, their unseen work can be expected to help the seeds of hope planted in the previous sections grow bigger and stronger. They could be used to guide preaching, music selection, or meeting devotions. With an infusion of trust, patience, and modesty, even something as banal as quarterly giving statement letters have the potential to be a tool in fostering the restoration of integrated hope.

Third Avenue: The Experience of Integrated Hope

Lastly, we return to Mezirow and Kolb as we search for a way to offer a concrete experience that challenges a congregation's meaning perspectives. As I have said, no one event is capable of reaching the entirety of a congregation, especially not if the event is outside of regular worship. That said, such an experience can still be transformative for the core members of the church who do attend, and it has the potential to turn them into agents of hope much as I described of the pastor in the first avenue.

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[252] Job 38:1-40:5

I have shown that my context is a congregation that has ultimate hope but has lost practical hope, and that the two types of hope are connected by way of Jesus' bodily resurrection. I have also shown that concrete experience, combined with reflection, has the potential to disrupt and improve systems of meaning. Therefore, I propose a series of special events for the congregation wherein the church brings in guest speakers who embody the mission of God with a focus on this-worldly mission.

Every community has individuals who do outstanding work for the betterment of the community. Often these are outgoing individuals who organize events or who simply run local businesses with an eye toward helping their neighborhood. Sometimes these people are visible, but sometimes their work is more subtle. Sometimes they are Christian, but sometimes they are not affiliated with a church in any substantial way. It is my belief, however, that the work they do to improve the lives of those around them is work for the reign of God whether or not they would use that term for it. Or, to put it in other terms, these community-minded individuals exemplify practical hope regardless of how much thought they give to ultimate matters. Examples of who to invite might be a librarian who goes the extra mile to help disadvantaged patrons find work, or perhaps a community policing officer.

I propose bringing such an individual into the church for, say, a potluck meal wherein they can give a presentation. While this seems quite simple, the idea is to build upon an existing cultural phenomenon—the potluck meal—to do something quite intentional. The setup leading to such an event should encourage the speaker to share their passion and why they do what they do—or to adapt Mezirow's terms only slightly,

to share their meaning perspective. Great care must be taken to make sure the presenter understands their role: to talk about what they are doing to improve the community, not to belabor the problem itself, as to do the latter would only further entrench hopelessness. It is my hope that by hearing from someone who is improving their community, the congregation might observe the *missio Dei* at work, thus challenging any idea that "the world is going down the tubes." This will offer an opportunity for church members to learn through perspective transformation.

However, for that to happen it is also important that reflection be encouraged. The most immediate way for this to begin is for the Pastor (or other leader) to end the event with a question and answer session between the guest speaker and the congregation. I would encourage the first questions to be asked by the Pastor to help focus the practical hope on display. Agency and pathway questions might help with this: "Why do you believe you can make a difference?" or "Where do you get the ideas to do what you do?" Allowing time for the congregation to ask questions will then begin the reflection process for them. While I do not believe it would be effective to have written discussion questions based on my experience, if the presentation is truly engaging, conversation may continue in the parking lot or on the drive home. The Pastor's closing remarks and perhaps a closing prayer can help direct that by connecting the work of the guest speaker to the mission of God, which is to say connect the practical hope to the ultimate. The Pastor referencing the event in a future sermon or newsletter might also prompt further reflection.

Having established that hope begets hope, I would expect experiences like these to help congregation members to not only see the good things happening in the community with new, more hopeful eyes, but also to begin thinking more about what *they* can do in a similar vein. Such hope truly is contagious and nothing would help it spread quite like a personal, transformative experience of it. The more of these events that can be facilitated the better—a single one would be better than nothing, but reinforcement with reflection would truly create new, practically hopeful habits of meaning. My experience tells me that to set up events like these would be a fair amount of work, probably requiring the pastor to personally network and develop relationships with community members for each and every event, though a well-connected congregation member might be able to help. A realistic goal considering both the effort required by leadership and the energy required of the congregation to deeply participate might be to do an event quarterly.

Hope and Mission

Lastly, I would like to underscore a crucial implication of my third avenue: the connection between hope and mission. Dana Robert defines Christian mission as "our response to the Good News that God is present in Jesus Christ, who came into the world with a message of forgiveness, joy, and hope for all of God's creation."[253] Psychologically, if one hopes for something, and if that something is *worth* hoping for,

[253] Dana Lee Robert and Toby Gould, *Joy to the World!: Mission in the Age of Global Christianity: A Mission Study for 2010 and 2011* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 2010), 7.

then one is motivated to work for it. Theologically, even ultimate hope that lays beyond the agency and pathways of our own lived existence inevitably leads to a drive to work for the good of God and God's people in ways we *can* achieve in this life. Donald Capps, when speaking of the pastor as agent of hope, also alludes to the potential of hope as mission for the congregation: "The church as a community may represent these life-attitudes as well: by striving to be a community in which these attitudes are valued and prized, a community in which despair, apathy, and shaming are recognized as inevitable facts of life but not allowed to dominate and control the church's life."[254]

The third avenue bears with it potential for the congregation to respond by sharing their growing sense of hope with the world: by actually becoming involved in the work of "laying stones" for God's present and future reign. For some of the guest speakers, there may even be an opportunity for congregation members to become directly involved—every encouragement should be given for this to happen. But regardless, the example set by each guest implicitly invites the congregation to themselves become involved in the world around them in a new way, as mirrors who reflect the reign of God through justice, beauty, and evangelism, to invoke Wright's categories. Indeed, as the congregation learns to receive practical hope from those actively engaged in the world, it is natural for their ultimate hope to be shared in reciprocity. And the inclusion of such organic mission in the life of the church is a sign that an integrated Christian hope is a reality which can be achieved, for we know how to get there.

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[254] Capps, *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*, 163.

CONCLUSION

Summary

In summary, hope may be understood in two distinct dimensions: practical and ultimate. Practical hope refers to goals that may reasonably be met within our lived existence, where ultimate hope is for that which transcends this life. With practical hope the agency and pathways are our own, with ultimate hope we must trust in agency and pathways outside of ourselves. In many ultimate cases with regard to Christian hope, the agency and pathways rest in God alone.

For First United Methodist Church in Hutchinson, Kansas and others like it, the problem is an observed hopelessness. There are at least three factors that fuel it. The first is rural decline. Many residents in small town Kansas remain closely connected to their rural roots. Some have even moved "into town" in recent years. For them, and therefore for the community, the decline of rural communities due to advancing agricultural technology also means a change in social and societal structures that can even challenge their sense of self. Second, FUMC, even more than most Mainline churches, has seen significant decline in numbers over many decades. Third, the actions and rhetoric of the denomination create a metanarrative that reinforces a sense of practical hopelessness. Through all of it, however, evidence points to ultimate hope remaining strong. What hopelessness exists may be understood as a practical hopelessness.

Biblical theologian N. T. Wright writes at length about the doctrine of bodily resurrection and about how it is poorly understood in our time. I suggest that this is

largely due to our sensibilities in the era after the scientific revolution: we understand decomposition well enough that the idea of bodily resurrection more than two thousand years after Jesus is difficult to reconcile. Yet the belief has clear precedent in scripture and is enshrined in the Apostles' Creed. Among other things, it shows that God cares deeply about this world and this life and that anything we do here for the Reign of God has direct implications for the coming fullness of God's reign. Bodily resurrection is therefore inseparably connected to mission, as it is the work of mission that brings God's reign into the present, physical world. Furthermore, I argue that a robust understanding of bodily resurrection can be a bridge between ultimate hope and practical hope, for if one has hope in ultimate things, and if one believes in the resurrection of the body, then one must also have practical hope for the church and for the world around us.

Finally, I offer three avenues by which this theory might be applied in context. First, the Pastor must themselves be hopeful. As I have shown, many authors believe that "hope begets hope," and so the resurgence of practical hope in any congregation is most likely to begin with the Pastor. Doing so will require intentionality on the part of the pastor, though, since the same forces can easily stifle the pastor's hope. Second, emancipatory learning may be encouraged in three ways: through teaching a fuller, more embodied sense of resurrection, through the reframing of past events that have lacked intentional reflection, and by fostering the allies of hope. Third, experiences may be provided to challenge a congregation's sense of practical hopelessness and, with appropriate reflection, to prompt a transformation in their own meaning perspectives.

Evaluation

Evaluation of these ideas can begin with the three avenues for restoring hope. Given the importance of the pastor maintaining hope, the first avenue, the pastor should take personal stock on a regular basis, perhaps even weekly. Helpful questions might include, "Do I believe God is working in my congregation?" "What 'stones' have I laid or seen lain for the reign of God this week?" or, "Have I become entrenched in narratives other than that of God's already-present reign among us?"

While the effects of fostering emancipatory learning, the second avenue, are difficult to measure, one can at least begin by assessing whether or not the proper opportunities for disruption have been offered. Have narratives of trust, patience, and modesty been present lately? And have those concepts been observed in others in the church, showing that the ideas are taking root in the congregation?

With the third avenue, assuming the recommended experiences have gone according to plan, the true effects should be visible in the tone of congregation members' reflection: are they hopeful or dismissive? Then, is there evidence that these experiences and the reflection upon them is inspiring a missional drive in congregation members? It may be that leadership is needed to help facilitate this drive if congregation members *want* to do something but are timid or don't know how to go about it.

Utilizing these avenues, I would expect only small signs of hope at first leading to more robust signs of increased hope in three to five years. With that said, I would not expect hope to develop smoothly or consistently with regards to the distinctions drawn. In other words, I would expect agency and pathways to develop separately. For instance,

one might observe conversations such as, “I have this great idea! But, it would never work,” (pathways stronger than agency) or, “Let’s do it! But how?” (agency stronger than pathways.) Such moments would likely generate frustration, but to the informed and intentional observer would actually be signs of unevenly developing practical hope. An observation of that type might then lead to teaching that is adapted to the weaker component. I would again point to Snyder’s “Hope Scale” in Appendix A, as the questions provided may be helpful in looking for signs of agency and pathway development.

Ultimately, given the tie between hope and mission, I would expect an increased sense of integrated hope to lead to an outward push. I mention the missional drive with regards to the third avenue especially, but the eventual truth is that all three avenues eventually lead to mission. Therefore, a transformed life for the congregation should, in the end, also be evident in transformation of the entire community.

A Note on Resistance

My work in this thesis takes as its foundation Hope Theory which emerges out of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology was itself a reaction to earlier psychoanalytic theories such as those of Sigmund Freud which focused more on what was wrong, i.e., mental illness and pathologies. As such, to bring in a concept from Freud at this late stage can be little more than an extended footnote. With that said, however, as we consider the

evaluation of actual living out of my proposals I believe there is benefit to be found in the Freudian idea of resistance.

At the risk of oversimplification, the basic idea of resistance is that change—even positive change—is difficult and therefore we tend to resist it. Chris Schlauch explains,

> "Change involves understanding why we are the way we are, and that understanding involves exploring the past, and some of what is painful in the past. But we want to protect ourselves from re-experiencing pain. So we limit our exploration, and our change."[255]

A classic example of resistance is a psychotherapy client who is eager for her appointment, but who, once the appointment has started, becomes reluctant to engage deeply in the issues at hand.[256] Professionals describe this as "what may be a very common sequence."[257]

Such resistance, properly understood in the psychoanalytic sense, is tied to the idea of transference, the tendency to redirect emotions felt in one place to another, often the therapist. Crucially, the resistance can be asserted in two primary forms: resistance to the *awareness* of transference and resistance to the *resolution* of transference.[258] For example, let's say a client has come to feel emotions toward the therapist that in actuality originate with his father when he was a child. That client will naturally avoid even being aware of this transference, in essence avoiding the shame and embarrassment such an

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[255] Chris R. Schlauch, email message to author, December 5, 2018.

[256] Merton M. Gill, *Analysis of Transference Volume I: Theory and Technique* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1982), 23.

[257] Gill, *Analysis of Transference Volume I: Theory and Technique*, 23.

[258] Gill, *Analysis of Transference Volume I: Theory and Technique*, 15.

admission might bring. The client will also resist healing since to receive it means re-entering painful times.

The usefulness of these ideas in the restoration of hope to a congregation come primarily from the resonance between transference and resistance and Mezirow's idea of habits of expectation. While not technically transference, admitting that one's expectations have been formed by uncritically examined experiences rather than by the ever present, all-encompassing hope of God is a potential source for embarrassment and shame—once again we encounter one of Capps' threats to hope. Even if it is never necessary to become aware that hope was misplaced, even the resolution of it may be expected to be met with resistance.

In practice I would expect this to look similar to many attempts at change in congregations: a lack of engagement. Schlauch says it well when he says that congregation members will react to transforming hope "By not showing up. By showing up but talking about other things. By getting involved in conversations that get in the way of staying focused. By having conflicts that disrupt. By dropping out. By showing up late. By developing factions."[259] The antidote is to address the resistance. In a congregation this means acknowledging and taking seriously that it is easier *not* to change, that uncritically examined habits of expectation are easier than more accurate ones. It means admitting boldly that lack of hope in this world may be the path of least resistance, but that hope in God's action in this world as well as the next, while more difficult, is also more true.

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[259] Schlauch, email message to author, December 5, 2018.

It is not difficult to imagine a Pastor and other church leaders becoming discouraged upon experiencing the behaviors in the above list. But resistance in psychotherapy is actually a sign of being on the right track, as it is a sign that transference has been encountered and is in process of finding healing. In a similar way, resistance behavior in a congregation should be seen for what it is and, while frustrating, should become itself a sign of hope to those leading the restoration of a broader hope.

Next Steps

When I began work on this thesis, my aim was not to restore hope in congregations. Indeed, my starting point was a desire to study hope in evangelism. It was in that work, however, that I realized my congregation and many congregations had lost sight of the fullness of Christian hope and it became clear that that hope would need to be restored before it could be effectively shared. I have repeatedly referenced N.T. Wright's assertion that the church should be a bridgehead for the reign of God, a place where the in-breaking of the future may stage itself to advance further until all the world is as God intends. As much as I dislike metaphors of war, this one does paint the picture: of what use is a bridgehead if the soldiers have forgotten how to fight?

My work so far has shown that congregations may lose practical hope while retaining some measure of ultimate hope. The avenues I offered were designed to bridge the two, to use the existing ultimate hope as a foothold in the restoration of practical hope. It stands to reason, then, that the work of evangelism might be understood as doing

the inverse: that the practical hope that exists in some measure in every person might itself become a bridgehead for the church to share the ultimate hope it has in God.

Indeed, some work on hope in evangelism has already been done. Bryan Stone describes a similar bridgehead when he writes that, "Evangelism lives by hope and is essentially a restless activity, called forward by the promise of the end of our journey together as a church and, ultimately, by the confidence that the *telos* of the church is the *telos* of the world itself."[260] He even says that, "While evangelism is frequently referred to as 'faith sharing,' it might just as appropriately be termed 'hope sharing.'"[261] More interestingly in light of my practical and ultimate hope, however, is Stone's reference to the Greco-Roman world of early Christianity as being "characterized by fatalism, cynicism, and apathy."[262] Indeed, such words might also be described as an atmosphere of hopelessness into which the hope of the gospel spoke boldly.

Another interesting avenue might be to look at evangelism and hope among marginalized groups who had little reason for practical hope. For many African Americans slaves, for instance, Christianity's hope was primarily an ultimate hope as it provided the promise of something better once the horrors of this life were over.[263] Yet for many it translated to this world too: what was the role of hope in evangelism around slave

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[260] Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 56.

[261] Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, 56.

[262] Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, 57.

[263] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans, 3rd ed.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). This exhaustive volume offers many examples of slave religion and how it sometimes translated into action.

uprisings, for instance, as they worked to improve the lot of slaves in this world? Or, later, how was a more integrated hope shared during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s by figures like Martin Luther King, Jr.?

More to the practical point, however, is how we might apply what we learn about "hope sharing" in such cases to today's world. If my work is successful in helping congregations to regain a full, integrated Christian hope, then they will naturally become a bridgehead through which hope is breaking into the entire world. What may we do to facilitate that and how will we keep our efforts ethical?[264] When we encounter difficulty, how will we intentionally engage in reflection such that we do not once again default to malformed habits of expectation but rather experience the totality of God's hope anew? These are all valuable questions that follow from my research and are a natural extension of my normative theology. If Wright is correct that the hopeful church is a bridgehead, if Snyder and Capps are correct that hope begets hope, and if I am correct that hope may practically be restored in a congregation where it has waned, then a congregation with a restored integrated hope will by definition become transformative for the world.

[264] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018). Stone has more to say on evangelistic hope and its intersection with ethics in this more recent work.

APPENDIX A:

TOOLS FOR MEASURING HOPE

The following tools are reproduced from C. R. Snyder, ed. *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures & Applications* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 69-71, 76. Note that in the second tool, items 3, 5, 7, and 11 are "distractors" and are not used to measure hope.

Interviewing for Hope

General Hope Queries

- When you experience difficulty in reaching a goal, do you think that it is because you have used the wrong strategy or because you lack talent and/or ability?
- Are you capable of making plans to move forward even when you encounter obstacles?
- Overall, do you think that you reach your goals?
- Do you have difficulty recalling past successes?
- In pursuing a goal, is it easier for you to plan how to reach your goal, or to motivate yourself to follow through with your plan?
- Generally, how will you know when you're on the right path to achieving your desired goal?
- How will you know when it's achieved? When you reach your goal, what will be different in your life?
- What do you say to yourself as you work toward something you want?
- How true is this statement for you: "I usually get the things I want in life."
- If I were to ask your parents (friends, spouse) to list three words that would describe you, what would they say? What would you say?
- Tell me about a fine accomplishment in your personal/professional life. What did you learn from that experience?
- Tell me about a time when you accomplished something after many hardships and setbacks? What kept you going? Tell me about the paths you took to reach your aims.

Goal Queries

- How do you go about setting your goals?
- Can you explain in detail a goal that you currently are pursuing?
- Describe one goal you'd like to attain. What steps will you take to reach that goal?
- How many goals do you pursue at a given time?
- What goals have you set for yourself today/this week/this year?
- What is your general "success rate" at achieving your desired outcomes?
- Would you consider yourself a goal-oriented person? Why or why not?

Agency Queries

- Are you determined when trying to meet your goals?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not much" and 10 being "very strong," how motivated are you to work toward a desired outcome?
- How successful have you been at setting and reaching your aims?
- Where do you see yourself now/in a month/in a year/in 5 years?
- How are you making sure that you will be successful?

Pathways Queries

- If the original pathway to your goal doesn't work, how easy is it for you to make other plans to reach that same goal?
- How do you usually go about getting what you want?
- What strategies have you used or, do you use, to solve your problem(s)?
- When encountering obstacles to your goals, how do you get around them?
- What plans do you have for today/this week/this year/5 years/your life?
- When you have been successful at accomplishing your past goals, how did you do it?
- How would you describe your ability to reach your goals and to find ways around obstacles?

Barriers Queries

- When faced with a difficult problem, how do you react?
- How do you feel when you encounter a barrier to a goal?
- Are there prejudiced practices in your community/workplace that impede your progress?
- How do you rate your ability to handle setbacks?

- Tell me about a time you faced a major barrier to your goal attainment.

Adult Dispositional Hope Scale Items and Directions for Administering and Scoring

The Goals Scale

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes YOU and put that number in the blank provided.

1 = Definitely False 2 = Mostly False 3 = Mostly True 4 = Definitely True

___ 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
___ 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
___ 3. I feel tired most of the time.
___ 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
___ 5. I am easily downed in an argument.
___ 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
___ 7. I worry about my health.
___ 8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
___ 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
___10. I've been pretty successful in life.
___11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
___12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

Notes: When administered, we have called this the "Goals Scale" rather than the "Hope Scale" because on some initial occasions when giving the scale, people became sufficiently interested in the fact that hope could be measured that they wanted to discuss this rather than taking the scale. No such problems have been encountered with the rather mundane "Goals Scale." Items 3, 5, 7, and 11 are distorters and are not used for scoring. The pathways subscale score is the sum of items 1, 4, 6, and 8 and the agency subscale is the sum of items 2, 9, 10, and 12. Hope is the sum of the four pathways and four agency items. In our original studies, we used a four-point response continuum, but to encourage more diversity in scores in our more recent studies, we have used the following 8-point scale 1 = Definitely False, 2 = Mostly False, 3 = Somewhat False, 4 = Slightly False, 5 = Slightly True, 6 = Somewhat True, 7 = Mostly True, 8 = Definitely True. Scores using the 4-point continuum can range from a low of 8 to a high of 32. For the eight-point continuum, scores can range from a low of 8 to a high of 64.

Source: Taken from C. R. Snyder, C. Harris, J.R. Anderson, S.A. Holleran, L.M. Irving, S.T Sigmon, L. Yoshinobu, J. Gibb, C. Langelle, & P. Harney. (1991). The

will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 570-585. The scale can be used for research or clinical purposes without contacting the author. Reprinted with permission of the American Psychological Association and the senior author of the scale.

APPENDIX B:

MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE DATA

FOR FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, HUTCHINSON, KANSAS

Year	Full Membership	% Change	SS Enrollment	% Change	SS Attendance	% Change	Worship Attendance	% Change
1870								
1871								
1872	12							
1873								
1874	38							
1875	125	*229%*	145					
1876								
1877	164							
1878	250	*52%*	200					
1879	241	*-4%*	200	*0%*				
1880	188	*-22%*	300	*50%*				
1881								
1882								
1883	192							
1884	232	*21%*	188					
1885	242	*4%*	305	*62%*				
1886	289	*19%*	250	*-18%*				
1887	332	*15%*	257	*3%*				
1888	396	*19%*	350	*36%*				
1889	540	*36%*	550	*57%*				
1890	562	*4%*	340	*-38%*				
1891	554	*-1%*	491	*44%*				
1892	603	*9%*	415	*-15%*				

1893	628	*4%*	658	*59%*	489			
1894	657	*5%*	577	*-12%*	427	*-13%*		
1895	740	*13%*	405	*-30%*	348	*-19%*		
1896	706	*-5%*	475	*17%*	303	*-13%*		
1897								
1898	680		350		300			
1899	654	*-4%*	400	*14%*	200	*-33%*		
1900	614	*-6%*	375	*-6%*	254	*27%*		
1901	641	*4%*	375	*0%*	254	*0%*		
1902	670	*5%*	398	*6%*	244	*-4%*		
1903	760	*13%*	400	*1%*	250	*2%*		
1904	860	*13%*	474	*19%*	306	*22%*		
1905	673	*-22%*	495	*4%*	281	*-8%*		
1906	699	*4%*	585	*18%*	382	*36%*		
1907	805	*15%*			382	*0%*		
1908	868	*8%*	690		495	*30%*		
1909	918	*6%*	740	*7%*	490	*-1%*		
1910	981	*7%*			572	*17%*		
1911	1102	*12%*			615	*8%*		
1912	1125	*2%*	1250		648	*5%*		
1913	1407	*25%*	1219	*-2%*	633	*-2%*		
1914	1509	*7%*						
1915	1352	*-10%*						
1916	1430	*6%*	1055					
1917	1500	*5%*			650			
1918	1425	*-5%*	1170		685	*5%*		
1919	1495	*5%*	1059	*-9%*	550	*-20%*		
1920	1650	*10%*	1126	*6%*	561	*2%*		
1921	1876	*14%*	1284	*14%*	706	*26%*		

1922	2082	*11%*	1940	*51%*	996	*41%*		
1923	2043	*-2%*	1917	*-1%*	1038	*4%*		
1924	1518	*-26%*	1539	*-20%*	851	*-18%*		
1925	1275	*-16%*	1051	*-32%*	731	*-14%*		
1926	1420	*11%*	1389	*32%*	727	*-1%*		
1927	1333	*-6%*	1178	*-15%*	671	*-8%*		
1928	1276	*-4%*	1155	*-2%*	674	*0%*		
1929	1330	*4%*	956	*-17%*	578	*-14%*		
1930	1350	*2%*	903	*-6%*	580	*0%*		
1931	1534	*14%*	1217	*35%*	632	*9%*		
1932			1209	*-1%*	649	*3%*		
1933			1082	*-11%*	638	*-2%*		
1934	1711		1268	*17%*	656	*3%*		
1935	1740	*2%*	1186	*-6%*	624	*-5%*		
1936			1035	*-13%*	570	*-9%*		
1937	1682		1115	*8%*	600	*5%*		
1938	1774	*5%*	1080	*-3%*	600	*0%*		
1939	1604	*-10%*	1060	*-2%*	525	*-13%*		
1940	1604	*0%*	848	*-20%*	430	*-18%*		
1941	1614	*1%*	793	*-6%*	400	*-7%*		
1942	1627	*1%*	840	*6%*	405	*1%*		
1943	1625	*0%*	831	*-1%*	327	*-19%*		
1944	1669	*3%*	744	*-10%*	402	*23%*		
1945	1679	*1%*	737	*-1%*	417	*4%*		
1946	1711	*2%*	798	*8%*	451	*8%*		
1947	1907	*11%*	885	*11%*	458	*2%*		
1948	2008	*5%*	914	*3%*	502	*10%*		
1949	2119	*6%*	1080	*18%*	494	*-2%*		
1950	2139	*1%*	1142	*6%*	518	*5%*		

1951	2332	*9%*	943	*-17%*	419	*-19%*		
1952	2348	*1%*	1134	*20%*	527	*26%*	741	
1953	2402	*2%*	1201	*6%*	532	*1%*		
1954	1742	*-27%*	1420	*18%*	698	*31%*		
1955	1688	*-3%*	1463	*3%*	682	*-2%*	876	
1956	1765	*5%*	1419	*-3%*	685	*0%*	750	*-14%*
1957	1786	*1%*	1525	*7%*	687	*0%*	670	*-11%*
1958	1846	*3%*	1479	*-3%*	726	*6%*	680	*1%*
1959	1735	*-6%*	1404	*-5%*	671	*-8%*	495	*-27%*
1960	1741	*0%*	1539	*10%*	673	*0%*		
1961	1759	*1%*	1368	*-11%*	677	*1%*	526	
1962	1766	*0%*	1355	*-1%*	670	*-1%*		
1963	1807	*2%*	1418	*5%*	658	*-2%*		
1964	1849	*2%*	1387	*-2%*	635	*-3%*		
1965	1717	*-7%*	1367	*-1%*	609	*-4%*	625	
1966	1751	*2%*	1049	*-23%*	613	*1%*	615	*-2%*
1967	1741	*-1%*	1317	*26%*	575	*-6%*	615	*0%*
1968	1748	*0%*	1385	*5%*	535	*-7%*	612	*0%*
1969	1723	*-1%*	1368	*-1%*	584	*9%*	559	*-9%*
1970	1723	*0%*	1237	*-10%*	432	*-26%*	495	*-11%*
1971	1727	*0%*	1157	*-6%*	368	*-15%*	424	*-14%*
1972	1710	*-1%*	1160	*0%*	347	*-6%*	428	*1%*
1973	1681	*-2%*	929	*-20%*	329	*-5%*	412	*-4%*
1974	1620	*-4%*	820	*-12%*	323	*-2%*	428	*4%*
1975	1607	*-1%*	869	*6%*	320	*-1%*	428	*0%*
1976	1627	*1%*	852	*-2%*	332	*4%*	460	*7%*
1977	1661	*2%*	766	*-10%*	326	*-2%*	474	*3%*
1978	1650	*-1%*	745	*-3%*	321	*-2%*	466	*-2%*
1979	1664	*1%*	770	*3%*	341	*6%*	471	*1%*

1980	1534	*-8%*	744	*-3%*	315	*-8%*	467	*-1%*
1981	1587	*3%*	640	*-14%*	300	*-5%*	460	*-1%*
1982	1519	*-4%*	737	*15%*	285	*-5%*	427	*-7%*
1983	1349	*-11%*	725	*-2%*	274	*-4%*	387	*-9%*
1984	1262	*-6%*	653	*-10%*	259	*-5%*	369	*-5%*
1985	1225	*-3%*	661	*1%*	252	*-3%*	357	*-3%*
1986	1211	*-1%*	648	*-2%*	253	*0%*	368	*3%*
1987	1180	*-3%*	588	*-9%*	260	*3%*	374	*2%*
1988	1118	*-5%*	580	*-1%*	270	*4%*	364	*-3%*
1989	1086	*-3%*	594	*2%*	255	*-6%*	350	*-4%*
1990	1054	*-3%*	538	*-9%*	263	*3%*	382	*9%*
1991	1024	*-3%*	569	*6%*	254	*-3%*	358	*-6%*
1992	1002	*-2%*	520	*-9%*	252	*-1%*	355	*-1%*
1993	953	*-5%*	505	*-3%*	236	*-6%*	314	*-12%*
1994	938	*-2%*	499	*-1%*	238	*1%*	325	*4%*
1995	907	*-3%*	470	*-6%*	221	*-7%*	324	*0%*
1996	888	*-2%*	459	*-2%*	221	*0%*	329	*2%*
1997	879	*-1%*	453	*-1%*	185	*-16%*	301	*-9%*
1998	853	*-3%*	435	*-4%*	177	*-4%*	303	*1%*
1999	839	*-2%*	440	*1%*	175	*-1%*	291	*-4%*
2000	847	*1%*	435	*-1%*	163	*-7%*	278	*-4%*
2001	847	*0%*	435	*0%*	163	*0%*	278	*0%*
2002	802	*-5%*	382	*-12%*	152	*-7%*	272	*-2%*
2003	792	*-1%*	423	*11%*	160	*5%*	288	*6%*
2004	783	*-1%*	454	*7%*	149	*-7%*	265	*-8%*
2005	775	*-1%*	364	*-20%*	133	*-11%*	264	*0%*
2006	747	*-4%*	341	*-6%*	107	*-20%*	243	*-8%*
2007	673	*-10%*	275	*-19%*	93	*-13%*	220	*-9%*
2008	647	*-4%*	295	*7%*	90	*-3%*	219	*0%*

2009	652	*1%*	231	*-22%*	80	*-11%*	229	*5%*
2010	617	*-5%*	193	*-16%*	76	*-5%*	225	*-2%*
2011	577	*-6%*	213	*10%*	75	*-1%*	215	*-4%*
2012	476	*-18%*	185	*-13%*	68	*-9%*	196	*-9%*
2013	453	*-5%*	176	*-5%*	63	*-7%*	187	*-5%*
2014	415	*-8%*	216	*23%*	64	*2%*	174	*-7%*
2015	401	*-3%*	275	*27%*	71	*11%*	161	*-7%*
2016	383	*-4%*	253	*-8%*	101	*42%*	153	*-5%*
2017	357	*-7%*	157	*-38%*	76	*-25%*	144	*-6%*
2018								

Table 1. Membership, Sunday School Enrollment, Sunday School Attendance, and Worship Attendance data for First United Methodist Church, Hutchinson, Kansas

Notes:

1872 Congregation Begins

1875 Last number of SS Total illegible, “14x”

1883 Last two numbers of SS Total illegible, “1xx"

1895 Third number of SS Total illegible: 40x

1907 Third number of membership illegible “80x”, SS Total illegible

1916 Third digit of SS Total illegible, “10x5”

1918 Journal, same in handwritten log except attendance (which was 650)

1923 Change in SS Total reporting

1924 Start of Trinity United Methodist Church

1929 Trinity SS exceeds First for first time? (Don’t have 1928 for Trinity)

1944 Change in SS reporting?

1947 SS number from journal, but a bulletin had a note saying, “Let’s keep Sunday school attendance at 650!”

1949 Archive documents differ from journal, archive had SS total at 1013 and SS attendance of 539

1950 Archive documents matched journal on this one

1951 Change in membership reporting??

1952 Worship attendance is December average

1954 Education building completed mid-year, sparked attendance bump as described in newsletter

1955 Worship attendance is fourth quarter only

1956 Worship attendance is first three quarters only (also of note, Easter saw 1,010 in SS and 1,817 in worship at Convention Hall)

1957 Worship attendance is fourth quarter only

1958 Worship attendance is first quarter only

1959 Worship attendance is 5/25-6/29 only (end of evening worship service?)

1961 Full statistical report

1965 Reported as prior year to the one below, attendance for this (previous) year was noted as an “all time high”

1966 Worship attendance is 6/1/66-4/30/67

1967 Worship attendance from journal for first time, perhaps a reporting of above number?

1969 Archive document shows worship attendance at 495, perhaps reported below?

2017 SS Total reporting seems to have drastically changed and is no longer reported as such in the Journal

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