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Resurrection as surplus and possibility: Moltmann and Ricoeur

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Abstract

Though Moltmann and Ricoeur have a history of interaction, little attention has been paid to this relationship and its implications for their respective programmes. These thinkers have much in common, however, and the Ricoeurian categories of surplus and possibility elucidate critical aspects of a theology of hope, serving to strengthen its contemporary implications. Nuance is provided for the resurrection's role in redemption, and an existential mode of hope is delineated. Focusing on Moltmann's interactions with Ricoeur concerning the resurrection elevates these latent themes and demonstrates the fruitfulness of a continued conversation between these two thinkers. Furthermore, examining Moltmann's thought in Ricoeurian perspective opens new directions for conceptualising resurrection hope and praxis in a postmodern context.

God's raising of the crucified Christ remains a central Christian symbol of hope in the midst of suffering and oppression. Throughout history, Christian communities have found sustenance and strength in the memory of God's act and its implications for the future. Yet circumstances and ideologies frequently obscure or eclipse this symbol, shaking the grounds of hope. In modern theological discourse, Jürgen Moltmann's exploration of the resurrection reclaimed the centrality of hope and opened new paths of inquiry for eschatological theology.[1] His positing of the resurrection within the history of promise renewed the focus on God's present activity in light of the future. Moltmann's work reinvigorated Christian commitment to meaningful praxis as theology and politics coincided under the rubric of hope. As fruitful as this symbolic retrieval has been, however, it is currently in need of development and reconfiguration. Given new social conditions and conceptual shifts broadly construed as 'postmodern', a rethinking of the grounds for hope is called for.

Although we have arguably entered a post-postmodern theoretical phase, the resurrection and its implications continue to merit reconceptualisation

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

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in light of postmodern theory. As has become widely documented (and, perhaps, overdetermined) in the literature, ours is the era of 'incredulity toward metanarratives', of the dissolution of a supposed unified 'reality' and frame of reference.[2] Attempts to periodise history or to view time linearly are de-emphasised in what Foucault termed the 'epoch of space'. Called into question are claims of objectivity and normativity. Closed systems, notions of unity and sameness, as well as the idea of fixed identities, are subverted. Exalted are concepts of play and difference. Reality is grasped in terms of metonymy, fragmentation, hybridity and multiplicity. These shifts in the discourse present new challenges not only for theory but also for praxis and political engagement.[3]

Despite such sociotheoretical dislocation, Moltmann's discussion of the resurrection remains central for present constructions of Christian hope. Thus, even though Moltmann can rightfully be categorised as a 'modern' theologian, his project contains resources of continuing relevance, and it cannot be swiftly discounted.[4] Drawing out his interactions with Paul Ricoeur highlights ideas more amenable to conversation with postmodern discourse. Even as the resurrection remained arguably the central symbol in Moltmann's early theological programme, it functioned as a point of convergence for key exchanges between Moltmann and Ricoeur.[5] Taking the resurrection as launching point, Ricoeur responded directly to Moltmann's theology of hope.

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

[3] At one end of the spectrum of responses one might place Fukuyama's resigned vision of the triumph of capitalism. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). The opposite end might be characterised by Hardt and Negri's utopian hope concerning the revolutionary potential of the 'multitude'. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), and idem, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). For a survey of current cultural, political and theological challenges in a postmodern context see Joerg Rieger, 'Introduction: Opting for the Margins in a Postmodern World', in Joerg Rieger (ed.), *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 3–22.

[4] For a discussion of Moltmann's relationship to modernity see Miroslav Volf, 'After Moltmann: Reflections on the Future of Eschatology', in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *God will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 233–57.

[5] Attention is given primarily to the earlier work of both thinkers. In addition to providing a workable scope for this inquiry, such a limitation is appropriate for two reasons: 1) the themes addressed in this study appear more prominently in earlier

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In conversation with Hegel and Kant, Ricoeur explored hope philosophically in a Moltmannian vein.[6] Subsequent developments in Ricoeur's thought have been incorporated by Moltmann to strengthen the latter's own position on the implications of the resurrection.

Through a focus on two Ricoeurian themes, surplus and possibility, I will explore this interaction between Moltmann and Ricoeur to demonstrate the fruitfulness of such a relationship.[7] The aim at this juncture is not to build a cohesive system, but rather to take a few exploratory steps toward a new vision for a Moltmannian theology of hope strengthened by Ricoeurian categories. This examination facilitates a salutary shift in emphasis in Moltmann's articulation of resurrection hope. It demonstrates that this interaction strengthens conceptualisations of the salvific efficacy and existential impact of the resurrection. Such an exchange also charts new routes for thinking about hope theologically and philosophically in postmodernity.

Context of promise

Moltmann's theological tour de force involves in part reconceiving history in light of promise. This idea of promise is not merely a new lens through which to examine the phenomenon of history. Rather, Moltmann claims that it is in the concept of promise that history has its genesis.[8] Understandings

works and 2) certain of these works are the context for explicit exchanges between Moltmann and Ricoeur.

[6] Central for this study is Paul Ricoeur's essay 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', tr. Robert Sweeney, in Don Ihde (ed.), *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 402–24. See also Paul Ricoeur, 'Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems', in Mark Wallace (ed.), *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, tr. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 203–16.

[7] Despite Moltmann and Ricoeur's history of dialogue, few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis. See e.g. David Stewart, 'In Quest of Hope: Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Moltmann', *Restoration Quarterly* 12 (1970), pp. 31–52, and David Jasper, 'The Limits of Formalism and the Theology of Hope: Ricoeur, Moltmann and Dostoyevsky', *Literature and Theology* 1 (1987), pp. 1–10. In addition to Moltmann and Ricoeur's direct interactions, clear commonalities exist in their reactions to the 'desert' of post-Enlightenment criticism, and in their projects of thinking through theology or philosophy, respectively, as *spes quaerens intellectum*. For discussions of Ricoeur's relationship to theology more broadly construed see Dan Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Mark Wallace, *The Second Naiveté: Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

[8] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 109–12, 258–61.

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of linear time, of time progressing toward a goal, derive from the God of the covenant revealed to Israel.[9] In contradistinction to epiphanic religions and local deities, the God of Israel is a God of promise and journey. YHWH is not tied to a specific region and is not static. Rather, this God is identified by the covenant of blessing made to Abraham and subsequently to Israel at Sinai. The covenant is one of continuing divine presence toward a destination, as God promises to draw the Israelites into an experience of profound blessing. The history of redemption is initiated as a history of promise. Successive covenants and acts of deliverance speak to the partial fulfilment and further expansion of the promise. God is seen to be faithful and true, and the promise of redemption increases in breadth and significance.[10]

In what sense is the resurrection to be understood in light of this view of history? Moltmann parts ways with theologies that regard the resurrection purely in terms of fulfilment. In such conceptions, the resurrection is simply God's Yes, and completes the cycle, as it were, of promise and anticipation. God's pledge to redeem creation was completed in Christ, and humankind now dwells in this present eschatological reality. Such approaches often become existential (Bultmann), focusing on the personal appropriation of this resurrection experience, or transcendental (Barth), exalting the risen Christ's lordship to the neglect of present longing.[11]

In contradistinction to such views, Moltmann claims that the resurrection continues God's history of promise fulfilment and expansion. In such a both/and schema, God's raising of Christ is an answer to humankind's longing for redemption, even as it is the first fruits of this consummation. The risen Christ embodies the promise of what will be, not only for humankind, but for all of creation. Just as the God of Israel intervened in history through acts of deliverance and liberation, likewise, in Christ, God has acted. Considered in this light, it is clear that this action is neither totalising nor final. The resurrection confirms that 'the One who has promised is faithful'. Yet, humankind still remains in a state of anticipation and hope. The 'already' of Christ's resurrection is juxtaposed with the 'not yet' of ours and of the total redemption of creation. The end has not come, but the resurrection proclaims that God will come. The promise is hence expanded to encompass all of creation in an eschatological vision of redemption.

[9] Moltmann does make a distinction between history conceived of as simply linear and a more nuanced view which incorporates rhythms and cycles into an overall linear progression, preferring the latter. See *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, tr. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 138.

[10] Cf. the discussion in Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, tr. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 98–108.

[11] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 45–68; cf. Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, pp. 13–21.

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Drawing upon Von Rad's Old Testament theology, Moltmann observes that history is driven forward by an 'overspill of promise (*überschießender Verheißung*)'.[12] This notion is critical in his schema and to my investigation. It conveys an idea of excess, profit or overflow. As noted above, the promises of God are not exhausted in history. They are fulfilled in part as God vindicates historically (e.g. the exodus, postexilic restoration and resurrection), and yet continue forward in expectation of total fulfilment. Thus, an overspill remains, as if in reserve, providing a potential energy that fuels praxis in the present.

The idea of an overspill of promise connects directly with the two Ricoeurian themes of surplus and possibility. Reflecting on Moltmann's understanding of history and promise, Ricoeur notes that the 'opposition [between old and new] is never complete, inasmuch as acts of deliverance, announced as new, are represented by analogy to the saving acts of the past: New Earth, New David, New Zion, New Exodus, New Covenant'.[13] In other words, future promise has echoes in the past and present. The unrealised potentialities of history are thrust forward in anticipation and hope. The events and texts of the past are not exhausted of their meaningfulness. Thus, Ricoeur cites with approval Moltmann's concept of history as promissory, especially in light of the resurrection.

The tension in history, of promises confirmed yet not fully realised, contributes a notion of *surplus*.[14] The 'already-not yet' aspect of the resurrection is the ultimate example of this tension which drives history in anticipation. Furthermore, this overspill opens up new *possibilities* for meaningful life in the present. Here Ricoeur prefers Moltmann's conception of the resurrection over against Bultmann's presentist existentialism.[15] The resurrection corresponds to a future-orientated way of being in the world. This possibility for being is wholly new and is inaugurated by the resurrection.

Resurrection as surplus

In Ricoeur's estimation, the resurrection is the event that reflects par excellence the divine economy defined by the logic of superabundance. The realm of actuality, of the 'what is', is marked by the logic of reciprocity or equivalence. This is the sphere defined by our existence in the present. Yet the resurrection opens up a new dimension of reality. In a sense it breaks

[12] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 107–8.
[13] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 405, n. 2.
[14] Ibid., p. 405.
[15] Ibid., pp. 405, 407.

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into our system, overwhelming it. What is revealed is the 'how much more' of God. This is the nature of divine being as gift, grace and abundance. It is the Yes over against the No of our limited experience, coming in, as it were, from without. This surplus of grace permeates our existence in the present, opening up future possibilities in expectation. The abundance of being and goodness displayed through this event results in an overflow, which longs for completion in redemption.[16]

Ricoeur derives this notion of superabundant grace from Pauline sources. In comparing Adam and Christ, Paul declares, 'For if by the fault of one many died, how much more the grace of God and the gift conferred by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, have abounded unto many' (Rom. 5:15). The creative tension between the first and second Adam results in the surplus described. Furthermore, 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (5:20). Thus, the logic of God's superabundant grace is made manifest. Rather than the logic of equivalences, which would have led to an equilibrium of sin and grace, the divine economy reveals an overflow. This is a gifted surplus of grace bestowed into our sphere, and displayed in the resurrection.[17] 'Resurrection surprises by being in excess in comparison to the reality forsaken by God'.[18]

This consideration of the surplus of grace in the resurrection parallels Ricoeur's explorations of the surplus of meaning (*surplus de sens*) in textual hermeneutics. In the linguistic realm there exist semantic arrangements that produce creative tensions and result in surplus. Ricoeur highlights this process, in particular, through his discussion of metaphor. The metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, occurring on the level of the sentence.[19] More than an emotive, decorative addition to language, metaphor contributes new cognitive content. The employment of a word to signify what it does not normally signify creates a discord in the sentence which is productive. A surplus of meaning exists between the literal reference and this new configuration. The reader's thoughts are drawn from the primary, literal meaning to the secondary, figurative level.

Moltmann interacts explicitly with Ricoeur in this area, employing Ricoeurian language and themes to amplify his views on the resurrection event. The significance of the resurrection has traditionally been downplayed in comparison to the emphasis on the cross event. Moltmann notes the common perspective of ascribing salvific significance to Christ's death on

[16] Ibid., p. 410.

[17] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, tr. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), p. 272.

[18] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 411.

[19] See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 46–52.

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the cross. The resurrection is often an afterthought or a mere validation of the work of atonement accomplished on the cross. Yet, the cross event, though critical, is not the totality of what occurred at Calvary. The raising of the crucified Christ represents God's abundant grace and justifying power for the cosmos.[20] 'Christ's resurrection has an added value and a surplus of promise over Christ's death . . . This surplus of Christ's resurrection over his death is manifested in the surplus of grace compared with the mere cancellation of sin.'[21] The resurrection is the 'how much more' of God's redemptive work.

Furthermore, the resurrection is significant for the cross in that it imbues it with saving potential. The cross without the resurrection is horror and defeat. Yet traditional soteriology often focuses primarily on the expiatory nature of Christ's death on the cross. The resurrection is seen in discontinuity with this event. At best it is proof that God remains sovereign even over death. As a corrective, Moltmann issues the reminder that the resurrection demonstrates that the crucified one is the Christ of God.[22] Only through God's presence on the cross can the crucifixion manifest salvific efficacy. Not only this but, seen in reverse, the resurrection brings God's future liberation into our present in the incarnation and cross.[23] The eschatological horizon is thus brought near and breaks into our sphere of existence. Only if we view the cross in light of the resurrection can it be said to be 'for us'. Thus, the resurrection assures us that this surplus of grace, which is ours in the future of Christ, is made available to us in the cross event. 'So justifying grace is not merely a making-present of the Christ crucified "for us"; it is even more a making present of the risen and coming Christ.'[24]

The resurrection thus functions metaphorically in the 'text' of our existence. A new configuration is presented to us which causes dissonance. As Moltmann has noted, the resurrection, though operating within promissory history, is radically discontinuous, a creation *ex nihilo*.[25] The coming God presents a new reality, with a new arrangement in which the dead are raised and all creation is transformed. The risen Christ is a symbol of this coming

[20] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, tr. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 116.

[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, tr. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 186.

[22] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, tr. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 182.

[23] Ibid., pp. 184–5.

[24] Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 186.

[25] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 226.

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reality. 'The Christian expectation is directed to no other than the Christ who has come, but it expects something new from him, something that has not yet happened so far.'[26] In light of the resurrection, the 'in spite of' of our existence is transformed into the 'how much more' of God's gracious abundance.

In sum, this Ricoeurian category edifies Moltmann's theology in at least two ways. First, surplus serves to elucidate the added value of the resurrection in the drama of redemption. The surplus of salvific value is made visible in the act of raising Christ from the dead. The resurrection is not subsumed under the cross but exists in tension with it, as a distinct yet intertwined movement in the divine drama. Second, the notion of surplus helps clarify the added impetus for living and the motivation for hope in the present. Abundance has broken into our limited sphere. Graciousness and life pour in and provide ground for freedom, joy and hope. This economy of superabundance, defined by the gift, has social and political implications. Patterns of scarcity and privation in the human realm (whether economic or political, for instance) are called into question. The resurrection as surplus comes to signify in part a protest against conditions of abjection, poverty and exploitation in the world. This orientation based on surplus consequently means new possibilities for life in the present.

Resurrection as possibility

Reflecting on freedom in the light of hope, in conformity with the resurrection, Ricoeur recalls the Kierkegaardian 'passion for the possible' as the mode of ideal existential posture.[27] This phrase describes one's bearing in life – one's being-in-the-world – as an orientation toward the future. As noted above, Ricoeur believes that one should regard the resurrection in light of the future of our existence. He rejects as insufficient the backward-looking nostalgia of Hegel or the presentist existentialism of Bultmann. The resurrection, conceived of in light of God's promise, contributes to an anticipatory freedom in living that is staked on hope.

At this point we must recall Ricoeur's hermeneutic of the text, which walks through the movements of reception, evaluation and appropriation. The third position proves crucial and is the test for true understanding. The act of appropriation has an existential dimension, in which the world of the text is brought to bear on the reader. The world of the text, in contrast to

[26] Ibid., p. 227.

[27] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 407. Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that this Kierkegaardian notion informs Ricoeur's overall philosophical program; see his *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*.

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the work of the text, is that set of projected possibilities and new modes of being which the text offers.[28] Hence there is a future-orientated aspect in the reception, interpretation and appropriation of texts, since they project new possibilities for us to live out. Such appropriation is ultimately meaningful because of what Ricoeur terms the *redescriptive* power of certain types of texts.

For Ricoeur, poetic language and narrative are of particular importance, having potential to contribute to our concept of being. Following Aristotle's work in *Poetics*, Ricoeur notes that in poetry both *mythos* and *mimesis* coincide.[29] In other words, the processes of imagination and imitation of reality meet. It is for this reason that Ricoeur speaks of the capacity for poetry and narrative to redescribe reality.[30] Such genres have the power to present new possibilities not only for conceiving of reality but also for living in it. The work of the text, that inner structure of metaphor and poetic signification, presents an alternate world to the reader. By reconfiguring reality, new possibilities are made manifest, and beckon the reader toward new ways of being in the world.

Taken together, these notions of redescription and appropriation are laden with transformative potential. A poetic text presents a world alternatively. It shows us a way the world potentially could be. Thus the dynamic of the metaphor can be extrapolated to describe the function of the text as a whole. Dissonance is created between the reality of the text and the reality of the reader. This can be subversive as it is inherently a challenge to the status quo. Appropriating such texts means creatively living out their depicted realties. These new modes of being, following an alternative logic of the text, aim for and realise new possibilities. Texts consequently contribute to this passion for the possible, as metaphor and imagination interact to spur us on. Existentially we remain orientated toward the future, in a constant dialectic of anticipation, realisation and greater anticipation.

Ricoeur's reflections here can be integrated into our conversation on the resurrection. The resurrection is the metaphor that provides us with new possibilities. These possibilities are radically other, being brought about by God. 'The passion for the possible must graft itself onto real tendencies, the mission onto a sensed history, the superabundance onto signs of the Resurrection, wherever they can be deciphered. It is necessary that the

[28] See Paul Ricoeur, 'What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding', in John B. Thompson (ed. and tr.), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 145–64. Note that elsewhere Ricoeur speaks instead of the 'world in front of the text' with similar intimations.

[29] Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in Lewis Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 102.

[30] Paul Ricoeur, 'Manifestation and Proclamation', in *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 58.

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Resurrection deploy its own logic, which obviates the logic of repetition.'[31] Here the notion of surplus bursts the bonds of reality in its limitations. The surplus of hope manifest in the resurrection contributes to an orientation toward life that is wholly new, characterised by this response to the abundant grace of God. The resurrection opens up the possible, and hope supplies the passion to embrace such possibilities.

Due to the resurrection, believers can live orientated to reality in new ways. This existence is characterised by longing and future hope. In Christ's resurrection, God is revealed as the God who is coming. History, effected (and affected) by this Hebraic God of promise, is spurred forward toward its consummation in Christ's *parousia*. Because the future is 'the mode of God's existence with us', our mode of existence is in hopeful anticipation.[32] At some point, Moltmann reminds us, all of God's promises will be fulfilled. This eschatological horizon draws us forward in hopeful living that has implications for personal and corporate – as well as ecclesial and political – life.

Grasping the depth of the possibilities opened to us may be aided by distinguishing between *futurum* and *adventus*. The former assumes continuity between the present and some future point. One can extrapolate forward based on current conditions to depict the circumstances of that projected moment. Nothing new enters into the equation. On the contrary, *adventus* is predicated upon the in-breaking of that which is outside the system. Something radically other and new (*novum*) comes to meet us, from the future, as it were. In this conception the eschatological breaks into our reality. The future holds new possibilities, based on this creation *ex nihilo* of new configurations. The resurrection proclaims the future as *adventus*, as the in-breaking of God into our reality, and as such, holds forth possibilities heretofore closed to us.[33]

The possibility opened up through the resurrection is the future of history. It portrays the *novum*, the radically new, which comes to transform history, not merely to interrupt it. 'Hope, in its springing forth, is "aporetic", not by reason of lack of meaning but by excess of meaning.'[34] The surplus of meaning in the resurrection contributes to new possible meanings for reality. As the present is conceived of eschatologically, in light of God's future, hope enables new modes of being in the world. The ordinary of existence is

[31] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 412.
[32] Jürgen Moltmann, 'Introduction to the Theology of Hope', in M. Douglas Meeks (ed. and tr.), *The Experiment Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 50.
[33] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, pp. 25–9.
[34] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 411.

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ruptured, and God's new possibilities have entered our realm. 'As a historian discovers hope in the mode of memory, so the prophet shapes memory in the mode of hope.'[35] Our past and present must be viewed in light of the future. They are the past and present of things future.[36]

The resurrection as metaphor has a surplus of meaning. It is a poetic redescription of reality, projecting new possibilities for existence. These concepts are directly pertinent to Christian eschatology. Kevin Vanhoozer, in his study of Ricoeur's relationship to biblical hermeneutics, remarks:

> Thanks to metaphor, we may entertain visions of what might be. For this reason alone we could infer that metaphorical discourse is perhaps the most appropriate language with which to express an eschatological vision of the world, for it is precisely the 'more than actuality' which is the object of our hope.[37]

Hence, the way reality is redescribed in the resurrection offers us new possibilities for living. The resurrection contributes to the possible because hope is allied with the imagination.[38] In the resurrection God's imagination for a redeemed cosmos is made manifest. Our lives now, and Christian theology as eschatology, are responses to this revealed imagination. Therefore, Moltmann can conceive of the theologian's task thus: 'for me theology is not a church dogmatics, not a doctrine of faith. It is the imagination for the kingdom of God in the world, and for the world in God's kingdom.'[39]

Ricoeur's conception of future possibilities and Moltmann's coming God combine in the resurrection. God's eschatological reality is made known in the world. The resurrection as possibility is God's act of poetic redescription of reality. We are invited to embrace this reality through appropriation, living in hopeful anticipation. Such a lifestyle entails a praxis of hope, involving prophetic confrontation of that which crushes life and its possibilities.[40] The alternate reality we embody subverts the status quo, as it declares the reign of God in a world which rages against it.

[35] Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, tr. M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 106.
[36] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 26; cf. Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, pp. 118–33.
[37] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 71.
[38] Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 408.
[39] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. xiv.
[40] Cf. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 329–38.

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Resurrection: event, symbol or metaphor?

Up to this point I have primarily considered the resurrection as either metaphor or symbol. The distinction between these must be clarified. Furthermore, I must ask how the resurrection traditionally conceived of as *event* fits into this discussion. Such enquiries serve to highlight residual tensions between Moltmann and Ricoeur.

Stephen Davis has classified views on the resurrection into two broad categories, each composed of two subdivisions.[41] The first group consists of those who argue that Jesus indeed was raised, that the resurrection is a real event. Within this group are the subcategories of those who posit a physical, bodily resurrection and those who hold to some view of a spiritual resurrection. This latter subcategory might argue that the tomb was not empty but that Jesus was still in some sense raised (perhaps as a soul or spirit). The second broad category consists of those who deny a real resurrection.[42] Within this grouping are those who flatly deny the possibility of a resurrection on philosophical, scientific or other intellectual grounds. The second subcategory consists of those who, while denying the reality of Jesus' resurrection, redefine it as some sort of subjective experience or symbol of an existential reality. This allows them to maintain the semblance of belief in the resurrection while dramatically altering its conception. Davis cites Bultmann as typical of this latter subgroup.

Moltmann has sought to move beyond the individualistic existentialism of Bultmann in his definition of the resurrection. The resurrection is an event, and has an objective sense beyond that of the believer's experience. In this sense it takes place outside subjectivity (*extra nos*) and is not a construction nor projection of individual or communal longing. In Moltmann's thought, the resurrection is indeed *real* and maintains an event-like foundation. In this regard, Moltmann should be placed in Davis's former category: those who maintain that the resurrection was something that happened, first and foremost, to Jesus.

At the same time, however, the resurrection must be grasped symbolically, and cannot be understood as simply history or 'brute' fact. In Ricoeur's schema, a symbol functions metaphorically yet has an organic base. It is not solely a linguistic phenomenon but is rooted in time and space. It stands not simply for itself, but references a greater reality. The symbol participates in

[41] Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 34–6.

[42] Note that, for Davis, 'real' indicates an objective, historical event, broadly defined.

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the reality to which it refers.[43] It necessitates a signifier in the world in order to refer to the symbolic realm (i.e. the signified). The symbol thus requires some grounding in our reality (as material substance or as part of sensory experience) even as it points figuratively to some aspect of experience that cannot be described otherwise.

Moltmann's neo-orthodox heritage presupposes a retrieval of central Christian symbols whose enduring potency requires reconsideration. For Moltmann, the resurrection is not an event-in-itself. It does not stand alone in this sense, as an isolatable act in history. On its own it has not effected a change in the cosmos. Rather, as an event that functions metaphorically, it is a symbol of the Christian future hope. It is a symbol of the God to whom the future belongs, and to whom Christians look for redemption. The transformation of reality occurs as the Holy Spirit of life, released into the church through the cross event, operates with Christian hope in anticipation of the final consummation.

Since Ricoeur approaches the resurrection primarily through the text and in terms of present experience, questions as to its nature as event appear irrelevant. These are not directly addressed and fall outside the scope of his inquiry. What is characteristic of his views is the textual nature of history and experience.[44] Texts do not so much offer a window into the past as project future possibility. Indeed, the independent nature of texts, including the resurrection narratives, renders irretrievable authorial intent, let alone the 'facts' of any recorded events. Resurrection as event is thus unavailable. Due to this de-emphasis on its event-like nature, resurrection as symbol is therefore also inaccessible. Without an affirmation of some material base (i.e. event) – and, hence, without a signifier – the symbolic process is subverted.

What alone remains is the metaphor of resurrection, available to us in the text, and pertinent to present existential experience. In this way, Ricoeur remains Bultmannian, though he critiques Bultmann in favour of Moltmann. Yet, his difficulties with Bultmann pertain not to an existential understanding of the resurrection but to its orientation. The resurrection continues to have primary significance existentially; it simply must do so as it orients us toward the future. This resurrection-based existential experience

[43] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 57–63. Cf. Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 13–18; and Paul Tillich, 'The Nature of Religious Language', in Robert C. Kimball (ed.), *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 53–67.

[44] For a full discussion of these concepts see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, tr. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988), and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, tr. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

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must be approached textually, and is not apprehended *a priori* and without hermeneutical reflection.[45] It brings into our experience the dimensions of surplus and possibility, enabling us to live in hope.

Moltmann would uphold – though not be limited by – the existential impact of the resurrection depicted by Ricoeur. Certainly the resurrection has existential implications. Yet Moltmann has clearly reacted against the individualism latent in much existential thought, particularly that of Bultmann. Moltmann has remained historically rooted, in part due to his engagement with biblical, Hebraic faith, and in part due to his interaction with materialists like Ernst Bloch.[46] Christian hope has an external source and object, and cannot be reduced to subjective experience. Moltmann maintains that Christ will come again, even as Christ was truly raised. A Christian hope that is meaningful and able to withstand the assaults of a godless reality is rooted in this external event. It is a sovereign act of God, and forms the basis of the hope for the Christian future.[47]

More recent comments by Ricoeur seem to indicate an appropriate placement in Davis's latter category concerning views on the resurrection. When pressed on the plausibility of traditional interpretations of the resurrection for philosophers, Ricoeur admits his departure from such views.[48] He claims that the resurrection narratives blunt the force of the passion accounts, reducing the productive effects of the stories of Christ's self-donation on the cross. He regards the resurrection as synonymous with the cross, in the sense that resurrection is to be equated with meaningful death. The notion of eternal life must be connected with a life well lived and a death died in some sense for others. Resurrection entails 'resurrection in the Christian community'.[49] This provides further evidence that Ricoeur regards the resurrection as metaphorical and as having primarily

[45] Ricoeur's critique of Bultmann's project deals less with its existentialist posture than with the manner through which it is reached. Bultmann's move to demythologise travels 'too quickly', not dealing in depth with the texts but asserting an unmediated self-awareness, problematic in its Cartesian orientation. See Paul Ricoeur, 'Preface to Bultmann', tr. Peter McCormick, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*.

[46] Moltmann's interactions with Käsemann, whose own project of historical retrieval was in part a reaction to Bultmann, have certainly played a crucial role as well.

[47] Cf. Van Harvey, 'Secularism, Responsible Belief, and the "Theology of Hope"', in Fredrick Herzog (ed.), *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 135–8. For a contemporary appraisal of Moltmann's views on the resurrection see George Hunsinger, 'The Daybreak of New Creation: Christ's Resurrection in Recent Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 (2004), pp. 163–81.

[48] Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, tr. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 152.

[49] Ibid.

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figurative application to humankind's life and future. Furthermore, rather than speculate on this future, the proper emphasis must remain on life in the present. The future-orientated, existentialist posture, which Ricoeur derives from Moltmann, doubles back upon itself to re-emphasise meaningful life in the present, irrespective of future realities.

There remain, therefore, noteworthy differences between Moltmann's and Ricoeur's understandings of the resurrection. Arguably, Ricoeur remains bound by the limits of the Heideggerian project which he sought to reform. One hears echoes of Heidegger's advocacy of the stolid embrace of death as the ground of one's ultimacy and meaning, though, to be sure, Ricoeur rejects *Dasein* delimited as being-toward-death in favour of a more nuanced 'being until death'.[50] Speculations on the possibility of life after death or concerning a God who breaks into our reality are unhelpful, even though originally Ricoeur sought to provide philosophical language for such ideas. Embrace of the present, and of meaningful life lived in light of the limit experience of death, take precedence. The resurrection as metaphor retains a limited scope as a resource to be appropriated as needed in such present experience.[51]

A Moltmannian perspective maintains the reality of the resurrection as an event that symbolically prefigures a coming reality, impacting all of creation. The resurrection is God's parable. It is God's concrete act in history which needs explication and expounding. Its inner logic must be teased out to ascertain its message. It does not stand alone. It serves as symbol to forecast a coming reality and functions metaphorically in our lives in the present in response to this coming reality. Event, symbol and metaphor coincide, providing a comprehensive foundation for Christian hope.

Future modes of hope

Despite the residual tensions, the direction of this encounter between Moltmann and Ricoeur highlights resources for theologising hope in a postmodern age. Given the contemporary shift in focus from metaphysical epistemology to contextual hermeneutics, what is to become of a theology of hope developed in large part in dialogue with modernist visions of history and liberation? Contemporary social and theoretical turmoil has done much to undermine such modern perspectives and to challenge former grounds of

[50] Ibid., p. 156.

[51] It remains to be delineated to what extent Ricoeur's views have changed since his initial interactions with Moltmann on the resurrection. The more hopeful, future-orientated perspective coming through in Ricoeur's early works appears to have shifted to an emphasis on suffering solidarity in the present.

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hope. Thus, as Bauckham and Hart have asked, 'Can the modern enterprise of hope be redeemed from despair?'[52] Resisting the presentist undercurrent that re-emerges for Ricoeur, use can be made of his categories as they amplify Moltmann's futurist orientation in a way that maintains its relevance in present discourse. The sources of Christian hope have not changed; the ways to speak of it have.

The postmodern introduction of difference presents an alternative vision of reality with which this recast theology of hope can engage. Modern conceptualisations emphasise sameness, linearity and reciprocity. Such frameworks work well for closed systems, and are inextricably tied to the logic of capitalism in its assumption of scarcity and its laws of 'equal' exchange.[53] Postmodern sensibilities account for the play of differences, for the realities of fragmentation and inequity, and open up spaces for alternative assessments of value. While such novel directions can at times be tyrannous, they create space for new – and potentially redemptive – understandings of reality. The mode of this modernist system, regulated by the assumptions of scarcity and reciprocity, is seen in Bloch, with whom Moltmann interacts extensively. The resurrection chafes against such a framework. Ricoeur provides alternatives.

For Bloch, the nature of reality – and human existence in particular – is characterised by incompleteness. His unique ontology of the 'not-yet-being' (*Noch-Nicht-Sein*) posits humans as open projects, continually in flux as they move toward closure. The engine driving his utopian vision is a longing for wholeness. Bloch's revisionist psychoanalytic model wedded to Marxist historical materialism interweaves notions of 'hunger' and 'desire' to describe this drive.[54] Utopian consummation (*ultimum*) is concrete and this-worldly, yet implies a material difference wherein that which is lacking has been supplied. The principle of hope, which can be exegeted in all aspects of human life and culture, emerges from this longing for completion.[55]

[52] Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 212.

[53] It can be argued that capitalism accords more with a postmodern emphasis on play and diversity, rather than fixed and predictable modernist logic. See the provocative discussion in Jean-Joseph Goux, 'General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism', *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990), pp. 206–24. Although this is not the place for engagement of this issue, I would argue that the play and multiplicity of capitalism is ultimately an ideological projection of a system fundamentally predicated on the reciprocal logic of the same. Authentic difference need not be co-opted and can be genuinely disruptive.

[54] Marcel Neusch, *The Sources of Modern Atheism*, tr. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 185–7.

[55] Bloch's magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1986), seeks to uncover these traces of hope in literature, history and popular culture.

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An ontology of lack or scarcity is presupposed and undergirds this system. It remains tied to modernist schemas of the economy and of historical progression through defined stages.[56]

Dwelling on gift and abundance, Ricoeur's approach must be seen in a different light. Our reality has been interrupted and experiences excess and overflow. Plenitude rather than incompleteness is characteristic. The longing and future-looking orientation stems not from a need for completion but from an excess which spills forward. Our being and the modes of being in the text converge and stretch toward new possibilities and orientations. While there are presumably only a limited number of parts (or perhaps only one) that can be supplied to make up the whole for Bloch, an openness characterises the field of possibilities available to Ricoeur's overflowing Subject. This focus on the newness of difference makes room for a divine superabundance that shatters the limited, modern logic of reciprocity predicated on scarcity.

Whether one chooses to engage a logic of scarcity or a logic of superabundance will have significant implications for the resultant conception of hope. On what is hope predicated? What motivates hope in the present? The Moltmannian perspective orientates hope toward the God who is coming, toward the redemption of all creation and toward the *shalom* of God's kingdom. To be sure, we experience lack in the present. The effects of the Fall reveal that Bloch's emphases on incompleteness and longing are ineluctable. We hope in part because circumstances now are clearly less than acceptable. Yet the abundant grace of God and the redemptive hope that have irrupted into our reality find important echoes in Ricoeur's system. Our hope has a foundation in God and present circumstances need not lead to despair. Ultimately, the two sides must work in tandem, as the cross of the present and the future resurrection reinforce Christian hope.[57]

Mention of the cross and present despair reminds us of the importance of solidarity and liberation in Moltmann's theology. His interactions with Bloch, and subsequently with Frankfurt theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer, ensured that negation and critical praxis retained centrality in his programme. To be sure, Bloch's work remains far too central to Moltmann's project to be

[56] It may be appropriate to debate to what extent Bloch should be categorised as 'modernist'. His mysticism makes important breaks with post-Enlightenment secular rationality. Nevertheless, these key aspects of his thought exhibit modernist themes that prove problematic in our current context.

[57] An important additional avenue for research concerns fleshing out what a hermeneutics of existence in light of hope would entail. Such directions are intimated in Moltmann's recent work. See esp. Moltmann's chapters on promise and history in the section 'Hermeneutics of Hope' in *Experiences in Theology*, pp. 87–133.

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excised. Yet those committed to concerns of justice must consider whether even a shift in emphasis from the likes of Bloch to Ricoeur will lead to a diminishing of the liberative focus in a theology of hope. Hope remains political. Social and economic ramifications need to be kept in view, to think hope through theologically in all its arenas.

Will Ricoeur's framework blunt the edge of such a focus? It need not. Appropriating Ricoeur as philosophical dialogue partner should not mean relinquishing such confrontation of the powers. His own writings – and his reflections on hope in particular – speak directly to sociopolitical realities.[58] Ricoeur's concerns for justice stem from a trajectory different than Bloch's, but his interactions with Marx and the Frankfurt school have kept him true to a focus on emancipatory themes. His mediation of Gadamer and Habermas, while reflecting a preference for a Gadamerian hermeneutics of tradition, incorporates the needed critique of ideology.[59] Ricoeurian categories and concepts in dialogue with a theology of hope can maintain the eschatological vision and political thrust of Moltmann's original manifesto.[60]

As the church is called to hopeful resistance to the powers of domination and oppression, the resurrection retains central import in its mission. Moltmann's theological oeuvre bears out the politics of hope and its implications for praxis. In light of the themes of surplus and possibility, the notion of the resurrection and the hope it engenders are sharpened. Rather than operating from a position of impoverishment, Christians, as witnesses to God's superabundant grace and provision, are propelled forward due to

[58] See e.g. Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 409.

[59] See Paul Ricoeur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 63–100. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, 'Ethics and Culture', in David Stewart and Joseph Bien (eds.), *Political and Social Essays* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), pp. 243–70. Reflecting on this debate in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. G. H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 237, Ricoeur notes that 'hermeneutics without a project of liberation is blind, but a project of emancipation without historical experience is empty'. The relevance of Ricoeurian themes to such (theological) projects of liberation is evinced e.g. in the Latin American context. See esp. the works of José Míguez Bonino and Juan Luis Segundo.

[60] Though sociopolitical concerns retain potency, ways of articulating them will look different, given Ricoeur's hermeneutical method. Numerous creative possibilities exist for articulating a theology of hope along less modernist, metanarratival lines, and instead in conversation with a contextual hermeneutics of existence. A cohesive, overarching political programme may give way to more ad hoc, non-systemic yet no less prophetic articulations of politicised hope. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, 'The Project of a Social Ethic', in *Political and Social Essays*, pp. 174–5, noting that 'social ethics defines a level of judgment much more than a system constituted or to be constituted. This is the field of varied, multidimensional, discontinuous reflection. The convergence of concrete studies is always better than the false logic of systems.'

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this overflow. The longing for fulfilment comes not from privation as much as from an experience of plenitude – God's goodness made manifest in the resurrection.

The act of raising Jesus from the dead opens a new dimension of reality and, consequently, new possibilities for present life. The redescriptive power of resurrection hope is subversive, as an alternative arrangement of power and dominion becomes evident. The old order has fallen, the new has come. Christians are those who await the new, even as the new is already at work in the present. Imagination based on *adventus* not *futurum* shapes the mode of such life. Furthermore, Christians do not simply await their own individual resurrections. Rather, all that the resurrection of Jesus entails – new life, new creation, justice, reconciliation – forms the object of such hope. Despite a postmodern destabilisation that is both theoretical and sociopolitical, the resurrection brings a surplus of life into the present, orientating the church toward the future, and leading it into new possibilities. As theologians continue to reflect on this dynamic throughout the present theoretical phase with its concomitant challenges, theologies of hope no doubt will endure.[61]

[61] Special thanks to Travis Ables, Nancy Bedford, Randal Joy Thompson and Kevin Vanhoozer for helpful feedback on earlier versions. All shortcomings that remain are, of course, entirely my own. While completed well before, this article goes to print after the passing of Paul Ricoeur. I offer it humbly in interstitial memoriam.

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