

# Towards a Model of Christian Hope: Developing Snyder's Hope Theory for Christian Ministry

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## **Abstract**

This article seeks to develop a recent psychological model of hope for use within Christian ministry. Charles Snyder's Hope Theory is first examined, noting particularly his helpful definition of hope as a 'positive motivational state'. The article then explores the relationship between emotion and cognition in the context of a psychology of hope, with further work on the social rehearsal of emotions. After a brief summary of the content of a theology of hope, following the contours of recent theologians such as Robert Jenson, the remainder of the article seeks to develop a specifically Christian version of Snyder's model of hope, with the view to this being used to nurture the practice of hope in the Christian community. Christian hope is described as a positive motivational state based upon the confidence that both the agency and the pathways posited by the triune God, in and for the church, will attain their intended goal.

**Key Words:** hope; psychology; Snyder; emotions; eschatology

## **Putting Hope on the Agenda**

It does not take an academic article such as this to demonstrate the elusive nature of hope within our society. As it has been put by one of the foremost public figures in the contemporary world: to have hope today is indeed an act of sheer audacity.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is our conviction here that the cultivation of hope is in fact one of the central tasks of Christian ministry, traceable back to the Church's foundational Scriptures, which exhort God's people to be ready at all times to give an explanation of the hope that is within them.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while having hope may well be a seemingly audacious act, such audacity ought somehow to be elementary in the Christian vocation.

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<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. 3.15.

While the need for hope is thus fairly straightforwardly established, giving an adequate account of such hope is far less easy. For a start, we suffer from semantic indeterminacy: 'hope' is both a noun and a verb, and while the two uses may overlap, any model of hope needs to reckon with both aspects of the word – roughly, hope as an object and hope as an action. We must then acknowledge that a comprehensive rendering of hope, in both its nounal and verbal forms, would need to be performed in a number of different intellectual registers, each one with its own repertoire of descriptive words and logical connections. In this article, we will restrict ourselves to the resources offered by the intellectual registers of theology and psychology – a decision that implies, in this instance, that a conversation between these two disciplines will prove most fruitful for the task of fostering hope within Christian ministry today. Moreover, to add to the difficulty of rendering 'hope', even the location that hope should have as a category within contemporary psychology is by no means obvious. Is hope an emotion? If so, either partially or fully, then a further question arises: what anyway is an emotion? Finally, we might profitably inquire into the contexts within which hope occurs: specifically, is hope individual or corporate?

The existence of such searching questions suggests that any account of hope adequate to the task of Christian ministry will need to be suitably sophisticated. To move beyond the banal exhortation simply to 'Have hope!', Christian ministry will need to develop a sufficiently nuanced understanding of hope and its cultivation. It is proposed here that a dialogue between theology and psychology can provide just such a nuanced understanding. As Watts *et al.* indicate, 'psychology has a significant contribution to make to theology, alongside more accepted disciplines such as history and philosophy'.<sup>3</sup> As a piece of practical theology, this study proceeds with the assumption that an intelligent rendering of hope will require recourse both to the themes and traditions of Christian theology and to the methods and findings of the social sciences. In particular, this article will seek to develop a specific model of hope from recent psychological research – Snyder's Hope Theory – in an intentionally Christian direction. This will go some way towards addressing the concerns about hope raised above: What is hope? Where should it be located within human life? How can it be fostered?

### **Hope Theory: A Promising Model**

The work of Charles Snyder is an obvious place to go within psychological literature in order to explore the notion of hope. Snyder was a leading figure within the rise of positive psychology, and furthermore devoted a significant proportion of his energies to researching and developing the part of that discipline that became known as 'Hope Theory'. At his death in 2006 it was claimed that 'as a result of his scholarship, mentorship, and generous spirit, hope is more accessible'; Snyder's work had 'demystified hope for the world'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fraser Watts, *et al.*, *Psychology for Christian Ministry* (London: Routledge, 2002), 285.

<sup>4</sup> Shane J. Lopez, 'C.R. (Rick) Snyder (1944-2006)', *American Psychologist* 61, no. 7 (Oct 2006), 719.

Snyder's basic observation, as set out in his seminal 1994 publication, *The Psychology of Hope*, is that 'Hope is the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals.'<sup>5</sup> The *novum* of this definition is that Snyder added 'waypower' to the prevailing understanding of hope, which tended to focus only on 'willpower'. In the existing account, which aligned neatly with the view taken by popular culture, hope was understood to be simply the expectation that one's goals were attainable – in Snyder's language, hope was the cheering recognition that one possessed the necessary 'willpower' for the desired goal to be reached. As such, the common view inferred that hope was simply an emotion, an affective reaction to one's particular prospects within a state of affairs. Ernst Bloch, a Marxist philosopher who nonetheless drew heavily upon psychology in his monumental work on the history of social interactions, *The Principle of Hope*, captured this with pithy succinctness by describing hope as 'the most important expectant emotion'.<sup>6</sup> As an emotion, hope indicates the perceived success of a person's willpower in the relevant set of circumstances.

Snyder's assertion was that willpower alone was not sufficient to account for the power of hope in human behaviour. Hope requires willpower *and* waypower – which is to be defined as the 'mental capacity we can call on to find one or more effective ways to reach our goals' or 'the perception that one can engage in planful thought'.<sup>7</sup> This delightful phrase – 'planful thought' – introduces a new notion to the inherited description of hope as an emotion: hope is also *cognitive*. As Snyder notes in a more recent exposition of his model, it is this 'cognitive component' that 'anchors hope theory'.<sup>8</sup> Hope, according to Snyder, is *both* affective *and* cognitive, the combination of *both* willpower *and* waypower; or, to put it in Snyder's more nuanced language, hope is:

a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals).<sup>9</sup>

This quotation from Snyder is instructive: hope is not an emotion as such (where emotion is understood to be a purely passive response to circumstances), but a 'positive motivational state'. It certainly includes the expectant emotion proposed by the earlier model of hope, but Snyder's model provides additional heuristic power by also incorporating cognitive function. By thus locating hope explicitly within cognitive psychology, Snyder empowers hope to be a constructive notion within human life; since it includes cognitive elements, hope is something that can be fostered and nourished, rather than simply experienced. Elsewhere, Snyder

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<sup>5</sup> Charles R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 5. Snyder comments in his endnotes that in previous work he used the term 'agency' instead of willpower and 'pathways' instead of waypower.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 75.

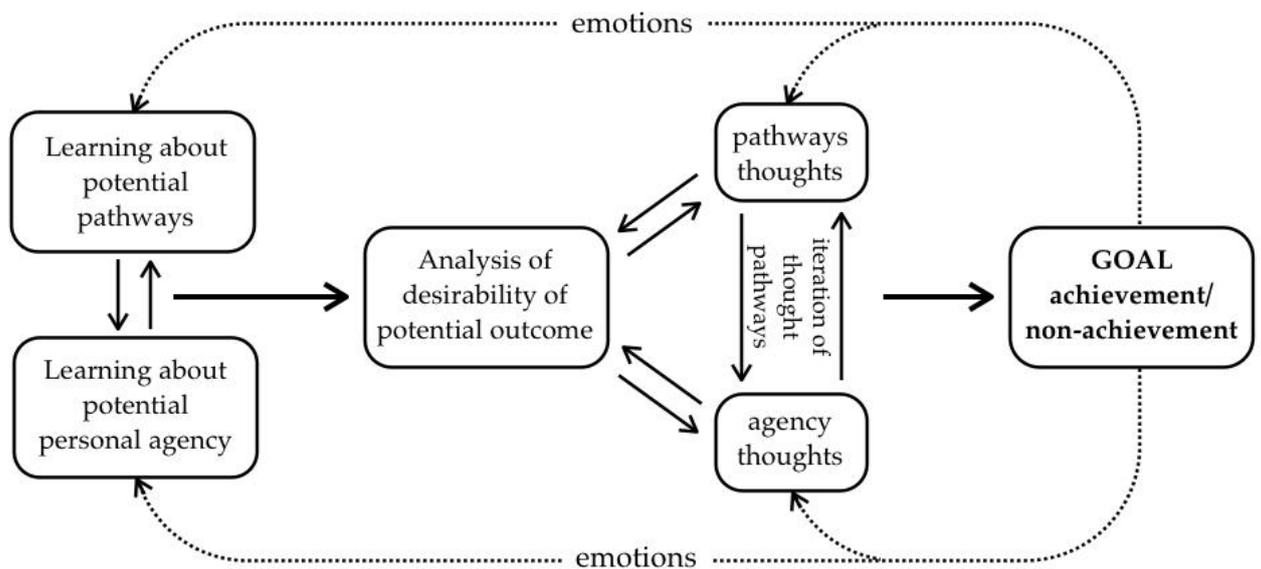
<sup>7</sup> Snyder, *Psychology*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> C.R. Snyder, *et al.*, 'Hope Theory: A Member of the Positive Psychology Family', in C.R. Snyder and S.J. López (eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258.

<sup>9</sup> Snyder *et al.*, 'Hope', 258.

describes hope as ‘a personal rainbow of the mind’, which, like the meteorological phenomenon, ‘lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible’.<sup>10</sup> Located thus ‘in the mind’, hope’s cognitive character becomes evident.

Diagram 1 below, based on Snyder’s own diagram, clearly depicts the cognitive movement involved in his theory. The whole diagram represents the state of hope; this state is ‘motivational’ because the general direction of the arrows is towards the goal. However, the addition of cognitive process at each stage of the diagram leads to significant learning potential, illustrated here by arrows in both directions. Such thinking serves to modulate the content of the proposed goal (here, the ‘analysis of desirability of potential outcome’) based on experience and reflection about available levels of agency and open pathways (that is, the ability both to reach the goal and to find ways of reaching it). Goals are thus revised in order to maintain a state of hope. Crucially, emotions occur in Snyder’s theory as part of the feedback process. Upon completion or non-completion of the goal, the consequent positive or negative emotions feed into subsequent analyses of other potential goals, pathways and agencies. Hopeful (or unhopeful) emotions are thus a result of successful (or unsuccessful) cognition; in Snyder’s words, ‘goal-pursuit cognitions cause emotions’.<sup>11</sup> The apprehension of these emotions also becomes a creative element in subsequent cognition: ‘hope theory involves an interrelated system of goal-directed thinking that is responsive to feedback at various points in the temporal sequence.’<sup>12</sup>



*Diagram 1. The cognitive process of Hope Theory<sup>13</sup>*

Hope Theory thus suggests itself as a promising model for consideration by practical theology because its coupling of emotion and cognition coincides with a key

<sup>10</sup> Charles R. Snyder, ‘Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind’, *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002), 269.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder *et al.*, ‘Hope’, 258.

<sup>12</sup> Snyder *et al.*, ‘Hope’, 260.

<sup>13</sup> Developed from Snyder *et al.*, ‘Hope’, 259.

affirmation of the Christian message: that hope is not merely a passive response to favourable circumstances, but rather a confident expectation that creative transformation can and will occur – even, a *positive motivational state*.<sup>14</sup>

### Hope Theory: Pitfalls and Possibilities

Snyder's model is not without its critics. For instance, Tong *et al.* question Snyder's proposal that hope is associated with both agency and pathways (willpower and waypower). They claim that there is a 'discrepancy' between Snyder's model and the way in which laypeople in fact experience hope. Their proposal, which they test through four empirical studies, is that laypeople do not usually include pathways thinking in their understanding of hope: hope is connected only with agency – the sense that goals can be attained.<sup>15</sup> This is, of course, what Snyder himself noted: that the prevailing view of hope is dominated by the sense that one has the willpower to reach one's goals.

Tong *et al.* note that their research is not conclusive, but their proposal does at least draw our attention to an important consideration of Christian theology which also needs to be brought into critical conversation with Snyder's model; that is, that Christian hope is not entirely dependent on resources latent within the hopeful individual, but rather looks extraneously to God. Tong *et al.* comment:

Snyder's model seems most relevant to situations where people are still able to change the environment in their favour. However, there are other kinds of hope situations where such personal influence would lose its relevance...For example, some religious perspectives encourage a hope that has little to do with personal strength, such as the biblical hope for redemption of the world.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, while Snyder intends his model to be 'more heuristic' than the prevailing view of hope,<sup>17</sup> Tong *et al.* believe that his complexification of the model by the combination of pathways and agency thinking in fact makes it *less* heuristic, because it is applicable only in certain circumstances where such personal control in the attainment of hope is possible. For instance, in the sentence, 'I hope the weather will be fine tomorrow', the word 'hope' is in use, but personal control is inapplicable.<sup>18</sup> Snyder's rebuttal would presumably be semantic: such 'hope' for fine weather is in fact either wishful thinking or optimism, depending upon the probabilities provided by meteorological forecasts; the 'hope' about which his theory speaks is the genuinely personal 'hope' that motivates human action.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Rom. 8.18ff.

<sup>15</sup> Eddie M.W. Tong, *et al.*, 'Re-examining Hope: The Roles of Agency Thinking and Pathways Thinking', *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 7 (2010), 1207–1215.

<sup>16</sup> Tong *et al.*, 'Hope', 1213–1214.

<sup>17</sup> Snyder *et al.*, 'Hope', 257.

<sup>18</sup> Tong *et al.*, 'Hope', 1214.

<sup>19</sup> For a helpful discussion of the differences between hope, wishful thinking and optimism, see Fraser Watts, *Theology and Psychology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 138–141.

However, a concern remains: is Snyder's account of hope as heuristic as he intends? Tong *et al.* have rightly identified that Hope Theory appears to be overly invested in the capacity of individuals to generate the willpower and waypower needed to attain their goals. From a Christian perspective, it is simply *prima facie* false that hope is reliant upon an individual's personal capabilities. Indeed, the central theological motif of hope is resurrection – as, for instance, articulated in the Christian funeral service – and such an act of resurrection is obviously not a latent capacity in the person being raised! Without wanting to suggest that humans are thoroughly incapacitated (which would be a doctrinal blunder resulting from insufficient attention to the goodness of God's creation), it remains the case that the central basis of hope articulated by the Christian faith is an action external to the Christian individual: hope for the definitive coming of *Jesus* to renew the earth as his own kingdom.

Despite this concern, Snyder's model remains an attractive psychological account of hope for use within Christian ministry, not least because its inclusion of cognitive function coheres with the biblical injunction to renew our minds in light of the Christian hope. That this inclusion of cognitive function is *also* the root cause of the criticism leveled above simply means that careful work will need to be done in order to safeguard Hope Theory against an over-dependence on human ability to create the conditions for hope. In the remainder of this article, we thus need to propose some necessary critical modulations of Snyder's theory, in order that its constructive potential can be put to use within Christian ministry. One way to do this, which will be followed here, is to re-plot Snyder's model once we have given a fuller account of the interrelations between emotions, cognition and community.

## Emotions and Cognition

Eysenck and Keane note that the role of emotions in cognitive psychology has only recently become a matter for research and comment.<sup>20</sup> Often, emotions have been considered only as they affect cognition – so, for instance, the effect that a person's mood might have on his or her cognitive function is a matter for observation and study.<sup>21</sup> However, there is an increasing body of research that traces the connection in the other direction – that is, the influence that cognition may have on emotion. Central to this research is the following consideration: do stimuli require cognitive processing in order for an affective response (emotion) to occur? The answer to this is a matter of debate among psychologists. On the one hand, Zajonc argues that emotional processing can occur independently of cognitive processing; on the other hand, Lazarus argues that 'cognitive appraisal' is crucial for the experiencing of

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<sup>20</sup> Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook* (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2000), 489.

<sup>21</sup> This direction of the relationship between emotions and cognition is articulated in Edward J. Lawler and Shane R. Thye, 'Bringing Emotions into Social Exchange Theory', *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (August 1999), 217–244.

emotions.<sup>22</sup> A mediating position is to suggest that emotional processing requires cognitive processing, but that this cognitive process does not always have to be conscious. In other words, Zajonc's 'independent' emotions may well simply be the result of sub- or un-conscious cognitive activity. This reasonable suggestion allows us to continue with our exploration of the connection between cognition and emotion. It is probable that there is some circularity (or, perhaps, *spirality*) in this connection, with cognition producing emotion, and emotion in turn affecting cognition.

As noted above, Snyder perceives hopeful emotions to be the result of goal-directed cognitive processes, thus locating him clearly in Lazarus' camp. In turn, the resultant emotions feed back into subsequent cognitive activity. Snyder notes that he agrees with the 'functionalist' view of emotions articulated by R. W. Levenson in 1994:

Emotions serve to establish our position vis-à-vis our environment, pulling us toward certain people, objects, actions, and ideas, and pushing us away from others.<sup>23</sup>

For Snyder, the emotions that feed into one's analysis of the potentiality of reaching one's goals strongly affect a person's motivational state of hope, whether positively or negatively. Sometimes, these emotions may arise out of situations entirely unrelated to the actual goal that is desired – he references a beautiful sunset or a terrible car crash, both of which have the ability to produce an intense emotion that will feed into the ongoing agency and pathways thinking of a person. As Snyder puts it:

the hope model contains both feed-forward and feedback emotion-laden mechanisms that contribute to the person's success in his or her goal pursuits.<sup>24</sup>

In short, emotions function something like cognitive highlighters, drawing attention to the willpower and waypower thoughts that are relevant to the cultivation of hope in a particular situation.

Robert Roberts, a Christian psychologist, has proposed an understanding of emotions as 'concern-based construals', by which he means that emotions are 'states in which the subject grasps, with a kind of perceptual immediacy, a significance of his or her situation'.<sup>25</sup> Without defending the intricacies of Roberts' argument,<sup>26</sup> his general point is useful for our purposes. Emotions and cognition are fundamentally connected to each other because emotions arise as a result of the particular concerns

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<sup>22</sup> For a brief summary of their respective views, see Eysenck and Keane, *Psychology*, 490–492.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Snyder, 'Rainbows', 254.

<sup>24</sup> Snyder, 'Rainbows', 255.

<sup>25</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 11.

<sup>26</sup> For which, see Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

that hold cognitive attention in a person's life. So, a gardener who is concerned for the well-being of a newly planted lawn will feel anxiety as days pass without rain. Persistent emotions of this nature may cause the individual to reappraise the initial concern: it becomes no longer a concern for the lawn to flourish, but now simply that it will not die. In this way, emotions feed the cognitive perception of hope.

Hope, then, is an interpretive model that allows an individual to incorporate experienced emotions into a coherent personal narrative. Seen in this way, emotions are less arbitrary and more grounded in a person's life. Emotions interact with the cognitive processes of pathways and agency thinking, either lending support to the overall sense that the desired goal can be reached, or causing what support there is to disintegrate. As we move towards a Christian model of hope, we must keep in mind the key role that emotions have in sustaining a state of hope.

### **Social Emotions**

An important psychologist to include in our conversation here is James Averill, who characteristically describes emotions as creative products, in contrast to what he sees as the prevailing view that tends to disparage emotions as 'holdovers from our prehuman animal heritage'.<sup>27</sup> In the book he co-authored with Elma Nunley, *Voyages of the Heart*, Averill presents a 'constructionist' view of emotions which celebrates their creative potential within mature human life.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, emotions do not simply remain static and unchanging, as if they were pre-programmed responses to particular stimuli; instead, emotions should be allowed to be 'open to discovery, exploration, and challenge'.<sup>29</sup>

Two aspects of Averill's work stand out for our present purposes. First, such a valuing of emotions is not an excuse for 'the frivolous display of one's emotional bric-a-brac', but is rather an invitation to disciplined self-appraisal and transformation.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Averill seeks to recover the *social* moorings of emotions: 'Emotions are not just individual "happenings"; they are the living embodiment of the values of a society.'<sup>31</sup> The contemporary world often sees emotions as intensely private and personal, but Averill and Nunley seek to demonstrate that emotions in fact 'form a bridge between the self and society'.<sup>32</sup> The role of society in our experience of stimuli and our consequent emotions must not be underestimated.

This social habitat of emotions is helpfully explored by Douglas Davies in his recent book, *Emotion, Identity and Religion*. He too notes the connection between emotions and social values, calling them the 'two driving forces of human life' that 'interplay

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<sup>27</sup> See James R. Averill, 'Emotional Creativity: Toward "spiritualizing the passions"', in C.R. Snyder and S.J. López (eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 172–185.

<sup>28</sup> James R. Averill and Elma P. Nunley, *Voyages of the Heart: Living an Emotionally Creative Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Averill and Nunley, *Voyages*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Averill and Nunley, *Voyages*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Averill and Nunley, *Voyages*, 290.

<sup>32</sup> Averill and Nunley, *Voyages*, 301.

at all times in creating and maintaining human identity'.<sup>33</sup> He makes a useful distinction between feelings and emotions: *feelings* refer to 'the many sensations and experiences that individuals have each moment of their life', while *emotions* are 'the names a society gives to selected feelings'.<sup>34</sup> Societies – or groups within a society – possess distinctive 'emotional repertoires' made up of the preferred emotions that group members should feel. These emotions are often rehearsed through shared activities or rituals, which simultaneously bind the group together around a set of core values. In turn, participating in these rituals serves as a powerful heuristic tool to induct new members into the core values and emotions of the group. Being 'schooled' in an emotional repertoire is thus an essential part of belonging to the group, and becoming cognizant of its particular understanding of life.<sup>35</sup>

These insights suggest an interesting direction of development for a model of hope that is aware of the importance of both cognitive and emotional elements. Hope cannot be cultivated in individual isolation. Rather, the purposive goals and hopeful emotions that are necessary for hope to exist arise most habitually within *social* interactions. While Snyder's Hope Theory is not ignorant of such social connections,<sup>36</sup> it is noticeable that the model is predominantly individualistic. Practical theology's development of Snyder's model must therefore endeavour to expand the account of hope at every stage of the cognitive process to include the influence of social life. It is a fundamental tenet of Christian faith that the hope it posits is not individual, but corporate – indeed universal: the renewal of the world.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the kind of emotional transformation envisaged by Christian faith occurs within a social context: the community of saints, across the world and through the ages. The implications of this must be factored into any model of hope utilised by Christian ministry.

### A Brief Theology of Hope

Before moving on to the construction of such a model of hope, we must pause briefly to explore the notion of hope from a theological perspective. Hope is, of course, a 'key word in Biblical faith',<sup>38</sup> but it has gathered a particular nuance within recent theological discourse due to a loose association of theologians often referred to as theologians of hope. Historically, the 'theology of hope' movement began in the mid-twentieth century in reaction to the dominance of the de-eschatologised theology of German liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth century. The key theological figures of Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Jenson span, but do not exhaust, the development of this perspective. We will sketch here a couple of notable contours of

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<sup>33</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity, and Otherness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>34</sup> Davies, *Emotion*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2, 'Ritual, Values, and Emotions', in Davies, *Emotion*, 37–67.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Timothy R. Elliott and Elisabeth D. Sherwin's paper, 'Developing Hope in the Social Context: Alternative Perspectives of Motive, Meaning, and Identity', *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research and Practice* 1, no. 2 (1997), 119–123.

<sup>37</sup> Rom. 8.20–21.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi: Encyclical Letter* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2007), 3.

this current theological reflection about hope, inevitably with a degree of systematic schematisation.

*First, underpinning the theology of hope is the proposition that all reality is structured eschatologically.* This coincides with a general recognition in contemporary theology that created reality is narrational in nature – a thought mirrored in other social sciences by the turn towards narrative as a key explanatory concept. To say that reality is *eschatological* is simply to take this one step further and affirm that creation's narrative is moving towards a particular end, a denouement. Robert Jenson, in his characteristically bold style, states that eschatological narrativity is in fact what gives God's creation its structural integrity:

God does not create a world that thereupon has a history; he creates a history that is a world, in that it is purposive and so makes a whole.<sup>39</sup>

Eschatology, for so long seen as an unnecessary radical addition to the true, ethical core of the Christian message, is here recognised as the primal rhythm embodied by God's creation: the world occurs, as it were, along the trajectory of God's promise. Hope is a kind of epistemological lens that is able to bring such movement from promise to fulfillment into focus. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it, hope recognises the influence of God's future in the present and so 'makes the present historical'<sup>40</sup> – in other words, hope allows the present to be seen in relationship with its denouement in God's eschatological future, and so creates the sense that the world's narrative is moving from one episode to the next. Theologically speaking, hope creates history.

*Secondly, the denouement of Christian eschatology – and so the object of Christian hope – is given describable content by the resurrection of Jesus.* The outlandish claim of Christian theology is that the ultimate fulfillment of creation's narrative has already been prefigured by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Pannenberg describes this as the 'unity between what happened in Jesus and the eschatological future'<sup>41</sup> – the one guarantees and underwrites the other. This connection between Jesus' resurrection and ultimate Christian hope for the *eschaton* is clearly indicated in the New Testament, not least by the Apostle Paul who observes that if Jesus were not in fact raised from the dead, then both faith and hope would be futile.<sup>42</sup> Christian hope, in other words, is not a vague optimism about the arrival of some unspecified future, marginally better than the present; rather, it is the audacious conviction that the resurrection of Jesus is the historical anticipation of the future renewal of all things and the coming of God's kingdom – or, as the Apostles' Creed has it, 'the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting'. The resurrection of Jesus thus provides the proper goal for Christian hope: the world is to be such a place in which the risen Christ can be at home. Hope 'sees in the resurrection of Christ ... the future

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<sup>39</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>40</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 183.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 109.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor. 15.17–19.

of the very earth on which his cross stands'.<sup>43</sup> The Old Testament prophets grasped this future in their poetics: 'let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream'.<sup>44</sup> But a theology of Christian hope is able to put flesh on these prophetic bones by describing a past event – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – as the guaranteed shape of an anticipated future. Not only does hope create history, hope also provides the describable denouement of that history: the triumph of Jesus and his love.<sup>45</sup>

*Thirdly, hope is the proper mode of life lived in anticipation of this eschatological culmination.* Hope, where it occurs in human life, is the subjective counterpart to the objective occurrence of Jesus' resurrection and our anticipated participation in this along with the renewal of all things. As such, hope is a specifically Christian mode of being, in which the future of Jesus and his love is anticipated in the present. Thomas Torrance helpfully describes this as the dynamic way in which

we are caught up in a vectorial movement that runs counter to the regressive flow of corruption and decay and carries us forward into the future to the final and full disclosure of our real being in Christ.<sup>46</sup>

It is impossible not to recall here Snyder's description of hope as a 'positive motivational state'. Christian hope is not simply a matter of standing by, watching God's eschatological activity, but rather a matter of being 'caught up' in that activity, a movement that would be described theologically via a discussion of Spirit and Church, pneumatology and ecclesiology. With this third point – the fostering of hope as a mode of human life, a particular 'motivational state' – we have reentered the primary subject matter of this article, to which we must now return.

## A Model of Christian Hope

First, a few parameters to keep in mind as we develop Snyder's Hope Theory for Christian ministry:

- (1) *This model of hope seeks to trace the practice of Christian hope, rather than its content.*  
We must be aware of the semantic range of the word 'hope'. While 'Christian

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<sup>43</sup> Moltmann, *Hope*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Amos 5.24.

<sup>45</sup> The reason for identifying Jesus' *love* as the describable future posited by Christian hope is explained by Robert Jenson, via the intriguing concept of 'the antinomy of hope'. The argument goes thus: hope, if it is attained, is no longer hope, but rather certainty. This is troubling, since according to 1 Cor. 13.13, hope is something that 'remains', even in the eschatological future. The 'antinomy of hope' is that for hope to be hope rather than mere wishful thinking, it must propose an attainable future; yet if that future is attained, then hope is no longer hope. This antinomy is only resolved theologically by articulating the true content of Christian hope as hope for the specific love of the triune divine persons, which is not a static fulfilment, but rather a future full of further hope. In Jenson's words, 'If I hope to be loved by and to love someone and to my joy find this hope fulfilled, the very same hope has then its true beginning, for the hope is identified not by impersonal benefits but by the personhood of the beloved.' Jenson, *Theology*, vol. 2, 321.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), 90.

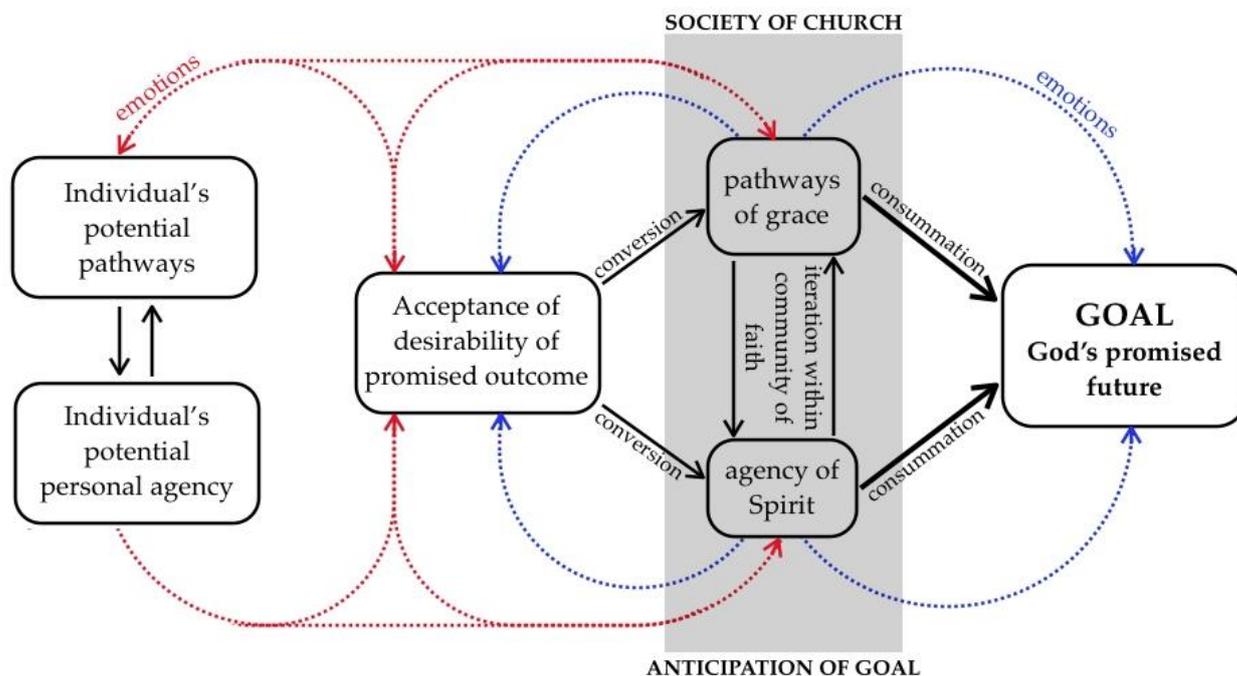
hope' can also refer to the object of hope (which in this case would be the eschatological kingdom of Christ), the term below will be used primarily in its subjective aspect as a state of being. The preceding theological sketch has shown that these two aspects of hope are not unrelated; however, it is important to be clear that what the subsequent model seeks to foster is not a particular content, but rather a particular motivational state.

- (2) *Christian hope is an essentially social motivational state.* Here, practical theology must buck the trends of much twentieth-century theology and of contemporary secularism, which both envisage faith as a fundamentally private matter. Christian hope is not a hope for personal salvation disconnected from the salvation of the rest of the human or material world. The theological concept of the *totus Christus* will thus be operative in the following model of hope: whatever is generated within the Christian individual is a result of incorporation into the body of Christ.
- (3) *Christian hope is a gift given in anticipation of and as a guarantee for a promised future.* Our revised model of hope will have to come to terms with the very odd nature of Christian faith, which is that it grows out of the future rather than from the past. Consequently, some of the logic of Snyder's model will need to be reworked. For instance, whereas in Snyder's theory the object of hope was to be generated from an individual's assessment of the desirability of potential goals, in a Christian theory of hope this goal is already posited by the promise of God. Moreover, Christian faith is fundamentally constituted by a conviction that God will keep his promises. This, in turn, makes the cultivation of hope for this particular outcome all the more pressing, because without such hope – as has already been highlighted above by reference to the Apostle Paul – Christian faith is meaningless. Conversely, the growth of such hope is itself a kind of guarantee of the promised future; Scripture puts this down to the work of God's Spirit.<sup>47</sup>
- (4) *Finally, a Christian theory of hope will include an account of emotions.* It is suggested here that a model of the motivational state of hope in God's future is the interpretative tool necessary to incorporate human emotions into a coherent narrative.

With these parameters in mind, the following account of Christian hope is offered, as a critical development of Snyder's Hope Theory: *Christian hope is a positive motivational state based upon the confidence that both the agency and the pathways posited by the triune God, in and for the Church, will attain their intended goal.*

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Eph. 1.13-14.



*Diagram 2. The Cognitive and Emotional Processes in Christian Hope*

The diagram above indicates the cognitive stages and emotional processes at work in Christian hope: cognitive stages are depicted by rounded boxes, while emotional processes are represented by dotted lines. The 'positive motivational state' of hope occurs when an individual can be located along the trajectory of this diagram, moving from left to right. At the far left, the two connected boxes indicate the potential pathways and agency of an 'un-hoped' person, someone who is yet to encounter the hope held out by Christian faith. At the far right of the diagram is the posited goal of Christian hope, God's promised future, the triumph of Jesus and his love. In between is the motivational state of hope, which consists of, first, an acceptance of the desirability of the outcome promised by Christian faith, and secondly, a set of pathways and an agency by which an individual may move towards the intended goal.

In annotating this diagram, the following observations can be made:

- (1) Unlike Snyder's original model, the pathways and agency potentials of the individual are here not directly related to the goal of Christian hope. Hope's goal is in fact prescribed by God, rather than being the result of combining an individual's pathways and agency thoughts. Here, this is represented at the beginning of the motivational state of hope by the use of the words 'acceptance' and 'conversion'. Our model disconnects a person's latent potential from the ability of that person to participate fully in the agency and pathways of hope. Practically and pastorally, this means that all people can be invited to hope, since this is not dependent in any way upon their innate capacities.

- (2) Although there is no direct cognitive movement from a person's potential pathways and agency to the actual pathways and agency of hope, these elements are in fact connected by an *emotional* cycle, represented by the red dotted lines. A useful definition of emotions, used by Douglas Davies, is that 'An emotion is a temporary feeling state that acquires narrative content and leads to a predisposition to act.'<sup>48</sup> The feelings that surround acceptance of the Christian hope (perhaps joy at being set free from past failure, or anxiety over a perceived loss of moral freedom) often form into a recognisable narrative, sometimes told as a 'conversion story'. It must be stressed, however, that this cycle of emotions will continue to change and develop throughout a person's participation in the pathways and agency of hope, indicating how that person views the desirability of the goal of Christian hope in relation to the other hopes that may be available to him or her. In pastoral ministry, it is important to be aware of this cycle of emotions since it is a good indication of a person's willingness to participate in the processes of hope. To put this the other way around, members of the Church who detach themselves from corporate life may well be struggling to accept the desirability of Christian hope above other hopes.
- (3) Thirdly, the pathways and agency of hope occur within a *social* context – that is, in this case, the context of the Church. As both Averill and Davies indicated, societies can be transformative contexts, since they exert considerable influence upon an individual to conform to the values held by that society, which in turn filters the experience of emotions. Such a society could be oppressive if its values turned out in fact to be contrary to the common good of that society's members; however, the Church is grounded in the assumption that the values it attempts to exhibit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness – are in fact good for its members, since they anticipate the consummation of the Church's hope in God's future. Snyder's notions of waypower and willpower are reworked in our model: waypower becomes the 'pathways of grace', which are provided by God within the life of the Church, variously filled out by differing theological traditions but usually including Word and Sacraments; willpower becomes the 'agency of the Spirit', who provides the necessary momentum to move static or sluggish human life into the pathways of God's coming kingdom.
- (4) Finally, there is thus a second cycle of emotions, represented here by the blue dotted lines. As individuals participate in the pathways of grace, resourced by the agency of the Spirit, they begin to inhabit the emotional repertoire of the community of faith – another set of feelings that have less to do with their own potential pathways and agency, and more to do with the promised goal of hope: so, for instance, expectancy about the possibility of transformation, or a feeling of compassion for others to be included in God's future. The presence of these emotional responses reveals the extent of a person's assimilation to the values of the community of faith; in other words, these emotions coincide with their formation as a disciple of Jesus.

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<sup>48</sup> Loyal Rue, quoted in Davies, *Emotion*, 26.

## Key Learning about Hope for Christian Ministry

The model of hope suggested by this diagram remains a work in progress, offered here in the conviction that the practice of developing ways of nurturing hope is incumbent on all who are engaged in Christian ministry. While the model – and the diagram – will inevitably need to undergo much revision, if not complete dismemberment, there are certain points of key learning that have been established by the process so far.

First, we can now provide some reasonably straightforward answers to the questions with which this article began. Is hope an emotion? Yes, but not only so: hope also includes a cognitive element – the ability to assent to viable goals and to recognise pathways that lead from the present to the future. Putting cognition and emotion together gives a basic working definition of hope as ‘a positive motivational state’. Next, what is an emotion anyway? In response, we have benefited from the work of Douglas Davies, who notes that an emotion is a society’s or group’s name for a feeling that falls within a recognised and preferred repertoire. Moreover, hope belongs to the emotional repertoire of the Christian community, perhaps even as its most characteristic emotion, responding to the audacious content of Christian faith which posits a future in which Jesus and his love triumph. Finally, is hope individual or corporate? As we have seen, while hope is the positive motivational state of any individual, it is nurtured by and within the community of faith. It is to the Church that God gives his Spirit, as the agency of hope; and it is in and by the Church that the pathways of grace are discovered and iterated.

Secondly, a more general comment about the task of cultivating hope in Christian ministry can be offered. The model of hope presented above doggedly refuses to allow hope to be a simple matter; consequently, Christian ministry must also operate with a sufficient degree of sophistication. For a start, attention needs to be given to both sides of hope – individual and corporate – both of which maintain an emotional cycle. Fostering individual hope requires careful exploration of the desirability of God’s promised future, in order to facilitate the ongoing process of conversion from a state of ‘un-hope’ to hope. But the hope of the community of faith also needs to be developed. This community, as our model shows, has moved beyond the stage of accepting the desirability of God’s promised future, and its hope is now sustained by participation in the ‘pathways of grace’ by the ‘agency of the Spirit’. The hopeful waypower and willpower of the Christian community give rise to a distinctive emotional repertoire, which in turn is rehearsed through the regular practices of the community: praise, confession, intercession, learning, mission, action. Those who lead these practices should be increasingly aware of how their activities promote (or, unfortunately, in some cases, obstruct) hope for a specific community. Perhaps a useful question to be held in mind by all Christian ministers would be something like the following: how does my word, action or attitude *here* leave this group of people (and the individuals within it) openly expectant for God’s promised future?

Finally, a self-critical comment is required. The model of hope proposed here – like all psychological models – possesses the dangerous attraction of systematic precision. It hardly needs to be said that both human life and Christian ministry are far more complicated than boxes and arrows suggest. This is not, of course, to discredit the work above; models like these provide us with a great deal of heuristic capability that would be otherwise inaccessible. However, the neatness of the diagram is already worrying. In particular, the disconnection between an individual's potential pathways and personal agency – referred to earlier as a person's 'un-hoped' state – and the pathways and agency available to that individual within the 'motivational state of hope' is troubling. This disconnect was driven by the conviction that Christian hope arises purely as a possibility generated by God's eschatological activity, rather than as a result of human potentiality; it is, after all, a hope for *resurrection*. Yet, as Robert Jenson reminds us, there must be some degree of connection between a person's 'un-hoped' state and their hopeful participation in the anticipation of God's promised goal:

If the gospel is indeed to be news decisive for those who, at a time and place, are there to hear it, it must be news about the projected fulfillments and feared damnations by which people's lives are then and there moved.<sup>49</sup>

Here is at least one aspect of our model which requires further consideration. Christian ministry should never repeat a banal exhortation simply to 'Have hope!'; Christian hope speaks into specific situations – 'projected fulfillments and feared damnations' – with the cheering news that Jesus and his love will triumph, that the present episode of life, along with all others, will find its denouement in God's eschatological kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

Charles Snyder's Hope Theory offers competent psychological resources to Christian ministry for the task of nurturing hope within the Christian community and among its members. Granted, Snyder's theory has been modulated along the way – especially by engaging with the notion of social emotions – but his seminal insight that hope is a 'positive motivational state' has been demonstrably productive for our subsequent reflection. It is incumbent on Christian ministry to develop a sufficiently sophisticated understanding of hope and its cultivation, and the model suggested here begins to undertake this work. Ultimately, the function of such a model of hope within the Christian community is to sustain the practice of hope itself – the persistent confidence that both the agency and the pathways posited by the triune God, in and for the Church, will attain their intended goal.

[www.theologyandministry.org](http://www.theologyandministry.org)

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<sup>49</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15.

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