

## On Hope: Critical Re-readings

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**Abstract:** Some recent discussions of Christian hope refer to the difficulties posed for a theology of hope in view of aspects of contemporary thought. Of particular interest here are those discussions that include reference to the thinking of Jacques Derrida, and the way in which in his work he makes use of a messianic structure yet seems to exclude the possibility of any realised messianic hope.<sup>1</sup> While there are aspects of Derrida's thought that pose challenges for Christianity, a dialogue with Derrida and others can also help to open up theology to its own best possibilities. In what follows I propose to pursue such a dialogue, especially in the light of specific issues raised by James K. A. Smith.

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### Derrida's hope

Much of Derrida's writing concerns the possibility of openness to the completely other ("the impossible"), to an event that cannot be expected, planned for, recuperated or accommodated within the circle, however we might characterise it (structure, reason, the economy, or a horizon of meaning, for example). Justice, love, forgiveness, the gift, and so on, exemplify the impossible. As promise, the impossible impassions and motivates us but remains part of an absolute future that cannot be presented as such.<sup>2</sup> Its conditions of possibility are, equally, its conditions

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the chapters by James K. A. Smith and Kevin L. Hughes in Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg, eds., *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 200-227; 101-124; John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 117-159; John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) 156-180.

<sup>2</sup> "... another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design." Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York/London: Routledge, 1994) 75.

of impossibility (the gift, for example, must be given in complete freedom, but we always risk reducing it to being an element of exchange once it is recognised as a gift).<sup>3</sup> The impossible enables the circle to turn but remains exterior to it, although it is not simply transcendent to the circle:

the overrunning of the circle by the gift, if there is any, does not lead to a simple, ineffable exteriority that would be transcendent and without relation. It is this exteriority that sets the circle going, it is this exteriority that puts the economy in motion. It is this exteriority that engages in the circle and makes it turn.”<sup>4</sup>

In an important passage from *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes democracy as the impossible or as the event, and sets out the relationship of democracy to hope. I quote at length because this passage contains so many of the key features of Derrida’s thought on these matters:

the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the arrivant from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), just opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited as such, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope—and this is the very place of spectrality. It would be easy, too easy, to show that such a hospitality without reserve, which is nevertheless the condition of the event and thus of history (nothing and no one would arrive otherwise, a hypothesis that one can never exclude, of course), is the impossible itself, and that this condition of possibility of the event is also its condition of impossibility, like this strange concept of messianism without content, of the messianic without messianism, that guides us here like the blind. But it would be

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<sup>3</sup> Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) 1-18.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 30.

just as easy to show that without this experience of the impossible, one might as well give up on both justice and the event.<sup>5</sup>

In so far as the impossible can be awaited but cannot arrive in the present, Derrida's thinking of it has a messianic structure, but it is messianic without reference to a particular messiah. It is messianic in form, but not, apparently, in substance.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, John D. Caputo argues that Derrida's messianic thought cannot only be formal, since that would oppose the very concrete historical and particular engagement of deconstruction, and repeat the violence of metaphysics in the establishment of an overarching, transcendental structure. Instead, Caputo maintains that deconstruction is another messianism—in the style of, and alongside the Abrahamic religious messianisms.<sup>7</sup> In his longing for justice, or for democracy-to-come, Derrida is completely engaged rather than removed and speaking at the level of

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 65. See also, for example, Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, *Religion*, eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 1-78, 17ff.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 167ff; Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 16ff. See also the later clarification: "A messianicity *without* messianism is not a watered-down messianism, a diminishment of the force of the messianic expectation. It is a different structure, a structure of existence that I attempt to take into account by way of a reference less to religious traditions than to possibilities whose analysis I would like to pursue, refine, complicate, *and* contest - ... the possibility of taking into account, *on the one* hand, a paradoxical experience of the performative of the promise (but also of the threat at the heart of the promise) that organizes every speech act, every other performative, and even every preverbal experience of the relation to the other; and, *on the other* hand, at the point of intersection with this threatening promise, the horizon of awaiting [*attente*] that informs our relationship to time – to the event, to that which happens [*ce qui arrive*], to the one who arrives [*l'arrivant*] and to the other. Involved this time, however, would be a waiting without waiting, a waiting whose horizon is, as it were, punctured by the event (which is waited for *without* being awaited.... No future, no time-to-come [*à-venir*], no other, otherwise; no event worthy of the name, no revolution. At *the point of intersection* of these two styles of thought (speech-act theory and the onto-phenomenology of temporal and historical existence), but also against both of them, the interpretation of the messianic that I propose does not ... much resemble Benjamin's. It no longer has *any* essential connection with what messianism may be taken to mean, that is, at least two things: on the one hand, the memory of a determinate historical revelation, whether Jewish or Judeo-Christian, and, on the other, a relatively determinate messiah-figure." Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons," *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinkler (London: Verso, 1999) 213-269, 250-251.

<sup>7</sup> See Caputo, *Prayers and Tears* 134-143; Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 168-180; James K. A. Smith, "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 78 (1998): 197-212; James K. A. Smith, "Re-Kanting Postmodernism? Derrida's Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone," *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 558-571.

theory.<sup>8</sup> He makes an impassioned commitment to the messianic.<sup>9</sup> Yet in his insistence that the “messiah” remains in the absolute future, Derrida rejects the belief that any finite (for which we might also read “determined”) instantiation of justice, or democracy, or the messiah, will be adequate to the task.<sup>10</sup>

In an article in the previous issue of this journal, I discussed Derrida’s critique of any religious faith that purports to know its object.<sup>11</sup> The reference also concerns the claim of any determined object of hope:

At some point, you ... translate your faith into something determinable, and then you have to keep the ‘name’ of the resurrection. My own understanding of faith is that there is faith whenever one gives up not only certainty but also any determined hope. If one says that resurrection is the horizon of one’s hope, then one knows what one

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<sup>8</sup> As he later explains: “Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe) is anything but Utopian: it refers, in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most irreducibly heterogenous otherness. Nothing is more ‘realistic’ or ‘immediate’ than this messianic apprehension, straining forward toward the event of him who/that which is coming.” “As this unconditional messianicity *must* thereafter negotiate its conditions in one or another singular, practical situation, we have to do here with the locus of an analysis and evaluation, and, therefore, of a responsibility.” Derrida, “Marx and Sons,” 248, 249. “To all this I would oppose ... everything I placed earlier under the title of the im-possible, of what must remain (in a non-negative fashion) foreign to the order of my possibilities, to the order of the ‘I can,’ to the theoretical, descriptive, constative, and performative orders (inasmuch as this latter still implies a power guaranteed for some ‘I’ by conventions that neutralize the pure eventfulness of the event). That is what I meant earlier by heteronomy, by a law come from the other, by a responsibility and decision of the other—of the other in me, an other greater and older than I am. This im-possible is not private. It is not the inaccessible, and it is not what I can indefinitely defer: it is announced to me, sweeps down on me, precedes me, and seizes me *here now*.... . . . . This im-possible is thus not a regulative *idea* or *ideal*. It is what is most undeniably *real*.” Jacques Derrida, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 85-136, 134.

<sup>9</sup> For Derrida this is a commitment to the messianic rather than to messianism, although he opens the possibility that his thought bears some relation to messianistic tradition. Derrida, “Marx and Sons,” 250-251.

<sup>10</sup> “... a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must be kept, that is, not to remain ‘spiritual’ or ‘abstract,’ but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 89.

<sup>11</sup> Robyn Horner, “On Faith: Relation to an Infinite Passing,” *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 13 (2009). Available at

[http://www.acu.edu.au/about\\_acu/faculties\\_schools\\_institutes/faculties/theology\\_and\\_philosophy/schools/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_13/](http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties_schools_institutes/faculties/theology_and_philosophy/schools/theology/ejournal/aejt_13/)

names when one says 'resurrection'—faith is not pure faith. It is already knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

As soon as the object of hope becomes known, in other words, it is reduced to the dimensions of human aspiration. Prayer, which we might normally situate in the context of hope, must for Derrida be characterised by a kind of hopelessness: "I am not expecting, I am not hoping: my prayer is hopeless, totally, totally hopeless. I think this hopelessness is part of what prayer should be." At the same time, in prayer we frequently re-enter the economy: "Yet I know there is hope, there is calculation. .... I know that in praying something happens...."<sup>13</sup> Where there is hope, there is always the beginning of a certain accounting: "... if one could count on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program."<sup>14</sup>

### Issues raised in relation to Derrida's thinking of hope

James K. A. Smith responds to Derrida's thinking of hope with a number of interrelated criticisms. Smith argues that by its very nature, hope cannot be indeterminate, and he seeks "to show (contra Derrida) that determinacy per se cannot disqualify particular hopes." He maintains: "indeed, hope must be determinate and cannot be otherwise. Christian hope thus cannot be excluded simply by virtue of its determinacy."<sup>15</sup> Determinacy need not be a necessary characteristic of hope if we are considering it in terms of epistemology or language (that we cannot fully know the object of hope does not present a problem for Smith), but it is certainly necessary for him if we are contemplating hope in an ontological or phenomenological register (ontological or phenomenological indeterminacy seems, to Smith, to undermine hope's very character as hope). Smith argues that by denying the possibility of a determined object of hope, Derrida denies the possibility of the phenomenon of hope

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida in Richard Kearney, ed., *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) 12.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, in John D. Caputo, Kevin Hart and Yvonne Sherwood, "Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Kevin Hart and Yvonne Sherwood (London: Routledge, 2004) 27-50, 31. See also the discussion in Martin Beck Matuščík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Postsecular Meditations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) 183.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 169.

<sup>15</sup> James K. A. Smith, "Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation," *The Future of Hope*, eds. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 200-227, 205.

as such.<sup>16</sup> In support of this position he undertakes a phenomenological analysis to show—in continuity with much of the theological discussion of hope—that there are five essential elements in hope’s structure if it is to be genuine: a hoper; an object of hope (which is good); a distinct intentional act of hoping; a ground (which enables it to be distinguished from wishful thinking); and the potential for fulfilment.<sup>17</sup> Christian hope, Smith maintains, exhibits this structure, even while demonstrating a degree of nescience with regard to the precise bounds of hope. In this way, Christian hope remains possible.

As an initial consideration, we could ask whether responding to Derrida with a phenomenological analysis really addresses his critique, since Derrida is not doing phenomenology but is instead often suggesting ways in which phenomenology—to the extent that it remains within a metaphysical framework—inevitably fails. Derrida’s negative reference to the horizon of one’s hope is indicative of his approach; the necessity of the horizon for phenomenology is one of Smith’s key discussion points, and it is one that Derrida does not dispute. Having a horizon for one’s hope, where it is effectively brought into being, is precisely what Derrida seeks to avoid.<sup>18</sup> Evidently, the need to think hope in terms of its object and according to being or a phenomenological horizon, is part of what Smith sees as a theological bottom line: for Smith, it makes no sense to speak of hope without reference to what is or will be given in some way as a phenomenon that can be affirmed. We will need to consider whether a characterisation of the messianic such as Derrida’s completely undermines its theological use.

Questioning the need for indeterminacy with regard to the object of hope, Smith links determinacy with finitude, and then argues that Derrida is unnecessarily critical of the

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 207n230. See also Kevin L. Hughes, "The Crossing of Hope, or Apophatic Eschatology," *The Future of Hope*, eds. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 101-124, 104-105.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 207-209. For classic studies of hope, see, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, questions 62-67 and II-II, questions 17-22; and its 1935 summary in Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard Winston, Clara Winston and Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Although cf. the attempt “to head off initial reactions from post-foundationalists” in Smith, "Determined Hope," 204-205n.225.

finite.<sup>19</sup> The link between determinacy and finitude happens quite quickly in the text, but is an important step in Smith's argument. He distinguishes between "Justice Itself" and (the presumably temporal) Christian incarnations of justice, but then seems to imply that this distinction should not exclude those incarnations from being just as well (that is, justice does not need to be indeterminate). Smith slips immediately from the need to "maintain this critical posture" with regard to any identification of "our particular regime with 'Justice Itself'" (in other words, he affirms that finite incarnations of justice can never approximate infinite justice) to his summary of "Derrida's fundamental logic regarding determination and violence." This is that "determination itself is violent and leads to violence; therefore, in order to avoid violence we must have a hope which is indeterminate; and ... our mode of expecting [it] must be 'without horizon'."<sup>20</sup> Yet Smith maintains that finitude is "violent and exclusionary only if one assumes that finitude is somehow a 'failure,'" and that "Derrida conflates ... 'the historical production of violence' with the 'necessary production of violence' in its relation to religion."<sup>21</sup> What is interesting about this argument—and we take it together, as Smith requests in his note, with his other writing on Derrida and the violence of finitude—is that it seems to suggest that the object of hope can be finite, or at least, that it can have finite dimensions.

For the sake of clarity I summarise Smith's approach: the context of the argument is whether or not hope's object can be determinate; the claim is that Derrida equates determinacy with finitude, and finitude with necessary violence; and the counterclaim is that finitude does not need to equate with violence, even if it cannot be fully equated with its infinite inspiration (here, at the risk of sounding Platonic, which I don't think is Smith's intention, "Justice Itself"). My question, however, is why the object of hope needs to involve any determination (any finite definition) at all, if it is infinite. Smith's valuing of all that is genuinely good in the finite is laudable, but it seems to me that there is a completely different point at stake. Derrida gestures

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 220. Smith makes this point with reference to Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," trans. Mary Quaintance, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1992) 3-67, 24-26; Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 87. While the point might be argued with reference to Derrida's insistence on *in*finitude, I am not sure that Derrida argues against finitude as such. With regard to Derrida's determinate hope, see Smith, "Determined Hope," 222.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 221.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 221. See also Matušík, *Radical Evil* 155.

towards the impossible character of justice, love, democracy, and so on, not in order to cast judgment on the human but to alert us to the danger of settling for too little, of settling for anything less than the infinite. Now, surely this is true for theology, too, which will not have its infinite hopes dashed in any merely finite resolution. The nub of Derrida's disagreement with theology on this question actually concerns not whether the finite is of value, but whether the infinite is ever to be realised. For Derrida, the messiah simply cannot come (in the present), because its presentation would run counter to its infinitude; as soon as the messiah is limited to the dimensions of what can be known, it will no longer be the messiah. ("If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.")<sup>22</sup>

This leads me to consider a second, related argument in Smith's work, which is that the object of Derrida's hope—democracy to come—is itself determined, and is thereby somehow finite or limited.<sup>23</sup> There is perhaps greater merit in this point, not because Derrida presents any determined idea of democracy-to-come, but more because democracy is a specific and historically evolved form of the political. It is difficult, in these days when "democracy" and "freedom" are seen as exigencies that can be brought about by force, not to feel the faintest suspicion about them. This may just underline the distance, however, between Derrida and Francis Fukuyama, or more recently, George W. Bush. In any case, Derrida thinks democracy as a value rather than as a state, so that it stands as an aporetic good to be desired alongside justice and the gift, and so on.<sup>24</sup> Such a move preserves its status as always "to-come," and

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<sup>22</sup> "Were the messiah ever to show up in the flesh, were, *per impossibile*, his coming ever taken to be an occurrence in historical time, something that could be picked up on a video camera, that would be a disaster. The effect would be to shut down the very structure of time and history, to close off the structure of hope, desire, expectation, promise, in short, of the future." Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 163.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, "Determined Hope," 222.

<sup>24</sup> "... an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today...." Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 59. " 'Democracy to come' does not mean a future democracy that will one day be 'present.' Democracy will never exist in the present; it is not presentable, and it is not a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. But *there is the impossible*, whose promise democracy inscribes—a promise that risks and must always risk being perverted into a threat. There is the impossible, and the impossible remains impossible because of the aporia of the demos: the demos is *at once* the incalculable singularity of anyone, before any 'subject,' the possible undoing of the social bond by a secret to be respected, beyond all citizenship ... *and* the universality of rational calculation, of the equality of citizens before the law.... And this impossible that *there is* remains ineffaceable. It



thereby strips it of any determinacy. Democracy to come would have no content as such and its fulfilment would be endlessly deferred.

We do have a further suggestion from Smith to consider, however, which is that while it has “an important degree of determinacy,” Christian hope also has “an important, and perhaps helpful, lack of specificity and indeterminacy.”<sup>25</sup> This is relevant in response to Derrida’s point concerning hope in the resurrection, because it seems to me that very little of the theology of resurrection, from Paul onwards, is very clear about what resurrection means. Contemporary theological discussions of resurrection highlight an enormous range of understandings, not only of the resurrection of Jesus, but also of the resurrection for which Christians can hope.<sup>26</sup> But Smith’s point is perhaps even more relevant than he intends, or at least, it is relevant in more ways than he might realise, which quickly becomes apparent in reading only the other essays in the book of which his chapter forms a part, let alone the vast Christian literature on hope. Christians do not always have the same idea of that in which their hope consists. This variance suggests not only a lack of specificity and indeterminacy concerning some of the details, but a much more intrinsic indefinability when it

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is irreducible as our exposure to what comes or happens. It is the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event. To history, if you will, a history to be thought otherwise than from a teleological horizon, indeed from any horizon at all. When I say ‘the impossible that there is’ I am pointing to this other regime of the ‘possible-impossible’ that I try to think by questioning in all sorts of ways (for example, around questions of the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, and so on)...” Derrida, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides,” 120. “Derrida makes connections between the notion of the *a-venir* [sic], derived from the reading of Blanchot and Levinas, and an analysis of the concept of democracy, as democracy to come, or democracy as promised. This promise is understood on the model of the promise to Abraham.... Derrida imports this complicated temporality of the event which, in so far as there is faith, has already arrived. This promise of democracy has, as analysed by Len Lawlor, this complex temporality of contingent historical conjuncture, categorical injunction and an afterlife in an indispensable double affirmation, in human communities of remembrance.” Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time* (London: Routledge, 2007) 137. See also the discussion of the “here and now” at 141.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, “Determined Hope,” 225.

<sup>26</sup> On Jesus’ resurrection, see, for example, Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2000); Robert B. Stewart, John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan And N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2006); Anthony J. Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). On Christian resurrection more generally, see Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006) 174-179.

comes to the object of Christian hope. The symbol for hope may be heaven, but what on earth does that mean? One response to Derrida is simply to say that Christians simply do not really know what they are hoping for.

### Other conversations

While this kind of response could perhaps bring the conversation with Derrida to a close, it seems to me that there is more to be brought to the table than this. Although he concentrates primarily on the need for a determinate (if not completely known) object for hope, Smith lists five elements altogether in his phenomenological analysis: a hoper; an object; a distinct intentional act of hoping; a ground (sufficient enough to enable it to be distinguished from wishful thinking); and the potential for fulfilment. A more focused discussion of some of these elements, involving a wider range of thinkers, might break open the question of hope in a more profound way. Given the limitations of space, I will bracket here the issue of the identity of the one who hopes, but I will highlight the remaining elements in a consideration that will pick up aspects of the recent work of Martin Beck Matušík, which will serve as a point of entry for the contributions of a number of others—Jean-Luc Marion pre-eminently—but also Martin Heidegger; Emmanuel Lévinas; Jean-Louis Chrétien; and Claude Romano.

### Two trajectories for impossible hope

Matušík writes about hope in the context of a meditation on radical evil, and speaks about the impossibility of hope in two ways. On the one hand, there is the “paradoxical, aporetic dimension of impossible hope,” a “first-order impossibility [that] maximizes the intention of hope [but] whose satisfaction is permanently deferred.”<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, there is a second-order impossibility, where “the religious is revealed [by way of the uncanny] in (inter)personal and impersonal dimensions of faithful awakening or awareness as well as by saturating my ordinary experience with the counterexperience of impossible hope.”<sup>28</sup> The two dimensions of hope as Matušík outlines them incorporate aspects of the trajectories of the work of Derrida and Marion respectively, whose differences—in terms of their potential

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<sup>27</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 166.

<sup>28</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 166, 168. Matušík speaks of hope as a “counterexperience to the religious revealed as the messianic now-time.” Matušík, *Radical Evil* 18. I interpret this as a ‘counterexperience to the religious[,] revealed as the messianic now-time.’

reference to God—have a bearing on our discussion.<sup>29</sup> It is important to note, however, that even though Matušík’s thinking of the impossibility of hope is religious, it takes place within a nontheological, postsecular framework, and that he seeks to avoid making any ontological claims: “The religious as the phenomenon of excess, which I ponder in these meditations, is not instituted through the ontotheological frame of reference (metaphysical, propositional, evidential way) but rather existentially (self-transformative way).”<sup>30</sup>

### Hope as a saturated phenomenon

In our discussion of Derrida, we have already seen something of the first trajectory of hope. We turn, then, to consider the second, which is where Matušík makes use of Marion’s thought of the saturated phenomenon. Marion’s fundamental argument (against those who insist that phenomenology is oriented chiefly to the presence of objects to a self-present subject, and is inherently a metaphysical project) is that Husserlian phenomenology contains within it the seeds of possibility for thinking phenomena that cannot be presented, such as events, idols (especially works of art), flesh, icons (especially other persons), and revelation.<sup>31</sup> A saturated phenomenon

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<sup>29</sup> “We have contended that Marion and Derrida are agreed in regarding the ‘intention’ or the ‘concept’ as an ‘arrow’ which is aimed at the heart of God from which God must be ‘shielded’ ... or kept ‘safe.’ For Marion, ... this is because the arrow of intentionality is too weak and narrow to penetrate or comprehend the infinite givenness of God; it would compromise the infinite incomprehensibility of God who has utterly saturated the intention ‘God’ in a plenitude of givenness. But for Derrida, ... the arrow takes aim at God and never reaches God precisely because the name of God is the name of what we love and desire, ... something *tout autre* which is not ‘present,’ not only in the narrow conceptual sense of conceptual presentation advanced by Marion, but also not *given*.” John D. Caputo, “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion,” *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 185-222, 199.

<sup>30</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 19. “By ‘existential’ I do not mean an ontological structure of being-in-the-world, but rather the passionate care for one’s soul...” (6)

<sup>31</sup> Marion claims that, free from the principle of sufficient reason, phenomena do not have to appear according to the metaphysical horizons of object-ness, or even being, and they are not dependent on the constitutive capacities of the transcendental I. Instead, phenomena appear as given (they “give themselves”). While there are some phenomena that are poor in intuition, there are also phenomena that are saturated in intuition. It is not only the case that concepts overrun intuition (meaning exceeds what is actually given) but that intuition can also overrun the available concepts (what is given exceeds a single meaning, or even multiple meanings). These arguments are iterated at length in the phenomenological trilogy, Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998); Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford:

occurs where the givenness of the phenomenon overruns the available concepts that might enable us to see it as any thing. Marion describes his project as follows:

I am therefore proposing to follow another way to accede to such an invisible and to justify it phenomenologically: to consider phenomena where the duality between intention (signification) and intuition (fulfillment) certainly remains, as well as the noetic-noematic correlation, but where, to the contrary of poor and common phenomena, intuition gives (itself) in exceeding what the concept (signification, intentionality, aim, and so on) can foresee of it and show. I call these saturated phenomena, or paradoxes. They are saturated phenomena in that constitution encounters there an intuitive givenness that cannot be granted a univocal sense in return. It must be allowed, then, to overflow with many meanings, or an infinity of meanings, each equally legitimate and rigorous, without managing either to unify them or to organize them.<sup>32</sup>

Unable to be constituted by a subject, the saturated phenomenon constitutes the self (or more correctly here, *l'adonné*, the one “given over” to the revealing phenomenon, or “the gifted”).<sup>33</sup>

In Matušík's work, it is the religious—by way of the saturated phenomenon of “the uncanny”—that (inexplicably) gives rise to hope. Marion speaks of a “perturbation,” or “resistance” that arises as a result of the incapacity of *l'adonné* to receive intuitive excess, or counter-experience: “the finitude of the transcendental subject (and therefore of his intuition) is ... suffered and experienced as such in the contradiction that the excess of intuition imposes on it with each saturated phenomenon.”<sup>34</sup> In a

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Stanford University Press, 2002); Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). For the main outlines, see my introduction to his work: Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Marion, *In Excess* 112.

<sup>33</sup> “But the visibility risen from the given provokes at the same time the visibility of *l'adonné*. In effect, *l'adonné* does not see itself before receiving the impact of the given. Relieved of its royal transcendental status, it no longer precedes the phenomenon, or even accompanies it any more as a thought already in place. Since it is received from what it receives, it does not precede it and especially not by a visibility prior to the unseen of the given. In fact, *l'adonné* does not show itself more than the given—its screen or its prism remain perfectly unseen as long as the impact, crushed against them, of a given does not illuminate them all at once. Or instead, since, properly speaking, *l'adonné* is not without this reception, the impact gives rise for the first time to the screen against which it is crushed, as it sets up the prism across which it breaks up. In short, *l'adonné* is phenomenized by the very operation by which it phenomenizes the given.” Marion, *In Excess* 50.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, *The Visible and the Revealed* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 119-144, 137.

similar way, Matušík's hope is a marker of saturation (the experience of counter-experience), although sometimes it also seems to bear the characteristics of saturation itself.<sup>35</sup> For Matušík, the gift of hope marks the givenness of a saturated phenomenon.

### Hope without ground

Marion maintains that the saturated phenomenon is not determined by the principle of sufficient reason:

I have not only formally identified this new determination of the phenomenon. I have also tried to apply it to the task of offering reasons for a type of phenomenon that has hitherto been left in the margins of ordinary phenomenality—indeed, has been excluded by it. Or rather, not to offer reasons, since what is at issue is liberating a phenomenon from the requirement of the principle of (sufficient) reason....<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, according to Matušík, hope as it arises in the face of the uncanny has no cause (or sufficient reason): “... even tragic beauty cannot explain why hope is given at all or why it is given to us here and now.”<sup>37</sup> Hope, in other words, arises in response to no thing. Further, just as Marion's saturated phenomenon arises without initiative from the self—being “received from what it receives”—hope, for Matušík, does not originate in the self but is “granted” or “intimated.”<sup>38</sup> “We intimate hope in releasement when we grasp that hope is as impossible for free agency to secure as its granting to us is sudden and unexpected, ‘the unhoped for’.”<sup>39</sup>

Taking this approach, any ground for hope would not emerge with the kind of visibility that Smith's phenomenology would appear to require.<sup>40</sup> That does not mean

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<sup>35</sup> Marion, "Banality," 137-139.

<sup>36</sup> Marion, "Banality," 120-121.

<sup>37</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 190.

<sup>38</sup> See above: Marion, *In Excess* 50. Matušík, *Radical Evil* 201.

<sup>39</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 195.

<sup>40</sup> On the relation between being and the event, see the newly translated text of Claude Romano, *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009). Romano argues that both traditional ontology as well as ontology as it is reconceived by Heidegger render an inadequate account of the event. He maintains: “... an event is in principle what *itself opens the playing field where it can occur*, the unconditioned ‘condition’ of its own occurrence, that whose an-archic welling up abolishes all prior condition, or even that which occurs *before being possible*” (18). Being is not primary. “‘Earlier’ than Being is the event by which it *occurs*. Having priority by right over Being, which it establishes, and of which it alone is the condition, such an event [here, birth] ‘is’ not” (20). We note, too, the

that we would be precluded from committing ourselves to a reading of it, but only that as a ground for hope, it would be otherwise groundless. And while we are referring here to the ground of hope as what might give rise to it, we can also consider this approach in terms of the intentionality of hope. Smith is concerned to highlight that hope must have an object in any phenomenological characterisation; correlatively, there must be a hope intention, a consciousness of something for which I am hoping. Marion's classic definition of the saturated phenomenon is that "intuition gives (itself) in exceeding what the concept (signification, intentionality, aim, and so on) can foresee of it and show." According to this understanding, the intentions aimed at what is given in intuition can only be massively deficient. If what is given in the saturated phenomenon is considered as the promise of that for which we might hope, then it would consistently defy my capacity to arrive at an adequate concept in which it might be contained. This is, perhaps, another way of arriving at the conclusion that the object of Christian hope cannot be known, but its consequences seem to be more radical than Smith's argument might suggest. This will become apparent in the extended discussion below.

### Hope without object

Significantly for our considerations of Smith, and hope as it is generally considered in theological tradition, Matušík maintains that it is possible to speak of hope in an intransitive mode.<sup>41</sup> While hope usually takes an object (becoming what he calls "hopes"), Matušík considers hope as a mood or a state, and links this with the work of Heidegger.<sup>42</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's very brief reference to hope is as a mood associated with having been, de-emphasising its typically forward-looking aspect but underlining *Dasein*'s being as temporality:

... what is decisive for the structure of hope as a phenomenon is not so much the 'futural' character of that to which it relates itself but rather the existential meaning of hoping itself. Even here its character as a

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differences between Marion's thinking of the event and Romano's, highlighted in Shane Mackinlay, "Phenomenality in the Middle. Marion, Romano, and the Hermeneutics of the Event," *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Eoin Cassidy and Ian Leask (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 167-181, 174-176.

<sup>41</sup> "As anxiety is to fear and evil is to wrong, so is hope to hopes. I speak of evil and hope in the first, intransitive sense. Any excess or saturation also has transitive and intransitive modalities." Matušík, *Radical Evil* 3.

<sup>42</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 18.

mood lies primarily in hoping as hoping for something for oneself. He who hopes takes himself with him into his hope ... and brings himself up against what he hopes for. But this presupposes that he has somehow arrived at himself. .... Such a mood ... is ontologically possible only if Dasein has an ecstatico-temporal relation to the thrown ground of itself.<sup>43</sup>

The issue of the adoption of Heidegger's thought in Christian eschatology is a vexed one.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, Nicholas Adams argues that Heidegger's thinking of the future in terms of death precludes the use of his thought in Christian eschatology, as there is no room for Christian hope. This is part of a broader argument that Christian eschatology cannot simply be 'added on' to a more generalised eschatology.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Joanna Hodge makes the claim that "the analytic of finitude in *Being and Time* does not preclude the possibility of a life to come." She maintains that it is actually Christian thought that provides Heidegger with a means of thinking time, and so that

the notion of hope, in Paul's Epistles, thus can be taken to prefigure the temporal determination of anticipation (*Vorlaufen*) in *Being and Time*, and ... the temporality implicit in the notion of faith underpins the thought that the forgetting of being can be overcome.<sup>46</sup>

These comments contribute to our questioning about the extent to which hope that is given without a goal might still contribute to a Christian thinking of hope. Of relevance here, then, is Heidegger's thought of hope as a mood as such. Heidegger's characterisation of hope is clearly finite since ultimately it relates to anticipatory resoluteness in the face of being-towards-death. While he speaks of hope in terms of

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 395-396. Matušík refers to this passage (18) and also picks up other aspects of Heidegger's work, for example, on the uncanny.

<sup>44</sup> See especially Nicholas Adams, "Eschatology Sacred and Profane: The Effects of Philosophy on Theology in Pannenburg, Rahner and Moltmann," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2.3 (2000): 283-306; Nicholas Adams, "The Present Made Future: Karl Rahner's Eschatological Debt to Heidegger," *Faith and Philosophy* 17.2 (2000): 191-212; Joanna Hodge, "Phenomenologies of Faith and Hope," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 37.1 (2006): 37-52; Leroy T. Howe, "Eschatology in Heidegger," *The Iliff Review* 28 (1971): 19-27; Judith E. Topping, "'Hineingehalten in die Nacht',": Heidegger's Early Appropriation of Christian Eschatology," *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now*, eds. Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009) 133-151.

<sup>45</sup> Adams, "Eschatology Sacred and Profane," 286.

<sup>46</sup> Hodge, "Phenomenologies of Faith and Hope," 38, 39.

its having an object, his real emphasis is on the way in which *Dasein* “takes himself with him into his hope,” and in this sense, we could be considering hope intransitively, whether or not we consider finitude to be definitive.

At the same time that Matušík tries to separate the mood of hope from any specific goal, so that hope in his work is not hope for any outcome in particular, he recognises the hermeneutic dimensions of phenomenology such that there will be inevitable interpretations of the saturated phenomenon that gives rise to hope. Marion uses the saturated phenomenon as a way of thinking “phenomena of revelation” within phenomenology, but aims to leave any claim regarding their “Revelatory” status to theology. What this actually implies is well spelled out by Matušík:

When the saturated phenomenon gives itself by revealing itself, we arrive at impossible counterexperiences of the second order. Phenomenologically, the possibility of counterexperiential revelation can prescribe or prophesy neither historical (Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist) nor contemporary mystical forms of revelation (cf. 367n.90); it can at best describe the condition of their phenomenal *impossibility* or excess or resaturation.<sup>47</sup>

In various ways Marion can be seen to admit the need for hermeneutics, although whether this is hermeneutics of a derivative type rather than hermeneutics in a more fundamental, Heideggerian sense, is open to question.<sup>48</sup> What is of interest here is the relation between a hermeneutic of the saturated phenomenon that gives rise to hope, and what then emerges as hope’s way forward—without an object. For both Marion and Matušík, that way forward is prayer.

Neither compelling God to appear on terms of the saturated phenomenon described by a new hyperphenomenology nor streamlining the biblical revelation to match it in a literal way with terms of counterexperience, I hold nonetheless intransitive space for I-Thou relationship with the divine whether in prayer or otherwise. Admitting the hermeneutical turn through which every phenomenon

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<sup>47</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 86. On Marion and r/Revelation, see Robyn Horner, "Aporia or Excess: Two Strategies for Thinking r/Revelation," *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Kevin Hart and Yvonne Sherwood (London: Routledge, 2004) 325-336. See also the discussion of Marion and Claude Romano in Mackinlay, "Phenomenality in the Middle. Marion, Romano, and the Hermeneutics of the Event."

<sup>48</sup> On Marion and hermeneutics, see Shane Mackinlay, "Interpreting Excess: The Implicit Hermeneutics of Jean-Luc Marion’s Saturated Phenomena," PhD, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2004. A revised version of this text is forthcoming as Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).



must pass in revealing itself to me, prayer needs to be no more hostage to the entropic view of the universe than it needs to be lost in signifiers. .... One either prays, and so relates to a living intelligence, call it God or Spirit...., or one faces an entropic, practico-inert universe in which one's hope is already an orphan.<sup>49</sup>

Hope, for Matušík, may be intransitive, but it is still a response to what ultimately can be seen as a promise, and prayer is a commitment to meaningfulness of some sort, even if that meaning cannot be definitively articulated. We can compare with this Marion's understanding of prayer, where prayer opens the possibility of address to we know not whom:

the de-nomination operated by prayer (and praise) according to the necessary impropriety of names should not be surprising. In effect, it confirms the function of the third way, no longer predicative ... but purely pragmatic. It is no longer a matter of naming or attributing something to something but rather of aiming in the direction of ..., of relating to..., of comporting oneself towards....<sup>50</sup>

Hope might have no ground in any traditional sense (that is, we admit that the saturated phenomenon exceeds our capacity to make any one interpretation definitive), and yet it can sustain the possibility of prayer. If we return to consider it in terms of the resistance prompted by the saturated phenomenon (which is no thing), the granting of hope is in fact reminiscent of the consolation without previous cause (CSCP) described by Ignatius Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*:

God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause. It belongs solely to the Creator to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of his Divine Majesty. I said without previous cause, that is, without any preceding perception or knowledge of any subject by which a soul might be led to such a consolation through its own acts of intellect and will.<sup>51</sup>

While the CSCP draws the soul to love of God, we could say that it does so by means of saturation.

Jean-Louis Chrétien's overtly Christian phenomenology specifies that only hope for the un hoped for is really hope. Chrétien's entire corpus turns on the thinking of excess, particularly God as excess entering into thought. In *The Unforgettable and the*

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<sup>49</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 170.

<sup>50</sup> Marion, *In Excess* 144-145.

<sup>51</sup> Louis J. Puhl, ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1968) 147 (exercise 330).

*Unhoped For*, in spite of his many appeals to a wide variety of philosophers, it is the Christian God who founds memory in the unforgettable and sustains the promise of the unhoped for. While this specificity might seem to bring definite content to the object of hope, Chrétien's manner of thinking hope's orientation simultaneously forbids access to its object as such. He elucidates this first with regard to Heraclitus:

[Hoping for the unhoped for] becomes what defines the highest hope, a hope rendering all the others vain, in so far as it clears a path there where no path had hitherto been cleared and as if in expectation of our step. Hope disassociates itself from all calculation. It is the access to what is without access, the way toward the *aporon* as such. ...if one can hope for the unhoped for, is there anything else than this to truly hope for?<sup>52</sup>

In moving from the Greeks to an examination of biblical understandings of hope, Chrétien recognises that hope is now linked with a promise: hope becomes hope in God.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless:

biblical hope has as its object what can be hoped for only from God, thus what is impossible by any human force, and what we neither could nor would have to hope for from ourselves and by ourselves. There, too, though again in a wholly different sense than in philosophy, hope renounces what one ordinarily regards as hope.<sup>54</sup>

God's self-manifestation—as event (suddenness) and excess—is beyond (or against) what could be hoped for, and must remain unhoped for even as it has been at once given and promised.<sup>55</sup> It is the unhoped for that actually grounds hope in what cannot meet hope because of its immeasurability.

The work of Claude Romano in relation to thinking the event is relevant in many respects to the present discussion, but here we will limit our considerations to his thinking of the phenomenology of awaiting. Even then, we will pass over his extraordinarily insightful examinations of expectation and the event that cannot be

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) 104.

<sup>53</sup> Chrétien, *The Unforgettable* 107.

<sup>54</sup> Chrétien, *The Unforgettable* 107-108, emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> “The fact that God remains *kruphios*, secret, in his very manifestation, and that revelation reveals his excess over our speech and our thought, ensures that the unhoped for does not cease at any instant to be unhoped for and to come to us with a disruptive suddenness. Our hope could not be so sure that the gift that it hopes for exceeds us and exceeds all human hope, unless this gift has already been made to that hope, and unless the promise that we receive has already been kept.” Chrétien, *The Unforgettable* 117.

expected, and awaiting as being “held entirely toward what which it expects,” to move directly to his thinking of the awaiting that awaits no thing, but awaits, “purely and simply.”<sup>56</sup> “[T]hat toward which this awaiting is held is not a future occurrence, as undetermined as it could be; it is rather the un-awaitable in its strong sense, that which could overturn the world.” He goes on to suggest that such an awaiting “... disposes us, not only to that which we cannot await, but to that which it is impossible to await; it prepares us for that for which we find ourselves unprepared, but also for that which nothing can prepare us for.” It appears as a letting go or “slackening,” as “availability,” and ultimately as “vigilance.”<sup>57</sup> This is hope that hopes for nothing, and is, indeed, “the background of prayer.” Without explicit reference to Derrida, Derrida is here resituated (and perhaps we also hear echoes of Jean-Luc Nancy): “Is not true prayer that in which we ask for nothing, expect nothing, but relinquish to God our requests and expectations?”<sup>58</sup> Romano moves, then, from the philosophical into the religious—although not the specifically Christian—to maintain that religious hope is precisely this availability and openness to the un hoped for. It can only be such because it has renounced hope altogether. Romano argues, in fact, that religious hope cannot be specified: “if it is not deprived of its residue of waiting-to-see, if it has not reached the appeasement and the lightness, absorbed in and awaiting that is not awaiting anything, does it not risk always being reversed into its opposite?”<sup>59</sup> This understanding enables us to reread Marion’s explicitly Christian affirmation of the last things with new eyes:

And this is why, for the men of the world, the impossibility of knowing the hour, therefore of foreseeing (the end of time and the coming of Christ, which in fact are one), demands renouncing the anticipatory calculation that would allow them to appropriate this event par excellence; they must instead await it insofar as it remains unforeseeable, that is to say as if each moment was and was not the right one. This expectation without foresight, characteristic of the unpredictable landing, defines the phenomenological attitude appropriate to the event—vigilance.... Vigilance and expectation

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<sup>56</sup> Claude Romano, “Awaiting,” trans. Ryan Coyne, *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now*, eds. Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009) 32-52, 49-50.

<sup>57</sup> Romano, “Awaiting,” 50.

<sup>58</sup> Romano, “Awaiting,” 51. See the discussion of Nancy and Derrida on prayer in Horner, “On Faith.”

<sup>59</sup> Romano, “Awaiting,” 51.

invert foresight; thus the event itself escapes all preparatory anticipation in the past, is concentrated in its pure *fait accompli*, arises without genealogy and can even be established after the fact as a new beginning....<sup>60</sup>

### The fulfilment of hope

We are led, then, to consider a final aspect of Smith's phenomenological analysis of hope, which is that it contains the possibility of its fulfilment. In Christian belief this is understood, as Marion clearly articulates, in terms of "the end of time and the coming of Christ." This end and arrival is perhaps imagined (if we transpose it into Derridean terms) as the dissolution of the gap between meaning and being that characterises human life, which would do away with the vicissitudes of *différance*. Now we see through a glass darkly, then we will see face to face, and this despite Thomas Aquinas' caveat that beatitude does not equate with comprehension of the infinite.<sup>61</sup> Yet this reflects but one understanding of eschatological time; there is another (within Christian tradition itself) that focuses on the eschatological interruption of time, the now rather than the not yet. There has been recent interest in re-establishing the balance between these two strands of eschatology.<sup>62</sup> John Panteleimon Manoussakis suggests we go further, and move away from thinking eschatology (as the arrival of the kingdom of God) in terms of The End:

... a teleological eschatology has no place in theology but only in cosmology. The eschaton can be found on either side of the End of History, or on both sides, before it and after it, but it should never be identified with that End itself. Hence the impossibility of telling when the kingdom will come. The impossibility is not based on the unknown but rather on the unknowability of the kingdom's coming. ... its

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<sup>60</sup> Marion, *Being Given* 237.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.12, a.7

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, eds., *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology," *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) 3-20; John Panteleimon Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction?," *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) 21-33; John Panteleimon Manoussakis, "The Anarchic Principle of Christian Eschatology in the Eucharistic Tradition of the Eastern Church," *Harvard Theological Review* 100.1 (2007): 29-46.

coming is necessarily situated outside time and history, where the question of ‘when’ has no meaning. The kingdom of God does not coincide with the culmination of History, that is, with a totality, but it signals a breach in the body of history, a rupture occasioned by the encounter with the Other.<sup>63</sup>

It seems to me useful, then, to push this to its limit and to ask whether the interruption of time by what exceeds it might not be the very modality of the eschaton, with or without the end of history. In what follows I will consider various explorations of the interruption of time. While they are not specifically Christian (and need not even be typically religious), they may help us to think the possibility of the fulfilment of hope (as the un hoped for) without reducing the infinite to the terms of the finite.

Matušík links hope to what he calls “messianic time,” and to forgiveness:

Hope is intimated as beauty that manifests itself in the midst of the tragic. Hope arrives out of the dimension of time ... [that] is neither marked by our melancholy past nor by nostalgia and longing for an anticipated future. If hope were something determined by the phenomenological field of experience, then it would not signify a radically new beginning. Any such novelty would be the passage of time, it would lie in my agency, it would not be a dimension that affects my relation to time. Beauty transforms my relation to lived time.<sup>64</sup>

The time of which Matušík speaks here is time in “its saturated dimension”; it is messianic time, or “the time of promise.”<sup>65</sup>

History’s disaster is rescued, if hope is granted, by the chips of messianic now-time. The time of promise marks that uncanny dimension of time. ... [T]his is not another kind of time but its saturated dimension. I ascribed its uncanniness to hope’s upsurge. Hope intimates a promise granted within our nonanxious relation to the passing of time.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from its evident connection with Walter Benjamin’s “now-time,” Matušík’s thought here might also remind us of the work of Lévinas, where, for example, we read:

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<sup>63</sup> John Panteleimon Manoussakis, “The Promise of the New and the Tyranny of the Same,” *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now*, eds. Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009) 69-89, 73.

<sup>64</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 189-190.

<sup>65</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 18, 189.

<sup>66</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 153, 191.

But this compensating time is not enough for hope. For it is not enough that tears be wiped away or death avenged; no tear is to be lost, no death be without a resurrection. Hope then is not satisfied with a time composed of separate instants given to an ego that traverses them so as to gather in the following instant, as impersonal as the first one, the wages of its pain. The true object of hope is the Messiah, or salvation.<sup>67</sup>

For the early Lévinas, in particular, hope is for the redemption, reparation, or resurrection of the despair or pain of the present for the “I”: “does not the essence of time consist in responding to that exigency for salvation?”<sup>68</sup> Redemption is not found in the promise of eternity, but in the possibility of forgiveness in “the unraveling of the knot which is tied in it, the definitive, which its evanescence does not undo. It is an exigency for a recommencement of being, and a hope in each recommencement of its non-definitiveness.”<sup>69</sup> This forgiveness, however, cannot be brought about by the “I” itself, but only in relation to the other.<sup>70</sup> As Alphonso Lingis explains: “It is alterity, in the guise of the other, the appeal and the demand of the other that faces,

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<sup>67</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1978/2001) 93. On the connections between Lévinas and Benjamin on time, see Asher Horowitz, "How Levinas Taught Me to Read Benjamin," *PhaenEx* 1.1 (2006): 140-174. “The time of the now experienced in remembrance ought to be understood as that ‘inversion of historical time’ which for Levinas ‘is the essence of interiority.’ Interiority or radical separation is the condition, above all, for the removal of the subject from his place in the totality and is for Levinas an essential condition of the ethical relation” (165) Nevertheless, Horowicz notes the differences between Lévinas and Benjamin on the relation of history to eschatology (167). <http://www.phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex/article/viewFile/40/108> (accessed December 18, 2008)

<sup>68</sup> Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 94.

<sup>69</sup> Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 95. See the comments on salvation made by Graham Ward in relation to a subsequent Lévinasian text, *Time and the Other*: “Salvation here is not personal integration, inner healing that comes about through the reconciliation between the I and the wholly other”; “[Salvation] is the establishment of history...”; “Salvation is a sociality in which justice is established and maintained”; “In this eschatological an-economy there is both a present realization and a ‘not-yet’”; “Salvation, the revelation of the endless meaning, the excess of the other, issues from each us [sic] living out the unappeasable responsibility for the Other.” Graham Ward, "On Time and Salvation: The Eschatology of Emmanuel Levinas," *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Seán Hand (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996) 153-172, 162, 163.

<sup>70</sup> “But it cannot endow itself with this alterity. The impossibility of constituting time dialectically is the impossibility of saving oneself by oneself and of saving oneself alone. The ‘I’ is not independent of its present, cannot traverse time alone, and does not find its recompense in simply denying the present. In situating what is tragic in the human in the definitiveness of the present ... we recognize that we are not going to find in the subject the means for its salvation. It can only come from elsewhere....” Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 95-96.

that comes to draw the self-identical existent out of itself—and makes it exist, that is, transcend itself and be temporal.”<sup>71</sup>

While he resists the commitments of ontology, Matušík makes use of phenomenology, but evidently it is a phenomenology going well beyond the bounds of the work of Husserl. If hope is not to be “something determined by the phenomenological field of experience,” then it seems Matušík might be referring to what Lévinas quite serendipitously (for our purposes) describes as the eschatological, where “[e]schatology institutes a relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present,” although this takes place “within the totality and history, within experience.”<sup>72</sup> Robert Bernasconi clarifies the relationship between eschatology and history in Lévinas by commenting that “[e]schatology is within history as the precondition of history,” and further, that “[t]he references to the ‘beyond history’ do not postulate a *Hinterwelt*. The beyond history is, rather, that which interrupts history. It is that which history cannot recoup. Eschatology in Levinas is not a question of the future, but a disturbance or interruption of the present.”<sup>73</sup> Lévinas uses the term ‘eschatology’ primarily (although not exclusively) in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, where, for us, the relevance to hope is that its ‘object’ might also signify without necessarily becoming the focus of theoretical representation:

the first ‘vision’ of eschatology (hereby distinguished from the revealed opinions of positive religions) reveals the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of the totality, the possibility of a signification without a context. The experience of morality does not proceed from this vision—it consummates this vision; ethics is an optics. But it is a ‘vision’ without image, bereft of the synoptic and

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<sup>71</sup> Alphonso Lingis, “Translator’s Introduction,” Levinas, *Existence and Existents* xxiii. In relation to hope, Lingis comments: “the irresistible lure of the future is not constituted by the prospect of being, which of itself tends to subsist, conjoined with the possibility of nothing. For Levinas the lure of the future is essentially the lure of pardon” (xxiv); “the promise of the future is a promise of resurrecting the past, with all its forces, but in such a way that it would begin anew. It is just this that is pardon: redemption of the past itself” (xxv).

<sup>72</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979) 22.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Bernasconi, “Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida’s Take on Levinas’ Political Messianism,” *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 3-19, 6, 7.

totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type....<sup>74</sup>

However, Lévinas subsequently moves away from using the term.<sup>75</sup> The shift most likely reflects a response to Derrida's critique of Lévinas in "Violence and Metaphysics," a critique which can be read—as Bernasconi carefully points out—either as a determination that "Levinas's eschatology is in reality nothing more than a teleology in disguise," or as an argument that "Levinas has been obliged to formulate his idea of eschatology in a language that remorselessly returns it to teleology and to the logos, in spite of Levinas' intentions to the contrary," which nevertheless does not mean that it is strategically without value.<sup>76</sup> Curiously, it seems that while Lévinas appears to read the critique in the first sense, and henceforth moves away in his philosophical writings from the language of eschatology, Derrida moves towards the eschatological sphere—at least in terms of the messianic without content.<sup>77</sup> We might suggest that what emerges in *Specters of Marx* is an embracing of Lévinasian eschatology precisely in its distinction from any teleology.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly enough, this understanding of the messianic is reflected in Lévinas' confessional writings, where he observes:

Waiting for the Messiah is the actual duration of time. Or waiting for God. But now waiting no longer testifies to an absence of Godot who will never come. It testifies, rather, to the relation with something that

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<sup>74</sup> Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity* 23. On "having a sense," see Emmanuel Lévinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. André Orianne, 2nd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995) 44-45. See also the discussion of intentional versus intuitional routes to thinking excess, in Robyn Horner, "The Weight of Love," ed. Kevin Hart (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 235-251, 236.

<sup>75</sup> "Here again I must express my reservations about the term *eschatology*. The term *eschaton* implies that there might exist a finality, an end (*fin*) to the historical relation of difference between man and the absolutely Other, a reduction of the gap which safeguards the alterity of the transcendent, to a totality of sameness." Emmanuel Lévinas, "Ethics of the Infinite," in Kearney, ed., *Debates in Continental Philosophy* 65-84, 81.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," trans. Alan Bass, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978) 79-153. This essay was first published in French in 1967, 6 years after the appearance of *Totalité et l'infini*. Bernasconi, "Different Styles," 10-11.

<sup>77</sup> "Derrida may be said to have developed an *immanent* eschatology in which the *eschaton* takes the form of the ever-impending aporia. In such an eschatology finitude is always with us in the form of its impossibility." Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2003) 116.

<sup>78</sup> See Ward, "On Time and Salvation," 154-156.



cannot enter the present, because the present is too small for the Infinite....<sup>79</sup>

The relation between Lévinas' philosophical and his confessional writings remains, of course, at issue, but we see here the scaffolding on which any Lévinasian contribution to a thought of hope is to be structured.<sup>80</sup> We see here, too, a crucial point for a renewed engagement with Derrida, since rather than being a question of the infinite deferral of hope's realisation (testimony to "an absence of Godot who will never come"), it is a matter of the excess of the Infinite for thought. That we cannot with any certainty name or represent the Infinite might mean that we live with the danger of falsely identifying it (hence Bernasconi's warnings about needing to be vigilant with regard to the potential slippage between eschatology and teleology).<sup>81</sup> However, the infinite fulfilment of hope is no longer disqualified, even if it cannot be unquestionably known. Further, the eschaton does not bear a relation to a historical end, but potentially to every moment. This brings us back—with a slight modulation—to Matušík, who claims: "creation and forgiveness burst into our lived time with the infinite in every now. This brings redemption into the messianic now-time, and if love is not discovered in time, no afterlife can teach it."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 143. The French text was first published in 1982. I am indebted to Graham Ward for drawing my attention to this passage in his discussion of Mosaic eschatology in Ward, "On Time and Salvation," 165-166.

<sup>80</sup> "I always make a clear distinction, in what I write, between philosophical and confessional texts. I do not deny that they may ultimately have a common source of inspiration. I simply state that it is necessary to draw a line of demarcation between them as distinct methods of exegesis, as separate languages." Richard Kearney and Emmanuel Levinas, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986) 13-34, 18. See the discussion in Catherine Chalié, "Levinas and the Talmud," *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 100-18, 100-01. See also the observations by Jeffrey Kosky on the potential over-determination of this distinction: Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) xix. In the context of Lévinas' eschatology, see not only the articles by Ward and Bernasconi referred to above, but also Silvia Richter, "Language and Eschatology in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 26.4 (2008): 54-73.

<sup>81</sup> "If the messianic is invariably enigmatic and not given ecidentially, then a questioning of it can be made to seem inappropriate to its own mode of givenness. Nevertheless, the lack of certainty should not in the confessional writings be turned into a new basis for conviction without suspicion. Rather it calls for all the forms of vigilance that are cultivated in Levinas' philosophical writings." Bernasconi, "Different Styles," 16.

<sup>82</sup> Matušík, *Radical Evil* 249.

The saturated phenomenon takes place outside the passage of ordinary time. For Marion's take on this, we think immediately of the text, "The Present and the Gift."<sup>83</sup> There the present (as gift) is ordered by the past and the future, such that in his view it resists any metaphysical hardening into presence.<sup>84</sup> However, another very helpful example occurs in his discussion of the erotic reduction, "where the event from elsewhere reigns," and where Marion describes the dimensions of time as follows:

... the future is defined as the time of the expectation of an elsewhere, in which nothing happens; the present, as the time in which elsewhere comes to pass [happens] and makes the present of its passage; the past, finally, as the time in which elsewhere has passed beyond the moment of its present and abandons our time to the side of the road, where it withdraws.<sup>85</sup>

With regard to this definition, Marion again identifies the difficulty of thinking the present otherwise than according to "the metaphysical aporia, wherein the present by essence imposes its concentration in the instant without duration, which ... only exists on the condition of disappearing without delay." One way that this passing present is overcome (at this point, in a finite way) is in the process of eroticisation: "the flesh that is crossed only lives by the contradiction of being only for as long as it is not yet. If the accomplishment were accomplished, it would disappear as a process...."<sup>86</sup> As *The Erotic Phenomenon* unfolds, we see the authenticity of eroticisation only emerging in the fidelity of the oath of each lover to the other, yet as Marion explains, "faithfulness requires nothing less than eternity."<sup>87</sup> The lovers can only make their oaths eternal by entering into an eschatological as if in the moment of eroticisation,

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<sup>83</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 161-182. The significance of this text is suggested by its recent republication in an appendix to DeRoo and Manoussakis, eds., *Phenomenology and Eschatology*.

<sup>84</sup> "The present of the Eucharistic gift is not at all temporalized starting from the *here and now* but as memorial (temporalization starting from the past), then as eschatological announcement (temporalization starting from the future), and finally, and only finally, as dailyness and viaticum (temporalization starting from the present). As opposed to the metaphysical concept of time, the present here does not order the analysis of temporality as a whole, but results from it. This reversal ... implies that we will understand the Eucharistic presence less in the way of an available permanence than as a new sort of advent." Marion, *God Without Being* 172.

<sup>85</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 33, 37, trans. modified.

<sup>86</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* 132.

<sup>87</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* 185.

with God as their witness.<sup>88</sup> This thinking of time links readily to the kind of infinity that Matušítk invokes with the idea of hope as the possibility of beginning. “To hope is to be able to begin. To hope is to find my path to the infinite in time,” or better, “[hope] carries the promise of possibility, the breakthrough of the infinite into the now.”<sup>89</sup> Better still:

Hope arises in gaps between the passage of time (our field of phenomenological experience) and another beginning (granting). That beginning, if it is to merit the name of hope, dawns otherwise than our once-forgotten past or anticipated future. That dimension breaking into lived time is experienced neither cosmologically, immemorially, nor linearly within its ordinary or historical flow. It is counterexperience.<sup>90</sup>

## A Reply to Smith

Returning to the characterisation of hope sketched by Smith in his response to Derrida, I suggest that it is possible to argue for a different understanding of each of the elements which has been under examination, or ultimately, for a different understanding of hope than the one he puts forward, and which might still be useful for Christian thought. According to this approach, the ground of Christian hope as promise would not be “known” as such, but risked (not because it would be merely “wishful thinking,” but because it would demand a commitment of faith in the context of a community of tradition). The object of hope could never be foreseen, not only because no hope intention could ever be adequate to its possibility, but because as what could not be hoped for it would actually demand the renunciation of any expectation. Finally, the possibility of the fulfilment of hope would rest not in the anticipation of the abolition of the difference between finite and infinite, but in the recognition that the infinite has already broken into the finite. It seems to me that on this account, Derrida might be closer to Christian hope than we might think.

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<sup>88</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* 211. “The anticipatory resolution thus results in the eschatological anticipation—as lover, I must, we must, love as if the next instant decided, in the final instance, everything.”

<sup>89</sup> Matušítk, *Radical Evil* 191, 244.

<sup>90</sup> Matušítk, *Radical Evil* 50. We note the distance from Lévinas, however, in the reference to immemoriality.

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