

Moltmann – Hope and Imagination

According to Moltmann, Hope and the eschaton understood properly “is forward-looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming the present.”¹ It provides an inventiveness and “elasticity in self-transformation, in breaking with the old and coming to terms with the new;”² “a 'passion for what is possible' (Kierkegaard), because it can be a passion for what has been made possible.”³ It leads to action: “hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience;”⁴ and empowers the “creative transformation of reality, provide[ing] inexhaustible resources for the creative, inventive imagination of love.”⁵ I contend that this empowered, creative, inventive imagination of love leading to transformation are key ingredients to human flourishing.

Moltmann contends that the converse is also true. Hope and the eschaton *not* understood properly robs people of “directive, uplifting and critical significance” for the “days that are spent here, this side of the end.”⁶ It therefore “loses its mobilising, revolutionising, and critical effects upon history.”⁷

But what is a properly understood eschaton? Moltmann defines it is one that focusses on the physical cosmos of which we are a part, not “fleeing the world, with resignation and escapism”⁸ to some static, eternal, “heavenly bliss.”⁹ Hope

*sees in the resurrection of Christ not the eternity of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands. It sees in him the future of the very humanity for which he died. That is why it finds the cross the hope of the earth.*¹⁰

Moltmann believes that the major cause of a poorly understood eschaton is the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology,¹¹ bringing with it a focus on the “eternal present of being” rather than “the hope and experience of Israel.”¹² Moltmann’s critique of the adoption of Greek ways of thinking is extensive. The following are examples and quoted for reference:

¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 5th ed. (London: SCM Press, 1967), 16.

² Ibid., 35.

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

¹² Ibid., 41–42.

Hence the form in which Christian theology speaks of Christ cannot be the form of the Greek logos or of doctrinal statements based on experience, but only the form of statements of hope and of promises for the future.¹³

In the struggle against the seeming deceit of the Christian hope, Parmenides' concept of God has thrust its way deeply indeed into Christian theology. ... we find ourselves in the field of Greek thinking rather than of the Christian knowledge of God.¹⁴

Now these forms of thinking, in which the real language of eschatology is still obscured today, are entirely the thought forms of the Greek mind, which sees in the logos the epiphany of the eternal present of being and finds the truth in that. ... The real language of Christian eschatology, however, is not the Greek logos, but the promise which has stamped the language, the hope and the experience of Israel.¹⁵

The controversies continue also through the New Testament, especially where Christianity encountered the Greek mind. ... Just as in theological thought the blending of Christianity with the Greek mind made it no longer clear which God was really being spoken of, so Christianity in its social form took over the heritage of the ancient state religion. It installed itself as the 'crown of society' and its 'saving centre', and lost the disquieting, critical power of its eschatological hope.¹⁶

It is ultimately always a result of the influence of Greek methods of thought and enquiry when the revelation of God which is witnessed in the biblical scriptures is understood as 'epiphany of the eternal present'. That describes the God of Parmenides rather than the God of the exodus and the resurrection.¹⁷

Moltmann, therefore, distinguishes between two contrasting ways of understanding the eschaton. The first, based on the biblical narrative, he describes as time-based: an “apocalyptic dualism which distinguished the passing aeon from the coming aeon.”¹⁸ The second is a Greek philosophically influenced “metaphysical dualism which understands the coming as the eternal and the passing as transience.”¹⁹

Others have made a similar distinction. James and Bock, for example, name a model that parallels Moltmann's metaphysical dualism as a “spiritual vision” model which “tends to

¹³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40–41.

¹⁶ Ibid., 41–42.

¹⁷ Ibid., 84.

¹⁸ Ibid., 159.

¹⁹ Ibid.

view the eternal state as heavenly, timeless, bodiless, and unrelated to the materiality of the present creation.”²⁰ Apocalyptic dualism they name the “new creation model” which “emphasises an earthly, material, time-sequenced, embodied existence in a new heaven and new earth.”²¹

In this paper, shorthand is used to refer to these models. For the metaphysical dualism – spiritual model, I will use Vertical Eschatology (VE) to represent its transcendent nature. For apocalyptic dualism – new creation model, I will use Horizontal Eschatology (HE) to represent the time-based cosmological renewal.

The following diagram loosely²² describes a Vertical Eschatology (VE):

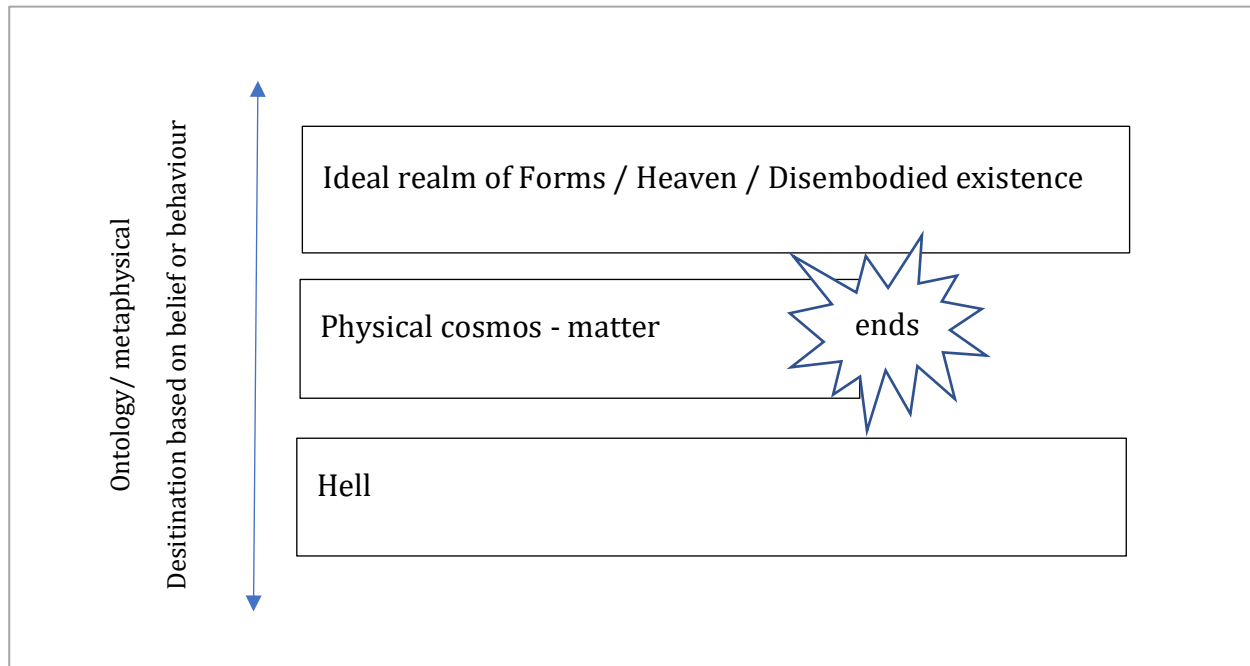


Figure 1 - Vertical Eschatology (VE)

The following diagram loosely²³ represents the Horizontal eschatology (HE).

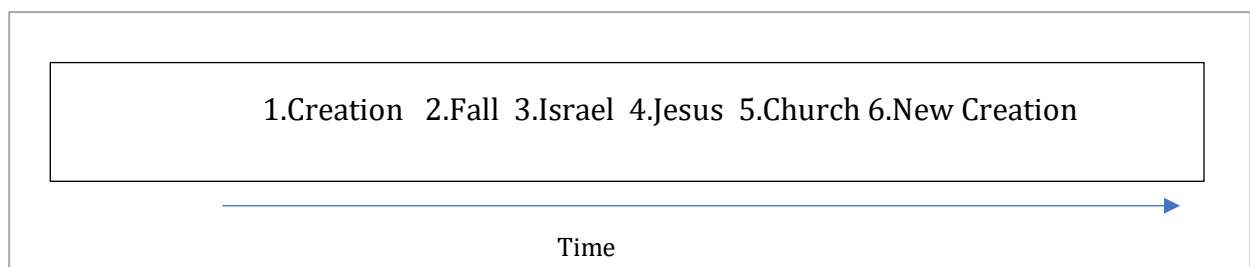


Figure 2 - Horizontal Eschatology (HE)

²⁰ Steven L James and Darrell L Bock, “New Heaven, New Earth: Analysing the Recent Rise in New Creation Eschatology” (n.d.): 36.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Of course there are many variations on this. If applied to religions such as Buudhism or Hinduism, hell may not be part of their reality, the world may not come to an end, but continue on and endless cycle. Concepts of the afterlife (Heaven, Nirvana) may or may not be a place where individual identity is maintained. Hell may or may not feature in various views of reality. VE, typically,however, devalues the material cosmos.

²³ Again, this is a schematic approximation. Heaven, for example, is part of the created order, but is not represented, nor is the coming together of heaven and earth in the final step.

There are many ways of describing the Biblical drama of redemption in HE. I've shown it here as unfolding over six acts, a slight modification of Goheen's five acts: (1) creation, (2) the fall into sin, (3) Israel's story, (4) the story of Jesus Christ, and (5) the story of the church, leading to (6) the consummation of God's plan of redemption—an act not yet complete.²⁴

The Biblical drama has strong symbolic and metaphorical themes. These 'show' symbolically rather than 'tell' systematically, leading to a feeling of discovery which fires the imagination. For example, one such theme running through scripture, according to G.K. Beale, is the Temple.²⁵ The following is a brief description of how the Temple relates to the Biblical drama:

1. Creation. "God created the cosmos to be his great Temple"²⁶ It is declared good but not perfect,²⁷ and therefore to be extended.
2. Fall. Humankind, the Image of God, is placed in the Temple as "vice-regent" to "extend the cultic boundaries of God's presence worldwide."²⁸ Humanity fails to do this.
3. Israel. Adam's commission to rule, expand, and be a blessing to the nations is passed on to the patriarchs (Gen 1:28; 9:1,6-7; 12:2; 12:3; 17:2,6,8; 22:17-18; 26:3; 26:4; 26:24; 28:3-4; 35:11-12; 47:27). Israel fails to do this.
4. Jesus. "The successful fulfilment of the Adamic commission awaited the presence - and obedience - of the last Adam, Jesus Christ."²⁹ Jesus is referred to "as a Temple because he was the beginning of new creation."³⁰
5. Church. "As a result of Christ's resurrection, the Spirit continued building the end-time Temple, the building materials of which are God's people, thus extending the Temple into the new creation in the new age."³¹
6. New Creation. "This building process will culminate in the eternal new heavens and earth as a paradisaal city-Temple,"³² God's home.

It is important to show the links between the narrative and the Temple because, as we will see, Volf uses the metaphor of "God's Home" as a basis of human flourishing.

There are three points that I would like to emphasise here, as we will draw on them in our review. The first is that narrative is a key component of a HE. As Moltmann notes, the "Easter reports in the New Testament proclaim in the form of narrative,"³³ narrative

²⁴ Michael W Goheen, "The Urgency of Reading the Bible as One Story," *Theology Today* 64, no. 4 (January 2008): 474.

²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Temple*, New edition. (Downers Grove, Ill: Ivp Academic, 2004).

²⁶ Ibid., 227.

²⁷ This phrasing comes from a talk by Rikk Watts at Alphacrucis college, Brisbane on 4 Dec 2019.

²⁸ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 227.

²⁹ Ibid., 392.

³⁰ Ibid., 170.

³¹ Ibid., 393.

³² Ibid.

³³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 188.

provides a particular power not native to abstractions from the story. Secondly, an understanding of HE is to be a blessing to the world, not to save souls from it. Thirdly, this blessing is to the entire cosmos.³⁴

In the next section, I will extend this understanding and propose that HE is the catalyst to human flourishing. However, before we leave Moltmann, one other point is relevant to our review of Volf – Moltmann’s understanding of the purpose or task of theology. It is no surprise that it comes from his conviction that “from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope.”³⁵ “The inescapable task of theological thought”,³⁶ says Moltmann, is to properly understand the eschatological message, and to “break through the categories” limiting eschatology to “transcendental” or “existentialist” terms.³⁷ If this is the case, and the right understanding of eschatology results in human flourishing, then a theology of human flourishing must locate the root cause of theology’s lack of delivery of human flourishing as its lack of focus on the right eschatology. As we will see, Volf does not show these linkages.

Extending Moltmann – the Grammar of Flourishing – My presuppositions

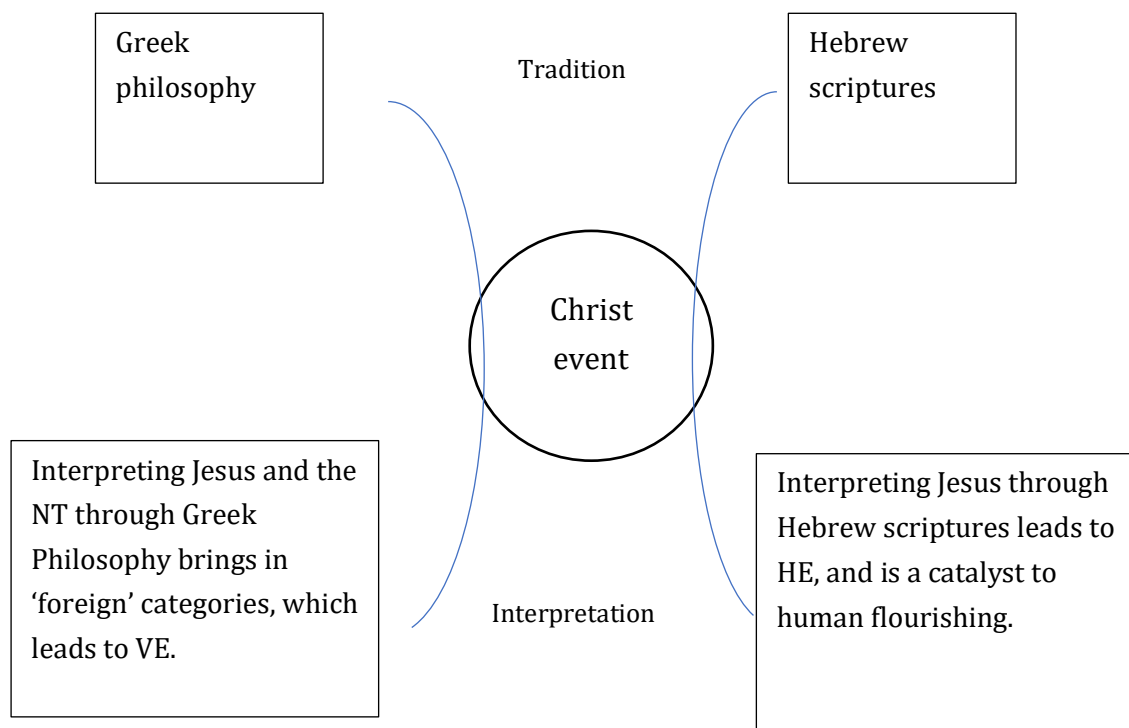
It is the working hypothesis of this paper, that HE, in contrast to VE, provides a living “grammar” for, and is the catalyst to, human flourishing. The proper recovery of eschatology requires the story of Jesus to be interpreted in the overall narrative of the story of Israel, rather than through the categories of Greek philosophy. The following diagram and table summarise this assertion.

³⁴ Note that Hell does not fit neatly into a HE, as most biblical references to new creation apply to ALL of creation, not some of it.

³⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

³⁶ Ibid., 40.

³⁷ Ibid.



Vertical Eschatology (VE) – components that hinder human flourishing:	Horizontal Eschatology (HE) – components that provide “grammar” of human flourishing:
Change is a problem; engineered to conform to a set of ideals	Embraces change and transformation; Change emergent – open ended, spontaneous
Being	Doing
Abstract; Eternal truth	Story; Narrative improvisation: creative innovation within story
Closed universe	Open cosmos – open to genuine future possibilities
Cannot hope for anything different	Hope springs from events and anticipation of the future
Static	Dynamic
Knowledge making	Worldmaking ³⁸
Suspicious of imagination	Hope imagines a new future and brings it into being

³⁸ Ibid., 338.

Vertical Eschatology (VE) – components that hinder human flourishing:	Horizontal Eschatology (HE) – components that provide “grammar” of human flourishing:
Seeks compliance to ideal	Embraces diversity; use of gifts in community to create a new humanity
Soul is trapped in “tomb” of the body	Emphasis on body - Psychosomatic unity (you can’t be human apart from your body)
Material world is less important than abstract world or disembodied heaven.	Matter matters. Creation is God’s home/temple. Our final destination is new creation with God.
Detachment from the world; apathy - virtues properties of the individual. ³⁹	Passion for the world and relationships: Trust, hope, care, compassion
Private spirituality; salvation of individual soul.	Community as foretast of new humanity; embodiment of the Kingdom.
General	Particular: time, place and culture.
Death is the doorway	Death is the enemy

There are a few things to note in the extension of our discussion of Moltmann about this difference between VE and HE and the relationship to human flourishing.

The first is the communal dimension of HE and its incorporation of a diversity of giftings in service of community, which, according to Judge, was “an historical innovation of the first order.”⁴⁰

The next is HE’s ability to promote improvisation, innovation and imagination within the overall guidance of an unfinished narrative. This insight has been used by many authors including Wright,⁴¹ Strom,⁴² and Goheen.⁴³ A VE does not accommodate imagination and contingencies well.⁴⁴

To the extent that other religions or worldviews import or mimic the fatalism of Greek philosophy, they are considered to have adopted a VE. A reading of Provan would suggest

³⁹ Edwin A Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. Edwin A. Judge, Reprint edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), sec. 2034.

⁴⁰ Ibid., sec. 2922.

⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God)* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996), 140.

⁴² Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace & Community* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), sec. 1978.

⁴³ Goheen, “The Urgency of Reading the Bible as One Story.”

⁴⁴ Mike Higton, Christopher Rowland, and Jeremy Law, eds., *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringer* (Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 281; Joseph L Mangina, “RETRIEVAL, REPAIR, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A CHRISTIAN HUMANISM: Hans Frei and George Lindbeck as Theologians,” *Pro Ecclesia* 27, no. 4 (2018): 396.

that “axial age” religions have a strong VE.⁴⁵ Islam, too, is not immune to Greek philosophy. It has been argued that Islam has been highly influenced by Greek philosophy.⁴⁶

HE avoids some of the pathologies associated with a VE. Talbott argues that “religious persecution” and “atrocities” arise from “an obsessive fear of eternal damnation.”⁴⁷ Instead, HE emphasises being a blessing to the world. Similarly, VE’s emphasis on a body-soul dualist split has been used to justify slavery, racism, colonial endeavours, and the mistreatment of women.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters* (Waco, UNITED STATES: Baylor University Press, 2014), sec. 5278, accessed August 21, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=1643634>.

⁴⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Victory Of Reason: How Christianity Led To Freedom, Capitalism, And Western Success* (New York: Random House Inc, 2005), 21.

⁴⁷ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God: Second Edition* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 25–27.

⁴⁸ Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars* (Tübingen, GERMANY: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 18–19, accessed November 21, 2019, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=1746138>.

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