

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the last century, psychologists have attempted to offer theories to define and explain the phenomenon of hope. While the literature is vast, C. R. Snyder's theory of hope has proved the most influential.² One of the fundamental assumptions of Snyder's theory of hope is that "human behavior is largely driven by the identification and pursuit of goals."³ In other words, Snyder's influential theory of hope is tied to the belief that humans have agency to reach toward their desires. But hope is not only the belief that one can attain some set of discrete goals. Hope is also related to more general *dispositions* regarding human and divine agency. The disposition of hope impacts one's commitment to social justice and is related (along with spiritual stability) to petitionary prayer.⁴ All of this is to say that hope is foundational to understanding what it means to be a human; it underlies the motivations and methods that humans have for reaching toward the objects of their desires.

While psychological theories of hope are helpful for describing the mechanism of hope more broadly as well as offering granular studies that describe the role of hope in relation to specific human attitudes and actions, one must turn to theology to understand hope in its theological, and therefore truest dimensions. To put this another way, while psychology is descriptive, theology is prescriptive and thus offers insight into how

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² For an overview of recent theories of hope that includes additional information on C. R. Snyder see Matthew W. Gallagher, Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti, Shane J. Lopez, and C. R. Snyder, "Hope" in *Positive Psychological Assessment: A Handbook of Models and Measures*, eds. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, 2nd ed. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2019), 77–95.

³ Gallagher, Teramoto, Lopez, and Snyder, "Hope," 79.

⁴ For example, Sandage and Morgan suggest that hope is associated with commitments to social justice while Paine and Sandage examine the connections between spiritual stability, hope, and prayer. Steven J. Sandage and Jonathan Morgan, "Hope and Positive Religious Coping as Predictors of Social Justice Commitment," *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* 17 (2014): 557–67; David R. Paine and Steven J. Sandage, "More Prayer, Less Hope: Empirical Findings on Spiritual Instability," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 17 (2015): 223–28.

humans ought to order their hope as well as what hope means for creatures in relation to the triune God who has created them.

There are a variety of ways that theology might address these questions. For example, we could turn to Christian Scripture and systematics to develop a biblical theology of hope, or we could look to the history of the church to see theologies of hope in practice.⁵ This paper seeks to examine the virtue of hope through the work of the nineteenth-century poet and exegete Christina Rossetti.

Rossetti was born in London in 1830 to her Neapolitan father and Italian/English mother. Rossetti's father, Pasquale Giuseppe, was a Dante scholar. He offered an education to Christina as well as her three siblings. When Rossetti was a teenager, she suffered ill-health that plagued her recurrently. Her decline in health seemed to coincide with a burgeoning devotional life connected to worship at Christ Church, Albany Street. She rejected suitors, opting instead for the single life. In 1872, she was diagnosed with Graves' disease, which eventually led her to settle into a rhythm of life at home with her sister and mother. In 1862 she published *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, her most celebrated work. Despite her success, Rossetti went on living a quiet life with her family until her death from cancer on December 29, 1894.⁶

To turn to Rossetti for an essay on the theology of hope might seem strange at first glance. She was not a cleric. She did not hold a university post. While generally well-educated, she did not have formal training in biblical studies or systematic theology. Yet for all of this, Rossetti occupies an important place as an ecclesial theologian. She wrote devotionally, for the good of the church, with a broad but unspecialized education in Scripture and theology. In fact, it is precisely in her role as a lay Christian deeply committed to the church that she was able to avoid many of the controversies of the academy while still offering theologically substantive contributions that have had significant influence well beyond her life.⁷

⁵ For the former, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967); and for the latter, see Sang Yun Lee, *A Theology of Hope: Contextual Perspectives in Korean Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

⁶ For biographical treatment of Rossetti see Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); and Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

⁷ Rossetti's most significant theological influences come from Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement, as it is sometimes known. The Oxford Movement is the name given to the theological ferment in the Church of England that sought to recover the English Church's Catholic past. In part, this included a renewed emphasis on the importance of holy orders (especially apostolic succession), a recovering of patristic methods of interpreting Scripture, as well as an appreciation for the doctrine of reserve. The doctrine of reserve refers to the veiling of certain theological truths by the uses of images and figures so as not to squander the depths of the Gospel for those who are unprepared for them. This is linked to Jesus's teaching about scattering pearl to swine (see Matt 7:6). See also Emma Mason, "Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7, no. 2 (2002): 196–204.

Rossetti's work provides fertile ground for examining the virtue of hope. Rossetti's masterful grasp of Christian Scripture and the keen psychological insights of her work make her especially suited to this endeavor. Moreover, Rossetti provides an important female perspective on the virtue of hope in a society in which men had far more power at their disposal to identify and attain their goals.⁸ Finally, the growing interest in Rossetti's work, and renewed focus on her theological contributions more generally, provide a timely opportunity to explore her contribution to the virtue of hope.⁹ In the following pages I argue that Rossetti situates the virtue of hope as an invitation from God present in the figures of nature and the figures of Scripture. I suggest that, according to Rossetti, while nature provides images for hopefulness, it is only fully realized in Christ through the figures of Scripture. For Rossetti, this hope does not come to fruition save in the life of the world to come. And our response to hope, for Rossetti, is utterly dependant on God's prevenient grace. Drawing from Rossetti's prose works, as well as her notable poem "Goblin Market," I argue that she offers a thick description of the virtue of hope that stands up to recent psychological findings.

II. HOPE IN THE FIGURES OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE

Rossetti is a biblical theologian. In order to best understand Rossetti's theology of hope, then, one would do well to begin with her interpretation of Scripture. Like other Tractarians such as John Keble, John Henry Newman, and Edward Bouverie Pusey, Rossetti believed that Scripture ought to be read typologically in addition to reading for its literal sense. Rossetti believed that the images and figures in Scripture were placed there by the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth that God has for his people. In other words, it was not just the message of the Bible that mattered, the images that conveyed this message were themselves signs laden with meaning. Tied closely to this belief was Rossetti's perception of the seamlessness of Scripture and nature. The images of Scripture conveyed truth, but their appearance in the natural world reflected this truth as well. Moreover, the phenomena of nature exist to communicate the truth of God, even if this truth remains somewhat veiled. Thus, for Rossetti, Scripture and nature reinforce one another as they draw the human to God.¹⁰

⁸ For discussion on Rossetti's role as a female interpreter see Robert M. Kachur, "Repositioning the Female Christian Reader: Christina Rossetti as Tractarian Hermeneut in 'The Face of the Deep,'" *Victorian Poetry* 35 (1997): 193–214; and Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 425–28.

⁹ Recent studies on Rossetti's faith have focused on its relation to ecology. See for instance, Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Todd O. Williams, *Christina Rossetti's Environmental Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁰ For a discussion of this see Christina G. Rossetti, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (London: SPCK, 1879).

To make this more concrete we can look at an example from Rossetti's *Seek and Find*, a commentary on the Benedicite (a canticle taken from the Septuagint translation of Daniel 3). In commenting on the roles of the sun and the moon in the Benedicite ("O ye Sun, and Moon, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and magnify Him forever"), she notes that

The Sun, to our unaided senses the summit of His visible creation, is pre-eminently the symbol of God Himself: of God the giver, cherisher, cheerer of life; the luminary of all perceptive beings; the attractive centre of our system. The Sun, worshipped under many names and by divers nations, is truly no more than our fellow-creature in the worship and praise of our common Creator; yet as His symbol it none the less conveys to us a great assurance of hope.¹¹

Here Rossetti draws an image from nature and exegetes its meaning, then situates it within Scripture. She notes that the sun is a "symbol" of God because it is "the luminary of all perceptive beings," and "is the attractive centre of our system." This is evident to Rossetti because in many cultures the sun was the object of worship, though she sees that Christians now recognize the sun as another creature meant to bring glory to God. Moreover, the sun "conveys to us a great assurance of hope." Rossetti does not explain why she sees the sun to be connected to hope, but perhaps it is obvious given its sustaining role in human life and its constancy in bringing light and warmth day by day. It brings hope itself, but it also brings hope as a "symbol" or sign that conveys something of the faithfulness of God. Rossetti then goes on to note the various appearances of the figure of the sun in Scripture, alluding to the further lessons one might draw from it. The point here is that Rossetti begins with a liturgical text that is laden with naturalistic imagery, and then expands upon these natural images before rooting them once again in the text of Scripture.¹² In this particular example, she is interested in the ways that the sun brings hope.

Rossetti contemplates the virtues of hope in other passages of Scripture as well, as is especially evident in her commentary on Revelation, *The Face of the Deep*.¹³ Commenting on Rev 5:13 (in which all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth bring glory to the Lamb), Rossetti notes, "since all Holy Scriptures are written for our learning, this thirteenth verse cannot but be meet for us to ponder over. And it strikes me that whoever conscientiously and unflinchingly puts and keeps himself in harmony with this text, must find that for practical purposes even predestination itself is

¹¹ Rossetti, *Seek and Find*, 34.

¹² For Rossetti, letting the images in nature and Scripture interplay with one another is a theological move, and a deeply traditional one at that. But in some of her works, she is also influenced by the emblematic tradition. See Heather McAlpine, *Emblematic Strategies in Pre-Raphaelite Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 85–145.

¹³ Christina G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1893). For further discussion see Dinah Roe, *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 168–96.

shorn of difficulties and terrors.”¹⁴ She goes on to explain that this vision of the whole creation giving praise to “Him that sitteth upon the Throne” (Rev 5:13) self-evidently portrays the eternal victory of God in Christ. Thus, for Rossetti, no matter the difficulties that Christians face, even this one passage laden with symbolic imagery (a throne, a lamb, etc.) is enough to stoke the fires of hope. In light of this beatific vision, everything that might trouble the conscience about predestination is stripped away, for all creatures are in submission to the Lamb. In a characteristic move, she goes on to weave in passages from throughout the canon, noting that,

This is to take our Master at His word when He said: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” This is with Job to hold fast integrity come what may. This is with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to silence the adversary: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”¹⁵

The upshot of Rev 5:13 for Rossetti is that all these heroic acts of faith (Jesus’s command to cease worrying; Job’s fidelity to God; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego’s willingness to be martyred) are grounded in an eschatological hope. Later on in the same commentary, Rossetti can sum up the book of Revelation by noting, “this point of the Revelation, after so many Fatherly Lovingkindnesses and terrors of the Lord have been laid bare—for amid unfathomable mystery the great Love wherewith God loves us, and the tremendous woe from which He would fence us, stand out as clear as day—at this point, patience once more meets the pilgrim soul.”¹⁶ Rossetti’s point here is that hope, even though it is deferred, is sustained because of the vision of God’s great love. Even the shadow side of providence, the “terrors of the Lord,” is meant to serve the end of God’s love.

To return to Snyder’s theory of hope, we remember that hope presumes the identification and pursuit of goals. While Rossetti’s deep reading of the Apocalypse does not lead her to a discrete goal that she has power to attain on her own, it does serve as a kind of goal, a vision of what will be in God’s time, and thus it sustains her hope. This is not to say that the Christian has no agency. However, the role of the Christian is not to achieve some delineated list of goals but rather to cultivate the disposition of hope through patience. To quote from Rossetti once more, “All I have read, then, is to lead me up to patience: patience under ignorance, patience under fear, patience under hope deferred, patience so long as free will entails the terrific possibility of self-destruction; patience until (please God) my will freely,

¹⁴ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 190.

¹⁵ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 190.

¹⁶ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 360.

finally, indefectibly, becomes one with the Divine Will.”¹⁷ Rossetti does not want to look to the end of the consummation of all things in Christ as an inevitability in which she has no role to play. There remains for her “the terrific possibility of self-destruction” as she notes, but by patience she is able to see the goal for which she is striving, in which her will becomes one with Christ’s.

That this oneness with the Divine will may not come to fruition is cause for some holy fear. “Hope and fear in this life are interdependent,” writes Rossetti, “indeed hope without fear might perhaps be viewed no longer as hope but rather as longing expectation, fear without hope as desperate anticipation. But during probation such distinctions are beside the question. Fear is the ballast of Hope, Hope the buoy of Fear.”¹⁸ For Rossetti, hope is fragile enough that it can only grow in certain conditions, in a state of tension between “longing expectation” and “desperate anticipation,” between certainty and dread. Hope is tied to possibility, and this is nowhere more evident or vital than in contemplating the eschaton.

As Rossetti draws from the figures of nature and Scripture, then, she suggests there is reason to hope. Her suggestion that hope is necessarily tied to a kind of “goal” in which humans have some level of agency affirms the premises underlying Snyder’s theory of hope. Rossetti’s understanding of the “goal” is a theological vision of what God will do in Christ, and the agency that she does have is the ability to wait patiently in cooperation with the work of God. How this works out raises questions about divine and human agency, as well as the nature of grace. In the next section I will address Rossetti’s understanding of each and how they interrelate to one another.

III. HOPE AND DIVINE AGENCY

While psychology offers various theories of hope, it does not take into account the underlying theological questions that emerge in attempts to understand hope in relationship to God’s activity. Rossetti’s work describes the virtue of hope along these lines. By taking soundings in Rossetti’s work, we can see that she viewed hope to be virtue that begins and ends with God. However, by means of God’s “preventing” or prevenient grace, he gives human beings a roll to play in the cultivation of hope.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 360.

¹⁸ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 464.

¹⁹ When Rossetti uses the term “preventing” grace she is referring to what is commonly called prevenient grace. This was a customary term in the Church of England. See also the discussion of “preventing” grace in Article X of the Church of England’s *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*.

Rossetti kept a reading diary, *Time Flies*, that includes brief theological and biblical reflections, as well as verses of poetry. In her reflection on Ember Friday²⁰ in Trinitytide, she writes,

Nothing but the love of God can account for or can justify an indomitable hope. Hope seems the more intimately allied to love, inasmuch as fear, its opposite, will be cast out by perfect love: wherefore? . . . Hope contrariwise is a pleasure. Hope, like the rainbow, can be evoked out of clouds and gloom to supply a bridge between earth and heaven: but can only be evoked by the sun-like love of God.²¹

We see here that for Rossetti hope is both justified and evoked by the love of God. To have a vision of God's love is to instill the possibility of hope, for without that vision, one cannot see aright. Rossetti felt this reality deeply, and in addition to writing about it, her prayers themselves are dependent upon this principle. She prays, "Good Lord Jesus, our only Hope; because we cannot help ourselves, help Thou us."²² She goes on to petition God for quickening, cleansing, and healing, because we are not able to attain these by ourselves. This only underscores the point that Rossetti recognized her utter dependence upon God for all things, but especially for hope.

That hope begins with God's love, however, does not mean that humans are without a role to play. Rossetti picks up on this in her commentary on Revelation, noting, "because our God is Almighty, therefore can He demand of us purity and perfection, for by aid of His preventing grace we can respond to His demand."²³ God's commands are only intelligible qua commands because of his "preventing grace" that gives us the ability to respond to them. In this sense, Rossetti sees nature to be endued with a certain kind of grace, and therefore human beings do have some real agency and opportunity to cooperate with this grace.

Rossetti offers further clarity of her understanding of prevenient grace in her discussion of the ways that Christians can share with the author of Revelation the tribulation and patience required to testify to Jesus Christ. She writes that we too can share in this journey, "yet neither effectually nor in maturity unless our own free will co-operate with God's predisposing grace."²⁴ There is a sense in which all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are on the same journey toward God's consummation of all things in Christ, yet this only becomes the case "effectually" and "in maturity" when we choose to cooperate with that grace. Rossetti's position here fits nicely with Snyder's theory of hope, except she has done the theological

²⁰ Ember days are sets of three days in each of the four seasons that are to be devoted to prayer and fasting for agriculture. They are also opportunities to pray for ordinands in the church.

²¹ Christina G. Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, 7th ed. (London: SPCK, 1902), 278–79.

²² Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 537.

²³ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 25.

²⁴ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 26.

ground-clearing necessary to prove humans have agency to identify goals in the first place. It is not “natural” to the human condition, but it is a gift of God’s grace. This only deepens how we might understand the nature of hope. It is a gift not only because it provides a telos for our lives, but because to move toward that telos of our own volition is itself an evidence of God’s grace, whether we have attained our goal or not.

The end of hope for Rossetti, in an ultimate sense, is eschatological, as I have noted above.²⁵ The end of hope is laid out in Scripture’s plain sense, but Rossetti also sees it figured into the signs of Scripture. Using the Authorized Version, Rossetti quotes Rev 2:10, the letter to the church in Smyrna, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” She comments on this, noting, “there is comfort in the certainty that though the limit of any trial be hidden from me, by God that limit is prefixed and is all along well known; the end is planned and adjusted from the beginning.”²⁶ Here Rossetti suggests that God’s providence both allows for trials, but also sets their end. This means that hope can have as its object a definitive end in God. She draws this conclusion not only by observing the logical implications of God revealing this plan, but also by the figures that he uses. The “ten days” of tribulation signify the number of testing throughout the canon, and they always come to completion. She goes on,

Let us recall some Bible Tens, and fortify hope by cheerful meditation. Ten commandments compose a complete scheme of righteousness. Ten days even of tribulation will not be an excessive period wherein to practise their observance. David had his instrument of ten strings whereon to worship God. Our ten days of weeping may emit as sweet a harmony of prayer and praise, and as triumphant a note of victory.²⁷

Rossetti goes on to enumerate other instances of testing wherein the number ten serves as their completion. Thus, Rossetti sees that the prophecy about tribulation for Christians will serve its purpose in leading them to righteousness. This time of testing, however, is not the final word. Rossetti exhorts the reader,

We dwell upon terrors of Judgment: let us also dwell on its hopes.
It will have a great sound of a trumpet, and the trumpet-blast is

²⁵ Brad Sullivan suggests that Rossetti’s hope “for meaning and clarity and completeness must be ‘deferred’ until she can escape from the self-destructive cycles of world existence,” in Brad Sullivan, “Grown Sick with Hope Deferred’: Christina Rossetti’s Darker Musings,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 32 (1996): 228. However, Sullivan is missing the point that here, death is not the “end” for Rossetti, but the door to more life. He is correct that for her the end of hope is on the far side of death. However, that hope is not in life’s termination, but its fulfillment in the world to come.

²⁶ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 62.

²⁷ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 62.

music. It will be with clouds, and God Almighty of old set His bow
 in the cloud. It will bring to sight angels. It will bring back saints;
 the particular saints we having loved and lost, long for. Yet, after
 all, these are but its minor hopes. It will bring back Christ; our
 supreme Hope, or else our supreme Fear. But the hope is in Him,
 the fear is in ourselves. From ourselves and from our fear, good
 Lord, deliver us.²⁸

We see here that, for Rossetti, our secondary hopes might lie in our reunion with those who have gone to be with the Lord. Indeed, in cultivating the virtue of hope we might have any number of goals that we've identified to be worth pursuing. That being said, the end of all hope is our "supreme Hope," Christ himself. And there can be no fully developed theory of hope without Christ as the explicit telos, for he is, for Rossetti, the measure by which we can measure all other hopes.

The end of hope also raises interesting questions about the utility of psychological theories of hope. They are useful in so far as they provide a description of the means by which humans identify and strive toward certain goals, but they do not provide a normative account of which goals are worth hoping for, nor do they provide the evaluative measures by which we might parse worthwhile goals from those that, however desirable, might lead toward evil ends. In the last section on this paper, I draw from Rossetti's "Goblin Market" to show the consequences of disordered hope and how we might realign our hopes to their proper end.

IV. MISPLACED HOPE AND THE CROSS

Perhaps Rossetti's most lasting theological influence comes not from her works of commentary or devotion, but from her poetry, especially one poem prepared with children in mind. This is Rossetti's famous poem "Goblin Market." "Goblin Market" is a longish narrative poem with an alternate rhyme scheme. The poem follows the misadventure of two sisters, Lizzie and Laura, who are tempted, day and night, by throngs of goblin men who are selling the most sumptuous and delicious fruit. As readers, we are warned of the danger lurking behind this offer of forbidden fruit. Laura, however, cannot resist and eventually gives in and purchases some fruit with a lock of her hair. The result is that she feasts on the dizzying array of produce and returns home only to be upbraided by her sister, Lizzie.

The next day, Laura longs to taste the fruit once more, but finds that the goblin men have disappeared and remained hidden from her. This realization, and the craving for more fruit, leads her to a quick decline that seems to be leading toward her death. Lizzie, seeing Laura's state, eventually decides that she will go to retrieve some fruit for her sister, to whom the goblin men have become inaccessible. Lizzie pays for the fruit, but since she will not eat it herself, the goblin men try to force her, squishing the ripe fruit and their juices all over her in a violent attempt to subdue her.

²⁸ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 82.

She resists their violence, and eventually struggles home to her sister Laura. The texts reads:

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
 "Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeeze'd from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me;
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men.²⁹

Laura does as Lizzie asks. The fruit juice tastes terrible to her, and acts as a kind of purifying poison. Eventually, the same fruit juice that caused her decline becomes the means of her salvation:

Life out of death.
 That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,
 Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
 Felt for her breath,
 Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face
 With tears and fanning leaves:
 But when the first birds chirp'd about their eaves,
 And early reapers plodded to the place
 Of golden sheaves,
 And dew-wet grass
 Bow'd in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
 And new buds with new day
 Open'd of cup-like lilies on the stream,
 Laura awoke as from a dream,
 Laugh'd in the innocent old way,
 Hugg'd Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
 Her gleaming locks show'd not one thread of grey,
 Her breath was sweet as May
 And light danced in her eyes.³⁰

The narrative ends with the two sisters grown, healthy, with their own children, passing on the warning about the dangers of the goblin market.

²⁹ Rossetti, *Complete Poems*, 17.

³⁰ Rossetti, *Complete Poems*, 19

Interpretations of this poem are quite varied.³¹ For the purposes of this paper, however, it is useful as a means of illustrating the consequences of disordered hope. If hope is the belief that one might attain some goal or end, then theology's task, in part, is to clarify which goals or ends are worthy of attainment. For example, if one hopes to achieve some end that is to their detriment, besides describing the mechanism of hope with psychological theory, we must also have a means to determine if the hope is rightly ordered. "Goblin Market" reveals that Laura's desire for goblin fruit, though it appears to be good, is in fact the cause of her illness. Laura's hope is disordered both because it is illicit (Laura goes against the warnings of Lizzie) but also because it is self-destructive. We might still say that Laura identified a goal (to eat the goblin fruit) and attained her desire (by eating the fruit), but this is clearly neither useful nor positive. This is to say that the *virtue* of hope is necessarily laden with a moral framework, and that moral framework is bound to both the community as well as a certain vision for the telos of human life. We can recognize Laura's hope as disordered because it fails to meet both standards, but those standards exist outside of psychological description.

"Goblin Market" is also powerful for its description of the ways the negative effects of disordered hope might be healed. In a Christological reading of the poem, for instance, Lizzie becomes a Christ figure who bears the wrath of the goblin men and is smeared by the forbidden fruit. This defilement, however, becomes the key to Laura's own purification and healing. The fruit that poisoned her, crushed against the flesh of her sister, becomes the medicine by which she is healed. Her disordered hope becomes reordered by recognizing the damaging effects of her desires, and by "kissing" and "sucking" the violent reality to which these desires led. This brings healing and restores to her mind a proper moral framework that is passed down to her own children.

Much more might be said about the theological genius of "Goblin Market," but for our purposes here, it is enough to focus on what it has to say about hope. In short, Laura's desires for goblin fruit illustrate the psychological dimensions of hope. She sees an object of desire and is

³¹ Simon Humphries argues for *some kind* of religious reading in Simon Humphries, "The Uncertainty of *Goblin Market*," *Victorian Poetry* 45 (2007): 391–413. More specifically, for a reading that looks at the eucharistic themes in the poem see Marylu Hill, "Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': Eucharist and the Erotic Body in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *Victorian Poetry* 43 (2005): 455–72. Victor Roman Mendoza offers readings "inflected rather intimately, if not somewhat idiosyncratically, by Marxist and psychoanalytic theoretical work" in Victor Roman Mendoza, "Come Buy': The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *ELH* 73 (2006): 913–47; while Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullberry suggest an ecofeminist interpretation in Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullberry, "Ecofeminism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'," *Victorian Poetry* 126 (2014): 63–87. Anna E. MacDonald even reads the poem in relation to lactation and breastfeeding in Anna E. MacDonald "Edible Women and Milk Markets: The Linguistic and Lactational Exchanges of 'Goblin Market'," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 11 (2015), <<https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue113/macdonald.html>> [last accessed March 18, 2022]. And this is to name only a handful of the many theological, economic, and ecological readings.

motivated to obtain that object, even if at a price. But the poem also indicates the importance of rightly ordered hope. According to the logic of “Goblin Market,” a hope can be said to be rightly ordered when it is aimed to the end of human flourishing and when it aligns with the values of the community. Moreover, a rightly ordered hope must have its ultimate end in the eschatological fulfillment of what God is doing in Christ. In the world that Rossetti creates in “Goblin Market,” the analogy to this eschatological vision is the safeguarding and care of Lizzie’s and Laura’s children. While eating the goblin fruit damages the future flourishing of each of their offspring, Lizzie’s act of redemption for her sister secures the future of their children and becomes a cautionary tale of both the dangers of the goblins and the hard-won freedom Lizzie secured. Lizzie’s sacrifice illustrates that even when a disordered hope is actualized there is hope for redemption.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will briefly review the arguments of this paper. In short, while psychological theories of hope are necessary for their description of the mechanism for identifying, desiring, and attaining goals, they fall short of grounding the phenomenon of hope in theological terms. To that end, we must turn to theology, and in the case of this paper, the theology of Christina Rossetti has proved fruitful as one point of departure for exploring the virtue of hope.

According to Rossetti, hope is defined by reference to the figures of nature and Scripture, both of which reveal, in their respective ways, the truth of God. Moreover, Rossetti shows us through these figures that hope begins and ends with God. The possibility that there might be something to hope for—in any ultimate sense—derives from what God is doing in Christ. God’s prevenient grace gives us the capacity to cooperate with that hope and sets within our sights the object of our hope, Jesus Christ. It is easy for us to find that our hopes are disordered, as Rossetti’s “The Goblin Market” illustrates, but they can be reoriented through the sacrifice of Christ to their proper ends in him.