

“UNDISAPPOINTED”: GROUNDING HOPE IN THE SPIRIT AS BOTH LOVE AND GIFT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Latin trinitarian tradition has argued that the biblical testimony names the third person of the Trinity both “Love” and “Gift.” The tradition has at times located Rom 5:5 as a proof-text for this pattern of naming: “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” This *proof-text* attaches firmly to a *context*, functioning as a ground clause for the first half of the same verse: “*This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” In other words, the context of this classical trinitarian locus is hope. Recognizing this connection might provide promise for the present moment. In this paper, I will argue that in a world fearing plague and plagued by fear, the historical and biblical pattern of naming the Spirit as Love and Gift may ground an “undisappointed” hope.

I will outline my proposal in four parts. First, we will briefly explore the cultural moment we occupy, a world fearing plague and plagued by fear. Second, I will explicate the traditional Latin trinitarian pattern of naming the Spirit both “Love” and “Gift,” sparked by Hilary, formulated by Augustine, and clarified by Thomas. Third, the contextual and canonical pattern surrounding Rom 5:5 will lead us toward the storyline of the Bible and a biblical theology of hope. Fourth, connecting the classical dogmatic and the biblical theological storylines will allow us to see that a world fearing plague and plagued by fear might navigate such a moment with an “undisappointed” Christian hope, grounded in the person of the Spirit, who offers hope as he is given as Gift, being poured into our hearts as Love.

II. A PLAGUE OF FEAR

We live in a moment fearing plague and plagued by fear. The multi-year global Covid-19 pandemic has collided with another contagion of

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widespread anxiety. Millions (billions?) of people have stacked months upon months of physical isolation and distance, masking and testing, getting sick and recovering or dying. The singularity of the pandemic moment found fertile ground to grow in soil of already-present waves of clinical anxiety. In response, some Christians have sloganeered the moment by calling for “faith over fear” or “worship over worry.” No matter the misuse of such slogans, both faith and worship are helpful as Christian responses to fear and anxiety. If we consider the classical triad of Christian theological virtues, faith and worship (or expressive love for God) occupy the first and third; thus I want to explore below how the classical pattern of trinitarian naming might unlock the second of the three virtues. In a fear-filled world, the Spirit can gift us hope.

III. THE SPIRIT AS BOTH LOVE AND GIFT

Augustine wanted to find a proper, personal name for the Spirit akin to the naming of the Father and the Son, since both the Father and the Son could be called both “holy” and “spirit.”

Definingly for the Western theological tradition, Augustine also argued at this point for the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. He noted that the Spirit is called the Spirit of the Son in numerous Scriptures, and the Son promises to send the Spirit (John 15:26) and then symbolically did so (John 20:22).² Here Augustine nevertheless retained the trinitarian *τᾶξίς*, because Jesus said he will send the Spirit “from the Father” (John 15:26) and that the “Father will send” the Spirit “in my name” (John 14:26). “Thereby,” Augustine argued, Jesus “indicated that the source of all godhead, or if you prefer it, all deity, is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son is born.”³ This allowed Augustine to distinguish between generation and procession, and thus to explain how the Spirit is not a second Son of the Father: “He comes forth, you see, not as being born but as being given, and so he is not called son, because he was not born like the only begotten Son.”⁴ Thus the doctrine of the dual procession of the Spirit arose as Augustine struggled in light of Scripture to find an appropriate pattern of naming for the person and relation of origin of the Spirit. While Father and Son as begetter and begotten were fairly straightforward, he also adopted two names for the Spirit. First, following

² At this point, Augustine’s argument that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque* as it was added to the Latin expressions of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) was sparked by biblical reasoning on both theological as well as decidedly exegetical grounds. In a decisive way, Augustine could not escape the logic of Scripture in the Upper Room discourse and thus defined the dual procession of the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7) that became the classical dogma of the Latin-speaking church.

³ English translations taken from Augustine, *The Trinity (De Trinitate)*, trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 4.29.

⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.15.

Hilary, he explicated the Spirit as hypostatic, consubstantial Gift.⁵ Second, he also referred to the Spirit as the consubstantial, hypostatic Love⁶ of the Father (Lover) and the Son (Beloved).⁷

Eight hundred years after Augustine's death, Thomas Aquinas stood on his shoulders and explicated a robust trinitarianism in questions 27–43 of the *Summa Theologiae*. There are two processions in God: the generation of the Son, and the "spiration" of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Because "whatever is in God is God . . . any kind of procession which is not outward is a way of communicating the divine nature."⁹ Thus is God's perfect fecundity (*perfecta fecunditas*) shown.¹⁰ The divine relations are grounded in the processions (*quod relations quae secundum processiones*) and are "real relations."¹¹ Thomas engaged Boethius's seminal definition of person (*persona*) as "an individual substance of a rational nature,"¹² correlating it with hypostasis ("what is distinct through a relation"),¹³ and "subsistence," rather than "substance,"¹⁴ settling on defining person as a "relation as something subsisting" (*relatio ut subsistens*). "Otherwise put, it means the relation by way of that substance which is the subsistent hypostasis in the divine nature."¹⁵ He explicated the proper names of the persons: Father, Word, Image, Holy Spirit, Love, and Gift. In terms of these latter names, he argued that the Spirit proceeds as from the will;¹⁶ therefore the Spirit can be both Love and Gift. Moreover, he argued that the temporal missions of the Son and Spirit reveal the eternal processions of God, yet without change in God; these missions instead produce a change in the creation.¹⁷ In this way, "the verb 'sent' rightly applies to a divine person in that he is newly present to someone; the verb 'given' in that he is possessed by someone. Neither occurs except by reason of sanctifying grace."¹⁸ The salvific and revelatory missions of

⁵ Hilary's trinitarian axiom, "Infinity in the Eternal, the form in the Image, and the use in the Gift," is cited and explicated with conditional approval by Augustine, as well as at some length by Thomas in terms of trinitarian appropriations. See Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 2.1; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 6.10; see also 8.1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 7. *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: 1a. 33–43*, ed. T. C. O'Brien (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1a.39.8.

⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 8.7–14.

⁷ E.g., Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.37.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.4.

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.3.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.5.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.28.1.

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.1.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.4.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.1.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.4 in Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.4.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.2.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.3.

the Son and Spirit are all grace, intended by God for “loving union with the divine person.”¹⁹

About this pattern, Levering concludes that the Latin trinitarian pattern can be endorsed not merely as traditional but also as biblical:

We can—and should—attend to the web of texts [e.g., Rom 5:5; 1 Jn 4:7–13] that associate the Spirit with “love” and “gift” in the economy of salvation, and we can expect to find therein some limited, but precious, instruction from God the Teacher regarding the distinction between the Spirit’s and the Son’s processions in the mystery of the Trinity. The Son is begotten; the Holy Spirit is given—and given as the greatest gift, love. Augustine is right: the Holy Spirit, in the Trinity, is personal “Love” and “Gift.”²⁰

As I have noted, a key text in this nexus is Rom 5:5. “This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Here the implied biblical pattern of naming the Spirit both “Love” and “Gift” connects to the biblical theme of hope.²¹

IV. THE CONTEXTUAL AND CANONICAL PATTERN OF HOPE IN ROM 5:5

When we look at the canonical pattern of hope in Scripture, we find the word deployed as both a noun and a verb. Hope is both something that someone can *have* and something that someone can *do*. It can be marked in the Hebrew Scripture by verbal or nominal forms of קוה, (“wait, expect, hope for”) or לחי (“wait, hope, cause to hope”). We see both terms used, for example, in Ps 130:5: “I wait (קוה) for the Lord; I wait and put my hope (לחי) in his word.” Here the LXX renders both Hebrew verbs with the verb ἐλπίζω. The MT also uses בטח (“security, confidence, hope;” e.g., Ps 16:9, “Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely [ἐλπίζω, LXX, 15:8]”). The NT also uses both the verbal and nominal forms (ἐλπίζω and ἐλπίς). For example, in Rom 8:24, Paul writes, “Now in this hope (ἐλπίς) we were saved, but hope (ἐλπίς) that is seen is not hope (ἐλπίς), because who hopes (ἐλπίζω) for what he sees?”

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.2.

²⁰ Matthew Levering, “The Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Communion: ‘Love’ and ‘Gift?’” *IJST* 16 (2014): 142.

²¹ Thomas himself treats hope in his discussion of irascible passions (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a.40.1–8) and hope as a theological virtue (2a.17–22). Here he argues that “the object of hope is a future good, arduous but possible to attain. . . . in one way eternal happiness, and in another way, the Divine assistance” (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 17. *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Laurence Shapcote, 2a.17.7), and “a mean between presumption and despair” (2a.2ae.17.5). Following Gregory and Isa 11:2–23, Thomas argues for seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are distinct from the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a.68). “The theological virtues have God for their object” (2a.20.3).

We can plot the canonical testimony of hope and its attendant implications on a 2x2 matrix (see Figure 1).²² The horizontal axis is the subjective sense of hope (hope as a verb) with the feeling of hopelessness on the left and hopefulness on the right. The vertical axis is the objective reality of hope (hope as a noun) with temporary or false hope on the bottom and eternal, real hope on the top. In the bottom left quadrant, a person who has false or temporary hope (noun) and does not feel hope (verb) is left in a state of despair. In the top left quadrant is a person who has true, eternal hope (noun), in other words a Christian, but does not feel hope (verb), leaving that Christian discouraged. In the bottom right, we find a person who has false or temporary hope (noun), but feels a sense of hope (verb). Nevertheless, that hope will sooner or later leave that person eternally disappointed.²³ In the top right quadrant, we find a Christian with true, eternal hope (noun) who also feels a deep sense of hope (verb). Such a person's state is one of delight, or stated negatively, "undisappointed"—they are not despairing, disappointed, or discouraged, but delighted in the nature and work of the triune God.²⁴

FIGURE 1
Eternal

	DISCOURAGEMENT: A Christian who has true hope (noun) but does not feel hope (verb)	DELIGHT: A Christian who has true hope (noun) and feels hope (verb)	
Hope-less			Hope-full
	DESPAIR: A non-Christian who has false hope (noun) and does not feel hope (verb)	DISAPPOINTMENT: A non-Christian who has false hope (noun) but feels hope (verb)	
	Temporary		

At this point, I want to contend that the implied biblical and traditional pattern from Hilary to Augustine to Aquinas of naming the third triune person both "Love" and "Gift" connects in Rom 5:5 with the movement of

²² I developed this 2x2 matrix independently of Kelly Kopic's matrix of lament and hope, yet I think the two complement each other. See Kelly M. Kopic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 33.

²³ This matrix helps explain why those without Christian hope can display and sense more hope than a person with Christian hope in any given moment or season.

²⁴ This rubric in some ways maps onto the point that Horton makes about Moltmann's theology of hope: "The eschatological newness seems to be *entirely* future, relevant to us in the present only as anticipation. This is the heart of his theology of hope. And, to be sure, this is an important aspect of the believer's attitude in the wilderness experience of the already and not-yet: 'For who hopes for what is seen?' (Rom. 8:24). Nevertheless, the believer's experience is not all hope or anticipation of future glory for a restored cosmos. It includes incorporation into the newness that has already appeared. Justification and the renewal of the inner self, together with the indwelling of the Spirit as a 'deposit,' are announced as part of the 'already' that not only anticipates but participates in the 'age to come.'" Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 36.

Christian persons from discouragement (top left) to delight (top right), and the movement of non-Christian persons from despair or disappointment into Christ and “undisappointed,” delighted hope, both as a subjective feeling and an objective reality.

To get there, let’s return to Rom 5 itself. In Rom 5:1, we find that Paul summarizes his argument from chapter 4: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith.”²⁵ He uses a passive verb here—a divine passive. God justifies, and those who are justified receive this justification. Paul says that God counts us righteous the same way he counted Abraham righteous: by trusting in him and his provision of Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. From here Paul explains the benefits of this justification:²⁶

- we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;
- we have access through him by faith into grace;
- we stand in this grace which we have by faith;
- we boast in the hope of the glory of God;
- we boast in afflictions, because afflictions are the trailhead for the pathway of hope, and hope does not disappoint.

Those last two benefits of justification by faith both center in hope. At that point we learn three aspects of hope: certainty, possibility, and suffering.

First, Paul describes the certainty of hope: “we boast in the hope of the glory of God” (5:2). “We boast in hope of the glory of God” means that hope is an objective reality grounded in the unchanging and unchangeable glory of God himself. God revealed this glory in creation and God will reveal it in the eschatological consummation.²⁷ God revealed this glory to Moses on the mountain (Exod 34). This glory traumatized Isaiah as he saw the curtain of heaven pulled back and heard the angels announce, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” (Isa 6). In Rom 5, Paul explains that the objective hope of the glory of God is so sure that Christians can boast about it like “it’s a done deal,” because from the parade view of heaven it is a done deal. For Christian hope to fail, God would have to fail.

Second, Paul explains the possibility of hope: “And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope” (5:4–5). Christians boast not only in hope, but in suffering

²⁵ This verse likely marks a hinge in the flow of the epistle’s argument, and a shift from justification by faith into the “result” of that justification: hope. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 247–48. Similarly, Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 217.

²⁶ Schreiner argues, “Three consequences of righteousness are articulated: peace, access to grace, and hope” (*Romans*, 253).

²⁷ Our discussion of this point at the annual symposium of the St. John Fellowship of the Center for Pastor Theologians (June 2022) helped me clarify the revelation of God’s glory as the revelation of both God’s character (divine attribute) and God’s conduct (divine action) in creation and eschatological consummation.

and affliction, because these mark the only trailhead of the pathway toward hope. Rest only arrives for the weary. Hope only comforts the afflicted. Those already living their best life have no need for hope, because they already have what they long for. But no one, Christians included, always (or even often) lives their best life. In this world, people groan. In this world, people suffer. In this world, people wait. On this point, Paul posts four checkpoints on the pathway toward hope: suffering, endurance, proven character, hope.

Christian hope starts with suffering. It starts with the uncertain moments when lockdowns threaten livelihood and when viruses threaten vitality, when Christians grow weary of the world's sorrow and sadness, when they come to the end of their ability to fix things. Here we see that our suffering has meaning because it produces endurance. Christians endure and this requires delay. Christians do not endure when there is no delay. We might encapsulate the biblical witness to hope by saying that "hope is faith during the delay." Suffering, Paul explains, teaches Christians to withstand the waiting. First Thessalonians 1:3 says hope inspires endurance. A person knows that they are hopeful when they endure waiting. The word "endurance" shows up thirty-two times in the NT (we might say one for every day of every month, with a bonus for those especially difficult days). Endurance then produces proven character. The word here has to do with something has been documented and verified.²⁸ Christian character is a character that has stood up to the test of the times. Christian character has passed through all phases of the clinical trial and is ready for display to the general public. As character is tested by suffering and affliction, Christian endurance emerges into hope. And here we find the way we may connect hope to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, named in the tradition in light of the biblical testimony as both Love and Gift.

V. THE SPIRIT OF HOPE

In Rom 5:5 Paul describes the Spirituality of hope. This hope does not disappoint, Paul says. It is a certainty and a possibility for a specific reason: "This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." When we say that such Pauline hope is Spiritual, we must capitalize the "S."²⁹ Christian hope is not an ambiguous feeling. Christian hope is grounded in the love of God poured into our hearts through the indwelling of the third Person of the Trinity. As we have seen, the church's classical tradition has argued that the Holy Spirit is properly named Love and Gift, like the Son is named Word and Image. By filling Christians with his Holy Spirit, God *gifts* them *love*, indwelling their heart and life and mind and will and emotion. The axiom of Nicene orthodoxy is that the external works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). All three persons of

²⁸ BDAG, s.v. δοκιμή, ἤς, ἡ, 256.

²⁹ A pattern cogently demonstrated by Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

the Trinity do all the works of the Trinity in creation and redemption. Yet specific divine works are also appropriately attributed to specific divine persons. In this light, we can say that the Spirit is the distinctive agent of hope in a Christian's heart because the Spirit is hypostatically, personally distinct as Love and Gift within the Godhead. In God's undivided works outside of the Godhead, the work of filling the people of God with hope is appropriately attributed to the divine person called Love and Gift, the Spirit.

Too often, Christians follow the discourse of this world, with a Walt Disney World Carousel of Progress view of hope: "There's a big bright beautiful tomorrow, shining at the end of every day." The world speaks of hope in generic slogans, and Christians often adopt this mode of discourse. Now, the eschatology of hope demonstrates that tomorrow does shine brightly no matter the darkness of any given today. Channeling Thomas, we might call hope a "wayfaring" virtue.³⁰ But this hope can only be believed as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit inside of a Christian heart; and Christians receive the Spirit not in some mushy-gushy emotional state, but united to Christ upon the stone-solid timbers embedded into the hilltop of Calvary and rising from the garden cave in resurrection life. The gospel thus bookends Paul's theology of Spiritual hope in Rom 5:1–5: "He was raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25) and "while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6)."³¹

So here is the foundation of "undisappointed" hope: Christians will not be disappointed in their hope because of the gift of God's love saturating their hearts through the Gift and Love of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, the distinctive agent of Christian hope. Christians have received the Spirit because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the base of the cross on Calvary and from the emptied cave in the garden, God gives the Gift to fill the Christian heart with Love, and as the Spirit fills the Christian, that Christian will live delighted with "undisappointed" hope.

V. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the traditional pattern of naming the Spirit both Love and Gift has a long historical pedigree, and this pattern is implied by the pattern of the biblical witness. In Rom 5:5, the text connects the possession and exercise of Christian hope to the indwelling of the Spirit, whom the Father and Son gives to Christians as Gift and with whom the Father and the Son loves Christians as Love in the singular, external, economic, *ad extra* work of the triune God. Christians can move from possession of objective hope but discouragement in their subjective sense of hope as they are filled by the Spirit, the distinctive personal agent of Christian hope. People who are not Christians can move from hopeless despair without real hope or from their feeling of hope that will disappoint them as temporary

³⁰ For example, Thomas refers to the *spes viatorum* "the hope of wayfarers" or "travelers/pilgrims" (e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, 2a.18.4).

³¹ Horton notes the disagreements of the theologians of hope on the role of the resurrection in *Covenant and Eschatology*, 285n78.

at best as they come to Christ and are also filled by the Spirit. In this way, in a world of fear, plague, and apathy, anyone has the possibility to move toward a delighted, "undisappointed" hope.