ELEVEN

Hope

Is this, then, all that life amounts to—to stumble, almost by mistake, into a universe which was clearly not designed for life, and which, to all appearances, is either totally indifferent or definitely hostile to it, to stay clinging on to a fragment of a grain of sand until we are frozen off, to strut on our tiny stage with the knowledge that our aspirations are all but doomed to final frustration, and that our achievements must perish with our race, leaving the universe as though we had never been?

—James Jeans

Our world contains within itself a mysterious promise of the future.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

—Nicene Creed

NOT LONG AFTER THE DEATH OF Jesus, a new flame of hope kindled by belief in his bodily resurrection began to spread across the ancient Mediterranean world. The Christian hope for the "resurrection of the dead" brought a new appreciation of real time into world history. Still clinging to the ancient anticipatory stance of Abraham, the earliest Christians understood time as real, irreversible, and filled with meaning. They looked for the eventual return of Jesus at the end of time to bring all events to a glorious fulfillment. They hoped the ending would be soon, but they were willing to wait.

If the gradual rise of life, mind, faith, and freedom allows us to understand the universe as a drama of awakening, all the more so does the hope that springs eternal in human hearts. Christian resurrection-hope, as distinct from archaeonomic pessimism and analogical optimism, implies

that the creation carries with it a unifying principle of meaning not yet fully actualized. Throughout much of Christian history, however, the analogical longing for timelessness has weakened Christianity's hope that the whole universe will have an eventual fulfillment. Given the fact of perishing, the allure of heavenly timelessness has generally been more attractive than the prospect of living fully in time in the expectation that creation will be healed and made whole. Even today, remnants of Platonic otherworldly optimism overshadow the strains of Abrahamic hope left pulsing here and there in the religious world. Meanwhile, the figure of Democritus continues to loom over intellectual life, giving us a world whose gates we may enter only after abandoning hope.

All this pessimism notwithstanding, I believe that questions about the meaning of time and reasons for hope are still stirring beneath the surface. At the end of the eighteenth century the philosopher Immanuel Kant was still asking the eternal questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for? These questions are still alive. How to answer the third of these, however, is more complicated now than in Kant's lifetime. After Einstein, it is hard to separate our personal anxieties about time and perishing from the contemporary concern among cosmologists about the eventual death of the universe itself. We realize nowadays, more certainly than ever before, that human history, the story of life, and the whole cosmic journey are a package deal. The hope that swells in human hearts is an ache that rises up from the heart of matter itself.

It is hard to imagine, though, how hope for the material universe can be reasonable and right if, as many astrophysicists surmise, absolute death is the final destiny of the whole story of nature. The universe, science tells us, is going to collapse owing to energy depletion in the far distant future. How are we to digest this bitter news? The analogical response is that we can always leap overboard into the sea of timelessness as the cosmic boat approaches final catastrophe. More often than not in Christian history, hope has meant the soul's longing to be transferred from the tortures of time to the bliss of eternity. As long as the soul can find salvation in an immaterial heaven after death, is this not enough? What happens in time or world history never lasts anyway. So what difference does it make whether

or not the universe endures? Why is the long passage of time worth worrying about?

Not only analogical faith and theology but science, too, has had a troubled relationship with time. Theoretical physicists today, according to one of them, are generally more impressed by pure timelessness than by the concrete passage of time.[1] Even scientists who do not believe in God, or the soul, or in life after death, still sometimes enjoy turning their minds loose in the timeless theater of pure geometry. In this immaterial realm they find relief from the merciless momentum of irreversible time. It is satisfying enough for them to assume with Einstein that geometry rather than providence decides what the universe is all about.[2] "It fortifies my soul to know that, though I perish, truth is so," exclaimed the nineteenth-century poet Arthur Hugh Clough. A similar sentiment must uplift the hearts of many pure scientists. In this respect, a thinly disguised version of the analogical stance is still alive in the secular intellectual world.

Christian hope, as the Nicene Creed implies, denies that a flight into timelessness accurately defines human destiny. Our hope for resurrection means that our bodies, the very materiality of our existence, can be saved. And since our bodies link us to the physical universe, human hope is inseparable from the final outcome of the whole cosmic drama.

The New Testament, if read rightly, is not pointing us toward an exit from Earth and the cosmos. Christian faith longs not for the abandonment of creation but for its healing and fulfillment. Early Christian prayers, hymns, and canonical writings, especially the letters of the apostle Paul, express joy in the news that the whole of creation has become new in the person and destiny of Jesus.[3] The Gospel of John claims that in Jesus the "Word of God"—the fountain of all meaning—has now "become flesh," filling matter and time with indestructible importance. We read in Colossians that in Jesus "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."[4] Matter, by being the extended body of Christ, is also charged with a divine presence and promise everywhere and everlastingly.

How, then, can Christians be satisfied to look away from the cosmos or leave it behind when they die? And, as I shall be asking in Chapter 13, how can they be indifferent to ecological concern for nature here and now?

The incarnation of God in Jesus makes matter and time meaningful forever. In the Letter to the Colossians, traditionally attributed to Paul, Christians are told that the Jesus who was put to death, who was buried and is now alive, is the universe's dramatic principle of coherence, the one in whom "all things hold together."[5] In the self-sacrificing person of Jesus, Christians believe, the whole cosmic drama is joined climactically to indestructible rightness. And in the resurrected life of this defenseless victim the meaning and destiny of time are revealed for all ages.

The idea of a Christ-transfigured universe would never have taken hold, without the early disciples' experience, soon after Jesus's death, of his empowering new presence. In their earliest gatherings after his crucifixion the friends and followers of Jesus were both consoled and puzzled by the experience of their teacher's new presence among them. While some may have wanted to be carried away immediately into paradise, most of them accepted a commission to enter back into time and history.[6] They began almost immediately to spread their newfound hope over an extensive geographical area. Starting at the end of the first century, they composed Gospels to disseminate their newfound faith across the ages to come. According to these hope-filled documents, the universe is not to be "left behind" but transformed and renewed.

Interestingly, the resurrection stories also give the impression that a quality of not-yet-ness permeates the whole Easter experience. In the canonical resurrection stories Jesus encounters his friends powerfully but elusively.[7] He is with them, but he also goes "before them." He meets with his disciples but then slips out of their grasp. The disciples testify to Jesus's aliveness by proclaiming that their crucified master now "sits at the right hand of the Father" and lives on through his Spirit, keeping the future open.[8] By virtue of his "forgiveness of sins" the past no longer defines or holds power over the disciples. Witnessing resurrection empowers them to remain inside of time while also looking forward to time's fulfillment. The Nicene Creed reaffirms the hope expressed in the Gospels that a shamefully executed outcast is the one who "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." And it is his reign, not that of pedestrian potentates, that "will have no end."[9]

Promise

The inconclusive endings of the Gospels and the overall raggedness of the resurrection narratives may be read in three distinct ways. Archaeonomists typically debunk the New Testament resurrection stories, citing the absence of scientific evidence for the extravagant claims they make. Defenders of analogy tend to spiritualize the resurrection, forgetting the Council of Nicaea's emphasis on the inseparability of God, matter, and time, affirmed now in the Creed. The anticipatory stance, however, connects all of human history and the whole cosmic story to the resurrection-hope of the Gospels. This is because the Jesus of the Gospels—the Jesus of Christian worship—belongs to the future more than to the past or the present.[10] The earliest Christians looked for their slain and resurrected Lord to come back into the present from out of the future to renew the whole of creation. They expressed this expectation especially through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. What they hoped for was not a timeless gathering of spirits but the climax of a cosmic drama. Neither archaeonomy nor analogy is equipped to grasp or point us toward such a meaning. To understand why not, we need to probe deeper into the question of whether hope is in any sense compatible with the universe as it is understood by science after Einstein.[11]

Archaeonomy. In 1923 the British philosopher Bertrand Russell colorfully described where the universe will end up if we look at it from an archaeonomic point of view. "All the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system; and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins."[12] Such a universe, Russell went on to say, is not worthy to hold its human inhabitants.

Portraits of the universe these days do not have the same scowl as Russell's, but in almost all scientific versions of contemporary cosmology a skull is grinning in. A few scientists disagree with this pessimistic impression, including the renowned physicist Freeman Dyson, who tries hard to wipe away both the scowl and the skull.[13] Most scientists, however, claim that in spite of its having gradually given rise to thought over the course of

billions of years, the universe is headed toward an abyss of mindlessness. According to archaeonomic materialists, life, thought, faith, moral aspiration—all of these fascinating outcomes of cosmic history—are reducible in the end to aimless elemental bits of matter. The great American philosopher William James, reflecting on what I have been calling archaeonomy, captures what this would mean if true:

> That is the sting of it, that in the vast driftings of the cosmic weather, though many a jeweled shore appears, and many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, long lingering ere it be dissolved—even as our world now lingers for our joy—yet when these transient products are gone, nothing, absolutely *nothing* remains, to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which they may have enshrined. Dead and gone are they, gone utterly from the very sphere and room of being. Without an echo; without a memory; without an influence on aught that may come after, to make it care for similar ideals. This utter final wreck and tragedy is of the essence of scientific materialism as at present understood.[14]

Archaeonomy, we have seen, is unwilling to wait. It decides here and now that the universe was ontologically complete at the beginning, at the point when it was lifeless and mindless. Unlike the anticipatory stance, archaeonomists have nothing to wait for, since the cosmos was as real in the beginning as it was ever going to get. There is no room for the natural world to become more than it was at the start. Archaeonomy instructs us that what happens in the passage of deep time is that the original elements get reshuffled. What is packed into the beginning determines everything that happens later, including the eventual death of the universe.

Most contemporary scientists and philosophers subscribe to some version of archaeonomic pessimism, believing that the passage of time will have accomplished nothing in the end. In this way, archaeonomy turns out at heart to be just one more example of the distaste for time among modern and contemporary scientific thinkers. Archaeonomy insists on reducing

the universe to its subatomic elements, initial conditions, and physical constants so that everything subsequent to the initial moment is anticlimactic. No room remains for fuller being, and certainly no room for hope. Archaeonomy allows for no transformative drama in which an entire universe is liberated from the deadness of the past and transformed into a story of life, thought, freedom, and faith. For archaeonomists, there is no reason to wait, let alone hope.

Analogy. Analogy, like archaeonomy, conveys little in the way of cosmic hope. It has no expectation that time is significant enough to lead to a transformed universe. Hence analogy has little incentive to look forward to what is not-yet in the flow of time. For it, the fullness of being, goodness, and beauty already resides outside the universe, in the timeless abode of an unchanging Absolute. There can be little interest in the cosmic future if everything truly beautiful and good has already been actualized in eternity. Analogy appeals, then, to otherworldly optimism but not to cosmic hope. Assuring us that each soul's destiny lies outside of time, analogy implies that after our brief stay here on Earth is over, the central core of each human being, the immortal soul, may leave the material world behind for good. Much the way Einstein's geometry melts time into space, analogical theology dissolves the vast temporal journey of the universe into the timeless dwelling place of pure spirit.

Analogy pictures our souls soaring away from time when we die, on their way to eternity, where the fullness of being is thought to reside. Analogy no doubt affirms human dignity and ennobles our personal histories, but that is because it believes our souls and personalities already belong more to eternity than to time. Quite early in Christian history, variations on the analogical worldview turned the religious longings of the faithful toward a spiritual world beyond matter and time. Analogical Christianity ever since has looked for the fulfillment of Jesus's promises not in a transformed universe but in a harvesting of souls from the universe.

Analogical theology fails, therefore, to make resurrection-hope relevant to the question of cosmic destiny. For analogical Christians the drama of redemption is sometimes mixed with elements of biblical anticipation, but in its usual forms, analogical theology reduces Christian hope to the

salvation of souls. During the early Christian centuries, the claim that Jesus was alive began to drift away from its native Abrahamic anticipatory moorings, eventually coming to rest in a neo-Platonic piety that longs for the core of our human existence to be transported out of time and into the spiritual splendor of eternity. Interpreted analogically, the Nicene Creed's profession of belief in "the resurrection of the dead" and "the life of the world to come" has usually meant the interruption of time by eternity rather than the fulfillment of time in the compassion of an incarnate God.

Anticipation. New and unpredictable things have been happening in our universe for billions of years, including the recent arrival of inquiring minds. So there is no reason to assume that the cosmos has yet run its course in irreversible time. Quite probably, more surprises will be arriving from out of the future. If so, to understand the universe, we have to keep scanning the horizon up ahead in search of a still-out-of-sight dramatic coherence that can be encountered only by those willing to wait in hope. Instead of digging back into the universe's granulated opening moments or springing headlong into eternity, anticipation stays close to the cosmic ground. It looks not up above but up ahead for a dramatic coherence. From the perspective of anticipation, Christian resurrection-hope cannot be separated from hope for the future redemption of the entire universe.

What, then, are we to say about the elusiveness, or the not-yet quality, of the biblical resurrection accounts? I think we may read the Gospel stories with the same anticipatory expectation with which we have been reading the unfinished universe all along. In the New Testament the resurrection is not a climactic epiphany of God but a promissory event that points Jesus's disciples in the direction of a new future. The narrative form of the biblical accounts of Jesus's resurrection is different from reports of visitations by the gods in pagan religions. It is more akin to the ancient biblical narratives of the promissory appearances of God in the stories about Abraham and Moses. In these ancient accounts God appears, makes promises, elicits the response of faith, and then disappears into the future. The New Testament stories about the resurrection of Jesus have a similar quality. If we read these stories in an Abrahamic anticipatory spirit, we notice that the Easter event resists being pinned down to the present or shoved into

the past. Jesus goes before or ahead of his earliest followers, calling them toward a new future.[15] We may wonder whether his disciples would have had any resurrection experiences at all had they not already been steeped in the habit of anticipatory hope by their familiarity with Jewish spiritual traditions going back to the ancient stories about Abraham.

Anticipation, I want to emphasize once again, is completely compatible with the methods and discoveries of the natural sciences. It endorses analytical and mathematical inquiry because these are essential to grasping the physical constraints that grammatically hold together the moments and episodes of the drama of awakening that we call the universe. I have not been criticizing science, whose practice requires great patience, but archaeonomy, which has a built-in epistemological impatience. Likewise, I have criticized the analogical vision not for its compassionate longing for an end to suffering and death but for its refusal to incorporate the whole cosmic story and the evolution of life into its optimism. I have taken issue with both the analogical and the archaeonomic stances because, instead of waiting for the universe to reveal its meaning up ahead, they declare dogmatically that the fullness of the world's being lies either in eternity or at the beginning of cosmic history. Neither hope nor moral aspiration, I believe, can survive for long in either milieu.

Fulfillment

Christian hope implies that time has a meaning and that it carries a divine promise of final fulfillment. But the universe as science sees it is destined eventually to collapse physically and energetically. How can we hold these two readings—one of promise, the other of perishing—together? Is the whole long story of the universe destined to be lost and forgotten completely in the end, or can it somehow be remembered forever?

Let me begin a response by noting that human memory, using the tools of science and history, can recall past episodes of the cosmic story long forgotten. It is the function of memory to give past events new life in the present, but it is still a mystery that we can talk about the past at all. If time makes every moment perish, then being able to refer to what happened

earlier in time implies that the past has not perished absolutely. All the series of moments that have made up the cosmic story are still around, somehow waiting to be recalled. Where are they waiting?

Christian theology submits that the ultimate repository of past events, including the whole of cosmic history, is the infinite care and compassion of God. In fact, most religions are attractive to their followers because of their promise, expressed in thoughts about immortality, resurrection, and reincarnation, that the past can never be fully forgotten. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead has developed an interpretation of the cosmos in which events that took place in the remote cosmic past are still resonating in each present moment. Many fields of research, ranging from the neurosciences to astrophysics, may also contribute their own answers to the question of how remembering takes place. Theology itself fully supports scientific research into the mysterious power of memory. But since the universe can be read at different levels, as I have been saying from the start, there is room for both scientific and theological ways of making sense of things, including time and memory.

That God never forgets is a fundamental belief of Abrahamic religion. This teaching can be consoling, however, only if God's remembering is not a mere accumulation of information but above all an exercise of divine compassion. Recall, for example, Jesus's message that the very hairs of our heads are numbered, or the psalmist's cry: "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?"[16] Christian hope means that every moment of experience, both human and nonhuman, is rescued and saved everlastingly in the breadth and depth of divine compassion—and with full experiential immediacy.

The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich captures the classical Christian sense of divine memory in terms that do not differ altogether from those of Spinoza and Einstein:

> Nothing truly real is forgotten eternally, because everything real comes from eternity and goes to eternity. . . . Nothing in the universe is unknown, nothing real is ultimately forgotten. The

> atom that moves in an immeasurable path today and the atom that moved in an immeasurable path billions of years ago are rooted in the eternal ground. There is no absolute, no completely forgotten past, because the past, like the future, is rooted in the divine life. Nothing is completely pushed into the past. Nothing real is absolutely lost and forgotten. We are together with everything real in the divine life.[17]

If time means an irreversible passage from past to future, however, Tillich's analogical sense of divine care needs to be expressed in a more anticipatory way. The fundamental units that make up our time-ferried universe are not atomic physical bits, as Democritus and modern atomists may have thought. Rather, nature is made up of temporal moments. If time is real, then the basic constituents of our dramatic universe are not spatial objects but unrepeatable events.[18] Each event in cosmic process is a singular throb of existence that is fleetingly actual and then perishes. But it does not perish absolutely. The temporal events that occur in the cosmic story are received and transformed in subsequent events. Traces of the entire cosmic past are retained in every present moment, so there is no absolute loss in any temporal series. Occurrences or events, even though they perish individually, keep adding up or accumulating in the irreversible flow of time. Events do not dissolve into nothingness as the cosmic drama unfolds. In some way, past moments are still extant, or else we could not refer to them or talk about them at all.

But, again, where are the past moments that make up the cosmic story waiting? Whitehead, who was familiar with the work and person of Einstein, took this question seriously. He agreed with Einstein that time is inseparable from nature, but contrary to Einstein, he insisted that time is real. Time is an irreversible passage that cannot be fully grasped by geometry. Indeed, Whitehead thought that the modern obsession with geometry was partly responsible for the loss of a sense of real time on the part of scientists and other thinkers. Whitehead was critical of Einstein's cosmology, therefore, for its failure to differentiate past, present, and future. He must have

noticed that Einstein had associated God with the timeless geometry of the universe, thus blunting the cutting edge of real time and nullifying the experience of real perishing.[19]

Einstein dealt with the fact of perishing by endowing the universe's geometry with the attribute of timelessness, wherein there can be no real loss. Consequently, the analogical side of Einstein's philosophy of nature led him, Platonically, to identify the real universe with the eternal geometric perfection that "tells matter how to move."[20] Since what happens in time is always subject to loss, the place for humans to hang out, it would seem, is not in time but in eternity. In his passionate love of timeless geometric perfection Einstein was no less religious than most other devotees of analogy. He assumed that time cannot be real in comparison with the eternal mathematical perfection with which nature is organized.

Nor does Einstein's idea of God, unlike Whitehead's, require the attribute of personal caring. For Einstein (like Spinoza), it was almost as though God, whom Spinoza identifies with nature, is too magisterial to condescend to caring for what happens in the lowly realm of time-passing. For Whitehead, time and perishing were real, and God was deeply personal and temporal. God, he said, is "a tender care that nothing be lost."[21]

Not only is time real but so also is perishing. The main problem for philosophy, religion, and theology, then, is to find a way to respond to the fact that things in time inevitably perish. In Whitehead's way of thinking, Einstein did not take the passage of time seriously, so he failed to take the fact of perishing seriously as well. Where there is no real loss, there is nothing to save. God, according to Whitehead, is inseparable from time and loss, and all events are rescued from absolute perishing by the same responsive God who offers relevant new possibilities to the creative cosmic process. This God is the ultimate ground of our hope, and there is no genuine hope apart from the redemptive compassion of God.[22]

In Whitehead's theological cosmology even though each moment in time perishes, it is felt fully by God and remains alive in God's experience—cumulatively and everlastingly. Everything that has ever occurred in the cosmic story is received into God's life without fading—that is,

without the loss that we ourselves experience when things we cherish are gone. God's preservative care is the ultimate reason why the past has not perished absolutely and why we are still able to recall it and ask about its meaning. Historians, in their concern to know what has happened in the past, are unknowingly instruments of the everlasting divine care that nothing be lost.

In Whitehead's view, God is the ultimate, infinitely caring recipient of all the moments of experience that make up the temporal world.[23] God retains all events in increasingly intense feeling, thus redeeming everything that happens in the cosmic drama, including the suffering of living beings. But, as Whitehead argues, there is more to God than just preserving and saving the past. I take this to mean that God is also the ultimate reason why nature is a story. The temporal universe, as I have been saying, is not just the predictable outcome of timeless geometry and eternal laws of nature. It is also a dramatic awakening that wanders far outside the boundaries of geometry. To have the shape of drama—or what Whitehead calls "adventure"—the universe, at each moment of its existence, must be open to new possibilities that arrive unpredictably in a way that no amount of scientific expertise could ever fully anticipate.

God is the ultimate reason why new possibilities exist. God—as I interpret Whitehead—is the ultimate source of the novelty that makes the universe dynamic and dramatic.[24] God transcends the universe not only spatially but also temporally. God, I have been proposing, is the not-yet that keeps the future open and allows room for new possibilities to greet the past passage of time and give it continually new meaning in each present moment. God is unsurpassably intimate with every moment that makes up the cosmic story. As the cosmic passage of time is taken into the divine life, each moment is related in a novel way to the ever-expanding pattern of beauty that already makes up God's inner life. This, too, is a reason for hope.

The point of the universe, according to Whitehead, is the building up of beauty.[25] Pope Francis seems to agree when he writes in his encyclical on ecological responsibility that "in the end we will find ourselves face-to-face

with the infinite beauty of God (*cf.* 1 *Cor* 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which *with us* will share in unending plenitude."[26]

Even though from a scientific perspective the universe will eventually undergo death by energy collapse, the theological position summarized here allows that everything that goes into the cosmic drama is everlastingly sublimated, preserved, and redeemed in God's own compassion—that is, in God's capacity to care forever. All that goes on in time, therefore, is not lost but preserved and transformed by God's increasingly widening vision and memory into a depth of beauty that promises to redeem all suffering and loss. In this theological understanding, God suffers and strives along with the world. Hence, it is not the timeless perfection of geometry but the limitless compassion of God that gives us reason to hope in the face of time's perpetual perishing.

This account notwithstanding, the question can be asked again: Is Christian resurrection-hope anything more than a comforting illusion? Our contemporary archaeonomic intellectual culture will inevitably reject every theological vision, including the one that I have all too succinctly summarized just now. Let us recall, however, the distinction made here between the universe's geometric and dramatic coherence. Einstein's relativity physics provides a good example of the geometric coherence that ties the universe together gravitationally. Christian faith, however, claims in effect that in the resurrection of Jesus the whole universe reaches—by anticipation—what I have been calling a dramatic coherence.

In order for the universe to be the carrier of dramatic meaning no violation of nature's physical regulations occurs. The universe can undergo dramatic transformations that do not show up on maps of geometric understanding. We have already seen an instance of this nonintrusiveness in the surprising appearance of the first living cells on Earth 3.7 billion years ago. From the point of view of physics and chemistry, no habitual routines in the physical universe had to be interrupted to let life come into the story. But even though the origin of life required no suspension of physical and chemical routines, the universe by virtue of that event suddenly became

completely new, dramatically speaking. What could be more dramatic, after all, than the story of a lifeless universe becoming a living one?

The drama of life entered into the universe without making a crease in its physical and chemical patterns or in its geometric coherence. Consequently, for Christians the dramatic events at the root of their sense of a renewed universe are trivialized if we try to confirm them by way of the same method of inquiry we use for finding geometric coherence. It is by way of anticipatory hope, not by science or mathematical abstractions, that dramatic coherence is encountered by those who are prepared to wait. Neither archaeonomy nor analogy has the requisite epistemological patience to encounter the universe in the fullness of its being and becoming.

Summary

Theology, I have been saying, looks to find reasons for our hope. As a general rule, theology in the age of science does not look for reasons to hope by pointing to miraculous events in the habits of nature, as Einstein assumed. In anticipating life's final victory over death and expecting "the life of the world to come," theology may read the same cosmic story in different ways. One way is that of analogy; another the way of anticipation. These two readings sometimes merge and mix in the minds of individual Christians, but analogy has usually overpowered anticipation. And both readings have had to combat a third, the fatalism and cosmic pessimism that today finds its home in archaeonomic depictions of nature.

Christians, in past ages, have looked at both the Nicene Creed and the natural world mostly with an analogical eye. During the fourth century, when the articles of the Nicene Creed were being painfully put together, its architects favored the analogical stance. They were unable at the time to connect their resurrection-hope to irreversible cosmic time and an awakening universe. Part of the reason for the analogical emphasis in so much Christian spirituality lies in the wording of the Creed itself. Reflecting biblical imagery, the Creed professes that after Jesus died and rose again, "he ascended into heaven." The ascension into heaven has often been pictured

analogically to mean that a savior has finally opened up an avenue from time to eternity. The expectation that Jesus will "come again . . . to judge the living and the dead" suggests that the saved are destined to be snatched from the temporal world and transported into the spiritual world of timeless perfection up above.

This, however, is a misrepresentation of the dominant meaning of Christian hope, as the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) recently recalled, centuries after Nicaea.[27] The Jewish background of early Christian theology looked forward to the renewal, not the abandonment, of the cosmos. The Christian resurrection-hope originally entailed the revitalizing and transforming of creation, not an escape from the cosmos. The biblical doctrine of creation and the New Testament proclamation that the Word of God "became flesh" are assurances that matter and time have always been theologically important. Time, in other words, matters to God. The incarnation of God, reaffirmed emphatically at Nicaea and again at Vatican II, means that matter and time are everlastingly inseparable from the life of God. This implies, I believe, that what happens in time contributes something to the very identity of God. Just as a loving parent cannot help being changed by the suffering and joys of her or his child, so also a caring God cannot help being affected—and that means transformed in some way—by what happens in the cosmic story.[28]

Finally, although the universe is tied at one level to unbreakable physical and chemical routines, it reveals itself at another level as an unpredictable drama going on in deep time. It is especially in the drama rather than the geometric grammar of the universe that we look for reasons to hope. And even if the universe is condemned physically to eventual death, whether by heat or by cold, the trail of moments that are making up its dramatic interior do not end up vanishing into a void. The story of the whole universe, Whiteheadian theology speculates, is registered permanently within the hidden, indestructible rightness to which the universe is awakening. Christians hope also that the imprinting of the whole cosmic story on the compassionate "memory" of God also includes in some way the subjective survival and ongoing transformation of personal consciousness after death.[29]