

Article

A Process Theology of Hope: The Counter Apocalyptic Vision of Catherine Keller

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Abstract: Christianity continues to decline in the traditional west, yet is at the same time experiencing significant growth in the majority world. Research indicates that by 2060 the portion of those who identify as non-religious will decline significantly across the globe. Christianity in the future will largely be dominated by an apocalyptic eschatology that has the potential to disengage Christians from our current planetary crisis. Catherine Keller has developed a counter-apocalyptic vision that challenges traditional eschatology in its potential to disconnect faith from the planet's most urgent challenges. Keller attacks a key facet of apocalyptic eschatology that enshrines an omnipotent deity. Her approach is evaluated within the broader process-relational theology from which she has emerged, particularly that influenced by Whitehead. It is argued that her eschatological alternative is best placed to offer a vision that enables Christians to take the earth seriously, to generate a chastened and realistic hope, grounded in a process relational ontology.

Keywords: Keller; apocalypse; hope; omnipotence; eschatology

1. Introduction

Hope is a key biblical theme in both the first and second testaments. The sage of proverbs tells us that hope deferred makes the heart sick (Proverbs 13:12), while the apostle Paul argues that hope is one of big three, along with love and faith (1 Corinthians 13:13). However, not everyone sees hope as important, with some like Nietzsche arguing that it is potentially hazardous. Nietzsche recounts the famous myth of Pandora's box (which in the myth is a jar), and the various evils that have been released in the world when the box was first opened. Tradition has it, that only one evil remains in the jar, which is traditionally translated as "hope". Zeus, it is argued, has allowed hope so that humans would not give themselves away in despair. Nietzsche (1984, p. 58) believes that "it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment". This reminds us of the well-known phrase from Karl Marx where he describes religion as the opium of the people, distracting the masses with a hope to come in the next life. It is unsurprising then, that Nietzsche's questioning of hope would lead him to see alcohol and Christianity as the two biggest narcotics in European society. As we shall see later, a simple embrace of hope comes with its own dark shadow, in that those who hope for a better world can generate their own forms of terror and destruction. Keller (2018, p. 58) has argued that hope needs to be rethought, whether in its secular or religious form. Promises of utopia can itself lead to totalitarianism on the back end of revolution. She further argues that a desire for a specific future can often morph into a guarantee of that future, as with certain theological eschatologies like those on offer from Jurgen Moltmann. Utopia, as a guarantee, will prove to be problematic.

So are we allowed to hope then? And if so, what are we are allowed to hope for, and on what basis? If Moltmann (1971, p. 178) is perhaps a little too hopeful in his guarantee of a specific future, he is perhaps at least right to remind us that hope has its foundations in the sufferings of the present, and that hope is possible in human life when the "existing and the possible can be fused with one

another, in which the possible is realized and the new can be made possible". The "dissatisfactions and sufferings of the present" certainly abound, and we needn't look far to realize that our current world system is fragile and that the challenges are large and multifaceted. Climate change and nuclear war being potentially the two most devastating existential threats we face (Chomsky 2017).

Alongside these collective existential threats, we see the rise of nationalism and its attendant furies, long prophesied by the Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells. Castells (2004) long argued that language would continue to be a driver of identity and that the network society and globalization would result in a backlash from patriarchal and fundamentalist groups. Both globalization itself, and its identity-based reaction, would lead to enormous suffering for the world's poor and the environment (Castells 2000). Amidst these challenges, we have many who tap into the fears and hopes of those both with power, and those with little access to power, who fuel this uncertainty. It is not surprising that nationalism and religion form a powerful and almost unstoppable alliance, with a potential for devastating consequences. The above difficulties give rise to the various political, social and cultural answers that seek to address these concerns. Within a religious context various proposals arise seeking to address how these problems should be attended to, and in what shape or form the responses should take. These questions find themselves falling under the broad category of eschatology¹.

There are many different versions of eschatological hope within world religions, and Christianity in particular, that mark our current landscape. Many of these eschatological hopes have a long history within the church, often being formed out of the cultural contexts in which they immersed. Some might argue that questions of eschatology might be irrelevant to many of those in the "traditional west". The church has been in decline in many of the historic Christian centres, and will likely continue to reduce in both influence and numbers. Globally though this is not the case, as religious belief as a proportion of the world population is projected to grow substantially in the decades to come (more of this later). The specific brand of Christian belief of the future is likely to be captured by an eschatological outlook that absolves us from taking responsibility for the earth and the significant challenges we are facing. It is apocalyptic² in its outlook, being driven by an understanding of God where God is both all-powerful and all-knowing. Even within countries with declining religious belief, a fusion between non-religious nationalism and religious fervor often form alliances for specific goals. Regardless, eschatology is here to stay, and it is a particular eschatology that will gain the biggest market share. This version of eschatology can best be defined as decoding apocalyptic. This specific brand of eschatology finds itself under a more broadly based evangelical eschatology that is awaiting the final return of Christ and divine intervention to bring about a new heaven and new earth.

This needn't be the only eschatological outlook though that Christians might embrace to generate hope. Catherine Keller's counter-apocalyptic vision and process eschatology provide one such alternative, potentially better suited to our current challenges. It is one that provides a chastened, or realistic hope, for our future. Central to Keller's concern is the dual damage that omnipotence and omniscience pose to any healthy eschatological outlook, with particular focus on the former. Keller's proposal, however, needs to be examined against the backdrop of both the growth of religion worldwide (particularly Christianity) and its dominant eschatological outlook. This provides the context for demonstrating the importance of an alternate eschatological hope grounded in a rejection of omnipotence and omniscience. Keller's outlook is one that is perhaps most relevant to our current planetary emergency, a hazardous hope, one grounded in a specific vision of God. This vision generates a hope that is a "struggle of the vulnerable now". Not from any place of certainty, but a hope that

¹ The word eschatology is often conceived as dealing with the "last things". McDowell and Kirkland (2018, p. xii) have challenged this conception of eschatology. Rather they propose "a series of lenses on understanding eschatological statements, or what the content of Christian hope is". In their work, Catherine Keller is examined through an existential lens.

² This apocalyptic outlook falls mostly within McDowell and Kirkland's apocalyptic lens, though with clear overlaps with the political lens too. It is important that their lenses should not be construed "as discrete and exclusive (there are overlaps between them) or as simple and coherent categories (there are multiple types of approaches even within each).

“cuts free from the numbing cycle of optimism and pessimism. Optimism and pessimism both know the outcome. The hazardous hope however does not know, does not predict. Nor does it patiently await ... this hope grieves even as it activates. Even now” (Keller 2018, p. 59). To prosecute the case for the relevance of Keller’s eschatology we must first proceed to outline the current growth of Christianity worldwide, and the specific eschatological tenor we have mentioned it embodies. This will move us into looking specifically at Keller’s critique of this form of eschatology, focusing on its use of revelation, and its understanding of an omnipotent Deity. The next part will describe Keller’s response in process-relational terms. What will emerge from this is a rejection of apocalyptic eschatology and particularly its version of an omnipotent Deity. It will be an affirmation of a non-coercive, interconnected God, understood panentheistically. This will form the hope that generates Keller’s response to what she believes is the current planetary emergency.

2. Eschatology and the Growth of Religion

There is no shortage of voices decrying the decline of religion in the west. This decline has been going on for some time, specifically in North America, Europe and Australasia. This has been slightly offset by the boom in Pentecostal mega-churches in many of these settings. Despite this, the decline continues to be rapid and substantial. What is often forgotten though in these discussions, is that the worldwide trend is moving strongly in the opposite direction. Indeed, religion worldwide is expected to grow significantly over the next few decades. Hackett et al. (2017, p. 8) has shown that the world’s non-religious members are due to decline substantially from 18 to 13%, while the growth areas will be dominated by the Christian and Muslim faiths. The research indicates that:

Between 2015 and 2060, the world’s population is expected to increase by 32%, to 9.6 billion. Over that same period, the number of Muslims—the major religious group with the youngest population and the highest fertility—is projected to increase by 70%. The number of Christians is projected to rise by 34%, slightly faster than the global population overall yet far more slowly than Muslims.

There is significant growth in the Christian religion in South America, Africa and parts of Asia. The research (p. 12) indicates that by 2050 Africa will account for a staggering 42% of the world’s Christians. Although Pentecostalism is one of the fastest growing denominations, there is increased growth in Anglicanism and Catholic branches of the faith (Jenkins 2002, pp. 90–92). The form and tenor of this growing Christianity is one less inclined to liberal versions of the Christian tradition. Its focus is supernaturalist, with a strong emphasis on healing and prophecy, often deemed to be fundamentalist in nature (p. 107). Fundamentalism is a complex term, with a multifaceted history, and used differently depending on the context.³ Apocalyptic Eschatology, however, has been central to fundamentalism in its early formation.⁴ Although it is certainly true that the majority of Christians believe in a second coming, they have very different understandings of how this will eventuate. The forecasting of the end times is central to the fundamentalist outlook, and something that even in the seventies James Barr (1977, p. 191) recognized had the potential to overwhelm conservative evangelicalism more broadly. Further to this the 1970s and 1980s saw the wedding of apocalyptic logic to the republican political agenda in the United States (McDowell and Kirkland 2018, pp. 20–21). The Christian right in America is not simply committed to a passive waiting, but rather in actively participating to bring about the millennial future. This end-time view now seems central to evangelical thinking and that, “Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and evangelicals believe that the End Times will usher in a battle

³ Fundamentalism as a movement has its roots in some of the specific challenges that faced American culture in the 1920s. It focuses on strong beliefs around the inerrancy of scripture and salvation through Jesus to achieve this salvation and avoid the tortures of Hell (Marsden 1980, p. 3).

⁴ James Barr (1977, p. 199) has recounted the history of the formation of fundamentalism with its direct link to apocalyptic millenarianism.

between God and Satan. Fundamentalists believe that the battle is taking place today, and the earth itself is the battleground" (Clark 2005).

Unfortunately, this view and its vision of the future is a catastrophic one, in which the last things involve not "a renewed earth, but the destruction of the earth. Heaven is, then, an escape from this world after being called into the clouds". According to Žižek (2010, p. 336) fundamentalists have always tended to read the apocalypse in strictly biblicist terms, in a literalistic manner. Keller (2004, p. 4) encourages us not to abandon the apocalypse to the fundamentalists though, but rather to imagine an alternate future to the one that they provide. This involves challenging a hope that is not about "a final omnipotent intervention from above".

Keller grounds her counter apocalyptic vision in a process ontology (McDowell and Kirkland 2018, pp. 46–47). This involves a rejection of an omnipotent and omniscient being. Keller has attacked the conception of an omnipotent deity and made this critique central to her counter apocalypse. Indeed, it is her critique of traditional apocalyptic visions that they too easily endorse these two features of understanding God that are so problematic, omnipotence and omniscience. By re-imagining God in terms of process thought, Keller offers a hope that is more earthy⁵. It is, therefore one which cannot simply wait for a future eventuality, and in the process neglect current concerns. It can also not rely on coercive power to bring that future about. It is a hazardous hope that as mentioned earlier, is neither pessimistic nor optimistic.

3. Rejecting the Apocalypse and Omnipotence

It is in Keller's book *God and Powers: counter apocalyptic journeys* in which she takes aim at traditional eschatologies that have placed their hope largely in a future divine event. This event will be brought about by divine intervention from God and will demonstrate God's power. This future event is a certainty, based on God's foreknowledge of the future. Keller (2004, p. 19) believes that we need to raise a theological question about power more generally, questioning traditional answers within this stream of eschatology. Keller rejects Calvin's understanding of God, and what she deems his incomprehensible providence, which she equates with divine omnipotence more generally (p. 26). She believes that this omnipotent God is a false God (p. 29) and rejects the idea of a transcendent understanding of God that this might imply. This transcendence is often coupled with the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*. Keller takes issue with this particular doctrine that involves God creating the world out of nothing. Rather, Keller (2008, p. 48) prefers an understanding of God where God lures out of the deep, what she calls a *novo-creation-ex-profundis*. On her account, there was no all-powerful act of creation that brought the universe into being. Here Keller is drawing specifically on the process tradition, in which there were always other entities in existence alongside God. This major feature of process theology is linked to another of its key tenants as articulated by Whitehead; that God persuades, rather than forces.⁶ If one has a God who can use power to create a world, surely this God can intervene in the future to change it for the better? And if God can, then why doesn't God do this? Keller (2004, p. 30), along with process thinkers more generally, rejects God's ability to intervene with force. She believes that "Christians are ready for an alternative to an assumption of Gods omnipotence, for a transcending cosmic power". Keller (2004, p. 31) asks us to,

Let the hierarchical universe of unilateral and omnipotent sovereignty fade into a more widely democratic cosmos of unpredictable and uncontrollable—but never unordered—interrelations. God is called upon not as a unilateral superpower but as a relational force, not an omnipotent creator from nothing, imposing order upon chaos, but the lure to a self-organising complexity, creating out of the chaos.

⁵ McDowell and Kirkland (2018, pp. 46–47) have accurately referred to her apocalyptic vision as being one from below.

⁶ For a good introduction to the religious thought of Whitehead see Dombrowski's *Whitehead's religious thought: from mechanism to organism, from force to persuasion* (Dombrowski 2017).

An important critique that emerges from her vision of a persuasive God who is not omnipotent, is a challenge to liberation theologians who have found too easy sustenance in apocalyptic imagery and language. Although not rejecting liberation accounts, she cautions those that would read the book of Revelation as an anti-imperial apocalyptic justification for violent revolt against those that oppress (such as empire). It is hard for us to “clean” the book of Revelation from its misogynistic and brutal imagery. Here omnipotence “doubles and mimics the imperial power” (Keller 2004, pp. 41, 46), for in the apocalypse,

God’s enemies also get tortured. So what instability of agency is John compensating for, or repressing in the ritual torture of the enemies of the Messiah? Could it be the omnipotence of God that is so highly contestable? Is the regime of invisible divine power not difficult to believe in, especially when history seems –as it so often does—to be going the other way? What is more theologically unstable than the dream of divine control?

It is these broader questions of how power is portrayed in Revelation that should lead to the questioning of omnipotence itself according to Keller (2004, p. 48). This should lead to further questions being asked concerning how utopian dreams of the future, with the apparent dissolution of all mourning and suffering, are brought into being. If this is achieved through unilateral omnipotence, then the potential justification for ritual violence to bring about peace can be justified (Keller 2004, p. 50). This leads Keller (2004, p. 51) to conclude that we ought to question the entire “doctrinal arsenal of omnipotence: divine sovereignty, aseity and impassibility, irresistible grace, creation ex nihilo, the exclusive incarnation and revelation in Christ, Final judgment”.

Does this mean that we need to reject engagement with the apocalyptic language of Revelation completely? Keller (2004, p. 74) suggests not. She appreciates the vision of the new creation, but rejects the torture chambers in the basement that is the underside of that vision. The hope of liberation in the book of Revelation is often accompanied with the complete extermination of one’s enemies. We must, therefore, accept the “moral limits” of this book and the negative impact that it has had

But if for a moment we bracket the clumsy question of whether we should blame the text itself or only its interpretations for all the human-made apocalypses of two thousand years of biblical citation, we may at least agree that the story needs changing. (Keller 2004, p. 81)

Keller looks to Whitehead as one example of someone who provides a counter exception to the omnipotent deity and the violence of revelation. She builds on Whitehead’s metaphysics, rejecting the notion of separate substances, and affirming the reality of an interdependent becoming. What is so important about Whitehead’s metaphysics that provides Keller with an alternative vision to omnipotence? Central to process ontology is the affirmation that at a fundamental level events, not substances, are primary. Further, these events are all interrelated and interconnected. These interrelated events are in a continual creative movement and becoming. God, as the supreme being, is part of this metaphysical reality, often referred to as its chief exemplification. Each event is referred to as an actual occasion that prehends the past through a process of concrescence as it moves towards a novel future. At a base level, these actual occasions have “feeling” towards the past, or other actual occasions. Although Whitehead’s metaphysics is certainly complex, this key idea of inter-connectedness that Keller (2018, p. 138) engages with, allows her to propose a Deity that is in an interdependent activity of becoming with us.

Each actuality, divine included, is a process of embodiment contracting in itself the entangled materializations of the universe. The metaphor is of divinity as one who does not control any creature, even an electron . . . Divine agency then does not control the outcome of any becoming, even its own. It causes only by calling. It does not coerce, command, or hack its way into the creature, even the electron

This is linked back to the earlier discussion of creation-ex-profundis that Keller proposes, which is against a creation out of nothing. There is an emergent of becoming from the deep, through a continual

interdependent multiplicity of difference. Keller believes that a process theistic vision allows for a deep affinity with the natural world, one in which God is deeply connected with the process of becoming itself. The image emerges of God and the world as “all in”, and moving towards the future with real risk. In this reality we “conceive here a divinity who is potentially ‘all in all’ and, as such, relational through and through, requiring our participation” (Keller 2018, p. 146). It is for this very reason that Keller embraces a panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship. She is careful to describe her panentheistic approach as apophatic panentheism, being cautious to foreclose discussions on the God-world relationship. Nonetheless, she maintains the importance of panentheism for both its potential critique of divine omnipotence, along with the challenge it poses to our collective effort of becoming, and with that, one’s personal responsibility for the future.

4. Panentheism and Process

Keller asks us to imagine a God that is present within the world, and the world within God. This is traditionally known as Panentheism, which needs to be contrasted with both Pantheism and Theism. David Griffin (2014, p. 2) outlines the panentheistic position as one in which “the world’s causal patterns are part and parcel of that which exists necessarily, understood as not simply God (as traditional theism says), or simply as world (as atheism says), but God-and-the-world”. Panentheism has a long history both in philosophical and theological traditions. It finds a central place though in the process metaphysics developed by Whitehead. Process metaphysics argues that God is also subject to the same process and duration that any other entity in the universe is (Debaise 2017, p. 27)⁷. This process is a continual creative becoming (Whitehead 1978, p. 222). The universe, like God, is a creative advance into novelty. Philip Clayton (2000, p. 505) believes that it is panentheism that can provide the resources we need to begin to think about divine agency in fresh and creative ways. Pantheism is often conceptualised using the mind/body analogy. Clayton suggests seeing God as mind and the universe as body (Clayton 2008, p. 147). This has strong affinities with certain perspectives on how Hegel conceptualized the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Peter Singer (1983, p. 108) has argued that a Panentheistic perspective is what best captures Hegel’s understanding of God, and in ways very similar to process thinking, “God needs the universe in the way as a person needs to the body”.⁸

Many fear that this is a downgrading of traditional conceptions of God, but that needn’t be the case. God may still be conceived as the ultimate being who cannot be surpassed by any other being, and further, that this being can be all-wise. God, as an actual entity, has the wisdom of the ages as it has been transformed through the passage of time (Hartshorne 1967, p. 128). The future though has not arrived, neither for the universe, nor for God.

God, therefore, does not know the future, nor does God have the power to intervene to bring about any specific change in the world. God can lure the world into a preferred reality, can persuade, but not force. God can lure because God is intimately involved in the world panentheistically. One can see clearly how this is a blow to any eschatology that might want to fix a certain outcome to a desired future date. Hans Jonas believed that this perspective on God’s nature was the only plausible option for a belief in God after Auschwitz. Jonas (2008, p. 270) tackles this by arguing that “Only a completely unintelligible God can be said to be absolutely good and absolutely powerful, yet tolerate the world as it is”. Although this generates specific questions concerning theodicy, the finer point Jonas is asking us to consider should not be passed over too quickly. It is a suffering and becoming God (p. 290), and a rejection of omnipotence that he is proposing (p. 291). The myth that Jonas develops to describe this God is deeply eschatological, where God has risked within creation, and needs creation to become

⁷ Debaise (2017, pp. 26–27) discusses how creativity is the ultimate principle in the universe to which even God is in the process thereof. Creativity is the description of all of reality being in the process of continual creative advance.

⁸ Singer (1983, pp. 104–8) does a good job in distinguishing between Pantheism and Theism and then locating Hegel in terms of both. This is the point at which he proposes panentheism as the alternative to best capture Hegel’s understanding.

God's hands and feet. This is not dissimilar to where Keller will go with her articulation of the nature of God and its implications for eschatology. Keller (2018, p. 146) remarks that "God cannot do it for us" and that

if we perpetuate a theology of omnipotent control, we can blame all of our failings on God who might have intervened, might have rescued us. The failure might feel like a betrayal. But the betrayal, it seems after all, is our own. And our theology, our God-construct, is complicit.

Therefore, process eschatology always entails that we are at risk. If God cannot intervene at any point in the future, the risk of oblivion for the human species, or the planet as a whole, is all too apparent. We cannot wait for the apocalypse to come, but ironically we may bring about the apocalyptic end of the world. Hope though can be grounded in the belief and affirmation that God at every given moment is holding out before us a preferred future of justice, beauty, and value. God acts through us by being with us, and hence "There is no divine action apart from creaturely action, but equally the divine action is the principle of hope in the creaturely action" (Cobb and Griffin 1976, p. 158). Norman Pittenger (1970, p. 90) in his defense of process eschatology believed that the traditional perspective on the last things, which emphasizes a future divine intervention, foretold through divine omniscience, does not allow us to face reality with honesty and humility.

Keller has been quick to remind us that the future is an open one, and as yet unknowable. This has been the key insight process theology has sought to address based on Whitehead's metaphysics. The future is not determined, but it is there as a possibility or probability (Keller 2011, p. 93). We cannot know nor control that future though. This need not lead us to despair, however, because we believe that "a better now is possible" (p. 158).

5. A process Eschatology for Earth's Future

Having explored in some detail the core vision of Catherine Keller's counter apocalyptic alternative with regards to eschatology, based on the process ontology developed by Whitehead, we can now explore its implications for the earth's future. Keller offers a process panentheistic becoming that affirms interrelatedness, while at the same time rejecting omnipotence and omniscience as divine features of God.⁹ Why could this be important for a more holistic approach to eschatology for the planet?

For one, it does not allow us the luxury of sitting back to watch and wait for a future divine intervention. To put it more directly, there is no rider coming on a white horse to restore the world to a past glory, nor a coming utopia. It is of course by no means obvious that the belief in a divine intervention in the future will result in apathy in the present. In fact, millenarian theology has in the past led to intense missionary activity. The difficulty remains though, that there is a strong temptation in apocalyptic eschatology to neglect the earth if there is a guaranteed utopia in the offing.

Keller reminds us that we ought to feel the urgency of climate change, knowing that there is no divine action to come, none that will simply turn down the temperature from decades of human abuse. The recent HBO series *Chernobyl* is a stark reminder of the dangers of nuclear power to destroy not only human life, but life on a large scale. In recent times there has been a strong push for evangelicals to begin to think about the earth in a way in which our efforts are taken up into God's plan for the future. Most notably NT Wright has been one of the more vocal proponents arguing for a continuation of this earth, and not its destruction. Although admirable, and certainly dignifying to human effort, it still allows for the eventual culmination of the ages and intervention by God to bring about the future new heavens and earth. The temptation still remains however, to disconnect from the existential threats and challenges we are facing. Keller's process vision brings human efforts to the front and centre of the current drama. God cannot rescue us. Further to this blunt assessment, there is no foreknowledge

⁹ For a more philosophically informed reflection regarding the earth's future from a process perspective see Gare's (2016) work *The Philosophical Foundations of Ecological Civilization*.

of the future that allows us to take comfort that things will turn out for the best. So where then does hope lie?

This is where Keller's apophatic panentheism urges us to think the God-World relationship as one of interrelatedness and becoming. We are interrelated in two ways, both with God and the rest of the universe. Becoming and continual change, allows us the vision to work for a better future. By being interrelated to God we may be invited (or lured in process language) towards an alternate reality than the one we currently inhabit. In this sense God is continually, in every moment, holding out the best possible alternative in any given situation. This is what is seen as divine persuasion, as against divine coercion. The hope here is grounded in God's continual faithfulness not to give up on us, or the world. God's interrelatedness with us further allows us to influence God, along with being influenced. In this sense, as Whitehead (1978, pp. 347–48, 351) noted, "God is the fellow sufferer who understands". Interrelatedness has a further implication though, in that we are connected not only to God, but to each other and the earth. Our interconnectedness reminds us of our shared fate, while at the same time the collective potential to work together for a future that is good for all. This interconnected multiplicity is such that there is a potential that can be harnessed to a becoming that could be transformative. This transformation though is fraught with risk, in that there is the very real potential that we might wipe out life, or at least human life. This is a rejection of hope as pure optimism. It is, however, not simply given over to pessimism either. For if we can affirm God's presence, panentheistically understood, we can embrace God's faithfulness in each moment, along with our interrelated collective becoming, and hope for a better world. This must always be a hazardous hope. Can the "eventiveness of every becoming" offer us anything?

And we will wonder, in view of the earth crisis that the anthropos embodies, if any kairos can arrest and suspend the chromos of planetary doom—enough, at any rate, to trigger the realization of another possibility. Surely not, we suspect, if we await some messiah, as great exception to our condition, to come do it for us. (Keller 2018, p. 6)

6. Conclusions

Religion, and Christianity in particular, will continue to grow worldwide over the next few decades. This will happen alongside the growing planetary challenges from existential threats such as climate change and nuclear war, to the rising refugee and humanitarian crises we face. The political and cultural challenges of nationalism, racism, sexism and LGBTIQI discrimination are also apparent.

Eschatologies that defer hope to a time to come have the potential to remove us from many of the above challenges we collectively face. While at the same time, extreme millenarian versions of this future could easily make those realities even worse. It is perhaps too hopeful to imagine that the process eschatological theology articulated above by Catherine Keller will come to dominate the future of the Christian church.¹⁰ Process theology has been, and perhaps will remain, a marginal movement within the broader Christian tradition. It is not unreasonable though to believe that the counter apocalyptic vision that Keller proposes, may take the hard edges off omnipotence and omniscience that currently fuel end-time thinking. Certainly, a panentheistic alternative has the potential to remind us of our interrelatedness to God and the environment. This case will need to be prosecuted carefully to account for the aversion evangelicals feel towards pantheism.

Nonetheless, Keller asks us not to lose hope in dark times, but rather to forge a collective alternative of creative becoming. By affirming God's faithfulness to each event of becoming we know that we are not in this alone, that there is still hope, and perhaps still time. This hope cannot be misplaced, or displaced, to a coming future. Rather it is a hope grounded in God and the potential becoming of our

¹⁰ There are various networks that exist to help churches and communities engage with process theological thinking. The Centre of Process studies at Claremont, along with the recent Centre for Open and Relational Theology are notable examples.

collective multiplicity. If hope is still in Pandora's box we must open it and risk the outcome. We must wrestle with hope, for too much is at stake to keep the box closed.

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