



# Hope in Communion with Others: A Narrative for the Terminally Ill

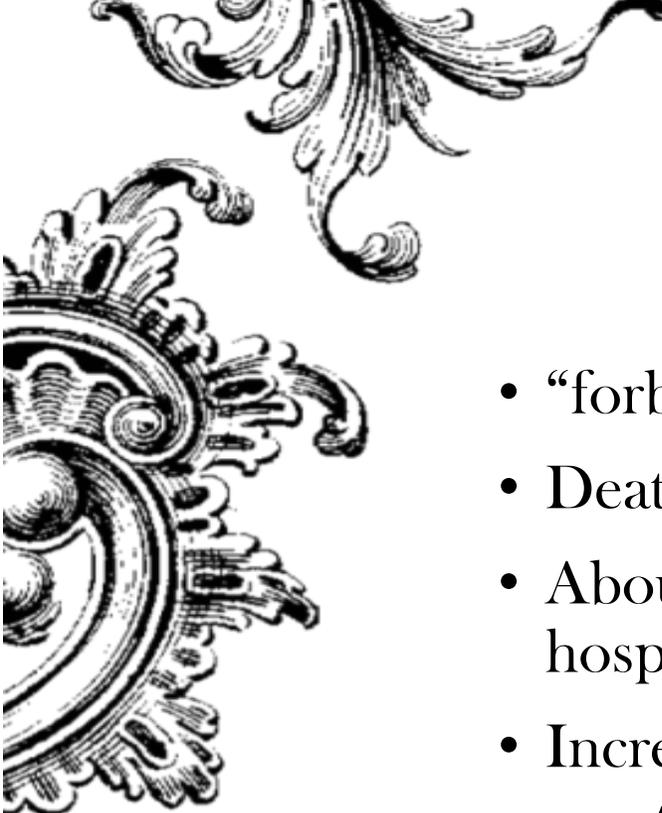
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# Outline

- Current narrative
  - Proposing a new story
  - Erik Erikson: hope as relational
  - Martin Buber: hope rooted in God
  - Gabriel Marcel: hope as a shared mystery
  - Our Catholic faith
  - Implications
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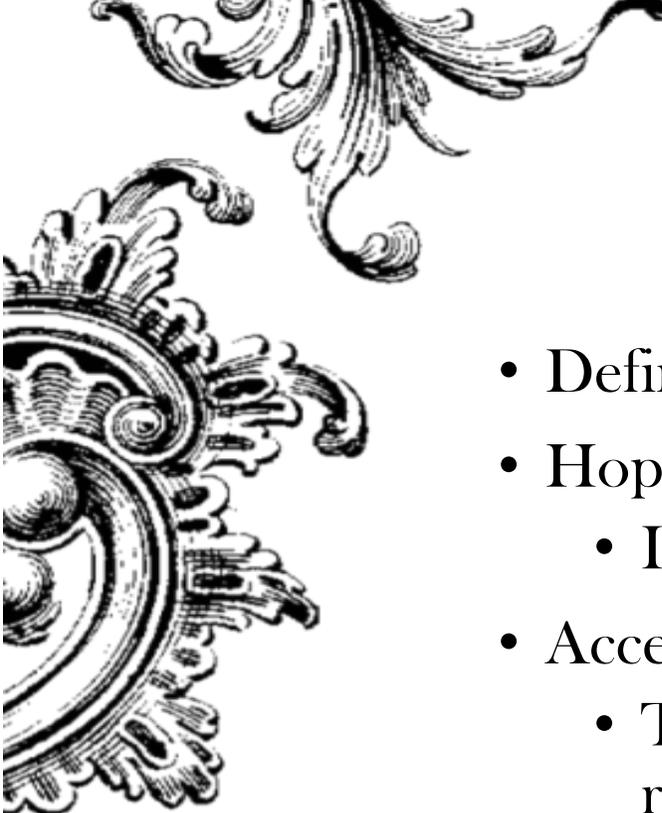
## Current Narrative: Death Denying

- “forbidden death” (Aries, 1977/2000)
- Death is no longer accepted as a natural part of life
- About 75% of Americans want to die at home, but about 63% die in hospitals and only 33% die at home (Mattes and Sloane, 2015)
- Increasingly aggressive treatments
  - Advances in technology and medicine



“Life is extended enormously, and we have come to focus more and more on putting death off rather than accepting its inevitability. This change is most common in Western cultures, and it seems to be particularly prominent in the United States.”

(Thompson, 2011, p. 180)



## Current Narrative: Hope in Physical Health

- Defined by the medical field: hope equates to curative treatments
- Hope particularized to hope for cure
  - I have hope (thing) vs. I hope (action)
- Acceptance of death as loss of hope or giving up hope
  - To hope is to fight: “Fighting has become *the* cultural signature in relation to modern death” (Kellehear, 2014, p. 75)
- Hope only exists if physical health remains a possibility



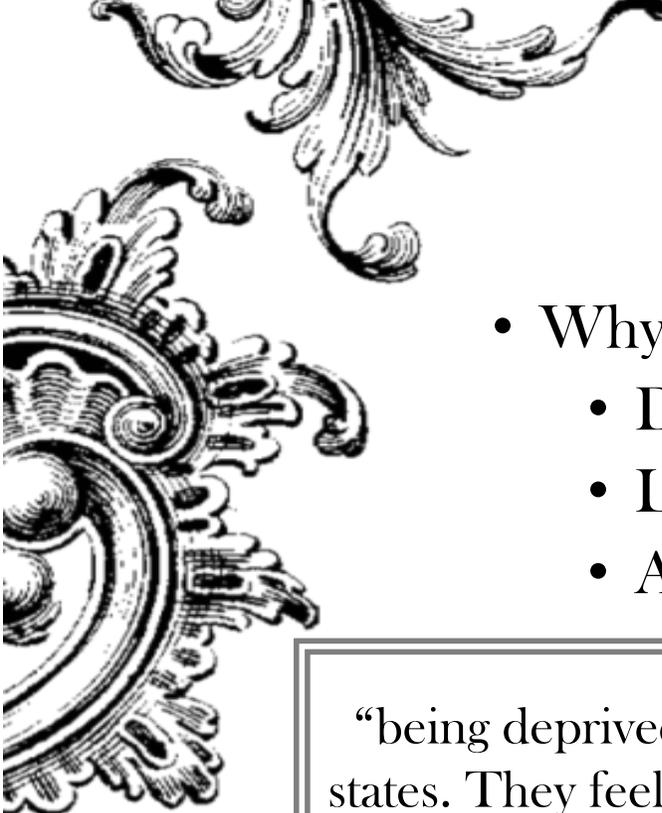
Hope “refers to the patient’s belief that some thing, action, or entity (usually medical authority) will be successful in preventing or significantly delaying their death.”

(Eloitt & Olver, 2007, p. 143)



# Current Narrative: Cultural Values

- We collectively value:
    - Health, independence, autonomy, self-reliance, self-determination, physical appearance, productivity, ability to ‘do’
    - Emphasis on ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’
  - Fighting to preserve a way of life, an identity
  - Dependence on others as a weakness and thing to be avoided
  - Cultural worship of medicine and technology
    - “‘magical’ confidence we have in the curative power of medicine” (Toombs, 2004, p. 193)
    - Terminal illness shatters this illusion of medical omnipotence
  - Human person as only a physical or biological being
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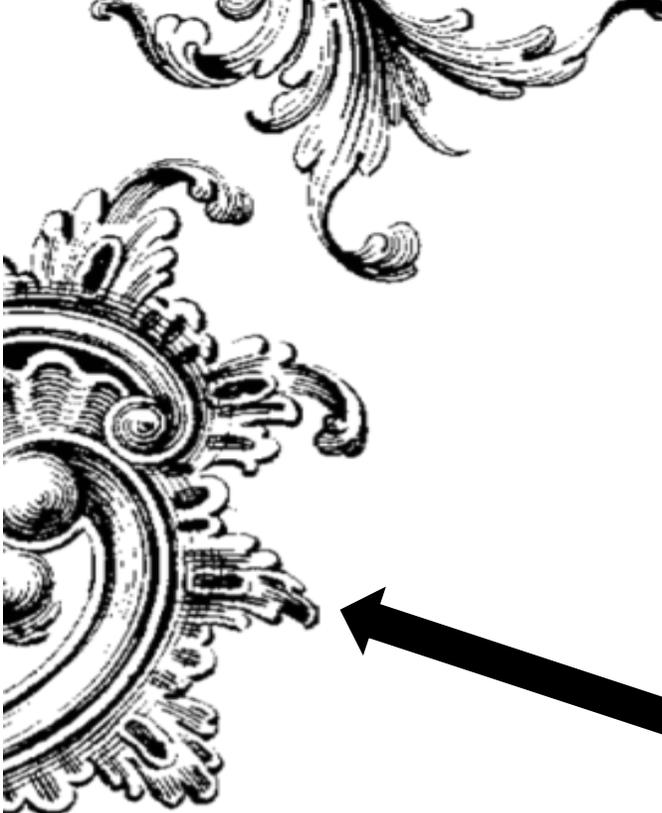
# Proposing a Different Narrative

- Why is a different narrative necessary?
  - Death and illness only as medical concerns
  - Lack of psychological and spiritual preparation for death
  - Adverse effects for medical staff, families, and the dying person

“being deprived of their usual world quickly lead dying people to catastrophic emotional states. They feel smashed, isolated, torn from their usual assumptions about how the world works or how the world is for them, and anguish, emotional meltdowns, depression and loneliness, grief, and loss of control become strange, sometimes constant, new companions.” (Kellehear, 2014, p. 22)

“we need to remind ourselves of what people commonly fear about the process of dying—being a burden to others, being vulnerable, being abandoned, dying in great suffering, and losing dignity at the end” (Kellehear, 2014, p. 75)

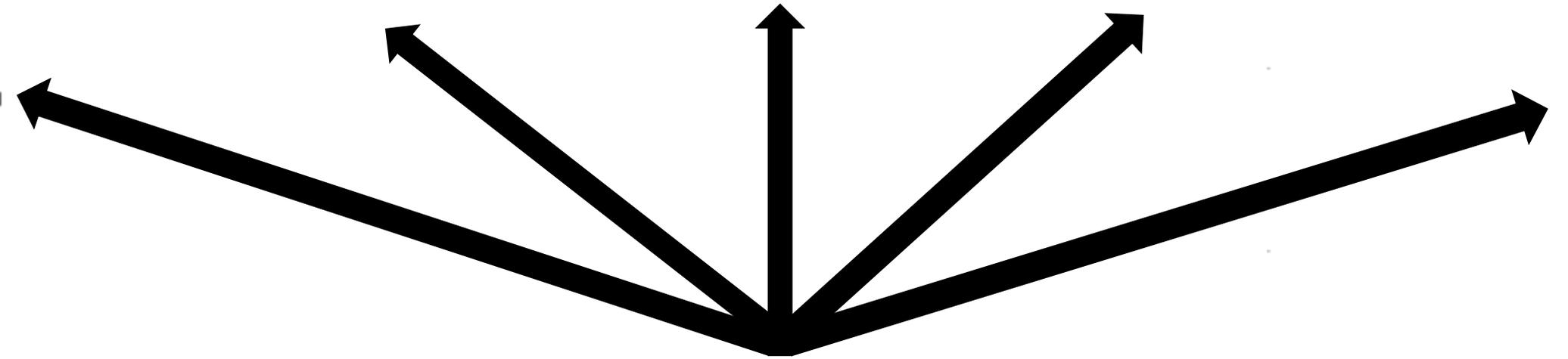




Hope in Communion

(hope situated within)

(unconditional hope)

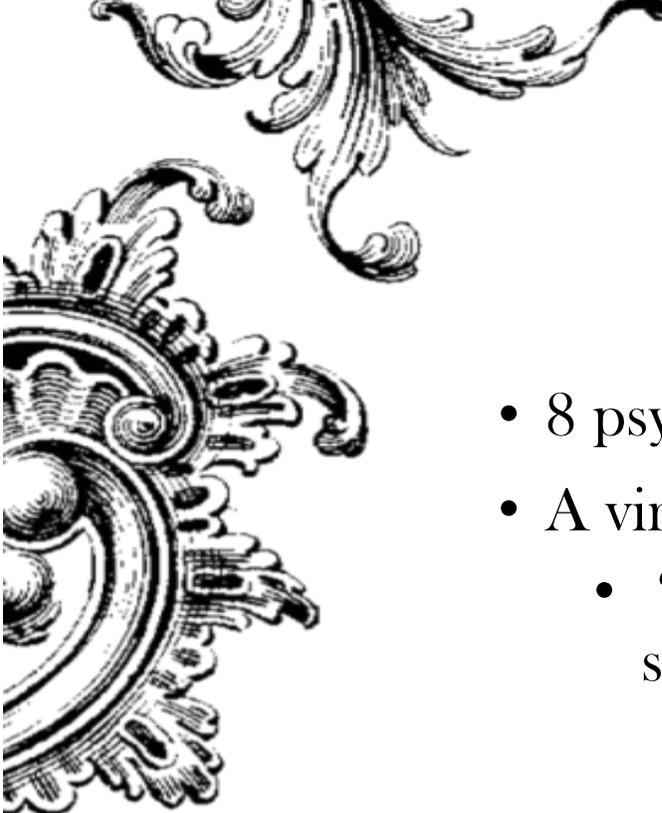


Hope in Physical Health

(hope for)

(conditional hope)





# Erik Erikson: Hope as Foundational

- 8 psychosocial stages: crisis and resolution
- A virtue develops with the resolution of each stage
  - “certain human qualities of strength” related to developing “ego strength” (Erikson, 1964, p. 113)
- Trust vs. mistrust —————> hope



“the amount of trust derived from earliest infantile experience does not seem to depend on absolute quantities of food or demonstrations of love, but rather on the quality of the maternal relationship” (Erikson, 1950/1985, p. 249)



# Erik Erikson: Hope as Essential

- All subsequent resolutions to crises depend on hope
- Hope sustains life and holds the ego intact
- The most basic but most lasting virtue, acquiring new qualities depending on the stage



“hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive”  
(Erikson, 1950/1985, p. 115)



# Erik Erikson Takeaway Points: Hope as Relational

- Hope is born out of a trusting relationship
  - Hope is the ground upon which the ‘ego’ or identity of ‘I’ rests
  - Hope is essential for the ‘I’ but is dependent on the ‘you’
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# Martin Buber: The Other as ‘You’

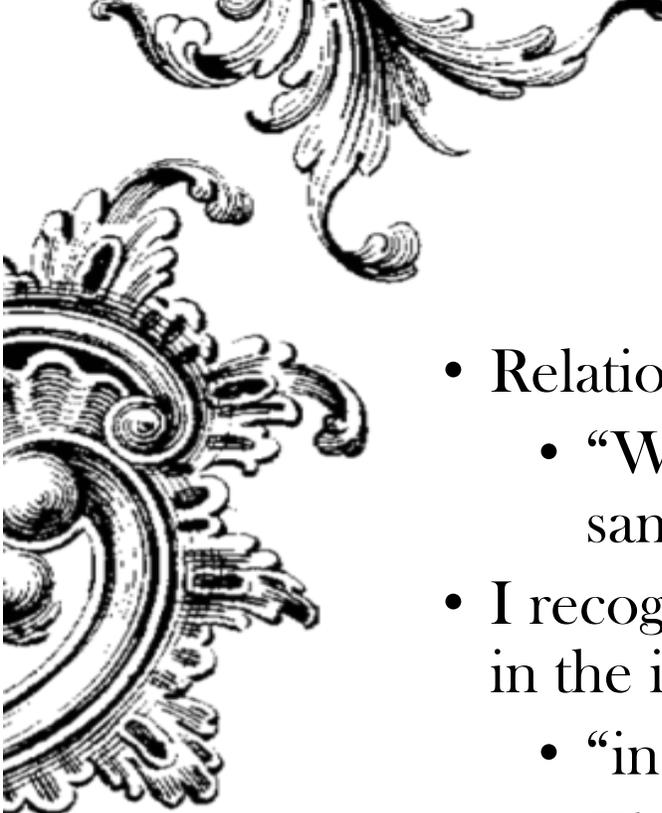
## Modes of Existence

I-It	I-You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Objectify to examine, to conquer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confronting with reciprocity</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking from the other; use, possession</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Giving to the other; care, openness</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Distances</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Draws closer</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Isolating and devoid of feelings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An intimate meeting</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leads to nothingness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leads to God</li></ul>



“When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.” (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 59)





# Martin Buber: The Other as Eternal

- Relationship to the other and to God are intimately intertwined
  - “Whoever knows the world as something to be utilized knows God the same way.” (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 156)
- I recognize you as ungraspable, as overflowing my comprehension, as made in the image and likeness of God
  - “in every You we address the eternal You” (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 57)
  - The I-You relationship “does not help you to survive; it only helps you to have intimations of eternity.” (Buber, 1970/1998, p. 84)

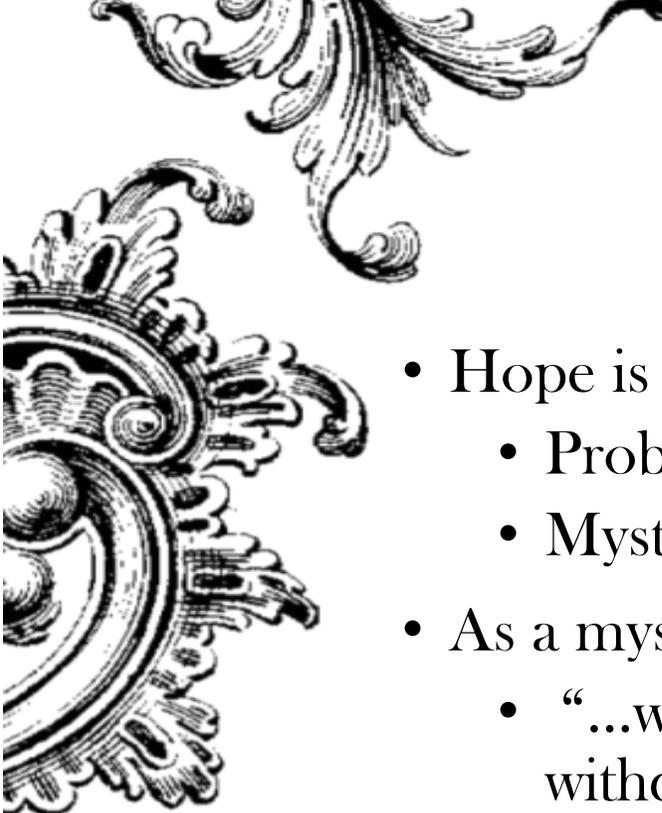


“Only the being whose otherness, accepted by my being, lives and faces me in the whole compression of existence, brings the radiance of eternity to me. Only when two say to one another with all that they are, “it is *Thou*”, is the indwelling of the Present Being between them.” (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 35)



# Martin Buber Takeaway Points: Hope Rooted in God

- We bestow value on each other
  - The 'I-You' relationship requires God, the eternal Being, to unite us to one another through Him and by Him
  - Erikson and Buber:
    - The relationship that cultivates hope and grounds my identity, requires God as the binding force between 'I' and 'You'
  - Hope as derived from a relationship with my neighbor and with God
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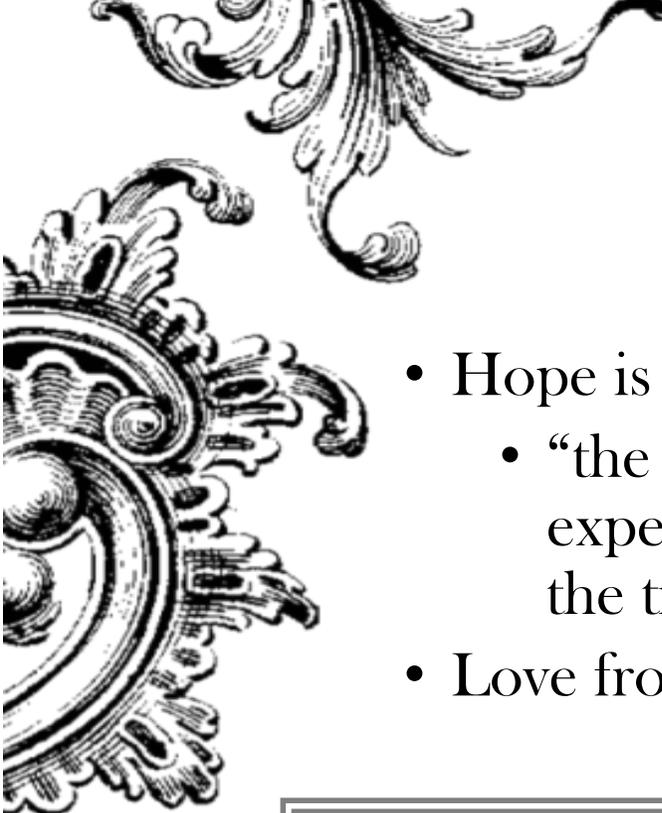


# Gabriel Marcel: Hope as a Mystery

- Hope is a mystery not a problem
  - Problem: completely knowable or comprehensible yet hinders me
  - Mystery: ungraspable because I am a part of it
- As a mystery it requires faith - a belief in a power greater than myself
  - “...what is the meaning of despair if not a declaration that God has withdrawn himself from me?” (Marcel, 1962, p. 47)
- Hope is not merely acceptance, but non-acceptance with patience
  - Not simply optimism or desire
  - Requires humility and patience



“A mystery...is something in which I find myself caught up, and whose essence is therefore not to be before me in its entirety. It is as though in this province the distinction between *in me* and *before me* loses its meaning.” (Marcel, 1965, p. 100)



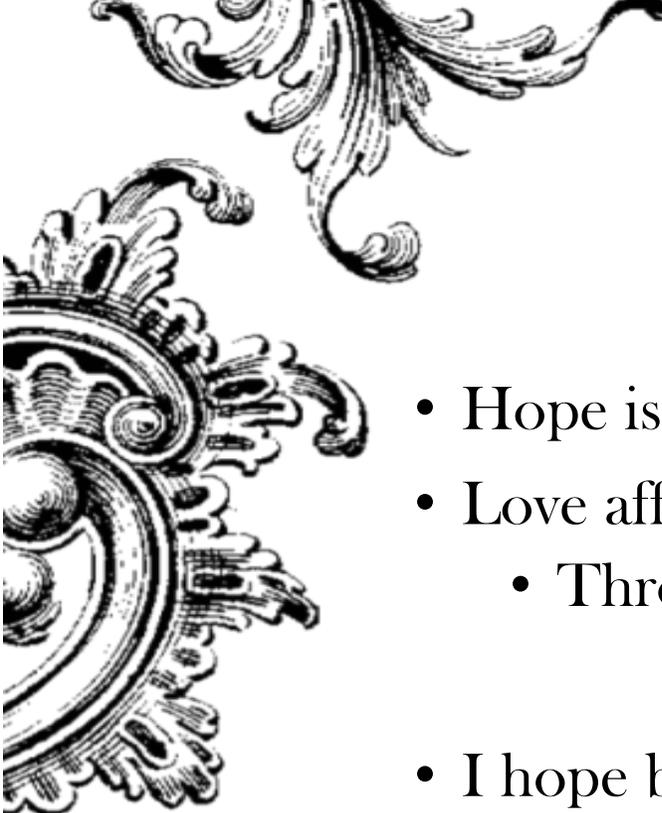
# Gabriel Marcel: Hope Requires Community

- Hope is always associated with a communion
  - “the availability of a soul which has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will and knowledge the transcendent act” (Marcel, 1962, p. 67)
- Love from a living witness (a neighbor) frees us from the obsessive fear of death

“The opposite of hope is not fear, it is a state of dejection...in a quite general way one may say that it is the state of being who expected nothing either from himself, or from others, or from life. There is nothing here which resembles fear; there is rather an immobilization of life; we might say that life is congealed or frozen.” (Marcel, 1951/1979, p. 158)

“to hope cannot but be to hope for us—for all of us. It is an act which in some way embraces in itself the community which I constitute with all those who have been sharers of my own venture.” (Marcel, 1951/1979, p. 171)





# Gabriel Marcel Takeaway Points: Hope Transcends Death

- Hope is a mystery within which we all live, participate, and exist
- Love affirms our being and transcends the gap, the abyss, we call death
  - Through love and community we exist both on earth and after death
- I hope because I exist within a mystery that transcends death through love
- Through loving relationships we are witnesses to hope in salvation



“Thou, at least, thou shalt not die’ is rather ‘Because I love you, because I affirm you as being, there is something in you which can bridge the abyss that I vaguely call ‘Death.’”

(Marcel, 1951/1979, p. 62)



# Our Catholic Faith: Hope in Christ

- We are bound together and united in Christ: the Body of Christ
  - “Not only is she (the church) gathered *around him*; she is united *in him*, in his body.” (Catholic Church 789)
- Our hope is in Christ
  - The Paschal mystery reveals the meaning of death and source of hope
  - We participate in Christ’s death to also be resurrected with Him
  - Our death is a final participation in Christ’s redeeming act



“The Church who, as Mother, has borne the Christian sacramentally in her womb during his earthly pilgrimage, accompanies him at his journey's end, in order to surrender him "into the Father's hands." She offers to the Father, in Christ, the child of his grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory.”

(Catholic Church 1683)



# A Different Narrative: Hope in Communion with Others

- Hope
  - A way of being not a thing I have
  - The fruit of loving relationships
  - An unconditional mystery within which we exist
- Others
  - ‘You’ rather than ‘It’
  - Other as both neighbor and God
- Communion
  - The place where hope resides
  - Our participation as members of the Body of Christ

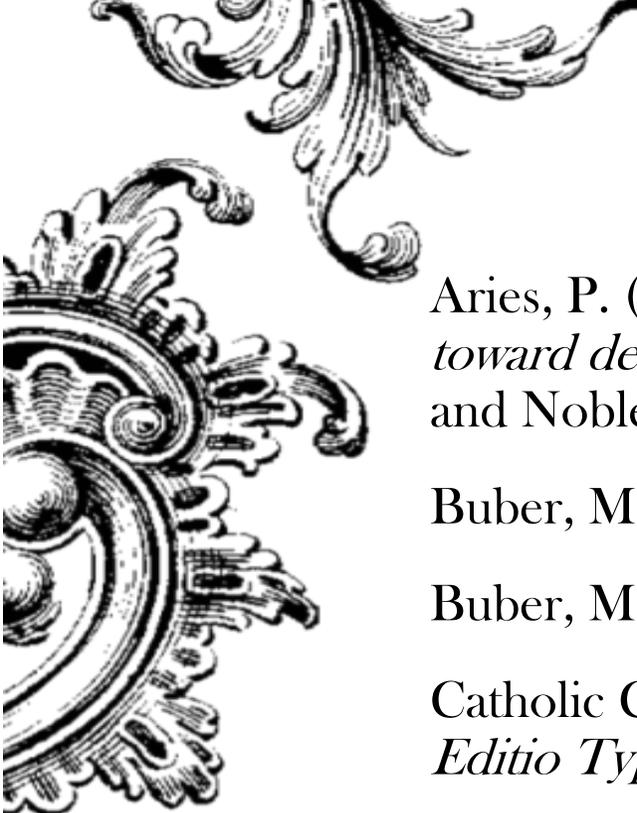


It is through communion that we are united in the Body of Christ and find hope in life eternal.



## Implications: A Call for Care and Community

- A need to expand end of life care beyond the medical world
    - Systematic incorporation of psychological and spiritual preparation for death
  - Value our loving relationships as an answer to questions of identity: ‘Who am I?’
  - Recognize our own ability to be a witness to hope
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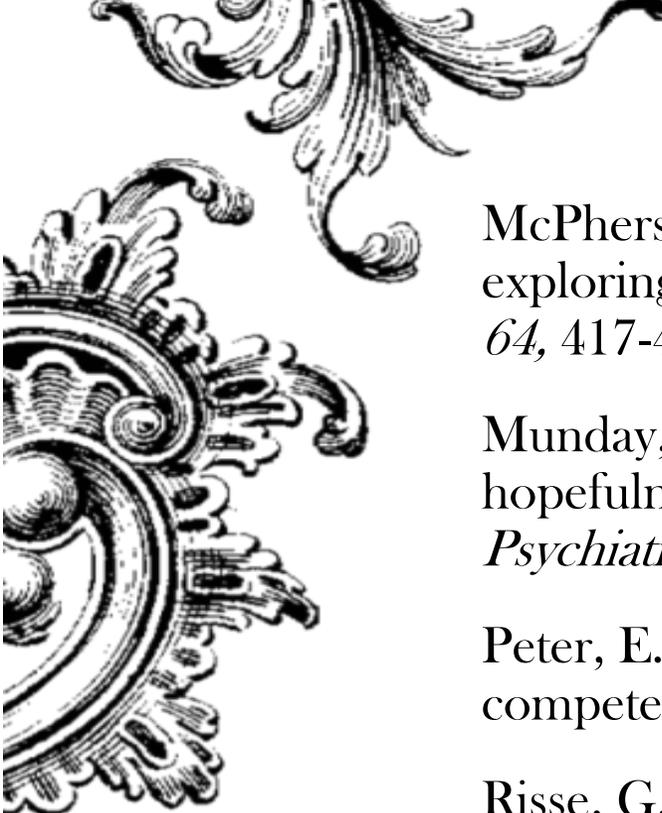
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Thank you!

Comments or Questions?

Additional comments are welcomed!  
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