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Expectation

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In his poem *Expectativas*, Mario Benedetti writes of his expectations as he prepares to return to his native Uruguay after twelve years in exile: *he quedado en suspenso/ lo espero todo y ya no espero nada.* ¹ The line can be translated “I hold myself in abeyance/ I expect everything and I expect nothing.” It deftly evokes the contours of a desire to be ready for anything that might emerge, avoiding disappointment, since after all one does not really know even what to expect of the future, especially in returning to a beloved landscape after a long forced absence. And yet one cannot really expect everything and nothing at once, not in the face of a particular path with its localized topography. Embodiment – or put more dynamically, walking in a given terrain as a singular person in a particular time and place- evokes concrete expectations. Perhaps nothing illustrates this more vividly than pregnancy. An expectant mother asks, hoping to receive; searches, hoping to find; knocks, hoping the door will open. Her concrete expectations will vary – and they may not necessarily be joyful- but they will be alive and powerful. From the perspective of the life of faith in particular, expectations for oneself, for others and for creation are inescapable: “I cannot hold myself in abeyance; I do not expect everything but I do expect something.”

1. Dreams and expectations

When I was pregnant with our oldest child, a daughter, I dreamed repeatedly that in reality our human baby was an animal: a fish, a dog, a horse. It was a pregnancy during

a tumultuous time in Argentina, during which my husband was laid off from his job and we often lived hand to mouth. None of this dampened the excitement and generativity of teaching theology as a freshly minted professor while simultaneously becoming a mother. I lived in a state of enjoyment combined with the desire to finish the semester and its writing projects, all the while wondering how a baby would fit in concretely with my theological vocation. My cravings were for *mate* (a green tea-like infusion common to the South Cone) and for *alfajores* (small cakes filled with *dulce de leche* and covered with chocolate), which are today still some of our daughter’s favorite foods. It was largely quite a hopeful and happy time.

The sense of expectation my husband and I felt, however, was somewhat marred by nervousness about the momentous nature of becoming parents, wondering how to provide for the child and the fear of something “going wrong” with the baby. My husband wondered whether he would be able to love this child sufficiently, and what (perhaps partially unwelcome) changes fatherhood would bring to his life. I blithely underestimated the amount of exertion and attention it takes to raise a child, even a healthy child. Expectation born of the Christian faith does not fully cast away either fear or mistaken optimism, but is a stance of hope and confidence in God’s faithfulness in the face of the many dangers, toils and snares that exist in the world and threaten to diminish the flourishing of God’s good creation.

Our home was a one-room apartment in an old building since condemned and demolished. It had holes in the floor and holes in the ceiling, through which sometimes we could glimpse the stars. We had decorated it so as to overlay it with a certain rustic charm; we used to call it our chicken coop. In retrospect it seems somewhat like a
manger. I see now that the theme of living in close proximity to the animals, to nature – including the insects that would rustle down from the holes in the ceiling- in a stance of expectation permeated both the dreams and the reality of that pregnancy. We awaited our child and we trusted that with her would come enough bread to feed her, in accordance with the popular saying, “Los hijos nacen con un pan debajo del brazo” – literally, children come into the world with a loaf of bread tucked under their arms. In other words: Have no fear! Do not the birds of the air and the lilies of the field have enough – do they not have provision made for them? And so we trusted, and waited, and our child was born in the fullness of her time, and we were filled with wonder at her, as so many parents had been before us and continue to be today at the awe-inspiring moment of birth.

2. Mary’s expectation in art

Pregnancy and expectation have long had both Mariological and Christological connotations. They are woven through the cultures of Spain and Latin America and are intimately familiar to people there, regardless of their personal religious beliefs or disbeliefs. Reminders of Mary and her expectation are embedded in time (as in liturgical calendars that spill over to national holiday calendars) and space (through the presence of statues, shrines, paintings, pendants and many other artistic representations). One example of this is the “Feast of the Expectation” (Expectatio Partus) in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar. In the Mozarabic calendar it was celebrated on March 25 (nine months before Christmas), but the Council of Toledo of 656 set it on December 18 in order to avoid celebrating during Lent. In some Spanish speaking parts of the world the feast is still celebrated on both dates. Given her constant presence, both the expectant

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2 The Mozarabs were Christians living in Al-Andalus, the area of the Iberian Peninsula ruled by Muslims (711-1492), but the Mozarabic rites predate Al-Andalus.
Mary and the baby she awaits, are signposts and markers for the expectations of those who venerate her still today – and even for those for whom she is simply a benevolent presence.

Many of the important images of the Virgin Mary as she is venerated in Spain and Latin America refer to Mary’s own “immaculate conception,” wherein her expectation is not yet that of pregnancy: hers is the expectancy of a young girl, for whom many things are still possible. The Calasparra sanctuary in Spain functions in honor of “Our Lady of Hope” (Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza) in remembrance of the immaculate conception of Mary. In other important images, however, especially in Latin America, she is expectant in the more literal sense of being with child; the most important of these is probably the Virgin of Guadalupe (See Appendix, Figure 1). Guadalupe is depicted with the black girdle around her waist that often symbolized pregnancy in the pre-Hispanic cultures of Mexico. In other well-known images, such as the Virgin of Luján in Argentina and the Virgin of Aparecida in Brazil, Mary also appears without the Christ child, in a manner that points simultaneously to Mary’s own immaculate conception as taught in the Roman Catholic tradition and to the virginal conception of Jesus, sometimes symbolized by a noticeable swelling under her dress.

What is notable in the case of these Latin American images of mariological expectation is not their similarity to their European counterparts, but their subtle yet profound differences from the conventions of European art. The main difference is that Mary is depicted in ways that make reference to a deep connection with nature; expressed theologically, the art points to the fact that Mariological and Christological expectation is inseparable from ecological and cosmological expectation. In Latin American
representations, Mary’s garments often have a triangular shape (in two-dimensional
depictions) or a conical one, as can be seen in the statue of the Virgin of Luján in
Argentina (see Appendix, Figure 2). That statue was fashioned in Brazil and arrived in
what is now Argentina in 1630. The base of the terracotta statue is in fact conical; it is
covered with both a dress and a cloak that serve to emphasize that shape. Both the
triangle and the cone can be understood as schematic representations of mountains; the
shapes have deep resonances in the indigenous cultures of the Andean region in
particular.

In the Colonial art of Latin America and especially in the work of Andean
painters (native artists trained in the European style of oil painting) there are many
depictions of the Virgin wearing wide dresses: they could serve to cover the Virgin’s
throne in a fashionable manner akin to European dress styles, but by using triangles and
cones the Andean artists managed also to incorporate reference to the Pachamama,
Mother Earth, who traditionally was also depicted in the shape of a mountain.

A good example of this is Luis Niño’s painting of the Virgin of Málaga (ca. 1740;
see Figure 2). Niño, who was an indigenous painter, sculptor and silver worker born in
Potosí, Bolivia, incorporates many Andean and cosmological symbols into his painting of
Mary. Besides her large, mountain-shaped triangular dress, these include angels with red
and blue wings (sacred colors for the Incas), a golden halo around Mary’s head
reminiscent of the sun (a central protagonist of the Incan pantheon), and a dark crescent
moon at Mary’s feet which refers simultaneously to the pregnant woman in Revelation
12:1-2, to the notion of Mary’s immaculate conception as depicted in European painters

3 Cf. “La imagen de Nuestra Señora de Luján” at:
http://www.basilicadelujan.org.ar/basilica_lujan_011.ar
of the Baroque period and to the *tumi* ceremonial knife of Andean religions traditionally used by figures such as Mama Occllo, the mythical first queen of the Incas. The gold decorations seen on the painting are exclusive to the Andean regions of Bolivia and Perú and incorporate both pre-Columbian and colonial techniques.\(^4\) Other images, such as the 18\(^{th}\) century oil painting of the “Virgen María del Cerro Rico del Potosí” by an anonymous Bolivian artist, turn the bottom of Mary’s body into a literal and recognizable mountain, one that is not just venerated but also abused through brutal mining practices.\(^5\)

I mention these images not only because they are deeply embedded in Latin American spirituality but also because they weave Mariology and Christology tightly together with the earth. In such artwork, Mary’s expectation is not directed toward a privatized piety that she will somehow compartmentalize and store away “in her heart,” but has ecological and cosmological implications, as well as the socio-political ones familiar to us from the Magnificat. Images of the expectant Virgin can be admittedly quite saccharine, as in the “Virgen de la Dulce Espera” (Virgin of the Sweet Expectation) currently making the rounds on social media as an aid to pregnancy.\(^6\) By contrast, the work of Niño and other colonial era artists firmly grounds Mary’s expectation and her vocation to the earth and its realities. In an era of strip mining and mountaintop removal the images of the expectant Virgin -herself not unlike a mountain- take on particular pathos. Latin American colonial era religious art teaches us to ground our expectation in both earthly and heavenly realities, in a way that refuses to dichotomize the two


\(^5\) It is found in the Museo de la Casa de Moneda in Potosí, Bolivia; there are at least four more extant versions of the same image from the 18\(^{th}\) century.

dimensions: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Clearly the intention to colonize the imagination of the inhabitants of the Latin America through art existed as part of the process of “Christianization” carried out in colonial times by the Roman Catholic Church. However, the native artists managed to subvert aspects of that colonization and transmit wisdom in ways that paradoxically remind the Christian faith of its calling, including ecological and cosmological dimensions of its eschatological hope and expectancy.

Outside of occasional depictions of the Virgin Mary, “expectant” mothers do not abound in Western art, religious or otherwise. An exception is the work of Gustav Klimt, who crafted several significant images of expectation linked to pregnant women. One is his portrayal in oil on canvas of a pregnant woman entitled The Hope I (1903), now at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, which caused quite a stir in Vienna at the time of its inception, with its representation of a partially unclad, confident, very pregnant woman surrounded by the forces of death.\(^7\) A second Klimt painting, The Hope II (1907; see Figure 4), now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is rendered in oils, gold and platinum on canvas, and shows a pregnant woman looking down. A skull looks out from the side of her dress and near her feet three women look downcast as if in prayer or mourning.\(^8\) Despite the forces of death (skull) and despair (the three sad women) below her, the pregnant woman looks strong and collected. Her right hand is raised as if in blessing. The painting seems to imply that her experience of expectation gives her

\(^7\) The image can be seen at http://www.klimt.com/en/gallery/women/klimt-die-hoffnung1-1903.ihtml.

inner strength and becomes a blessing also to those who look at her – somewhat as
happens in many paintings and icons of Mary.

A final work by Klimt worth considering is his triad of mosaics from 1905-1911
for the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, made of marble and inlaid with enamel, gold and semi-
precious stones. The images include a tree of life, stylized ferns, a couple embracing and
–most interestingly for our purposes- a pregnant woman. The panel dedicated to her is
titled *Expectation* (*Die Erwartung*; see Figure 5); Klimt also referred to her as the
*Tänzerin* or Dancer, in his preliminary sketches for the frieze. Though it seems unlikely
that Klimt was influenced by Latin American art of the Colonial Era –the artistic
references on his mosaic are probably to Egyptian and Classical sources- one can
discover analogies to the work by Luis Niño mentioned above. Both paintings include
triangular forms and decorative work in gold, as well as many references to vegetation
and nature framing their depiction of a mother. Perhaps the point made in one way or
another by all of these visual interpretations of mothers (either pregnant or having already
given birth) is that their expectation is never only anthropological: “We know that the
whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22). The
expectations inherent to pregnancy and motherhood are grounded in creation– though
ultimately no more so than the expectations of fatherhood. The link between expectation
and the earth is not gendered; it is a common human experience.

The connection between visual art and expectation that I have developed in this
section is a logical one, because the very notion of expectation has to do with *seeing*: *ex*
+ *spectare* means literally to look forward or ahead. The term points us toward the visual
dimension of what we await. But Mariology itself can also point to the limits of that
vision. In the “Great Antiphon to Our Lady” of the Feast of the Expectation, Mary asks:

Fileæ Jerusalem, quid me admiramini? Divinum est mysterium hoc quod cernitis!

(Daughters of Jerusalem, why do you marvel at me? What you behold is a divine mystery!). Longing to behold or to see is a central dimension of expectation. In pregnancy, one longs to see the child; yet even modern imaging techniques do not wholly fulfill that longing, because vision is not enough: one desires to hold, smell and touch the coming child as well. Not everything can be “seen” – and even if we behold a “divine mystery” it does not mean we have fully grasped it.

3. Moving beyond sight

Clinical psychologists have described what they call an “expectation deficit,” especially in old people. It seems that after a certain stage (after around 70 years of age), older persons have a harder time than young people (for example those in their 20s) in using “predictive cues” to guide their attention in an anticipatory way. Neurological measurement has shown that this deficit is related to a “diminished functional connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the visual association cortex.” This affects their performance of certain tasks. As a result, older adults tend to shift from the “proactive cognitive control” of their younger days, to a “reactive cognitive control.” In other words, as we get older we are not able to see and respond to stimuli as quickly as we did in younger days – as we will soon detect if we try to play a card game that demands rapid responses to visual cues. The progressive changes to our prefrontal cortex

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preclude the same kind of processing of information at different stages if our lives. The very notion of “expectation deficit” (attuned as it is to visual cues) illustrates one reason why the visual connotations of the metaphor of expectation are not robust enough to account fully for hope.

Another insight, this one from neurological research, is that expectations rooted in visual interpretations filter out many possibilities on the basis of prior likelihood. In other words, because there are more visual stimuli than we can possibly process, our brains learn to focus in on part of the picture on the basis not only of our attention, but of what cognitive neuroscientists call “expectation.” There is indeed a growing field of literature focused on the neurobiology of expectation. Given the mass of ambiguous visual information with which we are constantly bombarded, expectation both guides how we acquire visual information (so we don’t see everything “for the first time” daily) and also helps us interpret what we are seeing. We seek congruency and expectation helps us find some measure of it.\(^{11}\)

Our brains work beautifully to try to predict what we will see on the basis of all we’ve seen before, and make sense of it quickly. But precisely this neurological effectiveness seems to point to the possibility that that our reliance on the visual can filter out elements that are “unexpected.”\(^{12}\) Said otherwise, our dependence on the visual domain in some ways limits the reach of our expectation. Looked at from a theological


point of view, it becomes problematic any time we excessively filter out the unexpected, since God is in the business of doing a “new thing.”

In his memoir about serving as a young blind man in the French Resistance during the Second World War, Jacques Lusseyran illustrates the limits of the visual domain beautifully. After an accident blinded him at the age of eight he soon realized that he could perceive objects even if he did not touch them or see them: “When I became really attentive (...) then trees and rocks came to me and printed their shape upon me like fingers leaving their impression in wax.”¹³ Later, during the war, his task was to discern which people were trustworthy enough to join their cell of the resistance movement:

When I was very young I had acquired the habit of guessing since I could no longer see, reading signs instead of gestures, and putting them together to build a coherent world around me. (...) The light which shone in my head was so bright and strong that it was like joy distilled.¹⁴

His expectation about the persons who surrounded him did not depend on visual cues, and so he was able to open himself to the unexpected – and indeed to joy.

“I have come” – says the Johannine Jesus- “that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind” (John 9:39). The spiritual blindness of which he speaks is grounded in a lack of humility and in the certainty that one does indeed “see” all that is needed. If expectation is based solely on what has already been seen, what space is there for faith or for the new things God has promised to do? “Blessed are those who have not seen” – says Jesus to Thomas later on in John’s gospel- “and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29).

¹⁴ And There Was Light, 158.
When we ponder expectation, however, it is difficult to get away from an overreliance on the visual. We cannot easily get away from the visual connotations of “expectation” simply by switching languages and etymologies. Erwartung in German at first glance may seem more promising than the Latin expectatio with its direct reference to sight (spectare). Nevertheless, the roots of Erwartung are in the older Germanic words warte and wara, which also have visual connotations: they refer to what soldiers or others do who watch, wait and look out. In Spanish there is the word aguardar (to await or expect), which again has the Germanic root warden (to guard or to watch). Ultimately all these expressions harken back to the Proto-Indo-European root *wer-4, indicating watching and guarding. So the Germanic route circles back to the same sort of possibilities and limitations as expectation: watching and waiting.

Though tactile, olfactory and auditory dimensions are missing from the etymological root of expectation, recourse to the Old Testament can help ground our reflection. Significantly, these other dimensions do belong to the Hebrew tiqvah (תִּקְוָה), often translated as “expectation.” The Hebrew word literally means a cord, and is metaphorically something to which we can attach ourselves or to which we can be attached. The attachment symbolizes the ground of our hope and is much more palpable and corporeal than an “expectation” linked solely to “looking” or “seeing.” When we read in Psalm 9:18 that “the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever,” the word translated “expectation,” “hope” or “patience” is tiqvah. Such expectation is economic and material, not impalpable. It has to do with concrete justice and the conviction that

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15 The Yiddish word is similar: dervartung (דערוָרטונג), as are several of the equivalent words in the Nordic languages.
God does not sanction the unjust distribution of necessary resources, and that justice will prevail.

Expectation “upon God” in the Old Testament – as in Psalm 62:5 - always carries with it an embodied component. It appears with some regularity in the Wisdom literature (cf. Proverbs 10:28, 23:18, 24:14). One might imagine expectation in the Hebrew sense of *tiqvah* as kind of umbilical cord, connecting the expectation of the infant to that of his or her mother in a bodily fashion that eventually will no longer be needed for sustenance, yet which will leave an indelible mark. So also is our expectation “upon God” concrete and one day to be fulfilled so as to be experienced in a wholly new yet palpable way.

4. **Anticipation and palpability**

Another fruitful way to expand the semantic field of expectation is to ponder one of its related dimensions: anticipation. The very word (*ante + capare*, i.e. “take into possession ahead of time”) incorporates a tactile dimension that enriches the visual emphasis embedded in expectation. We can see this in Carly Simon’s song “Anticipation.” The scenario is that of a woman waiting to go out on a date – indeed she wrote it as she was waiting for the musician Cat Stevens to pick her up on just such an occasion. In the lyrics Simon captures a problem common to both anticipation with its tactile sense (“how right your arms feel around me”) and to expectation with its visual emphasis (“so I’ll try to see into your eyes right now”): the challenge of living the moment intensely rather than focusing on what is to come, to the detriment of the present.

She sings:

We can never know about the days to come
But we think about them anyway
And I wonder if I'm really with you now
Or just chasing after some finer day.\textsuperscript{17}

She describes the song as a kind of “moral lesson to herself” to encourage herself to be able to live in the present without “always looking back on something in the past, reminiscing or else anticipating something in the future.” Such an attitude “keeps you late for the good old days, which are right here now.”\textsuperscript{18}

The temptation to override the present by looking either too much to the past or to the future seems inevitable, but a combination of expectation and anticipation can do much to link past and future to the present in ways that allow it to be more meaningful, vivid and intense. At its best, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in community is exactly such a moment. We are invited to take and taste the bread and wine, in remembrance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but also in anticipatory celebration of that which is to come in the eschatological banquet. For a moment we become “capable” ahead of time (ante-capare) of that which we know we will see in the future (ex-spectare). The palpability and materiality of the elements are central and indispensable to the Eucharist, and are one reason churches have for the present largely deemed it inappropriate to partake in “virtual” Lord Suppers via the internet.

From a sacramental (and therefore pneumatological) perspective, it becomes clear that in order to make space for the unexpected, expectation indeed must include not only visual but palpable dimensions. 1 John 1:1 puts it beautifully: “We declare to you what

\textsuperscript{17} Carly Simon, “Anticipation” (Quackenbush Music, Ltd. ASCAP, 1971), \textit{Carly Simon Official Website}, at: \url{http://web.archive.org/web/20121026041229/}

was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life…” It is perhaps no coincidence that the non-visual senses activate different area of our brains, and that these are more amenable to reaction even as our brains age and change. As Jürgen Moltmann points out, we should speak not only about foreseeing and foretasting, but even of “fore-smelling.”\(^\text{19}\) Thus, both the hope that our “joy may be complete” (1 John 1:4) and the corresponding expectation about the future of that manifestation of God in the flesh, are based on much more than simply sight.

### 5. Expectation interrupted

According to Save the Children’s report *State of the World’s Mothers*, based on factors such as child mortality, healthcare, education and economics, Argentina is the country in Latin America where mothers are best off. It ranks 36\(^{\text{th}}\) out of 179 countries; by comparison the United States is ranked in 33\(^{\text{rd}}\) place, Germany in 8\(^{\text{th}}\) place, and Norway in 1\(^{\text{st}}\) place.\(^\text{20}\) On the other extreme are the Democratic Republic of Congo (178) and Somalia (179). On the face of it, Argentina is an excellent place for pregnancy, childbearing and early motherhood, as indeed I can give witness, as it is where I was born myself and gave birth to our three daughters. My own recollections of being an expectant mother there are quite rosy, despite economic and health hardships. When our girls were born they were surrounded by the love of our families and friends, and constantly blessed on the street by strangers. Nevertheless, the situation in Argentina as in Latin America

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\(^{19}\) Personal conversation, June 23, 2015.

\(^{20}\) Save the Children, *The Urban Disadvantage. State of the World’s Mothers 2015*, at: [http://www.savethechildren.org/atr/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM_2015.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atr/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SOWM_2015.PDF)
generally is not as happy as it might appear at first glance; a great deal of gendered violence hides in the shadows of the statistics.

In Argentina around 745,600 children are born each year. A little over 15% of these babies are born to mothers under 20 years of age. Shockingly, eight to nine of the babies born daily are born to girls ages 10-14. In most cases, the men who have fathered those children have committed incest. Government agencies estimate that in around 80% of cases these young girls are made pregnant by their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, older brothers or stepfathers. One wonders what social construction of masculinity functions so that these men are able to use and abuse these young girls sexually, in most cases with impunity. What kind of expectation does this kind of pregnancy and birth evoke? What is the future of a child conceived in violence, born to another child? What is our expectation for a girl who has become a mother before she is fully out of puberty? This tragic, ongoing situation makes it clear that we need to focus not only on the expectation that we as adults may have for our children or grandchildren, but also on the expectations that children should be able to have of adults – even before they are able to articulate them. Expectation never flows only in one direction. Societal expectations need to shift, so that men are expected *never* to use and abuse young girls and women. The cases of these children who have children as a result of abuse and incest illustrate how complex it is to articulate the expectation in the light of a child: which children do we mean?

One reason why these young Latin American girls are having children is a legal system profoundly influenced by a particular Christian theology that opposes abortion in all situations, regardless of the age and health of the mother or the circumstances that led

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to pregnancy. That includes pregnancies that result from incest or other forms of rape. Sometimes the law countenances abortion in cases of rape, but the courts refuse to allow it and medical professionals are reticent to carry it out for fear of prosecution. A theological conviction about the “sanctity of life” (and arguably an “expectation” about the promise of an unborn child) thus leads indirectly to the grotesque imposition of motherhood on girls who are still children. Lucía, an eleven-year-old Dominican child, raped by her brother-in-law and forced to carry her baby to term, asked for a doll to hug and play with even while she was in labor.\textsuperscript{22} Another young Paraguayan girl, only ten years old and pregnant because she was raped by her stepfather, was forced by law to have the baby despite her own fragile health; she weighed only 34 kg when her baby was conceived.\textsuperscript{23} The examples are too numerous to recount.

The absolute prohibition on abortion that emerges from a certain theology of “expectation” with regard to unborn children also leads in some cases to the criminalization of miscarriage and stillbirth.\textsuperscript{24} This can be quite devastating even for adult women. For many women, the unplanned interruption of a pregnancy brings with it profound heartache alongside many other mixed emotions and the literal shedding of blood: in their grief, they “experience the death of a hope, the thwarting of an

\textsuperscript{22}“Niña violada está obligada por ley a parir el hijo de su violador,” \textit{Miograph} (February 10, 2013), at: https://phmiograph.wordpress.com/2013/02/10/nina-violada-esta-obligada-por-ley-a-parir-el-hijo-de-su-violador.

\textsuperscript{23}“Niña paraguaya violada por su padrastro tendrá que dar a luz,” \textit{La Nación Mundo} (May 8, 2015), at: http://www.nacion.com/mundo/latinoamerica/Nina-paraguaya-violada-padastro-luz_0_1486251447.html

\textsuperscript{24}An example of this the case of Purvi Patel in the United States, sentenced in Indiana to 20 years in prison in March 2015, for “feticide” as a result of an apparent miscarriage and stillbirth; cf. “National Advocates for Pregnant Women Decries Purvi Patel’s Sentence of 20+ Years,” March 30, 2015, at: http://advocatesforpregnantwomen.org/blog/2015/03/post_6.php.
expectation.” What all too easily goes missing from abstract theological pronouncements about pregnancy, children and expectation is the profoundly embodied experience of the mother who makes it materially possible for a child to be born into the world. Such an experience may be “natural” (that is, it happens in nature) but it is traversed physically and spiritually by profound dimensions of joy and loss, of certainty and ambiguity, of hopes and fears.

Certainly, it would be incomplete to ponder the expectation stimulated by the birth of a child without taking into account its mirror image: the loss of hope and the shattering of expectation that can occur as a result of an unwanted and unexpected interruption of a pregnancy. That experience has profound theological implications. Serene Jones points out that a woman who goes through a miscarriage experiences a paradox of life and death: literally carrying within herself the death of the beloved and expected one, while not succumbing to death herself. Looking at the experience of such women through a Trinitarian lens, she ponders the “images of the miscarrying, stillbirthing, barren-wombed God” able to accompany us in our grief and loss. The Triune God has also experienced death, and yet paradoxically is not dead but alive, offering “to the world the gift of the future,” though at first glance, everything seemed lost on the cross.  

6. **Joy of every longing heart**

Though it is important not to erase the particularities of each expectant mother’s experience, it would not be wise to privatize the experience of pregnancy and birth, or

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26 Jones, “Hope Deferred,” 149.
limit it to the mother alone. The expectation that arises from the birth of a child is
mediated socially and is shared by a community made up of many people, including
those who choose not to bring children into the world. Expectation is not a solitary
matter. Søren Kierkegaard famously makes the point that “life must be understood lived
backwards” though of course it can only be “lived forwards.” As a consequence, life can
never really be fully understood because we can never stop time in order truly to “look
backwards.” This idea is often expressed popularly as Livet skal forståas baglaens, men
leves forlaens (“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”). Few things illustrate this as clearly as having and raising children, because it entails
“living forward” at a particularly rapid rate. It is the community of people around us who
can retain vivid memories—like snapshots—of particular scenes of that time in our lives,
and are therefore able to stop time for just a moment and “look backwards” for us.

The complexity of childbirth and childcare in the first few months and years of
life tend to transform everything into somewhat of a blur, even if we try to register our
impressions in writing or through photographs and film. The main thing my husband and
I hoped for our own babies before they were born was good health, and we further hoped
to be able to provide for them. But once they were born there was little space for
reflection and even for sleep. Concentrating on responding to their basic needs was
paramount. It is only in retrospect and with the help of the memories of a community that
we as parents are able to put together a portrait of our expectations and experiences at the

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time. Our memories of our expectations for our children are also very much shaped by our present history with them.

Something similar happens in the community of faith each year in the season of Advent. We remember and recreate—in retrospect and in light of the resurrection—our expectation regarding the baby Jesus. Charles Wesley expresses this perfectly in his hymn *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*:28

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.  

Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thine own eternal Spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.  

Of course it is unlikely that Joseph, Mary and the rest of the immediate family around Jesus had these sorts of expectations for him: a liberator, a savior, hope of every nation and of the earth itself, full of grace, able to bring God’s reign to fruition through the gift of the Spirit. There would have been certain messianic expectations around Mary’s pregnancy as there were around any pregnancy in a devout Jewish family in that time and place. If the accounts in Luke and Matthew of the conception and birth of Jesus

28 The lyrics are in the common domain; the hymn can be accessed at [http://www.hymnary.org/text/come_thou_long_expected_jesus_born_to](http://www.hymnary.org/text/come_thou_long_expected_jesus_born_to) (Hymnary.org).
are to be taken as based in some measure on the recollection of the family about some of their experiences at the time, we can conjecture that they would have had some sort of inkling about what he might become. But it is the community of faith, in retrospect, looking both backwards and forwards in time, that is able to articulate a deeper dimension of messianic expectation rooted in the life and message of Jesus.

Sometimes our expectation is not particularly positive. “Oh that I might have my request; oh that God would grant my expectation!” – cries Job, expressing his desire that God might simply crush him and finish off his life, since he simply does not feel that he can stand his sufferings any more (Job 6:8-10). His so-called friends are one reason that he desires simply to die. Rather than support him, they accuse him of injustices he believes he has not committed (Job 6:14-23). This points to an important dimension of expectation: for it to be positive it needs to be more than solitary. There has to be a community dimension to our expectations if they are to be hopeful ones. We might say that there is an implicit ecclesiology to expectation, whether it be directed to the community’s children, or to our own individual future. “Looking forward” is not an individualistic endeavor, but one to be tested out and mulled over in community.

Augustine makes the point that both lack of hope (desperatio) and crazed or perverse hope (perversa spes) can choke the life out of us, or -as he puts it- “kill our souls.” People who fall into this trap decide there is no hope for them, in part because of guilt about things they have done. They close themselves off from the possibility of grace, transformation and redemption. Good, genuine and well-directed hope, on the
other hand, is a liberating hope.\textsuperscript{29} Something similar could be said about the expectations that we as a community have for our children: both a lack of expectation and a perverse sort of expectation can kill their souls. Privileged children are often crushed by expectations of “excellence” and “success” (\textit{perversa spes}). Children from vulnerable populations often suffer from the consequences of closed horizons, including lack of access to education, clean water and healthy food (\textit{desperatio}). For all children, given the forces of capitalist globalization and the ecological crisis, there are real questions about what their chances of a healthy life will be in the future state of the world. Our expectations for them cannot be based on blind optimism; they should lead to efforts on the part of adults to equip children with life-giving skills in the face of many imminent dangers: playing, laughing, making music and art, dancing and singing, telling stories, living sustainably and connecting deeply with their communities.

7. Conclusion: Trinitarian expectations

To elaborate imaginatively on the connections between pregnancy and expectation, as I’ve tried to do in this paper, is not without problems. Despite her interest in natality, Hannah Arendt, for instance, does not think that creativity is appropriately captured by metaphors drawn from life – including pregnancy. As she puts it:

To create and to give birth are no more creative than to die is annihilating; they are but different phases of the same, ever-recurring cycle in which all living things are held as though they were spellbound.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Nam sicut liberat bona spes, et recta spes; ita decipit perversa spes.}” Cf. Augustine, \textit{Sermo} 87.10
She is of course not alone in that appreciation. But her rhetorical move reduces pregnancy and childbirth to a rather mindless process that does not take into account the agency of the creatures involved. Moreover, the cyclical sense of the eternal present that underlies her comment is not congruent with biblical images of expectation or indeed of the actual experience of pregnancy of many women.

As a theologian, I have found my own experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and the experience of raising children to be quite stimulating to creativity. They allowed me new insight first of all into the pneumatological dimension of life, in particular to the role of the Spirit as our Mother (John 3:3-7), as an active force in our adoption as children of God (Gal. 4:6-7 and Rom. 8:15-16) and as a Midwife helping creation give birth to new life (Rom. 8:20-27). They also shed light on maternal and pneumatic dimensions of the pastoral and theological task, for example in Galatians 4:19-20, where Paul describes what he does as being “in labor” until Christ is formed in others.

The second time I became pregnant, it was with twin daughters. During that pregnancy, I had a different dream. It conveyed a clear –almost stern- verbal message:

*Una madre embarazada con gemelas es una clave para entender la doctrina de la Trinidad* (“A mother pregnant with female twins is a key to the doctrine of the Trinity”). I woke up startled. To be an expectant “mother of multiples” did lead me to feel a bit like a goddess of fertility at times, so I wondered if that had gone to my head. However, in the dream the message was that such a pregnancy was a key, not the key. The wording of the message left plentiful space for hermeneutical flexibility. Even so, I wondered: Exactly in what way is this a key?
There was a triplicity and a unity in such a pregnancy, certainly, perhaps even more than in Gregory of Nazianzus’ famous figuration of Adam-Eve-Seth in his *Fifth Theological Oration*. Gregory plays with the image of Adam as a creature of God, Eve as a fragment of the creature, and Seth as the begotten of both, to imagine three consubstantial persons, one of which (Eve/Spirit) proceeds from but is not begotten by the other (Adam/Father). The image is meant to illustrate that the Spirit can be of the “same substance” as the First Person without being eternally begotten in the way that the Son is.

The “mother with twins” image doesn’t work exactly as Gregory’s image does because twins do have an identical origin. It does, however, point to a simultaneous three-ness and one-ness as well as a strong sense of both christological *and* pneumatological expectation. The expectation of a mother awaiting twins is a bit like the expectation of the First Person in the face of all that the Son and the Spirit are to do. Twins in the womb are deeply connected to their mother and to each other -so much so that one cannot think of one without the other. Once they are born they continue to seek each other out, to embrace and to hold hands. Identical twins (such as my daughters) even share the same placenta.

The analogy soon breaks down, of course, though it is perhaps suggestive as one in a series of many images of perichoretic indwelling. One problem with it is that beyond its nod to *perichoresis* it does not incorporate the dynamic of the cross. Stillbirth, infertility, and miscarriage do so far more clearly. As Serene Jones points out, God’s

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redeeming grace is in fact not reflected as well in pregnancy and mothering as it is in images of maternal loss.\textsuperscript{32} As with all imaginative exercises having to do with the Trinity, there is therefore in my dream of the mother expectant with twins a still greater dissimilarity in such similarity (\textit{maior dissimulitudo in tanta similitudine}), to put it in the wise words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). And yet again, given the ineffable God’s coming to us in the flesh, that phrase can be reversed so as to say (with Eberhard Jüngel), in speaking of God and humanity, that there is a still greater similarity in the midst of such dissimilarity.\textsuperscript{33} The incarnation skews everything and allows for kataphatic possibilities even as we recognize God’s mystery and otherness.

Perhaps what can illuminate us here are Bonaventure’s ideas about God as a fountain of fecundity. He describes the First Person in particular as marked by \textit{fontalitas} and \textit{fecunditas} – characteristics Bonaventure links to \textit{paternitas} but which I think could be connected to \textit{maternitas} as well. The expectation of the First Person is linked to the work of the Son as the image, wisdom and art (\textit{ars Patris}) and to the work of the Spirit completing, fulfilling and uniting the love of the Father and Son to creation. Indeed, for Bonaventure all created things are linked in a likeness to God, are touched by the Triune God’s self-diffusive love and find their fulfillment in God (John 16:28).\textsuperscript{34} The image of the mother pregnant with twins is too self-contained to function very long as an \textit{analogia trinitatis} (as well as implying a kind of subordination of two of the Persons). But it is helpful in putting time and history into the equation, because pregnancy is very much a

\textsuperscript{32} Jones, “Hope Deferred,” 150.
\textsuperscript{34} See \textit{Itinerarium} and \textit{Hexaemeron} 3.4
matter of involvement of a body in time and space in order to allow for fecundity to give of itself to the world.

The perichoretic expectation of the Three Divine Persons with regard to each other is never expressed aside from God’s expectation with regard to creation – the creation in and through which divine love is diffused and expressed: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jer. 29:11). God’s expectation of and for us is the origin and the end of our expectation of God and of each other. In the face of the human experience of pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion; in light of our dreams for our children and their expectations of us as adults; in the face of the earth’s distress and of God’s promise of a future with hope, we cannot hold ourselves in abeyance. We do not await everything but we do await something. And that “something” has to do with the fullness of God manifested not only in a new heaven, but also in a new earth.
Appendix

Figure 1: Virgin of Guadalupe (1531) – Unknown artist

Source: Public Domain
Figure 2: Virgin of Luján – Anonymous 17th century Brazilian artisan

Source: www.artelista.com
Figure 3: Luis Niño, *Virgin of the Victory of Málaga* (Potosí, Bolivia, ca. 1740)

Source: [http://denverartmuseum.org/collections/spanish-colonial-art](http://denverartmuseum.org/collections/spanish-colonial-art)
Figure 4: Gustav Klimt, *Die Hoffnung II* (1907)

Figure 5: Gustav Klimt, *Die Erwartung* (detail)

Source: [www.1art1.de](http://www.1art1.de)