



The 2010 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture † Hope

Introduction

Hope. It's a catchphrase on our bumper stickers. It's a buzzword on the lips of our leaders. It's the youth sitting in our churches and the futures we dream for them, but still we ask: what is Hope? We see the word everywhere from ad campaigns to refrigerator magnets, but in an era of constant war, unending poverty, and pervasive indifference, we want to know: where can we find Hope?

The 2010 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture explore the radical theological and missional significance of Hope and the practical implications for our youth ministries. These lectures look at Christian Hope through the eyes of two current practical theologians and educators, a world-renowned university minister and author, and an ordinary radical.

The hope in the world, ubiquitous though it might seem, may be running out, but we do not despair. Because it's also the journey of the cross. It's the mystery of the empty tomb. It's the God who stands in the gap of a broken world and holds us in a divine embrace as we pray, "Our Hope, Lord, is in you."

The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture are designed to foster original scholarship pertaining to youth and the contemporary church. The lectures are delivered as a series at the Princeton Forums on Youth Ministry and are published annually. Lecturers include scholars who are not directly involved in the practice or study of youth ministry but who can bring the fruits of their respective disciplines to bear on ministry with the young. May these lectures inspire you in your ministry with young people.

Faithfully,

Dayle Gillespie Rounds
Director, Institute for Youth Ministry
Princeton Theological Seminary

2010 Lectures

Kenda Creasy Dean	"Ascension Deficit Disorder: Youth Ministry as Laboratory for Hope"
Rodger Nishioka	"The Uniqueness of Christian Hope" "Hope as Cruciform"
The Reverend Peter J. Gomes	"The Christian Hope for a New Generation"
Shane Claiborne	"Becoming the Church We Dream Of"



The Uniqueness of Christian Hope † Rodger Nishioka

Hope has become a buzzword in our culture. Certainly this is thanks in no small part to the successful campaign of President Obama, who featured the word hope on many of his advertisements. As happens in our image-driven culture, *Star Wars* aficionados quickly replaced the President's image with that of actor Mark Hamill as the young Luke Skywalker and retained the word hope, while detractors of the President's campaign kept his image and replaced the word hope with nope. Even now, those detractors use the very same word to describe their political worldviews, as in the bumper sticker that reads, "I hope Obama fails." Regardless of your own political leanings, it is true that this word has captured the nation's rhetoric, if not our imagination. While the exact nature of this hope is certainly being contested, nevertheless, hope itself is of great attraction. The description for this year's theme of the Princeton Youth Ministry Forums is beautifully composed.

The hope in the world, ubiquitous though it might seem, may be running out, but we do not despair. Because hope itself is also the journey of the cross. It's the mystery of the Empty Tomb. It's the God who stands in the gap of the broken world and holds us in a divine embrace as we pray, "Our hope, Lord, is in you."

I begin by talking with you about this God who stands in the gap of the broken world and holds us in a divine embrace as we pray, "Our hope, Lord, is in you." Specifically, I want to discuss the uniqueness of Christian hope as a hope found in God through Jesus Christ.

To do this, I rely heavily on the work of theologian Jurgen Moltmann.

First, I want to provide a brief introduction to his life because one's life experiences inform one's hermeneutics. Moltmann, professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, was born in Hamburg, Germany, on April 8, 1926, seven years after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War. He grew up in a secular home, without significant Christian influence. As a boy, he wanted to study science and mathematics. However, in 1944, his education was interrupted when he was drafted by the German army at eighteen years old. Moltmann was sent to the front lines in the Belgian forest. In 1945, he surrendered to the first British soldier he met.

For the next three years he was confined as a prisoner of war and moved from camp to camp. First held in Belgium, he was later moved to Scotland and then to northern England. His experience as a POW had a powerful impact on his life, as it was in the camps that he had time to reflect upon the devastating nature of the Second World War. It was also in the camps that Moltmann met Christian chaplains, was given the New Testament and Psalms to read, and was first introduced to Christian theology.

Moltmann reflects about the war experience: "In July 1943, I was a seventeen-year-old in the air force auxiliary in a battery in the center of Hamburg, and barely survived the fire storm that the Royal Air Force's Operation Gomorrah let loose on the eastern part of the city. The friend standing next to me was torn to pieces by a bomb that left me unscathed. That night I cried out to God for the first time: 'My God, where are you?' And the question 'Why am I not dead too?' has haunted me ever since."¹

When the war was over, Moltmann returned to his home in Hamburg. As a result of his reading the Bible and theological texts in the POW camps and attending the Student Christian Movement conference in the summer of 1947 with a group of POWs, Moltmann decided to pursue theological training. He received his doctorate from the University of Göttingen, under the direction of Otto Weber, in 1952. From 1952 to 1957, Moltmann was the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Bremen-Wasserhorst. In his autobiography, he talks about his work with young people and, in particular, a confirmation class of fifty wild boys.²

In 1958, Moltmann became a theology teacher at an academy in Wuppertal that was operated by the Confessing Church and in 1963 he joined the theological faculty of Bonn University. He was appointed professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen in 1967 and remained there until his retirement in 1994. From 1983 to 1993, Moltmann was the Robert W. Woodruff Distinguished Visiting Professor of Systematic Theology at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. He married the feminist theologian Elisabeth Wendel in 1952; they have four daughters.

Moltmann has contributed many books to the field of theology. I am drawing heavily upon three of them, including *Theology of Hope* (1964), *The Crucified God* (1972), and *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (2004).

Now, I want to venture an understanding of hope. I believe the description for the theme of hope for these Princeton Youth Forums is correct. I believe that hope, while we may hear the word often, is trivialized today. It is trivialized because the way we use hope is flimsy and sloppy. By and large, I argue that the way we use hope is to state that something desired may happen. Young people today reflect this.

“I hope I get an A on this quiz.”

“I hope I make the team.”

“I hope he shows up at the party.”

I don't mean to trivialize the desire. The desire is real and may be deeply felt. The young person may truly want this to happen, but the wanting or desiring is not based on certainty that it will happen. Inherent in this use of hope is a passivity. Sure, I really want it. I really desire it. But it may or may not happen. That's life. And, as seems to be a philosophical mantra for many young people today, “life sucks sometimes.”

This is not the same as biblical hope.

The Psalmist proclaims in Psalm 130:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Where the word hope appears in the Hebrew scriptures, most often the Hebrew word is *yachal*, meaning trust. This is not passive. Trust here carries with it an active way of being. To hope in the Lord as the Psalmist calls to Israel is not to sit back and wait and see what may or may not happen. For the Hebrew people, to hope is to live believing that God is trustworthy

and, therefore, we shape our lives and livelihood around this reality. There is certainty here that God will be God. In the New Testament, Paul writes in Romans 5:1–5:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our *hope* of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces *hope*, and *hope* does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

The word hope here is the Greek work *elpidos* from the root *elpiso*, which is an absolute. There is no hesitation here. This is not wishy washy. This is certitude. This is without a doubt. This will come about because it is dependent upon God, not dependent upon us.

Too often in our contemporary language, hope, as we use it, is flimsy, even tenuous, because it depends upon human beings and we know ourselves to be capricious. But Christian hope is different because it is dependent upon God and we know God to be faithful and just.

Now, here's where it starts to get really exciting.

Toward the end of Romans, Paul writes again about hope. In Romans 15:13, Paul writes: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Moltmann believes this to be unique. He writes "Nowhere else in the world of the religions is God so directly associated with human hope."³ He writes that for hope to be in God, the one who is eternally present, the deity is the wholly other, timeless and eternal, beyond humankind, even revealed in a unique way to human experience. Well that is something. But truth be told, it is not so special. There are other examples of this, such as Allah, the prophet Mohammed, and Yahweh, Father Abraham, and King David, as well as the coming Messiah. For the Hindus, there is Brahma, the supreme being and for the Brahmins, a whole host of teachers and priests. All these faith traditions make similar claims that the locus of their hope, their faith, is in the deity. But for this hope that is in God to be transferred to human beings, Moltmann argues that this is something new.

By the grace of God, we become possessors of this hope and partners with God in it. This, Moltmann argues, is unique in religious traditions. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we not only hope in God, we *are* hope in God. As my favorite philosophy professor in college would say, "Think about that for a few years and it will really mess you up."

Now I want to say a few words about the relationship of Christian hope to eschatology. The word eschatology refers to the study of the *eschaton* from Greek, meaning final, ultimate, last, and extreme. In Christian theology, eschatology refers to the study of the end of human history and the future that God is ushering in through Christ's second coming.

Moltmann writes that Christian hope is wholly and entirely confident hope, a stretching out to what is ahead, and a readiness for a fresh start.⁴ But be careful. Moltmann seeks to correct the view of Christian hope that focuses only on the future. This study of the future, eschatology, is sadly misconstrued among Christians. For Christian hope to be focused only on the future is a distortion. To be sure, Christian hope is located in Jesus Christ and his future, his coming again.

But Christian hope, since it is located in Jesus Christ, takes into account all of Jesus's life, his incarnation, his death, his resurrection, and his coming again. Too many Christians limit hope only to the future. Moltmann argues that Christian hope must be based on the whole remembrance of Christ. If we only talk about hope as the second coming of Christ, then the present is empty and all that is left for us to do is to sit and wait for an hour and a day of which we know not. But if we talk about hope as the full remembrance of Christ, then Jesus is already in the process of coming to us, and in the power of hope we open ourselves today with all our senses for the experiences of his arrival. By arrival, then, we mean a future that is already present, yet without ceasing to be future. Jesus is in the process of arriving. This means Christian hope is not focused only on the future coming of Christ; it is focused on the past and present coming of Christ through Christ's body the church. In the present, then, we can experience Christian hope now.

This is crucial for young people, many of whom struggle to even conceptualize a future. In a July 2009, article published in the *American Journal of Pediatrics*, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported that one out of five teens believed they would not live to be thirty-five-years old.⁵ A theology of hope that is solely focused on some future moment, the second coming of Christ, is irrelevant to at least twenty percent of our young people.

The Kingdom of God is at hand, as Jesus says. In community with him through his body, the church, we are co-workers for the Kingdom, the reign of God now. In Matthew 10:7, the disciples are told to preach, saying the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, and to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons—the very things that are said about Jesus himself in Matthew 11:4–5. According to Jesus, the reign of God is not just God's affair; it is ours as well. Hope dwells not only in God and in God's future. Hope dwells in us, here, now, today. Through Jesus Christ, hope has come so close to us that we don't just wait for it. We can already seek it and its righteousness by enacting it here and now.

In the nineteenth century, Moltmann writes, diaconal church work and mission in Germany was called Kingdom of God work. Johann Hinrich Wichern's Rauhe Haus in Hamburg, Gustav Wener's cooperative brotherhood in Reutlingen, Bodelschwingh's homes for the disabled in Bethel are examples in Germany. But we could also name Elizabeth Fry's work for better prison conditions in England, Lord Ashley, Earl of Shaftesbury's fight for factory legislation in England, the efforts of abolitionists in America, Kagawa's social work in the slums of Tokyo, and much more. At that time, work for the Kingdom of God led beyond the frontiers of the church building, out into society. Something similar took place in the peace movement in Germany, and in the movement for liberation in Latin America; from the church to the Kingdom of God in the world. But whether inside the church or outside it, the place is the important thing, and that place is this earth.

Moltmann calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God on this earth. Christ won't just come to meet us out of heaven, but out of the earth, as well.⁶

Hope as cruciform. I begin with a poem by Theodore Roethke, *In a Dark Time* (1964).

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood—
A lord of nature weeping to a tree,
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,

My shadow pinned against a sweating wall,
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
A man goes far to find out what he is—
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind.
And one is one, free in the tearing wind.

This poem was quoted by Dr. Jerome Groopman, author of *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness*. Groopman is a professor at Harvard Medical School who, in his work with terminal AIDS and cancer patients, attends to the very ill and dying.

I heard an interview with him on National Public Radio's *On Point* program, where he was discussing the difference between hope and sunny optimism. Groopman said that optimists like to feel that everything is going to turn out fine. Everything is going to be great.

But true hope, he said, is different. It sees all the problems, all of the obstacles and pitfalls, and the opportunities for failure. Still, even seeing all that, people with hope gird themselves and envision a path to a better future and then work for it. They mobilize themselves. The main reason that true hope is so powerful, he said, is that it's "clear-eyed."

In his remarkable book, Groopman weaves together moving tales of his patients with thoughtful reflections on the nature of medicine and the possibility of hope in patients with extremely serious diseases. Most of the patients in these stories have cancer, with often-fatal consequences. He starts off with the case of a devout Jewish woman he met when he was a medical student. She lacked the will to fight her breast cancer because she believed it was a punishment from God. Eventually, too late, her doctor convinced her to accept the treatment that might have saved her life.

In other cases, Groopman tells stories of oncologists who themselves get cancer. Some insist on painful experimental treatments, in full knowledge that the chances that it will provide a cure are slim. Sometimes, they are driven by hope, but in other cases, by desperation. In other cases, the afflicted doctors give up the fight against cancer prematurely, as if they are unable to summon up the hope they tried to give to their patients. Finally, Groopman tells his own story, not of cancer, but of a disabling back problem that threatened to significantly curtail his life. He tried several different therapies, but they didn't seem to help, and even made the problem worse. Finally, he himself gave up hope in his own recovery, and just tried to live with the progressively worsening problem, with his life becoming ever more circumscribed. It was only through meeting a specialist who confronted him with his own refusal to hope that he came to find a cure. This personal experience gave him further insight into the ways that fear can overcome hope.

Groopman's discussion of hope fits in very well with a great deal of other work on the mind-body connection. While he is skeptical about the overblown claims of some alternative medicine that the right attitude can in itself end serious disease, he does explain some of the evidence that one's mental attitude can have a powerful impact on the course of one's recovery. Hope can have both direct and indirect beneficial effects in fighting disease. Therefore, it is an essential element in treatment; so it is very troubling that specialists are not given more training in how to enable their patients to become hopeful, to see both their disease and the possibilities for health more clearly.

That is what I think Roethke means when he writes, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see." To begin to see is to view the world not with some Pollyannaish optimism, but with a reality that is based on hope. The challenge, of course, is not to fall into despair—Roethke's midnight that comes even in the midst of broad day or "pins one's shadow against a sweating wall."

Moltmann discusses this very human danger of falling into despair when he writes, "if the Christian faith is dependent on the power of hope for its life, and if reason is dependent on hope for its attentiveness, then without hope, faith crumbles, and reason becomes cynical and unreasonable."⁷

He reminds us that while human arrogance is named as the original sin—human beings wanting to be like God—that is only half the truth. The other half is resignation, which is much more widespread, especially, I worry, among young people. The temptation today is not so much that we want to play God. It is much more that we no longer have any confidence in ourselves or humankind or even God, so we simply fall into despair. Despair and arrogance are symptoms of hope's decline. They cannot prevail against hope, but they can seriously hinder it.

In what might seem at first counterintuitive, Moltmann argues brilliantly that the Christian response to despair is to understand hope in light of the cross. This is what I mean in saying hope as cruciform. He reminds us all that a theology of resurrection and hope is only made possible through a theology of crucifixion. This is so important, it must be repeated. *A theology of resurrection and hope is only made possible through a theology of crucifixion.* I have to confess that this is a struggle for me, especially as a Protestant Christian.

A few weeks ago, I was in Millbrae, California, a few miles from the San Francisco International Airport, in a place some of you know—Mercy Center—a retreat center that used to be the North American mother house for the Sisters of Mercy. As the order has declined in number and is aging, they have converted much of the facility into a conference center. Typical of Roman Catholic retreat centers, in every sleeping room is a crucifix. When I entered my room, Jesus was hanging on the cross above the pillow on my bed. As I glanced at the Lord, I noted that this particular artist's rendering of our Lord's sacrifice was rather graphic. The crown of thorns was pronounced, as were the nails in his hands and feet. Further, there was blood dripping generously from all of his wounds. Clearly, this artist wanted the viewer to feel the pain and suffering of Jesus. I got it. I thought to myself that Mel Gibson would like this portrayal of God on the cross.

I confess that I did what I usually do. I took our Lord off the wall and put him in a drawer. I always do that when I visit Roman Catholic retreat settings. It is not that I deny Jesus' crucifixion, it is just that I do not feel the need to dwell on it. I consider myself to be more of an Empty-Tomb-type believer. That is why I put Jesus in the drawer. But, I was attending the conference; I was also reading Moltmann's work, *The Crucified God*, in preparation for these lectures. Moltmann makes plain the connection between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

For him, resurrection faith is faith in the crucified one; and hope that overcomes the world, that can hope against despair, is born in the community of the crucified one. "The resurrection of Jesus does not relativize the cross so that it becomes a past datum of history or a transitory stage on the way to heavenly glory, but qualifies it so that it becomes an eschatological saving event because only it says who really suffered and died here. So the crucified Christ has not changed into a risen and

glorified figure. Rather, his resurrection qualifies the one who has been crucified as the Christ, and his suffering and death as a saving event for us and for many. The resurrection does not evacuate the cross but fills it with eschatology and saving significance.”⁸

Moltmann seeks to make his theology of hope more concrete. Typically, he explains, Christians claim hope from the cross through one of two assessments of the cross.

1. The cross is a source of hope because Christ died for the sins of the world.
2. The cross is a source of hope because its true meaning is found in the resurrection.

To be sure, Moltmann places the crucifixion and the resurrection in a mutually informing relationship whereby each gives the other greater meaning. The view of the cross, then, is not either/or but both/and. More centrally, however, he finds the cross a source of hope because God is revealed in the event of Christ’s abandonment. Moltmann’s concern for this theological point is not so much soteriological (salvation) but rather divine ontology (being), specifically the proper relationship between the Father and the Son. He wants to ensure that the cross, actually, concretely, centrally, and vitally affects God. In the event of the cross, God is located in suffering and suffering is located in God. God is not simply some distant deity sitting comfortably among angels and cherubs who sing praises to God twenty-four-seven. Rather, in the event of the cross, God is present in the very midst of godforsakenness. As such, God is the God of the forsaken. Since the suffering and death of Jesus is in God, then God does not remain unaffected, but suffers the death of God’s own son. Therefore, and note this because it is at the heart of Christian hope founded upon the cross of Jesus, there is no suffering that in history is not God’s suffering.

Moltmann goes on to say that when God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified, and, in this act, God consummates his unconditional love that is full of hope.⁹ Moltmann argues that hope, if it is Christian, must be grounded in the cross. It must be cruciform. Christian hope knows that all suffering is in God, and in God’s faithfulness is suffering. Through the cross, God proves that God is not an apathetic deity, detached, despairing, unmoved. God is the suffering God, the crucified God. God is not only distantly future; God is present in suffering today.

If you know Andrew Root’s work in his book *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, then Moltmann’s hope as cruciform should have some resonance. Root argues for a new kind of relational ministry with young people where the goal is not using a strategy of gaining influence in their lives so we can coerce them to do what we think is best for them, but rather *place-sharing*. He defines place-sharing as when we place ourselves fully in the reality of the other, refusing to turn away even from its darkest horror. Just as Jesus incarnate, crucified, and resurrected was fully our place-sharer, so we, too, as Jesus’s disciples, must ourselves become place-sharers, suffering with and for young people.

There is obviously much challenge here. Root’s theory is not to be understood as Sigmund Freud’s *counter transference*, where we take on the identity of the young person in an unhealthy way. Rather, it is an understanding of relationship where we are to stand with young people in their suffering. This is the clear-eyed perspective that Groopman talked about. It is helping young people see in the darkest of times while we remain with them. It is significant that Root does not call us to be place-takers, but rather place-sharers.

Chap Clark writes in his book *Hurt* that abandonment is the defining issue for contemporary adolescents. He argues that external systems and internal systems, particularly healthy, meaningful adult relationships, are no longer experienced by the vast majority of American adolescents. Consequently, they feel a profound sense of abandonment, and of loss, and many believe they are left to suffer alone. If the bleak picture Clark paints is accurate, then Root’s call for place-sharing has much to offer us. Further, Moltmann’s view that hope found in the suffering God, the God of Jesus on the cross, speaks volumes

to the desperate need for young people to know and experience a God who does not leave them alone to their own sadness and despair, but instead, through the meager yet faithful ministry of adults, accompanies them and brings them to a life of hope through the grace of God.

In a letter to a friend, Thomas Merton wrote:

Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. You gradually struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. In the end, it is the reality of a personal relationship that saves everything.¹⁰

By the way, I took Jesus out of the drawer.

1. Jurgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place. An Autobiography*. Margaret Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 17. The death of Moltmann's friend, Gerhard Schopper, occurred during what the British forces termed Operation Gomorrah—the first planned destruction of a major German city.
2. *Ibid.*, 55. Moltmann writes that he had to prepare twice weekly for this battle, at one point twisting the arm of one boy and throwing him out of the class, which earned Moltmann a certain degree of respect. Indeed, he was touched and honored to be invited to bring greetings at this class's golden confirmation, the 50th anniversary of the boys' confirmation.
3. Jurgen Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning. The Life of Hope*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 87. Moltmann uses this text from Romans to begin his chapter on the living power of hope in which he contrasts the power of hope with the sin of despair.
4. *Ibid.*, 87–88. Moltmann's idea of the future means to live in the present of the risen Christ while also stretching out to the coming Kingdom of God. He pairs our waiting with our hastening, our hoping with our enduring, our praying with our watching, and our being patient with our curiosity.
5. Iris Wagman Borowsky, M.D., Ph.D., Marjorie Ireland, Ph.D., and Michael D. Resnick, Ph.D. "Health Status and Behavioral Outcomes for Youth Who Anticipate a High Likelihood of Early Death." *American Journal of Pediatrics* Vol. 124 (No. 1 July 2009): 81–88.
6. Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 92-93.
7. *Ibid.*, 93.
8. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 182.
9. *Ibid.*, 248.
10. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters by Thomas Merton*. William Shannon, ed. (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1985), 144.

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