



# Giving Reason for Hope in a Time of Uncertainty

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“For twenty centuries the sum of evil in the world  
Has not diminished, and no Parousia, either divine or revolutionary  
Has been fulfilled.”

ALBERT CAMUS

“My little hope is nothing more than  
That small promise of a shoot  
That announces itself right at the beginning of April.”

CHARLES PÉGUY

“Hope is not the conviction that things will turn out well,  
But rather it is the certainty that something has meaning  
Without caring about the result.”

VÁCLAV HAVEL

# STILL CHRISTIAN HOPE

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In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the immanent hopes of modernity (its promise of a future) contributed, along with the rediscovery of the forgotten eschatological character of the Gospel of the Kingdom, to taking over the ecclesial consciousness about the intrahistorical dimension of the virtue of Christian hope, the human response to the Promise of God.

Its objective ceased being exclusively the contents of the (so-called) *final stages* or *last things* of the human condition (death, the resurrection, personal and universal judgment, purgatory, heaven, hell). The dichotomy of *future life* - *present life* had separated what God in Jesus Christ and in His Spirit had united in an indivisible and unambiguous way forever.

Precisely because I await the “resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”, I must be opposed here and now to the posers of death and destruction and love this life so much that I try with all my strength to liberate it from exploitation, oppression and alienation. And conversely: precisely because I love life, I commit myself to its justice and I fight for its freedom wherever it might be threatened. For that reason, I hope that once and for all death might be absorbed into the victory of life and that “there might not be more pain, suffering or lamentation” (Rev 21:4 et seq). Whoever would suggest that the here and the beyond of Christian hope as alternatives, robs Christian hope of not only the strength to live, but also of consolation in death.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *El Espíritu de la vida*. Sígueme (Salamanca, 1992), pp. 126-127.

Historical emancipations and their promises of a future, through Vatican II, have burst out as their own subject in the life of the Church. Salvation history and profane history constituted, without confusion or separation, one and the same history. From that time on, Christian hope has had to justify and articulate its narrative in relation to the immanent promises of a future, their processes and consequences, although not under their conditions.

Christianity should give reason for its hope to whomever might for it, whatever might be the historical circumstances and the state of the soul of the one who culturally confronts the future (cf. 1Pt 3:15). But in no case should their circumstances, whether favorable or not to intrahistorical hope, condition the content of the theological virtue of hope since it depends exclusively on the Promise of God.

### **From "Let's Be Realists; Let's Ask for the Impossible!" to "What There Is, Is Unsustainable."**

Less than sixty years ago, the Church dialogued with the utopia of endless progress, which is an aspect of modernity, and with its vision of the future as promise. Within that sociocultural framework, Christian hope offered itself reasonably as a fellow traveler.

Since that time, the modern utopias have lost their vitality and, dead and without prestige, they seem to be the obsolete belongings of recalcitrant Illuminati, religious visionaries, and nostalgic revolutionaries. In the present, the idea of the future as the promise of a livable and dignified life or a life of rights for every human being is moribund. The crisis of immanent historical hope has dragged along with it the Christian eschatological hope. The hardships suffered by the theological virtue of hope in order to keep it alive and standing in the hearts of the members of the Christian communities is eminently verifiable. This hope is frequently confused with historical optimism.

In this period, we have gone from thinking of the future as the time of the promise to conceive of it as an imminent threat with some tinges that are clearly apocalyptic. From May 1968 to the Spring of 2024, we have gone from "Let's be realistic; let's ask for the impossible!" to "What there is, is unsustainable": capitalism, economic growth, the consumer society, the emphasis on production, the ecological crisis, the large numbers of human beings who are cast aside, armed conflicts, etc.

In the decade of the 1960s, we lived captivated by an optimistic expectation for the future as the promise of unlimited progress. Those years went by amid cultural climates favorable to utopian dreams, that fostered a social movement that demanded, a little adolescently, a chimeric fullness: to be realists expecting the impossible. To demand a world that would be without social classes and

hunger, a just and free world, was pure realism because it seemed that you could touch it with the tip of your fingers.

The year 1968<sup>2</sup> is usually considered in Europe as the inflection point of the utopian dream: the student riots of the French May, the entry of the Russian tanka aborting the Prague Spring, the assassination off Martin Luther King, Jr., are remembered in the collective memory as the end of a golden age for historical hope. That explosion of the French May left behind it the nuclear threat, the abyss of poverty, the growing deterioration of the environment and produced by default the disappearance of all utopian goals. From that time forward, we have been accompanied by a diffuse sense of loss. What is left to us has nothing to do with what had been promised us. So, the result was easy enough to detect. Dialogues and cultural diagnostics were filled with words like dis-enchantment, des-peration, dis-appointment, and dis-illusion. Even today dim echoes of that breakup of historical hope can be perceived.

This crisis grew sharper in the same measure as we adopted the halt that Walter Benjamin put to historical optimism. “The history of progress walks on cadavers.” In the name of all kinds of utopias, human beings have sown history with barbarity and terror. Even with the best intentions to create heaven on earth, the utopias have only managed to create a hell, a hell like only man is capable of building for others like him (Karl Popper). The memory of Auschwitz and of the Russian gulag was the best antidote for not allowing ourselves to be cheated again by an intrahistorical hope, confused by a naïve historical optimism.

More significantly, we had the opportunity, which we did not capitalize on, to comprehend that

Progress is not bad because it takes us to the final catastrophe, but rather because it itself is catastrophic. It can only be maintained by destroying species, contaminating oceans, polluting the air and, above all, producing victims. And why is that? Because what is important is the conquest of new goals, while what is not important and lacks meaning is the human, social and material cost of the conquest. Hell is not what is waiting for us but rather is alive where we are now. It is true that not everyone perceives it that way. There are those who can turn the catastrophic into gold, but there are many more of those for

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2 Nevertheless, in that same year was celebrated the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (in Medellín) and Gustavo Gutierrez gave a conference (in Chimbote, Perú) which was the origin of his work *Theology of Liberation*. Both events caused to flower the most important theoretical-practical thought of a utopian character and the religious outlook of the modern age. Such a different meaning that the same date can hold for people in the same world warns us of the danger of those generalizations of which we Europeans are so fond.

whom the situation in which they live is like a state of exception. And this does not happen in totalitarian States, but rather inside of right-wing States.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1980's, the crisis of modernity put an end to seeing the future as the time of the Promise. Afterwards came post-modernism, liberated from the linear sense of the historical metanarrative of progress that converted the future into an old idea of the past. Realism no longer consisted of hoping for the impossible, but rather of extracting the most advantage out of the modest offering of the eternal present as a hostel for possible use by the members of the European bourgeoisie. The most reasonable thing was not to lose oneself in "the here and now" nor to forget about the great stories about a utopian future.

In addition, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 opened the way to economic globalization. At last, we were at "the end of history", proclaimed Francis Fukuyama. The world was left without any alternatives. From now on, democratic capitalism was going to oversee the resolution of all the contradictions of our society. Globalization offered the eternal present of hyper consumption, unlimited production and the political unification of the world. A mercantile ecumenism that made the Internet into the way of reconciliation and the terrestrial sphere into the image of the saved community. In this present, the future and its promise were no longer necessary because in some way they had been made reality or were on the way to doing that.<sup>4</sup>

We abandoned the 20<sup>th</sup> century and entered the 21<sup>st</sup> without leaving the age-old human path that walks over the cadavers of millions of people exterminated by mass deaths, by administered death, by toxic death and atomic death: "Chernobyl, Verdun, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bhopal, Palestine, New York, South Africa, Iraq, Chechnya, Tijuana, Lesbos ... an unending geography of death that has devoured time and turned it into a catastrophe. ... It is death provoked by millions of people, and in which there dies the individual, history and the future of humanity. It is the death that post-modernism, with its celebration of the sham of an inexhaustible present, denied and which has now returned, like everything that is repressed, stronger than ever."<sup>5</sup>

The final balance of this process is catastrophic; globally, our time is unsustainable. Marina Garcés would say that our time is already not that of post-modernism, but rather that of unsustainability. Modernity, history, ideologies and revolutions are over. Now resources are coming to an end: water, oil, clean air. Ecosystems along with their diversity are being extinguished. It seems as if time itself is ending. We are in the process of exhaustion and extinction, perhaps not as a species, but as a civilization based on development, progress and expansion.

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3 Reyes MATE, *El tiempo, tribunal de la historia*. Trotta (Madrid, 2018), p. 60.

4 Marina GARCÉS, *Nueva ilustración radical*. Anagrama (Barcelona, 2018) (4th ed.), p. 23.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

The end of history has changed its sign. In front of us, we no longer have an eternal present nor a place to which we can arrive. Rather, it is a threat. Our relationship to the present has also changed. It is now not one that had to last forever, but rather it is whatever we can no longer tolerate, that which is literally unsustainable. The question “Where to?” has been made obsolete. It has been substituted with “Until when?” that questions everything from the most intimate matters to the most communal, from the individual to the global, from the political to the economic. We have gone from the post-modern condition to a posthumous condition, from the present of salvation to the present of condemnation, from endless celebration to time with no future. This new condition is observed all around us. A new narration, unique and lineal, is imposed on us; it is that of irreversible destruction of our conditions of life.<sup>6</sup>

### **“Now or Never”; the Time of Hope**

In this posthumous situation, according to sociologists like Ulrich Beck and philosophers like Daniel Innerarity, humankind lives trapped by uncertainty with respect to its future. To know what the future is going to bring us is more difficult than ever. This difficulty has to do with the peculiar volatility that characterizes the world in which we live. We find ourselves amid especially unstable structures and any factor can destabilize our lives at any moment. We have problems and crises that are so complex and swift – from the financial crisis to the social effects of artificial intelligence, passing through the pandemic, the ecological crisis, world poverty, armed conflicts, terrorism, etc. – that we seem to be incapable of generating the enormous quantity of knowledge that we need to confront them.

We know this firsthand. We have experienced as never before the destabilizing impact of a succession of crises as a threat to the future of our lives. The terrorist attack on the twin towers (2001), the financial crisis (2008), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), the war in Ukraine (2022), the worsening of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (2023), the global climate crisis, etc., have increased and socialized the feelings of uncertainty and confusion just at the time that we are rationally confronting our future. The difficulty of predicting the future makes us uneasy. We are still clinging to the vague memory of an unfulfilled (or stolen) promise. In any case, how can it have happened to us that the future does not look at all like the one that we had been promised?

This is the serious matter with which we are confronted. Can we reasonably await a future as the promise of a global society that is balanced and just, of a healthy environment and of a sensible system of protection for everyone? Or should we await it as a threat of greater social imbalances and injustice, of the

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6 Ibid., p. 13-31.

irreversibility of the global ecological crisis and of a system of protection exclusively for the rich?<sup>7</sup>

However, there exists a serious difficulty in confronting it rationally: the apocalyptic mentality. The horrors suffered by humanity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their continuation into the 21<sup>st</sup> have fed into the so-called apocalyptic discussions. That is, terror-filled announcements of exterminations that spread information about the end times of human history: the nuclear end time (the military means of mass destruction), an ecological end time (the destruction of the Earth), and an economic end time (the impoverishment of the third world). These are narratives that at the current time fascinate many people, as much in the political scene as in that of science, the arts and religion.

Nevertheless, these modern apocalyptic feelings are completely lacking in practical consequences. Many people, especially those who benefit from the unjust system of global capitalism, live very concerned by the apocalyptic predictions, but not at all concerned about doing everything possible to refute them with their commitments. They are not even capable of interrupting their vacation plans as a halfway measure. They look at the apocalyptic horrors in the present generation, but nearly no one considers their own death. Such feelings just produce universal catastrophism and alarmism while they foster general indecision. People feel paralyzed. They do not even decide “to watch and pray”, which would be the minimum that should be done if the apocalyptic sentiments were taken seriously.<sup>8</sup>

I refuse to believe it is inevitable that “uncertainty is our only certainty and the apocalypse the only future imaginable.”<sup>9</sup> We need to distance ourselves from the apocalyptic ideology which, like a virus, attempts to take over our minds. Like Marina Garcés, I affirm that this immanent time of risk contains also a revelation: the stimulus of the “now or never” is the moment for action. Some protest movements and those of countercultural intervention invite us to declare ourselves as not being submissive to apocalyptic ideology, incapable of intervening effectively in the human conditions of the moment, which is historical time. It also invites us to interweave participation to create “a new and triumphant utopia of life, where no one can decide for others, including their manner of death, where love is truly certain and happiness possible, and where the heirs of those condemned to a hundred years of solitude might have at last and forever a second opportunity” (Gabriel García Márquez). Disobedience and collaborations need conceptual, historical, poetic and esthetic tools that return to us our per-

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7 Cf. Daniel INNERARITY, *Política para perplejos*. Galaxia Greenberg (Barcelona, 2018), pp. 169-179; “Instrucciones para sobrevivir a la perplejidad política”, *El País*, Feb. 27, 2018.

8 Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *La venida de Dios. Escatología cristiana*. Sígueme (Salamanca, 2004), pp. 268-269.

9 Marina GARCÉS, *El tiempo de la promesa*. Anagrama (Barcelona, 2023), p. 24.

sonal and collective capability to combat radically against the credulousness of our time and begin to find the signs to weave together again a time of livability.<sup>10</sup>

Within that attraction to “now or never” I include also the time of Christian hope as a corollary of the Promise of God in Jesus Christ. Christian hope does not turn us into seers of the future, nor does it give us any advantages to get out of the terminal quagmire in which we find ourselves. However, it helps us understand the present’s challenges and make reasonable predictions about the future. That hopeful point of view is not based on any human utopia, but rather in the fulfillment of the Promise of God.

The Christianity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century assumes the task of facing the future with hope from the perspective of the *memoria passionis et resurrectionis Christi*. This task, unavoidable for Jesus, in no way should be substantiated by the testimony of a “cheap” hope, but rather by an authentic accounting and practical justification of it. Christian hope is not the opposite of modern historical optimism. Neither is it a tonic for living in the postmodern society of boredom<sup>11</sup> or to stimulate our desires in this era of a lack of enthusiasm.<sup>12</sup> Hope is an antidote so as not to be overtaken beforehand by uncertainty and catastrophism. Hope, equipped with the identity marks of the risen Jesus, is an *interruption* into the present and an *anticipation* in Him of the future of humanity for those who do not have hope: the “extras” and the crucified of this time which is so perplexing and indifferent to their cries of pain.

We can interpret legitimately the sufferings of the present time as birth pangs of the new creation and the moans as the groans of the Spirit longing for God (Cf. Ro 8:18-25). But no one assures us of their happy enlightenment nor the metamorphosis of tears into songs of liberation. Neither can the God who raised the crucified Jesus. The salvific presence of His Spirit within history motivates, creates tension, disquiets and constantly mobilizes the hearts of human beings in the direction of the promise of the Kingdom, but without doing violence to their freedom. The Breath of God permanently impels the Christian community and men and women of good will to go inside real time, precisely where the existence and the dignity of human beings is in play. Our collaboration is indispensable to dry tears, mitigate sufferings and make into a reality that new world which is the dwelling place of God with human beings (Cf. Rev 21:3-5).

But the Promise of God is not always fulfilled in real time. On the one hand, the confusion we experience day after day blinds us Christians from seeing the signs of the Spirit and it makes us deaf so as not to hear the clamor in the cries of the impoverished and in the lament of our needy soul (cf. Mk 8:18). Without a

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10 Marina GARCÉS, *Nueva ilustración radical*, pp. 13-15.

11 Cf. Byung-Chul HAN, *La sociedad del cansancio*. Herder (Barcelona, 2017).

12 VARIOUS AUTHORS, *La era del desánimo. Una lectura creyente desde la filosofía y la teología*. Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2018).

doubt human freedom can be blind and deaf to the Promise of God for human history and, in that case, will remain frustrated. The divine plan of salvation has need of our involvement since God has not foreseen that it can be accomplished on the margins of our freedom. God's plan (that is nothing less than a total brotherhood among humans, of the universal reconciliation of all men and women) transcends it, in as much as it perfects it, the very idea of justice. The divine call to participate in it comes to us preferentially through the faces of the poor, of the victims of injustice. Precisely because the plan of God for history is that this reality of injustice might disappear definitively, His hidden Presence manifests itself in the cry of all those who suffer from this reality and in the action of all those who fight to make it disappear. In the denial of their denial, they remind us dialectically of the plan of God. Consequently, when we the members of the Church are blind and deaf to the call of God, hidden and present in the victims, the practice of the Church, whatever might be its intent, will not be directed to nor be concentrated on the processes of liberation in favor of our neighbor.

On the other hand, the action of the Breath of God habitually seems more like the whisper of a soft breeze than the violence of a hurricane that cracks mountains and cracks open rocks. (cf. 1 Kings 19:11=12), while the power of sin, although definitively conquered, continues to be enormous. Frequently it makes the Spirit of God, and its Promise eat the dust of defeat, although it fails in evicting them from history.

There where the human creative spirit arouses life and freedom, solidarity and liberation, creative fantasy and utopian projects of a new human race, the Spirit can be found in action and fermenting inside of this human history which is chained up by sin, injustice and death. But also the Spirit is there where the economy of death condemns millions of human beings and the disappearance of many and varied forms of life,<sup>13</sup> there where the egotistical affirmation of one's own freedom generates insensitivity and apathy when facing the suffering of others, there where the cult of living well dehumanizes human beings, and in a word, there where sin rules over our freedom. The Spirit is the one who fills the universe, who guides the course of the ages with admirable providence and renews the face of the earth (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, §§11 and 26) and who suffers a process of humiliation, hiddenness and *kenosis*.

In these circumstances, Christianity needs to remember ceaselessly that the truly important and decisive thing is not either its success or its failure in the concrete struggles for justice but rather is service-oriented love for the liberation of one's neighbor. "Hope is not the conviction that things will turn out well, but the certainty that something has meaning, without giving importance to the final result" (Vaclav Havel).

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13 See Imanol ZUBERO, *Against the Necronomy. The need and possibilities for an economy at the service of Life*. Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2024), Booklets 193.

Said in another way, from the perspective of hope, commitment to liberation is valid and not in function of its efficacy or its results. We Christians believe that, for as many sacrifices and defeats as there might be, this commitment is always fruitful; there is no act of love that falls into a torn sack in a definitive or irreversible way. For this action, God has promised His special presence through Jesus as a prolongation of His creative and salvific action. The death of Jesus on the cross, His “unfruitful” love symbolized by it, shows that all activity directed to the liberation of the poor and the reconciliation with one’s neighbor is valid *in and of itself* and not only for the success that it eventually might attain. The task given by God to the Church and yet to be accomplished in our history, will always have the stigma of failure, the marks of suffering and death, the identifying traces of the impotent love of Jesus who, at the same time, never gave up the fight. “Pressed on all sides, but not beaten down; endangered, but not without hope; persecuted, but not abandoned; brought down, but not annihilated. We carry always in our bodies everywhere the death of Jesus, so that also the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body (II Cor 4:8=10). This experience is precisely the one that allows believers to grasp that salvation is not in our human hands and that, despite that fact, *God grants a future* to our efforts of liberation and reconciliation which goes beyond the limits of our history.”<sup>14</sup>

### “To Hope for the Impossible”

This “small hope” (Charles Péguy), as Miguel García Baró has written, has to do with “hoping for the impossible”:

There is real Christianity only when there exist men who in the secret of their hearts dare to truly hope for the impossible. In the same way that it was not possible for someone who had been sentenced to the death on the cross of a slave to be resurrected by God Himself, against the expectations of the experts of the religion, in that very way it is impossible today for the destructive tendency of history to be held back and reversed. It is impossible for those who have been defeated by so many centuries of violence to be rescued and for their pain not only to be forgotten but erased. It is impossible for what has already happened to be annihilated. It is impossible for those who have been betrayed to recover their confidence in humanity. It is, above all, impossible and scandalous for sinners to be invited to the eternal banquet of forgiveness and for them to be seated next to the righteous who had been sacrificed, although they had been hastily called together after the eleventh hour. It is impossible for the lost opportunities in all lives to be repeated, returned and outdone. The

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14 See Eduard SCHILLEBEECKS, *Cristo y los cristianos. Gracia y liberación*. (Madrid, 1982), pp. 819-820.

Kingdom of Heaven is impossible, and we do not distinguish with which prudent policy we would be able to attract it into our history which is so based on what is real and solidly possible. Precisely because all of this is impossible, we hope for it in the activity of full hope that also must be incessant activity. If we were to believe that the impossible is possible, not only would we look evil in the eye, but rather we would not rest waiting for the combat among the gods of Manicheism to give us a final solution for our history. Only a freedom taken to its ultimate consequences still speaks eloquently about God amid the ruins.

This “hope for the impossible” is etched into the dynamic of the human being like an agent of desires. The resurrection of Jesus and its healing effects for human beings and the cosmos are in a state of rupture with the possibilities of this life, but they are found as a continuum with the unlimited human yearnings and desires for freedom, love, hope, justice, liberation, etc. These flourish consubstantially as absolute expectations in the individual and collective human consciousness, although they might be rejected, ignored or substituted with other things. They are the reflection of profound anthropological structures which manifest the mystery of the human person as a being which necessarily but ineffectively projects itself and transcends itself in its historical adventure. It needs to be a fulfilled promise of full justice, and integral liberation and it never achieves that. For that reason, we say that man is a limited being with unlimited aspirations. Xavier Zubiri described the human being as the “relatively absolute”: finite with pretensions of infinity, relative with pretensions of being absolute. “From that proceeds an interminable dynamism, thrusting onward by a desire that never ends to find its ultimate goal, in the same way that a sailor never reaches the farthest horizon.”<sup>15</sup> Ernst Bloch gave a name to that unquenchable dynamism: “the hope principle”.

Facing this spectrum of impossible human desires, Jorge Riechmann considers authentic hope to be a kind of desire “tied to expectations that are in some way or another *viable* because “hope must be possible of becoming a reality while a desire possibly cannot be fulfilled. You can desire to be Mick Jagger, but you cannot hope to be him.”<sup>16</sup>

I know that “desire places us in an ambiguous infinity” and that we human beings can follow a mistaken route when we look for the impossible. We think of ourselves as being divine and we expand our diabolical realities. We promise ourselves to reach heaven and we end up creating hells. Be very careful with absolutes since they have given way to authentic catastrophes. There is a plethora of

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15 See José Antonio MARINA, *La arquitectura del deseo. Una investigación sobre los placeres del espíritu*. Anagrama (Barcelona, 2007), p. 125.

16 See Jorge RIECHMANN, *¿Vivir como buenos huérfanos? Ensayos sobre el sentido de la vida en el Siglo de la Gran Prueba*. Catarata (Madrid, 2017), p. 242.

historical examples. Consequently, the treatment of desire calls for the discernment of its falsifications and deformations either to reject them or to rehabilitate them amid the labyrinth of desires which we human beings are. This objective is not always obtained.

With all these cautions, the operation that substitutes an *impossible* desire for a *viable* desire, so that an accounting might be made of materialistic hope (which is neither metaphysical nor religious) seems to me like a “castration” of the human soul. But it also eludes the unavoidable, that is, the question posed by the suffering of the uncountable victims of the “countryside” (Giorgio Agamben) that is our world as the handiwork of global capitalism. And leaving these victims without a response makes them factually irrelevant for the future. The sense of life in the century of the Great Test (which is what Jorge Riechmann calls the 21<sup>st</sup> century because in it we are betting on the eco-humanistic future of the third millennium<sup>17</sup>) has been changed into a category reserved for the victors or the survivors.<sup>18</sup> “In the end, utopias would be the last astute thing in our evolution if they were the only thing that existed and God didn’t exist” (Johann B. Metz), that resurrects those who perish by an unjust death.

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of the offering of Christianity. But we are not talking about just any resurrection, rather very precisely that of Jesus of Nazareth, the *Crucified*. We cannot forget or undervalue the ties between the resurrected Jesus and his history on earth. The novelty of Christianity is rooted in that point of union. He did not “die in bed like a good burgher” but rather they killed him on an ignominious cross, condemned by the imperial authority for having proclaimed in the name of God the fulfillment of His Promise, the possibility of another world, that is, “an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.” Therefore, His resurrection is not the direct response ‘elike the gods), but in expectation of divine justice for those “Abels” who in this world die before their time, like the *crucified* Jesus, victims of injustice, of violence, of intolerance and indifference.

The story of Jesus of Nazareth ended on the cross because we men killed him. The Messiah of God not only took on himself “the death of dying”, but also

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17 See Jorge RIECHMANN, “Ecohumanism In The Century of the Great Test” in AA, VV, *Wake up! Proposals for a Decentred Humanism*. Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2018), Booklets 172.

18 I am always moved by this quote from Primo Levi: “Those ‘saved’ at Auschwitz were not the best, those predestined to the good, the bearers of a message. All that I had seen demonstrated to me the opposite. Primarily those who survived were the worst, the egotists, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the ‘gray area’, the spies. It was not a fixed rule (there weren’t, nor are there fixed rules in human things), but it was a rule. I felt myself to be innocent, but listed among the saved, and for that reason constantly searching for a justification, before myself and before the others. The worst survived, that is, the most adept; the best ones had all died.” Primo LEVI, *Los humildes y los salvados*. Muchnik Editores (Barcelona, 1989), pp. 71-72.

the “death of being killed” (Marina Garcés). He not only assumed the expiration of human life, his mortality, but also the “dying before his time” of extermination or injustice. In brotherhood with the innumerable victims of injustice, human history also walked over the cadaver of the Son of God and over the apparent ruin of the messianic hopes. In His passion, the dark night of injustice hit hard the faith of Jesus in the proximity of his Father and in the nearness of the Kingdom of God, but he died like the “Faithful Witness” of the wonderful presence of God and of the eruption of the Kingdom in his descent into the hell of an unjust death (Rev. 1:5). So then, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus primarily answers the question about meaning in the context of the desire that there be justice for the victims of injustice, and that life after death is the destiny of humanity.

Outside of the area of religions, in the experience of innocent suffering by the victims of injustice, impossible desires have been reborn and are sustained: “the yearning that injustice might not have ultimate power” (Mark Horkheimer); the desire “to see things as they appear from the perspective of redemption (Theodore W. Adorno); or the expectation that the next second might be the small door through which may come the Messiah (Walter Benjamin), All of these constitute authentic preambles to the decision to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, to allow this decision not to appear arbitrary, but rather reasonable. Why is it not going to be reasonable to have the dream that God might raise victims and to raise our hopes that it will happen like that?<sup>19</sup> Why not have hope that a universalized brotherhood might reach even the dead?

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19 I make my own a play on words of Francisco Fernández Buey about a utopia: “The history of the utopia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century ought to tell us to distinguish between getting our hopes up and to have hope,” Francisco FERNÁNDEZ BUEY, *Utopias e ilusiones naturales*. El Viejo Topo (Barcelona, 2007), pp. 329.

# HOPE, “PASSION FOR WHAT IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE PROMISE”

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This is neither the place nor the time to offer an historical sketch about the “Copernican turn” that reflection about hope has experienced at the hands of eschatology from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to our day.<sup>20</sup> But I will stop first to point out some characteristics of the category of “promise”, just as they appear in the work by Jürgen Moltmann, *Teología de la Esperanza*, without which that radical change cannot be understood. Judeo-Christian hope originated in the credibility given to the promise of God by those who believed it.

## “God Is Revealed in the Way the Promise Was Made and in the History of the Promise”

From its beginning (the creation) until its finale (when God becomes “all in all” [I Cor 15:28]), the revelation of God is configured by the nature and orientation of the promise. Yahweh manifests His identity according to various contents of His promise: land and descendants, liberation from slavery and land which had been promised, the return from exile as a new exodus and a new covenant, and the resurrection of the victims of injustice are some of the images of that promise. The word that reveals God fundamentally has the character of the promise and, for that reason, being of an eschatological nature. It is founded on, and it is open to the reality of the fidelity of God to the point of naming God as the author of the fulfilled Promise (cf. Heb 10:23). Consequently, God neither identifies nor reveals “Himself” as being an absolute in Himself, but rather in His constant faithfulness to the history of His promise which at the same time begins

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20 Josep GIMÉNEZ, *Lo Último desde los últimos*. Sal Terrae (Santander, 2018), pp. 53-86.

the history of Israel and gives meaning to the history. The word of God does not give His people information about sections of heaven and the customs of their inhabitants, but rather reminds it of its history, of a road whose goal is demonstrated and guaranteed by His promise which always takes the form of the divine gift of human conquest. Although frequently it might be the image of God which is less present in the consciousness of the community of believers.

The God who is spoken of here is not a God who is either intra-worldly or extra worldly, but “the God of hope “ (Rom 15:13); a God who has “the future as a constitutive element” (Ernst Bloch); a God who is just as we come to know Him in Exodus and through the prophecies of Isaiah; consequently, a God that we cannot contain within ourselves or above us, but rather, in purity only in front of us; a God who comes out to meet us in His promises for the future and who, for that reason, we cannot “have” at all, but only wait for with active hope.<sup>21</sup>

### *We are talking about the Advent God*

As an illustration of some of the particulars of the promise, I will use a narrative from Jeremiah in which he buys a field as a proof of the fortunate future promised by Yahweh at the moment when the forces of the king of Babylon were laying siege to Jerusalem and when the prophet is a prisoner in the house of the king of Judah (Cf. Jer 32). The weight of reality seems to make the hopeful gesture of Jeremiah only a delusion. The prophet comes out of the ditch of history which had been built at that time by the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem by the troops of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 29-30). His action is not rooted in his perception of reality, but in the promise of Yahweh.

But now, and for the same reason, this is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says about this city of which you say: Sword, famine and plague will deliver it into the hands of the king of Babylon. I mean to gather them from all the countries where I have driven them in my anger, my fury and great wrath. I will bring them back to this place and make them live in safety. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them a different heart and different behavior so that they will always fear me., for the good of themselves and their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will not cease in my efforts for their good, and I will put respect for me into their hearts, so that they turn from me no more. It will be my pleasure to bring about their good, and I will plant them firmly in this land with all my heart and

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21 Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *El espíritu de ...*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21.

soul. ... I am going to bring them all the good I promise them. People will buy fields in this land of which you say: It is a wasteland without man or beast. It is given over into the hands of the Chaldeans. People will buy fields, pay money, draw up deeds and seal them, and witness them in the land of Benjamin, in the districts around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah, of the highlands, of the lowlands, and of the Negeb. For I am going to restore their fortunes – it is Yahweh who speaks, (Jer 32: 36-44)<sup>22</sup>

The announcements of the Promise that arouse the hope collide with the reality experienced in the present (the Babylonian captivity) and interrupt its logic. The images, symbols and narratives of the Promise are not, therefore, the result of the historical experience. Nor are they the fruit of the utopian desires of human beings weighed down by suffering and captivity of an unjust system. In the mouth of the prophets, they are offered as the condition for the possibility of new experiences. They don't try to shed light on the reality that is right there, but rather the reality that is to come. They aspire to insert that reality into the change that has been promised and for which we hope. They don't want to get behind reality, but to precede it.

### *The future of the promise transforms us*

In this way, the promise of God *interrupts* the fate of His people because it affirms a truth that challenges the weight of reality. It introduces a truth that creates its own place within the scheme of what is real. It is a shared expectation that is certain although it has not yet happened. The word of Yahweh is an action that puts truth and reality into tension with one another because it does not recognize the limits of that reality; it does not accept what that reality says is possible but creates in that reality new possibilities.

The promise is a truth which, at the risk of it not being actualized, turns into an irreversible commitment when it is made. Its veracity is sustained by the word of Yahweh, and it needs nothing else. Its *effectiveness* lies in instituting a link with God's people, and in organizing the time of fear and hope. It is actualized to the extent that it orients the actions of believers toward a future which is possible through faithfulness and obedience to a command. The promises of God speak about the future, but they are made in the present. They talk about the future but invoke a new beginning and a shared memory. They bind themselves to time, but they do not set a date. The divine promise situates the one who receives it into an unsavable difference with respect to the reality of the world and it is converted

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22 Translator's Note: The translation of this quotation and of all others is from The Jerusalem Bible.

into a territory in which to be committed to anticipating it. His prophetic action disputes reality regarding the boundaries between the possible and the impossible in the least favorable situation.<sup>23</sup>

How can it be that the future, something that does not yet exist, something is not yet formed, comes to affect us? Are we not falling into the logical impossibility, as is commonly said, of putting the cart before the horse? It is evident that the future is not something that is just *right there*, something that is waiting for us and toward which we are moving inexorably forward, without any option other than adapting ourselves. The future transforms us to the extent that it is anticipated – defined, prefabricated – already in the present. The future acts on the present to the extent that it is in the present when we lay the foundation for what the future is going to be. To think about the future, in a certain sense, is to anticipate it. For that reason, it is not possible to situate yourself in the present if not within the framework of a projection of the future. Between the various historically possible futures and the structural uncertainty that life contains, to attempt to define that concrete future that we desire requires making decisions and adopting strategies beginning from today. On the other hand, we already know that the past is not what it was, but rather what it is said to have been at any given moment. Creating traditions is a fundamental constitutive practice in any society. Between the past and the present, the same as between the present and the future, relationships are established that are mutually beneficial.

To a large extent, the future is decided today. It is for that reason that the future transforms us. One of the most relevant consequences derived from what has been shaped by the uncertainty of our advanced societies is the importance of choosing possibilities for the future that are open and not predetermined. The theology of the promise deprives of authority a theology of “there is what there is” and it postulates it as a theology of Hope. It deals with finding reasonable and rational answers to questions such as: when and where does the God of the Promise reveal His fidelity and in that reveals Himself and His present? That is, when and where does He take note of the future of the Promise and of the identity of the Advent God?

No one has expelled us human beings from any paradise. We have always lived “on the outskirts” of a paradise rising to our best desires, unreachable by what is possible for us. Hope should demonstrate its fortitude in this contradiction with the present because “hope is passionately for whatever is made possible by the promise”. Paradise is in the future as the fruit of the fulfillment of the promise. Paradise is the fruit of God’s dream (Cf. Is 11:1-10).

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23 Cf. Marina GARCÉS, *El tiempo de la ...*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-21.

## Hope *for* and *in* Jesus Christ, the Basis of Christian Hope

At the center of Christian hope is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean passionate about what had become possible by the fulfillment of the promise of God. We Christians have received His tradition, His way of being within reality, that is nourished by the experience of the eruption of the Kingdom of God as the definitive, liberating and eschatological action, directed preferentially to the poor, and from them to all Israel and the rest of creation. The old hopes of the people of Israel were at the point of becoming true. God was actively fulfilling His promise and His Kingdom erupted into history as good news, as Gospel. The cause for which Jesus handed over His life, His passion as a believer was summed up by the evangelist Mark, “After John had been handed over, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of God and saying, ‘The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.’” (Mk 1:14-15). God had fulfilled His promise. The possibility of a new fraternal order in the world and a new fraternal heart in human beings entered with Him into history and installed itself definitively in it.

Obviously, the Kingdom of God far exceeds any human form of utopia because it is from God, but it is related to other eschatological terms such as “civilization of love” (John Paul II); “civilization of poverty” (Ignacio Ellacuría); “culture of shared sobriety” (José Ignacio González Faus); “that life may be possible” (Jon Sobrino); “that the world becomes a home for mankind” (Ernst Bloch); or “another world is possible” (Movement for a Better World). The tradition of Jesus of Nazareth becomes present and continuous in history through the *commitments* and practices of those who are inspired and mobilized by the desires and requirements of some event with an historic and worldwide future of universal interest (Cf. Mt 25:31-38). For example: the goals of men in the world, the ceasing of xenophobic and racist practices, sustainable development, regional and world peace, the liberation of cultural and ethnic minorities, or the real spreading of the tradition of human rights, etc.

Receiving the tradition of Jesus and hoping as he hoped calls for men and women who are enlivened by the expectation of a utopia without a defined or definitive content (Paul Ricoeur calls it an *intervien*) and which can be universalized in order to reach “those who died before their time, victims of injustice, violence, indifference and intolerance (as Johann B. Metz has insisted on many occasions). It is an expectation capable of permanently nourishing an ethic of conviction which, in turn, motivates an ethic of resistance and responsibility, and allows itself to be accompanied at every moment by a hope that, according to Charles Péguy, pulls along with it and forces to move both a utopian conviction (faith) and a commitment (charity).

Jesus of Nazareth was a momentary loser. So, for those who were in control, His practices of the Kingdom seemed a delusion (Cf. Mk 3:21) because they had

gone outside of the realm of the reasonable. They disqualified it, branding it as heterodox, alternative, blasphemy, crazy and subversive. The death of Jesus on the cross, a manner that was proper for someone without citizenship (or without papers, as we would say today), accused of changing the imperial order of things (the *pax romana*), was the price that He paid for being faithful to the promise of the Kingdom amid a society that was apathetic and indifferent to the suffering of the people. He was not sleeping, but wide awake when, knowing what was about to come down on top of Him, He continued to dream, waiting for the Kingdom of God. When everything seemed apparently lost (Cf. Jn 11:53), he made the decision to go up to Jerusalem (Cf. Lk 9:51), motivated not by a delusion which would have turned Him into a kamikaze, but rather a lucid faithfulness to the promise of God to the end. There he experienced failure, abandonment by His friends, a verdict of innocent in favor of the Darkness, the use of the justice of God against the transparency of His own life and the silence of the God of the kingdom. Had He tried in vain and spent his life uselessly? (Cf. Is 49:4; Mk 15:34). It would be night (Cf. Jn 13:30). Jesus of Nazareth hoped that contrary to all the things that he experienced in that dark night of injustice and ignominy, the dawn of the Kingdom of God would break forth definitively, made possible by His faithfulness to the divine promise until the very end of the suffering and death. “If the grain of wheat does not die, it does not produce fruit” (Cf. Jn 12:23-24).

### **Hoping from the Memory of the “Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ”. Jesus Christ, the Fulfillment *in fieri* of the Promise**

The hope of the disciples at the dawn of the Kingdom sprang from the resurrection of Jesus and their reencounter with Him. Their hope in the Kingdom was a recovered hope and with the identifying marks of the one crucified. The risen Christ “is the hope” (Col 1:27) in the Christian tradition. In the Christ event (life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and the coming of the Holy Spirit), they recognized the confirmation of the fulfillment *in fieri* of the divine Promise, just as Jesus had proclaimed it with its Good News of the Kingdom of God. The light of the resurrection proclaims the definitive fulfillment of the Promise as a new possibility in and for human history.

Hope has as its objective the *novelty* of a future that, although it has been constructed by man, cannot be more than what has been *given* to it from somewhere else, since man can only build the future through exploitation and the reproduction of the past. What can give an absolutely new future, different from what is in our power to procure, is the hope that gives birth to the proclamation of the resurrection.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Cf. James S. J. MOINGT, *El hombre que venía de Dios II*, Declee (Bilbao, 1993), p. 13.

God has fulfilled the Promise in His Word, Jesus of Nazareth, and in the Spirit of the Promise (Cf. Ep 1:13) that expresses it permanently in history by (a) endowing it with unimaginable possibilities for the future (Cf. Jn 3:1-8; Rm 8:15-17); (b) announcing by its cry of birth pangs a new reality that is already inchoate, but still waiting to be completely born; and (c) provoking vocations, missions and sending out committed people to anticipate and concretize in the present what is proclaimed and guaranteed until freedom and the glory of the children of God is achieved (Cf. Rm 8:19-21).

Christ has saved us with this hope. It is hope in which we still do not see, nor can we see and we remain waiting with patience. It is the Spirit who comes to the aid of our weakness and intercedes in our unarticulated sighs, waiting for humanity to be emancipated from the slavery of corruption to obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God (Cf. Rm 8:18-27).

Christian hope does not have its matrix either in an illusory confidence in the unlimited possibilities of mankind, or in an ingenuous optimism in the indefinite progress of humankind, but rather in an open Promise which is maintained by its fulfillment by God in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Christian tradition admits that the Promise is a *dimension of reality* and hope, a theological virtue in addition to being an animal passion and human habit. The divine promise of what does not exist yet (and for that reason, opens and makes history) is turned into the mover, the motive, the means and the torment of history.<sup>25</sup>

*To have hopes ...*

The hope exhibited by the Resurrected One allows us also to have hopes in the possibilities of a new world, brotherly and reconciled, and of new men and women with hearts of flesh like that of Jesus of Nazareth. This possibility is a passage that is opened even in the most extreme human situations of disgrace by means of the Judeo-Christian apocalypse. Given that I don't have the space to spend time on it,<sup>26</sup> I will limit myself to pointing out some features. The Christian apocalypse is not a catastrophizing announcement of the future, but a denunciation of the catastrophes of the present and the announcement of the fulfillment of the divine promise: the Lord is coming as an *interruption* of the course of events to save the just ones who are suffering. "Behold, I make all things new" (Rv 21:5).

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25 Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *El espíritu de ... op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

26 Cf. Francisco Javier VITORIA CORMENZANA, "Interrumpir el tiempo para alumbrarlo nuevo" in *Iglesia Viva* 277 (2019, third quarter), pp. 43-63. It is condensad in *Selecciones de Teología*, 232, Vol. 58, pp. 343-355.

The arrival soon of the Lord Jesus will bring to an end the time of iniquity and will do justice to the innocent victims of injustice.

Very soon now, I will be with you again. ... the Time is close. Meanwhile let the sinner go on sinning, and the unclean continue to be unclean; let those who do good go on doing good; and those who are holy continue to be holy. Very soon now I will be with you again, bringing the reward to be given to every man according to what he deserves. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Happy are those who will have washed their robes clean, so that they will have the right to feed on the tree of life and can come through the gates into the city. These others must stay outside: dogs, fortune tellers and fornicators, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone of false speech and false life. ... I shall indeed be with you soon. Amen! Come Lord Jesus! (Rv 22:7-20)

The apocalyptic vision nourishes the hope for resistance.

It is not that active hope in the future with which Abraham left his land behind and Moses led the people of Israel out of the Egyptian captivity, but rather a resistant expectation, persevering and capable of This is not that active hope in the future with which Abraham left his homeland and Moses led suffering in the middle of a situation in which nothing can be done to get away from the misfortune. But combatting this hope are those individual attitudes and postures that unceasingly tend to appear in times of human distress: anger, aggressiveness, depression and self-destruction. Apathy and cynicism are forms of spiritual sclerosis and weakening that precede the destruction of the world. They both anticipate it and produce it in their own way. The apocalyptic expectation is not simply an indolent submission to fate but rather lifts up those who are depressed. The true apocalyptic thinking teaches how “to hold your head high” and to remain open to the new beginning by God when the fall of this system of the world is seen.<sup>27</sup>

We continue waiting for the second and definitive coming of the Lord Jesus to put an end to the time of iniquity and with Him to do justice for the innocent victims of injustice. The pascal light reaches into the place of the dead to lead them in a passage from death to life in the fulness of divine communion and the reencounter with reconciled humanity. As J. B. Metz reminds us, “When all is said and done, utopias would be the ultimate wisdom of evolution if they existed

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27 Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *La Venida de Dios. Escatología cristiana*. Sígueme (Salamanca, 2004), pp. 291-299.

by themselves and if a God did not exist,' who raises "the dead who have been killed" and the "dead who have just died."

... *without getting our hopes up*"

"Thy Kingdom come ..." OK, very good. But when? When will the Kingdom of God come to the poor? When will the hungry be filled? When will those who cry finally laugh? When will the ultimate will of God for this world be fulfilled? Or is it perhaps that we are not talking about this world? The answer is, in the words of Lope de Vega, "always tomorrow and we never get to tomorrow". As stated by Albert Camus, "over the last twenty centuries there has been no diminution in the world of the sum total of evil and no divine or revolutionary Parousia has been fulfilled."<sup>28</sup> It is not hard to fall into the temptation to archive the promise of the Kingdom of God along with so many other promises of liberation that time has been given the task of converting into utopian fuel for obstinate minorities or to unfulfilled prophecies that feed the skepticism of the integrated social majorities.

The experience of the crisis of the historical expectations of modern times has served to purify Christian hope, freeing it from a serious burden: confusing it with historical optimism. This is about a hope that carries with it from its origins the signs of its own demise. It is a hope that is crucified from its beginnings. All through history the driving force of the Spirit has suffered an endless number of breakdowns. We must look at it from the perspective of the lordship of the Crucified One. The theology of the Cross, as we are reminded by Jürgen Moltmann, "is nothing less than the reversal of the Christian theology of hope."<sup>29</sup> This change of optics has not been easy for us. It has brought with it the need to carry out serious efforts both theoretical and practical, to purify historical Christian theology, often confused with an ideology of progress that ignored the reality of its own victims.

The *memoria crucis* (Cf. I Cor 1:17-25) definitively demolishes any enthusiasm or blind faith in the historical success of humanizing projects, but, although it might seem paradoxical, it supports the value of Christian hope. This does not guarantee any kind of ascending progression in history, but it equally prevents the failure of human utopia from being considered historically or metaphysically inevitable. In history, there exist permanently unexpressed possibilities for human ascent because the Spirit of the Crucified One has been poured out over it as both the *first fruits* (Cf. Ro 8:23) and a *guarantee* of its future fulfillment (Cf. II Cor 1:22). It will never be able to be dislodged from it, although it can be mo-

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28 Albert CAMUS, *El hombre rebelde*. Losada (Buenos Aires, 1978 [9th ed.]), p. 281.

29 Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *El Dios crucificado*. Sígueme (Salamanca, 1975), p. 14.

mentarily defeated. The historical fertility of hope possesses the time and style of a fermenting agent. “The ‘deadline’ for its effectiveness does not exist in the adventure of gratuity” (Juan Luis Segundo) and the promise of the Kingdom is awaited and works like a gift from the Other.

Yes, Christian hope allows us to *have dreams* about reaching “a new and devastating utopia of life, which offers a second chance to the lineage of those condemned to a hundred years of solitude” (Gabriel García Márquez), but it prevents us from *getting our hopes up* about ever achieving it. The fulfillment of the promise also depends on human collaboration, and it is this and the power of sin that can make it fail in its historical realization, once again.

Given all of this, we Christians have a principle and foundation for understanding that, as Claudio Magris has written, utopia means not to give into things as they are and to fight for things as they ought to be and to know that the world needs very much to be changed and redeemed. Utopia means to remember the millions of people who perished throughout the centuries because of unspeakable violence and who have been buried in forgetfulness. Utopia gives meaning to life because it demands, against all likelihood, that life has meaning. Utopia and disenchantment, before being put in opposition to each other, must sustain and correct each other. The end of totalitarian utopias is only able to free if it is accompanied by the consciousness that redemption, promised and thrown away by them, must be sought with greater patience and modesty, knowing that we do not possess any definitive recipe, but also without deriding it.<sup>30</sup>

In times of uncertainty and apocalyptic alarms we need, more than ever, to activate that *memoria crucis* and remember, as Walter Benjamin said, that “only on behalf of those who are without hope that we have been given hope.” Hope allows us to think about, with seriousness the meaning of human history and to confront the commitment to the promise of the Kingdom with a certain amount of *affectionate pessimism*, the fruit of believing not that the world can be fixed, but rather that it makes sense to fight so that it might have a solution (José Ignacio González Faus).

So, what is the present state of the Kingdom preached by Jesus? Probably the same as always: the opportunity it offers to us, amidst evil, to continue finding concrete experiences that are humanizing and liberating. It also gives us the ability to continue to understand these experiences not as unconnected fragments, small treasures (in the best circumstances) that are the remains of a shipwreck that the water has carried on to the beach, but rather as signposts that point out a possible path toward a distant future. In the middle of the anxieties and perplexities of the present, the Spirit keeps on urging us and making possible histories that are engaged in the construction of an open future of life and fraternity for humanity. Fully into the crisis of the future, the Spirit is moving so that

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30 Cf. Claudio MAGRIS, *Utopia y desencanto*. Anagrama (Barcelona, 2001), pp. 11-17.

the vital trajectory of Christianity can be changed into a human story of salvation by God for men and women and is credited with being a religion that prepares the way to the “God who is coming”.

The story of the Promise *continues* and *interrupts* the fall of human beings into the hands of an unproductive resignation to the apocalyptic catastrophism provoking resistance movements and outbreaks of dissatisfaction everywhere. That thing that we commonly call *reality* limits us, sustains us, urges us, gives us wings, but it is not enough for us. Human intelligence ceaselessly invents *real possibilities* which are not the fantasies of the enlightened, but rather amplifications which are allowed by reality not only because we integrate them into our plans (José Antonio Marina), but also more radically because God has lovingly and freely assumed it as a part of His own plan: “to be all in all” (1 Co 15:28). For that reason, the anxious waiting period of creation, desirous of the fulfillment of the promise of being liberated from the slavery of corruption, can be read as the expectation of the birth of the new creation (Cf. Rm 8:18-26).

Our hope does not depend on the facts of reality; it is reality that depends on our hope. Only this hope can be classified as “realistic” because it is the only one that takes seriously the possibilities that run through all of reality. Hope doesn’t take things exactly as they are found, but rather how they can be modified. “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). Looking at reality with the eyes of hope, which is the same as looking at it with the eyes of faith, transforms reality. This is not an exercise in creating illusions, but a reading of reality that discovers the unexplored possibilities, things that are *unexplored and viable*. (Paulo Freire), that exist and act in its womb. They are the small promise of the sprigs that turn green (Charles Péguy) or of the pollen that turns yellow (Jorge Picó) at the beginning of the month of April. They are the signs of the Kingdom of God that is already present among us, although not yet in full form.

The promise of God is active not only as a source of comfort in times of depression, but also as a call to secure its historical viability. Christians should confront the social fabric of reality with enthusiasm following the example of the Gospel, but also with the intention to reach their viable historical objectives. It falls upon them to be as ingenuous as a dove, but also with the same amount of evangelical *shrewdness* as the serpent (Cf. Mt 10:16).

The Christian message of hope means that we must be opposed not only to the skeptics and those who do not care, but also to those who are tragically resigned who worry a great deal but who don’t do anything and look at the historic struggle as a desperate undertaking. For that reason, “with hope, not only do we have something to drink, but we also have something to cook” (Ernst Bloch). Hope is not a kind of “spiced wine” or an energy drink that faith administers to us to reconstitute our weak vital signs while we are waiting for the arrival of the “celestial banquet”. Above all, hope is the condiment with which, beginning now, to prepare the table of “rich food and generous wine” that is the feast in the Kingdom of God. In a word, everything that makes “life livable”. So, Christianity

has something to cook. It has something to do in this new territory created by the promise of God, for the purpose of giving more of itself, moving it “barely half an inch” (Josep M. Esquirol) toward its fullness. It has a task in this society: the construction of an integral democracy and of an evangelical Church in the service of a fraternal society, liberated and in peace.

Christianity needs to be accompanied in this task by large doses of *shrewdness* that resist discouragement, based on imagination and of *patience* that allows it to submit itself to adverse conditions without abandoning hope. It will also have need of the help offered by Christian prayer which is the womb of Hope. It discovers that “to worship God” is to affirm that Absolute Mystery is not only “the life of our life”, but also that hidden pain that is felt when facing a suffering, hungry, oppressed, tired, disoriented and impotent human being.

Let us not forget that when hope is real, it has always meant to grab on to the hard, the obscure and the slimy part of life, to overcome the temptation to “throw in the towel,” and to keep moving forward, clenching your fists and savoring on your lips the bitterness of one’s own existence, while at the same time shouting out “my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”. And one feels through and through, in spite and against oneself and history, the serenity of one who knows, against all appearances, that his history and the history of humanity “are in good hands” since they rest in those of God and the Promise that responds to the name of Father.

## **To Give a Reason for Hope in the Middle of Social Uncertainty**

In the middle of uncertainty and of apocalyptic threats, in the present time movements (to protest, to self-organize life, to intervene in wars, to welcome refugees, for climate change, for an alternative economy, for freedom of culture, for new feminisms, for new habits of consumption, etc.) break out that are bent on not losing time and on winning the future for a “universally livable life”. Their struggles, their works in the “politics of the everyday”, help us Christians to see our time as being ripe for the fulfillment of the promise of God (*Kairos*). We Christians are not the exclusive recipients of the promise of God. We are its administrators to the extent that we are capable of giving an answer to everyone who asks us about a reason for our hope (Cf. 1 Pe 3:15). This is a responsibility that affects first the Church, then its communities, organisms and institutions, that is not based on its capacity to emit dogma, but rather on the exercise of itself as an evangelical and Messianic example. As Vatican II reminded us, the Church is “the seed and the beginning” of the Kingdom of God (Cf. LG 5), and consequently a “Messianic people” (Cf. LG 9).

This claim bumps into a sociological Catholicism which, beyond the discourses of the magisterium and the theologians, has not a trace of being Messi-

anic nor any sign of being the bearer of an apocalyptic stimulus. In general, the Messianic factor has become irrelevant to the life of the majority of Catholics who act in their daily lives in a way that resembles that of non-believers apart from cases of fanaticism. Generally, we Catholics are more inclined to pray “O Virgin Mary, O Virgin Mary, let me stay as I am” than to call out “Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!” as did the first Christians.

Christianity becomes so fused with our society that we share its ambiguities and contradictions so that we do not have any message of hope to offer to our contemporaries? We Catholics have the same difficulties in sharing the Messianic traditions of Christianity as those who are not. We have allowed liberty to be sequestered by consumption and by spectacles (by bread and circuses). We have renounced our responsibility in exchange for security, and we live fascinated by power and indifferent to the pain of the world. We need to be converted, to change our mentality and our behavior, so that our way of life might act as an *interrupter* of the old normal, and at the same time as an *eruption* into the reality of “another normal” which offers life and happiness to victims of injustice while we hope and pray for the return of the Lord. Come Lord Jesus!

We Christians of our European societies, men and women who are beneficiaries of a world order that is at the service of death by killing (in different versions), who take life for granted, need to be converted, we need to change our hearts so that we can change our practices, and vice versa. We need to enter a process of anthropological revolution that deals with liberation from our wealth and a well-being based on superabundance, from our consumption, from the unchangeable practices based on our desires, from our arrogance, from our domination, from our apathy, from our delusions of innocence and from our purely masculine culture. We are dealing with a revolt against the “everything goes on as it is” and of a struggle against ourselves. We are dealing with an authentic interruption, the expression of hope that is not only believed but lived.<sup>31</sup>

*“Confronted with the pain of others, let’s stop everything!”<sup>32</sup>*

The category “*interruption*” used by Johann B. Metz has always seemed courageous to me, both regarding theological thought and a pastoral perspective. God comes into the extermination camps of the world to save, but His Presence is effective only in so far as there are in them men and women who *interrupt* the sufferings of the others. Sometimes it is because they create political and cultural

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31 Cf. Johan B. METZ, *Mas allá de la religión burguesa. Sobre el futuro del cristianismo*. Sígueme (Salamanca, 1982), pp. 45-48.

32 Cf. CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA, *Reflection at the End of the Year. In the Face of Other People’s Pain, Let Us Stop Everything!* Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 223). Papers 28.

conditions which allow them to move forward at least an inch along the road to liberation. At other times, it is because they are the “balm” (Etty Hillwaum) that soothes the others without being able to pull them out of their captivity. At other times, it is because their intervention stops the sufferings of the victims from being forgotten and hidden in societies in which what they call *structures of plausibility* are in reality *structures of obfuscation*. We Christians have been called to the following of Jesus to anticipate, either as He did or as a remembrance of Him, the future which is interruption into this apathetic time that is traversed by uncertainty and by terrible threats.

Surely, in the present circumstances, the greatest and most urgent challenge of the Spanish Church is to stop and reverse the direction of the cultural tendency which for the last 40 years and more has been changing Christian faith and hope into banalities. There is nothing more deadly for Catholic Christianity than to be culturally irrelevant and ethically and politically barren. It is a dear price that is being paid for having been limited to being, in the words of Johann B. Metz, “a religion for bourgeois festivals.” Neither the promise of God nor hope are in crisis. What is in crisis is the one that has been called on to be its bearer: the Church. And there is no exit possible without taking charge of that anthropological revolution.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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1. The author says that we have gone from an optimistic expectation of the future as a promise, to thinking of the future as a threat with tinges of the Apocalypse. Why has this change dragged along with it the theological virtue of hope?
2. What have been the consequences of having opted along with postmodernism for an eternal present as a refuge for all contingencies?
3. What characterizes the time of unsustainability in which we are living? What are the consequences of the apocalyptic uncertainty that it has generated?
4. "To confront the future with a hope based on the remembrance of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ". Why is Christian hope not the reverse of historical modern optimism?
5. In what way does the author relate the resurrection of Jesus with justice?
6. The author states that "it is not possible to place yourself in the present if it is not within the framework of a projection into the future." What role does the future have in the recovery of Christian hope?
7. The phrase "hope is being passionate about what is made possible by the promise" condenses a large part of the contents of the second part of the Booklet. Try to explain its meaning in your own words.
8. What does it mean for life and Christian faith to live a hope which is crucified from its origins? What does it mean in your life?

If you wish, you may send us your responses, reflections and opinions to the mailbox at [bookleets@espinal.com](mailto:bookleets@espinal.com)

Cristianisme i Justícia (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a study center that was created in Barcelona in 1981. It brings together a team of volunteer scholars and activists who desire to promote social and theological reflection that will contribute to the transformation of social and ecclesial structures. It is part of the network of Faith-Culture-Justice Centers of Spain and also of the European Social Centers of the Society of Jesus.

## Booklets CJ

187. *On Technology*. O. Quintana
188. *Fictitious Commodities*. G. Casanovas (ed.)
189. *The Sequestration of Truth*. J. García del Muro, F. J. Vitoria, S. Herrera
190. *The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Human Rights*. J. Ordóñez
191. *What Is the Purpose of Crying?* J. Laguna
192. *Cultural Democracy*. J. Picó
193. *Against the Necronomy*. I. Zubero
194. *Towards Postcapitalism*. R. Díaz-Salazar
195. *From the Synod to the Jubilee: Building a Community in Dialog*. C. Inogés
196. *Giving Reason for Hope in a Time of Uncertainty*. F. J. Vitoria

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