

- **The Biblical Vision of Hope in Today's World**
- **La Vision biblique de l'Espérance dans le Monde d'aujourd'hui**
- **Die Biblische Hoffnung in der Welt von Heute**

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RÉSUMÉ

1) L'espérance chrétienne est paradoxale. Elle se définit face à des situations de souffrance. Elle ressemble à un pendule qui oscillerait entre la mort et la vie. En effet, l'espérance chrétienne est fondée sur la résurrection de Jésus-Christ d'entre les morts. Et l'espérance de la vie éternelle à la fin des temps admet qu'il y aura des gens exclus du royaume de Dieu.

2) L'espérance chrétienne ne nous fournit pas d'idéologie ou de programme politique capables de créer un monde meilleur. Créés par Dieu cependant, les hommes et les femmes ont pour mission de s'occuper du monde entier et d'améliorer les conditions de vie sur cette terre. Mais face à la mort, ce que nous pouvons espérer en ce monde est très limité. Seul Christ nous donne l'espérance d'une vie au-delà de la mort.

3) L'espérance chrétienne est contestée. Comme Feuerbach au XIX^e siècle, il y a aujourd'hui des gens pour déclarer que l'Évangile de la victoire de Jésus-Christ sur la mort n'est qu'une manière pour l'homme de se projeter dans un ciel imaginaire. Quand nous proclamons l'espérance chrétienne dans un contexte de doute et d'indifférence, nous devons entendre de la Bible que cette espérance a tou-

jours été controversée. Elle rencontre en tout temps des adversaires. Notre espérance est donc une espérance militante.

4) Nous sommes appelés par Dieu à vivre notre espérance chrétienne en encourageant les personnes qui ont perdu espoir. Cette espérance ne se limite pas à notre vie spirituelle intérieure et au monde à venir. Elle est d'abord une espérance vivante pour ce monde où les gens souffrent. Si nous qui proclamons l'espérance chrétienne refusons de relever les défis que nous lance notre situation, particulièrement à l'égard des opprimés, des pauvres, des exclus, des malades et des personnes qui connaissent la solitude, notre témoignage n'est pas crédible. D'après l'Écriture, l'espérance implique à la fois la promesse du salut et le respect de la dignité humaine.

5) Les nouveaux cieux et la nouvelle terre que Dieu nous a promis ne sont pas présentés comme le prolongement de l'univers actuel : celui-ci va au-devant de sa fin. Notre lutte pour une société plus humaine et notre combat contre la haine, l'injustice et la guerre ne font pas partie du salut et de la vie éternelle qui nous sont donnés par le baptême et qui sont alimentés dans la foi. Nous sommes appelés à aimer notre prochain parce que c'est la volonté de Dieu. Mais nous ne contribuons pas en cela à la délivrance finale.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

01. Die biblische Hoffnung ist ein Paradox. Sie findet ihre Ausprägung in Situationen des Leidens und des Schmerzes. Hoffnung ist wie ein Pendel, das ausschwingt vom Tod zum Leben. Die spezifisch christliche Hoffnung ist in der Auferstehung Jesu Christi von den Toten verankert. Selbst die Hoffnung auf ein ewiges Leben bei der Vollendung aller Dinge weiß jedoch, daß es Menschen geben wird, die vom Königreich Gottes ausgeschlossen sein werden.

02. Die christliche Hoffnung liefert weder eine Ideologie noch ein politisches Programm zur Erschaffung einer besseren Welt. Als Geschöpf Gottes ist jeder Mann und jede Frau damit beauftragt, sich um die Welt zu kümmern und die Bedingungen für ein dauerhaftes Leben auf dieser Erde zu verbessern. Doch angesichts des Todes sind unsere Hoffnungen für diese Welt begrenzt. Nur Christus bietet uns die Hoffnung eines Lebens jenseits des Todes.

03. Die christliche Hoffnung ist Angriffen ausgesetzt. Analog zu Ludwig Feuerbach im

neunzehnten Jahrhundert gibt es auch heute Leute, die behaupten, das Evangelium des Sieges Jesu Christi über die Macht des Todes sei die Projektion des dem Menschen eigenen Seins in einen imaginären Himmel. Wenn wir die christliche Hoffnung in einem von Zweifel und Gleichgültigkeit geprägten Kontext predigen, gilt es, von der Bibel zu lernen, daß diese Hoffnung immer schon kontrovers war. Es wird immer solche geben, die sich dagegen aussprechen. Unsere Hoffnung ist demgemäß eine militante Hoffnung.

04. Wir sind von Gott dazu berufen, die christliche Hoffnung auszuleben und Menschen, die deprimiert sind, zu ermutigen. Diese Hoffnung ist nicht lediglich eine Verheißung, die unserem inneren, geistlichen Leben und der kommenden Welt gilt, sondern sie ist vor allem eine lebendige Hoffnung für eine Welt, in der Menschen in Schwierigkeiten sind. Wenn wir, die wir über

die christliche Hoffnung reden, vor den Anforderungen unserer Situation (vor allem den Unterdrückten, den Armen, den Vergessenen, den Kranken und den Einsamen) davonlaufen, dann ist unser Zeugnis nicht glaubwürdig. Hoffnung im biblischen Sinn umfaßt beides, die Verheißung des Heils und die Würde des Menschen.

05. Der neue Himmel und die neue Erde, die Gott uns verheißt hat, sind nicht als Fortbestand dieses Universums zu verstehen. Dieses strebt, trotz all seiner Ambiguitäten, dem Ende zu. Die Humanisierung unserer Gesellschaft sowie unser Kampf gegen Haß, Ungerechtigkeit und Krieg sind nicht Teil des Heils oder des ewigen Lebens, das uns in der Taufe gegeben ist und durch den Glauben genährt wird. Wir sind dazu berufen, unseren Nächsten zu lieben, weil es Gottes Wille ist. Dies jedoch ist kein Beitrag zur Vollendung aller Dinge.

Children without Hope

Have you ever seen children without any expectations for the future? There are many such children, especially in big cities. You can watch them hanging about in the streets. You can see these street children sitting on doorsteps, in back gardens and in parks. Many of them have no parents, no relatives, no homes, no food and only ragged clothes. With few exceptions, nobody cares about them. They are abandoned. Their eyes are dim. They have no hope for the future.

Let these abandoned children symbolize the brokenness of the world. There are millions of young people all around us who are suffering under the pressure of hopelessness. They are driven to despair for different reasons, whether oppression, hatred, crime, family breakdown and sexual abuse, poverty and disease. If nobody will try to help them, every glimmer of hope will fade away.

Can we dare to say that the Bible can give these badly treated children a vision of hope? How can the Christian faith be an instrument for bringing hope to those who do not see any in their daily life?

I shall deal with the question of hope from

two angles: 1. our God-given commission to create hope for people who do not have any, and 2. the specific Christological understanding of hope based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Religion of hope

From its very beginning, Christianity has been a religion of hope. We can already see it quite clearly in the Old Testament. In the history of Israel we recognise how God's blessing was always oriented towards the future. It was in faith and hope that Abraham left his homeland and began his pilgrimage towards the land which God had promised him. When the people of Israel left Egypt, God promised them 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Ex 3:8). Despite their disobedience and idolatry, which led them into punishment and condemnation, exile and dispersion, God always remained and remains faithful to his calling of Israel. His plans have always been to give his people 'a future and a hope' (Je 29:11). This God is the only true God.

The central point in the hope of the chosen people of Israel was the coming of the Kingdom of the Messiah (cf. Is 11:1-9). When Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,

came, he opened up a new future for everybody. He invited every kind of person to enter the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14). Through his proclamation of the Gospel, the poor and oppressed, the outcasts and strangers, the sinners and the sick received a new hope, which was one of restoration and salvation. The disciples of Jesus experienced that 'the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them' (Mt 11:5). Jesus of Nazareth promised people forgiveness of sins in the Name of God. Through his suffering, crucifixion and resurrection he conquered the power of death and extended the hope of a general resurrection of the dead at the end of human history. We therefore hope for eternal life. In fact, the ultimate ground of Christian hope can only be found in Jesus Christ, who is the One who will raise up believers to eternal life on the last day.¹

The Biblical vision of hope does not deal only with our individual attitude towards God. It has a collective dimension as well. In addition to the special hope for the people of Israel as a whole (Ro 11:25-27), we can look forward to the renewal of fallen humanity. By his grace alone, the loving and redeeming God will restore the human community. Even the creation waits with eager longing to be set free from its bondage to decay, when it will 'obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Ro 8:19-21).

For those of us who are confident and healthy, protected by a good family and a just society, it may be easy to proclaim that the Christian faith is a religion of hope. We can declare that from the very beginning man and woman were created with full expectations for both earthly and eternal life. To those who are in difficulties we point to the goal of history which is described as a paradise where there is no mourning, crying or pain (Rev 21:4). I have heard many such speeches in the Western culture to which I belong. Their weakness is obvious. It lies in what is missing. Often, this can be described as a sympathy with those who

are suffering. We should have combined pain with hope, suffering with renewal, and night with dawn. In the history of the people of Israel, that dark shadow-side to hope is always there. We know how the hope of the Promised Land encouraged them in the desert, in the exile and in the diaspora. This paradox of hope is very clear in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian hope, which goes back to him, comes out of humiliation, emptiness, crucifixion and death.² In his life hope is reached through suffering defeat. This aspect of the matter is particularly relevant today, when we are speaking to people who are in trouble.

Promise and Prayer

Hope relies on God's promises. A person or a community which can rely on a promise has something to look forward to. When I raise my eyes and fix them on a goal ahead, it gives inspiration to my everyday life. In an oppressive situation, a good promise can be of great help in keeping up one's courage. "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" says the Apostle Paul (Ro 12:12).

Whatever one's expectations, people can break their promises. A child who continually experiences that his or her parents do not keep their promises will eventually lose confidence in them. But when God has made a promise it is quite different. Then we can count on it, because God is faithful (1 Co 1:9). He cannot deny himself. In Jesus Christ, writes Paul, each of God's promises is a Yes (1 Co 1:20). This means that they are gathered up, confirmed and fulfilled in him who is God's Son.

Promises are the necessary precondition not only for hope, but also for prayer. As a result, hope can be seen in the context of prayer also. Prayer is our response to God's love. It is our report back to him that his message has been received. Prayer is therefore our reaction to his action. God has given us prayer in order that we may abandon ourselves to him, acknowledge him as Lord, and call on him in our hour of need

(Ps 50:15). In praying to God, we do homage to him as our God, the one true God. God is always present, and attentive to our prayers. In the Bible, God's promise to hear our prayers can be found in many variations, e.g. Jer 29:12: 'When you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you'. God answers our prayers, but he does so in his time and in his way (cf. Heb 5:7-9). There is a response from him even in the promise of a response! God's promises are always faithful; they are fulfilled, even if it is not necessarily as we imagine. In every prayer there is a hope, a hope for an answer. We do not see this hope, but we may be convinced that it is there. Hope is the motivating power behind our prayers. Because of God's promises, we can hope that God will give us signs of his gracious and saving presence.

Interpreting the Bible

Talking about the Christian vision of hope in today's world, it is desirable and relevant for us to reflect on the way in which we use the Bible. We cannot simply read the texts 'as they are'. Every translation is an interpretation. When we use Biblical texts for preaching and teaching, we are at the same time interpreting them. How then do we approach these texts? I would emphasize three points:

1. First, it is of great importance that we read the Biblical texts in their historical setting. From that perspective, the main question is: What is the text's original meaning? In order to answer that question, I am obliged to use the so-called historical-critical method of interpretation. There is no alternative to this.

2. Secondly, I approach the Biblical texts with questions thrown up by our own age. I have to try to discover whether the Bible lays down any principles for solving the problems I am dealing with. In some cases there are relevant texts which give us an immediate answer. But in other cases, we have to search hard to find appropriate Biblical guidance.

3. Thirdly, I read the Biblical texts spiri-

tually. That means that I try to listen to what God is telling me through the texts. The object of the exercise is to absorb the Word of God and allow it to work like leaven inside me.

These three approaches are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. So our next question is: What does this combined reading of the Biblical passages about hope mean to us today? With this question I have opened the door of hermeneutical debate, a burning issue from which no serious theologian can run away. The main point is how we can hear God's Word in our context today. This is a matter of finding a way to bridge the gap of 2000-4000 years of history. In order to be able to proclaim the living and active sword of the Word of God to our culture, we need to analyze the Biblical texts in their historical setting, as well as with respect to their relevance for people in our own time. This is not just an academic exercise, but also a matter of spiritual listening in faith. When, in our hermeneutical reflections, we pray that we may be guided by the Holy Spirit, we are not introducing a specific theological method. Rather, we are opening up our minds to the reality of God and confessing our devotion to him.

Karl Barth may have been right when, at the end of his long years of service to the University of Basel, he said: 'The first and most fundamental act of theological work is prayer'.³ The theologian who prays comes before God in order to seek a new clarity about what it means to say that God is the One who rules. We can only speak truly about God when we respond to his word to us. At a deep level therefore, theological work is a liturgical act, both an invocation of God and prayer to God. This prayer is the grammar of faith and the proper perspective from which to approach God.

A prayerful attitude does not excuse us from scholarly study of the Biblical texts and serious analysis of the conditions under which people struggle with their lives in real-life situations. The hermeneutical key is the dramatic encounter the fusion of

horizons between past text and present context.

Participating in the Christian Hope

We have already said that the Christian hope is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is directed towards the consummation of all things. How do we receive this hope in personal terms? Let me answer this question by quoting 1 Peter 1:3, a text which in the Church of Norway, at least, is used both in the baptismal and in the burial service: 'Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'. Here the living hope is based on a fact (the resurrection of Christ) and on a promise (our future rebirth). It is a hope given to us by the grace of God. It is not a result of our religious piety or of our moral life. Although the hope of salvation refers to a historical event, we are nevertheless unable to prove its truth by purely empirical research. Our hope always dwells upon the promise of what God wants to do.

As we have already emphasized, Christian hope arises from the victory of life over death. By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ has opened up the door of everlasting life and delivered us from the guilt of sin, distress and sorrow. The way towards trust in this hope lies through baptism and faith. As biological death approaches, our only hope is that we shall participate in the resurrection. Those who believe in Jesus Christ may bear witness to this by saying: 'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom 8:38-39). Christians could give their testimony in the same way as the Apostle Paul: '... whether we live or whether we die, we are the LORD's' (Rom 14:8).

Since that unique and decisive event, the

Christian hope has been inextricably connected with the resurrection. Jesus Christ is alive today! That is what we are called to preach. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain (1 Co 15:14). 'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor 15:20). When Christ finally comes again, 'all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement' (Jn 5:28f.). We therefore believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the transformation of the body.

The Christian hope does not mean that believers are protected against danger or disease. This hope is in no sense geared to a happy ending to world history. 'False comfort is just as dangerous as general despair', says Jürgen Moltmann.⁴ We cannot say that Christians will automatically be happy, healthy and successful. None of us is free from the trivialities of everyday life. Instead of promising us a life without problems, the Bible speaks of a God who can give the oppressed a new vision, and the suffering another future. The Holy Spirit can lead us to look beyond the threat of war, poverty, pollution and nuclear catastrophe to the Kingdom of God. In Jesus Christ we catch a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). What we receive in baptism is a foretaste of our future life in communion with God. In other words, it is an anticipation of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. The renewed world of which the Bible speaks is not a continuation of this life. Nor is it a restoration of our civilisation. Wolfhart Pannenberg puts it like this: The life of the future 'will unfold its dynamic through growth in the vertical dimension of our present life'.⁵ We are waiting for a final action by God, the Creator of heaven and earth, not for a progressive process within time and space.

The Christian Hope and Secular Hopes

Having now defined the Christian hope in Christological terms, I return to the question of the relationship between it and the many different kinds of hope which we encounter in the everyday life of the world. Before going any further, I would like to emphasise two points:

1. Man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). 'He endowed them with strength like his own', as Sirach has it (Sir 17:3). As creatures made in God's image, we are given the blessing of the divine commission: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish and the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Gen 1:28). This challenge is based on the hope that God will continue to preserve his creation and give it further growth. It is our prayer that he will continue to care for the life which he has created. At the same time we have to develop, train and exercise our God-given abilities in order to make the world a better place for people to live in. We are simply created in order to live out this hope. It lies within us. From this perspective, it is perfectly legitimate to dream of forging a better world.

2. We are destined to die. None of us can prolong his or her biological life into eternity. Life on earth has its limits, which are insurmountable. In spite of advanced medical techniques, like the transplanting of living organs, it is impossible for us to overcome death. We can delay it to some extent, but we can never overcome it. Whatever hopes we may have for our own lives, for our family, for our society and for the world as a whole disappear the moment death overtakes us. This does not mean that our lives are without significance for future generations. What we have accumulated can be handed on to our children and grandchildren. They will be able to preserve, improve or destroy our culture. Although we are all mortal, it is still possible

for us to work for a better world. As our temporary place of residence, there is a relative potential for change and development in the world. But it will never become a paradise. In our efforts to change structures and to humanise power, we run into a boundary line which points in the opposite direction. Heaven and earth will pass away (Mk 13:31). With Paul, we can say: 'For the form of this world is passing away' (1 Co 7:31).

Now if these two points indicate the character of our hopes within the secular realm, what is the relationship between them and the specific hope which is based on Christ's death and resurrection? In terms of shaping a better world for oppressed, hungry, handicapped and suffering people, it is right and good to say to ourselves: we can do it! God has instructed us to love our neighbours and he has equipped us with creativity and responsibility for building up our society. From this perspective we can pray, work and hope for improvement in social conditions. But the Christian hope has no programme for changing the structures of this world, or for developing a strategy for building a better society based on social justice and human rights. The Gospel of the Living Christ does not contain any ideology of how this world can become a paradise. But as God's creatures, we have abilities and resources for renewing the external framework of daily life, even though arrogance, selfishness and greed are always causing trouble and setting us back.

In the face of death, the Christian hope is a message which is quite different from the many hopes which we find in this world. Christ's victory over the power of death on Easter Sunday is unique. There is no parallel to this event in the history of science or of humanity. As the only hope for overcoming death, the Christian hope is not compatible with any hope in this world.

The outcome of these considerations is not a total separation between the Christian hope, on the one hand, and the many hopes of the world on the other. The Christian hope is woven together with faith and

love (1 Cor 13:13). Faith inspires us to realise God's purpose in caring for man and nature in this world. The call to love my neighbour as myself is motivated by the great commandment to love the Lord my God with all my heart (Mt 22:37-40). My whole life is to be shaped by my belief in God. There is no area of human life which is irrelevant to God and my Christian life. All our hopes have to be seen in the light of faith. This is the decisive, overall perspective from which we operate.

Being created in the image of God, man and woman have a special dignity, which is different from that of other living creatures like animals and plants. Because every person is a candidate for the Kingdom of God, believers are called to witness to and to care for them. We must support one another with hope. Also, those people who, according to medical and social standards of life, seem to have no hope, are to be embraced by social welfare and service. Faith sees hope, even where there is little or no hope to be seen. Therefore, every man and woman should be treated with dignity, without cost-benefit calculations. That means that we have a special responsibility for the weakest among us: the unborn child, the street children, the incurably ill, the disabled, the mentally handicapped, the senile and the dying. Where life seems to be meaningless, it is the Christian's duty and privilege to spread hope.

Hope in Everyday Life

I now return to the question which I asked at the beginning: What do street children with dim eyes see in the Biblical vision of hope? Like the sick and rejected people who once met Jesus of Nazareth, I think the street children of today would give one answer: mercy! That means care. If we can change the conditions of life for one of these unhappy children, a whole family may get a new future. In the world today there are thousands of possibilities for giving people a new hope.

Christian hope does not allow us to escape from the problems of everyday life. It

is in this world that we are called to live out our hope. The test is whether this hope is active in love or not.⁶ We are under the judgement of God not only as individuals, but also as congregations and as members of the wider society. Therefore, Christian hope does not give us any reason for triumphalism, but reminds us constantly that we are called to repentance.

We live in a competitive culture which is geared towards results. People around us are asking for a visible outcome in production and politics, in art and scholarship, in education and welfare. Sometimes you may feel strongly that your religion and faith have to bear fruit. If Christian hope does not fulfill its promises in the expected way, it may be evaluated as a bad advertisement for Christianity. There is no doubt that in today's society, our hope is under pressure from the demands of efficiency.

Now, Jesus tells us that 'every sound tree bears good fruit' (Mt 7:17). Living faith yields good works. It is a creative process which is initiated by the Holy Spirit. But that does not mean that we are never able to test the truth of our faith. We can never use good works or concrete results as a reliable standard for measuring the existence of faith.

The reality of Christian hope cannot be tested by its fulfillment either. Hope is not visible. When the Apostle Paul talks about the hope by which we are saved, he claims that 'hope that is seen is not hope'. He confirms this understanding of hope with a rhetorical question: 'For who hopes for what he sees?' (Rom 8:24). We hope for what we do not see. That is the distinctive character of hope. In the New Testament hope is a patient and confident waiting for the Lord. When we hope, we are set on course towards the final goal, the consummation.

The Challenge of Atheism

The Christian vision of hope is under constant attack in today's world. Like the fool in the Old Testament psalms, there are still people today who say in their hearts:

'There is no God' (Ps 14:1). If they are right, then there is no hope at all.

Today we are challenged by atheism on different levels. First, let me mention intellectual atheism. This is an attitude mainly based in a rational world view without any openness towards divine revelation. Secondly, in our century the world has experienced how atheism can be transformed into an ideological system, e.g. communism. Where the state authorities have monopolised an ideological atheism, the consequences seem to be a very restricted religious freedom and an attempt to prohibit the worship of God. Thirdly, atheism comes about as a result of secularisation. Some people in what was once Christian Europe are now so secularised that they know almost nothing about the God of the Bible. Fourthly, there are people all around us who act like atheists, even though they have heard about God and may have been baptised as infants. But in their everyday life God is simply not taken into account. For them, God is (practically speaking) dead.

Over against these different types of atheism, the Christian faith may have opportunities to witness in favour of its hope. With the help of good arguments, we may be able to reject false accusations which are levelled against it. But we shall never be able to give logical reasons or present rational evidence for the truth of our hope. Lastly, it is a question of confidence in the Word of God. Therefore, in many cases the challenge is to be prepared to give a credible testimony.

Let us look at people's attitudes in situations of terminal illness. I am not the only one who has experienced a big gap between a funeral conducted in a purely secular setting and one which is surrounded by the hope of resurrection when Christ comes again. The ultimate ground of our hope is the word of Jesus given to Martha when he raised Lazarus from the dead: "I am the resurrection and the life. he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26). The promise of

Jesus Christ himself, that on the last day he will raise the dead to life and take believers up into his eternal Kingdom, is the core of the Christian hope.

Summary

If I try to summarise my reflections on the Biblical vision of hope in today's world, I would highlight the following points:

1. The Biblical hope is paradoxical. It is shaped in situations of suffering and pain. We can illustrate this by a pendulum, swinging from death to life. Specifically Christian hope is anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Even in the hope of eternal life in the consummation of all things, there will still be people who will be expelled from the Kingdom of God.

2. Christian hope does not provide any ideology or political programme for creating a better world. As God's creatures, every man and woman has been commissioned to care for the whole world, and to improve the conditions for ongoing life on this earth. But in the face of death, our hopes for this world are limited. Only Christ offers us the hope of a life beyond death.

3. The Christian hope is under attack. Like Ludwig Feuerbach in the nineteenth century, there are people today who claim that the Gospel of the victory of Jesus Christ over the power of death is a projection of man's own being into an imaginary heaven. In preaching the Christian hope in a context of doubt and indifference, we need to learn from the Bible that this hope has always been controversial. Somebody is always against it. Our hope is therefore a militant hope.

4. We are called by God to live out the Christian hope and to encourage people who are depressed. This hope is not just a promise for our inner spiritual life and for the world to come; first of all, it is a living hope for the world in which people are in trouble. If we who talk about the Christian hope run away from the challenges of our situation, particularly from the oppressed,

the poor, the forgotten, the sick and the lonely, our testimony is not credible. In Biblical terms, hope means both the promise of salvation and human dignity.

5. The new heaven and the new earth which God has promised to us is not to be seen as a continuation of this universe. In spite of all its ambiguity, it moves towards an end. The humanisation of our society and our struggle against hatred, injustice and war is not a part of salvation or of eternal life, which is given to us in baptism and nourished through faith. We are called to love our neighbours because it is God's will. It is not a contribution towards the consummation of all things.

Finally, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Ro 15:13).

Notes

- 1 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: the Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, New York, OUP, 1980, p. 448.
- 2 Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In troens fylde*, tr. Gunnar Wickland-Hansen, Oslo, St. Olav Forlag, 1995, 283-287
- 3 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: an Introduction*, tr. Grover Foley, New York, Holt, Reinhardt and Winston, 1963, p. 160
- 4 J. Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future*, London, SCM, 1989, p. 37
- 5 W. Pannenberg, *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, tr. Margaret Kohl, London, SCM, 1972, p. 175.
- 6 Cf. *Confessing the One Faith: an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic faith as it is confessed in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order paper No. 153, Geneva: WCC Publications 1991, 102-103

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