

Some Notes on Theological Hope

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At the beginning of the twenty first century, we observe our world and see violence, injustice, division, and death. We also see justice, solidarity, compassion, martyrdom, and abundant life. For some people, ours is still a hopeful world. For others, on the contrary, it is mainly a hopeless world. While modernists, optimists and scientists keep promising us that things will be all right and tomorrow will be better, postmodernists, pessimists and nihilists tell us that basically there is no remedy: objective truth does not exist and violence is inevitable.

As citizens of this world, Christians – with other believing peoples – are asked to give a reason for their hope (I Pet 3:15) – their hope in heaven! After the theologians of the School of Hope, particularly theologian Jurgen Moltmann, other current theologians speak today of re-founding hope and of proclaiming theological optimism.¹

Still many Christians today do not seem to live as hopeful people and are not able to give a convincing reason for their theological hope. For them – and for many of us, perhaps –, Peguy continues to be right: “Hope, little hope, moves forward between her two big sisters, and nobody notices her.” Christian hope is as important – if not more, in this life – as her other two sisters faith

¹ See Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, London: SCM Press, 1970; Olegario González de Cardedal, *Raíz de la esperanza*, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1996, p. 481; Felicísimo Martínez Díez, O.P., *Avivar la esperanza. Ensayos sobre vida cristiana*, Madrid: San Pablo, 2002, pp. 35-40; Jonathan R. Wilson, *Gospel Virtues. Practicing Faith, Hope & Love in Uncertain Times*, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pp. 99-104.

and charity: "The human person is a hoping animal, and he cannot but hope."²

Human life is indeed a narrative of hopes in the plural – human hopes – and of hope in the singular – theological hope. I wish to reflect on theological or Christian hope. I shall concentrate first on the basic points of a theology of hope, second on its dimensions, and third on some significant properties of hope. I will close my reflection with a brief meditation on the hope of a Christian.

1. BASIC POINTS OF A THEOLOGY OF HOPE

The Three Theological Virtues

As human beings, we need to have human virtues, or firm good dispositions of the soul, such as justice and solidarity. As Christians in particular, we need, most of all, the theological virtues, which are not acquired but infused by God – they are God's gifts to us.

God's radical gift is *grace*, which elevates our being to the supernatural or divine life. In theology, grace is called the ontic principle of life while the theological virtues – and other infused virtues – are called the dynamic operative principles that issue good deeds for salvation.

The three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are three ways to respond to God: faith is the root of Christian life; hope is its orientation and charity, its substance.³ Protestant theologian Jonathan Wilson describes faith as the Christian way of knowing, hope as the Christian way of being and charity as the Christian way of doing.⁴ The three theological virtues are inseparably united: given by God and focused on God. Hope, in particular, is closely linked to faith and charity: faith guarantees the blessings of hope (Heb

² Cf. Pedro Laín Entralgo, *La espera y la esperanza. Historia y teoría del esperar humano*, Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1958, p. 16. See Fausto Gómez, O.P., "The Human person: Pilgrim with a Thousand Hopes," in his book *Social Ethics: Doctrine and Life*, Manila: UST, 1991, pp. 213-217.

³ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Salutis*, II, 1, 65; quoted by Olegario González de Cardedal, o. c., p. 468.

⁴ See Jonathan R. Wilson, o. c.

11:1); hope is not deceptive because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

Saint Paul considers hope as one of the virtues of the great triad of Christian virtues (I Cor 13:13; Col 3:14). The greatest of the three is charity. In Christian tradition, only charity gives perfection to faith and hope – and to all virtues! Without charity, the other two theological virtues of faith and hope cannot be fertile. Charity is the form of all virtues, especially of faith and hope. St. John of the Cross wrote that “without charity, no virtue is graceful before God.”⁵ Hope can only attain its object – eternal life – if informed by, or through, charity.

Although faith is considered the most basic virtue and charity, the most perfect one, hope is perhaps the most necessary in our earthly life. It was said: “*Dum spiro, spero*” – as long as I breath, I hope. Saint Augustine said it well: “*Vita vitae mortalis, spes est vitae immortalis*” – the life of mortal life is the hope of immortal life.⁶ What is the answer to the real situation of human existence? It is mainly hope: “The virtue of hope is the primary virtue corresponding to the *status viatoris*; it is the authentic virtue of the ‘not yet’.”⁷ After all, “People cannot live without hope... People can live without faith and apparently many do. Many also live without love. But without hope, something to move us onward, we simply cannot go on.”⁸

Definition of Hope

It is said that hope is a summary of the whole Bible. God is the God of hope (Rom 15:13). The theology of hope is particularly rooted in the Bible of hope. Biblical hope begins with the Old

⁵ San Juan de la Cruz, *Noche oscura*, II, 21, no. 10, in *Obras completas*, Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1988, p. 536). See St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 62, 4; II-II, 4, 3; 23, 6-8. See also Martin Gelabert Ballester, O. P., *Para encontrar a Dios. Vida teologal*, Salamanca-Madrid: San Esteban-Edibesa, 2002, pp. 28-31.

⁶ St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psal 103*, *Sermo* 4, no. 17: ML 37, 1389; Id., *Enchiridion ad Laurentium, sive de Fide, Spe et Charitate*: ML 40, 231-247.

⁷ J. Pieper, *Sobre la esperanza*, Madrid: Ed. Rialp S. A., 1953, p. 31.

⁸ Michael Downey, *Hope Begins Where Hope Begins*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998, p. 63.

Testament, which is "the classical book of hope."⁹ The Israelites lived for the future in hope: "O Israel, hope in the Lord, both now and forever" (Ps 131:3); "Blessed the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord" (Jr 17:7).

The new hope of the Christian is "a better hope" (Heb 7:19), a hope rooted in God the Father, in Christ, our hope (I Tim 1:1), and in the Holy Spirit and his gifts (Rom 5:5; II Cor 1:22); Eph 1:13-14). With C. Spicq, we may define biblical hope thus: "The certain expectation of eternal life and of the opportune means to attain it – an expectation founded on the promises, the fidelity, the love and the power of God."¹⁰

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks creatively of three kinds of hope: the passion of hope, the human virtue of hope, and the theological virtue of hope. Explaining St. Thomas, theologian Santiago Ramírez defines theological hope simply as: "*Virtus theologica voluntatis, expectative vitae aeternae per auxilium Dei*" – the theological virtue of the will, which tends decidedly to the attainment of eternal life with the help of the grace of God.¹¹ To be able to expect eternal life, perfect happiness, the will of man needs the gift of the infused virtue of hope. The classical definition of hope points to us the objects and the subject of hope. By examining objects and subject, we shall know better the nature of theological hope.

Objects of Hope

The Israelites of the Old Testament expected successive objects of hope: the posterity of Abraham, the Promised Land, the return to the fatherland, and the messianic era. Old Testament hope is generally this – wordly hope, with some exceptions, in particular

⁹ Albert Gelin, P.S.S., "L'Esperance dans L'Ancient Testament," *Lumiere et Vie*, 41, 1959, p. 3; L. López de las Heras, O. P., "La esperanza en la Biblia," *Studium*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1970, pp. 551-557.

¹⁰ C. Spicq, O.P., *La revelation de l'esperance dans le Nouveau Testament*, Avignon, 1931 p. 58.

¹¹ Santiago Ramírez, O.P., *La esencia de la esperanza*, Madrid: Ed. Punta Europa, 1960, p. 318. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *In 3 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 2; II-II, 17, 1-6; Marcos F. Manzanedo, O.P., "Relaciones y moralidad de la esperanza," *Studium*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, 1993, pp. 397-402.

the book of *Wisdom*, which speaks of the hope of immortality of the just (Ws 3:4; 5:14).

Christians hope the glorification of the Lord, the glory of the Father, the manifestation of this glory in the saints – in us all. They hope salvation, the inheritance of the saints, the Kingdom of God, eternal life. Christians hope also the immortality not only of the soul but also of the body (we are body-soul).¹² The object of hope – a future good, which is difficult but possible to attain – is objectively God himself, and subjectively, the beatific vision, or the vision of God by man in heaven. The *terminative object of hope* is God, as our ultimate end. In traditional theology, the *primary object of hope* is *eternal life* (I Jn 2:25) – always a veiled object for the human person. *Secondary but also important objects* of Christian hope are all things related to God, including the objects of our legitimate human hopes.

The *motive object of hope* is basically God's infinite love for humankind – and for his creation. Saint Thomas, expressing Christian tradition, speaks of the two fundamental motives of hope, namely, God's attributes of omnipotence and mercy.¹³

Secondary motives of our hope are God's grace and graces and the instruments of grace, including the humanity of Christ, the sacraments, the intercession of the saints, principally Mother Mary.... Also our graced good works as expressions of love. Our Lady, Mother Mary, to whom we ought to have special devotion, is an important icon of hope – and unique intercessor before God: *Mary* is, according to Vatican II, *a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim people of God*.¹⁴

¹² See L. López de las Heras, "La esperanza en la Biblia," *Studium*, Vol. X, No. 3, 1970, pp. 551-552; Teófilo Urdanoz, O.P., *Introducciones a la II-II, 17-22*, Madrid: BAC, 1959, pp. 498-504). Fausto Gomez, O.P., *Dimensión comunitaria y personal de la esperanza cristiana*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Manila: UST 1971, pp. 103 & 113.

¹³ St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 17, 2 ad 1; 18, 4 ad 2 & 3; 21, 1 & 4. See Martin Gelabert Ballester, *Para encontrar a Dios*, p. 193.

¹⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 68. See Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics* 2, Bangalore, India: Divine Word Publ., 1997, pp. 72-73; Antonio Royo Marin, O.P., *Teología Moral para Seglares*, Madrid: BAC 1957, pp. 253-254, and *Teología de la esperanza*, Madrid: BAC, 1969, pp. 121-154; Luis González de Carvajal, "Pequeño elogio de la esperanza," *Vida Nueva*, no. 2.250, Septiembre 2000, pp. 26-30.

Subject of Hope

Who are the subjects of hope? *Who hope* with theological hope? Those who do not believe in God cannot hope (Eph 2:12; I Th 4:13); however, they are all invited to hope ((Eph 2:12; I Th 4:13): God wants the salvation of all (I Tim 2:4). There is no hope in hell (Mt 25:41, 46): the attainment of the object of hope is impossible. In his Divine Comedy, Dante writes on the door of hell: "*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate.*" There is hope in purgatory (cf. Lk 16:22;). There is hope in the pilgrim Church.¹⁵ How about the blessed in heaven, do they have hope? Saint Paul answers: "But hope is not hope if its object is seen; how is it possible for one to hope for what he sees? (Rom 8:24).

Traditional Christian theology affirms that there is no hope in heaven; the blessed are not in the wayfaring state and the object of hope is not future anymore but already attained. Interpreting the teaching of the Church and of classical theology, Santiago Ramírez writes: "Once one arrives to the perfect vision of God face to face, the obscure and imperfect knowledge disappears – *in enigmata* – of faith (Rom 8:24–25). This is the reason why Benedict XII taught that the face to face vision of God excludes from the blessed in heaven the acts of faith and hope as strictly theological virtues." The saints in heaven "hope" secondary objects of hope, such as our salvation and the glorification of their bodies. This, however, is not properly speaking hope but a desire coming from charity.¹⁶

There are contemporary theologians who defend the existence of hope in heaven – a hope that is inseparable of charity as love of neighbor. With St. Irenaeus and Origin, theologians who speak of hope in heaven are, among others, P. Henry, Henri de Lubac, H. Urs von Balthasar, Olegario González de Cardedal. De Lubac writes:

¹⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), nos. 5, 48, 51. F. Gómez, *Dimensión comunitaria y personal de la esperanza cristiana*, pp. 126-132. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, Jesus Christ had formal hope (He trusted God completely), but not material hope (He enjoyed the beatific vision) of God). See Martin Gelabert Ballester, o.c., pp. 70-73.

¹⁶ S. Ramírez, o.c., p. 110; St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 18, 2. St. Augustine expressed this common teaching well: "*Cum venerit quod videamus spes non erit quia res erit.*"

"The saints of heaven must hope with only one hope the salvation of those who are still on the way and their own resurrection."¹⁷

The pilgrim hopes! The human person hopes as a free and responsible being, as a member of the human community and as part of the universe. As Christians we hope with all and for all. The immediate subject of hope in man is his will. St. Thomas places faith in the intellect (its object is truth) and hope (and charity), in the will elevated by God's grace: the object of the will is goodness.

The pilgrim hopes not as perfect human being, but as a vulnerable, fragile, finite, needy human being. He or she hopes precisely because he/she is weak, or sick or potentially a sick person.¹⁸ With God's grace and love, and, above all, with the Gift of Fear of the Holy Spirit, he will be able to journey hopefully and courageously to heaven.

The Gift of Fear is one of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit that are necessary for the perfection of the theological and cardinal virtues. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural habits by which we are disposed to obeying promptly the movements and inspirations of the Holy Spirit. While the virtues move us in a human manner, the gifts, in a divine way that depends not on us but on the Holy Spirit.

The Gift of Fear perfects primarily the theological virtue of hope; it also strengthens the moral virtue of temperance and is deeply related to the virtue of humility, which is called "the guardian of hope." The fear in the Gift of Fear is not principally fear of divine punishment for sin (*servile fear*), but fear of losing or offending God our Father (*filial fear*). A model of the Gift of Fear is, among other saints, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who witnessed in an eminent manner filial fear, spiritual childhood.

¹⁷ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Catolicismo. Los aspectos sociales del dogma*, Barcelona, 1963, p. 94; see Pedro Laín Entralgo, *La espera y la esperanza*, p. 357, nota 8; Fausto Gómez, *La dimensión comunitaria y personal de la esperanza cristiana*, pp. 127-132; Olegario González de Cardedal, o.c., pp. 517-518.

¹⁸ See J. García Férez, "Esperanza," in *10 palabras claves en humanizar la salud*, ed. by J. García Férez, Estella Navarra: ed. Verbo Divino, 2002, p. 383.

God, therefore, is the object of hope and at the same time the object of fear: of hope, by reason of his infinite mercy; of fear, by his infinite justice.¹⁹

Sins Against Hope

The basic points of a theology of hope ought to include the sins against hope. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when presenting the first commandment, "you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve," speaks briefly of the three theological virtues. On hope, CCC describes briefly the definition of hope and the sins against hope, namely, despair and presumption.²⁰ *Despair* is described today as anticipated failure, as inward death, as a voluntary renunciation of eternal beatitude deemed unattainable, as "the reverse of a masked pride." It is against God's mercy. Despair is a most dangerous sin. "To commit sin is death of the soul; but to despair is to descend to hell."²¹ It is not easy to commit a sin of perfect despair. It is not that hard, however, to commit sins of imperfect despair, such as, *acedia* or spiritual laziness, abandoning spiritual practices and prayer, discouragement, anxiety. From the part of God, all sins are forgivable; from the part of man, nevertheless, some sins may seem unforgivable, for instance, the sin of abortion.

While despair is a sin against hope by defect, *presumption* is a sin by excess. Presumption is described as "anticipated fulfillment," as "an excessive confidence to obtaining the salvation of the soul by means not sanctioned by God." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* avers that a person can be sinfully presumptuous if he thinks that he can be saved by his own powers, or if she misunderstands God's mercy by "hoping to attain his forgiveness with-

¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 19, 2 ad 2. See Jordan Aumann, O.P., *Spiritual Theology*, Manila: UST Faculty of Theology, 1982, pp. 262-266).

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, The Vatican, 1992, nos. 2091-2092.

²¹ See II-II, 20, 3; A. Royo Marin, o.c., II, p. 257; O. González de Cardedal, o.c., p. 519; John Heagle, *A Contemporary Meditation on Hope*, Chicago, Ill.: The Thomas More Ass., 1975, p. 24; Ferdinand Kerstiens, "Hope," *Sacramentum Mundi*, New York/London: Herder and Herder/Burns & Oates Lim., 1969, p. 61.

out conversion, and glory without merit.”²² Although the sin of perfect presumption is not easy to commit, it is not hard to sin against hope by trusting excessively in our powers to do good or in God’s infinite mercy – even without repentance.

What are the other sins against hope? Moltmann believes that the sin that threatens most the believer is not the evil he does, but the good he does not do; it is not his misdeeds, but his omissions. These accuse him of lack of hope. Another sin against hope today is solitude – the solitude of the Christian who is alone. In this sense, as theologian Felicísimo Martínez writes, loneliness and lack of hope are twin sisters. Absolute solitude, or despair, is like hell. For his part, Segundo Galilea considers as sins some current superstitions against hope, including religious, scientific and ideological superstitions.

In his book *The Virtues of the Vigilant Christian*, Carlo Maria Martini, quoting Heinrich Schlier, points out some of the signs of lack of hope today. These are, among others, the following: giving in to ill humor, impatience, uneasiness, bitterness; every failure in calmness, excessive talking in empty speeches, being scattered in a multiplicity of things, lack of stability in the decisions of life. Cardinal Martini mentions others: lack of clarity, lack of objectivity, incoherence, and dishonesty.²³ Words to ponder:

Is our world today aware of one of the most dangerous sins against hope? It is the over commitment to activity, to success, to progress and development, while cutting off the fountains of hope: contemplation, prayer, repose before God. Those who will not bother to keep the wellspring of creative liberty and fidelity clean and strong are sinning against their own hope and the hope of the world.²⁴

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2002; A. Royo Marin, o.c., II, p. 259; F. Kerstiens, a.c., p. 61.

²³ Carlo María Martini, *Las virtudes del cristiano que vigila*, Valencia: Edicep, 2002, pp. 102-103; Felicísimo Martínez Díez, o.c., p. 48; Segundo Galilea, *Espiritualidad de la esperanza*, Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1988, pp. 38-41; J. Moltmann, o.c., p. 22; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2002. See K. H. Peschke, S.V.D., *Christian Ethics 2*, Manila: Divine Word Publ., 1997, pp. 80-81; B. Haring, o.c., II, pp. 415-416; O. González de Cardedal, o.c., pp. 519-522.

²⁴ B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, II, Sydney: A Saint Paul Publication, 1979, p. 416.

2. DIMENSIONS OF HOPE

Theological, Trinitarian and Christological Hope

Hope is hope in God. The theological virtue of hope is obviously a theological hope, that is, a hope focused on God as our end and as our omnipotent and merciful grace for the journey. God is indeed the God of hope (Rom 15:13), the God of promise (J. Moltmann), God in front of us (J. B. Metz), the ultimate future (W. Pannenberg), the absolute future (K. Rahner).

Hope is hope in the Blessed Trinity. Christian hope is Trinitarian hope. God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit founds a new hope, a supernatural hope that perfects natural hope. Christ is the fulfillment of the promise, and the Spirit that He gives us is the Spirit of the promise fulfilled, but not yet consummated. In fact, all creatures – the whole humanity and even all creation – long for its consummation. Our Christian hope – the hope of the People of God, of the Church as the community of faith hope and love – has God the Father as its origin, Jesus Christ as the verifiable historical sign, and the Holy Spirit as its immediate agent in our conscience.²⁵

Hope praises the Father, our creator who continues creating. It praises the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who died for us, rose from the dead and lives! It praises the Holy Spirit, who leads us to doing the will of God for us and in the world.²⁶ The Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, is the animator of our hope: "It is in the Spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it" (Gal 5:5).

Hope is hope in Jesus Christ. Christian hope is a christological, and christocentric, hope, a hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, who points to us in the Holy Spirit the good of our hope. We live in Christ (Col 2:6), He is our foundation (I Cor 3:11), our hope (I Tim 1:1), and the hope of our glory (Col 1:27). Christ is the Lord who is risen and is coming! Christian hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. "The resurrection of Jesus is the gateway to the theology of the future" (Braaten).

²⁵ O.G. de Cardedal, *Raiz de la esperanza*, 511, 515.

²⁶ B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, II, 386.

The resurrection of Jesus offers to humankind a new *eschaton* that puts death to death, and, thus, opens the door of hope to all human beings in particular. Death is, indeed, the greatest challenge of hope. Certainly, if God can create from nothing, He can return the dead to life. To believe in hope implies to believe in the resurrection of the dead. "Only an eschatology that is drawn through the needle's eye of death and resurrection can carry a hope in the face of death itself."²⁷ The love of God will prevail over our death.

Eschatological and Temporal Dimensions of Hope

Biblical hope is deeply permeated by the eschatological dimension of Christian hope. The final end determines our hope. *Eschaton* is the final coming of Christ, the redemption of creation. It is our *telos*, our end and the end of the whole creation redeemed by Christ.

Christian hope is eschatological. In Christian hope, as in New Testament hope, we have a double eschatology: an *absolute or definitive eschatology* – the coming of the Kingdom at the end of time –, and an *ecclesial and relative eschatology* – the limited anticipation and realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Christian hope is also temporal. It is hope for our time and for all times in history. It is a historical and social hope. It commits us to the present, to the transformation of the present for the future.

Vatican II calls Christians to work for a better world as a demand of the coming Kingdom of God. "The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age."²⁸

Writes J. Wilson:

²⁷ C. Braaten, *The Futurist Option*, p. 77; Martin Gelabert Ballester, *Para encontrar a Dios*, p.70; see also pp. 194-196. See Juan Alfaro, *Esperanza cristiana y liberación del hombre*, Barcelona: Herder, 1972, pp. 142-173; O.G. de Cardedal, *Raíz de la esperanza*, 473; See Fausto Gómez, "The New Theology of Hope and the Liberation of Man," *Unitas*, Vol. 47, No. 1, March 1974, pp. 17-31.

²⁸ Vatican II, GS, 39. See also GS, 21; L. López de las Heras, a.c., pp. 553-554.

One of the determinative characteristics of our lives as Christians is that we are waiting for the redemption that has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. Our life as the disciple community is stretched between the first coming of God in Christ and his second coming. In between these times the Gospel calls us to live in hope. In this sense hope is not the content of an eschatological scheme but the way we live in light of the *eschaton*.²⁹

In the past, particularly the pre-Vatican II period, the vertical/eschatological dimension of hope was underlined. After Vatican II, the horizontal/temporal dimension was also given substantial importance. Indeed, our hope is not just a pie in the sky: "If we hope for pie in the sky, can we ever really look for potatoes on earth?" R. Jenson answers: "This hope is not a pie in the sky; it is hope for the resurrection of our potato-hopes," "the eschatological hope must be hope for all other hopes, or it is not eschatological."³⁰ An authentic Christian hope integrates and elevates legitimate human hopes: grace improves nature!

Like the first Christians, today the followers of Christ are tempted to forget the present. To fall into this temptation is a sin against hope. The human person, a creature, is finite, temporal. As the poet said: "*Nuestra vida es tiempo*" (A. Machado) – our life is time! O. G. Cardedal explains this powerfully. The human being lives in the present rooted in his past and oriented to his future. Life is love of the present, memory of the past and promise of the future. In this life, there is tension between the past and the future. The tension between past and future is the tension between tradition and modernity – without surrendering to one of them. The full present is built on the wholeness of the past (we are grateful for the good past, and sorry for the evil past) and the wholeness of the future (we accept it in hope and anticipate it in love). We have to live our time in anticipation of eternal life.³¹

²⁹ J.R. Wilson, *Gospel Virtues*, 98-99; see also p. 105.

³⁰ R. Jenson, *The Futurist Option*, pp. 96 & 99; see also pp. 93-106. See F. Martínez Díez, *Avivar la esperanza*, 128-134.

³¹ O.G. Cardedal, *o.c.*, 460, 484. José Luis Ruiz de la Peña writes: "Salvation is the future of liberation; liberation is the present of salvation – a salvation already working in the already and hoping the not yet of eschatological consummation" (*Creación, gracia, salvación*, Santander: Sal Terrae, 1993, p. 135).

The Christian, therefore, hopes in the “here-after” and in the “here-now.” Christian eschatology is undividedly transcendent and immanent, *anticipation of the future in the present and anticipating present of the future*. The integral salvation of the human person begins now! In hope we expect our salvation at the end of time – eschatological salvation – and we work in time to attain it. Hence, integral salvation includes temporal, that is, historical and social liberation.

Communitarian and Personal Dimensions of Hope

With the eschatological dimension, the Sacred Scriptures stress the communitarian dimension of hope. Theological hope is not only personal but also communitarian, or communitarian and personal.

As a student of theology, an article of Saint Thomas Aquinas struck me in his brief but beautiful treatise of theological hope: article 3 of question 17 of his II-II. The title of the article: *Utrum aliquis possit sperare alteri beatitudinem aeternam* – whether one can hope eternal beatitude for another. Right then, I decided to have this article as the topic for my licentiate thesis, and, later on, for my doctorate in theology.

For whom may I hope? Traditional theology answered: hope is primarily personal: “I hope my salvation.” It is secondarily communitarian: “I hope the salvation of others!” My stand then was fundamentally this one – a more open one, perhaps. I defended then that Christian hope is absolutely personal and properly (not secondarily) communitarian. Today I think I was not open enough and am firmly convinced that theological hope is – cannot be but – both personal and communitarian, or communitarian and personal. The human person is an individual and a social being, interiority and relationship.

Hope is personal. The subject of hope is the human being and the act of his hope is his personal act; subject and act, however, are open to the other, the community and the whole creation. I also want to be saved, and, therefore, I have to be continually converted – to God, to others and to nature. Each one of us is responsible for his salvation. God gives the gift of hope to each person, to each believer so that each one may know the God of hope by himself/

herself. (See Is 54:13; Jr 31:34; Ho 2:22; Jn 2:27; 6:45). Each one of us is asked to live his/her hope. Living our hope is not transferable. We can only live it with others and for others.

Hope is communitarian. In *Homo Viator*, G. Marcel asks: *Is not "I place my hope in you," the most authentic formula of "I hope"?* The most adequate expression of the verb "hope" is, without doubt, "I hope in you for us." Indeed, "hope is only possible at the level of the *we*." *I plus thou*, M. Buber tells us, equals *we*; in the *we*, the *I* and the *thou* are mutually enriched; moreover, one can only encounter and accept a *thou* when encountering and accepting the *Eternal Thou*. Truly, "the hope in which we live is not a hope for *me*, but a hope for *us*."³² E. Levinas reflects creatively, too, on the face of the other for me.

As a relational being opened to others, the human person hopes beatitude for himself and for others. Moreover, the Christian is a member of the community of hope – the Church of Christ. He begins to believe and hope in this community, the Church of the sacraments of grace, and a sacrament of hope.

Christian life is a life markedly communitarian. To live means to live in Christ who died for all (II Cor 5:15), and to live in Christ implies to live in solidarity: "One in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28), "we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25), people who help each other to carry the burdens of life (Gal 6:2). Jesus Christ is, as Schillebeeckx put it, "the primordial sacrament" in whom men encounter with God and with one another." The authentic Christian cannot be so unless he or she lives with and for others, and, therefore, hoping with and for others. PCP II writes: "The pilgrim is not only an individual, but rather an entire people."³³ It was said at the beginning: *Solus christianus, nullus christianus!*

³² J.R. Wilson, o.c., 14; Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, New York, 1958, pp. 3-6); Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, pp. 4, 60, 10, 23. See Vatican II, LG, 9; Fausto Gomez, O.P., *La dimensión comunitaria y personal de la esperanza cristiana*, pp. 172-174; O.G. de Cardedal, o.c., pp. 517-519, 189).

³³ E.H. Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Le Christ sacrament de la rencontre de Dieu*, Paris, 1960, pp. 38-41; J.A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, London: SCM Press, 1963, p. 76; Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II, 1991), *Acts and Decrees*, nos. 272-273; Fausto Gomez, O.P., *The Communitarian Dimension of Christian Hope*, Manila: UST, 1967, pp. 1-20.

As a theological virtue, a gift of God, hope is truly theological hope if in the company of charity. Charity makes the communitarian dimension of hope more intensively and extensively communitarian. Hope through charity moves the Christian to eagerly want and be committed to the salvation of the whole humanity. Thus, hope is deeply concerned with mission – the mission of evangelization.³⁴

Theological hope is communitarian and temporal. As theologians of liberation have made clear, this hope includes radical commitment to the integral liberation of man. This is personal and social liberation – liberation from injustice and liberation for human dignity and rights, liberation from violence and liberation for peace, liberation from sin and, in grace, liberation for love. To animate our Christian hope, the Church continues proclaiming by word and deed justice, solidarity, human dignity and rights, affective and effective preferential love for the poor and marginalized.

Words to ponder:

To ask others to reform without starting with the personal reform is the surest way not to reform anything. It is simply to charge others with the responsibility of reform (J. Alfaro).

Though hope is just taking the next step (K. Barth), each present step is weighty because it helps to decide the definitive future. Hope is not the opium of the people but an impulse to change the world in the perspective of God's promises, a revolutionary force which strives to create conditions favorable to the men most loved by God, the poorest and the weakest (F. Kertiens).³⁵

³⁴ See J. Danielou, *Essai sur le mystere du histoire*, Paris, 1953, pp. 39-41. See B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, II, 396; M. Gelabert Ballester, *Para encontrar a Dios*, 200; O.G. de Cardedal, *Raiz de la esperanza*, 518; Michael Downey, *Hope Begins Where Hope Begins*, 91. See also the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991), *Acts and Decrees*, Manila: CBCP, 1991, nos. 67-68. Among the hopes of the Asian Church there is, with inter-religious dialogue and solidarity with the poor, a growing sense of community: "The desire for community is a further sign of hope" (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, FABC, 5th General Assembly (Bandung, 1990), *Statement*, 2.3.6, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, edited by G. Rosales, D.D., and C.G. Arevalo, S.J., New York/Quezon City: Orbis Books/Claretian Publ., 1992, p. 278).

³⁵ F. Kerstiens, a.c., p. 65; J. Alfaro), o.c., p. 277. See Carlos H. Abesamis, *A Third Look at Jesus*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000, pp. 87-96: "Justice is the attribute of this new world" (p. 93).

On the way to beatitude, Christians wait for the redemption of the world (Rom 8:19–25). Their theological hope is not only communitarian, but also *cosmic*. In a sense, the whole universe expects a new heaven and a new earth.. “Through each human being, the cosmos hopes: in the reality of man the cosmic mineral, vegetative and animal obtains culmination... Already in the natural order... the subject of hope is ‘I in the universe,’ or, better, ‘I with the universe’.”³⁶

Reflecting on Gen 1:28, theologian J. R. Wilson has an illuminative comment: God’s command to subdue and have dominion over the earth is given before the Fall, that is, when Adam and Eve were sinless and, therefore, not yet affected by the Fall, when humanity became sinful. Wilson adds: “We have to care for the earth because God loved it enough to send his Son to redeem it. We will care for it in hope, not in despair.”³⁷

3. SOME PROPERTIES OF HOPE

Explaining the nature of theological hope, we now focus on some of its notes or properties. The notes or adjectives that unveil the nature of Christian hope are many.³⁸ For our part, we shall develop three significant properties of hope, namely *certain* hope, *patient* hope and *prayerful* hope.

Certain Hope

Certitude is an essential property of Christian hope. Peter Lombard included it in his classical definition of hope: *the certain expectation of the future beatitude*. Thomas Aquinas tells us that certitude belongs properly to the intellect – to faith –, which assents firmly to truth, and participatively to the will – to hope –, which directs the person to his end with certitude – a certitude that participates in the certitude of faith.³⁹ As trust in God, hope is unconditionally certain. Why? Because God’s merciful omnipotence

³⁶ Lain Entralgo, *La espera y la esperanza*, 590.

³⁷ J.R. Wilson, *Gospel Virtues*, p. 117; see also pp. 115-118 and 201 footnote 26. See J. Danielou, o.c., p. 338; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, The Vatican, 1999, no. 41.

³⁸ See B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, II, pp. 391-401.

³⁹ St. Thomas, II-II, 18, 4; *De Spe*, I ad 10; Peter Lombard, *III Sent.*, d. 26, 1.

(main motive of our hope) will not fail us! "I have not lost confidence, because I know who it is that I have put my trust in, and I have no doubt at all that he is able to take care of all that I have entrusted to him until that Day" (II Tim 1:12; cf. Rom 5:5).

There is certitude in our hope, but there is also fear! The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines hope as "the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God's love and of incurring punishment."⁴⁰ From the part of the human person, the Christians' hope is not certain, but mixed with fear and uncertainty.

Can we pilgrims be sure of ourselves? Saint Albert the Great asked himself when he was already old and close to heaven: *Nunquid durabo? Will I endure?* We hope then with sure hope (I Pet 1:3) as well as with certain fear (Phil 2:13), with certain insecurity (I Cor 10:12): "The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall" (I Cor 10:12).

Weakness, vulnerability, sinfulness, uncertainty are realities of the hope of the pilgrim. Thus with certitude, fear is an element of theological hope. The attainment of the object of hope – of eternal life – is difficult, that is *arduum*: *arduitas* is also an essential characteristic of hope. Truly, we depend on God and also on the hope of our brothers and sisters in the faith, but we also depend on ourselves: God wants and treasures our cooperation. J. Pieper speaks of the vital insecurity (Haring speaks of holy insecurity) that permeates man as a finite being. He also speaks of man's constant danger of falling into "non-plenitude on the way to the plenitude of the 'not yet,' of the extreme threat of *posse peccare*, of being guilty of sin, of being so close to nothing."⁴¹

Will I be saved? Will you be saved? We are sure of God's mercy and love, but we are not sure of our cooperation with God: the perseverance of our will till the end. Saint John of the Cross advises us thus: "Fear God with confidence." Charles Journet comments:

⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2090.

⁴¹ J. Pieper, *Sobre la esperanza*, pp. 83-84. See A. M. Carré, O.P., *Hope or Despair*, New York, 1955, p. 53; Fausto Gomez, O.P., *La dimension comunitaria y personal de la esperanza cristiana*, p. 58.

I am afraid because I am well aware that if God were to exact a strict account I should be lost; but I know too that he loves me with a love of which I can have no idea in this life. God's love will be victorious, for it is greater than my wretchedness.⁴²

A loving hope does not allow fear to dominate us.

Hope is Patient

The first Christians were impatient. Why? It would seem that they did not understand then that the Lord was delaying his Final Coming! With patience, they learned to hope as believers in the Christ who came and is to come!

In our age, the main problem it would seem is not impatience but passive resignation or not expecting eagerly the Coming of the Lord. Perhaps, many of us Christians want to delay Jesus' coming. After all, we are too busy, perhaps, and not hungry – just like those invited to the banquet (Mt 22:1-14).⁴³

Biblical hope is patient (Heb 11:30; Rom 5:3-5; I Th 1:3; Jm 1:2-4, 11). Our faith asks from us to be hopefully patient facing suffering. Suffering comes in many ways: as a personal failure, the chronic illness of a child, the death of a loved one; as injustice, violence, and destruction; as our own death. Pain may come at different times in our pilgrimage, including the *demonio meridiano* in middle age!

The crucified Lord invites us and empowers us to accept suffering and to be sensitive to the sufferings of others. Our suffering may become redemptive suffering, if patiently bore and joined to the sufferings of Christ, our Redeemer (I Pet 2:21). Thus, our "crucified hope" (J. Moltmann) may be turned into a resurrection hope: "I consider the sufferings of the present to be as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18). "Blessed are the sorrowful, for they will find consolation" (Mt 5:4).

⁴² Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Grace*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1962, p. 67.

⁴³ See Dolores Aleixandre, *Palabras para la espera. Descubrir la presencia del Espíritu en el mundo*, Maliaño, Cantabria: Ed. Sal Terrae, 1996, pp. 29-30.

Paul boasts of his sufferings – sufferings that bring patience, patience that brings perseverance, and perseverance, hope (Rom 5: 3-4). Christians “follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be made worthy of being partakers in his glory.”⁴⁴

In theological perspective, patience is an important virtue, or good habit, for hope. It is connected with the cardinal virtue of courage or fortitude. It is the moral virtue – an ally of courage – that enables us to bear the physical or moral hardships of life with tranquility, for the sake of greater goods – of eternal life. Patience is a needed virtue to control impatience, anger, and anxiety. It is a good habit, a hopeful attitude: Indeed, *la paciencia todo lo alcanza* – patience attains all things (St. Teresa of Avila).

Perseverance accompanies patience: hope is patient and persevering. This is clear in the Old as well as in the New Testaments. It is, indeed, necessary to persevere till the end (Mt 10:22). The virtue of perseverance aids patient hope to be constantly patient up to the end.⁴⁵

The great witnesses and models of hope are those who suffered much, like Job, Jeremiah, the martyrs, St. John of the Cross, Therese of the Child Jesus, the innocent victims of hatred, injustice and violence. Above all, Christ, the suffering servant, who went to his crucifixion meekly, serenely, and patiently – hopefully!⁴⁶

Someone writes:

The icon of hope is an anchor. While tossed about, while adrift, while unsettled, we find in hope the anchor that allows us to stay where we are buffeted, hope helps us. Like courage, hope is a virtue of holding on, of tenacity.⁴⁷

Hope is patient and persevering and also joyful. The Christian marches through life *in spe gaudentes* – joyful in hope (Rom 12:

⁴⁴ Vatican II, LG, 41. See B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, II, p. 398.

⁴⁵ See II-II, 136, 1-5, and 137, 1-4.

⁴⁶ See O.G. Cardedal, *Raíz de la esperanza*, 503.

⁴⁷ James F. Keenan, S.J., *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, Quezon City: Clare-tians Publ., 2001, p. 44.

12). Happiness is not the opposite of suffering: "It makes me happy to suffer for you" (Col 1:24). Hope is an essential ingredient of happiness in this life, and joy is a note of hope: "You have hope, this will make you cheerful" (Rom 12:12). The root of the hope of happiness is humility. Jesus said that "if we do not become like children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:3), that is, we will not know God as Father and we will not be happy."⁴⁸ The hope of happiness is rooted in being like children: being "little," was the root of the glorification of Christ (Phil 2:2-11), and is the ground of prayer.

Hope is Prayerful

Prayer is essentially linked to hope: "*Spes orat*"— Hope prays. Hope is prayerful! Prayer interprets and follows hope, according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, and only asks from God what is ordered to God — to eternal life.⁴⁹ "Commit to the Lord your way, trust in him, and he will act" (Ps 37:5).

Evangelical theologian J. Wilson, in chapter six of his book *Gospel Virtues* entitled *Sustaining Hope, the Practice of Worship*, has important points on prayerful hope. According to him, the virtue of hope is shaped in the practice of worship, which is one of the most powerful witnesses to the hope of the gospel. In worship, we are trained to look in hope to the *eschaton* of God as the source of our being and the fulfillment of our desires. What we learn in worship is that God has already given us everything in Jesus Christ. Commenting on Isaiah, Wilson cautions us against the worship God detests, that is, a worship done with bloody hands and corrupt lives (Is 1:10-17; Ps 73). He writes:

Much that we call worship is hopeless because it enables us to live in conformity to the illusions of the world rather than in conformity to the *schaton* of the gospel. We need to recover the practice of worship in hope so that our vision may be corrected and our witness faithful.

⁴⁸ O. G. de Cardedal, *o.c.*, p. 405.

⁴⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Psalm.* 32, 22; II-II, 17, 2 ad 2, and 4 ob. 3. See St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. 7: ML 40 234), and *Sermo 115 de Scripturis*, no. 1: ML 38 655); O. G. Cardedal, *o.c.*, pp. 447-448.

In our cultural situation, Wilson believes that worship is vulnerable to some kinds of corruption, including the practice of worship as *mass therapy sessions*, turning worship into a *quest for entertainment*, and turning worship into a *political rally*.⁵⁰

(Parenthetically! James Keenan articulates well a conviction I have since my mother died: the Funeral Mass cannot be yet fully a Resurrection Mass. "To ask (the close relatives) to rejoice in the resurrection is not only unrealistic, it is inhuman"⁵¹).

Needless to say that I strongly believe that hope ought to be celebrated and nurtured in our liturgical celebrations, in the celebration of the Sacraments, in particular the Eucharist, which is Real Presence of Christ, perfect Sacrifice and Sacrament of Sacraments. The Holy Eucharist is nourishment for the journey of hope and strengthens our orientation to the future – to heaven: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54; see I Cor 11:26).

Prayer is a mediation of hope. The best mediating prayer is the *Our Father*, which, according to St. Augustine, contains all that is related to hope. The Lord's Prayer is, above all, a communitarian prayer. In it, we oblige ourselves mutually to fraternity. As St. Cyprian put it: "We do not call *my Father*, but *our Father*, nor do we ask him *give me*, but *give us* the kingdom promised to us."⁵²

Christian prayer is personal, too: "When you pray, go to your private room... pray to your Father who is in that secret place..." (Mt 6:6). Vatican II: "The Christian is assuredly called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret." Still, even private prayer and all private exercises of piety are ordered to or flow from the liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, which is "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life."⁵³ And yet, contemplative prayer in particular led the

⁵⁰ J.R. Wilson, *Gospel Virtues*, pp. 122-1270. He defines worship as "the enactment of God's eschatological redemption by the disciple community."

⁵¹ J.F. Keenan, *Virtues for ordinary Christians*, p. 43.

⁵² St. Cyprian, *Liber de oratione dominica*, no. 8: ML 4 340-341; St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. 114: ML 40 285 (See Martin Gelabert Ballester, *o.c.*, pp. 86-88).

⁵³ Vatican II, SC, no. 12; LG, 11; see SC, 10.

saints to holiness. In contemplation, St. John of the Cross realized that God is *todo* (everything) and he was *nada* (nothing), and on the way to the mountain of perfection *nada, nada, nada...*: "Nothing, nothing; until leaving one skin and another for Christ."⁵⁴

4. THE HOPE OF A CHRISTIAN

How is my hope? I have this habit. Every summer vacation I examine my human hopes and, particularly, my Christian hope. This meditation – or dreaming awakened – has helped me, I think, animate and revive my hopes.⁵⁵

Some books and texts continue inspiring me as a pilgrim to eternal beatitude. I still remember – and go back to them from time to time – some books from my youth. In the first place, I recall *The Little Prince*, by A. Saint-Exupéry. Every time I read the dialogue between the Little Prince and the Fox I am moved: The Little Prince tells the fox that there are no hunters in his little planet; unfortunately for the fox, there are no chickens either: "nothing is perfect," the fox comments, before giving his simple secret of life to the Little Prince: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." On the pilgrimage of life, theological hope is essential!

I also keep treasuring the book *The Parables of Peanuts* (well, above all, the *Peanuts* comic strip) by Robert L. Short that helped me understand the good humor and the theology of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts Family* of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy and other wonderful kids (adults). Once Lucy and her brother Linus are watching the rain fall behind a window at home. Lucy comments:

⁵⁴ Quoted by Federico Ruiz Salvador, *Introducción a Llama de amor viva* (B), *Obras completas de San Juan de la Cruz*, l.c., p. 760). Speaking of prophet Ezequiel as paradigm of holiness – of the holy –, Walter Brueggemann develops the theme Only Holiness Gives Hope." See W. Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination. Prophetic Voices in Exile*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 49-87.

⁵⁵ See Fausto B. Gómez, "Life: A Pilgrimage with a Thousand Hopes – Plus One!" in our *Promoting Justice, Love, Life*, Manila: UST, 1998, pp. 19-25; John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, The Vatican, January 2001, no. 58; Michael Downey, *Hope Begins Where Hope Begins*, l.c., pp. 104-111; John Heagle, *A Contemporary Meditation on Hope*, l.c., pp. 47-60.

"Boy, look at it rain... What if it floods the whole world?" Linus answers: "It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow." Lucy: "You have taken a great load off my mind." Linus: "Sound theology has a way of doing that."

I continue enjoying *The Way of a Pilgrim* and the Russian Pilgrim's continued mantra: "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner." Continuing conversion from sin renews our hope in God. I love *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* (by R. Bach), the winged symbol of my hope. For Jonathan, "It was not eating that mattered but flight – more than anything else, he loved to fly! He was always on the way to a more perfect flight." During his novitiate in flying, Jonathan was hungry but happy, because he was hopeful. "The trick," he said, "is that we are trying to overcome our limitations in order, patiently." Once his mob of birds, interested only in eating, tried to kill him. Jonathan could not hate the mob of birds with little hope. On the contrary, he tried to help those hopeless seagulls – by loving them! Jonathan said: "You have to practice and see the real seagull, the good in everyone, and to help them see it in themselves." This is love, or better, loving hope.

Another traveling companion is *The Prophet*, by K. Gibran: "The physical consciousness of a plant in midwinter is not directed towards the past summer, but towards the coming spring. The physical memory of a plant is not that of days that are *no more*, but of days that *will be*. If plants are certain of a coming spring, through which they will come out of themselves, why can't I, a human plant, be certain of a spring to come, in which I will be able to fulfill myself? Perhaps our spring is not in this life... This life may be nothing but a winter." Yes, but, in hope, a hopeful winter!

In the 1990s, the books of moral stories, edited by William J. Bennet, had a positive impact on my human hopes and theological hope; in particular, *The Book of Virtues, A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (1993).

In a deeper sense, the *Sacred Scriptures* continue to be the best word on hope. One of my favorite texts on hope is from Isaiah: "Those who hope in Yahweh will renew their strength. They will soar as with eagle's wings; they will run and not grow weary; they

will walk and never tire" (Is 40:31). The *Gospels* in particular continue consoling us in the midst of the evil in the world and personal weakness and suffering. They present a portrait of Jesus Christ as our hope, and of his resurrection as the foundation of our hope. Indeed, what better inspiring words than these: *In Christ we live; in Christ we shall die, and in Christ we hope to live forever* (cf. I Cor 15:20-22).

In the Gospels, we learn about Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Lady of the *fiat* and the *magnificat*, our Mother, who keeps telling us 'Do whatever He tells you' (Jn 2:5). My Marian devotion, an essentially Christocentric devotion, includes the *Rosary*, a contemplative prayer through which Mary guides us "to 'read' Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message."⁵⁶

The saints are excellent traveling companions. Their lives and works strengthen our Christian hope. Like any saint, Saint Augustine was a hopeful Christian – and writes powerfully and elegantly on life as a pilgrimage. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is every time I meditate on it a renewed journey to deeper conversion – and hope! "Happiness, does not consist in having more, but in needing less;" "Thou has made us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee"; "All my hopes are in your great mercy and nowhere else. O love that is my God set me afire!"

As a Dominican, St. Dominic, my other spiritual father, the apostolic and evangelical man inspires my preaching and my life: the great Dominic, "never asking for reward, he just talks about the Lord." Reading St. Thomas Aquinas, the apostle of truth (according to John Paul II), one always learns something new: Every truth, he writes, "regardless who said it, comes from the Holy Spirit."

I continue feeding my roots – and my Christian life – with the works of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Teresa is a perennial teacher on prayer. She advises us all: "Never leave prayer. There is always remedy for those who pray." She consoles me: "Let nothing disturb you. / Let nothing frighten you. / All things pass away. / ... God alone suffices" – *Solo Dios basta!* St. John of the

⁵⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, The Vatican, October 2002, no. 14.

Cross is a guide on the dark night of life: "*Oh noche que guiaste./ O guiding night!/ O night more lovely than the dawn!/ Oh night that has united/ the Lover with His beloved,/ transforming the beloved in her Lover!*"

Among other helpful modern authors I wish to mention as messengers of hope for me Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, and Anthony de Mello.

I am a pilgrim! I am on the way to God, the God of our hope. To be on the way means that we come from somewhere and that we go somewhere; that we are sent and expected by someone.⁵⁷ *Where are you, dear God?* Someone said: "Lord, if you are in all places, how come I am always in another place?" (Madeleine Delbrel). I know that God the Father, the Good Shepherd, is looking for me, and I know that God, the Father of the prodigal son and of his elder brother, is expecting us!

As a follower of Christ, am I on his way, my way of hope? Two disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus: "Rabbi, where do you stay? (Jn 1:38). Jesus answered them: "Come and see." *Where are you today, Lord?* He is present in the praying and fraternal community: "If two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:19-20). Christ is present in the Sacraments, channels of grace and graces, particularly in the Eucharist: "This is my Body," "This is the cup of my blood."

Christ is present in the words of the Sacred Scriptures, particularly when these are proclaimed in the Church (SC, 7). "Lord, your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path" (Ps 119:105). He is also present in the needy of the world: "What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to me" (Mt 25: 31-46). The Lord is present in prayer, including private prayer as an encounter with the Lord.

Christian hope is hope of eternal life: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... God... will wipe away every tear from

⁵⁷ O.G. Cardedal, *o.c.*, p. 485.

their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. The old things have disappeared" (Rev 21:1, 4). Christian hope is not just "a pie in the sky," but authentic eschatological hope: "I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:11).

Christian hope is temporal. It is rooted in the past, oriented to the future and lived in the present. Theological hope places the past and the future in God's merciful and provident hands. It concentrates on the "present," on the 'now,' for God is the eternal now (Heb 3:7-8). The Zen master said: "The past is unreal, the future is unreal, too; only the moment is real. Life is a series of moments either lived or lost." The poet writes: "I am he who was, I will be he who is.../ My God, neither yesterday nor tomorrow, / there is only always, always today" (M. de Unamuno).

To be truly hopeful then is to be faithful to the "now," the only thing in our hands: "Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation" (II Cor 6:2). St. Therese of the Child Jesus writes: "I just keep concentrating on the present moment. I forget the past, and preserve myself from the worries of the future. Let us turn one single moment of suffering to profit, let us see each instant as if there were no other. An instant is a treasure."

We try to live the present fully. How? By doing what we ought to do with love, for the quality of our now is measured by our love – for God, neighbor and poor neighbor. To love, according to Segundo Galilea, is to do good in every moment and to share this good with others. In the end, he adds, the only good that will accompany us will be the love we have accumulated through the pilgrimage of life, the journey of hope.⁵⁸

When all is said and done on life, on happiness, on hope, what really matters is love – a love that is in this life "always ready to hope" (I Cor 13:7). Only the practice of hope in love will lead us on the way to heaven! This is the way of holiness, which is the goal of hope on earth: without holiness, "no one can see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

⁵⁸ Segundo Galilea, *Espiritualidad de la esperanza*, Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1988, pp. 52-56.

My hope is the hope of a vulnerable pilgrim, of a sinner loved by God. Our theological hope is a prayerful hope. Life is at times – as for S. Teresa of Avila – like a bad night in a bad inn. Sometimes, I feel I am in the desert, alone facing the aridity and the loneliness of life. I try to realize then that my hope is a hope on the way – on the way of Christ, on the way of the cross! My Christian hope tries hard to be a patient and persevering hope, to hope with others and for others – particularly with and for the poor. Through the dark night of life I ask, “Watchman, how much longer the night?” (Is 21: 11). I pray to God – and ask others to pray for me – to help me hope against hope, like Abraham (Rom 4:18), to keep my hope in gray days (Zc 4:10).

Going through the desert of life, I remember the words of Urs von Balthasar: “For the servant, God is always right”! Facing a terrible war, the death of innocent children – born and unborn –, the terrible sufferings of a loved one or of a lovely soul... one is tempted to disagree. *Why God’s apparent silence?* I do not know, but I do know – and strongly believe – that he cares, because He loves us and his Son died for us! And I believe and hope in him and in his grace for me – for us.

Rooted in the past, faithful to the present, we march to the future – we have our eyes on the future! We all know the lovely oriental story of the old man climbing the Himalayan Mountains. It was wintertime – a cold winter. On that day, it was also raining, so the old man took refuge for a while in an inn along the path to the peak. The innkeeper asked him: “How will you ever get there, old man, in this kind of weather?” The old man answered him: “My heart got there first, so it’s easy for the rest of me to follow.” *Where is my heart?*

“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him” (I Cor 2:9). “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’... Let him who hears answer, ‘Come!’ Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:17, 20). □