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CONFERENCE REPORT, Gerald Bray, Cambridge

RÉSUMÉ

La onzième conférence bisannuelle de l'Association Européenne de Théologiens Évangéliques a eu lieu au centre "Neues Leben" à Altenkirchen en Allemagne, du 16 au 20 août 1996. Les participants ont eu le privilège d'entendre, entre autres orateurs, les représentants de trois pays européens très différents. Le pasteur Flemming Kofod-Svendsen, qui a fait partie du gouvernement danois, nous a entretenu de son expérience politique. Il a dit comment il envisage, en tant que chrétien, l'avenir de la démocratie et de l'Union Européenne. Il a rappelé que les valeurs partagées par les pays d'Europe, comme le respect de la dignité de la personne, la solidarité sociale et la démocratie elle-même, étaient dues au christianisme. Il a souligné l'importance de la doctrine du sacerdoce de tous les croyants et a insisté sur le fait que là où les Églises ont confié des responsabilités aux laïcs, elles ont eu un impact sur le développement social.

Ludovit Fazekas, de Slovaquie, a soumis à la réflexion théologique de la conférence les expéri-

ences faites au cours de bien des années de souffrance, ainsi que dans le contexte de l'indépendance nouvellement acquise (et parfois non désirée). Il a montré que l'espérance chrétienne se fonde sur la résurrection de Christ. Cela appelle un accomplissement final, encore à venir. Mais nous trouvons par exemple dans la communion fraternelle et dans le repas du Seigneur des anticipations importantes de cet avenir.

Enfin, Serge Sannikov, d'Odessa en Ukraine, a apporté son éclairage sur la manière dont les chrétiens évangéliques font face au double héritage laissé par le communisme et par l'orthodoxie orientale, alors qu'ils cherchent à construire une société nouvelle sur les ruines de l'ex-Union Soviétique. Les Églises d'Orient ont souffert de l'héritage laissé par l'hésychiasme byzantin, qui sépare radicalement l'espérance chrétienne et l'activité humaine en ce monde. Le communisme a pu remplir ce vide dû à l'absence d'une espérance chrétienne authentique. Il est vital de cultiver cette espérance à une époque marquée par beaucoup de désespérance.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die elfte, im zweijährigen Turnus stattfindende, Konferenz der "Gemeinschaft europäischer evangelikaler Theologen" (GeeT) wurde vom 16.-20. August 1996 im Neues Leben-Zentrum in Altenkirchen (Deutschland) abgehalten. Die Konferenz hatte das besondere Vorrecht, unter ihren Rednern drei Repräsentanten aus sehr unterschiedlichen europäischen Ländern zu haben. Pastor Flemming Kofod-Svendsen, ein früheres Mitglied des dänischen Kabinetts, legte auf der Grundlage seiner Erfahrung des politischen Lebens in Dänemark dar, wie er als Christ die Zukunft der Demokratie und der Europäischen Union sieht.

Er stellte die Behauptung auf, daß die in Europa gültigen Werte, wie der Respekt vor der Würde des Menschen, die Sozialfürsorge sowie die Demokratie selbst, dem Christentum zuzuschreiben seien. Er hob die Bedeutung der Lehre vom "Priestertum aller Gläubigen" hervor und betonte mit Nachdruck, daß die Kirchen dort, wo sie den Laien Verantwortung zugestanden haben, einen bedeutenden Beitrag zur sozialen Entwicklung geleistet haben.

Dr. Ludovit Fazekas (Slowakische Republik) brachte die Erfahrung vieler Jahre des Leidens sowie der neuen (und eher ungesuchten) Eigenstaatlichkeit in die theologische Reflexion der Konferenz ein. Er zeigte auf, daß die christliche Hoffnung in Christi Auferstehung gegründet

ist, die auf eine noch zukünftige Vollendung verweist. Doch diese Zukunft ist auf bedeutende Weise vorweggenommen, z.B. in der christlichen Gemeinschaft und im Abendmahl.

Schließlich verhalf Dr. Sergei Sannikov aus Odessa (Ukraine) der Konferenz zu einem Einblick, wie evangelikale Christen bei dem Versuch, aus den Trümmern der früheren Sowjetunion eine neue Gesellschaft zu bilden, mit dem doppelten Erbe des Kommunismus

und der östlichen Orthodoxie konfrontiert sind. Die östliche Christenheit litt unter der Erbschaft des byzantinischen Hesychasmus mit seiner strikten Trennung von christlicher Hoffnung und menschlicher Aktivität. Der Kommunismus konnte dieses Vakuum füllen, das durch den Mangel an echter christlicher Hoffnung entstanden war. In einer Situation, die von viel Verzweiflung geprägt war, war dies unabdingbar.

The eleventh biennial Conference of the Federation of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) was held at the Neues-Leben-Zentrum in Altenkirchen (Germany) from 16 to 20 August 1996. The conference was especially privileged to have among its speakers three representatives of very different European countries. Pastor Flemming Kofod-Svendsen, a former member of the Danish cabinet, spoke from his experience of political life in Denmark, and of how he, as a Christian, sees the future of democracy and the European Union. He argued that the shared values in Europe, such as respect for the dignity of the person, social care, and democracy itself, are attributable to Christianity. He stressed the importance of the doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers', and urged that where churches have allowed responsibility to the laity they have had an impact on social development.

Dr Ludovit Fazekas, from Slovakia, brought the experience of many years of suffering, as well as of new (and somewhat undesired) statehood to the Conference's theological reflection. He showed how Christian hope is rooted in Christ's resurrection. This still points forward to a future consummation. But that future is anticipated in important ways, for example, in the Christian community and in the Lord's Supper.

Finally, Dr Sergei Sannikov, from Odessa (Ukraine) gave the Conference an insight into the way Evangelical Christians are facing the double legacy of Communism and of Eastern Orthodoxy, as they seek to build a new society out of the wreckage of

the former Soviet Union. Eastern Christianity has suffered from the legacy of Byzantine hesychasm, with its divorce between Christian hope and human activity. Communism was able to fill this vacuum left by the absence of genuine Christian hope. It was vital to cultivate this in a situation where there was much despair.

Pastor Kofod-Svendsen spoke as follows: In Acts we read how the Gospel reached Europe. From Church history we know how Christianity advanced from country to country. We also know what huge socio-political consequences Christianity had in the different European countries and among its peoples. If the gospel had not reached Europe and penetrated the different European countries, we would have had quite a different history.

It is not my task to explain what Christianity has meant for Europe. But we shall try to learn from history regarding the future of Europe. The first question we ask is: What is the identity of Europe? If we look at culture, it is rightly said that Europe is characterised by a cultural multiplicity. Here Europe stands in sharp contrast to the USA. The reason is the different historical background. I hope the multiplicity of European culture will continue in Denmark, Sweden, Germany etc., and also in different regions within these countries.

What then will keep European identity together? I think it is important that we have a kind of spiritual fellowship. When I try to look for the basis of European identity, I find it in one word: Christianity.

When we look at European values, we find the same things everywhere: belief in personal responsibility, love of freedom, solidarity with the poor, etc. These are values which are common and a natural part of our view of society. But all these values have their roots in Christianity. And I think that without the inspiration of Christianity these values will fall into decay or be derailed.

Let us look more thoroughly at the notion of democracy. What role has Christianity played in the development of representative democracy? Let me first emphasize that a country's form of government is not a divine arrangement. History has known the most varied forms of government. There have been those who have tried to show that a particular form of government is prescribed by the Bible. The Emperor Napoleon, for example, made catechisms in which he stressed the necessity of obedience to the Emperor.

In this century several people have tried to show that democracy is the form of government which corresponds most closely to the will of God. Of particular interest here is the attempt made by the famous theologian Karl Barth. He said that Scripture gives us a basis for solving social and political problems, even though these answers are not found directly in the Biblical texts. Barth draws an analogy between the Church and the state. From this he tries to prove that democracy is the right form of government. But it is not the purpose of the Bible to give concrete instructions on how to organise the form of government.

Even though the Bible does not say that democracy is the form of rule which best corresponds to the will of God, there is no doubt that Christianity has been of great importance for its development. If we go back to the New Testament we see that the early Church was a fellowship of individuals. The main thing was not the building or the hierarchy. There was one body, but it was made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12). Each person was known to God the Father by name, each was accountable to his or her Creator, along with the rest of mankind, for

everything he or she said and did.

Indeed, we have only a few examples which show that confessing Christians have taken an active part in working for democratic reforms. We have them, but it is easier to find confessing Christians who were against democratic reforms. I think the role which Christianity has played in the development of democracy has been mainly due to important cultural impulses which have arisen from Christian preaching and teaching. In particular I might mention beliefs about human worth, personal responsibility, multiculturalism, charity, the belief that all young people should have a minimum level of education, and the belief that everyone has a right to help and care in danger, distress, suffering and illness.

Perhaps the most important thing is the impulse towards social care as it developed in Western countries. If we compare this with the situation in countries where Christianity has not prepared the ground, we will find that the care which we know in Western countries is not given automatically as a matter of course.

Next I would underline that although the Christian Church has been organised in a hierarchical way for centuries, some of the most important theological thinking of the reformer Martin Luther concerned his teaching about laymen. Every person who is baptized and believes in Jesus Christ is a pastor with the right to preach and make decisions in the Church. We call it the priesthood of all believers. In many Protestant churches and church-organisations during the past two centuries this teaching about laymen has had an enormous influence, and it has created links with the political fight for democratic reforms and demands from the people to participate in decision making as of right.

In the Calvinist tradition there arose congregations which were totally independent. These, I believe, created an understanding of minority rights. And when you have an understanding of minority rights, an understanding of the importance of free schools follows. It is in

countries with an independent church tradition that we find free schools. Denmark is the only Lutheran country with a long tradition of free schools, thanks to the work of Grundtvig, the famous pastor, poet and politician.

Among Lutherans it has been common to stress obedience to the Authorities, with no changes to the existing system. We know it in Denmark from the orthodox period in our Church history, when we had an absolute monarchy. In the last century, when we had thinking about free constitutions in Denmark, we had examples of pastors, who were conservative in both the theological and the political sense of the word, who wanted to keep the existing set-up.

Generally we can say that where there has been a Church hierarchy with power, and where laypeople had very little spiritual or organisational influence, Christianity has had little importance in social-political development and progress in Europe. On the other hand, when you have spiritually mature laypeople with spiritual responsibility, and where the bishops and the pastors emphasise the priesthood of all believers and are willing to give laypeople responsibility, there Christianity has had great importance in the social-political development of the countries concerned.

If we believe in democracy, we should do all we can to preserve it. In 1939, the countries of Western Europe were ready to go to war to preserve a free Poland. Half a century later, that freedom has been achieved. The task now is to do all we can to ensure that democracy lasts more than ten years in central Europe and Russia. If we look at the key countries in central Europe, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, they have together a population of 64 million compared with the Union's 340 million, so that task alone should stretch us a good deal less than the Marshall Plan stretched the United States.

Not only will there be a risk of dictatorship in those countries in five years' time if such help is not provided, but also there will be a real risk of Western Europe's

being swamped by economic refugees long before then. We need to help Eastern Europe for the same reason that the West Germans had to help the East Germans. The rise of a tiny neo-Nazi group in the former East Germany is directly related to the pressure of immigrants from Poland. If economic refugees arrive in Poland from the former Soviet Union, the former President Lech Walesa told the Union: 'We will have to pass them straight on to you'.

We who are Christians should, above all, remember our fellow Christians in these countries. For years we have prayed for their freedom. Now, surely in answer to our prayers, there is freedom of religion right across Europe for the first time in history—and indeed as far as the Pacific coast of Russia. We should do what we can to help establish an economic base to undergird this political and religious freedom. We have the peace dividend, and even if the aid also costs a fraction more in VAT, it is an investment in peace and freedom which we may never be able to make again.

If we look at the former Communist countries, we realise that they do not want to be seen as 'ex-Communist countries'. The Hungarians have reminded us that they are an ancient European nation 'who spent four hundred years defending you against the Turks'. Prague was a famous European city when many of our cities were mere villages. Poland was a great nation when Russia had never been heard of. High on our agenda for the Inter-Government Conference over the next few years therefore, should be the economic recovery of our near neighbours, and preparation for their membership of the European Union.

If the European peoples can avoid nationalism and create a union of free and democratic states based on the values of Christianity, then I think Europe will have an important role to play in the future. At the moment, unfortunately, I see the beginning of several tendencies towards nationalism, intolerance and xenophobia. If we are to avoid these risks, we need the spirit of the Council at Jerusalem, where multi-racial thinking was created.

In my opinion, the European Union is a gift to Europe. Yet I admit that there are many weaknesses in it. We need more democracy, more openness, more willingness to share both with the former Communist world and with the Third World. In this situation we have to rethink and reformulate our teaching about the priesthood of all believers. This is the best way to create a new generation of Christians working with socio-political challenges and issues and at the same time thinking biblically.

Taking up the challenge to think biblically about the question of hope in today's world, Dr Fazekas addressed the Conference with the following reflection:

The foundation of the hope in the OT is the Exodus from Egypt and the covenant the Lord made on Sinai with Israel, to which he has added the promises.¹ This hope goes together with the confidence that the Lord is faithful and strong enough to fulfil the promises. It embraces land, health, family, protection and resurrection.² 'This hope must not be condemned as egoistic and earthly, because it relates to the Lord as the granting God.'³ In addition, hope is connected with the loyalty of the nation. The prophets who preached hope apart from the obedience of Israel were found to be false. The true prophets proclaimed 'deliverance through judgement'.⁴ Hope in the OT relates not only to Israel but also to the pagan nations. They will come to Zion and worship the Lord; they will become God's people, like Israel. It is a 'centripetal mission', but this hope does exist.⁵

After its conquest of the land, Israel put its hope in its king. The kingship functioned for some time but then, at the end of the monarchical period the Lord said: 'So in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away.'⁶ Under the hard knocks of history, Israel began to wait for a deliverer. He might be 'a prophet like Moses' or the prophet Elijah. But more and more, Israel started looking for an anointed king along the lines of Nathan's prophecy.⁷ This Messiah would be born as a child, sit on the throne of David and

establish an empire of peace. But he might come in the guise of the Servant of the Lord, who dies for the sins of God's people, or as a Son of Man, who transforms the kingdoms of wild beasts.⁸ In Jewish Apocalyptic this figure appears more and more often. But here, the coming of the Messiah was made dependent on obedience to the Law,⁹ which made this hope very uncertain.

In the NT the word *elpis* (hope) can refer to trust in God or to the object of this trust,¹⁰ but it has its basis in 'the historical manifestation of God in (the resurrection of) Christ'.¹¹ He was proclaimed as a winner in a cause (1 Tim 3:16). 'In the resurrection of Jesus the victory of God in the person of his Son for the good of man has been won already. Of course, Easter is only a foretaste of our hope but in the Easter testimony this future is already present... The battle is over. Practically speaking, (the adversary) is check-mated.'¹² It has a paradoxical character because it is not the hero but the Crucified One who was betrayed by men and forsaken by God himself (Mk 9:31; Mt 27:46), who has won. It is also paradoxical because the battle has been won, but not yet the war. In the meantime, we must endure the 'unresolved exigencies of the present'¹³ and wait for the time when Jesus will become Lord not only *de jure*, but *de facto* also.

The beginning of God's Kingdom was given in Jesus; its consummation lies in the future. But in some realms, its anticipation has already dawned. The man who is reconciled to God is a new creation in whom the saying of Jesus: 'I am making everything new' has already been anticipated (Rev 21:5, cf. 'The old has gone, the new has come' 2 Cor 5:17). Christian love is also a value which 'remains' (*menei* 1 Cor 13:13) beyond the limit of history, and it is 'eternity in temporality'.¹⁴ Christian community is also an anticipation of the eschatological gathering to Jesus. For both of these terms the Apostle uses the same word (Heb 10:25: *Me egkatalaipontes ten episy-nagogen heauton*; 2Th 2:1: *Hyper tes hemon episy-nagogen ep' auton*). In our wor-

ship we anticipate the heavenly worship: Our confession of the Lordship of Christ is the future confession of the universe (Ph 2:11). The Lord's Supper is an anticipation of the wedding of the Lamb (Rev 19:7; Mt 26:29).

Jesus sent his disciples out into the world with the instructions: 'The Kingdom of God is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons' (Mt 10:7f). With every restoration of man in body, soul and spirit, ground is taken from Satan and Jesus is proved to be the true Lord. The substantiation of the 'Great Commission' ('All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me', Mt 28:18f) makes it clear that their mission is a real conquest of the earth for the new Lord of the world.¹⁵ The first Christians, just after their baptism in the Spirit, promptly did such an 'unspiritual' thing as to adopt a communalism in relation to material goods (Acts 2 and 4). Some old structures remained, but they were soon made obsolete in the Church: Onesimus was a slave socially but at the same time he was also a 'beloved brother' in the Lord (Pm 16). Masters and slaves were made equal by the fact that both of them had the same Lord in heaven (Ep 6:9).

There is confusion in theology over apocalyptic. It is a pre-Christian current which not only 'uncovered' the situation (mostly in symbols), but also tried to make a 'railway timetable' for the future. The NT used it but made an 'anti apocalyptic apocalypse' as far as time scheduling was concerned. God remains sovereign! Those who ignore these facts have created the puzzle of Millennialism;¹⁶ those who do not frequently fall into the trap of eschatophobia. Our hope is not *when* but *that* Jesus is coming again. The meaning of his parousia is that he who is Lord *de jure* will then become Lord of the Universe *de facto*, and will give his Church the absolute satisfaction of reigning with him.¹⁷ After the resurrection of the dead he will judge all beings and put a final end to Satan and all evil. He will lead his Church into the Kingdom of God, in which his people in their

totality and in all respects will come to *shalom* – the 'normal conditions' of their Father's home.

In recent years, some philosophers have tried to grapple with the problems of the modern world by a process of what they call 'deconstruction'. This approach, which is now generally known as 'postmodernism', Dr Fazekas criticised as follows:

Postmodern critics come with the notion of 'deconstruction'. We float in a stream of scientific, technical, philosophical, political and theological constructions. We can escape the danger of totalization only if we deconstruct them.¹⁸ In fact, not only the extreme of totalitarian régimes, but all affirmations about 'great news' which claim to be absolute must be rejected. 'A war on the whole' has to be declared in order that the individual may not be regimented from outside.¹⁹

From this it follows logically that postmodernism puts its hope in pluralism. As J.M. Lochman has shown, Immanuel Kant opened up a new path in the eighteenth century with his idea of egoism over against pluralism. He distinguished a logical egoist who does not need the opinions of others, an aesthetic egoist who is satisfied with his own taste, a moral egoist who wants what is useful to him. The pluralist thinks that everyone of us is one among many and an independent citizen.²⁰ This principle was successfully applied in the western democracies and postmodernism extends the principle of plurality to the consequent relativism of a new worldview. "We understand postmodernism as a state of radical plurality... Truth, righteousness, humanity will appear next time in the plural."²¹ Some postmodernists trust in the motto: Anything goes. "A communal organisation or just a solidarity with the less able is not required. It is a hobby of some specialists."²²

Jacques Derrida entertains the idea of the Apocalypse.²³ He affirms that modernism tried to win absolute superiority by means of the outlook of the Apocalypse the unveiling of the end. Postmodernism says

that there is no such end: the end of the class struggle, of philosophy, of God, of subjects, of the world. Derrida wants to prove this by using the Apocalypse of John itself. 'The Apocalypse', he says, 'is an empty broadcasting, a broadcasting without a message. There is no last judgement, there is no truth. The Apocalypse is the unveiling of the unveiling. The Apocalypse was not, is not and will not be. Apocalypse now? Not now nor ever.'²⁴ Of course, we must consider that Derrida wants to deconstruct the complexity of the concept 'Apocalypse'.²⁵ Otherwise one can perceive with even minimal theological knowledge that he has turned the Apocalypse of John upside down. It is precisely 'the book about the end'.

Postmodernism sees many faults of modernism very clearly and it advances new solutions. One of them is pluralism. It sees that the ideology of totalization was pernicious, especially when the particular information was connected through political power to a 'scientific worldview', which had to be accepted under the threat of punishment. In this, postmodernism is right. But we cannot jump from one extreme to the other. Life in society is life in an organism. In this organism we must stress the differences among the particular members, but also the unity of the whole. True, modernism in its many forms stressed a kind of unity which led to much violence. We are individuals and have our God-given differences. But we are also members of an organism. To spoil the organism in the name of pluralism would be fatal. The care of the whole cannot be simply the hobby of some experts. It is a matter for all its members.

Postmodernism sees very well that the truth cannot be expressed by a single word. The truth is many-sided and many-coloured. We in the Church must also see that the truth is too great for our limited vision.²⁶ It is dangerous to make particular truth into a universal truth. This was the way chosen by all the heresies. Of course, this does not mean that we may look for the solution in relativism. *De gustibus non est disputandum*, but the truth is more than a

gustus. There is no hope for us if we do not see that somebody 'was vindicated by the Spirit' and won the cause by giving his life for others. He has become the Lord of the Universe – first of all *de jure* and finally *de facto*. His resurrection cannot be erased. There is no hope for those who see the solution in "polytheism".²⁷ That is a step backward into the pre-Christian era. Jesus has won the battle for all mankind. He who rejects that victory scorns his own life.

We have shown that atheism, especially in its political form, created a vacuum which sucks up everything with the label of 'spirit'. Postmodernism says that this is acceptable because there is no difference between the gods. Everybody should have his own idol. True, we do not want to force faith on anyone. But from our perspective we must say that there is no hope in this view of spirituality. In our times we are again concerned with the gnostic spirituality of the first century, which was preaching the seductive teaching: *Physei sozomenoi* – saved by nature. According to this way of thinking, we have in our spirit the spark of eternal life. It is under the ashes but can be inflamed and become a source of energy for us. We must reject this idea because experience proves that it does not work. It is the same as if a man were to try to reach the moon by using his legs to jump. No! God has prepared for us a 'rocket' in his Spirit, who takes up all who are weak but who have entered into the life of the Spirit of God (Ro 8:1ff).

Finally, the Conference was addressed by Dr Sannikov, who outlined some of the ways in which secular hope had tried and failed in the Soviet Union, and how Evangelical Christians are called to respond to the crisis which its collapse has created:

The end of the 1980s found Christian theology standing before the challenge of a new reality. The Berlin wall had collapsed and western Christianity suddenly discovered that the huge and hitherto unexplored world behind the wall was not only a mission field, but it also contained a defined theological culture with deep roots and its

own unique character.

This theological culture, belonging to the Evangelical churches of Eastern Europe, is still only weakly reflected in published materials. It is, more than anything else, a theology of practice as opposed to theory, and can be summed up by using the expression of early Christians: 'We don't engage in mental exercises, we just live.' The church in the West has been awaiting this rich, dynamic reality of theological experience for a long time.

For any person 'hope' is a basic concept of existence. Human beings cannot live without hope. It is not for nothing that we say 'hope dies last of all'. Psychologists confirm that if a man were deprived of hope, his life would come to an end regardless of whether or not that occurred in actual fact. Hope, as is well known, determines personality to be what it is and is its distinguishing feature. Erich Fromm defines man as *homo sperans*, a person who hopes, and attempts to show that 'to hope is the basic condition for being a human being.'²⁸ But only religious content makes hope the clear and sure basis of existence. For an unbelieving man hope is connected to the instinct for self-preservation because it is based on the values, the motivating factors and resources of this material life alone. An irreligious man can depend on himself, on other people, on the laws of nature, but he understands very well the limitations of the subject and object of his hope. Hope without religion is in essence 'horizontal', while at the same time the eschatological hope of the Old Testament prophets, having become the personal hope of every Christian, is the 'vertical' idea of salvation.²⁹

For the Christian, Christ crucified, risen and ascended into heaven as a forerunner for us all in the Kingdom of Heaven is the object of a hope which 'enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain' as 'an anchor for the soul, firm and secure' (Heb 6:19). That means that hope for the Christian is a special firm foundation for faith which manifests itself in love (1 Cor 13:13). It is no wonder that in the Hebrew text of

the Old Testament these various concepts (faith, hope and love) are frequently expressed in words which come from a common root. This same combination can be observed in Greek and Latin as well. Therefore hope, being the foundation for the existence of the personality, particularly manifests itself in the life, practice and theology of religious consciousness.³⁰

But for people living in a post-Communist society, the category of hope has a special meaning. In comparison with Western society, all those living in our countries live by hope. This is true not only of Evangelical Christians, Russian Orthodox, Catholics and other believers, but of non-religious people as well. What exactly do I have in mind here?

First of all, the East has always set itself apart by its emphasis on meditation, mysticism and transcendence in its approach to life and by its eschatological expectation of a beautiful, mysterious and unknowable 'tomorrow' than the more practical West. The Western consciousness, based on Roman business mindedness, strictness and order, was always more susceptible to today's problems. This has been evident in all spheres of the development of Western and Eastern civilizations.³¹

The victory of hesychasm in Byzantium, which was 'automatically' transplanted to Russia, curtailed the development not only of scholastic and rational theology in our countries for many years, but tragically influenced the development of socio-political relationships and slowed down the development of capitalism and market relationships, because it concentrated the attention of the individual and society on the eschatological hope of the coming kingdom of God tearing him away from the reality of this life.³² Western theology, in the form of it developed by medieval thinkers, gave no less attention to hope in the kingdom of God than the apophaticism of the East, but it did not divorce this hope from concrete effort and practical activity. It is sufficient, in this regard, to recall the progressive activity of the Franciscans and other Mendicant orders.³³

The heirs of the eastern emphasis on meditation were the Marxists and especially the Marxists of Russia, who in a distorted mirror reflected the dreams of the people for the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in their teaching on the creation of an earthly paradise here and now and at any cost. They wanted to build a kingdom of hope with violence and bloodshed, redistributing the wealth of the country as they themselves saw fit. Marx believed that a highly industrialized society could be transformed into a humanistic one, in which the goal of all social effort would be man and not things and Russian communists decided to try this out in practice.

In actual fact, communism, even though it rejected theism and religion, was at its base religious and sacral. The dream of building a communist society where all would be well for everyone became the driving force motivating the use of violence. Hope in a 'shining future' became an artificial substitute for genuine Christian hope.³⁴ Of course, this hope could not lead to anything except disappointment and disillusionment, because in its essence it was objectless and utopian in nature, yet nevertheless it entered into the consciousness of the masses to such a degree that today it is very easy for the most simple of average citizens to comprehend eschatological hope, despite the fact that in the aftermath of the disappointment with communism it is very difficult to believe that such a hope could possibly exist. Consequently the soil for the development of a theology of hope in post-communist countries was quite well prepared beforehand.

But there is another aspect to this problem. The contemporary political condition of our society is leading almost everyone to despair and is forcing them to live by hope. In the political arena of almost every country of the former Soviet Union no real centristic power is evident which is capable of balancing the polarized political forces and of keeping society from the extreme of limitless freedom and 'anything goes' or from the opposite extreme of authoritarianism and dictatorship.

On the other hand, the economy is so shattered that people, having lost faith in the possibility of finding a stable solution and at times even experiencing literal feelings of starvation, live with the hope of a miracle. For example, when I turn the tap on in the kitchen I can never be sure whether water will flow from it or not. Picking up the telephone receiver, I can never be sure that I will hear a dial tone, waking up in the morning I can never be sure that the same government system will be in place in the evening when I go to bed. And so it has been for five years in all areas of life. This is the ideal environment for a life of hope. Here in practice one can discover whether or not despair becomes the stimulus for hope.³⁵

But the hope of Christians who know their Lord is something quite different. It is akin to the hope of Abraham, which is based on the unwavering revelation of God (Gen 12:1-3). Therefore the Evangelical churches in post-communist countries have always ascribed great importance, and even more so today, to the understanding of the Bible as 'inerrant'. For if the foundation of Biblical inerrancy is destroyed, then Christian hope will become nothing better than a ephemeral communist utopia. But having come through years of persecution and ridicule on account of their assurance in the inerrancy of the Bible, Christians of the former Soviet Union are equipped to offer their society 'a better Hope' (Heb 7:19). This is not the hope of the Old Testament which promised goodness and blessing in the land (Gen 49; Ex 23:27-33; Dt 28 etc.), but this is a real hope in the resurrection of the dead (2 Cor 5:1), in the just judgment of God (2 Th 1:5), and in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven (2 Peter 1:11) even though here on earth, we have more goodness and blessing than people who are of this world (Mt 19:28-29). Taking all this into consideration earthly suffering, deprivations and lack are accepted as means from the Lord to mold every believer for the eternity which is ahead (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Such an understanding of the foundation

and object of hope for Christianity in post-communist society which lies beyond the boundaries of life on this earth none the less gives direction to that life; it leads to cleansing from sin and sanctification (1 Jn 3:3), binds people together through love (Col 1:4-5), produces maturity in the midst of suffering (Rom 5:1-5), strengthens in the unflinching achievement of goals (Heb 6:11), and increases joy (Rom 5:1-2) and boldness (2 Cor 3:12-18). It is hope which serves as the foundation for fruitful labour in God's harvest field (1 Cor 15:58).

Therefore theological hope for post-communist society does not rest on a theoretical base made up of the philosophical reasoning of Moltmann or Bloch, but on the divine source, on the Bible as the irreproachable revelation of God, and on the immutable reality of life, which had snatched away from the Church all possible hope in life here on earth. Therefore our Evangelical movement discovered Moltmann's ideas for itself at the beginning of the thirty year period leading up to the 1960s, and put them into practice by firmly placing their hope in Christ.

The experience of history and the life experience of many individual people testifies to the advantage of Christianity over other religions even from the position of humanistic civilization, i.e. from the point of view of the development of economics and technology. In addition, Evangelical Christianity offers assurance of salvation through the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit. Christ said, 'I came that they might have life, and have it to the full.' (Jn 10:10). In this and only in this lies hope for the countries of the post-communist world.

Therefore our present task is to develop and to put down in written form the theology of hope³⁶ which exists in our churches and at the same time to continue actively to labour to spread the good news of hope for 'the time is near' (Rev 1:3; 22:10).

Notes

1 Petr Pokorny, Josef Vesell, *The Perspective of Faith* (in Czech), 1991, p. 13ff.

- 2 Ps 73:3; Jer 12:1f.; Job 13:15. A rare instance of resurrection is found in Dn 12:1-3.
- 3 H. Bardtke, *Hoffnung*, RGG III, p. 416.
- 4 Am 2:13-16; Is 2:6-21. Cf Bardtke, RGG III, p. 416.
- 5 Is 2:1ff.; 19: 19-25. In addition, the future Messiah will be 'a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth', Is 49:6.
- 6 1 Sam 8:5ff.; Ps 118:8; 146:3; Hos 13:10.
- 7 Dt 18:18; 2 Sam 7:12f.
- 8 Is 9:1-7; 11:9; Dn 7:13f.
- 9 'God's kingdom could only come when Israel was completely obedient to the Law', E. Hoffmann in *Dictionary of NT Theology*, 2, 1986, p. 241.
- 10 Rom 4:18; 1 Cor 9:10; 1 Peter 3:15; Rom 8:24; Col 1:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 6:18.
- 11 H. Conzelmann, *Hoffnung*, in RGG III, 1959, p. 418.
- 12 K. Barth, *Dogmatik in Grundriss*, 1947, p. 142.
- 13 E. Stauffer, *Die Theologie des NTs*, 1945, p. 120.
- 14 'Love is the anticipation of the perfection of the Kingdom of God, which does not need any change.', J Souk, *Vyklad Epistoly Kolosenskym*, 1947, p. 72. Some say that the term *menei* has to be understood only in relation to charismatic phenomena, e.g. H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1969, p. 272f.) but the context shows clearly the eschatological line: in part, perfection (v. 9) and in part, fully (v. 13). Cf. H. D. Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 1954, p. 107. Cf. D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 1987, p. 75: 'It appears then that faith, hope and love, these three, all remain. They are eternal, permanent virtues.'
- 15 It is like the deed of Abraham, who bought some property for a burial site before the conquest of the land (Gn 23:4).
- 16 Out of a couple of verses in Rev 20 the whole theory of the Millennium was developed, and all the OT prophecies about the new earth were pressed into this framework. But how do we get the right to put them here, and not in Re 21-22? The great puzzle is whether the parousia will occur before or after the Millennium, and whether the rapture of the Church will be before or after the parousia. And when will the Petrine conflagration (2 Pe 3:10ff.) happen? I agree with D. A. Carson that 'one should distinguish between historic premillenarianism and dispensational premillenarianism. The latter is much more given to dates.' But as to time-scheduling, the NT differs substantially from Jewish apocalyptic, and we must not see the main message of NT eschatology as time-scheduling.
- 17 Some theologians think that in the Millennium an empire of peace in earthly conditions will be established (H. Ott, G. Fritzsche, IV, p. 419) and they evaluate it very positively. But such an evaluation lacks any exegetical foundation.
- 18 J. Derrida, quoted by Lochman, p. 66.

- 19 P. Lyotard, *Was ist postmodern?*, quoted by Lochman, p. 66.
- 20 *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, quoted by Lochman, p. 67.
- 21 Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 1994, p. 12f.
- 22 D. Sölle, op. cit., quoted in Lochman, p. 67.
- 23 In his book *Apokalypse*, Graz-Wien, 1985.
- 24 According to W. Welsch, op. cit., p. 65f.
- 25 Ibid. p. 66.
- 26 'We must use at least two words if we want to speak the truth accurately', A. Köberle, *Die Rechtfertigung und Heiligung*, 1929, p. 282.
- 27 Max Weber in W. Welsch, op. cit. p. 102f. : 'The opposite of the rationalism of the ethical kind of life is this polytheism... Our task is to train in polytheism, in spite of the wishes of monotheism.'
- 28 Erich Fromm, *Revolution of Hope*. In this work the well-known psychologist defines and analyses in detail the phenomenon of 'hope', and shows that hope is the main condition of being. 'It is an internal readiness, which while under tension still is characterised by an undissipated, internal activeness.' (p. 228).
- 29 These terms were used by Leo Baeck in *Judaism and Christianity* and developed by Teilhard de Chardin in *The Future of Man*.
- 30 The superiority of Christian hope was rediscovered in our time by Jürgen Moltmann who relied on the works of Ernst Bloch (e.g. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*) and others who defended the common Christian understanding of hope as the main driving force of life and thought for the individual person and for the Church as a whole. See J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, New York, 1964; *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, New York, 1969, etc.
- 31 For a more detailed discussion of these ideas, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London, 1957 and A. Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*.
- 32 The fruitful influence of Christianity, and especially of Protestantism, on the development of market relationships which has guaranteed the steady progress of Western countries was clearly demonstrated by Max Weber in his classical works, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and *The Economic Ethics of World Religions*.
- 33 See Antonio Sosini, *Portrety svjatykh*, 1-2, Milano, 1987.
- 34 An analysis of Marxist theory from this point of view was made by the well-known Russian philosopher D. Gorky, in his last work, *Oshibki genii samiye opasniye (The Mistakes of a Genius are the Most Dangerous)*, Moskva, 1995. More than anyone else, it was Ernst Bloch who, in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, tried to infuse Marxism with the principle of hope.
- 35 On the role of despair, cf. S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*.
- 36 *The Christian Calling in the Modern World*, Paper No 1 at the Theological Consultation of the World Evangelical Fellowship, 09-14 April 1996 on *Faith and Hope for the Future*.

Vinoth Ramachandra

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Vinoth Ramachandra lives in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is the Regional Secretary for South Asia of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), a global partnership of over ninety autonomous, national student movements.

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