

Christian Perspectives: Hope is a cheerful movement

Hope, as spoken of in the common vernacular, is a cheerful movement forward in time ? to a better place, a kinder place, and a place where we are all good and beautiful. Hoping is a fairy-tale word of wishing and fantasizing, paid for with the wanting and desiring currency of self-entitlement. The end of hoping is seen as a gift, but with no acknowledgement as to the source of the proffered treasure. This hope is propelled by human strength and knowing, and as such is nothing more than a powder puff philosophy, a second rate Hollywood movie created by those who would master and control the world, and then, in the face of the despair that results from human dominance, offer up a flimsy distraction. To a world that teeters on the edge of the abyss, this cheap tinsel offering will simply not suffice.

Hope, as generally spoken of in the church, appears, to those who claim faith in One beyond our sight, to have more substance, being scripturally based, not on our own inept strength, but in the limitless power of the Spirit. Christians will claim that 'their hope is in the Lord', that 'in Christ is the hope of glory.' But strangely, in the actuality of our Christian tradition, this hope has taken on a sense of righteous knowing. It has lost the magnificent vision which was its original intent and come under the sole proprietorship of the Christian churches' certitude. In the ecclesial courts it has become 'a superficial word, one in a series of surface ripples of thought designed more for the self-preservation of the churchmen than a response to the need of mankind.'(1) As such, the concept of hope in the church has become exclusive, and much like its secular counterpart, not much more than a pretty story to rock us off to sleep.

We shall need something of greater substance to hold us through the night. And the night is coming, of that we can all be assured. We shall need an understanding of true hope, hope that is not a reflection of our own idolatry, and as such is both beyond our own ability to manipulate, and our own ability to imagine. This hope must be based on truth. And truth, though we may be oriented towards it, we can never fully know. True hope, therefore, is a hope of which we know nothing. And this involves waiting on the unknown in a posture of active faith, certain of divine intervention, but uncertain as to the nature of its actuality.

This hope is inclusive, hospitable, and humble. Christianity is not the sole proprietor of this hope, for though the historic details of it are particular, the 'good news' it heralds is universal. This authentic hope is not a synonym for optimism and as such is not blind to the oppression of meaninglessness that blankets the world. Instead it moves out from solidarity with affliction, both personal and cultural. This 'new and lively hope' one that does not have to ignore the data of despair ? can deliver humankind from the oblivion that is being courted by the unthinking pursuit of 'progress' through technological mastery.(2) It is well, then, that we turn our attention toward it.

True hope does not move forward in time. Authentic hope stands outside of time, moving between the two parallels of eternity and history. This is brought about only in one way and that is through the compassionate movement of ourselves towards other ? Other being God, and other being one another. Paradoxically, as we move towards the other, there is an embracing of our own humanity and a binding to the larger cosmos of which Other/God simply is.

We move toward the other, and by some strange mystery, we encounter the process of life we have dared to name God, which is eternity. In the spiritual collision of these two entities, one ethereal, one mundane, hope appears, unaided by our own will, but in response to our expectant waiting on the unknown, and our humble acceptance of our human limitations. 'Only passionately embraced paradox, never objective thinking, is the means by which a person mediates the eternal in time.'(3)

This is true hope. May we have the courage to rest within it, and refuse all lesser offerings.

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