

## *Retrieving the Tradition*

### ON HOPE<sup>1</sup>

• Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger •

“To be a Christian is to be  
one who hopes; it is to situate oneself  
on the foundation of a sure hope.”



Paul reminds the Christians of Ephesus of the time when they were not yet Christians. Their situation was characterized by the lack of a promise. They lived in this world without hope and without God (Eph 2:12). A similar observation is found in 1 Thessalonians. Paul is here speaking to the Christians of this Greek port city of a hope that looks beyond death so that they will not have to live “like those who do not have any hope” (4:13). Therefore, one can conclude from these two passages that for Paul hope defines the Christian, and inversely that the absence of hope defines the atheist. To be a Christian is to be one who hopes; it is to situate oneself on the foundation of a sure hope. According to these texts, hope is not just one virtue among others; it is the very definition of Christian existence.

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<sup>1</sup>The text of this article returns to one of the lectures given in the framework of the jubilee of the Franciscan college of Rome, the Antonianum. The common theme of these lectures was “Francis, witness and guardian of hope.” This is why I have tried to develop the theme of hope particularly in the perspective of Francis and the Franciscan tradition. It seems to me that this point of departure, which has caused me to give more emphasis to certain aspects, remains to be completed, but it is also in a position to put in concrete form certain aspects of the theme.

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Casting a glance over the horizon of modern thought, one is tempted to contradict this last statement. True enough, hope has always been listed in the catalogue of Christian virtues, but was it not fear rather than hope that marked the average Christian? And even if there was hope, was it not much too narrow, far too restricted because it was restricted to the self alone? The question arises of whether one may purely and simply deny the hope of others. Ernst Bloch, in his *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, has emphatically revived this long-forgotten theme by defining it as the central question of all philosophy. The world represents for him “a laboratory of possible salvation.” With convincing eloquence he attempts to make it clear to us that the regeneration and reign of man would have precisely as a precondition the fact that “there is no God above, that there is not now and never has been any up there.”<sup>2</sup> Thus for Bloch the opposite of what we have heard in Paul is true; the atheist is the only one who hopes and, as long as the Marxist way of transforming the world was unknown, human beings lived in this world without true hope and therefore had to try to be content with an imaginary hope.

1. *The anthropological basis:  
hopes and hope*

Who, in this controversy, is the real guardian and witness of hope? This is the question. To find an answer we have to look at the matter a bit more closely. What do we really mean by the word “hope”? What is hope and what is it that those who hope are hoping for? One thing is obvious from the start: hope has to do with the future. It signifies that man expects of the future some joy, some happiness that he does not now have. Hope therefore rests on the experience of temporality according to which man never totally possesses his own being. He is himself only within the tension between the past and the future as he passes through the present. Naturally the hopes tied to this temporality can be of varying quality. A child can hope for the next holiday, a good report card

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<sup>2</sup>Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt, 1959), 1524. See Josef Pieper, *Hoffnung und Geschichte* (Munich, 1967), 85. For an English translation, see *Hope and History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

with its pleasant consequences, a piece of cake, or a nice picnic. Many such hopes mark our whole life and give it color. Paul for his part would not contest that pagans have such hopes; nor will Bloch deny them to Christians. But all these hopes cannot be for either of them the one hope which is our basic concern. So what is it then that is meant by this?

It will perhaps become clearer if we consider a little more precisely hope's opposite, which is fear. At first, of course, there are the thousand and one fears that weigh upon us in everyday life, from the fear of a vicious dog, to the fear of the daily annoyances that occur in our contact with others in the workplace and at home. Here again, it is not these small fears that particularly threaten man and lead him to despair. Behind them lies what we properly call fear—fear of ruining one's life, fear that life may become gloomy and difficult to the point of being unlivable.

After a confirmation, a professor once told me what he had said to a child, "You must be grateful to your parents for having given you life!" And the boy responded, "But I am not at all thankful for having to live. I would much rather not be alive!" This shocking comment from the mouth of a child of our day, far from being unique, could be taken as the definition of hopelessness. Life itself is not good; one can only take a stand against everything that is responsible for the evil of having to live. Destruction is the sole good that can be produced because being is itself evil. It is no longer a question of fear here—there is always an element of possible hope hidden in fear—but a question of pure resignation, of despair, doubt about being itself. Being is not good, especially if you have not experienced it as welcome, have not had "Yes" said to you, that is, if you have not been loved. This indicates that the fear which transcends all fears is the fear of losing love altogether, fear of an existence in which the little daily disturbances fill everything, without anything large and reassuring coming along to keep the balance. Then these little fears, if they constitute everything that can be expected of the future, will pass over into the great fear—fear of an unbearable life—because hope no longer dwells in it. In this case, death, which is the end of all hopes, becomes the only hope.

Through an analysis of fear we are back again to the key word, hope. If the fear that transcends all fears is in the last resort fear of losing love, then the hope which transcends all hopes is the assurance of being showered with the gift of a great love. One could

then say that simple objects become hopes by taking on the coloration of love, by more or less resembling it, each according to its uniqueness. Inversely, in fears one always finds the feeling of not being loved, a hope of love, but a trampled one. 1 John is, from the viewpoint of anthropology, perfectly logical when it says, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18).

In another sentence from the same epistle we also see the importance for the question of hope. It concerns one of the greatest expressions of the whole history of religions, "God is love" (1 Jn 3:26). A perspective opens up that allows a better understanding of the words of Paul with which we began. Up to now we have said that hope has for its ultimate goal the fulfillment of love. If therefore hope and love on the one hand, and God and love on the other, are inseparable, then it ought to be clear that God and hope go together; and that finally the one who is without hope is truly one who "lives without God in the world." But we are not far enough along to be content with stating it. For there remains the question of knowing whether passing from love to God is not crossing the frontier in vain.

What kind of love does the hope that transcends all hopes await? This is the genuine hope which Dr. Herbert Plugge of Heidelberg, on the basis of his contacts with the terminally ill and the suicidal, calls the "fundamental hope."<sup>3</sup> Without any doubt man wants to be loved by others. But is there not anything further to be hoped for in the last hours of life, when death has long since carried off dear ones leaving behind a terrible loneliness? And inversely, is there nothing lacking in the great moments of life, in the great "Yes" of one who knows he is loved? We need the answer of a human love, but this response reaches farther out of itself toward the infinite, toward a world redeemed. Heinrich Schlier, following a tradition which is not only that of the philosophers, but of anyone's experience, has rightly said, "To hope indicates, properly speaking, hoping against death."<sup>4</sup> With incomparable clairvoyance, Plato, in the language of myth and mystical

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<sup>3</sup>Herbert Plugge, *Wohlfinden und Missfinden. Beiträge zu einer medizinischer Anthropologie* (Tübingen, 1962). The philosophical significance of this work and everything specifically related to our theme is explained in striking fashion by Pieper, *Hoffnung und Geschichte*, 30.

<sup>4</sup>Heinrich Schlier, *Essais sur le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 165.

religions (and therefore in humanity's ancestral tradition), sets forth in his *Symposium* the perspective that we have tried to follow. The hope of man is at first, he says, to find for himself the beloved who complements him. But at the very moment when he finds that person, he realizes that the unity for which his whole being yearns is impossible. And so it is that the experience of love awakens at first "great hopes," hope in the restoration of our original nature, but at the same time it teaches us that such wholeness is indeed possible "if we retain a deep respect for the gods."<sup>5</sup> It could also be said that from Plato onward, man awaits in the depths of his being for something like a lost paradise. And here we return again to Bloch and Karl Marx who do not speak of anything but the restoration of the utopia to which they believe they can show the way.

At the same time of course the fundamental difference between Paul and Bloch or Marx reveals itself. Hope as described by Bloch is the product of human activity. Its realization is brought to fulfillment in the human "laboratory of hope." What one cannot do oneself is very consciously excluded. One could not hope for what one cannot control; there are directives only for what we ourselves can bring about.

Doing and hoping, however, are on two entirely different levels. If we need hope, it is because what is done and feasible does not satisfy.<sup>6</sup> Further, by its very essence hope refers to the person. True, it aspires to something that goes far beyond the person, a new land, paradise. But if it aspires to this, it is because the person has need of it; it is hope only to the degree that it is hope for the person concerned and not for anyone else anywhere else. The anthropological problem of hope therefore consists in the human need for something that goes beyond all human ability. Accordingly we must certainly wonder whether it does not happen to be the impossible that we need and whether, consequently, we are absurd beings—an aberration in the evolution of the species.

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<sup>5</sup>Plato, *Symposium*, 193d. See also the entire speech of Aristophanes from 189c to 193d.

<sup>6</sup>This is what Pieper has shown in a rigorous analysis in *Hoffnung und Geschichte*, 25ff.

2. *Faith as hope*

This is exactly the question to which the aforementioned sentences of St. Paul refer; the expectation of this “paradise” which is lacking never leaves us, but this condition becomes despair when there is neither certitude about God nor certitude of a promise made by God. It is because the promise did not exist (and cannot exist) without the incarnation, death, and resurrection of this God, that Paul says, the “others” are without hope. It is because Jesus is this hope that being a Christian consists of living in hope. In the New Testament as with the apostolic fathers, the concepts of hope and faith are, to a certain extent, interchangeable. Thus 1 Peter speaks of rendering an account of our hope, where it is a question of becoming the interpreter of faith to the pagans (3:15). The epistle to the Hebrews calls the confession of the Christian faith a “confession of hope” (10:23). The epistle to Titus defines faith that has been received as a “blessed hope” (2:13). The epistle to the Ephesians poses as a premise of the fundamental affirmation “one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” that there is “only one hope to which you are called” (4:4–6). These quotations could be multiplied,<sup>7</sup> as could those from the apostolic fathers. In the first letter of Clement of Rome, as in Ignatius of Antioch, or in Barnabas, “hope,” can be substituted for “faith.” Ignatius, for example, is “imprisoned for his name and for his hope.” Christians are those “who hope in the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

So, where are we now on the subject of hope? Hope rests first of all on something missing at the heart of the human condition. We always expect more than any present moment will ever be able to give. The more we follow this inclination the more aware we become of the limitations of our experience. The impossible becomes a necessity. But hope means also “the assurance that this longing will find a response.” If this experience of a void, of a desire which carries one outside oneself, comes to move the person to despair over self and over the rationality of being, then inversely this hope can be transformed into a secret joy that transcends every

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<sup>7</sup>See also, for example, 2 Cor 3:12; Gal 5:5; Eph 1:19; Col 1:23.

<sup>8</sup>Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 1, 2; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19, 7; cf. Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11, 1; 22, 8; 27, 1; Ignatius, *To the Magnesians* 9, 1; *To the Ephesians* 21, 2, etc.

experienced joy and suffering. This way a person is enriched by the very need which causes him to conceive a happiness that he would never be able to experience without this decisive step. Hope could accordingly be described as an anticipation of what is to come. In it, the “not yet” is in a certain way already here, and so is the dynamism that carries one beyond oneself and prevents one from ever saying, “Linger a while: you are so beautiful.”<sup>9</sup>

This means, on the one hand, that to hope belongs the “dynamism of the provisional,” going beyond all human accomplishment. On the other hand, it means that through hope, what is “not yet” is already realized in our life. Only a certain kind of present can create the absolute confidence which is hope.<sup>10</sup> Such is the definition of faith given in the epistle to the Hebrews: faith is the substance (“hypostasis”) of what is hoped for, the certitude of what one does not see (11:1). In this basic biblical text both an ontology and a spirituality of hope are affirmed. It is recognized today even in Protestant exegesis that Luther and the exegetic tradition that followed him are misguided when in their search for a non-Hellenistic Christianity they transformed the word “hypostasis” by giving it a subjective meaning and translating it as “firm confidence.” In reality this definition of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews is inseparably linked to two other verses of the same epistle which also use the term “hypostasis.” In the introduction (1:3), Christ is presented as the splendor of the glory of God and the image of the “hypostasis.” Two chapters further on, this christological and fundamentally trinitarian affirmation is expanded to the relation between Christ and Christians—a relation established by faith. By faith Christians have become participants in Christ. Now everything is going to depend upon maintaining their initial participation in his “hypostasis.”<sup>11</sup> These three texts fit together perfectly: the things of this world are what pass away; the self-revealing God who speaks in Christ is what endures, the reality that lasts, the only true

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<sup>9</sup>Goethe, *Faust*.

<sup>10</sup>On this point I am not in complete agreement with Pieper (see *Hoffnung und Geschichte*, 35ff.) who rejects all anticipation as contradicting hope. While there does exist a manner of anticipating which is incompatible with hope, there is also an attentive gift without which even hope is impossible. For the Christian this attentive gift is faith.

<sup>11</sup>On the interpretation of Hebrews 11:1, cf. H. Koster, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 8, 584–587.

“hypostasis.” Believing is leaving the shadowy play of corruptible things to reach the firm ground of true reality, “hypostasis”—quite literally therefore, what stands and that on which one can stand. In other words, to believe is to have touched ground, to approach the substance of everything. With faith, hope has gotten a footing. The cry of waiting wrung from our being is not lost in the void. It finds a point of solid support to which we must for our part hold fast.

Here ontology gives way to spirituality. This will be apparent if we consider the context of the definition of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews. As a matter of fact we are prepared for it in the preceding chapter (chapter 10) by a kind of subtle word play, by an accumulation of terms that all begin with the prefix “hypo-” (“under”): *hyparchein*, *hyparxis*, *hypomene*, *hypostellein*, *hypostole*.<sup>12</sup>

What is the point here? The author is reminding his readers that for the sake of their faith Christians have lost “*ta hyparchonta*,” that is, their money, their possessions, and what appears in ordinary life to be the “substance” upon which a life can be constructed. Here the Franciscan dimension of hope shows through, if I may so express myself. We shall have to come back to this. So the text now begins to play upon the words by saying that it is precisely through the loss of what ordinarily constitutes “substance,” the basis of daily living, that Christians are shown that in fact they have a better “*hyparxis*.” This one endures; no one can take it away. The lexical meaning of “*hyparxis*” is “that which is there, on hand.” This is what it means: We Christians have another mode of being; we are standing upon another foundation that can never be pulled out from under us—not even by death. The epistle concludes with the exhortation not to reject the full assurance in the confession of faith, which obviously implies “*hypomene*”—a word commonly translated “patience,” in which the objective and spiritual aspects are mingled. We have a solid foundation, more solid than the goods immediately within our grasp. The author makes still clearer the essence of this attitude by evoking the opposite in a passage from Habakkuk: “*hypostole*,” an attitude of levity, of dissimulation, of adaptation at any price. This attitude corresponds to the baselessness and falsity of an empty life which seeks only to save its own skin and by that very fact is lost (10:32–39).

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<sup>12</sup>On *hypostellein*, *hypostole*, see the important developments of K. H. Rengstorff, *ThWNT* (cf. n. 10), 7, p. 598ff.

### 3. *The dimensions of hope: its Franciscan element*

#### a. *Hope and possession*

At first glance it could seem that the statements of the epistle to the Hebrews belong to a Platonic vision of the world in which opposed to the visible world of appearances is invisible substance; the sole and unique reality to which one must attach oneself. When we follow the progression of this thought, however, it appears that this schema has been put at the service of a dynamism of hope which could grow only from an encounter with the risen Christ (with the promise that he not only expresses, but which he, himself, is). As we have already seen, it is to this dynamism of hope that the Franciscan spirit belongs—a spirit which is freed from the absolute power of possession, from that basic defect of the need to possess which regards possessions as the true substance of existence. Where possession in itself appears as a guarantee of the future, what develops is a pseudo-hope that can only deceive man in the end. The law of possession constrains him to “hypostole,” to the game of hide and seek, of compromises by which one tries to assure oneself of the sympathy of the powers that be, by hanging on to one’s “substance.” The person who tries to safeguard himself by lying may save his position (“*ta hyparchonta*”), but he pays too high a price. He destroys himself and loses his real foundation “*hypostasis*.” Hope founders in cynicism. Francis is the witness and guardian of hope because he has helped us “accept with joy” (Heb 10:34) the loss of rank, of position, of possessions, and has made visible, behind the false hopes, the true, the genuine hope—the one that no one can confiscate or destroy.

In this connection I should like to refer to the closing prayer of the *Gelasianum Vetus* evoked for the feast of the Ascension in the missal of Paul VI: “With the Church we pray that our hearts may strive toward the place where our substance already dwells—with the Father of Jesus Christ, with our God.”<sup>13</sup> And in point of fact no other feast of the liturgical year expresses as well as the Ascension of Christ does the essence of Christian hope: with Christ our substance abides in God. It is now going to be our concern to ground our daily life in our substance, not ignoring the substance of our very

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. J. Pascher, *Die Orationen des Missale Romanum Papst Pauls VI*, vol. 3: *Tempus pascale* (St. Ottilien, 1982), 117ff.

selves, not leaving our life outside its substance, not letting it sink into nothingness, chance, the accidental. And how easy it is to spend one's whole life missing the point, falling into alienation, drowning in the secondary. In the end such a life will have become empty of substance and therefore empty of hope. The hope that sustains us is that our substance is already in paradise. To live like someone who hopes is to have our life enter into the reality of self, to live in and by the body of Christ. This is "hypomene," enduring patience, just as "hypostole" is living for the moment, hiding from the truth, and thus avoiding life.

*b. Hope and the recollection of being*

In order to rediscover here from a different point of view the Franciscan dimension of our theme, I should like to demonstrate it by a passage drawn from St. Bonaventure's sermons for Advent, a treasury of the theology and spirituality of hope. The saint is commenting on that sentence of the *Canticle of Canticles* so important to the mystic tradition: "I sat down in the shadow of the one I have longed for" (2:3). The shadow of Christ, says Bonaventure, is grace, which for us is a cool retreat from the scorching heat of the world. "To be seated" signifies composure of the spirit, recollection, the opposite of a thought going round and round endlessly and without purpose. To enter into the domain of the One toward whom our interior expectation tends, we must stop "being open to the outside and be recollected interiorly. Let nothing prevent the taste of eternal goodness from penetrating one's being."<sup>14</sup> If these words sound a bit abstract, they are clarified when we consider them in conjunction with what the legends of St. Francis tell us of the origin of the *Canticle of the Sun*. In the midst of almost unbearable pains of illness, and in an inhospitable lodging, Francis becomes aware of the treasure that he has already received. God's voice says to him: "Live henceforth in serenity, as if you were already in my kingdom."<sup>15</sup> In his last years Francis had lost

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<sup>14</sup>For the first Sunday of Advent, sermon no. 2 in *Opera Omnia*, IX, 29a.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, *Speculum perfectionis*, 100 (Fonti francescane, Assisi, 1978, no. 1799); *Legenda perugina*, 43 (ibid., no. 1591 ff.). On the dating of the *Canticle of the Sun*, cf. C. Esser, *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, Bibl. Franc. Medii aevi XII (Grottaferrata, 1978), 47.

everything—health, possessions, his own foundation “ta hyparchonta.” And it is precisely from this man that the most delightfully joyous words issue. With all his hopes taken away, all his disappointments, there shines forth the “fundamental hope” in its invincible grandeur. Francis had truly left the “accidental” to enter into “substance.” Free of the multiplicity of hopes, he has become the great witness that man has hope, that he is a being of hope.

Still more concretely, do we not all run the risk of losing the grace of hope amid everyday vexations? The more our life is turned toward the exterior, the less the great and true hope can counterbalance the havoc caused by daily worries. Gradually these become the only reality, existence is depressing, hopes wear thin, initial optimism is exhausted, and ill humor becomes an insidious form of despair. We can remain people of hope only if our life is not contentedly grounded in the everyday but is solidly rooted in “substance.” The more we recollect ourselves the more hope becomes real and the more it illumines our daily work. Only then can we perceive the brightness of the world which otherwise withdraws farther and farther from view.

*c. The social and cosmic dimension of hope*

One question remains. An objection could be raised about what we have just said, that once more all this would tend toward escape into interiority and that the world *qua* accident would be condemned to hopelessness. What we should do is create living conditions such that the flight into interiority becomes unnecessary, since suffering would be eliminated and the world itself would become paradise. Obviously we cannot attempt within the framework of these reflections to explain Marxist and evolutionist theories of hope.<sup>16</sup> Let it suffice to counter with two questions that may to some extent put the whole matter back into the right light. First of all, as to the advent of paradise in this world, is it not more certain to begin when people are freed from the greed of possession and

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<sup>16</sup>For the essential, cf. Pieper, *Hoffnung*, 37–102. Cf. also U. Hommes and J. Ratzinger, *Das Heil des Menschen: Innerweltlich—christlich* (Munich, 1975); some important indications (in spite of the unsatisfactory conclusion) in W. Post, “Hoffnung,” in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. H. Krings, et al., vol. 2 (Munich, 1973), 672–700.

when their interior freedom and independence from the domination of possession have awakened in them a great goodness and serenity? Besides, where do we begin transforming the world if not with our own transformation? And what transformation could be more liberating than one that engenders a climate of joy? Here we are at the second question already. Let us begin with a statement: The hope for which Francis stands was quite a different thing from a retreat into the interior and the individualistic. It created the courage to be poor and the disposition for community life. On the one hand, it set new principles of common life in the community of brothers, and on the other hand, through the Third Order, it applied to the everyday life of his time that anticipation of the world to come already lived in common.<sup>17</sup>

Here again, in one of his Advent sermons, Bonaventure was able to translate into marvelous images this broad human dimension of hope. He says that the exercise of hope must resemble the flight of birds, who spread their wings and mobilize all their strength to move, to become wholly movement, to climb. So the one who hopes must, according to Bonaventure, set all his forces going, become motion himself with all his members in order to rise, to respond to the need of hope. Bonaventure presents it in detail in a sublime intertwining of interior and exterior meanings. “*The one who hopes must lift up his head,*” directing himself upwards, lifting up his eyes “for the circumspection of his thought and of his being; his heart for revealing his feelings, but also his hands through his working. To the dynamism of hope, to the comprehensive movement of man that hope wants to realize, belongs the physical and practical work without which one cannot raise oneself.”<sup>18</sup>

Let us restate it, this time without the imagery. In the Franciscan pattern of hope, which takes up exactly the model traced by the epistle to the Hebrews, it is a question of surmounting the wish to possess. Possession as a foundation of being is surpassed by a new foundation so that man is freed of the former. It is precisely

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<sup>17</sup>See my article, “Eschatology and Utopia,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1978); A. Rotretter, “Der utopische Entwurf der franziskanischen Gemeinschaft,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 37 (1974): 159–69; C. del Zotto, *Visione francescana della vita*, Quaderno I and II, Settimana di Spiritualità Francescana (Santuario della Verna, 1982).

<sup>18</sup>For the first Sunday of Advent, sermon no. 16, *Opera Omnia*, IX 40a. On the Franciscan attitude toward work, cf. C. del Zotto, *Visione francescana*, II, 187–197.

this greed for possession that shuts man out of paradise. Here is the key to the economic as well as the ecological questions which are both without hope unless a new “fundamental hope” comes to free man. This is why the way to the interior traced by the New Testament is the only way to the exterior, to free air.

Here the thematic of hope expands by internal necessity to the question of relation between man and creation. Human beings are so deeply tied to creation that there cannot be any salvation for them that would not be equally the salvation of creation. Paul has explained this connection in chapter 8 of the epistle to the Romans. The creature waits too. It is important to remember that the hope of creation does not extend, for example, to the capacity of shaking off the human yoke one day. It waits for man transfigured, man who has become the child of God. This man gives back to creation its freedom, its dignity, its beauty. Through him creation itself becomes divine. Heinrich Schlier makes this comment: every creature is oriented toward the expectation of this event. It is an infinite responsibility that is thus entrusted to humans—to be the accomplishment of every aspiration of earth and heaven.<sup>19</sup>

But for the moment creation makes the opposite experiment. It is subjected to vanity, not that she would have wished it but because of the one who subjected her to it (Rom 8:20). That one is Adam, who delivers himself over to the thirst for possessing and for lying.<sup>20</sup> He reduces creation to slavery; she groans and awaits the true man who will return her to herself. She is “subjected to vanity,” that is, she is herself implicated in the ontological lie of man. Instead of witnessing to the creator, she presumes to pass for God. “One no longer meets her in her truth; she no longer appears to be what she is, that is, creation.”<sup>21</sup> She participates in the fall of man and only the new man can be her restoration. He is the one she hopes for. It is from this source that the sermon of St. Francis to the birds takes its theological and profoundly human meaning, his whole being turned toward the creature. Here too Francis was perfectly right to take the Bible literally: “Announce the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Creation itself awaits the new man, and when he appears she

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<sup>19</sup>H. Schlier, *Das Ende der Zeit* (Freiburg, 1971), 254.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 255. See also his *Der Römerbrief* (Freiburg, 1977), 261.

<sup>21</sup>Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 260.

is again recognizable as a creation and thus becomes new. Only the “fundamental hope” can heal the relation between man and nature.

While I was rereading my *Catechismus Romanus* in preparation for my lecture on catechesis, I was struck by a curious statement on the subject of hope which had hitherto escaped me. The four principal parts of catechesis (creed, commandments, sacraments, the Our Father) are associated here with the different dimensions of the Christian life. The Our Father is said to teach us what the Christian must hope for.<sup>22</sup> This association of the Our Father with our subject of hope surprised me at first. This does not square with our familiar ideas on a theology of prayer. However, it seems to me that this remark cuts deep into the matter. Just what hope is becomes clear in the prayer. We understand what prayer signifies as we come to understand the subject of hope. And as the Our Father gives us the model of all prayer, it provides also the rule that governs the link between prayer and hope. It is therefore worthwhile to follow the line of thought opened up by this remark of the *Catechismus Romanus*, which at first sight appears curious and somewhat arbitrary. First the Our Father by its very content has something to do with hope. In the second place, it responds to the daily anxieties of people and encourages them to transform these through prayer into hopes. It is a matter of each day’s subsistence; it is a matter of the fear of evil which menaces us in multiple ways; a matter of peace with our neighbor, of making peace with God and protecting ourselves from the real evil, the fall into lack of faith, which is also hopelessness. Thus the question of hope goes back to hope itself, to our longing for paradise, for the Kingdom of God with which our prayer begins. But the Our Father is more than a catalogue of subjects of hope; it is hope in action. To pray the Our Father is to deliver ourselves to the dynamism of what is asked for, to that of hope itself. One who prays is one who has hope, for such a person is not yet in the position of one who has everything. Otherwise we would have no need to ask. But we know that there is someone who has the goodness and the power to give us anything, and it is to him that we stretch out our hands. The one who prays, says Joseph Pieper, “keeps himself open to a gift which he does not know; and even if what he has specifically asked for is not given him, he remains

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<sup>22</sup>*Catechismus Romanus*, Preface, XII.

certain, however, that his prayer has not been in vain.”<sup>23</sup> This is why teachers of prayer would not be able to be merchants of false hopes in any case; they are on the contrary true teachers of hope. —*Translated by Esther Tillman.* □

*JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER* was elected Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005.

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<sup>23</sup>Pieper, *Hoffnung und Geschichte*, 136, no. 32.