SALVATION BY HOPE[1]

By JOHN BLIGH

THE THREE THEOLOGICAL virtues, faith, hope and charity, are bracketed together in the New Testament itself. In 1 Cor 13, 13, St Paul says: 'Now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three, and the greatest of these is charity'. In Col 1, 3–5, he congratulates the Colossians on 'your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love you have for all the saints, and the hope reserved for you in heaven'. It is unlikely that St Paul himself created the triad. The earliest Epistle in which he uses it is 1 Thessalonians, where it is introduced rather clumsily in a passage about spiritual armour; St Paul tells his readers to put on 'the breastplate of faith and charity, and as helmet the hope of salvation'.[2] He does not even bother to match each theological virtue with a particular piece of armour – the breastplate is both faith and charity.

St Thomas Aquinas tries to explain the triad by linking the three theological virtues with the three psychological faculties, memory, understanding and will. But this does not work out very well. If faith belongs to the understanding, and charity to the will, we have only memory left for hope. But memory refers to the past, and hope to the future; which is inconvenient.

There is no neat, schematic way of explaining this triad, and some people feel that a fourth virtue should be added to it, namely gratitude *(eucharistia)*. It seems best to look upon these four virtues as different aspects of a man's time-conditioned response to God's revelation. When we turn to the past, we need faith, and from this faith will spring gratitude and love. When we think of God's action in the present, again we need faith, reverence and love. When we look to the future, there is no room for gratitude, and faith takes on the form of hope – we believed in God's promises in the past, we trust in his fidelity, and we hope for the fulfilment of his promises.

When St Paul speaks about justification, he normally says that we are justified by faith: it is our faith that puts us into a right relationship with God, or rather, through our faith the Holy Spirit

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[1] Rom 8, 24.

[2] 1 Thess 5, 8; cf 1, 3.

rectifies our relationship to God. But at the end of Romans 8 he suddenly says that 'it is by hope (or, in hope) that we are saved', and we may wonder why he suddenly substitutes hope. Two possible explanations suggest themselves.

If St Paul had thought of God as the clockmaker and the universe as his clock, he would not have described God as 'the God of hope',[1] nor would he have said that we are justified by hope. In the world as conceived by the Deists, the future holds no new possibilities; God is the ultimate conservative. But in Romans 8 St Paul conceives the universe in quite a different way: he is making an attempt to think about the whole creation together (one of the admirable things about him is the vast sweep of his thought). He sees the Spirit of God filling the whole creation, groaning within it, and moving it towards its consummation. It is faith which enables him to view the world in this way; but when faith travels on from the past and present into the future, it becomes indistinguishable from hope.

A thinker contemplating the whole of creation can look upon it either as a vast plural system of relative entities, with no centre, not united by any common purpose, and having, as a whole, no meaning or finality; or he can regard it, in the light of revelation, as moving towards the fulfilment of a plan known only to God who created it and to any to whom he has revealed his purpose. St Paul sees the world in this second way: the secret plan *(*or *mysterion)* of God has been revealed through Christ, and it centres upon the destiny of man. Not spatially but spiritually man is the centre of the universe. So the man who accepts God's revelation will look forward hopefully to the fulfilment of God's plans and will try to fit his own life into the pattern and finality of creation. In the context of Romans 8, therefore, it is not difficult to see how St Paul can say that we are saved or justified by hope. The man who has no hope is not adjusted to the plans of Providence.

In fact, such a man is not adjusted to this world at all. Hope is a necessity. There was a pop song about a year ago called 'A man without love is only half a man'; so too and even more so is a man without hope.[2] If a man has nothing to look forward to, he will not exert himself, and being inactive he will be unhappy. There is

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[1] Rom 15, 13.

[2] Philo, *On Rewards and Punishments*, 11 (Loeb Philo, VIII, 319), commenting on Gen 4, 26, says that only the man who sets his hope on God becomes really a man, worthy to be called Man (Enosh). A true Man is one who hopes in God – the two names are correlative.

a striking illustration of this in the book *No Picnic on Mount Kenya*, by Felice Benuzzi.[1] The author was a prisoner of war in a camp at the foot of Mt Kenya during the last war, and was utterly bored and demoralized by the sheer inactivity. One hot afternoon, he was vexed by a man in a nearby hut who was hammering away at something and singing while he did it. Suddenly it occurred to Benuzzi that the man was happy because he had a job to do. So he decided that he must set himself a task and work at it. He looked up at Mt Kenya and decided there and then that he would climb it. So he spent the next few months collecting and making the equipment and getting himself into training. Then he made his escape from the camp and climbed the mountain – the adventure of his life. He was a happy man from the moment he set himself an objective to work for. Hope for the future is an essential component of present happiness. Though they will never admit it, most undergraduates are happy because they have exams to work for. When they no longer have exams ahead of them, people have to set other objectives for themselves. One of the problems of retirement is to find new objects of hope and endeavour. Most people do not give sufficient thought to this matter. The reader has been warned.

In a way, hope is more necessary than love as a constituent of happiness – of being at least reconciled to one's lot in this world. In a way, hope does more to unite people than charity does. Men who hope for the same objective and decide to work together for its attainment are likely to love one another. Comradeship, friendship and love are by-products of joint efforts towards a common goal. The best way to unite a body of men is to give them a common task in which they need one another's cooperation.

The christian revelation includes promises which should sow in us the seeds of hope – other-worldly hope and this-worldly hope. By so doing, it helps to reconcile a man to this life, to himself, to his neighbours and to God. The other-worldly hope is particularly needed in old age. It can outbalance the disappointments of this life and prevent embitterment. It can help us to grow old gracefully.

Not all of this was in St Paul's mind when he said that 'it is in (by) hope that we are saved'. He was thinking, in the first place and chiefly, of how hope fits us into the plans of divine Providence. Secondly, his words may also mean that the state into which we have

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[1] Benuzzi, F., *No Picnic on Mount Kenya* (London, 1952).

been brought through faith, though it is a state of salvation, is still an interim state – a state of hope, not of final fulfilment. Before conversion, our status was that of slaves and outsiders. Once we have believed, we become sons and heirs; we are therefore safe, but not yet in possession of the inheritance. We are already saved because we are already heirs, but as heirs we live in hope.

So it makes little difference whether we say that we are justified by faith or by hope. These two words express different aspects of our one response to God's call.

The future reference of revelation and of faith can be clearly seen in some of the Old Testament archetypes of faith. God's revelation takes the form of *promise*, and faith is the response to God's call to get up and move into the future which he has planned. Let us take the examples of Abraham and Moses.

When God called Abraham to get up and go from Ur of the Chaldees and from Haran, Abraham trusted God to lead him on to the land which he was destined to own. And when God called him out of his tent and showed him the stars of heaven, saying 'So shall your descendants be!' – so numerous and so glorious – Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. But how could he *believe* such a splendid promise without *hoping* for its fulfilment?

When Moses was called by God to lead the Exodus, he asked God his Name. The answer can be translated in various ways: (a) The Septuagint took it to mean 'I am who am', that is 'I am the one who truly and eternally exist' – which suggests a static, immutable, conservative God. (b) Some scholars think the verb is causal: 'I am the one who causes to be', that is, 'I am the creator'. (c) Others think it is a refusal to answer the question: 'I am who I am!' – it is impertinence to ask. (d) But the favourite view at the moment is that it means: 'I will be who I will be' – which is an invitation: 'Follow me and you will find out who I am'. He is a God 'with future as his essential nature', a God whose freedom is the source of new things that are to come, a God who calls into beings things that are not.[1] When Moses asks, 'Who am I to speak to Pharaoh?' God replies: 'I will be with you'. Moses is to face the future, trusting in the divine assistance or partnership. He is to hope in God.[2]

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[1] Rom 4, 17. Cf Moltmann, J., *The Theology of Hope* (London, 1967), p 30.
[2] Cf Moltmann, J., *op. cit.*, p 285.

It is the same in the New Testament: in the fourth gospel, the first two disciples say to Jesus: 'Where do you live?', and he replies, inscrutably: 'Come and see!' – meaning, one may suspect, 'We shall know when we get there'. He called them out of their familiar ways into an unspecified future; and because they trusted him, they followed in hope. At the end of St Matthew's gospel, he sends his disciples to teach and baptize all nations, and promises to be with them always: they are to embark on an unknown future, hoping in God.

Of all the New Testament writers, the author of Hebrews comes closest to identifying faith and hope. He sees the Church *(ek-klesia)* as a congregation of men who are responding to God's call *(klesis)* a call which is essentially a promise and an invitation to enter into God's rest. Christians are 'sharers in a call from heaven'.[1]

The future reference of faith or hope is one of the things which make faith attractive. It is one of the reasons why men *want* to believe. The healthy human being does not want to believe that the universe is meaningless, that his life has no purpose, and that existence is absurd. A catholic philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, put it this way: 'We do not hope because we believe but rather we believe because we hope. For it is not rational necessity but vital anguish that impels us to believe in God. To believe in God is to feel a hunger for God, to be sensible of his lack and absence, to wish that God may exist. Faith in God is based upon the vital need of giving finality to existence'.[2] This does not mean that belief in God is wishful thinking. It means that in our search for truth, will cooperates with understanding. The distinction between will and understanding is as provisional and inadequate as the distinction between faith and hope.

Now let us consider the content of christian hope. A great deal has been written on the eschatology of the gospels; but for the discussion of hope we need the wider concept of 'futurology', if this mongrel word is acceptable in polite society. The question is, What did Jesus teach men to fear and to hope for, in this world and in the next? Did he teach them to hope almost exclusively for other-worldly blessings? Or did he want them to hope and work

[1] Heb 3, 1. The invitation of a king or of God is a command. To ignore it is an insult, deserving of a punishment (cf Mt 22, 7).

[2] Quoted by Jones, J. R., 'Love as Perception of Meaning', in Phillips, D. Z., (ed.), *Religion and Understanding* (Oxford, 1967), p 148.

for a better world here on this earth? And if so, how are the two hopes related to each other?

Under the Old Covenant, the hope of the Jews was, for the most part, this-worldly. Belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come did not establish itself until about the time of the Maccabean wars, say about 150 B.C. Abraham was promised land, an heir, and a great posterity. The Jews of the Exodus were promised a land flowing with milk and honey. In later centuries, the Jews hoped for a Messiah who would restore the throne of David and make Israel a world-power here on this earth.

When Christ came, he diverted the stream of Jewish hope. He refused to be a political Messiah and discouraged the political hopes of the Jews by telling them to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. In St Matthew's gospel, he tells his disciples to seek entry into the kingdom of heaven, and describes the Judgment through which they must pass before entering into the kingdom, but it is not clear whether the kingdom is to be on this earth or not. In St John's gospel, we learn from Jesus' dialogue with Martha in chapter 11 that he taught his disciples to look forward to the resurrection of the dead and eternal life to follow. The emphasis seems to be placed heavily on other-worldly blessings as the object of christian hope. But it would be a mistake to say that Jesus transferred all hopes to the other world. He preached a doctrine which would have transformed the situation on this earth, if it had been obeyed. But he did not describe a Golden Age of social justice to be worked for and achieved on this earth, nor did he propose a social policy designed to inaugurate a better world. On the contrary, his saying, 'The poor you have always with you', would suggest that he expected no radical alteration of the economic structure.

There are three ways of interpreting the futurology of Jesus. First, there is the view that according to Jesus, this world is simply the training ground or testing ground, where men prove themselves worthy or unworthy to be admitted to a kingdom of heaven which is not on this earth. Many christians through the centuries have taken this view. The extreme form of it is found in Gnosticism and Catharism: matter is evil, and the christian should desire to be saved out of this world, which is beyond redemption. The Gnostic's hope is for his own escape from the world, and for the world's destruction.

Secondly, there is the view that this life has some value, and that while it lasts, we are to work for a kingdom of social justice on this

earth, but what really matters is the life of the world to come – by comparison, this life is of no account. This view can be supported by quoting such texts as Lk 9, 25, 'What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul?'

Thirdly, there is the view to which many christians are inclining now, though it is not too easy to support it from the gospels, that John the Baptist and Christ attempted to launch a better-world movement, and appealed to other-worldly hopes and eschatological motives in order to make men more willing to accept the idea of social change. The most persuasive exponent of this view is Walter Rauschenbusch, whose book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was a best-seller in its own day (1907) and has recently been reprinted. His interpretation places much greater emphasis on this-worldly hopes.

The other-worldly hope is an essential part of christianity, and must not be passed over in silence. To the first generation of christians after Pentecost, this hope must have come very easily. At their Eucharistic liturgy, they recalled the Last Supper and the post-resurrection meals when Jesus was with them, and looked forward to his Return, which they hoped for, and probably expected, within a generation. Their most characteristic prayer was: *Marana tha!* 'Our Lord, come!' Their hope for the future sprang from vivid memories of the past and of Christ's promises.

For Peter, James and John who had seen the Transfiguration, and for St Paul, who had seen the glorified Christ on the road to Damascus, the future hope was particularly vivid, since they had been given a glimpse of the glory to come. We have a valuable insight into the mind of St Paul in Phil 1, 23, where he says: 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account'. He is willing to stay and complete his task on earth; but, that done, he wants to depart and be with Christ. The outlook of Jesus himself, at the Last Supper, was almost the same: having completed the task which his Father had given him to do, he rejoiced at the prospect of returning to his Father and told the disciples that if they really loved him, they would share his joy at the prospect of going to the Father.[1] And at the end of his Prayer in Jn 17, he prays for his disciples 'that they may be with me where I am, to behold the glory which thou gavest me in thy love for me before the world began'.

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[1] Cf Jn 14, 28.

For the modern christian, the other-worldly hope is much more difficult. He has no personal memory of Christ's time on earth, but must rely on imperfect written records; he no longer hopes for a visible parousia within his own lifetime; and the advance of astronomy has made it impossible for him to imagine where heaven can be, let alone what it is like. A well known Catholic philosopher was once heard to say: 'I am not at all sure that I wouldn't prefer to be snuffed out at death; but since the Church tells me that I shall survive, I try to live accordingly'. That is not the attitude of christian hope. We should look forward with real desire to being with Christ and his saints in the world to come. This desire is frequently expressed in the prayers of the liturgy. But for many of us, they do not entirely ring true; they sometimes sound like a meaningless formality.

So we are faced with the problem, How can we foster a lively hope of the world to come in ourselves and in others? We must look for useful analogies. Let us here consider two, the first of them from Scripture. The man born blind in Jn 9 lived in darkness before his cure; he knew that he was close to the temple, one of the wonders of the world, but he could not see it. When his eyes were opened, he was suddenly raised into a new world of light, colour, beauty, and much richer human relationships. Similarly, the believer lives in the darkness of faith in a world which he cannot see. Entry into the kingdom is the opening of the eyes of the soul, the granting, not of sunlight, but of the 'light of glory'.

Secondly, an example from our own times: suppose you have some wealthy friends in the Bahamas who send you an air ticket and ask you to come and spend next July with them. You will look forward to it in hope. You will not desire the intervening weeks or months to be simply blotted out of the calendar (not unless you are utterly miserable) and you will hope that nothing will prevent you from going. In the meanwhile, whenever you think of the matter, the prospect of being with your friends in their earthly paradise will cheer you up. The prospect of the world to come should work, psychologically, in that way. I believe it does for nuns, but not so easily for the rest of us.

The rest of us are much more interested in this-worldly hopes, and we should like to think that christianity is essentially a better-world movement. Let us see what can be said in favour of this view.

Immediately after Pentecost, the disciples launched a very inter-

esting experiment in social reform, as we read in Acts 4, 32: 'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common'. This was not communism – there was no common ownership of the means of production. The new movement was, in fact, economically unsound. No community can last long if it liquidates its assets and lives on its capital. Presumably the disciples were trying to fulfil the desire which Jesus expressed in his prayer at the Last Supper: that they might be one, as he and the Father were one, in order that the world might see and believe the divine origin of their community. In the same prayer, Jesus says to the Father: 'All that is mine is thine, and thine is mine'. So the disciples probably intended their sharing of property on earth to reflect the divine sharing in heaven, and to teach a lesson to the unconverted world.

Since the sharing of property quickly led to economic difficulties, we are inclined to say that it cannot have been according to the mind of Christ – it must have been a product of excessive enthusiasm. But the connection with Jesus' Prayer in Jn 17 shows that probably Jesus did intend them to make social experiments of this sort, once they had received the new Spirit.[1] We know from St Luke (and only from him!) that John the Baptist wanted to see a redistribution of property: 'Let him who has two coats share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise'.[2] When he quoted Isaiah, 'Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low', he probably interpreted the 'valleys' and the 'mountains' metaphorically, as the poor and the rich. In addition to Jn 17, there are a few other passages which suggest that Jesus intended to continue John the Baptist's better-world movement. He was not satisfied with the *status quo* and wanted his disciples, with the aid of his Holy Spirit, to create new social structures which would embody the principle of charity: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

If so, we must say that Jesus gave his disciples the vision, but did not give them the technical knowledge necessary to achieve the vision. He did not teach them a system of economics or tell them how to set about mass-production of food and consumer goods. This suggests that an alliance between the Church and science is necessary, and far more necessary than the Church has ever realized.

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[1] Cf Jn 7, 38. [2] Lk 3, 11.

A recent writer has suggested that when Jesus said his disciples would do 'greater works' than himself,[1] he was referring, not to healing miracles, but to the wonders of modern technology.[2] Perhaps it would be better to say that he was referring to works which his disciples would achieve through entering into alliance with modern technology and with modern economic and political thinking. Such an alliance could, within our generation, banish hunger from the earth.

If Christ and John the Baptist did try to launch a better-world movement, it must be admitted that the Church quickly fell away from this original vision. Already in St Paul and still more in St John, the emphasis is emphatically upon the other-worldly hope. St Paul still retains the idea that the Holy Spirit should make the christian uncomfortable about the *status quo* – he should groan with longing for something better.[3] But it is not evident that St Paul meant that we should groan with longing for a more just and charitable social order on this earth.

Finally, let us consider whether it is possible to hold these two hopes – for this world and for the next – in a fruitful tension. Or are they necessarily in conflict with each other? As a generalization, it seems true to say that the stronger the one hope in any man's breast, the weaker the other will be. But is this necessarily so?

The Marxist view is that other-worldly hopes are the opium of the people, a drug which deprives them of the energy to undertake the work of revolution. A man who looks forward to the world to come is more likely to acquiesce in the evils of the present world, especially if he is taught from childhood to believe that submission to the powers that be is highly meritorious. H. J. Laski says: 'Concentration on the life to come... has, it seems to me, done more than most factors in history to deflect the attention of men from the realities of our life here and now. The result of that deflection has always been to the interest of those who live by privilege'. [4] The strength of Marxism is that it wholly rejects any other-worldly eschatology in order to strengthen the hope of a this-worldly millenium.

The only way to resolve the antagonism between the two hopes is to place the principal emphasis on this-worldly hope as supplying

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[1] Cf Jn 14, 12.
[2] Williams, Colin, *Faith in a secular Age* (London, 1966), p 32.
[3] Cf Rom 8, 20–23.
[4] In W. H. Auden et al., *I Believe* (London, 1962), p 69.

a motive. In other words, we should tell people that their first task is to create a better world on this earth, and that if they strive to do so, they will be rewarded in the world to come. If they care for the poor in this world, they will find that they have treasure in heaven, but the important thing is to care for the poor in this world. While they are doing so, it is even better perhaps that they should forget about other-worldly rewards and just get on with the job. The preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus is summed up in the formula: 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand'. The emphasis is on 'Repent' – 'Change the situation here on this earth', and the eschatology is introduced as a motive for change.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rejects and attacks the legalistic view that religion is simply a set of rules, enforced by supernatural sanctions and designed to maintain the *status quo*. The supernatural sanctions of which he speaks are geared to change, not to the maintenance of the *status quo*. Until recently, there has been too much glorification of the *status quo* among christians. We have to recognize now that the *status quo* is not Utopia. Our reward in heaven depends on our efforts to change the situation here below.