

“Hope for What?: An Unfinished Agenda for the Church of the Nazarene”

Al Truesdale

Response

by

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Al Truesdale has brought to light an interesting question by proposing the two possible ranges for hope as found in the New Testament. As he presents the question, it would seem that we are being asked to choose one view or the other, each of which is mutually exclusive. Either we are to be *maximalist* and embrace hope for the totality of the created order, or we can choose to be *minimalist* in our view of eternal hope as the “steadfast anchor of the soul” and nothing more. This is not a new choice being put before us; rather it is a choice that has confronted the Church since its foundation.

I propose that rather than being a choice of either / or, we need to take a both / and approach to the question of the range of Christian hope. Just as our salvation is both present and future, and just as the Kingdom of God is both “already” and “not yet,” so also Christian hope embraces the whole of the created order – the *maximalist* view – and is restricted to those souls transformed by faith in Christ – the *minimalist* view.

As our salvation is present, and as the Kingdom of God is “already,” Christian hope is *maximalist*. As the Gospel message is proclaimed, there is hope for the world: hope for peace, hope for justice, hope for an end to hunger and strife and crushing poverty. There is hope for a better and more beautiful world in which the “kingdoms of this world” may become more nearly like the “kingdoms of our Lord.” We have seen this take place during the course of history. As the New Testament clearly teaches us, this hope is inseparably linked to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Christians in this world, our task is to live in such a way that our lives are witnesses to the hope that we have and an encouragement to others to join us by putting their faith in Christ as well. Our goal is not just to secure for ourselves “a home in heaven by and by,” but to make our present world one that more nearly approximates the world as God intended it to be. Unfortunately, what we see in the world today is an attitude which, in large part, is not just apathetic but antagonistic to Christian hope. Current socio-political and economic structures, scientific advances, aesthetics and learning, as well as the programs of many environmental activists tend to reject the very Source of the hope we proclaim. As *maximalist*, Christian hope must be evangelistic. But, hope is conditional. The condition for this hope being realized is the world putting its faith in Christ.

It is in this present, *maximalist*, range of hope that we live today. But, as Scripture reminds us, one day the “not yet” will become the here and now. Life in this world as we know it, as 2 Peter tells us, will be transformed. What we hope for in the eschatological sense will be realized. All things will become new. There will be judgment and destruction, and from our present perspective, we might even lament that the world as we have known it will face this destiny.

It might seem that all the good that has been done in the world, all that we have worked for, has been for naught. But I suggest that all that has been and is being done in the world in the name of Christ is being done in preparation for that day. It is then that our hope in Christ will bear fruit. The Scriptures assure us that destruction of the world will take place, and that Christ’s Church will “make an exit that will leave not so much the ‘smell of smoke’ attached to the

saints.” Though this view of Christian hope seems restrictive, and *minimalist*, Scripture reminds us that “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). The impression that the Apostle Paul gives us here as he alludes to the prophet, Isaiah, is that what to us now seems to be *minimalist*, will, in fact, become more *maximalist* than we can imagine.

I believe that Truesdale is on the right track when he suggests that appealing to specific texts may not be the best way to approach the subject of hope. We must look at the whole vision of God and His purposes in Jesus who came “to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). It is here that we find our true hope for today and for the future.