

HOPE OF A NEW CREATION
Rev. Dr. Ivelisse Valentin-Vera
Interamerican University of Puerto Rico

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Rom 8:19-21)

To speak of the hope of a new creation is to be willing to break paradigms, to move to the future while moving back to the beginning-genesis without pretending to go back to fundamentalisms. To speak of a new creation is to recognize that there is something broken that needs to be restored. Even more challenging is to think that this restoration can occur from hope and not from concrete human acts, if we define hope as a mere expectation of favorable results in complex or imprecise circumstances.

For Christians, the hope of a new creation is a pilgrimage from the eternity of God to the eternity of the fallen humanity. The cries and laments of fallen men and women move the maternal womb that gave them life to bring from eternity the new Adam, Jesus the Christ. He comes to redeem the children of God from the fall. They are subjected to hope, waiting to return to eternity. There is growth and maturity on this journey back to eternity, and both God and humanity are to take on a new image. God, in Christ, gets the scars of our suffering, and we, from Christ, the reconciliation to be able to present ourselves holy, without blemish before the Father. (Colossians 1)

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:22, 28

Faith and Promise

The primal faith of the people of God in Egypt pushed them towards a temporary liberation. God made himself present to walk along with them through their pilgrimage towards salvation from human slavery. God accompanied and guided them like a cloud and a pillar of fire towards the utopia of a promise. No one knew where they were heading or what they would find. It was their lack of knowledge that made them hesitate and back away on many occasions.

However, the Christian faith is not the same faith of the Hebrew people who left Egypt. Christian faith is no longer a force that pushes forward humanity from the sufferings of this world, waiting for a miracle from God in the unknown. It is not the faith of the *Deus ex machina*, which appears in literature or mythology to change the course of things supernaturally, as happened to the people in Egypt. The Christian faith is the hope of what is already anticipated in the resurrection. *Deus* no longer appears out of the blue to solve a temporary problem, much less with a promise. Through the vindication of Jesus in the resurrection, *Deus* anticipated the transformation of his creation to the fullness of life with him and in him as envisioned in Genesis.

The Christian's faith is power given by the Spirit, who now leads the history of humanity from the fullness of the risen Son until it reaches that same wholeness. We are no longer the people who walked in the desert, moving towards a promise. We are now the people moved by hope in the power of the Spirit. We are the people who have seen, who have heard, and who have touched what was in the beginning and appeared before our eyes. (1 John 1:1-3)

We inherited the faith of Thomas, John, Peter, Paul and the women. They saw, they heard, they touched. They lived the experience of wholeness through their encounter with the

risen Lord. Today we know what moves us and where does it take us, because the anticipation of what we hope for was seen and heard by the apostles. That experience was and still is the living force that goes along with their words: “*As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*” (Acts 4:20)

From Faith to Hope

Jurgen Moltmann says that “Christian hope springs from a faith that teaches us to discover in Christ the anticipation of the *novum* (the new) of redemption and the freedom destined for the unredeemed world. Hence, the guideline of its action is always the idea of the recreation of all things.”¹

Therefore, Christian hope walks towards what has *not been achieved* but *has already been* anticipated. It is the mystery of the *now* but *not yet* of the Kingdom discussed by theologians like Juan Stam and Oscar Cullmann, among others.²

The risen Christ has broken into our linear concept of time. Through the resurrection of Jesus the future comes to meet our present, and therefore lead us to it. The fullness achieved through resurrection take us back to the beginning of everything. The new creation is the reflection of the first man and woman, but now it bears the scars of pain and suffering imposed onto the humanity of God.³

¹ Moltmann, *Esperanza y planificación del futuro: perspectivas teológicas* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971), 426.

² Juan Stam, Protestante Digital, *El “ya” y el “todavía no” del reino*, 2017.
https://protestantedigital.com/print/37798/El_ya_y_el_todavia_no_del_Reino

³ Theologians José María Castillo and Jurgen Moltmann can be consulted to expand on the concept of the humanity of God.

The new creation anticipated through the risen Lord bears the marks of human suffering as a permanent reminder to humanity of the divine commitment to save us. The resurrection does not erase the wounds inflicted upon Jesus. Out of his own will, God leaves the marks of his pain tattooed onto himself. He wears them as scars of love shown to Thomas to transform our unbelief into faith. (John 20:27-28)

Jesus, Parable of Our Journey

*Christ is our hope because Christ is our future.*⁴

The current condition of humanity needs a radical alternative for its restoration. The hope that comes out of the expectation of a creation to be redeemed by passing onto all humanity the resurrection of Jesus, is an act of radicality of God to save his creation. Christian hope is radical.

The life, work, and resurrection of Jesus do not make up the biography of a hero, nor is it a Christological treatise that lays the foundations for Christianity. Jesus personifies the human being defeated in the face of injustice, in solidarity with our suffering and vindicated by God. In words of the mystic Richard Rohr, “the crucified and risen Jesus is a parable about the journey of all human beings and even the universe.”⁵

Our journey begins in God's creative imagination even before creation, including our falls and sufferings. We come from his eternity, but he also wants us to return to it.⁶ When we see Jesus as a parable of our life's journey, we find a new meaning in resurrection. Therefore, we do

⁴ Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2007), Kindle 380.

⁵ Richard Rohr *The Universal Christ* (New York: Convergent Books, 2021), 114 We can also find this concept explained extensively by John Dominic Crossan in *The Power of Parable*.

⁶ Psalm 139:13, 16, Jeremiah 1:5

not see the end of life as a consequence of sin and injustice, but we come to see Jesus as our ultimate destiny.

Eschatology and Hope

Expectation of the coming Christ can certainly not be a dream of revenge on the part of people who have come off badly in this world ('the day of revenge will come!'). Nor can it be a dream of power on the part of the powerless ('then we shall be the rulers and our enemies will be destroyed'). Nor, finally, can it well be a compensation for the disappointed ('things will be better in heaven'). Expectation and prayer for Christ's future is none of these things. It is the completion of that hope which was born of Christ's resurrection. The risen Christ 'must reign'.⁷

For the evangelical tradition, hope is eschatological; the future leads us to it. The restoration of creation in the relationship of shalom and harmony with its Creator is inseparably linked to the return of the one who came, rose and we hope will return, the risen One; Christ.

As Moltmann points out, sometimes, that hope has been distorted by turning apocalyptic texts into prophecies of horror, revenge, and judgment. However, the hope of a new creation that goes hand by hand with the apocalyptic narratives is based on the resurrection. For Christianity there is no parousia without resurrection.

Eschatological hope is celebration, joy, and optimism, because it is based on restoration, not destruction. The One who returns to restore his image to all things is the one who already came. He who came changed the paradigms of judgment, retribution and punishment for love, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. We await with creation for the manifestation of the One who will return. He is the incarnation of all that is good, and he is the same who will come again.

⁷ Moltmann. 2007. Kindle 392-395.

Transformation of the Present

"In its fullness, and not just in an appendix, Christianity is eschatology; it is hope, a look and orientation forward, and it is also, for that very reason, an opening and transformation of the present."⁸ To have hope is to believe in God as the power of the Spirit active in the present, as well as the ultimate future of all things. To believe in God as the eschatological future is not to believe in the destruction of creation, but in the full realization of creation until God, as the Apostle Paul anticipates, *becomes all in all* (1 Cor 15:28).

Paul also sees the final transformation underway, and anticipated in the present through the work of the Spirit, both in every believer and through the church. NT Wright says: "Pauline vision of restored creation – the way in which the resurrection of Jesus is worked out, through the Spirit, in the *present* renewal of creation, genuinely anticipating the *final* renewal still to come."⁹

The church, as a community of hope, along with Christ is also a foretaste of this new creation. Therefore, the values of the Kingdom are lived from within the church: equality, compassion, justice, love, and peace. When the church does not manifest these values, it suppresses the power of the Spirit and becomes an anesthetic to help us endure social evils. Thereupon, it does not act as a transforming force within culture.

The church cannot lose its prophetic role in society. While the church denounces injustices, it also announces salvation. The church should condemn oppressive structures, wherever they come from, while announcing the possibility of transformation. Christianity

⁸ Moltmann quoted in José María Mardones, *El País: Moltmann: Teología de la Esperanza*. 1986. https://elpais.com/diario/1986/11/28/sociedad/533516404_850215.html.

⁹ NT Wright. <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/beginning-to-think-about-the-new-creation/>

proclaims this transformation as a work of the Spirit mediated on earth by the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. If this is so, the silence of the church is sinful because it represents the silence of God.

Those who believe in the proposed redemption by the resurrection of Jesus, live out of the hope that moves them to manifest their own vital energy in a new openness towards the future. Thus, Christian hope is a transforming power that makes us feel uncomfortable and pushes us to walk and participate towards the change of all that is.¹⁰

That hope is the power of the risen Lord that moves the inner being of Christian men and women to transform the present. It is also outrage at the forces of crucifixion of this century. As born out of the cross, Christian hope emerges from the depths of human evil. And there, hope was fully manifested through Jesus' leap of faith in the hands of the Father. From the cross, evil and suffering are lived in relation to the ultimate future, the resurrection: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18)

Hope of a New Creation

*The world is not "a hopeless case." It is not in complete darkness. The world is geared towards salvation.*¹¹

In the hope of the New Creation, this orientation towards salvation occurs in a dialectic of ascent and return at the same time. It is in the descent and kenosis of the Son and his subsequent

¹⁰ To better understand this concept, see: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *La teologia e il Regno di Dio* (Roma-Brescia: Herder-Morcelliana, 1971), 144.

¹¹ J.A. Pagola *Seguir la Estrella*, Religión Digita 2022
https://www.religiondigital.org/buenas_noticias/Seguir-estrella_7_2410928889.html.

ascent in the resurrection that the human being can be raised to the time of creation. Nonetheless, that elevation of the created being is not an ascent but rather a return to the original image that comes to being through “repentance, contrition, and turning from the old path of sin.” Karl Barth teaches us that “everything that has been accomplished in it opens a perspective and can now be achieved by the human being: not in the sense that something is still missing, but in the sense that now everything is possible.”¹²

In the present or realized eschatology of Luke, Jesus lives in anticipation the values of the Kingdom. Now it is possible for Samaritans, Romans, Greeks, men, women, free, slaves, eunuchs and gentiles, poor, sick, prostitutes, adulterers and thieves, all together become the main characters of this new creation.¹³

Another glimpse of what is possible in the new creation is found in Pentecost. If we view this narrative as a parable of the Kingdom using Crossan's criteria in *The Power of Parable*, we will notice how the Spirit anticipates the radical inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus. At Pentecost the Spirit provokes that radical inclusivity that characterizes the Kingdom of God, respecting every language, every gender, every race and nationality. It is the Spirit who makes it possible that everyone understands each other, thus affirming their diversity. There:

¹² Sergio Rostagno, *Teólogos del Siglo XX: Karl Barth* (España: Editorial San Pablo, 2006), 77.

¹³ Luke 4:18, 21; 17:20-21 Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

"Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:9-11)

In this diversity, the mosaic of the Kingdom is built, where each tile is an integral part of the Image of God that will be projected onto everyone and everything, on the day of the final manifestation of the children of God. (Rom 8:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:28, Acts 17:28)

The hope of a new creation is collective and interrelational. It is for everyone "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹⁴

The New Creation is a collective redemption of radical inclusivity in the midst of a globalized world that challenges us to seek the face of God as a mosaic made out of widely diverse tiles. To live in the hope of a New Creation is to begin to break down the barriers of segregation in the *here* and *now* of the Kingdom.

Holiness and New Creation

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,^[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **3** All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

Our holiness is achieved in the hope that we will see Jesus in the manifestation of his glory on the day of his return.

¹⁴ Gal 3:27-28

This holiness, as we see it implicit in the Johannine texts, has an intrinsic relationship with the new birth. For the writer of the epistle, the expressions “son of God” (vv. 1-2) and “born again” (v. 2:29) “mean to be a new man, called to walk a new life, imitating the Father in a progressive assimilation and communion with him;”¹⁵ as for the evangelist John, for whom life in the Kingdom depends on that new birth. (John 3:3-5)

Thus, the Kingdom of God continues to amaze us with paradoxes that do not respond to our linear understanding of time. In the Kingdom of God you can be born again in old age, and can also change history. The change that Jesus proposes has to be lived out in the mystery of faith, in the dimension of the mystical and of divine mercy. This rebirth takes place in the heart of God, surrounded by forgiveness and love.

It is the Spirit what brings life upon creation. That *ruah* of God has the power to transform into a new life and into a new opportunity what already exists. Paul says it clearly: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:4

The baptism of water and Spirit erases our sins. It transforms us through the hope that can only be reborn out of the encounter with the risen Lord. This encounter allows us to believe possible what we thought impossible; it allows us to find life where there was death, to see the future where we thought everything had ended. “Everything can be improved and transformed, directing it towards that future promised in the resurrection. The story is not over. Change, transformation, the struggle for a fuller humanization is always possible.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Lectio divina para cada día del año 2 *Tiempo de Navidad* (España: Editorial Verbo Divino. 2000), 133-134.

¹⁶ Pagola. 2012. 106.

Today we can say with confidence “*I wish we were born again...*”, and we can make plans for that new life, because, in the resurrection of Jesus, God makes us all a new creation.

References

- Crossan, John D. *The Power of Parable*. USA: Harper One. 2021.
- Gibellini, Rosino. *La teología del siglo XX*. Bilbao: Sal Terrae. 1998. 298-319.
- Lectio divina para cada día del año: 2 *Tiempo de Navidad*. España: Editorial Verbo Divino. 2000.
- Pagola, J.A. *Cristo resucitado es nuestra esperanza*. Madrid: Editorial PPC. 2016.
- _____. *Es bueno creer en Jesús*. España: Editorial San Pablo. 2012.
- _____. *Seguir la Estrella*. Religión Digital. 2022.
- https://www.religiondigital.org/buenas_noticias/Seguir-estrella_7_2410928889.html
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *La teología e il Regno di Dio*. Roma-Brescia: Herder-Morcelliana, 1971.
- Mardones, José María. El País. *Moltmann: Teología de la Esperanza*. 1986.
- https://elpais.com/diario/1986/11/28/sociedad/533516404_850215.html
- Miller, L. and Stanley J. Grenz, Ed. *Fortress introduction to Contemporary Theologies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1998.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *Cristo Resucitado es nuestra esperanza*. España: Editorial PPC. 2016
- _____. *Esperanza y planificación del futuro: perspectivas teológicas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971.
- _____. *Experiences of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2007.
- Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ*. New York: Convergent Books. 2021.
- Rostagno, Sergio. *Teólogos del Siglo XX: Karl Barth*. España: Editorial San Pablo. 2006.
- Stam, Juan. Protestante Digital. *El “ya” y el “todavía no” del reino*. 2017.
- https://protestantedigital.com/print/37798/El_ya_y_el_todavia_no_del_Reino.
- Wright, N. T. . *Beginning to think about new creation*.
- <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/beginning-to-think-about-the-new-creation/>