

RESPONSE TO THE PRESENTATION BY DR. IVELISSE VALENTIN-VERA,
"HOPE OF A NEW CREATION" AND THAT OF DR. T. SCOTT DANIELS, "FINISH THEN
THY NEW CREATION"

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I would like to begin by saying that I agree with our expositors regarding the degree of relevance that eschatology has for understanding our faith and for our confidence that comes from knowing that this Christian story is "my story," as Dr. Scott points out.

Talking about eschatology goes beyond dealing with future events and when they will occur. Dr. Scott shows us a precise account of the two main millennialist positions that have influenced Western Christian traditions, including Latin America. Dr. Oswaldo Fernández, a Peruvian theologian, says that the discourse of holiness theology, especially in eschatology, has survived despite the obvious changes towards an individual and social ethic, more legitimately linked to its postmillennialist origins than to premillennialism grafted later.¹

However, and despite the differences, Christian eschatology has in common the optimism and hope that one day God will complete his work of redemption.² In other words, there is the conviction that God will triumph in the end. The differences are in the applications that come as a result of when and how we believe God's work will be accomplished.

Nevertheless, the prevailing eschatological models have not responded to the concerns of the times. Dr. Scott formulates the need for an "eschatology of hope," one that realistically pays attention to the personal and systemic nature of sin. Alberto Roldán, Argentine theologian and writer, says in his eschatology book that,

"...several of the models of eschatology have proved ineffective because they are escapist eschatologies, whose return of Christ is conceived as a rescue of the Church before the world experiences the judgment of God; eschatologies that suggest that we should be happy that things in the world are getting worse, because they confirm that the coming of the Lord is near. These are eschatologies that opt for dichotomous models that always postulate a confrontation between the present and the future, the spiritual and the material, the Church and the world."³

For this reason, in view of the various eschatological ideas, it is appropriate to consider Dr. Roldán's advice that we must renounce speculation. We know that time will dispel such speculations, as the sun dispels the morning fog. Speculations, especially apocalyptic ones, are usually readings subject to ideologies.⁴

René Padilla said, "Few needs of the evangelical community in Latin America demand greater attention from theology today than the need for a rediscovery of Christian hope⁵." This is also the view of the authors. Eschatology is the promise of a new creation that arises amid the clamor and laments of fallen men and women, as Dr. Valentin-Vera points out. The hope of a

¹Oswaldo. Fernandez, *Theologies of the Holiness Movement*. p.15

²Jeffery Bingham and Glenn Kreider, eds. *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016).

³Alberto Roldan, *Eschatology* p. 163

⁴Roldan. p. 11

⁵Idem. p. 163

new creation is for the Christian a pilgrimage from the eternity of God to the eternity of the fallen human being; a pilgrimage that produces growth and maturity that entails a new image, adds Ivelisse.

Scott, for his part, shares N. T. Wright's eschatological thinking as a proposal for the question of eschatology and how Christians should live in light of the hopeful end of God's history. Perspective that, Dr. Scott says, fits well into a Wesleyan perspective.

I find it intriguing how Wright approaches hope, because he appeals to a practical hope and not to a mere contemplative act that waits for events to happen. Hope must be applied within our reality, knowing what we expect. Pastor Valentín-Vera's comment, "Christian hope is to walk towards what is not yet but has already been anticipated. It is the mystery of the already but not yet of the Kingdom of which theologians John Stam and Oscar Cullmann speak." In other words, walking with expectation.

José Míguez Bonino, an Argentine Methodist, recounts in one of his books that on a wall in the city of Belfast, in Ireland, in the midst of a conflict that raged in the territory for several years, there was an inscription that said, "Is there a life before death?"⁶ This question which seems a contradiction is but the evidence of the disappointment of many about our world.

By the grace of God, Christians view the present with optimism. Dr. Ivelisse explains that the faith of the Christian is the hope of what has already been anticipated in the resurrection of Christ. The future comes to meet our present to bring us to a full realization. Scott, on the same point, says that the resurrection that was to occur at the end of history has been anticipated through baptism. In other words, you can now start a new life.

Dr. Ivelisse highlights the virtue of the resurrection in the sense that our life no longer ends as a victim of the sin and injustices of this world. In the resurrection of Christ, Scott indicates, the hope of a people rescued, restored and renewed became a reality. With optimism we see that God's grace is greater than the sin that pervades much of the created world.

The Church, as a community of hope, says Dr. Ivelisse, is also an anticipation with Christ of this new creation. On the other hand, Scott declares that every action that reflects and embodies the new creation will move into the world redeemed and incarnated by God. Therefore, we can observe that the resurrection does not cancel the cross or ensure a visible victory, but rather confirms Jesus' praxis of love and justice, and thus invites us to participate in that praxis, in the certainty that such praxis is not lost, but is always recovered and incorporated into the future of the kingdom.⁷

Dr. Ivelisse states that the church has a prophetic role in society: "While denouncing, it announces. It denounces sin and its evil deeds, wherever they come from, and announces the capacity of the human being to transform. The mission of the church must find its inspiration by looking at both the future and the past. This double gaze, towards the past and the future, allows the Church not to fall into either conformism or fatalism. In other words, if the church looked only to the past, that fact would lead it to perpetuate the status quo, both of itself and of society. On the other hand, if the Church only looked to the future, she would lack sufficient foundations for her message and praxis in the world. A synthetic look at both the past and the future allows

⁶ Míguez Bonino, José. *Space To Be Men*. p. 53

⁷ Alberto Roldan, *Eschatology*. p. 163

the Church of Jesus Christ to fulfill its mission⁸. If eschatology is what marks Christian theology from its apostolic beginnings, it should not be surprising, then, that the mission of the Church must also be inspired by the parousia of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Ivelisse comments that in the hope of the New Creation the human being can return to the original image. In relation to the latter, General Superintendent David Busic states in his book, "Way, Truth, Life," that Wesleyan holiness theology holds that the good news of the gospel is not only that we will one day be with God when we die, but also that the choice of abundant life in the kingdom of God is for now, right where we are. God's plan is that his image in us that was marred by the fall be restored to all its beauty and glory, so that we become his masterpiece, reflecting Christ's likeness in what we think, say, and do.⁹

Faced with so many ideas about the end times, it is necessary to at least examine which of these ideas is influencing our life and mission as a Church. How are we waiting for the coming of our Lord? With great expectation and joy? Or do we simply await the fulfillment of the times with the idea that the Lord is yet to come? "We proclaim his death, we proclaim his resurrection. Come, Lord!"

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⁸ Roldan, Alberto. *Eschatology*.p. 182

⁹ Busic, David, *Way, Truth, Life*.p.92