

“I cry out ‘Violence!’”  
Craig Keen

## Response

by

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Hoping not to do “violence” to Craig’s words, it seems to me that one might consider his paper to highlight two pressing concerns: the violence in our world (and the ways in which the Church has often been complicit with such acts or attitudes of violence) and a certain conception of time that assumes control and easily becomes authoritarian.

He outlines how Christ’s story, and specifically the resurrection, might be a “hopeful” response to the despair suffered by those violated or controlled. I would like to carry a little further (or maybe spell out a little more) how this story might be such a response of hope, and consider specifically how we, as a Church, might live out the good news of the resurrection. (Do we tend to think of hope primarily as a “personal” issue?).

This, then, is my question: What does it mean for the Church to live in hope? What can we say about hope and the Church’s mission in the face of violence and our eagerness to control? How might the Church live out Christ’s story as a story of hope? Let me offer three suggestions.

First, to say that the Church lives in hope, is to say that we do not live in *certainty*. When we “have certainty,” we tend to treat it as something we own, which is to be defended at all costs. When we are very sure that we are right and are in possession of the “Truth,” we easily take the license to condemn others and to set ourselves up as a fount of knowledge. Christ often refused to give people clear answers. For his audience to believe he was God’s Son was an issue of faith, not of absolute certainty. It required then (and does now) the risk to stake one’s life on the hope that Jesus Christ was and is indeed “God with us.” Faith is always such a “hopeful” risk, not characterized by ownership but by humility. Such a sense of hope also implies that the future is open-ended, not yet determined, as Craig points out. We wait for a radically new future, one that is like the resurrection, one that breaks in and interrupts us in surprising, startling, and unsettling ways.

Second, to say that the Church lives in hope, is to say that we do not live in *control*. Rather, we live in radical dependence on another. To hope for something is to confess our own inability; to point to what comes to us from the outside, what lies beyond our control. To live in hope is to walk in complete openness to receiving a life that is offered as a gift, not earned. For the Greeks, hope was not a virtue, precisely because it implied lack of autonomy, lack of control. The cities that hoped others would come to their aid were defeated. Hope is dangerous, because it makes it so abundantly clear that we cannot bring about on our own that for which we hope. If the Church is to live in hope, she must live in complete dependence on the Triune God, who is her only identity. The Church exists, loves, and lives only through grace.

Third, to say that the Church lives in hope, is to say that we do not live in *despair*. Dependence on grace may be precisely what allows for hope rather than despair. If we were the ones in control, would that not be reason enough to despair? Even though we do not walk by sight, even though we have neither knowledge nor certainty nor control, we live in “joyful hope for the coming of God’s reign” (as the Church affirms in the liturgy of the Eucharist). We live, indeed, in hope of resurrection, in hope of transformation of this creation into one that we can neither predict, nor manipulate, nor even yet imagine.

To live in hope, however, is not essentially about the future or about some other place, but primarily about how the Church lives *here and now*. It is to make real the hope that Christ and Paul expressed — that the Church be Christ’s body (1 Corinthians 12), that in our love we reveal the identity of the Triune God (John 17). The Church is the body of Christ, the one who lives Christ’s life now and within this world, which God has created and redeemed in Christ. Thus, above all, the Church is to be that holy presence in the physical: offered, broken, hallowed, shared, remembered.

In the liturgy of the Eucharist, we receive a new sense of the past, of the present, and of the future. When we share in the Eucharist, we remember the past — what was done for us on the cross. Yet, that is not a past that “has passed” in any linear fashion, but one that is happening right now, before our very eyes. When we share in the Eucharist, the present is transformed, sanctified, filled with meaning; we become one with the body that nourishes us. When we share in the Eucharist, we “wait in joyful hope” for a new future, a future that is already present in the resurrection of Christ, a future that speaks of God’s hope for all of creation. Time is no longer an abstract category, but something in which we participate physically. We remember, we share, we proclaim. Above all, if the Church is to live in hope, she must be a Eucharistic presence in the world and portray the hope of resurrection, of a life radically transfigured, unpredictable, dependent on God — a hope of what this world can become when it is thus broken, blessed, and shared.