

# The Hope of Our Calling'

BY THE REV. F. D. COGGAN, D.D.

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Romans xv. 13).*

**I**N the porch of Strasbourg Cathedral there stand two fine specimens of the Christian art of the thirteenth century. They consist of two statues, the one representing the Church and the other the Synagogue. The Church is depicted serene, forward-looking, as a woman crowned and holding firmly in one hand the Cross and in the other the chalice. The Synagogue is depicted as a woman dejected, her eyes bandaged, her staff broken, and the tables of the law falling from her hand. If the sculptor had so wished, he might have carved under the figure of the Church, the one word "hope", and under that of the Synagogue, the word "hopeless". It is a perfect illustration in stone of the difference which hope can and does make.

In the realm of pictorial art, I do not know of any picture which shows so strikingly the difference which the presence, or the lack, of hope, can make to a man, even when he is *in extremis*, as does Albrecht Dürer's picture of the two thieves at the Crucifixion. There is a world of agony in the face of the thief who railed on the Christ; there is a magnificence about the rough figure of the thief who said, "Lord, remember me . . .". The difference may be expressed in one word—hope, and that a Christ-centred hope.

Of the three "theological virtues" of which St. Paul writes in his famous hymn in the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, "hope" has been the Cinderella. Abundant attention has been given in theological thought to "faith" and "love". "Hope" has only too often been left at home neglected. The result of this neglect can be seen in an enfeebled religious experience. The Church as a whole, and its individual members in particular, lack a resilient joy and a fundamental peace largely through feeble apprehension, intellectually and spiritually, of the Christian doctrine of hope.

Part of the trouble with us Englishmen is that the word in our common speech is a feeble word. It has become surrounded in the language of every day with adjectives that are servile and uncertain. Thus, to worship God "with trembling hope and penitential tears", while having much of truth in it, seems strangely at variance with the New Testament concept of boldness of access to the Throne of Grace. There is a virility and muscularity about hope in the pages of the Scriptures which we should do well to seek to recapture. To the New Testament, then, let us turn for a while.

<sup>1</sup> The Annual Sermon of the Church Missionary Society, preached at St. Botolph's Church, London, E.C.2, on April 13, 1953.

## I

A glance at a concordance quickly makes it clear that the idea of hope was one particularly congenial to St. Paul. In brief, we may note that the word never occurs in the Gospels, but it is found five times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, three times in the Petrine correspondence, once in the Epistles of St. John, and some *thirty-five* times in St. Paul. Within the Pauline letters, it becomes a major theme in the Epistle to the Romans. We may pass by, with a casual glance, the occurrence of the word in the fourth chapter (where the Apostle remarks on it as one of the great characteristics of Abraham), and in the twelfth chapter ("rejoicing in hope"), where the word, so briefly touched on, can only be understood in the light of the meaning given to it elsewhere in the Epistle. This leaves us with three major passages—in the fifth, eighth and fifteenth chapters—to which to turn for an understanding of what I believe to be one of the fundamental concepts of the Apostle's thinking.

*First, in Chapter 5.* The passage is a crucial one for the understanding alike of the Epistle and of the whole Gospel of God. The writer has reached the point in his argument where, having demonstrated "the loving mercy of our God, when all was sin and shame", he can begin to elaborate the outcome of justification in the life of the individual thus reinstated with God. What difference does it make when a man knows the meaning of justification? The answer is crystal clear. He enjoys *peace* Godwards, that word which, as Johs Pedersen has pointed out, meant for the Hebrew "the fact of being whole . . . complete harmony . . . every form of happiness and free expansion . . ." (*Israel* I-II, pp. 311-313.) Further, he knows what right of entry to the throne-room of God means—the presence-chamber is open to him! Yet again—and here we come to our theme—he "exults in hope". What does the Apostle mean? He does not leave the term undefined. It is "hope of the glory of God". For St. Paul this phrase has a quite definite content. The glory of God is that likeness to God which man was intended to wear, and which has been defaced by sin. The specifically Christian hope, then, is that *that glory will be restored*. No wonder that the Christian, possessor of such a hope, exults! The writer then surveys the whole gamut of human experience—all is transformed by the experience of justification. Even tribulation, man's negative, in the hand of God becomes a positive, endurance. Endurance, in its turn, produces character, and character hope, the hope that *never lets a man down*, because God's love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us.

*Here, then, is Christian hope in its bearing on the individual life of the Christian.* St. John, as so often, rightly interpreted St. Paul when he wrote: "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is". That is the core of the Biblical doctrine of salvation, as it is also the core of the Christian doctrine of the Last Things. Depressing phrase! The early Church was far less concerned with last *things*, with dates and events at the End, than with the Person of Him Who was to come, Him at whose coming the process of restoring the lost glory would be consummated. There was One who had begun a good work in them.

Of that there could be no shadow of doubt. If evidence were needed, look *around*—at the changed lives of those who met week by week in common worship. Yes, indeed—look *within*, and catch a glimpse of transforming grace. That same Lord who had begun this good work would see it through till the Day—the glad Day when His reign, now partially thwarted, would be complete in them, and His likeness, now dimmed, would be fully restored. No wonder the cry went up “O our Lord, come!” This was a personal hope of the here and now. The primitive Church did not sing a dirge about passing death’s gloomy portals. It thought in terms of “striking camp and being with Christ—far *better*!” Its tingling (not trembling!) hope was that this body, so often the cause of humiliation and the avenue of sin, would be resurrected in the likeness of His glorious body. A hope such as that has power to nerve and to steady and to stimulate.

*Secondly, in Chapter 8.* If the vision of the Christian hope is majestic in chapter 5, it becomes almost oppressive in its greatness in chapter 8. Here, again, the idea of *glory* is central—“the glory which shall be revealed to us” (v. 8). Naturally enough, then, we find the idea of *sonship* also central, for God’s plan for men can only be seen in terms of His Fatherhood and their realized and developed sonship. But in chapter 8, St. Paul rises out of the sphere of the personal into the realm of the cosmic—“the whole creation” which now “groans and travails in pain”. *Now*, the whole creation is characterized by slavery, by corruption. This is the reverse of what was in the mind of God for His universe. Freedom and the glory of sonship were the divine categories of thought. Were—did I say? God does not go back on His plan. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” “Once they are made, God does not withdraw His gifts or His calling” (Romans xi. 29, A.V. and J. B. Phillips’ rendering).

“In Christ,” writes Father L. S. Thornton, in the second volume of his trilogy on *The Form of the Servant*, “in Christ . . . there is a re-making of the whole world. . . . The primary question confronting us is not: ‘What has Christianity to say about human society or about international order?’ but rather: ‘What is the relation of the new creation in Christ to the original plan of creation?’ Can ‘the mystery of the Christ’ throw light upon that plan which God framed ‘in the beginning’?” The apostolic writers have no doubt that it can do so. Indeed, it would scarcely be possible to over-emphasize the strength of their conviction upon this matter.

“In their statements we can distinguish three strands of thought. First of all, the purpose of God in creation, although frustrated and thwarted by the powers of evil, has none the less been brought to fruition in Christ through His great act of restoration. Secondly, in the new creation thus brought into being, there is disclosed the outline of the original plan. That which was obscured and distorted in the broken mirror of a fallen world can now be seen in Christ in its true proportions and in its original integrity. Consequently, in the third place, what stands revealed in the New Testament is not two plans but one. The mystery of the Christ is not an afterthought, supplementary to the original purpose of God. It was present ‘in the beginning’. The whole design of creation was Christ-centred from the first. It is,

in its very essence, Christological. Jesus is the goal towards which creation moves, because He is, also, the source of its movement. So, too, He is the matrix within which creation received its form, because the Father saw in Him the actual design from which He would fashion it. Only in Jesus, therefore, can man become that significant whole for which he was originally created."<sup>a</sup>

*Here, then, is Christian hope in its bearing on the cosmic scene.* "We were saved with this hope ahead," Moffatt translates the Apostle's word in Romans viii. 24, "the hope being that creation as well as man would, one day, be freed from its thralldom to decay and gain the glorious freedom of God's children" (v. 21). This is a hope on which to stretch the mind and nerve the will. In this hope of individual and cosmic re-creation, restoration in Christ, the disciple may well rejoice, as he is enjoined to do in the ethical section of the Epistle—"rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (xii. 12).

We may pause a moment at this point to remind ourselves that the Christian doctrine of hope on this vast scale has its roots, not in human wishful thinking, not in the projection of our desire for fulfilment and security, but in our very doctrine of God Himself. The soil into which those roots go down is the doctrine of the utter reliability of God. It is not without significance that the companions of "hope" in the Pauline trio are "faith" and "love". *Because* God is essentially reliable, utterly to be trusted, faithful unto and beyond death; *because* God is love, love bereft of all sentimentality, love in the blazing holiness and everlasting compassion which Calvary has shown it to be; *because* those two verities *are, therefore* the Apostle may complete the trio with "hope". There is nothing man-made about this. Hope springs eternal from its source in the character of God as revealed in Christ by the Spirit.

In the Epistle to the Galatians (v. 5), that Epistle which Lightfoot taught us to think of as the rough model of which our Epistle to the Romans is the finished statue, St. Paul delineated our theme in a series of bold strokes. "We," he says (we Christians, in contrast to our Judaizing opponents) "through the Spirit" (in contrast to any fleshly basis of operations) "by faith" in an utterly reliable God (in contrast to any trust in a code, however venerable)—"we, through the Spirit, by faith, eagerly expect the hope of righteousness". How could it be otherwise? In the Incarnation there was manifested a righteousness from God for all who trust (Romans i. 17; iii. 21). Once and for all, that happened at a given time in a given place—the invasion of God for the rescue of man. It was never to be repeated, final in the glory of its perfection. And yet—it is still to be completed. "We eagerly expect the hope of righteousness." There is the tension of the Christian, set as he is to live out his life "between the times". "We eagerly expect" because we know enough of our God to dare to affirm that He who has set His hand to the plough will not look back, however long and arduous may be the furrow, till that "righteousness" is seen through to completion.

<sup>a</sup> *The Dominion of Christ*, p. 4.

*Thirdly, Chapter 15.* We pass, finally, to the fifteenth chapter. If in chapter 5, we saw the Christian hope in its bearing on the life of the individual, and, in chapter 8, in its bearing on the cosmos, in chapter fifteen we view it in its bearing on the missionary enterprise. "Christ," says the Apostle, ". . . became a servant to the *circumcised* in order to prove God's honesty by fulfilling His promises to the fathers and, also in order that the *Gentiles* should glorify God for His mercy" (Moffatt, xv. 8, 9). Then follows a catena of Old Testament passages in which the Gentile hope centred in Christ is sketched. The Apostle concludes with our text: *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

## II

It is this last section which gives meaning to the second section. It is only as the Christian Gospel reaches out to, and is accepted by, men of all races, that wholeness will come to a distracted world. Only as the Body of Christ is built up throughout the world and men find their life within it, will a loyalty be found strong enough to overcome the divisive passions of a disintegrating humanity.

For the heart of the missionary enterprise is this, that our God planned wholeness for His children, for their personalities, for their society, for their cosmos. This plan can only be fulfilled in Christ. He, therefore, who puts his hand into the Hand of God as a fellow-worker, links himself on to omnipotent love and enters into partnership with Him Whose purposes cannot fail, even if it takes æons in which to work them out.

We exercise our ministry within the world-wide Church at a time when it is extraordinarily difficult to assess rightly the progress of the Gospel. The cross-currents of life and thought and of conflicting ideologies are so strong that sometimes we of little faith almost fear the ship is going down, and we cry out "Lord, save us, we perish". We forget the proximity of Him Who is Master of wind and storm, Who never leaves His Church, nor ever will till it arrives at the haven where it would be.

It was Bishop Gore who used to say that the Christian attitude to life should be one of proximate pessimism (or realism) and of ultimate optimism. He was right. We do not well to under-estimate the forces which are against us. He is a fool, as Jesus warned us, who does not sit down and count up the forces arrayed against him, ere he goes in to battle. He can the more readily face these forces since he knows that, ultimately, victory is secure. "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and *have the keys*. . ."

Our difficulty in assessing the progress of the Gospel is the greater in that we are, ourselves, implicated in that progress. We are in the midst of the battle. We look, for example, at China, and we see our brethren and sisters in Christ, cut off from all succour except that of prayer. That, in itself, might appear to be a major gain for the forces of the enemy. Over against that, however, is to be set the fact that, more and more, leadership has been passing into the hands of native Christians. In the Anglican Church, for example, the first Chinese

Assistant Bishop was appointed in 1911, and, as late as 1948, more than half the bishops were foreigners. Then the balance was reversed—just in time.

Or again, we look at Africa, and view with alarm the rise, fast and furious, of race prejudice and of forms of nationalism which, like prairie fires, have much inflammable material on which to feed. Recent events in Kenya have given us furiously to think. He would be a rash man who would dare to forecast how long missionary work, as we know it, will continue in the continent of Africa. The forces of the enemy are blatant and powerful. Over against that, however, we may note powerful movements of Revival. With whatever concern we may regard some of the marks of such movements, we cannot but believe that God the Holy Ghost is doing there a work which will, in the long run, prepare His Church for the ordeals ahead. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Again, the Christian forces in Asia have been, and are, pitifully small. Too late and too few have been at least the Protestant missionaries. That we must admit, and admit with shame. Not more than one person in fifty in Asia is a Christian in this year of grace. That on the one side. But on the other side, it may be pointed out that the influence of Christianity in Asia has been out of all proportion to the number of Christian disciples there. Already China and Japan have had Christian Prime Ministers, and India has seen a Christian Governor, Christian members of Cabinets and Christian presidents of assemblies.

In the field of reunion, it may seem to some of us that to sing "We are not divided, all one Body we" savours of mockery in view of our manifold and grievous divisions. An Indian convert, for example, cannot but contrast somewhat ruefully, the unity of Hinduism with the divisions of Christendom. That must be faced realistically as one of the great deficits on the ledger of Christianity. But, over against it must be set at once the growing consciousness of the sin of disunion and the manifold, and often daring, efforts towards, and experiments in, reunion. If we think especially of South India, we may remember also the words of Bishop Stephen Neill: "There is hardly a country in the world at the present time, in which negotiations between Church bodies are not proceeding with a view to full corporate union".<sup>3</sup> This twentieth century, in which the Christian Society "has become, for the first time in history, a geographically universal society",<sup>4</sup> is, also, the century in which, more than in any other, the Church has moved forward, albeit painfully and with many a setback, towards the goal of union for which it believes its Master prayed ere He went to the cross.

At home, the gap between Church and people still yawns wide. A society which still thinks largely in terms of scientific humanism, finds it hard to concern itself with a religion which is essentially one of salvation. A post-Christian generation, which, as a recent writer has reminded us, only knows Genesis as a biological term and Revelation as the name of a suit-case, is perplexed by most presentations of the Gospel of the Cross. Yet, on the other side, there is cause for hope.

<sup>3</sup> *The Christian Society*, p. 307.

<sup>4</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 295.

Men have lost that proud confidence in physical science which marked the first three decades of this century. There is, among those who think, a humbler approach to the things of God, and an acknowledgement that even science, unaided, may be like a naked razor in the hands of a child. There are even signs in some quarters of a return to Church attendance. At home, as abroad, the situation is not without signs of hope, but it is singularly difficult to assess the real work of such signs.

### III

Professor K. S. Latourette, in his monumental *Expansion of Christianity*, has taught us to think of the progress of the Faith as a series of advances followed by retrogressions, like the waves of an incoming tide. It is a fascinating picture which he has drawn. And it may well be that he is right. Perhaps, in the oft quoted words of A. H. Clough, we may say of the Christian missionary enterprise :

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

I have said that our difficulty in assessing the situation is the greater because we are, ourselves, in the midst of the battle. We need to hear, as did the Seer in the book of Revelation, the Voice of One Who says : "Come up hither, and I will show thee". It is then that we rise above the fallibility of human judgment and forecasting, above those elements of the unpredictable and the imponderable which mock the historian who glibly says, "History repeats itself ; as it was then, so it will be again". Then we see a Throne set, and on it One of incomparable Majesty, and in the midst of the Throne a Lamb as it had been slain, Whose are the blessing and the honour and the glory and the power. *There*, and not in any nice balancing of possibilities and probabilities, there, and there alone, is the basis of the Christian hope, resting on the fact of a God "Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, Who keepeth His promise for ever" ; resting on the Person of Jesus Christ, Who, whenever He is lifted up, does draw men unto Him, and proves Himself to be, in very fact, the Life and Light of men ; resting on the person of the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the Life-Giver, Who still, with the Bride, says "Come". *He* is our basis of hope, who "fills us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost".

Let there be, then, no defeatism in the hearts of any of us, whether we be engaged in the front line battle abroad, or whether we be grappling with the problems of strategy at home. Let us never be so engrossed in the perplexities of the situation that we fail to lift up our eyes to the God Who reigns, and reigns in almighty love and power. "We do not know," writes J. B. Phillips, "the ultimate purpose of God ; the most we can do here is to see and to know 'in part' (1 Cor. xiii. 9). But we can see the out-working in time and space of a vast plan whose roots are in eternity. It is something far greater, more far-reaching, more noble, more generous than most of our forefathers could imagine. We cannot shut our eyes to the breadth and depth of that

purpose. The highest, the best and the most satisfying thing that we can do is to ask to be allowed to co-operate with God's infinite patience in making men whole".<sup>5</sup>

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath been his counsellor ? or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again ? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen (Romans xi. 33-36).*

<sup>5</sup> *Making Men Whole*, p. 71.

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## The Eschatological Aspect of Justification

BY THE REV. DAVID ANDERSON, M.A.

### I

**J**USTIFICATION really has two eschatological aspects, of which the second is a development from the first. There is a sense in which the Age to Come is present now—it has been brought into existence by the Death and Resurrection of Christ. God has entered world history as Redeemer, and the 'kairos' of this event divides time decisively into two parts and opens up a completely new range of possibilities in respect of man's standing with God.<sup>1</sup> Within the faith-relationship the believer enters 'newness of life', and the powers of the Resurrection Age are imparted to him through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this experience the eschatological aspect of Justification is already a reality, for Christ's victory over sin and death and the evil powers which is the mark of the New Age becomes the possession of him who responds in faith to the free gift of God. But it is the nature of the new life to be, at the same time, both present and coming, something that is available here and now and yet also awaits fulfilment in the future. The believer has not yet attained. There remains a judgment and a consummation before eternal life can be a complete reality, though on the basis of his present experience of forgiveness in Christ the believer is as certain of being acquitted at the one as he is of being included in the other. "It is the combination of the *now* and the *not yet* that characterizes the Christian Weltanschauung."<sup>2</sup>

Before attempting to look at this combination of the *now* and the *not yet*, something must first be said about the situation from which deliverance is needed. Redemption is unintelligible apart from the

<sup>1</sup> See Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, part 2.

<sup>2</sup> Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting*.