



Christian Hope as Seen by J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

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Abstract: One of the most pressing issues today is the need to rediscover hope, which can give meaning to life and history and enables people to walk together. After all, it is that spiritual force that does not allow a person to stop or be satisfied with what they already have and who they are. It provides an opening to the future and paves new paths for human freedom. It gives meaning to human life on earth. Christianity has an important role in this regard, as it is an event that was born out of hope and entered history as a living and profound experience of hope. In doing so, it touched some particularly tender place in the human being, which is precisely hope, without which the human being cannot live. The purpose of this article is to show the magnitude and meaningfulness of Christian hope based on the analysis of selected works of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. To answer the question: what, according to him, is Christian hope, what is its basis and what is its specificity? What could it offer to the modern world? It is also an explanation of the thesis put forward by the author, which states that without God and without Christ there is no real hope, i.e. one that corresponds both to who man is and to the aspirations and desires arising from his ontic dignity. The first section addresses the reasoning behind hope from the perspective of anthropology. The second one presents and discusses the theological basis of Christian hope. Meanwhile, in the third section, the originality and specificity of Christian hope is shown.

Keywords: hope, eschatology, future, death, resurrection of Jesus, eternal life, immortality, ascension, the Parousia, Last Judgment

“Hope is among the earthly foods sought in every longitude and latitude, even when it runs out of the mortal coil.”¹ After all, man is not satisfied with what he already has and what he is. He needs the promise of something greater and of more time, thus of what is precisely called hope, without which he cannot live and is unable to take the next step.² Therefore, hope can be described as “a specifically human phenomenon that is neither a privilege of faith nor a natural property, but a rudiment of the existing individual.”³ It grows from the experience of the variability of the world and the human being. It links the present and the future. It opens the space of existence. It invites, so to speak, to life and paves new paths for human freedom. Its peculiarity is expressed in the fact that it “breaks into the closed order and opens the course of existence, opens the course of history ... when it gushes it is ‘aporetic’

¹ Ciechowicz, “Wstęp. Zadatki nadziei,” 6.

² Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 427.

³ Rozwadowski, “Nadzieja egzystencjalna,” 127.

not by lack, but by excess of meaning⁴; that it unceasingly strives to transcend what is temporal and finite, so that in place of the shallower hope, there is a deeper hope, and in place of the transient hope there is an everlasting hope.

Hope, due to the fact that it is a specifically human phenomenon, is a platform for dialogue between the hope that the Gospel brings and the hopes that people have. After all, Christianity from the very beginning was an event internal to human hope. It “entered history as a living and profound experience of hope and began to do the difficult work of sorting out man’s other hopes,”⁵ revealing either their appearance or that they are contained in his hopes. Christian hope has thus affected a special place in man, and continues to do so, as man continues to mature in hope even today. He seeks the hope that surpasses all human possibilities and offers the promise of eternal life. The answer to this search is Christian hope, because it transcends the finite and death. It is connected to the hopes cherished by people and makes the voice of hope from the other land audible in every earthly hope. Hence, one of the significant challenges that contemporary world poses to Christianity today is the justification and explanation of the hope that believers in Christ proclaim and live by. One of the theologians who has taken on this task is Joseph Ratzinger.

This article is an attempt to synthetically present the theology of Christian hope based on an analysis of selected works of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, in which he addresses this issue. Its purpose is to show what Christian hope is, what its foundation is and what its specificity is in the opinion of the author. As well as what new elements it brings to the life of a person and what significance this has for their development. In this discussion, we will first focus on introducing the anthropological dimension of hope and showing that Christian hope corresponds to the deepest aspirations and desires arising from the ontic dignity of a human being, and thus reveals the deepest truth about man and, moreover, points to the ultimate goal of human life. We will then proceed to present and discuss the theological basis of Christian hope, which in the thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is closely related to the person of Jesus Christ, i.e. his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the Second Coming. The final section will demonstrate the specifics of Christian hope, which boils down to the fact that it is a gift given by God through Jesus Christ, thus being linked to faith and love; that it is the hope of eternal life in and with God. The uniqueness of this study lies in extracting the various aspects of Christian hope present in the writings of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI and systematizing them in such a way as to create and present a comprehensive vision of Christian hope as perceived by our author. The result of the analysis, are the following conclusions: first, that Christian hope is not only an indispensable element in the life and spirituality of people who believe in Christ, but it actually forms their foundation and sets them in the right direction,

⁴ Ricoeur, *Podług nadziei*, 287.

⁵ Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 294.

which is the Kingdom of God. Secondly, that hope in the Christian sense is nothing but love, and it is love that has been revealed through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the justification of Christian hope is, according to Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, the person of Jesus Christ.

1. The Anthropological Basis for Hope

One of the most pressing issues today is the need to rediscover hope, which can give meaning to life and history and enables people to walk together. This is because it is the foundation of human existence and is a constitutive aspect of a human being. It is inscribed in the very structure of a person: in their freedom, in their relationship with others and with the world. It is also related to the fact that a man has different hopes at different times in his life. He seeks the meaning of life and fulfillment. He cannot live without hope, because without it his life would lose all meaning and become unbearable. Therefore, the very existence of man “is a perpetual subjection to some kind of hope.”⁶ However, he needs a hope that is lasting and reliable, i.e. one that transcends all temporal goals and does not let him close himself in the present, but opens him to the future and directs him towards something that does not depend on him and is a gift.⁷ Such hope arouses in the consciousness of the community some more or less defined project of tomorrow. Hope, therefore, has to do primarily with the future, from which man expects what he does not yet have. At the same time, it also weaves in temporality. In this way, it reveals a profound truth about the man, namely that “he never completely possesses his essence. He is himself only in the span of the past, through the present oriented towards the future.”⁸ Hope makes us realize that man’s true desire is to look forward to what can be called a lost paradise.

To further elucidate what hope is and to substantiate its anthropological dimension and meaning, J. Ratzinger suggests considering its opposite, which is fear. He points out that there are numerous types of fears that plague us in our daily lives, which are all grounded in fear proper. It is the fear that our lives may not be successful. It is the dread of the emptiness and meaninglessness of life.⁹ This fear is what our author calls the great fear, the essence of which boils down to the fear of losing love altogether. The fear of an unbearable life, which becomes such when a person no longer has any hope. The opposite of this fear is “hope beyond hope,” which is

⁶ Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 303.

⁷ Szymik, *Theologia Benedicta*, 7.

⁸ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 388.

⁹ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 389.

expressed in the confidence that man will be bestowed with the gift of great love.¹⁰ Therefore, according to J. Ratzinger, hope is ultimately directed toward fulfilled love. Only the experience of love and being loved can overcome this fundamental fear that lies behind minor fears. However, because human love and the love that man expects from others is imperfect, he needs and seeks unconditional, infinite and indestructible love. A love that transcends death (SS 26).¹¹ Only love understood in this way can provide the proper support for the hope of all hopes. At the same time, it is what awakens “the greatest hopes,” which include, according to our author, the hope for “the restoration of our original nature, and at the same time the knowledge that such healing is possible.”¹² Therefore, to have true hope means, according to him, to trust in spite of death. To look beyond oneself to a new land, to paradise. To something that man needs but that is beyond his own capabilities.¹³

In light of what has been said, it can be observed that hope has, according to J. Ratzinger, its basis in some kind of deficiency that man experiences in himself. In anticipation of something more that exceeds all that the world and other people can offer him. Hope indicates that the impossible becomes necessary for the human being. At the same time, it offers a deep conviction that this aspiration, which is in each of us, will find its ultimate answer and fulfillment. Therefore, the essence of hope includes the anticipation of the future. At the same time, this “not yet” is somehow already present in it, so that it becomes a force that constantly pushes a man to go further and never lets him stop and be satisfied with what he already has and who he is. Thus, a certain dynamic is present in hope, the essence of which is expressed in the fact that, on the one hand, it transcends everything that is temporary and finite, and on the other hand, it sheds light on our lives, because it shows that what is “not yet – there” is somehow already present. And therefore only a certain kind of presence can, according to J. Ratzinger, justify the absolute confidence that is hope.¹⁴

Hope links the present and the future. This is because it brings with it light, tranquility and joy. It is a response to something that rests deeper and is related to the basic situation of the man in his very existence, which is adequately conveyed by the word “tragedy.” This tragedy is the result of people experiencing and discovering the fragility and accidentality of their lives. At its core is the terrifying possibility that human life may have no meaning and that its end is nothingness and death. What characterizes the discussed situation of the man in his very existence is also the expectation of “paradise,” which the man cannot completely reject. Therefore, hope reaches, according to our author, to the future. It directs a person towards

¹⁰ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 389.

¹¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 234.

¹² Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 391.

¹³ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 391–392; Ratzinger, “Patrzec na Chrystusa,” 387.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 393.

something better and does not let him be content with what he already has and who he is. At the same time, it makes him realize that he can only be satisfied by something infinite, which he cannot achieve by his own efforts (SS 30). Thus, hope, on the one hand, reveals the end of human capabilities and, therefore, humanity's hope of building God's kingdom on earth through its own efforts. On the other hand, it points to the need for great hope, i.e. one that transcends all human hopes and that only God can provide (SS 31).

What justifies, in the end, the necessity of great hope, according to Benedict XVI, is, first of all, man's commitment to making the world more humane, and although he encounters difficulties and setbacks, thanks to hope he does not become discouraged and has the courage to move forward. After all, hope asserts that man and with him the whole of history is in the hands of a loving God, so that everything that exists has meaning and value and is heading towards a real future that reaches beyond death (SS 35).¹⁵ It therefore gives us courage and guides our actions in good and bad moments. Secondly, what justifies the necessity of the great hope that only God can provide to man is, according to our author, the problem of death and the existence of suffering, which are inherent components of human life and whose removal is not within our capabilities. For none of us can secure eternal life or eliminate the force of evil, which is the source of suffering. This can only be done by God, since he is the Lord of life and death. He is God who, having become a man, entered history himself and suffered in it.¹⁶ He alone has the power to "take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), so that there is hope for the healing of the world. This is, as Benedict XVI explains, "about hope – not yet fulfilment; hope that gives up the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations" (SS 36). Lastly, what supports the necessity of great hope is the presence in man of a desire for happiness and a "happy life," i.e. one that will last forever and that can only be guaranteed by God since he is Life itself and the source of life (SS 11).

To sum up, we can say that hope, as understood by our author, is, first of all, that spiritual force that secretly, so to speak, controls human life and enables man to overcome the obstacles of the present and turn to the future. It also determines how people relate to the present. Through it, a man can believe that he is acting in a meaningful way, like someone who knows where he came from and where he is headed. Therefore, the decision to choose hope has a crucial impact on the quality and shape of human life.

Secondly, the relationship between the hope experienced by man and Christian hope can be viewed in a manner analogous to the relationship that exists between nature and grace. After all, since grace does not replace or invalidate everything that has to do with nature, but rather builds on it and perfects it, as classical theology says,

¹⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, "Miejsca nadziei," 627.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, "Miejsca nadziei," 628; Szymik, *Theologia Benedicta*, 263.

it seems that this principle can also be analogously applied to the relationship that occurs between the hope that people have and the great hope that Christianity speaks of. As Christian hope is what, as Ratzinger/Benedict XVI demonstrates, cleanses and gives depth and direction to human hopes and expectations, by virtue of the fact that it points to their ultimate goal, to which all things are directed and which gives meaning to all human life on earth. Moreover, it promises eternal life, which is participation in the life of God himself.

2. The Basis of Christian Hope

According to J. Ratzinger, Christian hope is the very core of Christ's message. Its basis is God and his omnipotence, which was manifested fully in the resurrection of Jesus from death to life and "elevating Him above the Powers of this world, not excluding the hitherto invincible power of death, and placing Him in the eschatological Kingdom of God."¹⁷ Therefore, it says that death has been definitively defeated by God through Jesus Christ, and that therefore a new future has been opened to man and a new hope has been given to him (SS 2).¹⁸ It finds its support and basis in God, who is the Creator and Father of Jesus Christ. God, who brings everything into existence and as the only entity always "is" and is not subject to transience. He abides above the impermanence of man's becoming. Therefore, God is "for us a guarantee; he is for us, by his permanence, a support for our impermanence."¹⁹ He is different from the idols that are transient. He stands above and before all powers (cf. Rev 1:4; 1:17). He is the first and the last, and there are no gods besides him (cf. Isa 44:6). He manifests himself as the Lord of life and God of the living. Therefore, a man can rely on him.

This is confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus, which is "an eschatological act of God, i.e. one after which there will be no more death."²⁰ It is an event that says that Jesus lives forever because God, who is his Father, raised him from the dead. At the same time, it proves that immortality can only offer "being in someone else who still exists when I am no longer there."²¹ It can only be granted by love, "which would take the beloved into itself, into what is its own,"²² so that, as in the case of Jesus, he is not definitively annihilated by death, but saved, i.e. irreversibly brought into the sphere of God's life and participates in the glory, life and power proper to God.

¹⁷ Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Formalne zasady*, 248.

¹⁸ Cf. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Formalne zasady*, 249.

¹⁹ Ratzinger, "Wprowadzenie," 114.

²⁰ Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Formalne zasady*, 252.

²¹ Ratzinger, "Wprowadzenie," 242.

²² Ratzinger, "Wprowadzenie," 244.

Thus, only the love that God is and with which he embraces his Son, who gave himself out of love for people and in total devotion to his Father, is stronger than death. This is possible because God, as has been said, is eternal continuity and existence. Moreover, he represents a loving community of the three Divine Persons who are open to each other in a relationship of love and live in mutual loving relationship with each other. Therefore, the ultimate foundation for immortality and its basis is, according to J. Ratzinger, God and his love, the concretization of which is the love of Jesus for human beings, which, by virtue of being at the same time the love of the Son of God, merges into one with the divine power of life and love itself. Thus, only he who loved for all could give and gave to all the basis of immortality.²³ That is because his love triumphed over death, which God confirmed by raising him from the dead. His resurrection fundamentally changed the state of affairs for all mankind, because along with it, mankind was given the hope of immortality and eternal life, defined as abiding in God beyond the possibility of death. It also revealed that Jesus as the Risen One stands before us and that “in Him the power of love has indeed proved stronger than the power of death.”²⁴

The second important event that is fundamental to the understanding of Christian hope, is its basis and is the fruit of Jesus’ resurrection, is his ascension. According to J. Ratzinger, it expresses more than other celebrated and mentioned holidays of the liturgical year in the Church as to what Christian hope is. This is because it says that our destiny is heaven and unity with God. It means residing where the Risen Christ is, who in his glorified body sits at the right hand of the Father and draws all people to him.²⁵ The Ascension therefore points to heaven as our true future, which has been opened in the Man, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, through whom God entered human history and became one of us. Thanks to this, the union of the human being with the Divine being took place. The possibility of eternal existence was opened to man. Henceforth, heaven is the future of humanity, which it cannot provide for itself. This shows that hope in the Christian sense is always understood, according to our author, as a gift given by God to people in Jesus Christ. It is, in fact, about the union of the world and man with God, which is accomplished in the incarnation of the Son of God. By virtue of this event, Christ unites with us, and we unite with Christ, through which we are able to be united with God, and thus achieve final salvation.²⁶ The confirmation of this definitive destiny of man is precisely the ascension of Christ, which makes us realize that our belonging is already “up there,” that is, in heaven, whose gates have been opened anew to mankind by the Risen Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father.

²³ Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 245. Cf. Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 427.

²⁴ Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 248.

²⁵ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 396.

²⁶ Ratzinger, “Patrzeć na Chrystusa,” 385–386; Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 435.

Finally, according to J. Ratzinger, what sheds light on the understanding of Christian hope and what is the basis of that hope at the same time is faith in the second coming of Christ. It expresses the certainty that the history of the world will be completed and that it will not take place within its own history, nor will it be the work of a man but the work of indestructible love, the victory of which is Christ's resurrection. Therefore, faith in the second coming of Christ is closely associated with the Risen Jesus who, although left us to prepare a place for us in the Father's house is also present and constantly visits us.²⁷ For that reason, the Parousia combines the "now" with the "after," thus revealing the tension that characterizes Christian life, the essence of which is that its "today" is shaped and permeated by "tomorrow" which brings the hope of completing the present history. That completion will be the fruit and outcome of the second coming of Christ, since its purpose is to complete the work of redemption initiated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the salvation of the world, which consists in the transcendence of the world as a world, without which it would remain a world of absurdity and would head towards emptiness. The Risen Christ is a living testimony to that transcendence as he shows the destiny of the history of the world.²⁸ The truth of the second coming of Christ ultimately confirms that the world and human history will come to a definite and God-ordained end, and thus testifies to the fulfillment of the history of the world beyond its history. Hence, that truth brings hope for the fulfillment of the great promise of life with God and in God. Hope not only for the recovery of the lost paradise, the liberation of the created world from its corruption but also for participation in the divine sonship of Jesus, the redemption of the body and the resurrection of the dead to life.

Faith in the second coming of Christ is also, according to J. Ratzinger, related to the Last Judgment, since Christ will come at the end of time to judge the world (cf. Matt 24:29–31; 25:31–46). That judgment will consist of people seeing the truth about themselves but also in revealing the Truth, which is the Son of God who had become a man and thus a model for a man and a measure of the truth about a man. Therefore, the Truth that will judge people is equal to Love, which is confirmed by the fact that it first comes to a man to save him. It takes his place and brings the good news that a man is loved by God who is Truth and Love.²⁹ Faith in the Last Judgment is the belief that Truth is the ultimate judge and Love is the ultimate winner. In that way, according to J. Ratzinger, judgment is combined with the message of grace and with the aspect of hope as God has given the right to judge to the one who, as a man, is our brother and therefore one of us. The one who knows what it means to be a man because he had lived and suffered as a man. Finally, according to the author, the truth about the Final Judgment awakens in us the hope for real justice.

²⁷ Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, II, 303.

²⁸ Ratzinger, "Eschatologia," 202.

²⁹ Ratzinger, "Boża władza," 412.

It assures us that the final say in history does not belong to injustice within it but to justice – which is God, what brings us comfort and hope (SS 44). God’s justice also includes grace, as we learn by looking at Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Therefore, according to J. Ratzinger, there is an intrinsic relationship between justice and grace, also in conjunction with hope. For God’s judgment is, as the author explains, hope – as it is both justice and grace (SS 47). If the judgment was only grace it would mean that everything earthly would be meaningless and that God would not give us a definitive answer to the question about justice. If, on the other hand, it was only justice, it would mean only fear and trepidation. According to J. Ratzinger, what combines justice and grace is the incarnation of God in Christ. For justice is established through him. Therefore, we can already look forward to salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). Grace; however, allows us to hope and walk confidently toward the Judge, since he is also our “Advocate” (cf. 1 John 2:1). Consequently, faith in the Last Judgment is above all hope, because it suggests that God’s final word in history is justice which is able to “revoke” past sufferings and restore justice (SS 43).³⁰

To sum up, one can say that Christian hope, according to J. Ratzinger, is the kind of hope that draws from a Divine source. Its basis is God’s omnipotence, the expression of which is the creation of the world and a man and, above all, the resurrection of Jesus from death to life. That event opened up a real future for humanity. And although it still remains our future, it is already part of our present.³¹ For the goal of Revelation and, at the same time, the goal of mankind has been achieved, which is the union of God with a man and the union of a man with God, as part of which God and the world become one. Therefore, Christian hope is personal and Christological as its basis is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the overcoming of death.³² The confirmation of that Christological character of Christian hope is the fact that St. Paul claims that Christ is “the hope of eternal life” (1 Tim 1:1) and defines him as a personal hope as in him and thanks to him people gain access to the Father.³³ The above is also indicated by the Christian doctrine of heaven, according to which heaven is the place where God and a man meet. It is the encounter of the essence of a man and the essence of God, which takes place in Christ, who “passed life (*bios*) through death and definitely entered into the new life.”³⁴ The confirmation is also the ascension of Jesus Christ, which reveals that our “substance” is in God and that being with God is our future. Therefore, the ultimate foundation of Christian hope is Christ, who is both the object and goal of that hope as his destiny is our destiny. At the same time, it reveals the purpose to which we are all called.

³⁰ Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 428; Ratzinger, “Miejsca nadziei,” 627.

³¹ Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 211–213.

³² Balthasar, *W pełni wiary*, 573.

³³ Smentek, “Wiara jest nadzieją,” 64. Jesus, as Benedict XVI (*Jezus z Nazaretu*, I, 50) says, has brought us God, “and thus the truth of our ‘where to’ and ‘where from?’ He gave us faith, hope and love.”

³⁴ Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 251.

Therefore, God, through Christ, gave us the answer to the question: what is life and death? What is the meaning of human life? Where do we come from and where are we going? He became the companion of our journey. This companionship of God given to people has a face and a name. It is Jesus Christ. Jesus shows people the way beyond the border of death, which he himself overcame and returned from the kingdom of death to keep us company and give us confidence that we can find that way together with him (SS 6).³⁵ Therefore, according to J. Ratzinger, Christ is the true Teacher of life and Shepherd, because he knows the way that leads through the valley of death and to the life in God and with God, who is the source and fullness of life at the same time.³⁶ In this way, Christ gives people “great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments” (SS 27). That hope is God who loved us to the end to give us eternal life. Therefore, the basis of Christian hope and, at the same time, what it directs us towards, is the encounter with the living, personal and loving God (SS 3).

In light of what has been said so far, it can be seen that the only hope for a man, according to Benedict XVI, is love. However, it is the kind of love that was revealed in Jesus Christ: a reliable way of hope for immortality and the possibility of eternal existence with God. The whole life of Jesus and, in particular, his death on the cross, was a revelation of God’s incomprehensible love for a man and that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). For through the death of Jesus on the cross, God sacrificed himself to raise and save man (*DCE* 12). Therefore, the death of Jesus shows that God’s love is a reality that precedes everything and that we encounter that love most fully in the person of Jesus Christ, because he is the presence of God among us and he sacrificed himself out of love for us to reconcile us with his Father and give us a share in God’s life through his resurrection. Hence, Christ is the realized hope and thus the anchor of our trust.³⁷ Since God is love, which, as has been said, anticipates everything, this means that hope in the Christian sense is a gift from God, which we were given when his Son became man and rose from the dead for our salvation. Hope understood in that way is “hope for unlimited love, which is also unlimited power,”³⁸ which exceeds all human possibilities and is a gift that only God can give to a man.

3. Hope as a Distinguishing Feature of the Christian Faith

The distinguishing feature of Christians is that they have – as Benedict XVI writes – the future. “It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know

³⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, “Miejsca nadziei,” 628.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *Prawda w teologii*, 11–14.

³⁷ Ratzinger, “Patrzeć na Chrystusa,” 397; Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 431–432.

³⁸ Ratzinger, “Patrzeć na Chrystusa,” 387.

in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness” (SS 2). That future was made available by the resurrection of Jesus, which revealed the truth that death has been finally defeated because he lives and sits by the right hand of the Father. Since that time, heaven, which had been lost as a result of the sin of the first parents, has become the future of a man. Therefore, Christian hope is distinguished by the experience of meeting the risen Christ with his disciples, to whom he revealed himself as Lord of life and death. That experience reveals the specificity of Christian hope, the essence of which is expressed in the fact that it is a gift and guides a man toward the future, which is eternal life.³⁹ At the same time, that future, on the one hand, is already present and experienced in an initial way, on the other hand, it is still an object of expectation and promise. It awaits its definite fulfillment at the end of time. Thus, it can be said that the uniqueness of Christian hope is expressed in its characteristic tension between “already” and “not yet.”⁴⁰ In that sense, Christian hope is hope for the world, although it is not bound to the world. However, the one who nourishes it already experiences the joy of it.⁴¹ Thus, it becomes a force that pushes men to go beyond themselves and transcend themselves and all that is finite. At the same time, it affects the present because it sheds God’s light on our lives.

Therefore, J. Ratzinger defines Christian hope as an anticipation of what is to come and what is closely related to faith. For hope is the fruit of faith. And faith, based on Heb 11:1, is “the guarantee (hypostasis) of the goods that we expect, the evidence of the reality we do not see.” To fully understand the meaning of the quoted definition of faith and discover its connection with hope, one needs to refer to the two further verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which also contain the word “hypostasis,” as well as to its beginning, where Christ is defined as a reflection of God’s glory and a his essence – “hypostasis” (cf. Heb 1:3). It is also necessary to consider the following two chapters, which mention the relationship between Christ and Christians. That relationship is the result of faith, through which Christians receive a share in Christ and in his life. Therefore, the only true “hypostasis,” “substance,” i.e. a permanent and imperishable reality, is God, who reveals himself and speaks through Christ. Hence, believing in God means, according to J. Ratzinger, reaching the solid ground of true reality, that is, something that lasts and one can rely on. Thanks to faith, one can hold firm to what is hoped for and what is not visible. This is because it already gives something that comes from the expected reality. It brings the future into the present

³⁹ Benedict XVI, “We Have Set Our Hope.”

⁴⁰ The particular expression of hope understood in that way is the Eucharist, since it unites a man with Christ and, through him, with the life of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, through the Eucharist, a man can participate in the life of God. Auer – Ratzinger, *Il mistero dell’ Eucaristia*, 369, 376–377. It is “the foretaste” of the fullness of joy promised by Christ, the anticipation of paradise and the guarantee of the resurrection of bodies. “It sows a living seed of hope into our daily tasks and duties” (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20).

⁴¹ Smentek, “Wiara jest nadzieją,” 67.

time affecting the present and making the present come into contact with the future. Hence, it can be said that hope through faith has captured its ground (SS 7).

There is such a close relationship between faith and hope that, according to the author, it allows to treat both terms as synonyms, an example of which is the case of Abraham, who “believed in hope” (Rom 4:18). Ratzinger makes faith equal to hope, saying that “faith is the substance of hope” (SS 10).⁴² Hope, according to the author, is “the reverse side of the same coin, which is called faith.”⁴³ The above is expressed and confirmed in the classical form of dialogue during the baptism of a newborn, when the parents, on behalf of the child, ask the Church for faith as it guarantees eternal life. In the *Spe Salvi* encyclical, Benedict XVI defines life as the moment that gives ultimate satisfaction; as a fullness that embraces a man and a fullness that a man embraces; as immersion in the ocean of infinite love, which is life in the full sense of the word (SS 12). Hence, the characteristic feature of Christian hope is that it points towards the positive future that can only be given by God, who raises the dead and, in Christ, is for us the promise and fulfillment of the future. According to Christian hope, the ultimate already exists and our life is moving towards the fullness already available through faith, which has a significant impact on the approach of Christians toward the world and what it offers.

According to J. Ratzinger, that reference is well illustrated by the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which material goods (*hyparchonta*) such as wealth or money are contrasted with better and lasting goods (*hyparxin*) (cf. Heb 10:34), which include salvation given by God to men through the blood of Jesus (cf. Heb 10:19). The first of the above-mentioned goods are normal life security and are considered the basis on which they can be built. The second goods form a new and solid foundation for a life based on faith. They are the basis of existence that lasts and that no one is able to take away (SS 8). The purpose of that juxtaposition is to show two ways of living. One way is characteristic of people who do not believe in God; therefore, they have no hope. The second one, on the other hand, is proper to Christians who are ready to give up everything that, from the human point of view, is the safeguard of human existence on the Earth, as they base their lives on a different ground than material goods. On solid ground, which not even death can take away from them.⁴⁴ Therefore, they have complete trust in God and in his promise, which is closely linked to the person of Christ. That promise is not only related to the expected future but, even now, indicates what human life is and what value it has. Moreover, thanks to faith, which gives a firm ground and a solid foundation to their lives, Christians free themselves from the desire to possess and the forces that govern what is tangible – to become truly free people. Hence, what characterizes being a Christian is, according to Benedict XVI,

⁴² Cf. Grochowska, “Nadzieja w *Spe Salvi*,” 33; Smentek, “Wiara jest nadzieją,” 65.

⁴³ Ratzinger, “Spełniona nadzieja,” 630.

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 393–394.

hope, the certainty of which is rooted in Jesus Christ and through which a man is already saved (cf. Rom 8:24) (SS 1).

The fruit of hope is perseverance (*hypomone*) necessary for the believer, despite the encountered difficulties and failures, “to be able to ‘receive what is promised’ (cf. Hbr 10:36)” (SS 9), which is the source of all trust and hope. To be able to persevere in goodness and remain faithful to God. Hence, perseverance means “a life based on the certainty of hope” (SS 9) given to us by God through Jesus Christ. For through his person, God has already communicated to a man what is to come, so that God’s expectation takes on a new certainty. It is the anticipation of things to come that proceeds from the present. Specifically, from the presence of Christ in our lives and from our abiding in Christ and with Christ (SS 9). Therefore, as has already been mentioned more than once, the distinguishing feature of Christian hope is that it is closely associated with Christ, which also applies to Christian perseverance since it draws its strength from its bond with Christ. It allows staying strong despite adversities, following the example of Christ and becoming similar to him.⁴⁵ Finally, Christian perseverance is the ability to suffer for the love of truth and justice, and to suffer with others and for others. That ability, as Benedict XVI explains, “depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon” (SS 39). The one who makes that ability possible and is its unsurpassed model is God, who suffers with us through his Son. He shares and endures the suffering with us. Thanks that, from now on, in every suffering there is present “*con-solatio* ... the consolation of God’s compassionate love – and so the star of hope rises” (SS 39).⁴⁶

The originality of Christian hope is also expressed in the fact that it draws its strength and vitality from prayer, which is a privileged state of learning hope and an expression of the fact that we are unable to reach heaven through our own efforts (SS 32).⁴⁷ According to the author, there is a special relationship between hope and prayer. Through prayer, it becomes clear what hope is. What prayer is, becomes clear when one understands what hope is. That relationship is shown in an exemplary way, according to J. Ratzinger, in the “Our Father” prayer, which has to do with hope from its very essence and is also its interpretation.⁴⁸ It is a response to everyday human fears, such as the need for bread, which protects human life and ensures the possibility of normal functioning. It also protects against the main evil, i.e. losing faith. Finally, it teaches Christians what they should trust as it refers to hope, to the desire for paradise and the Kingdom of God, which is expressed at the beginning

⁴⁵ Smentek, “Wiara jest nadzieją,” 73.

⁴⁶ The aforementioned consolation, which has its basis in the incarnation and co-suffering of God, is for Benedict XVI, according to Jerzy Szymik (*Theologia Benedicta*, 261), “one of the basic arguments for the possibility and truth of Christian hope.”

⁴⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 434.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 401.

of the prayer.⁴⁹ Therefore, prayer, and in particular the “Our Father” prayer, is a sign and expression of hope and, above all, its realization. At the same time, it makes us aware of the truth that to pray means, first, to submit to the dynamics and content of the hope contained in this prayer. Second, to be open and ready to receive the gift that only God can give to a man. That gift is the eternal being with God, towards whom Christian hope is directed and in whom it will find its ultimate fulfillment. Therefore, prayer is what gives Christians great hope and makes them its servants towards others. In that sense, Christian hope is also always, according to Benedict XVI, hope for others. “It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the ‘perverse end’” (SS 34).

Since hope is an active hope and hope for others, it means that it is also hope for this world. For it is the driving force that sustains and transforms our lives. It shapes our lives in spiritual, bodily and social dimensions.⁵⁰ It helps to introduce the right hierarchy of values into the structure of civilization, to discover the meaning and significance of specific events by reading them through the prism of the future. It does not allow to reduce a man to the world of things as it reminds us of the truth that a man is a being created by God and has a supernatural vocation. Thus, Christian hope is a basis for recognizing the exceptional dignity and greatness of a man, regardless of what a man possesses, and confirms that dignity, and with it, affirms the entire earthly existence.⁵¹ It liberates Christians from the obsession of this world and the desire to possess, makes them truly free people, which is one of the essential conditions for the transformation of the world. However, the first and most basic condition is the personal conversion of a man and being in communion with Christ, which empowers us and includes us in his “being for all” and makes him our way of living from that moment (SS 28). Hence, the way inward is at the same time the only and proper way outward, i.e. the way to genuinely engage in the transformation of the world. That commitment finds its proper motivation in Christian hope, the goal of which is the kingdom of God, which is God’s gift to humanity (SS 25). In the opinion of J. Ratzinger, an example of hope understood in that way is St. Francis of Assisi, in whom it gave birth to the courage of poverty and the capacity for community. It allowed for the introduction of new norms of human coexistence in the religious community established by him, which were a form of common anticipation of the future world.⁵² The example of St. Francis shows that looking to the future, towards which Christian hope is oriented, is not an escape from the world but, on the contrary, it has a decisive influence and importance for building the temporal order. It makes us realize that eschatological hope appreciates the presence on the one hand, and does

49 Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 401; Ratzinger, “Patrzeć na Chrystusa,” 398–399.

50 Gniadek, “Moralna moc nadziei.”

51 Smentek, “Wiara jest nadzieją,” 75.

52 Ratzinger, “O nadziei,” 399.

not allow for its idolization and trust in what passes, on the other hand. This is because it unmasks the binding of a man exclusively to the affairs of the Earth, showing the illusory nature of the efforts of humans to build the kingdom of God on the Earth based solely on the strength and capabilities of a man.

Therefore, an important aspect of Christian hope is that it always has a communal character, because the essence of Christian hope is the fact that it is true hope for me, insofar as it is, at the same time, as Benedict XVI explains, hope for others (SS 48).⁵³ That has to do, on the one hand, with the fact that human beings exist in a manifold tangle of interdependence and relationships with other people, and on the other hand, with the fact that Christian salvation is always communal in nature. For Christ loved and redeemed every man and called all men to eternal communion. He restored unity with God and with other people, which was lost as a result of original sin. He included the believers in his “being for all,” so that it also become their way of life (SS 28).⁵⁴ That new way of existence is only possible through remaining in communion with Christ, which leads to unity with other people and people with each other. It binds us to others and makes our lives a life for others. It takes the form of responsibility for our neighbors, which is an expression of God’s love and, at the same time, a specific place for its manifestation.

The communal character of Christian hope is also indicated by what characterizes the life of Christians, that is, the fact that they are pilgrims, wanderers, trying to achieve eternal glory, the synonym of which is a blessed – happy life. However, the achievement of that true life, as J. Ratzinger explains, is “linked to a lived union with a ‘people,’ and for each individual it can only be attained within this ‘we’” (SS 14), which implies and, at the same time, indicates the ecclesial aspect of Christian hope. Although the Christian faith calls on each person individually, at the same time, it wants everyone for the whole. It wants to cover the whole history. That is why the call is addressed to all people. The ecclesiality and communality of Christian hope is expressed in the accountability of one for the hope of the others. Its basis is the single vocation of all people to become the one People of God and attain the eternal life promised to them through hope. This vision of a “happy life” is oriented, according to Benedict XVI, towards community and at the same time it points to something that is beyond this world “as such it also has to do with the building up of this world – In very different ways, according to the historical context and the possibilities offered or excluded thereby” (SS 15). This contribution is the “great hope” that Christ brings to the world. It is God who embraces the universe and grants that which we cannot achieve on our own. The power of this hope is expressed in that it pushes and motivates people to change this world. It also proposes a “new world” that does not

⁵³ Cf. Ratzinger, “Moim szczęściem,” 432–433.

⁵⁴ The existence of Jesus Christ, due to the fact that he is “for many” and “for you,” “enables and creates the union of all with one another through the union with Him” (Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie,” 203).

let hope be tied exclusively to the affairs of this world. Ultimately, Christian hope protects the world and man from despair. However, it is not, as has been shown, only an individual hope, as it always has a communal character. This is demonstrated by the understanding of salvation as a communal reality, which in Scripture is expressed through the depiction of a city (cf. Rev 21:9–27), a garden (cf. Rev 22:1–2), or a wedding feast (cf. Matt 22:1–14) (SS 14).⁵⁵

Finally, an important aspect of Christian hope lies in the fact that it appeals to man's freedom, which is never given to him once and for all, but must be gained again and again for the sake of good.⁵⁶ Freedom, on the other hand, demands the harmonization of different values and assumes that every decision has an individual dimension and is "a new beginning, for everyone who makes it."⁵⁷ It also invites people to draw from the treasury and moral experience of all humanity (SS 24). This means, according to Benedict XVI, that the moral health of the world and the proper functioning of human communities cannot be guaranteed solely by man-made structures. For the latter, even if they are good, are merely helpful and insufficient for the creation and adoption of community order. What is needed for this is a living conviction and the fusion of truth and goodness with freedom, and vice versa. What this conviction can be based on is Christian hope, because it opens up a real future for humanity. It is a hope based on truth, goodness and love. Only hope understood in this way constitutes a mobilizing factor for action that is ready to bear hardships, and at the same time becomes a generous and enthusiastic action. At the same time, it shows that all progress and commitment to the creation of a better world cannot be the proper and sufficient scope of our hope, because man on his own cannot build the kingdom of God in this world or possess the paradise he expects. For without God, according to Benedict XVI, there is neither hope and faith, nor happiness, justice and a life in truth. Nor is there genuine progress or a viable future. Only his love gives us the ability to last and assures us that there is true life (SS 31). This statement shows us that at the center of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's theological thought, is God, and it is God who has taken on our flesh and through this reveals to us our deepest nature and our future. Hence, only the truth within God makes people free and can free modern man from ideologies that offer him self-salvation and the dictatorship of relativism.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, "Patrzec na Chrystusa," 400.

⁵⁶ Gniadek, "Moralna moc nadziei," 4.

⁵⁷ Grochowska, "Nadzieja w *Spe Salvi*," 38.

Conclusions

At the center of the Christian faith is the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which says that he has been victorious over death and participates in the life and glory of God. This truth is decisive for man and his future, as it points to heaven as mankind's final destination. It thus provides the basis and foundation for Christian hope. It also influences the Christian understanding of eschatology as a reality that is profoundly anthropological and, above all, Christocentric: it is anthropological because it concerns man and his future; it is Christocentric because eschatology began with the coming of Christ and is connected with his redemptive death and resurrection, which gave rise to a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Rev 21:1).

The analysis of the texts of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI presented in this paper demonstrates that the specificity of Christian hope is reflected in the fact that, firstly, its purpose is to reach the kingdom of God. In other words, its purpose is the definitive union of the world and man with God. Secondly, it is a gift that was given to people by God through the person of his Son, who became man for our salvation. Thus, what justifies Christian hope is the person of Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of the Word of God and his love. Therefore, Christian hope has a personal and Christological character, i.e. it is in close connection with the person of Jesus Christ. Specifically, with his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the Second Coming at the end of time. Therefore, according to our author, there is no other viable hope outside of Christ, i.e. one that corresponds to the dignity of man. To who he is and to what he is meant to be. For such hope can only be given by the One who is the presence of God himself and who, through his resurrection, offers us a share in his glorious destiny. It makes it possible for humanity to achieve a future that it cannot provide for itself. Such hope can only be offered by the One in whom the power of love proved stronger than the power of death, as confirmed by the resurrection of Christ and him being seated at the right hand of God the Father. Therefore, God in and through Christ has given mankind a new hope. It is the hope of eternal life in and with God. Thus, the God whom Jesus Christ has revealed is, as J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI teaches, the foundation of our hope. Our hope, in turn, is Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, Christian hope is a fruit of faith. What underpins faith is abiding in and with Christ. It also includes prayer, which is the first place where one learns hope and is its concrete sign and expression.

Lastly, hope in the Christian sense is a hope that is, according to Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, closely related to love. A love that is indestructible and that a person can experience in the present. Such love was revealed in Jesus Christ. It is experienced by those who abide in Christ, making them part of his being for others. Henceforth, his "being for all" also becomes a way of living for people who believe in him.

It is noteworthy that Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, in his reflection on hope, links it to faith and love. He says the two should not be separated from each other, because love

can only be properly understood when it is seen and embraced from the perspective of hope and faith. At the same time, he emphasizes the primacy of love, seeing in it the reality that precedes everything. He also reminds us that authentic love is love that is always open to others and to the world around us. This also applies to Christian hope, since it is never just an individual hope, but always has a communal character. After all, authentic hope is invariably a hope for others, and thus an active hope, i.e. one that spurs action and makes one initially change oneself, then change the world in which one lives. It is a hope that finds its deepest motivation in the love of God and neighbor, and at the same time it finds its ultimate fulfillment in love. The fact that Benedict XVI acknowledges, as has been said, the priority of love over the other two theological virtues of faith and hope reveals one aspect of the originality of his thought, the essence of which lies in his reversal of the traditional order of presentation of the theological virtues. This is justified and supported by the new image of God revealed by Jesus Christ and described by the Pope in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, in which he restates and explains the truth that God is Love.

Finally, what distinguishes Christians from non-believers, according to Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, is that they have a hope that derives its certainty from meeting Christ and knowing the true God. Therefore, they have a future, because they know that the end of their life will not be a void. And while they bring “great hope” to the world and are its servants in the world, at the same time they themselves must learn again and again what their hope is. They must discover it again and again within themselves and let it penetrate and shape their lives more and more deeply. They must draw strength and motivation from it to act and transform the world. In other words, they must first live by hope themselves in order to be credible witnesses to it in the world and to be able to proclaim the hope that lifts people out of despair and lets them look to the future with confidence. This hope is the “great hope” that declares that the last word belongs to God, who in his Son has defeated death. For his cross carries with it the fullness of consolation and is the seal of its truthfulness, because it is the sign and expression of God’s incomprehensible love for man, who suffers with people, shares their pain and accompanies them to the end, by which he brings with him the hope of achieving the Easter victory with God.⁵⁸

To conclude, it is worth noting that Ratzinger/Benedict XVI in his reflections on Christian hope presents and captures in an original way, in theological and spiritual terms, what Scripture and the Tradition of the Church and philosophy say on the subject. He engages in a dialogue with modern ideologies that, by proposing human self-salvation and replacing faith in God with faith in the progress and development of mankind without God, are secularizing Christian hope. He contrasts these tendencies with the Christian understanding of hope, which derives its certainty and basis from faith in God and places all its trust in God. Therefore, he

⁵⁸ Szymik, *Theologia Benedicta*, 263.

demonstrates in his writings that the only real hope is the one given and offered to people by God in his Son, who became a man to save us all. For this hope transcends death and opens up a real future for humanity. The strength of our author's theological reflection on Christian hope is that it does not float above the ground, but approaches divine matters in terms of our human experiencing of them, and vice versa. Moreover, the fact that it inspires and stimulates thought and at the same time shows the reasonableness of Christianity and the validity of its proposals is another strong point of the reflection.

The synthesis presented in this paper certainly does not exhaust the entire volume of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's thought on Christian hope. Nevertheless, it can become a point of reference and a contribution to further research. It seems that one of the issues that should be addressed in the future is a demonstration of the contribution that Christian hope makes and can make today, both in building the world and in better human self-understanding. Specifically, it should involve bringing out and showing the praxeological dimension of Christian hope.

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