

“Hope” and the “Last Things”*



Beloved children in the Lord:

I.

At the beginning of the New Year of Salvation 2001, I sincerely pray that this year may be an arena of steadfast and constant “growth” in Christ, of deeper and more fervent communion with the “Lord Jesus Christ Who is our Hope,”¹ with the aid and encouragement of our Lady *Theotokos* the Directress and of all the Saints.

We are now entering into the third millennium after Christ, and we ought to glorify our Lord and God, Who gives us precious time to continue working for the glory of His Name and for our salvation.

This grateful acceptance of the gift of time and its correct use for our transformation and sanctification in Christ should be the common attitude of all the pious children of our Most Holy Orthodox Church; unfortunately, it is not.

As I asserted a few years ago and have affirmed repeatedly since then,² our brethren in Christ who are ailing spiritually in the face of abrupt and dramatic social developments—in the face, that is, of history and time—are experiencing a sense of malaise, a darkening of the vision of the “New Creation”³ that we await, a diminution of hope in Christ, and an eschatological anxiety and agony completely foreign to our Christian hope.

In view of this distressing observation, I would like to address myself especially to our “fainthearted”⁴ brethren in Christ, who journey with uncertain hope in the midst of a world without hope, and to remind them again, in a fatherly way, of *two fundamental truths* of our Holy Faith.

II.

The course of the fallen world of corruption, the passions, and sin into an ever-increasing decadence should not influence us negatively to the point that we become discouraged in the unending struggle for our “renewal” in Christ, which—as a “pledge of the Spirit”⁵—grants us a foretaste, even now, of the eschatological glory of the children of God.

Christian hope does not have a psychological or sentimental basis and starting-point and does not depend on the course of this decadent world, “which hath no hope”;⁶ our hope is Christocentric, “rooted”⁷ and “built up”⁷

on the God-Man; in precise and literal terms, our hope is a Person, it is the very Savior Christ Himself.⁸

Our hope, I emphasize strongly, is a charismatic reality, independent of the course of a world “without Christ,”⁹ in that a Christian—existing, as he does, in the “Babylonian furnace” of worldwide apostasy—constantly aims *to be in Christ and with Christ*, experiences an intense and vital participation in the Kingdom of Heaven, and is thus conscious of the Dew of the Spirit.

A deficiency in this charismatic hope attests, in essence, to the absence of Our Lord from the heart of a Christian, or at least to an inconstancy of His renewing presence within it.

This “absence” or “deficiency” gives rise to a frightening emptiness and a loss of equilibrium in one’s personality, and this, in turn, engenders so-called “eschatological agony,” “agitation” over what is expected to happen before the “End,” anxiety about a cosmic catastrophe of terrifying dimensions, and finally, a ceaseless preoccupation with the literature of “doomsday” scaremongering.

III.

In such a case, people completely forget that at the “end of the age,”¹⁰ that is, at the end of the present order of things, we await the advent, the glorious Second Coming of Our Savior Jesus Christ, at which time all things will be “restored”:¹¹ the universe will not be destroyed, but will be renewed, for “we look for a new Heaven and a new earth”;¹² our bodies will be “transformed” and will be made “like unto His [Christ’s] glorious body.”¹³

We should unceasingly keep before us the hopeful truth that the Incarnation of Our Lord two thousand years ago inaugurated the *Last Times*; ever since then, the Church has been on a journey, continuously “growing”¹⁴ towards her future *fullness*; the Divine “seed” is developing into a “great tree,”¹⁵ in which the righteous will “abide” and find rest; holiness in Christ increases quantitatively and qualitatively, because “where sin aboundeth, Grace much more aboundeth”;¹⁶ the Body of Christ is constantly being built up and awaits its *consummation*, when the number of the “predestined” elect¹⁷ will be completed; and then the Son will deliver all things to His Father,¹⁸ “that God may be all in all.”¹⁹

For Christians, who vividly live out their sanctification and “renewal” in Christ and who believe that every historical moment is the “last hour,”²⁰ it is very clear that the “End” of history means the *consummation* of the work of salvation, the culmination of the Divine Œconomy, the perfect attainment of the Kingdom of God, and the “gathering together”²¹ in the “marriage of the Lamb.”²²

To be sure, this consummation will come by way of *eschatological tribulations*: “For then shall be great tribulation.”²³

• But for the living bearers of hope, “those days shall be shortened”²³ and they will be given the ability to endure “unto the end”²³ and consolation, insofar as they will realize that those “sorrows”²³ herald the birth of the *New Creation*, the “*New Jerusalem*.”²⁴

• For the “many,”²⁵ that is, those who do not have hope, those who do not constantly and consistently seek after *being in Christ and with Christ*, those who do not keep vigil and pray that they may be found “in peace” “without spot and blameless” before Christ the Savior,²⁶ “those days” will be days of lamentation and mourning—albeit, futile and useless and, unfortunately, also eternal.

IV.

It is obvious, therefore, that when we do not keep in mind or experience in our lives *these two very basic truths* of our Holy Faith—that is, our Christ-centered hope and our joy in Christ over eschatological *consummation* and *fullness*—, then the center of our hope and expectations is displaced.

In that case, since our life has ceased to be Christ-centered, we feel “insecurity”; we are desperately preoccupied with various “signs”; we do not delight in the true “Sign,”²⁷ the “Great Sign,” that is, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Everlasting Sign”²⁸ spoken of by the Holy Prophet Isaiah.

Let this Sign be the constant center of our hope; let this Sign absorb our attention; let this Sign be the foundation of our spiritual edifice; let this Sign be unceasingly on the horizon of our eschatological expectations; let this Sign do away with feverish mathematical calculations about the “End,” because this Sign, Jesus Christ, is “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the Beginning and the End,” “the First and the Last,” “He Who is, Who was, and Who is to come,”²⁹ unto Whom are due all glory, honor, and thanksgiving, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages. Amen!

* Source: *Άγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 300 (January-February 2001), pp. 1-3.

Notes

1. I St. Timothy 1:1.

2. See “Nativity Encyclical” for 1996 (*Άγιος Κυπριανός*, Nos. 274-275 [September-December 1996], pp. 161-162, 166).

3. II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.

4. I Thessalonians 5:14.

5. II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14.

6. I Thessalonians 4:13.

7. Colossians 2:7.

8. I St. Timothy 1:1; St. Ignatius the God-bearer, *Epistle to the Trallians* II.2 (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. V, col. 676B), and *Epistle to the Philadelphians* XI.2 (*Patrologia*

Graeca, Vol. V, col. 708A).

9. Ephesians 2:12.
10. St. Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.
11. Cf. Acts 1:6, 3:21.
12. Revelation 21:1; II Peter 3:13.
13. Cf. Philippians 3:21.
14. Ephesians 2:21-22, 4:16.
15. St. Luke 13:19.
16. Cf. Romans 5:20.
17. Revelation 7:1-8; Romans 8:29.
18. I Corinthians 15:24.
19. I Corinthians 15:28.
20. I St. John 2:18.
21. II Thessalonians 2:1.
22. Revelation 19:7.
23. St. Matthew 24:21, 22, 13, 8.
24. Revelation 3:12, 21:2.
25. St. Matthew 24:12.
26. II St. Peter 3:14.
27. St. Luke 2:34.
28. Isaiah 55:13.
29. Revelation 1:4, 8, 17; 4:8; 21:6; 22:13.