

Christian Hope and Europe's Future

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The crisis of Europe is omnipresent – whether with regard to the functioning of the institutions in the European Community or with regard to the conflicting expectations in the different countries and nations in Europe. One would not need to live in the United Kingdom during and after the campaign on membership in the European Union and the Brexit decision on 23 June 2016 in order to be aware of this crisis. Rather, the recent wave of immigration into Europe, and not least into Sweden and Germany, the crisis in Greece, the crisis of the Euro, all these many forms of crisis have led to a sharpening of the focus on everybody's take on Europe and its future. However, the British Referendum has helped to concentrate the minds of all people engaged with Europe and its future to rethink the European project as a whole as well as the level of their respective contributions to it.

But before reflecting on Europe in more detail, it may be worthwhile to widen the perspective for a moment beyond the continent of Europe and beyond the question of Britain's forthcoming departure from the European Union, to the ongoing process of globalisation and to the breathtaking revolution in technology and its specific impact on all of humanity.

Nobody can deny that we all live in an ever more interconnected world and that this process of globalisation is irreversible. Even if we may long for a different world, even if we may watch countless episodes of *Downton Abbey* and the like in order to nurture nostalgia for a world long gone, even if we choose to hide behind old or new nationalistic and sectarian walls, globalisation is here to stay. Hence, we must tackle this development as critically and constructively as

we can. To be sure, the process of global interconnection has revealed serious fault lines in the different parts of our one world; it has exposed old and new inward-looking tendencies in nations, cultures and religions; and it has caused deep unrest as well as great excitement. Whatever our approach to it might be, globalisation is continuing with ever increasing speed.

Globalisation in conjunction with the massive technological revolution now underway has made not only the middle classes of this world increasingly insecure: Jobs are quickly disappearing as human labour has become unneeded or more expensive than robot labour; the mechanics of consumption switches from direct human contact in the market place to a more and more digitalised pattern of trade and, as a result, contributes to an increasing mediatisation and atomisation of human life and human connectivity. While the first waves of industrialisation and the related urbanisation did not significantly reduce the level of human encounter and exchange as such, the current digital revolution widens the field of potential encounter and exchange to include the entire planet and beyond, yet at the same time significantly diminishes concrete experiences of personal encounter and unmediated human relationships. The consequences of this development are only beginning to dawn on us now.

Since the High Middle Ages western intellectuals have been fighting for human emancipation, autonomy, and full subjectivity. However, the human subject that has emerged in the West thanks to Humanism, Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment finds herself rather more isolated and lonely in today's world and longing for

more fulfilling forms of genuinely human relationships.¹

These and related developments are of course not limited to Europe but concern all human beings alive and not yet born today. And the various forms of reaction to this rapidly changing world are in themselves not particular to European processes either. A crude struggle for political power and domination in our fluid world can be observed in Russia, China, India, the Middle East, Brazil, and elsewhere. The instrumentalisation of religion in this struggle is not unique to Europe either as recent developments in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, USA, and the Middle East only illustrate too well. Challenged by globalisation and digitalisation, political elites seem intent to control the flow of information and to mastermind the emotional households of their people in order to hold on to power. While controlling the flow of information proves ever more difficult and cumbersome (e.g., Panama Papers, WikiLeaks, et cetera), managing the emotional households of people seems a more promising endeavour because it appeals to a sense of belonging, however fictional, which has become ever more precious as traditional forms of connectivity are rapidly disappearing.

Confronted with atomisation and resulting powerlessness, threatened by unemployment, and challenged to cope with cultural, religious, and social forms of otherness, many people now turn to groups that promise affinity, stability, meaningfulness, work, and simplicity. To quote Francis Fukuyama, democracy as such cannot provide identity.²

The tribal forms which we can observe to be on the rise today are at least in part reactions to the challenges of the new global and digital complexity (*Unübersichtlichkeit*). When con-

fronting this tribalism it would not be helpful to deny that our lives are indeed significantly affected by ongoing complexification processes. Ultimately, however, the recipes of a pre-industrialised past will not suffice in our radically different environment. How then should we organise our societies and our global order today? What role can religion in general and Christian religion in particular play in this newly configured world? What expectations of the future are appropriate in this radically new and different environment? What could Christian hope and its wisdom contribute to the debate on human future today?

Obviously, in this article I cannot deal with all of these questions. With appropriate modesty, therefore, I propose, first, to discuss some neo-tribalist and populist approaches to the crisis in Europe. Second, I shall explore the promise of Christian hope. And third, I shall offer a few markers on how an enlightened Christian hope may help to promote a more promising approach to Europe's future.

The Danger of Neo-Tribalism and Populism in Europe

Today, everywhere in Europe we can observe new expressions of tribalist and populist thinking and acting. The ongoing refugee crisis has functioned as a catalyst for such thinking and acting. However, tribalism has always been a more or less visible feature in European societies whereas populism is a more recent phenomenon.³ Tribalism has to do with a basic instinct of defining a "we" against a potentially threatening "other," while populism claims that only my group can genuinely define proper belonging to a nation,

¹ For a discussion of "relation" as characteristic for our time's search for meaning see Werner G. Jeanrond, "Liebe, Hoffnung und Glaube als Kategorien relationaler Theologie", 161–173 in *Rationalität im Gespräch – Rationality in Conversation: Philosophische und theologische Perspektiven – Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*. Christoph Schwöbel zum 60. Geburtstag (ed. M. Mühling; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016).

² Francis Fukuyama, "Demokratie stiftet keine Identität", 49–50 in *Die Zeit* 13/2016.

³ Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as follows: "Populists claim: 'we are the people!' However, they wish to convey – and this is always a moral and not an empirical statement (and at the same time a political challenge): 'we – and only we – represent the people.' ... Populists are by necessity antipluralist; whoever contradicts them and questions their moral claim to sole representation does automatically not belong to the true people." Jan-Werner Müller, *Was ist Populismus? Ein Essay* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 18–19 (my translation).

religion, social group et cetera. The primitive division between us and them is exactly this: Primitive. It promises to offer belonging and protection against any danger within a real or imagined group deemed to be able to guard the self against concrete or imagined others. Tribalism has always been a feature of human society and of religious traditions, although an evil one because it limits human development, renewal, imagination, and transformation. Primitive tribal reactions to otherness appear today in the shape of social, cultural, religious, economic, and political attitudes, movements, and extremist parties all over Europe. And populist ideologies can be observed in many European countries and beyond.⁴

France for the French, Sweden for the Swedes, Finland for the *true* Finns, Britain for the self-appointed guardians of *British values*, especially in England whose noisy value defenders long for liberation from Europe. *Mother Russia* is back again, and in Poland a massive fight for so-called traditional Polish values is ongoing. Humorous banter about cultural differences can indeed be liberating and exhilarating; however, what is going on in Europe today is deeply disconcerting and calls for resistance.⁵ The nationalistic and populist noises in England, for example, are frightening: What does it mean to be *liberated* from Europe? To be liberated from European immigration? To be liberated from otherness? To be liberated from Brussels – the new fictional *Rome*, as it were, in many English minds. Is *Brussels* now the new anti-Christ? And even, after the Brexit decision the nasty tribalism which has come to the fore during the months of campaigning for or against Europe is continuing. In Europe, it seems, we are confronted once more with a massive problem of relating to otherness.

As already indicated, even religious tribalism raises its ugly head. Sectarian forms of Roman Catholicism have come out of the woodwork ever since Pope Francis has refused to provide the level of dogmatic recognition and security which certain Roman Catholic groups claim to require. As long as the pontiffs of the past have stilled such longings we have been admonished by the self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy to be

more obedient to the (infallible) popes. However, as soon as it has become obvious that the present Pope displays less of an interest in neo-Platonist upholstery and more of an interest in the factual situation of human beings and their needs, especially the poor, exploited, and marginalized, as well as those whose life and faith projects have not been perfectly successful, some bishops, cardinals, and lay people have started to revolt in favour of more security, clearer restatements of orthodoxy, cleaner boundaries to and subsequent exclusion of others. Such groups might find it difficult to cope with the freedom of the Christian believer in a church that clearly affirms human freedom as precondition for love – the love of God, of neighbour, of God’s creation, and of one’s own emerging self.

For a number of years, originally in connection with the failed European Constitution project, Christian voices were heard in favour of identifying the “soul of Europe” in expressly Christian terms.⁶ It was argued that Europe had always been Christian and that therefore any European constitution ought to display explicit references to God in the opening paragraphs of such a document. These voices hoped that such a reference would safeguard a clear emphasis on those religious values that, as it was claimed, had been underlying and inspiring the process of European integration ever since its beginnings in the aftermath of the Second World War. However a number of states, including France, Belgium, and Northern European states, rejected such a reference and instead proposed a very general mentioning of the significance of the cultural, religious, and humanist heritage of Europe as a basis for the development of universal values. Hence, neither God nor Jesus Christ was named in the proposed text of the constitution.

At the time I welcomed the exclusion of any reference to God, Christ, or the church in such a constitutional framework, because then as now I understand the European project first of all in

⁴ Cf. Müller’s many examples in *Was ist Populismus?*.

⁵ See Müller, 22–23.

⁶ See in this context also Werner G. Jeanrond, *Kyrkans framtid: Teologiska reflexioner III* (Lund: Arcus, 2012), 151–170 and Werner G. Jeanrond, “The Future of Christianity in Europe”, 182–200 in *Recognising the Margins: Developments in Biblical and Theological Studies: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne* (eds. W. Jeanrond & A. Mayes; Dublin: Columba Press, 2006).

terms of a community of law and not in terms of a homogeneous community of views of life. For me, Europe does not have a soul; rather Europe offers a constitutional space to all of its citizens and legal protection for the development of their respective religious or non-religious humanist convictions. I wish to argue that the religious fabric and future of Europe must be recognised as radically pluralistic. Any reference to a myth of a Christian Europe ought to be exposed as a dangerous tribal pursuit. Unfortunately, this foundation myth is still alive and kicking – not only in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary at this point in time.

In the perception of many, Europe has been a Christian continent during the greater part of the last two thousand years. In spite of the fragmentation of the Christian church into a Western and an Eastern church, in spite of the age-old and continuous presence of Jews and Muslims in many parts of Europe, in spite of the separation of the Western church into Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations, in spite of the secularization process following the Enlightenment critique of church and religion, many continue to associate Europe with a monolithic Christian heritage.

Of course, in its different and ambiguous shapes and forms Christianity has indeed contributed to the religious, cultural, legal, social, political, scientific, et cetera, development in Europe and to the emergence of pluralistic societies there.⁷ At the same time, there cannot be any doubt that one of the interests behind the drive for a distinctly Christian identity in Europe has been the concern to keep religious and social otherness at bay: the myth of a *Christian Europe* has been erected against Judaism, against Islam, against socialism and communism, against secularism, in short against any movement deemed to be *other* and hence deemed to be a threat. In that sense, Christianity has been used by some defenders of an integrated Europe in order to provide the European project with a strong internal identity and cohesion. At times, this myth has suited Church leaders; at times it has been in-

strumentalised by political rulers in Europe. In whatever form, this foundation myth has always been problematic and dangerous.

Europe has no soul. It is neither an exclusively Christian space, nor is its future the exclusive concern of Christian believers and churches. Europe is a geographical and legal space where people of different religious and secular orientations and backgrounds are called to learn to live together in closer co-operation and deepening mutual respect. Such a life together can never be free from conflicts, debates and pluralism; instead it always requires new attempts at understanding each other. The best way to deal constructively with difference and otherness is a culture of love.

To be sure, Christian religion, alongside Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions should actively contribute to the emergence of a culture of love, leading to mutual understanding, increased respect, and the establishment of just institutions.⁸ This seems to me to be a more appropriate approach to a life together that accepts and relishes otherness and difference than any futile search for a European soul or identity. Moreover, in such a pluralistic space, neither primitive tribal identity politics, nor populist politics of belonging through exclusion, nor shallow forms of civic religion are either necessary or helpful. How might the Christian praxis of hope be able to contribute to such a European development?

Exploring Christian Hope

Traditionally, faith has been considered to be at the centre of Christian religion, whereas love and hope have at best played second fiddle.⁹ There are a number of reasons for this predominance of faith in Christian thinking and praxis. One of them has been the appeal to faith in times of conflict when one was keen to determine the bound-

⁷ Cf. Rupert Shortt, "How Christianity Invented Modernity", 3–5 in *The Times Literary Supplement* No. 5933 (2016).

⁸ Cf. Paul Ricœur's reference to just institutions in Paul Touati, "Une vie exemplaire: Douze autobiographèmes de Paul Ricœur", 606–616 in *Förbistringar och förklaringar: Festskrift till Anders Piltz* (eds. P. Beskow, S. Borgehammar & A. Jönsson; Ångelholm: Skåneförlaget, 2008), 614.

⁹ Cf. also Jeanrond, "Liebe, Hoffnung und Glaube".

aries of the Christian church: who is in and who is (or ought to be) excluded? Love, of course, is hardly a useful concept in order to terminate relationships with others. Rather, love lives of otherness and of relating to the otherness inside and outside of me, including God's radical otherness.

While love, by nature, is inclined to transgress boundaries, faith, especially when understood as *fides quae*, can more easily be reduced to a list of propositions requiring assent.¹⁰ And if such assent is not forthcoming, a case of dissent can easily be constructed and upheld. Not only as a result of Reformation and Counter-Reformation such reductions have been flourishing, thus playing down the relational nature of faith (*fides qua*) in order to profile the content of faith (*fides quae*) with its respective beliefs, doctrines, catechisms, and lists of excluded propositions. The urge to establish the orthodoxy of one's own faith over against the assumed incomplete or heretical faith of others has led to an increased objectification and tribalisation of faith: Faith itself has become an object of faith. Generations of Christians have been brought up to believe in Christian beliefs, to argue for their respective orthodoxy, and to campaign against any deviation from their received tradition of faith.

Wars have been fought over faith and in the interest of defending one's particular set of beliefs against others. Even today, as we all painfully know, the defence of faith is often cited in order to legitimize violence against others – to sanction tribalism, populism, sectarianism, gender oppression, and interreligious and interdenominational warfare. Faith as an object of faith has been a dangerous liability (not only) for Christians.

As far as I know, no wars have been fought over love. Of course, in Christian history there have been many theological controversies about the question of whose understanding of love was truer. Loving God, one's neighbour, and the self in response to the multiple love command in the Bible has been accepted Christian praxis, although debates over the right conceptualization of

this love command are continuing. And like faith, also love has at times been reduced to an object of right doctrine, right faith, and thus been removed from the horizon of relational human praxis. For both Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, for example, love was ultimately controlled by faith.¹¹ Hence, the praxis of actual relationship with the human and divine other was adjudicated by appeals to right doctrine. The necessary border transgressing urge and experience of love was thus reined in with references to objectified faith and its doctrines.

Hope has not been as controversial in Christian life as either faith or love.¹² Hope seldom causes much debate, and no thinking Christian has ever seriously questioned the significance of hope for Christian life in this world – either with regard to the horizon of expectation for salvation and reconciliation, or with regard to expectations of an eternal life with God even beyond our individual death. Everybody will agree that hope involves perspectives of the future, of expectation, and of fulfilment of the divine–human relationship. Thus, hope, faith, and love all point to particular aspects of this original relationship between God and humankind within God's great project of creation and reconciliation. Like love and faith and together with both, hope initiates a human praxis in response to God's invitation to enter into relationship with God through following Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit. God's promise of covenant and fulfilment points to hope as the temporal framework for both love and faith.

The Christian understanding of hope has emerged from particular experiences in the Jesus movement and its rich Hebrew heritage. While hope as a universal phenomenon signifies human attention to and expectation of the future of individual persons, movements, communities, societies, and the universe at large, Jewish and Christian understandings of hope have concentrated

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between love and orthopraxis see Werner G. Jeanrond, "Orthodoxie und Ideologie: Ambivalenz und Potenzial von Orthodoxieansprüchen", 150–159 in *Concilium: Internationale Zeitschrift für Theologie* 50 (2014).

¹¹ Cf. Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 67–103.

¹² Cf. also Werner G. Jeanrond, "Hope and the Critique of Hope – Christian Perspectives: The Uneasy Relationship between Faith, Hope and Love in Christian Praxis", 63–82 in *Hope: A Form of Delusion? Buddhist and Christian Perspectives* (ed. E. Harris; Sankt Ottilien: EOS, 2013).

on the human relationship with God, a relationship which originates in God's gracious, creative and reconciling presence in this universe. Thus, Jewish and Christian expressions of hope are not limited to any single term, such as *hope*, *Hoffnung*, *espérance*, *elpis*, *spes*, *hopp* et cetera; rather these and related terms express significant experiences of women, men, and children of being linked to God with regard to their future as persons, communities, and humanity as a whole.

Central narratives in the Hebrew Bible (such as the story of Abraham's and Sarah's vocation, their pilgrimage and trust in God's promises, and Moses's conversion experience at the burning bush that the future of his people and his own personal future were intricately linked to God's plan and promises) articulate future perspectives and possibilities springing from faith and trust in and love of the living God, who is intimately involved in this universe and in human history. Moreover, the emerging Jewish and Christian faith traditions were characterized by messianic expectations, for instance, that salvation, eternal life, peace, justice, restitution, and resurrection are works of God which come to God's people (*adventus*) as gifts; they are not at the disposition of the people individually or collectively. Jewish and Christian understandings of the future recognize and honour the particular nature of the divine-human relationship to which God has invited all women, men and children. Thus, all human expectations, desires and hopes are confronted at once with the horizon of a future opened by God and with the purifying fire of the burning bush. Acknowledging God as creator and recognizing always afresh that the human future is a gift from God are two sides of the same coin.¹³ Moreover, affirming that God's creation is good (Gen. 1–2) and expecting that the future made possible by God's grace will also be good are intimately connected activities of trust.

In view of these comments it will be obvious that such a hope held by Jews and Christians differs radically from human optimism:

Optimism is no bad thing in itself. It is a kind of implicit confidence that things are going well in

the present situation. Optimism may be simply a feature of temperament expressing itself in a spontaneous logic: we can manage and cope in a world that is reasonably predictable. Optimism is happy enough with the system. In contrast, genuine hope is always "against hope." It begins where optimism reaches the end of its tether.¹⁴

The optimist cannot despair, but neither can he know genuine hope, since he disavows the conditions that make it essential.¹⁵

Whereas optimism springs from trust in one's own human position, plan, power, potential, and prediction within the system, Jewish and Christian hope as the result of trust in God and in God's promises must be critical of any totalising system.

It is interesting to note that both optimism and hope involve emotions. Emotions associated with optimism include feelings of satisfaction about the reliability of things and the predictability of human systems and processes, whereas emotions associated with hope include feelings of being part of ultimate relationships of love and goodness but also feelings of fear and frustration about facing unpredictability and possible upset and surprise in a relationship with the mysterious otherness of God. Hope enjoys the spectrum of emotions emerging from communities of trust, from expectation, desire, love, and joy, but also from respect, fear, frustration, and transformation.

Jews and Christians, as peoples of God, are peoples of hope.¹⁶ The particular expressions of hope in both traditions need to be assessed against the claims of the one ultimate human hope, namely to be eternally related to God. Anthony Kelly speaks in this context of the need to liberate all human hopes to their fullest dimensions.¹⁷ Jews and Christians thus advance a bold claim: They are peoples of hope; they expect the advent of a great future; and they are prepared to

¹⁴ Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 5.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2015), 136.

¹⁶ On Jewish hope see Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 114–146.

¹⁷ Kelly, 13.

¹³ Cf. Gabriel Daly, *Creation and Redemption* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988).

shape and live their present lives accordingly. Although Jews and Christians share in this praxis of hope, their particular religious experiences and expressions have differed since the parting of their ways in the early church.

For the emerging Christian movement, the experiences of the ministry, violent death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were increasingly linked to the development of its particular understanding of hope. The announcement of God's coming reign by Jesus of Nazareth and the related call to conversion, the authentication of both through God's resurrection of the crucified Jesus, and the understanding that these events ushered in the end of the ages opened a fresh appreciation of the advent of God's future: For the mortal individual, who could look forward to being raised by God, and for all humankind, which had been surprised by God's action in Jesus, the eternal son and Messiah, in this created universe. This already-not-yet tension of God's action on behalf of God's coming reign points to the significance of hope – now enriched through the dimensions of patience (notably in the Gospel of Mark and the Book of Revelation) and perseverance (particularly in the post-Pauline literature). The apostle Paul had widened the scope of hope to include all of creation:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8:22–25, NRSV)

The Letter to the Ephesians stresses that hope can only be found in God. Christians who were gentiles by birth lacked hope before their conversion (Eph. 2:12).¹⁸

However, both the “delay of the parousia and the outbreak of persecution against the Church challenged the NT [New Testament] authors to rethink the notion of hope and, to a degree, to

spiritualize it.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, the understanding of hope as confidence in God, “whose goodness and mercy are to be relied on and whose promises cannot fail”²⁰ is present everywhere in the Bible notwithstanding regional variations of expression and emphasis. It longs to be expressed and Christians need to be ready to account for it:

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15b–16a, NRSV).

This cursory look at biblical reflections on hope has demonstrated that, for Jews and Christians, hope addresses the perennial human question: From where do we come and where do we go? Hope as a future oriented relational praxis provides answers to the quest for meaning, to questions about the purpose of life, liberation from suffering, injustice, sin, and death, and the meaning of the universe and its final destination. Moreover, in biblical imagination, the personal and universal dimensions of hope are often interwoven and connected with God's creative and reconciling presence. Hence, hope concerns the great expectations of universal love, justice, and happiness. All relations within the divine–human network will be well – that is the horizon of biblical hope whatever their particular expressions might be. This hope for a comprehensive *shalom* and just fulfilment coming from God affects and guides the way Christian men, women and children live in the here and now. Changing circumstances lead to new concentrations on hope and point to the need for a critique of any particularistic or tribal hopes and of any instrumentalisation of hope by political interests.²¹

¹⁹ Terrence Prendergast, “Hope (NT)”, 282–285 in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 285.

²⁰ A. Barr cited in Prendergast, 282–283.

²¹ For a helpful distinction between political theology and theopolitics see Jayne Svenungsson, *Den gudomliga historien: Profetism, messianism & andens utveckling* (Göteborg: Glänta, 2014), 249. While political theology is tempted to support politics with theological claims, theopolitics knows that all existing legal-political forms of order need to be assessed in the light of the prophetic wisdom that God's coming

¹⁸ Cf. also Joseph Ratzinger, “On Hope”, 301–315 in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (2008), 301.

At best biblical expressions of hope attempted to widen the network of hope as broadly as possible. This universalising trend in biblical hope builds on the insight that by its very giftedness and vocation the praxis of hope must transcend my own or our own particular hopes and include the neighbour, but ultimately also the other and the stranger – the person in need and, of course, the refugee from war and persecution. Hope is universal. Nobody can hope for himself or herself alone. Hence Christian hope, too, is by necessity universal in its scope.

The experience of tension between the coming reign of God, on the one hand, and the challenge to live constructively in this world here and now, on the other hand, has been interpreted in different ways. The question to what extent and how human beings are called and able to contribute to God's reign in their lives (always conditioned and limited by space, time, and language) has been at the forefront of theological debate. Attempts to identify particular human plans with religious, social, and political manifestations of the reign of God have led to tragic and at times violent confusions concerning the interplay between God and human beings, while attempts to prescribe human passivity as the only appropriate attitude in view of God's absolute sovereignty have weakened human resolve and resistance to all kinds of ideological tyrannies.²² Individual life projects and political theologies may thus be empowered or limited by hope. Hope remains an ambiguous phenomenon.

This insight into the ambiguity of hope promotes a Christian critique of all those utopian projects which aim at perfecting human nature and society through exclusively human acts, but also a critique of those internal Christian projects which either identify particular ecclesial manifestations with ultimate features of God's reign or contrast in a dualistic fashion a totally new world to come with our present world as completely fallen.²³ How are Christians to navigate

their lives between the vocation to contribute to the coming reign of God in the freedom of their created existence and the hope that God's sovereignty will judge and perfect this universe and our lives at the end of time? Moreover, how are Christians to co-operate with others who do not share their hope? How should Christians relate to competing hopes, be they secular or religious in origin? These questions bring us back to the interface between Christian hope and Europe's future.

Christian Hope and Europe's Future

Christians are people of hope. They nurture expectations and look to the future. They are political beings. They feel called to build a culture of love in which they can articulate their expectations for the future, in our case for the future of Europe in a globalising world. Only a culture of love offers the necessary relational framework for dealing with otherness – the otherness of my neighbours, the otherness of our universe, the otherness of my own emerging self, and the radical otherness of God. According to Christian wisdom and experience, love is the only way forward for approaching this interlinked fourfold manifestation of otherness.

However, love must not be confused with like. The point is not to *like* everything and everybody – not even God could seriously issue such a command – rather to *love* means to respect the other as other – even if I do not like him or her. Hence, love implies hard work and intimate engagement, and, contrary to popular opinion, love has nothing to do with sentimental feelings of harmony or nostalgic romanticism.

Instead, Christian love is eschatological: It is bound up with hope and with hope universal. That means it looks to the future together with all human beings that have lived, live now, and shall live in this universe. Christians cannot imagine a future without all the others. Hence, I must reject two prominent Christian approaches to the world: first, I reject any aspiration that Christians are called to erect an anti-world in Europe – individually or collectively. And secondly, I reject the division of Europe into a secular and a religious sphere. Christians share the Eu-

shalom will always transcend any such human constructs and systems.

²² Cf. Jeanron, "Hope and the Critique of Hope", 65–66.

²³ For a brief discussion of Augustine's theology of the fallen world, see Jeanron, *A Theology of Love*, 45–65.

ropean space with other men, women, and children. Christians participate in the shaping of Europe's future. Thus, they take their place within the orchestra of voices and expectations without trying to subject all other faiths and beliefs to their own.

Christian love, hope, and faith do not limit themselves to interpreting the world; rather their goal is to change and transform it, though not against others, but with others. Christians share this ambition to shape the world not only with the two other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam, but with all people of good will. Moreover, Christians remain committed to seek the truth in love. Hence, their respect for otherness does not amount to an attitude of "let a thousand flowers bloom," but to a critical and self-critical interpretation of all hopes, plans, and visions of the future, approached through the perspective of God's gracious attention and loving recognition.

Exclusivist eschatologies provide no room for otherness, since they believe in a world where otherness is to be fought and ultimately overcome by exclusion. In the case of exclusivist eschatologies, beliefs control and subdue hope. However, at the other end of the spectrum, an indiscriminate pluralist approach to the future does not take otherness seriously either because it merely salutes any approach to ultimate reality, including one's own, as an equally valid response to ultimate mystery. Here eschatological expectation has become so general that it runs the risk of losing any distinctive features of a genuinely evolving relationship. Only a critical and self-critical approach keeps the eschatological horizon open for the self-communication of God, and takes seriously the tasks emerging from such a horizon: attending to otherness demands respect, curiosity, and engagement for the emergence of ever more otherness – including the otherness of one's own subjectivity that might evolve in the process of encountering others – and care for examining the other's otherness and one's own otherness in mutually critical correlation and the just pursuit of truth in the praxis of love.

The different eschatological outlooks reveal something about the relational potential of particular religious traditions and groups in European society. Christians have developed quite an

array of eschatological visions with indirect and direct consequences for all those *others* that have been refusing to be harmonized with Christian projects in the past. Both Jews and Muslims have been badly affected by Christian exclusivist eschatologies. However, even the opposite can be true: Jewish and Islamic eschatologies at times also have had disastrous consequences for others.

In all three Abrahamic religions we can observe the manifestation of individualised eschatologies according to which martyrdom for God's sake, or for one's own private understanding of what God wishes to be the case, is understood to guarantee immediate personal salvation and sainthood. Moreover, the combination of traditional eschatological concepts with individual apocalyptic imagination has led to explosive mixtures of religious violence with massive social and political consequences. It is important to recall that violence and terror in the name of God are never faithful to God's multiple love command: Love of God in conjunction with love of neighbour, world, and self. Eschatological faith and action outside the framework of love ultimately are destructive and deadly. Thus, violence in the name of God can never claim to be just love.

In Europe we rarely discuss the connection between eschatological concepts and their social, political, and ecological consequences for the world and the universe as a whole. Attitudes to the current use of global resources are, of course, intimately connected with an understanding of the universe as God's creative and reconciling project. Christian eschatologies thus must answer the critique that they often prioritise their own future at the expense of this aspect of otherness. Eschatology and ecology cannot be separated.²⁴

In conclusion, the vocation of the religions with regard to the future of Europe is not to provide strong harmonious and exclusive forms of group identity. Rather it is to develop the praxis of forming communities of hope, love, and faith, out of which religiously mature and critical people and communities can emerge who care for

²⁴ See Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudatio si: On Care for Our Common Home* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015).

God's project of creation and reconciliation. The religions have to respect the pluralist nature of European forms of democracy while developing concrete forms of love, justice, charity, mercy, and peace which in turn can support the democratic process in Europe.

Moreover, life in Europe must not be reduced merely to economics, to mobility of people and goods, and to consumption, however, justified and important these goals may appear to be.²⁵ Life in Europe must ultimately be life for the entire human person in her various relationalities and networks as well as life for the whole world and the universe at large. The horizon of the Christian hope includes all of humanity, i.e. the living, the dead, and the human beings not yet born: Every human person is my neighbour.²⁶ Nation states, forms of inter-state co-operation, forms of European integration, the work of the United Nations, all of these forms of human organisation must be subjected to critique by those religions who genuinely wish to promote human life within a framework of just love. It is the task of the religions to make sure that the question of *Who is the human being?* and the question *Who is a neighbour?* will not be subordinated to political, economic, or even tribal calculations.

Overcoming tribalism and populism in the religious, cultural, social, and political spheres of our lives must be a priority today. The contribution of the religions to the future of Europe is to enable growth in love for all women, men, and children. This growth requires vibrant and dynamic communities. To be sure, the priority of religious life in Europe is to nurture creative forms of transformative communities of love,

hope, and faith. Democratic processes on their own cannot create such communities; rather without such vibrant communities our democracies will wither away. To put it bluntly: our democracies require critical and self-critical religious movements that are capable of organising genuine communities of love and hope.

Christians expect no less than the reconciliation of all people in love and peace before God. That is a truly revolutionary hope, a radical hope, which will never be satisfied with a mere status quo.

Communities of hope keep the momentum alive that a better world is possible and desirable. This momentum will be good news for all of us – including the refugees who knock at our doors. However, we must go even further. The praxis of hope implies a praxis of sharing our lives and our goods with all people on earth. Since the horizon of our hope is universal, we cannot hope for our future while excluding the future of all those others. In a time of rapid social, political, and technological change, more than ever, we need just institutions to help us in this process of learning anew how to share. Christian hope – alongside Jewish, Muslim, and other forms of hope – will keep the burning desire for justice and peace alive and initiate the development of just institutions in Europe and beyond.

The current crisis of Europe may thus present us with a unique challenge and opportunity to contemplate our situation within a renewed horizon and act afresh with critical conviction, passionate love, and transformative hope for the renewal of our continent.

²⁵ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis: Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 198–211.

²⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (ed. and transl. H. Hong & E. Hong; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), 22: "The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbour, and when I fulfil my duty I show that I am a neighbour. Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbour but about becoming a neighbour oneself, about showing oneself to be a neighbour just as the Samaritan showed it by his mercy."

Summary

In this article I am discussing some pertinent aspects of the present crisis of European thinking about the future and some possible Christian responses to this crisis. First, I analyse some neo-tribalist and populist approaches to the European crisis and their implications for envisioning the future shape and structure of Europe. In a second move I explore the promise of Christian hope in today's world as distinct from any optimist attitudes. Moreover, I am discussing Jewish and Christian biblical and post-biblical reflections on hope and their lasting challenges for us today. Third, I offer some markers on how an enlightened Christian hope within a dynamic culture of love and faith may help promote a more promising and exciting approach to the future of Europe and the world.