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HISTORICAL TURN

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Hope and History



I. False Hope and Man's Search for Meaning: On Faith as the Basis for Hope

1. *The Problem of False Hope*

Hope is a funny thing. And it is odd the different things people use to give themselves hope. So, for example, not everything that we think will give us hope actually does. There is such a thing as *false* hope. That is because hope, as I will argue in what follows, needs to be tied to *truth*—the truth about the world and the truth about the human person.

When it comes to hope, there are, of course, the simple, everyday human hopes, such as: "I hope I get a raise at my job," or "I hope I won't have any unexpected medical expenses this year." These often enough turn out to be "false hopes." And then there is what is sometimes called the "theological virtue" of hope by which we are directed to union with God in heaven as our last end. One question we might ask is whether the hope which directs us to this supernatural end provides any help *in this life*? Does our hope for eternity help us when it comes to our hopes in time and in history? Or is our hope for eternity merely (as Feuerbach and Marx, among others, have argued) merely a *distraction* from human history—an "opiate of the masses."¹

1. The famous phrase "opium of the masses" (*das Opium des Volkes*) is Marx's and originates from the introduction of his proposed work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Although this work was never completed, the introduction (written in 1843) was published in 1844 in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Cf. also Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity), translated into English by the famous novelist Marian Evans (who wrote under the more recognizable pen name "George Eliot").

In what follows, I wish to argue that all human hopes must find their ultimate foundation in the theological virtues of hope and faith; otherwise, these hopes will remain false and empty—"distractions" (*divertissements*) as Pascal would call them²—not sure guides to the future or the present. Indeed, as we will see, false hopes can even, at times, do great damage.

So, for example, in his now-classic book *Man's Search for Meaning*, author Viktor Frankl tells how his senior block warden at Auschwitz, "a fairly well-known composer and librettist," confided to him one day that he had had a dream that the camp would be liberated on March thirtieth of that year, 1945. Sadly, says Frankl: "When F— told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth, F— suddenly became ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March thirty-first, he was dead." "To all outward appearances," says Frankl, "he had died of typhus." And yet, "Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect."³

Frankl confirmed his thesis with the chief doctor of the concentration camp who reported that "the death rate in the week between Christmas, 1944, and New Year's, 1945, increased in camp beyond all previous experience." The explanation for this increase "did not lie in the harder working conditions or the deterioration of our food supplies or a change of weather or new epidemics. It was simply that the majority of the prisoners had lived in the naive hope that they would be home again by Christmas."⁴ When it became clear to them that they would not, they lost all hope and, with it, the will to live.

Recognizing the dangers presented by the loss of hope, the senior block warden asked Frankl to say some words to his fellow prisoners to restore their hope when the mood had become especially low. Not an enviable task. How does one speak about hope to men facing prolonged daily suf-

2. Cf. Pascal, *Pensées*, 139.

3. See Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Beacon Press, 1959), 96–97.

fering, sitting in the dark at Auschwitz with the white ashes of their dead comrades spread all about them on the ground like snow? While hope was necessary to the prisoners' survival, *false* hope could be fatal.

Perhaps T. S. Eliot had it right, then, in "East Coker," the second of the *Four Quartets*, when he wrote:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.⁵

Frankl, however, I am glad to report, did *not* read them Eliot.

2. *Hope and Meaning*

What Frankl actually said to his fellow prisoners was this: namely, that "human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation and death." He implored them not to lose hope, but rather to "keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and meaning."⁶

Frankl is of course known and revered—rightly, to my mind—for the many inspiring passages in *Man's Search for Meaning* such as this one:

Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche's words, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*," could be the guiding motto for all psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic efforts regarding prisoners. Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a *why*—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible *how* of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost.⁷

Much of Frankl's post-war psychological practice of logotherapy was based on this insight.

And yet, with all due respect to Frankl's real achievements, is there not a danger lurking here as well—something Frankl conveniently skirts over in his otherwise excellent book? Namely, that the goal or purpose one adopts in life is not unimportant. After all, one can live for revenge as well as for

4. *Ibid.*, 97.

6. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 104.

5. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," III, 23–26.

7. *Ibid.*

love. And in getting the prisoners to focus on a future goal to which they could look forward, was Frankl not risking encouraging in them precisely the sort of false hope that might in the long run be deadly?

So, for example, Frankl suggests (rightly in my view) that, "A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the 'why' for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any 'how.'"⁸ That's true, I have no doubt, as long as the man remains convinced the person affectionately waiting for him is still alive. And yet, so many of the relatives of those in the camps were already dead, and the men in the camps either knew it or at least suspected it. And as for "unfinished work," imagine a young medical intern such as Viktor Frankl in Auschwitz in 1945: What chance was there of finishing that medical degree now? Of entering into an honored profession with esteemed colleagues beside one's beloved spouse? If those were the sort of things that had been giving a man the "why" for his existence, the decreasing likelihood of ever realizing these hopes could certainly have given him cause to doubt whether he should continue bearing with the terrible "how."

Frankl is on firmer footing, or so it seems to me, when he makes clear later on in his book that "there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered." Indeed, "We were not hoping for happiness," he tells us; "it was not that which gave us courage and gave meaning to our suffering, our sacrifices, and our dying."⁹ This is not an unimportant point, I think, for those of us who imagine ourselves proponents of what is sometimes called a eudaimonistic (or "happiness"-based) ethics. For there is reason to suspect that what Aristotle and St. Thomas meant by *eudaimonia* and *beatitudo* is so far from what we currently mean when we use the word "happiness," that perhaps we should cease using it. But if not happiness, then what?

Frankl's answer is intriguing. The typical reply with which a man lost in despair would respond to all encouraging arguments, says Frankl, went something like this: "I have nothing to expect from life any more." "What sort of answer can one give to that?" asks Frankl. None, in fact. Because "what was really needed," he says, "was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life."

8. *Ibid.*, 101.

9. *Ibid.*, 114.

We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct.¹⁰

Right action and right conduct: here is the first pillar. One key element of *eudaimonia* leading to man's ultimate human flourishing is right action and right conduct. As the philosopher Aristotle put it: "happiness is a certain activity of soul in conformity with perfect virtue."¹¹ So, too, in the Christian tradition, this insight is not negated, but deepened. Pope John Paul II, for example, in his encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, commenting on the passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which a rich young comes to Jesus to ask the question, "What good must I do to have eternal life," says this:

The question which the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth is one which rises from the depths of his heart. It is *an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man*, for it is about the moral good which must be done, and about eternal life. The young man senses that there is a connection between moral good and the fulfilment of his own destiny.¹²

And yet this insight, that the moral life, the life of "right action and right conduct," is a *sine qua non* for human happiness and human flourishing, is merely a first step. Christianity shares this insight with pagan philosophy. Does Christian faith offer anything more? Can it deepen this insight in fundamental ways?

I suggest it can, especially with regard to one of the great challenges to pagan morality: What to do when bad things happen to good people? What do we say about the virtuous man who suffers as though he were evil? And about the evil man who enjoys benefits as though he were virtuous? This is the question Glaucon poses to Socrates in book 1 of *The Republic* which generates the rest of the discussion in the book.¹³ And it is a question Aristotle too poses in book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he grants that one needs not only complete virtue, but also a complete life from which grave external misfortunes are absent.

10. *Ibid.*, 98.

11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by H. Rackham (London: W. Heinemann, Putnam's, 1934), 1.13, 1102a1. All quotations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from this translation.

12. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993): no. 7.

13. Plato, *The Republic* 2, 359d-361d.

For many reverses and vicissitudes of all sorts occur in the course of life, and it is possible that the most prosperous man may encounter great disasters in his declining years, as the story is told of Priam in the epics; but no one calls a man happy who meets with misfortunes like Priam's, and comes to a miserable end.¹⁴

Now admittedly the question of whether Aristotle believed that external misfortunes can destroy human happiness—or to put this another way, whether human happiness is at least to some extent dependent upon external conditions and chance—is one scholars continue to debate. The particulars of that debate need not detain us here. It is enough for our purposes simply to note that Aristotle's comments open up the question of the problem of suffering, and it is a question that, rather famously, remains unresolved. It is precisely here, I would suggest, with regard to the question of external misfortune and undeserved human suffering, where the perspective of Christian faith can offer a new perspective from which one can speak meaningfully of authentic "hope."

Consider Viktor Frankl's situation in Auschwitz from a solely Aristotelian perspective. He had set out years earlier to be a psychologist and physician, a good husband and father, and a respected citizen serving his community. As he walked among the grey blockhouse buildings of Auschwitz with the burnt ashes of his dead comrades covering everything, what was he to think? That right action and right conduct lead to human happiness and human flourishing? Although Frankl affirms this, it hardly seems adequate to the tragic irony of the camps. Good, virtuous men were dying left and right all around him, and some of the most vicious men history has ever known were being lauded as the heroic saviors of Europe. If nowhere else, certainly at the gates of Auschwitz, the vision that informs Aristotle's *Ethics* has reached its natural limits, and we must turn to another way of seeing the world. Christian faith, far from being a flight *from* the world, as Marx and Feuerbach and so many others have insisted, is, I would suggest, humanity's proper embrace *of* the world—in hope and love.

3. *Faith: Seeing the World Anew, "From the Perspective of Eternity"*

Later in his book, Frankl speaks of "sacrifice" and its meaningfulness. "It was in the nature of this sacrifice," he admits, "that it should appear to

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.9, 1100a5–9.

be pointless in the normal world, the world of material success. But in reality our sacrifice did have a meaning. Those of us who had any religious faith ... could understand [this] without difficulty."¹⁵

It would be interesting to propose this question as a test of religious faith: Do you believe that a sacrifice appearing pointless in the normal world, the world of success, can in reality be meaningful and significant? And are you willing to bet your life on the truth of that claim? If not, what does this fact say about your faith—not to mention the hope founded on it?

"It is a peculiarity of man," says Frankl, "that he can only live by looking to the future—*sub specie aeternitatis*."¹⁶ This last little "tag"—*sub specie aeternitatis*, "under the aspect of eternity" or "from the perspective of the eternal"—is noteworthy, and much depends upon how the whole sentence is construed. "Looking to the future," as Frankl has made clear, is *not* necessarily the same as looking at events *sub specie aeternitatis*. One can "look to the future" with an eye to getting out of prison by Christmas, and when that date passes, one's sense of purpose is lost. It is quite different, however, I would suggest, to look at the future, as well as the present, and indeed perhaps even the past, as Frankl suggests, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

What does this looking at history from the perspective of the eternal entail? This is a difficult question, as the reader can imagine, and not one to which we can give a sufficient answer in a brief space such as we have here. But in order to make a first stab at an answer, I propose we shift our focus a bit and come at it from a slightly different angle. The fundamental question, to my mind, is how we can view the world of time and change and suffering in which we live and move and have our being *now* from the perspective of *the eternal*, which is a perspective we will not truly share until we are fully united with God at the end of time? Is this even possible? It is, I would suggest, but it is a divine perspective only made possible by *faith*.

Josef Pieper poses a similar problem in his book *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*. How it is possible to be festive and joyful, he asks, in the face of the world's sufferings and given the reality of death? "Consolation exists," according to Pieper, "only on the premise that grief, sorrow, death, are accepted, and therefore affirmed, as *meaningful* in spite of everything."¹⁷ So,

15. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 105.

16. *Ibid.*, 94.

17. Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 28.

for example, says Pieper: "We can't festively celebrate [even] the birth of a child, if we hold with Sartre's dictum that 'It is absurd that we are born.'"¹⁸ If the world is meaningless, if life is meaningless, if existence itself is meaningless, then on what basis would we festively celebrate anything—birth, marriage, college graduation, job promotions, *anything*? You go to a wedding; the bride and groom look happy; everything *seems* joyful; and then you say to yourself: "They'll probably just get divorced. He'll cheat on her, or she'll cheat on him. Their children will hate them. One of them will get Alzheimer's, and in the end, they'll both be dead, anyway."

Now, one obvious response to this sort of thing might be simply to reply: "Oh, grow up!" That might be fine, as far as it goes, but it will need to be fleshed out a little bit. Plenty of grown-ups have such thoughts at weddings—don't tell me no because I've heard them—so we will have to think more seriously about what real "grown-ups" understand that the people who make such comments do not.

So, for example, another sort of response might go like this: "Look, why *not* celebrate? Sure, you're going to die; sure, you're going to suffer; sure, there are going to be bitterness, pain, and sorrow, but that's no reason not to celebrate *now*?" Yes, but that's precisely Pieper's point: we do festively celebrate major events in life in spite of suffering, pain, and death. The question is not, "Are those things sufficient to make us *not* celebrate?" The question is: "Is there any reason *to* celebrate?"

Note that I did not ask whether there might be good reasons to drink heavily or, as Walker Percy suggests in a famous essay on bourbon, whether it might be advisable to employ sufficient quantities of bourbon to relieve the malaise.¹⁹ That is not the question. Rather, the question is whether there is any reason to celebrate. And since we generally do not take the certainty of sorrow, suffering, and death to be especially good reasons to celebrate, the problem we have posed recurs: If the world is meaningless, if life is meaningless, if existence itself is meaningless, then on what basis would we festively celebrate anything—birth, marriage, college graduation, job promotions, *anything*?

18. *Ibid.*, 25.

19. See Walker Percy, "Bourbon," in *Signposts in a Strange Land* (New York: Picador, 1991), 102–107.

4. *"Dover Beach": Love in an
Age without Faith*

Perhaps a literary example of the problem is in order. One of the purest expressions of the modern sense of the pointlessness of celebration can be found in Matthew Arnold's 1851 poem "Dover Beach," written on the occasion of his marriage to Frances Lucy, a woman for whom he, wishing to marry but unable to support her on the wages of a private secretary, sought and obtained a position as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, a job that required him to spend long hours in dreary railway stations and small-town hotels, and even longer hours listening to children recite their lessons and parents their grievances. Arnold often described the duties connected with his job as pure "drudgery," and given the job description, it strikes me that one need not care for Arnold's prose or literary criticism in the slightest to sympathize with his plight. I mention these details about his marriage simply to make clear in advance that Arnold was, in his own way, neither unromantic nor undevoted to the woman he had just taken as his wife when he wrote this poem. Indeed, he would go on to father half-a-dozen children with the woman to whom he composed the following lines. As a love poem, it begins promisingly enough:

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow²⁰

Good so far. With the sea waves coming in and going out and coming in again, Arnold almost manages to strike an erotic note—or about as erotic

20. Here and below, I am quoting from the version at *The Poetry Foundation* website: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172844>.

as this buttoned-down Victorian Englishman of the academic establishment is capable of getting. But at this point, the poem takes a more sinister turn:

Listen! [he tells his wife] you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

This man is on his honeymoon; whence comes that “eternal note of sadness”? Indeed, in the next stanza, things go quickly from bad to worse, from “sadness” to “human misery.”

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Agaeon, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery [this is going downhill fast]; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

Poor Arnold. He is married to the woman he loves; he is on his honeymoon; they are looking out at a beautiful ocean vista; and all he can think about is Greek tragedy and “the turbid ebb and flow of human misery.” Not exactly the sort of cheery fellow one generally looks for in a husband.

But give the man credit for this: He understands that something is not right, that something has been lost, and that this loss has serious consequences for the possibilities of human joy and fulfillment. What is equally interesting is that he even recognizes what it is that has been lost.

The Sea of Faith [he says]
Was once, too, at the full,—and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

On Arnold's view, it appears that when the “Sea of Faith” enveloped the earth, then one might have looked upon this physical sea with joy. But as

that Sea of Faith has withdrawn, it has left a world disenchanted and dreary, merely bits and pieces of "stuff" here and there, no longer enfolding the world, but merely "naked shingles of the world."

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! [says Arnold finally] for the world,
 which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

So Arnold *was* an incurable romantic, as it turns out. It is simply that his romantic appeal to his new wife was rather grim: "Ah, love, let us be true to one another"—not because the world is sweet and you are sweeter, yet; nor because love is the world's rhythm, and to its tune I must dance; no, but because so much of the world is so thoroughly and completely terrible, we must hold on to one another for dear life. What does a newlywed wife say to a husband who tells her that the world only *seems* "so various, so beautiful, so new," but has in reality, "neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." It is likely he may have heard what many husbands hear on their wedding night: "It's time to stop talking now, dear."

• And yet, to be fair to poor Matthew Arnold, is "Dover Beach" not precisely the proper sort of poetic embodiment of the view of the universe expressed by contemporary philosopher Quentin Smith who insists that, in light of contemporary scientific theories about the origins of the universe, "the fact of the matter is that the most reasonable belief is that we came from nothing, by nothing and for nothing.... Our universe exists without cause or without explanation.... [It] exists non-necessarily, improbably, and causelessly. It exists for absolutely no reason at all."²¹ If existence itself is meaningless, then certainly festivity, joy, and hope are empty and ultimately illusory.

21. Quentin Smith, *The Felt Meanings of the World: A Metaphysics of Feeling* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Research Foundation, 1986), 300. To be fair to Smith, although he denies that the universe can have any *rational* meaning, he does grant that it can have "felt" meanings.

5. *The Perspective of Faith: The Necessary
Foundation of Authentic Hope*

“To have joy in anything,” says Josef Pieper, “one must approve everything. Underlying all festive joy kindled by a specific circumstance there has to be an absolutely universal affirmation extending to the world as a whole, to the reality of things and the existence of man himself.”²² What, then, is this act of will born of love by which we can affirm the world as a whole and the ultimate meaningfulness of human life and human history? For Christians, they call this affirmation of the world and its ultimate meaningfulness *faith*. And being able to make this sort of loving affirmation of human existence is, I would argue, a necessary foundation for authentic *hope*.

In his book *Introduction to Christianity*, the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger asked “What is belief really?” His reply was that

it is a way of taking up a stand in the totality of reality, a way that cannot be reduced to knowledge and is incommensurable by knowledge; it is the bestowal of meaning without which the totality of man would remain homeless, on which man’s calculations and actions are based, and without which in the last resort he could not calculate and act, because he can only do this in the context of a meaning that bears him up. For in fact man does not live on the bread of practicability alone; he lives as *man* and, precisely in the intrinsically human part of his being, on the word, on love, on meaning. Meaning is the bread on which man, in the intrinsically human part of his being, subsists. Without the word, without meaning, without love, he falls into the situation of no-longer-being-able-to-live, even when earthly comfort is present in abundance.²³

“[M]eaning is not derived from knowledge,” Ratzinger continues elsewhere.

To try to manufacture it in this way, that is, out of provable knowledge of what can be made would resemble Baron Münchhausen’s absurd attempt to pull himself up out of the bog by his own hair. I believe that the absurdity of this story mirrors very accurately the basic situation of man. No one can pull himself up out of the bog of uncertainty, of not-being-able-to-live, by his own exertions, nor can we pull ourselves up, as Descartes still thought we could . . . by a series of intellectual deductions. Meaning that is self-made is in the last analysis no meaning. Meaning,

22. Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, 26.

23. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 72.

that is, the ground on which our existence as a totality can stand and live, cannot be made but only received.²⁴

It was just such an act of affirmation of the ultimate meaningfulness of things, I would suggest, that Viktor Frankl made in the camp when he consciously chose to help and support his fellow prisoners, not out of a calculation for survival or personal benefit, but simply out of the un-stated conviction that "Doing this is what life is *for*." Each such act of self-less courage and love reveals—and *a fortiori* in conditions where they stand forth as "signs of contradiction" to everything around them—that the actor has taken a stand on the notion that, in the end, love and self-sacrifice matter; that within the whole vast scope of the universe, this small, seemingly insignificant, act of love and sacrifice is and will remain, in spite of everything, meaningful. And if within the whole vast scope of the universe, this act of love and self-sacrifice matters, then there is at least this one thing in the universe that actually does matter, and it will no longer remain "the most reasonable belief" to say anymore that "we came from nothing, by nothing, and for nothing," and that the universe "exists for absolutely no reason at all." This one eternally significant act, along with all the others like it wherever and whenever they occur, proclaims a decisive "no" to certainty about the meaninglessness of the universe. Like a candle flame in the night, it reveals that not all is darkness.

And yet, the darkness remains. It has not gone away. There are still a whole lot of "in-spite-ofs" remaining here: there is meaning, we say, *in spite of* pain, sorrow, suffering, death, disease, evil, Nazi concentration camps, and all the rest. When one says with one's life and one's actions, "This I know; this I am willing to take a stand on: that things like courage and love and self-sacrifice are meaningful—indeed perhaps the only meaningful things in this world—not in some other, imaginary, ideal world, but *this* world," then such a person will also be forced to admit that this act of affirmation (what Christians call "faith") is not something that could have been deduced or inferred from any set of experiences of the world, especially a world that contains a place like Auschwitz.

And yet, *somehow*, when I extend my sight beyond the here-and-now so as to be able to see the here-and-now *sub specie aeternitate*, it allows me to see the here-and-now in a new way and to live in the here-and-now in

24. *Ibid.*, 73.

a new way: a way that involves care and love and self-sacrifice. Why and how the human spirit reaches beyond the visible in this way to the ultimate source of meaning is hard to say. But the witness of individual acts of courage, self-sacrifice, mercy, and love proves it does. The love and care and self-sacrifice are not made necessary by the world, just as they are not logically deducible from it. Rather one discovers the love and care and self-sacrifice superabundantly breaking in upon the world, enveloping it with a logic beyond the logic of the world of war and survival and power and prestige and “who’s up and who’s not.” Existence, though still ultimately a mystery, the way love always remains a mystery, is no longer merely a puzzle to be solved or a mathematical equation to be completed. It is a gift to be celebrated and enjoyed. But also a gift to be loved and cared for. To the untrained eye, this faith in the meaningfulness of the world and the hope and love it makes possible will seem absurd precisely because it cannot be deduced from the world. And it is precisely the degree to which this act of love is not made possible by the world and not reducible logically to any string of data or inferences from the world, that we call this act of faith, hope, and love “supernatural.”

Hope—if it is to be real, authentic hope of the sort that can be the foundation for human flourishing and not the sort of “false hope” that will damage us in the end—needs to be tied to truth: the truth about the world, the truth about the nature and dignity of the human person, and ultimately, to the truth about history.

6. Faith, Hope, and the “Good News” of Jesus Christ

But who tells us the truth about the world and the human person? Where do we find the truth about history, the real “story-behind-the-story” of history, the context within which history makes sense and can thus teach us truthfully and not merely fill us with false hopes?

1 Peter 3.15 instructs Christians that they should be ready to “give a reason for the hope” that is in them.²⁵ For Christians, the reason for their hope is found in God’s revelation of Himself as the Creator who has created the world out of His infinite goodness and love, and as the Redeemer who rescues His People from slavery and makes a covenant with them, a covenant ratified ultimately by the blood of His Son sacrificed on the cross at Calvary.

25. Quoted from the King James Version.

This message, the “Good News” of Christ crucified and risen, is meant to provide a reason for the hope that is in those who have chosen to affirm the meaningfulness of acts of self-less love and courage in an otherwise empty and seemingly meaningless universe. Like Paul coming to the Aropepagus to give a name to the god who has heretofore been left unnamed, the Christian story says: We can give substance to your hope; we can give evidence of that unseen thing beyond and behind history, that only “the backward look behind the assurance / of recorded history / the backward half-look / over the shoulder / towards the primitive terror” can reveal.²⁶

What Christianity has to offer a man like Viktor Frankl, and the rest of mankind caught in our contemporary cosmic concentration camp, is this: The reassurance that the story handed over to us, and that we are commissioned to hand over to others, helps to make sense of the sort of life that in their best moments they know they want to lead—the sort of life that makes sense of the world and makes it something other than a miserable chaos. When human beings act in such a way as to affirm the meaningfulness of self-less courage and love, they testify to a certain truth about the world. The Christian *logos* gives reason for that hope and provides the undergirding substance for the truth that they affirm by their actions and embody in their lives.

Commenting in the Spanish newspaper *El País* on what he took to be the significance of World Youth Day, Peruvian Nobel Prize winner for literature and self-described “agnostic” Mario Vargas Llosa wrote recently that:

For a long time it was believed that religion, this elevated form of superstition, would disappear with progress in knowledge and democratic culture, and that science and culture would amply substitute it. This, we now know, was another superstition which reality has gradually demolished. Moreover we also know that culture, especially today, is incapable of carrying out this function which the free thinkers of the 19th century attributed to it with such great generosity and an equal amount of ingenuity. This is because in our day culture has ceased to be a serious and deep response to the great human questions about life, death, destiny and history as it sought to be in the past. On the one hand it has become an inconsequential light entertainment and on the other, a cabal of incomprehensible and arrogant experts, who have taken refuge in unintelligible jargon, light years from common mortals.²⁷

26. T. S. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages,” ll. 53–55.

27. Quoted from “God in Madrid,” an English translation of the address re-printed in *L’Osservatore Romano*, April 9, 2012.

“Culture has not been able to replace religion and will not be able to do so,” claims Vargas Llosa, because “the majority of human beings finds answers—or at least the feeling that a higher order exists, of which they are a part and which gives meaning and tranquility to their existence—solely through a transcendence that neither philosophy, nor literature nor science have managed to justify rationally.”²⁸

What is important to note for our purposes, as well, is the way in which the Christian revelation has opened up a new, authentically *historical* horizon for human aspirations, often misunderstood or otherwise missing. The late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus used to say that the world had forgotten its story and that Christianity’s duty was to remind the world of its story.²⁹ By this I take it he meant that by telling the world the Christian story of salvation history, Christians might help restore that sense of meaning and purpose for which so many in our post-modern world yearn, who, having succumbed to the allure of so many of modernity’s empty hopes and promises, both ideological and technological, have been left ever more subject to the dual temptations to meaninglessness and despair. As I’ve suggested several times above, the life of faith on this view is not a flight *from* the world, but an embrace *of* it, with all its sufferings and misfortunes. It involves viewing the world of time and change from a new perspective and with a new basis for hope and care.

In this regard, it will be instructive to compare the basis of hope we’ve sketched out above with what I suggest are the two most common ways that we human beings customarily try to give ourselves hope: the first is by attempting to predict and control history, and the second is by attempting to escape from it.

II. The False Hope that Comes From Attempting to Predict and Control History

Let us begin with the first of these: namely, prediction and control. Many people throughout history have been convinced that if they could see the future—if they could predict what was coming—then perhaps they could control events for their own benefit. That, at least, was the hope. This

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See, for example, Richard John Neuhaus, “Telling the World Its Own Story,” reprinted at: <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/apoo81.html>.

sort of faith and hope explains the perennial appetite for consulting predictive instruments such as horoscopes, tarot cards, and oracles.

Unfortunately, some people suffer from the misconception that the Old Testament prophets were in the business of predicting the future. An earnest study of the Old Testament would reveal that this was not the case. The Old Testament prophets almost always speak about the meaning of present events and where they are leading. The Old Testament prophets sometimes speak about what God will do, but they never do so in anything but the most general terms. Thus, as John Haught suggests in *Mystery and Promise: A Theology of Revelation*, the prophets “speak to us of the meaning of history, not in the mode of prediction, but in that of promise.”³⁰ More on this point shortly.

In the meantime, it is important to note that there is an odd irony involved in wanting to know the future, as the wiser Greeks in the ancient world understood. If the predictions you are given are true, then they cannot be changed. If it truly is your fate, then it cannot be avoided. The presumption that it can be avoided is based on the hubris that assumes I and I alone can escape the causal nexus of history that will envelope everyone else. The false hope is that no one else will use his or her knowledge and free will to change the future, only me. The hope is that I will become, in effect, for a time at least, the lord of history. And that is something, I am afraid, the real Lord of History simply will not allow.

Consider, in this regard, the example of Oedipus who, having learned that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother, and having left his home in a vain bid to escape his fate, set in motion a tragic chain of events that led him to do unwittingly all that had been foretold. Attempting to avoid his fate, he rushed headlong into it.

Foolish men like Oedipus imagine that wisdom comes from those like the oracle at Delphi or the blind seer Tiresias who can see the future. If one can see the future, they imagine, then one can control history—or so it would seem. True wisdom, however, means understanding that history cannot be controlled and that seeing the future can be a curse and not at all the blessing many people suppose it to be. So it is that when Tiresias is led into Oedipus’s presence, the seer cries out:

30. This is a wonderful little book, but is nearly impossible to obtain in print. Fortunately, it is easily accessible online. For this quotation, see chapter 9, paragraph 3, at: <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1947&C=1802>.

Alas, alas! How dreadful it can be
to have wisdom when it brings no benefit
to the man possessing it.³¹

Seen or unseen, fate will have its way in the end.

In this regard, it is important to note that we are not so distant from our ancient forebears as we might like to imagine. Do we not often play very similar cat-and-mouse games with history and destiny, justice and virtue be damned? History, we are told, has been the story of continual progress ever since the advent of modern science. We evolve. The universe evolves. Technology evolves—in fact, at ever faster rates. Greater understanding of nature brings with it greater ability to predict and control it by means of technological progress. And such developments give rise to the hope that, increasingly, we will be able to escape suffering and, eventually, perhaps even death, either by genetic manipulation or some other technological invention.

That certainly sounds hopeful. But not, of course, if you are one of the prisoners in Auschwitz on whom scientific experiments are being done. And not, one might imagine, if you are dying of cancer *now*. What a cruel fate: to die just before that last great scientific discovery makes death obsolete. If only science had been a little faster, if only there had been more money for research, if only there had been fewer restrictions, you too might have avoided death. Damn those religious fanatics with their irrational objections to scientific research! They cheated me—history cheated me—of the immortality I might have enjoyed. If it ever comes, that is. Modern science often holds out this promissory note of unlimited progress in some mythic future. The question is whether that promissory note is a source of authentic hope or a distraction from the realities of the here-and-now.

And what about the life that we live now? Well, it is a paradox, is it not? While, on the one hand, modern science seems to hold out the promise of unlimited freedom and control, by the same token, it often enough tells a story of “fate” and “determinism” as unavoidable as any ancient Greek tragedy. We are not fated by the gods, of course, but by our genes or by a combination of genes and society. But if we are “fated” by any of these—let us say, our genes—then will we not face the same quandary the ancient

31. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, translated by Ian Johnston (Arlington, Virginia: Richer Resources Publications, 2007), ll. 374–76. See also the same online at: <https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/oedipustheking.htm>.

Greeks faced about knowing their fate, wondering whether we should count ourselves blessed for having such knowledge or cursed?

Take for example Harvard professor Steven Pinker who wrote recently in *The New York Times Magazine* that, "One of the perks of being a psychologist is access to tools that allow you to carry out the injunction to know thyself."³² And how does Pinker propose to "know himself?" Well, says the *Times*, he has had himself tested for things like "vocational interest (closest match: psychologist), intelligence (above average), personality (open, conscientious, not too neurotic) and political orientation (more libertarian than authoritarian)." He has had M.R.I. pictures done of his brain—"no obvious holes or bulges" (nice to know, I suppose)—and will soon undergo what the *Times* describes as "the ultimate test of marital love." "Children?" you ask. "Twenty years of waiting for a husband who is away at the Trojan War while suitors eagerly court you?" No. "The ultimate test of marital love," according to the *Times*, is to have your brain scanned while your spouse's name is subliminally flashed before your eyes. Well, that does test *something*, I suppose. But personally, before I would put too much stock in the results, I would want to correlate the brain scan data with the husbands who remain faithful and wives who actually wait patiently for their absent husbands while they were away at war. Only an intellectual could believe that a brain scan would be a better test of love.

But whatever the pros and cons of these various tests, the *Times* articles goes on to say that Professor Pinker has also taken advantage of what they describe as "the ultimate opportunity for self-knowledge." And what is the "ultimate opportunity for self-knowledge?" "Raising children?" you ask. "Fighting a hopeless battle against tyranny?" No again. Pinker, as it turns out, has had his genome sequenced and allowed it to be posted on the Internet, along with his medical history. "Affordable genotyping," reports Pinker enthusiastically, "may offer new kinds of answers to the question 'Who am I?'—to ruminations about our ancestry, our vulnerabilities, our character and our choices in life."

And yet, it is interesting that, even with all this information available to him, Pinker faced his own tough choice, one that his test results could not help him with: namely, whether to learn what, if any, genetic markers for

32. See Steven Pinker, "My Genome, My Self," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 7, 2009.

“horrible conditions that you can do nothing about,” such as Huntington’s Disease or Alzheimer’s, the genetic sequencing had turned up? Pinker’s reply was this: “I figured that my current burden of existential dread is just about right,” so he chose to have this information withheld from him. Well, “know thyself,” I guess.

But is selective ignorance the same as the Stoic acceptance of one’s fate? Or is remaining ignorant in this way merely a form of denial—a way of prolonging the illusion of control, a way of avoiding the truth that life includes suffering and dying, privation and death?

Indeed, given the modern myth of scientific control, a “heroic” life tends to be seen, not as one where, like Epictetus or Aeneas, I accept my fate, but rather as one where I do battle with nature and fate to the last moment. My colleague Christopher Martin at the University of St. Thomas did some research in newspaper obituaries and found that phrases that involve “battling” death, such as “died after a long struggle,” have largely replaced older formulations such as “rest in peace” or “died peacefully at home.”

The ancient Greeks had their heroes, and we have ours: theirs learned to accept their fate with courage and still persevere in virtue, ours “struggle against death” to the last moment. They do not “give up” or “give in.” They “rage, rage against the dying of the light,” and “go not gentle into that dark night.”³³

And yet, when such people “lose hope”—that is, when they realize that technology will not restore an adequate quality of life that has come to characterize the young and upwardly mobile American upper-middle class—then they seek to have death administered to them. Suicide then becomes the last “heroic” act: the last act of “control” over nature and fate. But is this freedom? When many people—especially those who are young—increasingly understand suicide to be the ultimate act of self-affirmation, we know we have a culture that has lost much, if not all, of its hope in history.

III. False Hope in an Escape From History

Pain and suffering were supposed to be things of the past, as soon as we had ridden ourselves of the superstitions of Christianity and gave ourselves over fully to the sure guidance of science. And yet, the continued pain and suffering that characterizes the modern world has caused many of our con-

33. Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.”

temporaries to give way to new forms of gnosticism—so-called “New Age” *spiritualities*—which offer an escape from the busy-ness, and messiness, of our historical existence.

I will not say much here about the “new gnosticism” of these New Age spiritualities other than to observe that, ever since the days when men and women were encouraged to “leave it all behind” and go “find themselves” on a mountaintop in Tibet, or as was more likely, an ashram in Nevada, such spiritualities all too often seemed to involve forsaking all one’s obligations and responsibilities to family, friends, and society. In this way, they seemed to me then, as they do now, well-attuned to the individualistic, ego-centric culture of the American bourgeois-bohemian classes, and not so much to the blue collar steelworkers and construction guys I grew up with near Pittsburgh.

Be that as it may, another way to “escape from history,” Haught suggests in *Mystery and Promise*, is “the gnostic path of dreaming up some radically other world, to which we ‘essentially’ belong by virtue of an esoteric knowledge or ‘gnosis,’ membership in which therefore keeps us from having to dwell fully within the messiness of historical existence.”³⁴ If history is essentially suffering, if time and change are the sources of disruption, perhaps wisdom, then, involves recognizing that the changing world of history is illusory, and beatitude is to be found in an escape from history—into an eternal or timeless or mythic realm.

Unfortunately, some people mistake this view with the Christian view of history. Life is but a “valley of tears,” it is said. Our hope lies in an escape from history into the beatitude of heaven. Indeed, when I was a college student, contemplating my entry into the Catholic Church, my cradle-Catholic friend Dan Brennan said to me: “Smith, you’ve got a great opportunity now. After you’re baptized, you’ll be entirely free from sin. So if at the moment you leave the church, you get hit by a bus and killed, *bang!*—you’ll go right to heaven.”

“That’s good to know, Dan,” I told him. “But I think I’ll try to stick around for a while, just in case there’s something useful I can do on this end.”

“Well, okay,” he told me. “But it would be a shame to miss out on the chance. You never know whether you might end up falling into mortal sin and losing it all.”

34. Haught, *Mystery and Promise*, chap. 9, para. 9.

"It's a risk," I admitted.

But he had a point. If heaven is so good, and this life is nothing but a "valley of tears," why not just get there? In fact, why has God put us here in this world at all? Just to torment us? Just to give us more chances to fall into mortal sin and make ourselves even more unworthy of heaven?

The existential challenges presented by views of the afterlife are two-fold. On the one hand, if death is oblivion, it seems we need a notion of life after death in order to make this life meaning-*ful*. All this life, all this love, all these experiences, and then ... *nothing*? On the other hand, we cannot then rely upon a notion of life after death that in its own right makes this life meaning-*less*. My friend's get-out-while-the-gettin's-good view of the afterlife would, I suggest, *make* life meaningless. Authentic Christian faith does not.

IV. Faith, Hope, and History: Salvation History as the Basis for Human Meaning and thus for Human History Properly Speaking

Unlike some religions, Christianity does not describe events as occurring in some "mythical" time. Nor does it follow "the gnostic path of dreaming up some radically other world, to which we "essentially" belong, membership in which therefore keeps us from having to dwell fully within the messiness of historical existence. As T. S. Eliot insists:

A people without history
Is not redeemed from time.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
Only through time time is conquered.³⁵

Christian faith is not an escape from history and time; it is, rather, that "absolutely universal affirmation extending to the world as a whole, to the reality of things and the existence of man himself" described by Josef Pieper. "The Bible," writes Haught, "forbids our searching for meaning, salvation, or fulfillment completely apart from historical existence."³⁶ That is precisely the importance of speaking about salvation history. God's revelation of

35. See "Little Gidding," 233-34; "Burnt Norton," 4-5; "Burnt Norton," 90.

36. Haught, *Mystery and Promise*, chap. 9, para. 18.

Himself as the Creator who creates out of His infinite goodness and love, and as the Redeemer who rescues His People from slavery and makes a covenant with them, a covenant ratified ultimately by the blood of His Son, sacrificed on the cross at Calvary, opens up a new historical horizon for human aspiration.

“Earth’s the right place for love,” wrote the poet
Robert Frost,
“I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.”³⁷

We must learn to live, therefore, says Haught, “by promise rather than prediction or tragic resignation.”³⁸ That is to say, we must resist the two great human temptations to escape the mystery of history. The first is the temptation to attempt to control history for our own purposes by refining our skills at *prediction*. The second is the temptation to give way to *tragic resignation*, wash my hands of all responsibility for history and take refuge somewhere beyond it. We must learn to live, rather, by faith and hope in God’s *promise* of His continuing providential care. To live in faith and hope means neither seeking to control history and subject it to our will nor simply escaping from it. It consists, rather, in seeing within history—even in its sufferings—a meaningful sacramental foretaste of a beatitude that is yet to be fully realized. Our task as humans is to live in the tension between being fully present to reality *now* while living forward toward that which is *not yet*. Hope is what allows us to live faithfully and authentically in that tension.

The reason Christians give for this hope lies neither in their greater predictive powers about the future, nor in a superior spiritual ability to quiet the self in the midst of turmoil. It lies, rather, in receptive hearts open to the love of the Lord of History, whose love was so great, we believe, that He entered into history to redeem history (and us) from its slavery to sin and its subjection to futility. And so, too, must we enter into history, neither seeking to escape from it, nor simply accepting its faults. Our faith in the ultimate meaningfulness of what will seem to most people to be “absurd,” “utterly foolish” acts of self-sacrifice makes possible a hope that can give rise to a love that is neither passive, nor entirely needy, but which can instead be *transformative*.

37. Robert Frost, *Birches*, ll. 52–53.

38. Haught, *Mystery and Promise*, chap. 9, para. 10.

Allow me, if I may, to quote in this regard from one of my heroes: G. K. Chesterton. "Let us suppose," writes Chesterton, that "we are confronted with a desperate thing—say Pimlico," a once-fashionable London suburb that by Chesterton's time was considered part of the west-London slums.

If we think what is really best for Pimlico we shall find the thread of thought leads to the throne or the mystic and the arbitrary. It is not enough for a man to disapprove of Pimlico: in that case he will merely cut his throat or move to Chelsea. Nor, certainly, is it enough for a man to approve of Pimlico: for then it will remain Pimlico, which would be awful. The only way out of it seems to be for somebody to love Pimlico: to love it with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason. If there arose a man who loved Pimlico, then Pimlico would rise into ivory towers and golden pinnacles; Pimlico would attire herself as a woman does when she is loved. . . . If men loved Pimlico as mothers love children, arbitrarily, . . . Pimlico in a year or two might be fairer than Florence. Some readers will say that this is a mere fantasy. I answer that this is the actual history of mankind. This, as a fact, is how cities did grow great. Go back to the darkest roots of civilization and you will find them knotted round some sacred stone or encircling some sacred well. People first paid honour to a spot and afterwards gained glory for it. Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her.³⁹

Consider the perspective that would make this transformation of Pimlico possible. It would not be a vision of Pimlico that avoids the reality of Pimlico's problems, its sufferings and shortcomings. That would be a flight from reality to un-reality, and whatever hope we might have for Pimlico's future would likely be illusory and empty—as empty as the slogans one often hears from politicians and public relations officials about "better times ahead" and "the best is yet to come."

Neither is the needed perspective one that would view Pimlico purely as *material* to be molded into the "ideal" town by those with superior technical skills. That would be to attempt to cut-and-form Pimlico to one's own image, not to love it for what *it is*. This would be a mere *conditional* sort of love, one that says: "I will love you Pimlico if you become the sort of thing I want you to be"—in other words, if and to the extent that I see you becoming *worthy* of my efforts on your behalf by allowing yourself to be molded by me. This is the short-road to the well-intentioned tyranny of the rational planner.

It hardly needs saying that these hopes are also likely to reveal themselves as ultimately empty and illusory in the long run, given the undeni-

39. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 122–23.

ably “messy” character of particular, instantiated historical realities and their resistance to being forced into all pre-conceived, idealized mental schemes. So, for example, often when the past character of the place or the people begins to impinge on the purity of “the plan,” planners often lose hope, as will many of those who put their faith in them and their plans. For in such cases, who could blame the plan, given its rational perfection and the purity of the motivations that created it? But this, too, is in its own way a flight from reality to unreality—the abstract unreality of “the plan.” For even if Pimlico could be made to fit “the plan”—even if it could be shaped to fit my mental mold—what then? “The plan” is static; it exists outside of time. It is an end, not a beginning, as it must be, opening up to the (often uncertain) future.

In a similar way, all “happy endings” are the same; the time-line of the story must end there. If the story points to an uncertain future, then the ending is, to that extent at least, not “happy.” But as all mature adults know, all such happy endings are based on false hopes. They are based on the illusion that the newly-married couple will never have problems; the newly-reconciled lovers will never argue again; or that the villagers brought together by struggle will not fall out with each other over the next petty difference. If the ending is to be “happy,” it cannot be an end. It must be a beginning of something more, something new. “Happy endings” are thus profoundly anti-historical. They force an unnatural flight from the changeableness of history into an idealized state that can never in reality be maintained. The love people have for a place or a person will have to be fully *now* and *not yet*.

- One cannot love truly only for what someone or someplace might be *in the future*. And yet one’s love is always “forward-looking” toward a more profound union and a deeper communion, one that present sins and infidelities can often stifle and obscure.

Thus what if instead of the various ways of fleeing from the reality of Pimlico, we could see Pimlico clearly and truly say of it: It is good that it exists. Even with all its problems and difficulties, it is *good*. And because it is good, we can love it, warts and all. I can see Pimlico now, not outside of or beyond time or reality, but precisely as something *real* and *in time*; and because *in time*, thus also *on the way* toward an end not yet in sight. The love that affirms that Pimlico is good, and that it is good that it exists, can see Pimlico’s own inherent potential in ways that I, who wish only to shape Pimlico according to my own limited vision and plans, often cannot.

Instead of seeing Pimlico as the perfect matter to be molded by my genius, let us say that I begin to see it rather as something *beloved*, and so something to be treasured and cared for. Then it no longer serves *me* and *my* plans; rather I see myself in service *to it*. Now I no longer avoid its imperfections or see them as potential obstacles to “the plan,” threats to my ever-expanding will-to-power, but as *particularities* that give the place its own special character and beauty. Before seeking to *change* it, I must first seek to *understand* and *appreciate it*. Then the transformation I wish for it will be in accord with its own proper nature and character—one that proceeds from within the special “genius of the place” (*genius loci*), not one that is merely “imposed” from without, even if imposed with the best of intentions. Instead of desiring that Pimlico become something *other than it is*—something more like Oxford or Cambridge or the Harvard Yard—now I wish for Pimlico *to be Pimlico*, but the Pimlico the one who truly loves it would want it to be: its inherent beauties unveiled, its inherent goodness demonstrated, the best elements of its character realized.

And yet it is precisely this sort of *faith* in its ultimate goodness—the goodness grounded in its very *being*—that would allow me to believe in its future without denying the difficulties and problems of its present. When it fails to live up to my expectations, I would not lose hope for it any more than I could lose my love of it. When I see clearly what it is, I see more clearly what it can be when it can finally express what is best in it, not merely what I can make of it. When I love Pimlico in this way, I do not attempt to control it, nor do I flee it for some idealized reality outside of or beyond time: the “spiritual” Pimlico apart from its embodied existence, or the “ideal” Pimlico of my dreams. Rather I begin to see Pimlico, as I should see the rest of the world, *with love*, as something *on the way* within time and history to an ultimate, unseen end, one that I believe in but cannot fully envision, faith being “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.”⁴⁰

Thus when I struggle to help Pimlico transform itself, I struggle in the knowledge that my job is not to see to it that all of Pimlico’s shortcomings are destroyed or that they are rationalized into some overarching idealized plan. Rather, my job is simply to struggle, in the faith and with the hope that its shortcomings and sufferings, as well as mine, are all meaningful

40. Hebrews 11.1, KJV.

when viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. The world is God's, and He alone is the Lord of History. My task is more limited, but not therefore unimportant nor unmeaningful. Perhaps, then, it is true, as T. E. Eliot suggests, that "the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting."⁴¹

Hope is what bridges the divide between the limited realities of the "here-and-now" and the infinite promise of the "not-yet." Hope is what enables us to connect the past stories of our lives with an uncertain future. For Christians, the reason for this hope is to be found in their faith in the Creator Who made this world at its origins and proclaimed it "good, very good," and who has redeemed that same fallen world with the blood of His Son and who sanctifies us with the gift of His Spirit. The one who died on the cross and rose from the dead holds out the promise of hope that life is meaningful even in the midst of sin, suffering, and the dark reality of death.

41. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," III, 26; cf. n. 5 above.