

S.E.R. JOSEPH PAMPLANY

Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Tellicherry (India)

Eucharist as the Source and Summit of Hope

Dear Distinguished guests of the Eucharistic Congress,

The pandemic period of Covid is the right time to meditate on hope in the light of the Eucharist. Hope is both a theological and natural virtue. From a natural point of view we know that to live without hope is to cease to live, as observed by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It is true to say that hope is to human consciousness what breathing is to the living organism. From a theological point of view, we accept finite disappointments, in view of the infinite hope. It is difficult to define hope in the strict sense. Augustine is right, “*there are two things that kill the soul – despair and false hope*”.¹ Hope is not mere wishful optimism or what is contrary to despair rather it is a prophetic act which explains “*the human existence in the name of an ultimate mystery*”.² The Indian imagery of hope *Chakshuravana Galastamam Dhardhuram* from the ancient epic *Bhagavat Gita*, is very striking. It means that like the frog seeking for food even when it is trapped in the mouth of a snake, so do we, humans, caught by the serpent of time, unrelentingly seek for pleasure due to our hope. We know we would die anytime like that frog trapped in the mouth of a snake, yet our hope has no end!³ Hope keeps life going forward.

Hope is so significant in our life, because “we live in hope as a fish in water or bird in air”.⁴ Hope is our atmosphere or existential environment. As Jürgen Moltmann observes, “*The distinctive contribution of Christian faith is the hope it engenders in the midst of the ambiguous and even hopeless circumstances that plague human existence.*”⁵ From the Christian point of view, hope is not an abstract virtue, rather a person who is the saviour and redeemer of human destiny. This saving presence of the redeemer is perennially available in the saving and real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In what follows, we will argue that hope is funda-

mentally Eucharistic, as its existential, ecclesial and eschatological dimensions attain its fulfilment in the Eucharist.

1. Existential Dimension of Hope

Hope is existential as it grows or deteriorates with our daily experiences. Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence. Against the Greek and the Hindu mind that was deeply rooted in fatalism and consequently refused to accept hope as a virtue, Christianity justified the overriding impact of hope. However, the tendencies to reduce Christian hope merely to the question of life after death and the beatific vision thereafter are gaining greater momentum, while the questions of our hope within this life are often left relatively unconsidered. Holy Eucharist at the altar offering the beatific vision here and now challenges us to redefine our notion of hope.

1.1. Culture of Despair: Existential Threats to Hope

We are continuously compelled to live in a culture of despair, which is against the divine will. Radical individualism has redefined Christian faith as primarily oriented towards the salvation of the believer's own soul. Nothing outside of the idea of progress has room in the reflection on world history. As Pope Benedict XVI in *Spe Salvi* observes, modern forms of atheism is a reaction against the inability to explain the traditional theodicy puzzle, the co-existence of a compassionate God and ineffable cruelties of human suffering (SS 42). As God is unable to alleviate suffering, human being is placed at the centre of bringing back justice which ended up in bloody revolutions of huge massacre.

Erich Fromm rightly said, "*Hope is not a prediction of the future. It is the vision of the present in a state of pregnancy.*" In spite of the scientific achievements and economic development and social security, as Russel Botman suggests, humans of the 21st century face an "unprecedented crisis of hope".⁶ Painful public realities of the present era like covid pandemic, terrorism, wars, environmental crises, the nuclear age, multiple genocides, systemic inequality etc. create a global sense of

hopelessness or “radical futurelessness”.⁷ Within the ecclesiastical circle also hope is retarding due to various stories of clerical scandals unveiled globally. To live the Christian hope in the concrete sense has turned out to be an illusion.

Spe Salvi states the two-fold problems of hope in the context of modern era: the displacement of hope and hopelessness of prayers. By displacement of hope, it is meant that paradise is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. *“It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level – that of purely private and other-worldly affairs – and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world”* (SS 18). The kingdom established by Jesus is no longer counted to be attractive to the modern mind; rather it madly opts for the kingdoms created by science and technology. As the encyclical observes, Thus Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real *“Kingdom of God”* (SS 30).

The second problem according to *Spe Salvi* is that our hope is often hindered by the continuous experience of unanswered prayers. For example, during the Covid pandemic many began to raise questions against the divine providence as their continuous prayers were left unanswered. The reason for delaying to answer our prayers, according to Augustine, is *“By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him] ... Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God’s tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?”*⁸ If things seem increasingly hopeless in these crazy, nasty and tragic times, it may be because the time of hope is still yet to come. Hope is nocturnal in a sense; it can best be seen in the dark and things may need to get darker before we begin to discover hope’s creative genius.⁹

Modern thought, however shifts the focus of existential hope from God to the “myth of progress” and was led by a belief that humanity had within itself the capacity to perfect this world. However, such hopes seem dashed by the “horrors of history” of the twentieth century.¹⁰ As David Wilkinson observes, scientific optimism itself has been tempered by astrophysics, as it vindicated that the earth as such cannot sustain life

indefinitely. Progress cannot be achieved unlimitedly, as there are cosmic limits to what humanity can achieve.¹¹ Christian hope had emigrated from the church to the world and for the sake of both the world and the church it needed to be reclaimed.¹² It is often argued that meaninglessness and despair are in fact a key global challenge facing the human condition in our times.¹³

Jurgen Moltmann emphasises the existential dimension of hope while pointing out the two sins against hope as presumption and despair. “*Presumption is a premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God.*”¹⁴ Moltmann avoids the twin perils of a historyless hope and a hopeless history and grounded his theology of Christian historical hope in the divine promises that he fulfilled at the various junctures of history such as exodus, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus etc. which guarantees the openness of the future to come.

1.2. Various Existential Dimensions of Hope

The use of *elpis* and its cognates in classical Greek is fairly broad, referring to general expectations of the future whether positive or negative. However in the NT understanding *elpis* is always used positively with God as its objective. Anthony Kelly argues that hope comes into play when “optimism reaches the end of its tether”, as Paul’s depiction of Abraham “hoping against hope” (*par’ elpida ep’ elpidi*).¹⁵ Jewish writers also had emphasised the existential dimension of Hope as they invariably relate to life. The basis of Israel’s hope is the peculiar relation which exists between itself and Yahweh. Israel can confidently hope in Yahweh. He is entirely dependable, as he is characterized by steadfast love and his gift of redemption (Ps 130:4–5).

To hope is to live with a vision of reality shaped by God. What matters in the long run however, is not only that we are hopeful, but that we act hopefully. The most valuable contribution a Christian can make in our age of despair is to continue because of our faith, to act hopefully and in that way to be an encouragement to those who have lost all hope.¹⁶ “*The character of hope is like a baby beginning to walk. It is in the practicing that we learn, we will gain confidence in hope as we enter more deeply*

into the practices of hope. Hope emerges out of the process of hoping, shaped by practices and nurtured by habits."¹⁷

Hope according to *Spe Salvi* is closely associated with faith. Holy Father defines faith in an astonishing manner: "*Faith is the hypostasis of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen*" (Hb 11:1). In this definition the barrier between the future and the present is intertwined each other: "*The fact that this future changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future*" (SS 7). Hope is the conviction that "*I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me – I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good*" (SS 3). Based on Hebrews 11 Pope Benedict XVI rightly delineates, four existential terms that are closely associated with hope:

- *Hypostasis* – certitude in the existence of realities hoped for;
- *Hyparchonton* – means of hope in the supporting goods for the daily subsistence. When these were denied during persecution the early Christians remained unshaken;
- *Hypomone* – patience, perseverance, constancy. Knowing how to wait without failing in hope (Hb 10:36);
- *Hypostole* – means shrinking back through lack of courage to speak openly and frankly a truth that may be dangerous and it leads to hopelessness.

Hope is not a passive state of waiting, but an active readiness of preparation.¹⁸ Thus hope must change our fundamental orientation towards the present existence. It means an active hope in terms of living in "anticipation" in the inaugurated kingdom of God. It needs human cooperation which could be attained through conscientisation, formation and transformation. Besides it inevitably demands the continuous assistance of the Holy Spirit who recreates and reforms everything fresh and new.

According to Thomas Aquinas, hope is not a human feeling but a virtue. Based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he defines virtue as "*that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise*".¹⁹ Hope is different from natural or "acquired virtues" (*virtutes acquisitae*) as it is supernatural or "infused" virtues (*virtutes infusae*) gratuitously poured out by the grace of God. In the Thomistic theology, object of hope

is two-fold: the first object is composed of primary and secondary objectives. The primary object is eternal life as the final cause of human life, which is enjoyment of God in beatific vision. Importance to the primary object does not deny the secondary objects of hope that is the hope for earthly goods. As Aquinas observes, it is true that we cannot pray for something without hoping for it. He gives the example from the Lord's prayer that includes not just "*thy kingdom come*" but seeks "*our daily bread*". We can hope for earthly and secular good provided that earthly goods are hoped for "*with reference to eternal beatitude*" (*in ordine ad beatitudinem aeternam*, meaning we should only seek them in that kind and degree which is compatible with and conducive to eternal life).²⁰ Hope's second object is "*the divine assistance as the efficient cause on whose omnipotence and mercy, hope relies*". Therefore hope is both longing for eternal life and leaning towards divine providence.

Pieper articulates a clear difference between natural and fundamental forms of hope.²¹ Natural hope has varied objects and is something that can be empirically encountered and understood. Fundamental hope, which is singular, emerges from the depths of our being only once our ordinary hopes have been annihilated. The moment an element of absolute certainty enters in, hope disappears... The philosophy of hope implies the rejection of absolute knowledge.²² Memories of past hopes lead to a momentary liberation from the power of current events and to a critical confrontation with them. There is no hope for a new future without these memories.²³

1.3. Essential/Christological Dimension of Hope

In the NT, hope has a personal name, that is, Jesus Christ. God's salvation is seen in a new light on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hope is grounded in God's saving work in Christ. Peter is of the opinion that "*we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Pt 1:3). Paul equates faith with hope (Rm 4:18).

Christian life is a life between memory of the Christ event and the hope of his second coming. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were "*without hope and without God in the world*" (Eph 2:12). After the coming of Christ, hope is no more decided

by astrology: Saint Gregory Nazianzen enlightens us by the comment that the very moment when the Magi, guided by the star, adored Christ the new king, astrology came to an end, because the stars were now moving in the orbit determined by Christ.²⁴ Christian theology of hope essentially moves within the parameters of creation, incarnation, paschal mystery, pneumatology and eschatology.

Pope John Paul II underscores this point when he points out how the *“Church was born of the paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, stands at the centre of the Church’s life.”*²⁵ Three creative tensions seen in the life of Jesus are related to the theology of hope: (i) An incarnational hope that explains the dialectic of immanence and transcendence, (ii) Crucified hope, that is, a hope against hope and it explains the dialectic of cross and resurrection (iii) An eschatological hope, that is, “already but not yet” and it avoids optimistic certainty or pessimistic despair.²⁶

Because of the paschal mystery of Christ, even the worst suffering and the most oppressed person is strengthened by hope. As Pope Francis reminded us, *“By cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us and protect others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith which liberates us from fear and gives us hope.”*²⁷ Although the war against oppression continues, eschatological freedom, which is attained by participating in the saving grace of the Christ event, is a present reality. As a result, “men of the new age know they are free” even in the midst of oppression. ²⁸ Crawford suggests that in fact, the empty cross may remain an important symbol of hope for the suffering people, because the empty cross shows that “troubles don’t last always”.²⁹ For the suffering and the oppressed, *“Jesus is God breaking into their historical present and transforming it according to divine expectations. Because of the revelation of Christ, there is no need to worry about the reality of liberation. It is already at hand in Jesus’ own person and work, and it will be fully consummated in God’s own ordained future.”*³⁰ Belief in God affirmed the hope that death was not the end and hope in heaven affirms hope for those who have already died.

As Pope Francis explains the meaning of hope that crucifix conveys in the context of covid quarantine, “*Kissing the feet of the crucified Lord always gives hope. He knows what it means to walk He knows all about quarantine because they put two nails to keep him there.*”³¹ The saving grace of hope that Jesus has obtained on the cross is made directly available to humans in and through the Eucharist. “*The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord’s passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental re-presentation... this central event of salvation becomes really present and the work of our redemption is carried out. Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes ‘to the end’ (cf. Jn 13:1), a love which knows no measure*” (EE 11). Therefore we can conclusively argue that the existential dimension of hope is experienced and re-lived in the Eucharistic celebration.

2. Hope is Ecclesial

Hope is ecclesial, because the community of believers share the same hope and strengthens each other in hope. As we believe in the communion of saints, the heavenly Jerusalem is not regarded by the Christian tradition as “*a long row of hermitages, but as a civitas united by perfect fellowship and love in the new creation*”.³² Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the “perverse end.” As Pope Benedict observes, it is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God (SS 34). Hope helps us to understand that we are with God amidst of our suffering. St Augustine said: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis* – God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*.³³ Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with us*; hence *con-solatio* or God’s compassionate love is obvious in every suffering. That is why it is said, “*suffering is the mother of hope*”.³⁴

2.1. Liberative Dimension of Hope

Ecclesial dimension of hope sheds light upon its liberative aspect. Our hope shall not be confined to the matters concerned with the other world. As long as we see salvation in terms of going to heaven when we die –

the entire pastoral and ecclesial interventions are defined in terms of saving souls for that future. However, the New Testament presents the picture of a new Heaven and new earth, which demands the Church to share in that new reality. *“Then the main work of the church here and now demands to be rethought.”*³⁵

The scholastic theologians defined Christian as *homo viator*: the human “wayfarer” who is “on the way” to the heavenly homeland (1 Pt 2:11; Hb 11:13–16). This dual citizenship is emphasised in the second century *Epistle to Diognetus*, where it is said that Christians “reside in their own homelands, but as if they were foreigners... they are in the world but not of the world”.³⁶ This should not be misunderstood as Christians indifferently despising the earthly issues as done by many in history like Celsus, Voltaire, Gibbon, Hume, Nietzsche, Marx and others.

In the Reformation and Enlightenment period the Biblical hope was interpreted completely in terms of post-life and other-worldly belief in immortality. By the 19th century however worldly hope returned with the idealism of Hegel and reached its climax in the contributions of Schliermacher, who took an anti-supernatural/transcendental approach to religion and focused instead on a strong this-worldly emphasis.³⁷ This optimistic 19th century liberal progressive theological optimism was rudely shattered by WWI and the booming call for a neo-orthodox theology by Karl Barth that developed a dialectical theology reemphasising the transcendence of God.

Second Vatican Council rightly affirms the importance of engaging in this world: *“The hope of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one... Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ’s kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God”* (GS 39). It means that eschatological hope does not hinder the hope of the happiness of the present. As Moltmann argues, against the individualistic and other-worldly forms of religious hope, the Christian social hope which takes its historical and this-worldly dimension seriously must be emphasised. Hope is “the happiness of the present”.³⁸ Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but try their best to reform it according to the divine will. *“Such hope makes the Church the source of*

continual new impulses towards the realization of righteousness, freedom and humanity here in the light of the promised future that is to come."³⁹

Vaclav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, asserted that "*hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out*".⁴⁰ Hope is a powerful form of resistance that fights against the darkest clouds of despair accompanying suffering. It is capable of overcoming the void of hopelessness amidst the encircling suffering, "*knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance character*" (Rm 5:3-4). Hope lived in this sense is like faith involving action. "*Inactive hoping in the belief that all will turn out well is the best possible formula for ensuring that the worst will happen, we have to make our hopes become reality.*"⁴¹

The liberating dimension of hope is well reflected in the Eucharistic celebration. Pope Benedict affirms this fact, Eucharistic hope plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today (EE 20).

2.2. Hope is Eschatological

Starting point of every genuine theology, according Moltmann, is eschatology. "*A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning.*" He finds the fulfilment of divine promise not merely in the death and resurrection of Jesus but in his second coming. The eschatological discussions will be certainly deviated if it is envisioned in terms of spacio-temporal dimensions, as the early Christian communities did. Their "eschatological hope" was closely associated with imminent paroussia which was proved to be unrealistic.⁴² The continuing recurrent prophecies and claims on the end times are post-shadows of this unrealistic early Christian hope.

Eschatology is to be understood not as an abrupt end of everything existing but as a process that unfolds gradually within the parameters of eternity and realisation. As we receive the beatific vision *homo viator* becomes *homo comprehensor*: one who has "grasped" or "laid hold of"

(*comprehendit*). Our understanding of the mystery of suffering is always partial: As the apostle said, only hope gives answers: “*Now I know in part; then I shall understand even as I have been understood*” (1 Cor 13:12). We live in hope as an anticipation of that final revelation, when all will be understood.

In the apocalyptic terminology eschatological hope is presented in terms of new heaven and new earth (Rv 21:1). By the new earth and new sky the hopeful should not expect an earthly kingdom or secular utopia, but the social reform and work for the common good understood as a foreshadowing of the new age.⁴³ It has been suggested that the resurrection of the body may include the resurrection of social identities as our “larger body.” Moltmann also broadens the scope of eschatology into a cosmic dimension as he writes: “*death and decay are not only human problems, but pervade the whole of our world. Thus for humans to be resurrected to an existence without death, they must rise into a cosmos that itself is freed from decay.*”⁴⁴

Eschatological hope includes the hope in last judgment and eternal life. For a believer, “*the image of the Last Judgement is not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope; for us it may even be the decisive image of hope*” (SS 44). The Eucharistic dimension of this eschatological hope is highlighted in the discourse on the bread of life in the Gospel of John (Jn 6:25–71). Those who eat the body and drink the blood of the Son of Man is spared from the judgment and is given eternal life, whereas those who do not eat his body and drink his blood are condemned to eternal damnation (Jn 6:52–56). The same hope is bringing consolation to the souls in purgatory: “*The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death – this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today*” (SS 48).

Resurrection of the body is another important component of the eschatological hope. Paul found hope in this belief when he was being tried: “*I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead*” (Act 23:6). Pope Benedict explains the Eucharist as the rationale for the resurrection of the bodies: “*This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in*

its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the "secret" of the resurrection. For this reason Saint Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the Eucharistic Bread as "a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death" (EE 18).

The eschatological dimension of hope which is culminated in Eucharistic celebration is fully active in the writings of St. Paul: "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Co 11:26). It entails that all who take part in the Eucharist, as Pope John Paul II envisions, is "committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely "Eucharistic." It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" (EE 20).

3. Hope is Eucharistic

Eucharist is the sacrament of hope. The existential hope is relived, essential hope is re-enacted, ecclesial hope is celebrated and eschatological hope is foretasted in the Eucharist. As Pope John Paul II stated. "*The Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist*" (EE 26). The night before the crucifixion in which Eucharist was instituted was from a human point of view, the night of utmost hopelessness. It was the darkest night of the history where it was forced to believe that light was defeated by darkness and the divine by the diabolic. The community was disintegrating, one disciple had betrayed him and another would deny him; most of the others would run away. Severe suffering of scourging, loneliness and death on the cross was lying ahead. In this darkest moment of human history, Jesus performed an amazing gesture of hope. "*This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, poured out for you.*"

The Eucharist, in which the action of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is at work (EE 23), is also the source of the Church's unity. The unifying power of Eucharist is effected not only by participating in the banquet of the Eucharist as a community but also by the "*unifying power of the body of Christ*" (EE 24).⁴⁵ Eucharistic sacrament contains a representation of

the broken Christ on Calvary. Since the face of Christ dead on the cross is represented realistically, we have a memorial in the sense of the representation of the real death of Christ which took place in historical time.⁴⁶

The Eucharist, being a community event, helps us to develop community awareness and encourages us to reach out to those who are standing apart, by allowing “heart to speak to heart”, as Cardinal Newman envisioned. The community that is hoped to be built by Eucharist is not a narrow or sectarian one, rather it is cosmic in its dimension and global in its outreach. As Vat. II teaches, as “*the universal sacrament of salvation*” (LG 48), in every the Eucharistic celebration, which “*is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world, heaven and earth are united, all creation is embraced and permeated by His presence, and the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ*” (EE 8).

The eschatological hope is liturgically enacted, as Ratzinger observes, in the act of priest together with the worshipping congregation facing the East, leading the congregation into the new heaven and the new earth that are encountered in Christ returning to meet us.⁴⁷ The Eucharist, is not a self-made human event, rather, a divine-cosmic reality, since all of creation is waiting for redemption from “the pierced one” returning in the East.

What is enacted in the Eucharist is not only a reflection of the interconnection of Temple and synagogue, Word and sacrament, but also the bringing together of history and the cosmos.⁴⁸ The eschatological bringing together of history and the cosmos is taking place in every Eucharistic celebration, even though its culminating fulfilment is actualised in the second coming of Christ. In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting “*in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: they already possess it on earth, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality*” (EE 18).

Albert Nolan rightly observes that there are four components to Christian hope and we can observe that all these four dimensions of hope are eventually realised in the Eucharist: (i) God as the basis of our hope –

the hope that is envisioned in the Eucharist has its basis in the divine act of what God had done in and through the person of Jesus. (ii) The common good as the object of our hope – as we celebrate the redemption of mankind in the Eucharistic celebration, its objective of common good is obvious. (iii) The value of an attitude of hopefulness amidst of the culture of despair with the conviction that our God is a co-sufferer is enacted in the Eucharistic sacrifice. (iv) Acting hopefully in our world for the common good that encompasses the social, historical, this worldly, political and economic levels⁴⁹ aiming at creating a new age of hope that embody peace, justice, freedom, equity and wellbeing of the entire humanity. In the Eucharistic celebration all these four aspects of hope are fulfilled.

As we live in the “between times” of the promise and its fulfilment, Eucharist functions as the meeting point between the present and the future. Before the Eucharistic real presence we do not look from the present into the future, but from the future, eschatological into the present living reality. We do not deduce the future out of the present; instead we begin to experience the future in the present. Eucharist is what bridges the gap between the present and future, the already and not yet.

Eucharist is the bridge to cross the abyss between immanence and transcendence. Flora Keshgegian presents five dimensions of hopeful vision.⁵⁰ In what follows, we will argue that all these five dimensions are fulfilled in the Eucharistic celebration:

1. Seeing time differently – do not justify the present evil as divine will nor be satisfied in grand hopes and utopian end-claims that claim everything will be rectified at eschaton. The sufferings of Jesus commemorated and relived at the altar gives the ultimate answer to evil as well as human suffering. The identity of the risen Jesus as the one who was crucified makes God known in his faithfulness that endures even unto death. God is the one who is faithful to his promises against hopelessness.⁵¹
2. Accepting finitude – Instead of suggesting other-worldly horizons, the answers we offer for suffering and death must be construable also to the finite human mind. The real living Eucharistic presence of Jesus provides a consoling and construable answer to the finite human mind. Memory of Jesus’ victory over evil, at this level, can

be the ground of hope, and “*there is no authentic hope without memory*”.⁵²

3. Challenging transcendence – It means that the transcendent horizon of hope shall not be explained exclusively outside the history that guides and grounds our human journey as Christians. What is being enacted in the Eucharistic celebration is what God had done historically in the incarnated son of God and what he will be fulfilling at the second coming of Christ. Therefore in the Eucharistic celebration both historical and trans-historical dimensions embrace each other.
4. An ethic of risk – It means to engage hour by hour with life in a way that our deeds express that for which we hope. The ethic of risk is the very living dynamism of Eucharistic celebration.
5. Reconceptualising eschatological transformation – hope is envisioned here as a social habit that honours both time and place in an incarnational way that can help us inhabit time differently and point us into the world of praxis. Central to the Eucharist, is the desire for the new life bestowed by the living memory of Christ. Eucharistic memory and solidarity begins in “intentional remembering of the dead, exploited, despised victims of history.” Although the victims of history may be lost, we are alive. We are continuously challenged in the Eucharist to work hard for the removal and extermination of exploitation and enslavement of the despised.

Christian hope is grounded in Eucharist where the continual presence of God, and particularly God’s presence with those who suffer is vitally enacted. The key point is that in the Eucharist God is experienced as present in suffering, both identifying with the sufferers and actively involved in transforming the situation. Eucharist is the most powerful sign of God’s coming reign and of the promised transformation of all things. It looks toward a future in hope and with confidence that the victorious death and resurrection of Christ make a definitive difference and will bring all creation to perfect fulfilment.

The Eucharistic hope enables us to approach every suffering including even martyrdom as a Eucharistic celebration. Ignatius of Antioch who is called “Doctor of Unity”,⁵³ presents his martyrdom as Eucharistic

celebration: “...Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread [of Christ]. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my sepulchre and may leave no part of my body behind, so that I may not, when I am fallen asleep, be burdensome to anyone. Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not so much as see my body. Supplicate the Lord for me, that through these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God.”⁵⁴ Ignatius associated his martyrdom with the altar on which the Eucharist is celebrated and understands his martyrdom as “the fulfilment of his baptism and of his participation in the Eucharist”.⁵⁵

St. John Paul II presents Eucharist as the anticipation of heavenly glory: Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life ... For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world (Jn 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the “secret” of the resurrection (EE 18). “In celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly ‘liturgy’ and become part of that great multitude which cries out: ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’ (Rv 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth” (EE 19).

3.1. Theology of Hope Reflected in the Addai-Mari Anaphora

The East Syrian Holy Mass begins with a thrice repeated proclamation of hope caused by incarnation: “Glory to God in the highest, Peace be on the earth, and hope to mankind forever and ever more!” Again, the cross of Christ is presented as the source of hope. In *Onitha d’Qanke* (Hymn of the Sanctuary) it is repeatedly affirmed: “For we have hoped and placed our trust in the holy name of cross.”

The Addai-Mari anaphora presents a variant triad of theological virtue such as love, hope and salvation. The prayer after Hymn of praise (*Shurraya*) we pray: “In Your grace and mercy, grant that we may gather from them fruits of love, hope and salvation beneficial to soul and body.”

Here faith is equated with salvation. The divine Word is presented as the source of hope for both the living and the dead. *“His word is hope for the living, life for the dead”* (Turgama: Instruction Hymn). Again the very goal of epiclesis is presented as granting of great hope in eternal life. Prayer of epiclesis recites: *“May He dwell in this Holy Mass of Your servants, and bless and sanctify it. May this Holy Mass grant us remission of our debts, forgiveness of our sins, great hope in the resurrection of the dead and new life in your heavenly kingdom with all those who have found favour in your presence.”* The prayer after epiclesis again refers to the joy and hope imparted through the paschal mystery: *“We offer You thanksgiving with joy and hope, in Your Church redeemed by the precious Blood of your Anointed One.”*

Hope of the departed for eternal life is frequently repeated in this liturgy, for example in the intercessory prayer: *“We pray (...) for all those who have departed from us in your name, for this your people who await your mercy with great hope, receive this qurbana (Holy Mass).”* In the prayer of memoir the rationale for the hope of the dead is proclaimed as the resurrection of Jesus: *“All the departed, the little in company with the great, sleep in you in the hope that through your glorious resurrection you will raise them again in glory.”*

Christological dimension of hope is accentuated in this liturgy by repeatedly addressing Christ as the hope of mankind. In no other liturgy we find a designation “hope of mankind” assigned to Jesus.

- Christ, hope of all mankind, sanctify our bodies by Your sacred Body (Prayer before communion).
- Christ, hope of mankind, Lord of all forever. Amen (Prayer after communion).
- Christ, hope of mankind, Lord of all, may Your power dwell interiorly in us / who have received Your Body exteriorly (Thanks giving prayer).
- Christ, hope of mankind, Lord of all, make us who have received Your Body from the paten and drunk Your Blood from the chalice, worthy to sing Your praises with the thief in paradise, in the company of the just who do Your will, forever. Amen (Thanks giving prayer).

The moral dimension of hope is also mentioned in this liturgy: “*With the hope arising from repentance, let us turn away from wrong doing, repent of our sins, and forgive the trespasses of our brothers and sisters*” (Penitential service). In the prayer after communion hope is expressed in terms of freedom from judgement and condemnation: “*Christ, Our Lord, hope of mankind. Let not the holy Body and the precious Blood that we have received result in our judgement and condemnation.*” The thanks giving prayer of the priest also expresses similar desire: O my Lord, may they be for the remission of debts, the forgiveness of sins, the great hope of resurrection from the dead and for new life in the Kingdom of heaven, to us and to the holy Church of Christ our Lord, here and in all places, now and always and forever. In the Thanks giving hymn of the faithful hope is presented as the consequence of divine love: “*Let the eyes which saw Your love also see blest hope from You.*”

3.2. Triple Means for Hope

Misericordia among the *misera* is capable of generating hope amidst of the darkness of hopelessness. In our semiotic society sometimes hope could be expressed in a better way by a wordless gesture. During his Manila speech Holy Father was asked by Glyzelle Palomar weeping bitterly: “*Many children get involved in drugs and prostitution. Why does God allow these things to happen to us? The children are not guilty of anything.*” Her tears were answered by the merciful embrace of the Holy Father and this gesture was diffused around the world in seconds. The acts and gestures of mercy that we extend to the needy and the afflicted, as the Good Samaritan did, are powerful means to grow in hope. St. Oscar Romero said “*God is the protagonist of history.*” As we hope in God we do not resort to terrible means to attain the end. We can leave things in the hands of God, not because we are passive but because we are free to do what is good, however little that seems to achieve. Whenever we feed the hungry and clothe the naked we are bringing the hope of the kingdom historically much closer and vital.⁵⁶

Abiding in Jesus (Jn 15:4) we grow in hope. Belief in the continued assistance of Jesus is a sign of hope in the Lord who has promised to be

with us until the end of time (Mt 28:20). Being with the people amidst of their encircling troubles we make the hope keep going. Accompanying the oppressed and the marginalised lights the rays of hope within their mind set up.

Allowing to be broken like the wheat and grapes of the Eucharistic bread and wine we can instil hope. The Greeks told Philip that they wanted to see Jesus (Jn 12:20–22): Jesus said the story of the broken or disintegrating wheat grain. This is an indirect reference to the Eucharist, in the sense that anyone who wishes to see Jesus should turn to the broken wheat of Eucharist, where the incarnated, loving, healing, teaching, suffering, risen, glorious, merciful and judging face of Jesus is vitally revealed. The richness of John 12:20–22 is such that it can be described as a rapport of Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology. Every search in hope for God will ultimately be answered in the broken wheat of Eucharist.

Conclusion

Although of the three “theological” virtues, hope has been far less prominent in the theological discussions when compared to faith and love, it enables us to go beyond our visible horizons and finite limitations. In this study, we have come up with the conclusion that Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian hope. Hope unfolded in the Eucharist is grounded on the revelation of God in creation, redemption and eschatological parousia and stands for transformation and change in the present, towards a new creation. As Eucharistic hope is essentially communitarian it evades every dimensions of individualistic and egoistic thought. Being the meeting point of the dialectics of present and future, immanence and transcendence, earth and heaven, human and divine, Eucharist becomes the powerful semiotic presence of hope that could contribute towards human efforts for on-going social transformation within our world today.

Notes

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22. SCHUMACHER, *Philosophy*, 66.
23. MOLTSMANN, J., *Human Identity*, 10.
24. GREGAORY NAZIANZEN, *Dogmatic Poems*, V, 53-64: PG 37, 428–429.
25. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 3.
26. See PALM, *Transforming Hope*, 124.

27. POPE FRANCIS, *Why Are You Afraid? Have You No Faith?: The World Facing Pandemic*, Dicastery for Communication, Vatican 2020, 16.
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