



One Hope – Response by Bishop Shvarts

Bishop Pavlo Shvarts

There is no denying that that time of polycrisis, which Archbishop Dr. Antje Jackelén mentioned in her presentation, is not a new phenomenon in the history of mankind. Various crises such as wars, famines, natural disasters, diseases, and many other calamities were also present in the lives of our ancestors. They will probably be a part of our descendants' lives as well. For centuries, the Christian community (the Church) has been forced, just like us, to seek answers to questions about life in times of crisis. This search was not always successful, and the answers were only helpful for the society of the time. Despite this, Christians of the past, same to us, were looking for a source of hope. A source that would give strength to live in times of crisis and give hope for the future.

“I want you to panic!”, the words of Greta Thunberg quoted by Archbishop Dr. Jackelén, are not a novelty as well. Many Christian preachers and theologians preached God's punishments and described graphically the horrors of hell in order to instill panic in their listeners and thereby urge them to repent. In a way, this is a fulfillment of one of the tasks of the Law, which Lutheran theology tells us about. The Law, like a mirror, enables us to see our own imperfection (sinfulness) and the reality of the world in which we live. The Law has the power to snatch us out of our own utopia, for example, from an imaginary world, where no violence exists, and everything can be solved through dialogue.

It is worth mentioning that the practice of using exclusively the Law in one's message is popular not only among moralizing preachers but also among the new "prophets" of the secular age. If in the Middle Ages "prophets" terrified their listeners with hell, today they do it with horrors of atomic war, pandemics, and natural disasters. The



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difference of our time lies primarily in the fact that ideas and information in the digital age spread much faster and reach a much wider range of people. In that way, everyone can become a new "prophet" of the apocalypse or "an armchair expert". After all, is there anyone, who knows about the great power of a word better than the Christian community? It can heal and inspire but also destroy and take away the last hope. Fear turns into hatred and aggression if there is no hope standing in its way.

The real treasure of the Church is the Gospel, as Martin Luther described it in his 95 Theses. The gospel is filled with hope. It is paradoxical, that this hope is born on the cross out of the sacrificial love offered for all people and fully revealed its magnificence in the Risen Christ, who is our hope for the resurrection and the source of hope for Christians.

Having understood that we ourselves are in need of hope, we now should think of ways we can share it with others. Each of us has our own history, spirituality, and culture in which we grew up. Before sharing hope, we need to hear the story of the other person. Otherwise, we risk turning our hope into a "cheap" and meaningless idea, rather than a power that changes us through the Holy Spirit.

In my current situation, I find it difficult to imagine what it's like to hunger, which is a day-to-day experience of many people in Africa. However, the previous Ukrainian generations could have said a lot about hunger and the manmade famine, that killed millions of people. I *can* imagine what it's like to have a corrupt state system and even *tell* you about it, but there is no comparing it to the experience of people living in authoritarian totalitarian states. I can talk a lot about the war, Russian rocket attacks on peaceful cities, life during sirens, hiding in bunkers, and the horrors of occupation, but this story will probably sound somewhat distant for many of those present. Sometimes, when we talk about our suffering, we feel that our presence and our life story are a hindrance to those who strive to hold on to their own utopia. So,



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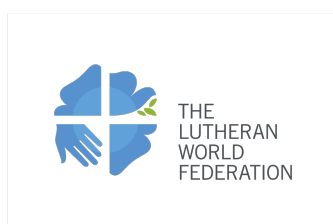


before we proceed with preaching hope, we need to learn to listen, to cry, and to rejoice together.

Our modern-day Ukrainian story of hope sounds like this: Even amid war and destruction, we hope for peace and revival of our country. We hope for justice for the victims of violence. We hope for the future of our children, even if they must study with air-raid sirens and in bomb shelters. We hope to be freed from fear and trauma. We hope for victory over hatred and for forgiveness. And of course, we hope for a just peace and an encounter with God. *Dum spiro spero* - as long as I breathe, I hope. The Latin saying quoted by Archbishop Dr. Jackelén is probably the only alternative we have today, both for the people and for the Church.

Hope is the gift of God that gives us the strength to live; it lifts our hands for battle against the injustice of this world and for service to those in need. This hope is part of our faith and the treasure we are called to share with others.

The [Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation](#) takes place 13-19 September 2023 in Krakow, Poland. The theme of the Assembly will be “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” It will be hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.



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