

Quotations on Hope

What we need... are not stories of optimism but narratives of hope. On a psychological level, optimism is about “feeling good” about yourself because you are “the capital of the future.” The obverse of such optimism is the denial of the horrors of history and disregard for ruined lives. Authentic Christian hope, on the other hand, is about the promise that the wrongs of the past can be set aright and that the future need not be a mere repetition of the past.

To hope does not mean to dream ourselves into a different reality, but to embrace the promise that this reality, suffused with suffering, will be transformed into God’s new world. We must acknowledge the underside of history; otherwise, we will never be redeemed. The good news is that those who hope can acknowledge the dark side of their history because the divine promise frees them from captivity to the past.

Miroslav Volf, *Against the Tide*

The source of the word “virtue” is revealing; it comes from the Latin noun *virtus*, meaning “strength.” The virtue that Christians call hope is not a warm feeling, or a sunny mood, or a habit of optimism. Optimism, as the great Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos once wrote, has nothing to do with hope. Optimism is often foolish and naïve — a preference to see good where the evidence is undeniably bad. In fact, Bernanos called optimism a “sly form of selfishness, a method of isolating oneself from the unhappiness of others.”

Hope is a very different creature. It’s a choice; a self imposed discipline to trust in God while judging ourselves and the world with unblinkered, unsentimental clarity. In effect, it’s a form of self-mastery inspired and reinforced by God’s grace. “The highest form of hope,” Georges Bernanos said, “is despair, overcome.” Jesus Christ was born in a filthy stable and died brutally on a cross not to make a good world even better; but to save a fallen and broken world from itself at the cost of his own blood. Such is the real world; our daily world; the world of Christian hope.

Archbishop of Denver Charles J. Chaput

To have Christian hope means to know about evil and yet to go to meet the future with confidence. The core of faith rests upon accepting being loved by God, and therefore to believe is to say Yes, not only to him, but to creation, to creatures, above all, to men, to try to see the image of God in each person and thereby to become a lover. That's not easy, but the basic Yes, the conviction that God has created men, that he stands behind them, that they aren't simply negative, gives love a reference point that enables it to ground hope on the basis of faith."

Pope Benedict XVI