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# The end of hope or new horizon of hope? An outreach to those in Africa who dare hope

## ABSTRACT

Afro-pessimism and post September 11, 2001 despair has taken hold of many people in the remotest communities of the world. This paper reflects critically on these realities and makes an attempt to point to new areas of study and action for missiology. The philosophical argument that recent changes in history mean the “end of hope” is critically assessed. Instead, it is proposed that a new religious horizon of hope has arisen. Its implications for missiology in an African<sup>1</sup> context are then explored.

## INTRODUCTION

When the world stood at the dawn of the last century people were infused with optimism. As early as 1892, a columnist for a well-known British periodical claimed,

The fact that we are approaching the end of another century of our era, strongly effects the popular imagination ... Even now the idea of the *Annus Mirabilis*, the year of Grace 2000, begins to affect us. We feel that if we could live to witness its advent, we should witness an immense event. We should almost expect something to happen in the Cosmos, so that we might read the great date (2000) written on the skies.<sup>2</sup>

Those of us who managed to see the dawn of the year 2000 as well as the year 2001 have at least seen the magical dates laser-beamed against the slopes of Table Mountain. The writing was not yet “on the skies”. We have instead, researchers tell us, entered the time of the “abolition of the category of the future”,<sup>3</sup> as we see “the end of history”<sup>4</sup> and are challenged by “the decline of secular hope”.<sup>5</sup>

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1 To speak of hope and future in Africa is not without difficulty. The idea that the African concept of time inhibits a view on the future is very well known. In a follow-up to this paper I will make an effort to indicate the place of eschatology in African Theology.

2 Quoted in Bauckham, Richard & Hart, Trevor 1999:4.m

3 Nowotny, Helga 1988. From the Future to the Extended Present, in Kirsch, G, Nijkamp, P & Zimmermann, K (eds). *The Formulation of time preferences in a multi-disciplinary perspective: The consequences for individual Behaviour and Collective decision-making*. Avebury: Aldershot.

4 Fukuyama, Francis 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Penguin. Moltmann (1996:218-226) critically examines the issue of the “end of history” in his book *The Coming of God*.

5 Bauckham, Richard & Hart, Trevor 1999. *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, ch 1.

Perhaps we should pray that our times would be a time of Grace. There was an upbeat anticipation that greeted the twentieth century. All indicators show that there is a downbeat feeling at the beginning of the year 2000. The horrific experiences of 11 September 2001 raised the consciousness of humanity regarding the low level to which hope has declined and declined as a result of the events in New York. The recent elections in Zimbabwe and the suffering of its people also made Africans aware of the dangerous levels to which despair can fall. Very few people will call our times “the great time” and this holds true for science, religion and our social organisations.

However, it is not “popular imagination” that will help us understand the challenges of this “century of grace”, we will need prophetic imagination. Popular imagination is itself imprisoned by despair. We see almost everywhere how the idea of Africanisation battles against a despairing popular imagination. Afro-pessimism is itself related to such despair. Prophetic imagination will indeed be unpopular since it will be pointing to a new horizon, the horizon of hope and also because it will be telling other stories, the many stories of future. A story of future is deeply rooted in Christianity: *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again*. This insistence on future is an aspect that is shared with Judaism and Islam. Religious people live within these stories and their identities are shaped by these stories. Is it possible that these stories can help us regain hope?

These are the issues that I will hold up as a tribute to those who dare hope for Africa at the turn of the century.

## GLOBAL SOCIAL DESPAIR

The world is engulfed in despair. However, it is also accustomed to despair. We have known personal despair, familial despair, national and regional despair. We have seen personal despair through the unprecedented increase in the availability and dispensing of depression treatments. South Africa with its high incidence of family murders and child abuse by family members witnesses familial despair on a daily basis. At the turn of this decade studies found that young people in South Africa in all race groups suffered from a lack of hope in their future. The Western Cape is known as one of the provinces with the best economic growth statistics but with free-falling social hope. We are used to despair as individuals, families, a nation and as a region. This time, however, the world and all its religions are faced with an unprecedented crisis of global despair.<sup>6</sup> But then again, even “global” despair is not unfamiliar to the peoples of the world. Global despair has already shaken the foundations of hope in two well-documented and horrific World Wars. The major difference of the current crisis of hope is that it rears its head at a time when the world is experiencing its optimal political (eg the end of the Cold War and an unprecedented embrace of democracy), relatively optimal economical (eg the flourishing financial market), technological (eg the growth of the Internet) and high cultural (eg the embrace of diversity) moment in history. As every category of the global graph is pointing upwards, the graph of human hope has plummeted and continues to do so in all sectors of human stratification. This unprecedented crisis of hope represents the crucial challenge to the Christian mission in the twenty-first century.

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6 Raimon Panikkar reminds us, “The crisis today is not that of one country, one model, one regime; it is the crisis of humanity” (*Christian Century*, Aug 16-23, 2000, p 836). Miroslav Volf comments on Andrew Delbanco’s *The Real American Dream*, “Our hopes are the measure of our greatness. When they shrink, we ourselves are diminished. The story of American hope over the past two centuries is one of increasing narrowing ... the horizon of hope has shrunk to ‘the scale of self-pampering’ (also in *Christian Century*, Aug 16-23, 2000, p 837).

I had the opportunity of working with international researchers in the Campbell Scholars programme of Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta from September to November 2000 under the leadership of Walter Brueggemann. The contextual studies spanned the African continent, the Caribbean Islands, Central Europe, North America, Canada and Asia. Our forthcoming book will reveal the global nature of this crisis of hope.

Hope is, to a significant extent, a crucial element of the structural issues driving the most important decisions in Africa today.

## THE UNMAKING OF HOPE

On the other hand, the world is neither unfamiliar with hope. Modernity was born out of the enthusiasm of a certain messianic hope expressed in terms of natural elements and the theology of the orders of creation. The people of the Enlightenment believed (a) that nature would eventually complete its own course; (b) that the world would, on its own accord, develop to autonomy and maturity; (c) that education will progressively lead to humanization and the fruits of democratization and civilization, and (d) that history was essentially open to the future of its natural completion.

The Renaissance turned the European human being into “the measure of all things”. The reason (rationality) of this central human being (anthropocentrism) became the basis of a (natural) hope for a complete and matured future of every person and place in the world. Under the leadership of this European subject, their rationality became the instrument of domination. This led to a colonial seizure of power over “poorer peoples of the land” who lived in the so-called new worlds “discovered” by the Europeans (leading to large-scale political dehumanization of “the other”), a technological seizure of power over the environment (leading to cosmic ecological destruction), and a continued march to economic domination over all the excluded peoples (leading to a this-worldly sacrifice in the global economy). This enthusiastic, European messianic hope with its strong claim that human beings can achieve the world’s fulfilment through rational means and its resultant technological achievements robbed human beings of their ecology and the environment of its magic. This hopeful enthusiasm deprived both humanity and the environment of their authentic being as it was given in their relationship to the Creator.

Christianity played no small part in this. The idea that the former millennium would be the golden age was directly related to the notion of it being seen as the Christian age. Christians planned, sought and organized military missions to take Jerusalem from the Muslims from the year 1097 AD until the years around 1400 AD. Having sacrificed the lives of many Christian and Muslim children in the crusades, Christians, thereafter, shifted their missionary focus towards the so-called new worlds. Mission was then extended from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Hope, an important category of redemption, has thus been co-opted for many centuries as the expression of an optimistic evolution of nature led by European human beings, albeit through domination and subjugation of others.

The unmaking of actions of hope manifested as development of nature, requires a conceptual break from progress and prosperity-faith; instrumental rationality, the Christian empire, an ecumenical movement embedded in Christendom, and even of a Christian European civilization embedded in the mainline churches of the Southern hemisphere.

The unmaking of hope has a long history, but recent history has both accelerated and reshaped the process. The plummeting of the graph of social hope did not start in 1990 when Mandela was released or in 1989 when the Berlin wall came down. Global hopelessness started to foster when Nelson Mandela was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment, when black people were first massacred

in Sharpeville (South Africa), when the armies of the Warsaw Pact undermined the humane nature of socialism, when Martin Luther King (Jr) was murdered, when Vietnam erupted, when modern terrorism reared its face and economic globalization graduated from a mere posture of internationalization to growing global inequality. The unmaking of social hope has continued ever since the 1960's to the very day in which we are now called to confess hope in Africa.

## THE QUESTION OF HOPE IN AFRICA

The unmaking of hope deepened in the 1970's to a level that the ecumenical movement had awakened to its alternative. The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Nairobi, Kenya, from November 23 to December 10, 1975. The theme of the assembly was "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites". It is not only the time, but also the place of the meeting that is significant from the perspective of mission. Section I of the Assembly had the responsibility to develop the sub-theme "Confessing Christ Today". An extraordinary level of convergence occurred among the four major traditions of the Council as the report took shape. At the heart of this convergence was the assertion that the missionary witness of the time should be grounded in the confession of Christ as "The Christ of God, the hope of the world". The second event that testifies to the reawakening to hope is the 1978 meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Bangalore, India. Again, both time and place are of significance. This meeting studied the implications of hope as they see Christians called to "give account of the hope" that is in them. They developed the overarching idea of "hope as the resistance movement against fatalism". It took the ecumenical movement a decade to theologically respond in the light of the new accelerated forms of the unmaking of hope. The third ecumenical landmark is the 1998 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, which met under the theme "Turn to God: Rejoice in Hope". The significance of time and place speaks for itself. It was on African soil that groundbreaking advances were made.

The World Council of Churches followed a very inclusive process to identify the theme of its eighth General Council held in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998. Church leaders, lay people, academics, groups of women and youth were consulted in this process. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, speaks of the result in the following way, "... today we are discovering that the liberations of society is not in itself the fulfilment of human hope ... For many (young people), the energy for hoping seems to have been exhausted by the effort to preserve and defend the acquired way of living ... One thing this (inclusive) exercise (of finding a theme relevant to Africa) showed is how personal and contextual the language of hope is (to Africans)".<sup>7</sup>

The Carnegie study conducted by Mamphela Ramphele and Francis Wilson (1989) arrived at the fundamental assumption that "whilst it is helpful and encouraging to think of rebuilding or reconstructing a new South Africa (SA) we believe it is important not to lose sight of the extent to which a society is an organism that grows rather than a structure that can be dismantled like a motorcar" (1989:5). This statement takes the issue of the eradication of poverty beyond the immediate concerns for social engineering or structural adjustment (World Bank) and calls for an organic approach to the eradication of poverty. Such an organic approach should regard poverty eradication also in relation to the dynamics of society as an organism. In chapter 13 Ramphele and Wilson described, what they called, the "Framework for Thinking" about poverty eradication in

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7 Raiser, Konrad 1997:78.

South Africa. They then open the chapter with the following challenge identified by Goran Hyden (*No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective*. SCM: London, 1983, xiv), “Turning the despair and pessimism, which presently affect wide circles of people inside and outside Africa, into hope and optimism for the future will only be possible if all actors ... are ready to question the premises on which they have based their outlook, strategies or action to date ... There are no shortcuts to progress.” This first reference seems to claim that “Afropessimism” is not only manifested “outside” of Africa, but also “inside” the continent. The unachievable shortcuts to progress in development, Hyden claims, must be replaced by accepting the challenge of questioning the premises of the framework of vision, strategy and action. Such questioning will lead to “turning the despair and pessimism ... inside and outside ... Africa ... into hope and optimism for the future ...” It is in this regard that Rhampele and Wilson conclude that “changing the low self-image and *sense of hopelessness* that poor people often have of themselves and their situation” (Rhampele & Wilson 1989:267, my italics) is crucial to the project of poverty eradication because sustainable livelihoods require “touch-stones of possibility” (Rhampele & Wilson 1989:267).

Hope is, to a significant extent, a crucial element of the structural issues driving the most important decisions in Africa.

## THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

At the end of the horizon of secular hope, we see a new religious horizon opening up. While social scientists of the last century have predicted the end of religion and the total secularisation of the world, we are beginning to see an accelerated desecularisation of the world.<sup>8</sup> All indicators reveal that religion, especially Christianity and Islam, will become major forces in the making of world politics and economic practices.

I, therefore, submit that the twenty-first century challenges Christians to remake the Christian hope by basing it anew in the new acts that God is doing in the world today. This eschatological hope does not start with Jesus. It is foundational to the whole revelation of the triune God. The Bible reveals God acting in history.<sup>9</sup> Such hope must be expressed as a category of grace, not of nature. Its existence is a gift of grace, its revelation, a mystery of grace and its historical appearance, a manifestation of grace. This redemptive category of hope thus breaks with the modern logic of cause and effect in all matters of nature. At this point the hope Christians are called to confess in the twenty-first century differs radically from the hope manifested in the deterministic understandings of Marxism, modern Capitalism, and the Enlightenment.

## MISSION AS HOPE IN ACTION

The quest for hope has been raised recently in the circles of theologians studying the mission of the church.<sup>10</sup> David Bosch neatly points out “it should come as no surprise that the recovery of the

8 See Berger, Peter L (ed) 1999. *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

9 Although the Greek word *apokalypsis* primarily means to reveal what was hidden and can be understood as making known the secret will of God, an eschatological interpretation sends one off seeking for actions of God in our times and places. Only God can help us see these actions through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guides all people in God’s mission with prophetic vision to see beyond the effects of nature.

10 C F Felix Wilfred (2000), professor at the University of Madras in India, makes a contribution to this quest in his book *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope*.

eschatological dimension is manifested particularly clearly in missionary circles”.<sup>11</sup> He continues saying, “From the very beginning of the Christian church there appeared to have been a peculiar affinity between the missionary enterprise and expectations of a fundamental change in the future of humankind ... Eschatology stands for the hope element in religion.”<sup>12</sup> A person of faith has to be sure of what they hope for. This hope must be confessed daily. We confess it because we do not yet see it and we certainly do not yet enact this faith (Heb 11:1). However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century we can be sure that the “already” of God’s future outweighs the “not yet” (to use Oscar Cullmann’s<sup>13</sup> expression) of our times.

After the dismantling of Apartheid and the fall of the Berlin wall an adulterated understanding of the future has arisen in certain Christian circles whereby some look at the ravages of history, the destruction of nature, the AIDS epidemic and ongoing conflicts as signs of the nearness of the second coming of God. This is not the first time that Christian notions have been used to justify apathy and lack of action. The category of hope has itself often led to quietism, passivity and paralysis. The gift of God becomes something that one should wait for. One is then challenged to be patient and willingly allow the world to endure its deserved suffering until the end. In such situations hope functions as a narcotic of the people. We, therefore, have to ask whether there is a relationship between hope and action. Indeed, the relationship is found in the Christian’s calling to discipleship. The purport of Christianity is not that we follow Descartes, Plato, Martin Luther King Jr or Desmond Mpilo Tutu, but that Christians shall follow Christ. The mission of the triune God calls for action in terms of the *Imitatio Dei* (the following of God). It is God’s mission and every action of human beings can only be a following. Confessing hope is confession and not acts of human assertiveness. The hope of a disciple is never based on one’s own agency but on one’s following of the acting God who has acted then in Jesus Christ and now in and among us all in the world.

Such remaking should therefore lead to a clearer understanding of *hope in action*. There is a vast difference between Bosch’s proposal for *mission as “action in hope”* and the idea of *confessing hope in action* as proposed here. Building on H J Margull’s viewpoints, Bosch chooses to speak of *“action in hope”*. Bosch then makes his definitive statement, “We perform this mission

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11 Bosch (2000:501) points out that nineteenth-century theology has closed the book on the eschatology. Even as late as in the year 1910 there was no reference to eschatology in the World Missionary Conference. Mission was then primarily understood as christianizing and civilizing of nations via church planting. This missionary enterprise was in itself interpreted in terms of an understanding that the world organically grows towards maturity.

12 Bosch, David J 2000:499.

13 David Bosch’s most direct but subtle critique of the theology and mission of Apartheid is rooted in Oscar Cullmann’s point about the direct relationship between mission and eschatology. Whilst the Dutch Reformed Church states in its document *Church and Society* (1990) that it has done everything in service of the reign of God, Bosch remarks, “... if ... their refusal to challenge unjust societal structures is rooted in a view about the inviolability of the ‘orders of creation’, they cannot appeal to ... Cullmann”. There is a certain platitude in the language of the reign of God, even when used by zealous missionaries, when such a notion is embedded in ideas about the “orders of creation” and is thereby separated from the critical element of eschatology. See Bosch, David J 2000:506. I have indicated how the notion of the “orders of creation” especially as expressed in a distorted Kuyperian theology has dominated South African apartheid theology (see A testimony on the Decisions of the Dutch Reformed Church, in WARC Publications, 1994, Nr 25:42-47. Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and also in “Black” and Reformed and “Dutch” and Reformed in South Africa, published in Wells, Ron (ed) 1997:85-105.

in hope.” Although he qualifies this definitive statement with the words “with due humility – as participation in the *Missio Dei*”, I find it still too restricted to mere acts of anticipation. The idea is that mission should anticipate what lies in the future. It elevates the action to an eschatology of expectation rather than one of God’s actions here and now. Eventually, this line of thought falls prey to a surplus of the future and a deficit of the here and now. He can therefore state that “... it may be correct to label our entire, comprehensive mission in the context of our eschatological expectation as ‘*action in hope*’”.<sup>14</sup>

We are not merely called to act in anticipatory hope. Our mission in the twenty-first century is to confess hope in action following God’s actions in our times. We take our point of departure in the notion that God is acting in history, at this time, in this place, in this country, on this continent and in this world. Our mission is to *confess* this hope. However, confessing this hope passively is not a following of God in this world. We are called to confess hope in action on the African continent. This confession is far removed from the idea that we can save the world and ourselves by our own works. Such Christian hope is understood as an action that is (a) based on the new actions of God in history; (b) rooted in the promises of God; (c) a conscious break from the frame of a natural or social causality, and (d) a critical challenge to Christianity and the church in the world. In short, such an understanding of mission will extend the idea of the *Missio Dei* to that of the *Imitatio Dei*.

We have tried living with a form of “hope” that comes from our achievements, but we are now challenged by a hope that comes from outside the realm of the human and the natural.

In the stark reality of the death of Christ we meet the terrible hopelessness that entrapped the disciples. The cross is the end of their history. The cross is the end of their Christianity and, yes, of their hopes for humanity. The cross represents the end of their mission. In a sense the cross of Christ is our most real exposure to the meaning of the words “end”, “fear” and “hopelessness”. In the cross we meet the limits of all being and doing, the final defeat of hope in the world, in people and in the finest institutions of religion, law and government. All that is left is to return home and wait for the bubble to burst (Lk 24:13-24).

Christians have for too many years been interpreting the cross one-sidedly in such an Anselmic way that we only see the doctrine of satisfaction in it. We see only this man, Jesus Christ and those people who crucified him as puppets on the string of an avenging God who has chosen the cross for God’s own satisfaction. Satisfied that all sins were atoned for, this God then performs another miracle: the resurrection of Christ. However, we never got the point made by the Gospel of Mark.<sup>15</sup> The cross left the most ardent believer without hope, silenced and afraid (Mk 16:8). With these descriptions Mark concludes his writing. Awkward as that may be, Mark’s original conclusion is the most instructive conclusion for people facing the realities of the twenty-first century. As we are facing the end of human development,<sup>16</sup> the end of history and the end of evolution, we are standing where those disciples stood: facing the cross. We are used to seeing cross bearers in our families and in poor countries. We have not yet learned the deep meaninglessness and despair that comes with the cross. We are now called back to the cross of Christ to ask again for its reason as we think about the church’s mission in the twenty-first century. Perhaps this time we will be struck by the true meaning of its futurelessness and hopelessness.

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14 David Bosch makes this argument under the heading “Mission as Action in Hope” (2000:498-510).

15 Donald H Juel has argued this point convincingly in many places, and most recently in *Christian Hope and the denial of Death: Encountering New Testament Eschatology*, in Polkinghorne, John & Welker, Michael (eds) 2000:171-183.

16 Polkinghorne, John & Welker, Michael 2000. *Theology for the twenty-first century: The End of the World and the Ends of God*. Harrisburg: Trinity.

Only then will we be able to understand the meaning of resurrection. At the height of hopelessness an act of hope that comes not from us, that has not been developed through human rationality, that bears no relation to evolution and which has never been seen before, surprises hopeless people. As an act of God, coming from outside human beings, religious institutions, legal institutions, medical institutions or the governmental institutions. Here, in a graceless, hopeless and brutal world the light of grace breaks the darkness of hopelessness.

The reference to the cross of Jesus Christ must not be seen, here, as a legal or religious recall to historical precedence. Instead we should be reminded of one of the most terrifying texts in the Hebrew Bible:

Do not remember former things. Behold, I am doing a new thing (Is 43:18).

This prophetic statement, he says, hinges on the socio-political and religious crises of the exile in the year 587 BC in Jerusalem. The known world of the Israelites had its final crash. They had reached the end of all known categories. Only prophetic imagination could look for and see the new acts of God in this world.<sup>17</sup>

How should we understand this call “not to remember former things” in the light of mission in the twenty-first century on the Christian calendar? It certainly does not invite the victims of the exile to forget the injustices they have experienced. It means, “stop looking for precedence” to enact. God thereby suggests that they would do well not to look for precedence in natural law or even divine intervention. “Behold, I am doing a new thing,” which is without precedence. It means that God is doing a thing that is new even unto God. Realistically, deep-seated hope lies in the prophetic imagination that the “newness” of God’s action will be without any historical (human and/or divine), legal (natural or tradition-based) or political precedence. Instead, we are invited to imagine the future by seeing new, surprising divine acts in this world. If you can imagine it, you will see it. We are now challenged to embrace the ideas of future and hope beyond the end of a mere belief in the natural unfolding of a created order or a technological climax of reason.

God’s future is inseparable from the future of every single being in God’s creation and also from every single historical judgment of God with regard to this world.<sup>18</sup> This is the plain and simple meaning of hope at the end of history. God does not want and did not plan on having a future separate from or without creation. The act of the resurrection means, beyond all doubt, that God has chosen this world as the theatre of God’s grace, including the continent of Africa.

Prophetic imagination does not imply a sacrifice of reason. It does necessitate a hermeneutical readjustment to the sites of the poor and the marginalized in the world ... where imagination originates. The new acts that God is doing among us, are happening as acts of liberation and humanization, not only as new acts in the unexpected places. Only the naive fails to see the socio-economic power of this substantial, this-worldly hope for the twenty-first century. However, we are called into this hope by way of a form of knowing embedded in the suspension of a socially acquired framework of interpretation forged by an advantageous socio-economic status. The elites of the Apartheid society have confused the interests of the country with the interests of their race. Sometimes, elites, in Africa and other places, have confused the interests of their countries with the interests of their tribes. Elites also face the danger that they can confuse the interests of a

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17 Cf Brueggemann, Walter 1986. *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

18 Moltmann (1996:22-24) argues that the concept of future is founded in the future of God.



country with the interests of their class. Christian elites have been prone to confusing the interests of their institutions and traditions with the interest of their countries. Remaking Christian hope requires specific attention to the poor and marginalized people of the Southern hemisphere (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America) and its Diaspora in the North. The future of God is bound up with God's will to be the "helper of the excluded" (Ps 10:14) and the hope of us all (1 Tim 1:1).

God challenges Christians in Africa to take responsibility for making social hope by confessing hope in action. This means: In the face of fear, "confess hope in action"; confronted by poverty, "confess hope in action"; facing the scourge of AIDS, "confess hope in action"! If Christians cannot confess hope on the cutting edge of the challenges of Africa, they lose the credibility and the moral right of professing their faith in public places.

The global economic world requires the exclusion of specified people in an economic reality that requires their (unfortunate, but) necessary sacrifice (triage) in a world of limits. However, some parts of the gospel message claim that if any Christian should give up hope for any one (even the smallest) of the creatures of God (whether it is a child or an orchid), that person has abandoned all hope for the future of God as Creator. Such hopelessness is a faithlessness that constitutes godlessness. The pursuit of Christian hope in an era of global despair rests, not so much on the natural potential of nature, as on the potent commitment and faithfulness of the Creator to the works (creation) of God's hands.

## MISSIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

The enterprise of missiology at the University of Stellenbosch will commit itself to a process of recognising the challenges through interdisciplinary studies; teaching students the challenge of Christian hope at the dawn of the century, and confessing hope in action. Nationally and internationally, I see the missiologists at Stellenbosch joining hands with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Council for Christian World Mission in forging the process. I wish to see churches, leaders and laypersons, covenanting for justice in the face of economic globalisation. Consequently, students who leave this institution will enter their ministries with a vision to lead this crucial mission of God in the world. They will be prepared to enter into critical and constructive dialogue with political, community and business leaders. These students will be able to engage them with knowledge of secular analyses and theories, but their language will be unashamedly Christian in grammar and in content.

Africa will yet rise to the challenge of the hope that God has for it and its people. The church and theological education is crucial to this mission.<sup>19</sup> "When all is said and done," write Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele (1989:267), the church in (South) Africa "is better placed than any other organisation, religious or secular, to work with poor people".

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19 The quest for a critical place for hope in the study and action of missiology is embedded in the appreciation of a diaconal-missiology. The kerugmatic and koinonial dimension are not thereby discarded. Hope is not only diaconal. It is our holistic calling in this world. However, it helps us to see the contextual challenges better

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