

Izvorni znanstveni članek/Article (1.01)

Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly 82 (2022) 2, 263—276

Besedilo prejeto/Received:06/2022; sprejeto/Accepted:07/2022

UDK/UDC: 27-423.79:364.624.6

27-423.79:141.32

DOI: 10.34291/BV2022/02/Dodlek

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Existential Anxiety and Christian Hope

Eksistencialna tesnoba in krščansko upanje

Abstract: The main idea behind this paper is that Christian hope can be a path to overcoming existential anxiety. Hope connects the vertical dimension, that is, faith and the meaning of life as a whole, with the horizontal dimension, i.e., love towards others and openness to communion. Both represent a correction of two deviations of modern people, namely the supposed calculability of their own lives and actions as well as social fragmentation and alienation. The two deviations prove to be a suitable ground for the application of the politics of fear, in which media mediation and fear production play rather important roles. That is why the perspective of hope is affirmed as a direct counterbalance to the perspective of fear.

Keywords: existential anxiety, the perspective of fear, the perspective of hope, Christian hope

Povzetek: Glavna misel tega prispevka je, da je krščansko upanje lahko pot do premagovanja eksistencialne tesnobe. Upanje povezuje vertikalno dimenzijo, torej vero in smisel človekovega življenja, ter horizontalno dimenzijo, torej ljubezen do drugih in odprtost do skupnosti. Oboje je popravek dveh deviacij sodobnega človeka, in sicer domnevne preračunljivosti lastnega življenja in dejanj ter družbene razdrobljenosti in odtujenosti. Oboje se izkaže za primerno podlago za izvajanje politike strahu, pri čemer imata pomembno vlogo medijsko posredovanje in produkcija strahu. Zato se perspektiva upanja potrjuje kot neposredna protiutež perspektivi strahu.

Ključne besede: eksistencialna tesnoba, perspektiva strahu, perspektiva upanja, krščansko upanje

1. Introduction

Insecurity, risk and fear are inextricably linked to human life. Life itself represents a risk. From its conception to death. Human life is in constant danger, and fear

is one of the instruments for dealing with dangers and for survival. People have always been aware of the risks. They have tacitly accepted those everyday risks without taking additional actions as long as it was possible to perform regular life tasks and to meet life needs. In situations and times of heightened danger, especially when it comes to dangers that threaten humanity as such (war, natural disasters, deadly infectious diseases), people take appropriate special communal and individual measures to reduce or eliminate the consequences of the danger.

If we observe the world through the perspective of the influence of politics, it can be said that with the end of the Cold War and the fear of nuclear destruction, the threats and fears of humanity seemed to have come to an end, entering a peaceful period. However, very quickly or at the same time, new fears have emerged on a global scale, which was especially due to their intensification through media action. Among the proclaimed and advertised dangers that cause fear, the most significant are climate changes, terrorism, which is turning into bioterrorism, and most recently 'War in Europe', though different versions of their synchronous combinations, are not excluded. Still, the main cause of fear following the events of 9/11 seems to be its political and media production. The politics of fear is based on fear discourse, and the media play a major role in promoting it. (Altheide 2009, 60–61)

Although the topic of fear has been the focus of theoretical scientific conferences and publications from the perspective of various humanities and social sciences for the last fifteen years, the current global situation requires additional efforts. The way of life and the way of thinking are the background of this paper's reflection. The following text contains a few interpretations of the phenomenon of fear in today's society, i.e., the factors influencing the way of life in a state of fear, and it is argued that these factors cumulatively result in a state of existential anxiety. The final part brings a discussion on the characteristics of Christian hope and its potential to lead people out of existential anxiety.

2. From Individualization to Institutionalization

Recent decades have witnessed fear becoming a major life topic in the public discourse. Talking about fear is the result and at the same time cause of the increase in fear as the predominant human emotion. To be more concrete, today one of the keywords is 'safety', while the main topic of public discourse is the necessity of protection. »Safety is more highly valued than any other condition in the culture of fear, acquiring the status of a moral good that trumps all others.« (Furedi 2018, 185) The constant emphasis on safety implies that it is constantly growing and endangering, which has changed people's everyday living environment and way of life. 'Safety' has permeated all aspects of life. It is not possible to walk along the streets of the city centre without being followed by security cameras, especially considering the dangers of terrorism or possible terrorism (it seems that the Covid pandemic whipped away that danger), increased in the so-called

western society. Every incident with heavily injured or killed people has been used as one more argument to increase the number of security cameras and to take even more rigid measures, like the control of e-mail correspondence and monitoring the phone conversations, messages and contacts of citizens. Surveillance cameras have become the regular inventory of the means of public transport or workplaces. Paradoxically, their presence has not diminished fear but has created a generation that fears like no other did before (Bauman and Lyon 2013, 91). All these measures remained in force even after the cessation of the acute threat of terrorism. At the time of the pandemic measures, those responsible for the ‚safety‘ of citizens also added thermographic cameras for measuring body temperature.

The purpose of this short phenomenological recall (meaning the level of social phenomena) of the contemporary everyday way of life is to become aware of the power of the ‚safety-thinking‘ that is a consequence of everyday experience. To be more exact, if one seeks to understand the social situation, one has to take into account the everyday experience of people. The narrative of safety and protection implies danger and fear. Fear is the other side of the ‚security coin‘. In his analysis of German society, German sociologist Heinz Bude stresses that the concept of fear unites everything that people feel, what they find important, what they hope for and what they feel despair about. This is why today we can speak of a ‚society of fear‘ (Bude 2014, 10). It goes without saying that not all societies are equal, but Bude’s analysis of German society can be taken as an example of the people’s mentality and the basic level of fear in the everyday life of the so-called developed countries of Western culture, primarily the EU and the USA. Bude’s analysis of the society of fear is specific in that it does not highlight major fears, such as fear of terrorism, war, or health threats. Bude views society in terms of income, i.e., in terms of the economic assumption of life. In the modern Western welfare state, a middle class has emerged that resides in a »zone of civilization comfort, social security, and personal development« (61). However, it is precisely in this part of society that the fear of loss is constantly smouldering because those who can lose more are then more afraid. It has also been shown that people who live in poverty but believe that they will be better off in the future are more satisfied than people who have a higher living standard but no positive vision of the future (Svendsen 2010, 164), as it makes them more susceptible to fear, the everyday fear associated with climbing or descending the career ladder, with taxes and interest rates on loans. In short, fear is associated with economic conditions that determine the quality and comfort of everyday life. According to Bude, for the post-war generation of Germans who have experienced security, comfort, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as an open field of opportunity to achieve their own ambitions, fear is more connected to the questions of whether pensions will be lowered and whether homosexuals will be hired or denied work, while the war with Russia, for example, they find unfathomable (Bude 2014, 147–148). It seems that the generation which, if we understood Bude well, has the least tolerance for fear now encounters fears that far exceed the capacity of its resilience. Such individual fears spill over into social interactions.

The everyday, smouldering fear, as described by Bude, makes a fertile ground for building on fear for political purposes. The greatest danger for social relations is in the combination of the fear of losing one's own position in the system and the fear of the whole system giving the individual a desirable social position might collapse (101).

It should be emphasized here that although Bude speaks of social classes, fear is a matter concerning the individual, not the classes as such. Also, even though the very discussion on social classes may evoke memories of some bygone times, the classes have not disappeared. What has happened is that belonging to a particular social class no longer influences the actions of individuals (Beck 1992, 92). Seen 'from the outside', the individual is a member of a social class, but 'from the inside', the individual is alone. Ulrich Beck puts fear in the context of individualization, and the engine of individualization is the labour market. In Western societies, the process of individualization has resulted in the separation of the individual from traditional support networks and his or her reliance upon own abilities. The focal characteristic and goal of individualization is the control of one's own life, from managing one's own body to managing money. Education, mobility and competition play key roles in this. Education that corresponds with the needs of the labour market affects not only the employment opportunities but also the level of income. The demands that the labour market poses in regard to mobility makes it impossible to maintain quality social and family ties. Competition places individuals with similar skills and knowledge in confrontation, turning them into opponents and eventually isolating them. (92–95) Social isolation weakens each individual's critical power as »individuals on their own are far more likely to be overwhelmed by a sense of insecurity than to have the confidence to develop critical thought« (Furedi 2002, 172). The separation of individuals from the community has also weakened their ability to »communicatively act towards the world of life« (Dodlek 2016, 94), and they have less and less things in common that would enable mutual understanding and communication. Individualization, driven by a desire for self-determination, snatched people their root of belonging (Bauman and Leoncini 2018) and alienated them, turning them more vulnerable and susceptible to negative influences. The contemporary individual is not a hunter (Bauman 2007a, 100) but has become prey. Independence, which individuals expected to yield more security and control over their own lives resulted in quite the opposite, i.e., it made individuals more dependent and insecure.

»Among the negative effects of individualization processes are the separation of the individual from traditional support networks (e.g., family or neighbourhood), the loss of supplementary sources of income (e.g., part-time farming), and, along with this, the experience of an increased wage and consumption dependency in all spheres of life. To the extent that the main income security of this new condition of life, steady employment, is lost – regardless of the availability of social security – people are suddenly confronting an abyss.« (Beck 1992, 93)

Losing a job does not imply only the loss of economic security and independence; it also has a negative impact on the already weakened social ties. By gaining independence and severing ties with historical consciousness, people also lost traditional ways of dealing with anxiety and insecurity and were left to fend for themselves even in that domain (Beck 1992, 153), disembedded (Beck and Willms 2004, 63), aware that all of their choices carry a risk (109). This does not simply mean that the world is a dangerous place to live, but the fact that automation and computerization have caused spikes in unemployment rates in Western Europe cannot be ignored (Mythen 2004, 123; 126).

The process of individualization has not turned individuals into independent masters of their own lives (Jamnik 2021, 819); it made them completely dependent on conditions they cannot influence, which in addition creates risks individuals are powerless against, with nothing left to do but surrender to the system. Thus, individual people have become completely dependent on the system whose protection they can buy only by complete submission to it. Moreover, only by surrendering to the system can individuals gain freedom (Bauman 2000, 20). »Individualization thus means precisely *institutionalization*, institutional shaping and, hence *the ability to structure* biographies and life situations *politically*.« (Beck 1992, 132) The institutionalization of individuals as core primary elements of society did not strengthen them but in fact, put an unbearable burden on them. Due to this unbearable burden of decision-making, individuals tend to surrender themselves to control and manipulation by the system (133), as well as blind obedience (Beck and Willms 2004, 67) in anticipation of the system's support. However, due to the influence of the process of globalization and the consequent weakening of the political power of the state, this system has become non-transparent for individuals, only causing more uncertainty (Bauman 2007a, 2). If individuals who are left to themselves and focused on themselves trying to find a solution to socially generated problems, they end up humiliated, with destroyed self-esteem, lost trust and stolen sense of security (2010, 144). They can no longer detect neither the source of danger nor the source of protection, or even discern whether the alleged sources of danger and protection are in fact one and the same. Liquid fear (2006) that cannot be located represents the greatest danger because everything can become a cause of fear. Today's individuals seem to live in a minefield (2017, 37).

Bauman highlights five societal changes that have created a new environment of insecurity in which the individual can barely get by (2007a, 1–4). Concerning hope, the fourth one is the most interesting: life is less and less a long-term flow of experiences which can be understood as one whole, but more and more the sum of short-term events which have to be secured. If we connect the basic life uncertainty with a highly fragmented lifestyle, people are forced to seek their life orientation more in the lateral than in the vertical sphere. Such a state directs them primarily to the care and the insurance of short-term life episodes. The extent to which that insurance goes are the possibilities of the precise calculation of chances and dangers in a certain period of life. Long-term planning, which also

includes that which cannot be calculated, becomes less and less acceptable. Now, life insurance seems to cover or, at least, reduce the risk of the underlying uncertainty. It can be calculated and expressed with numbers and the amount of money as a kind of certainty. Yet life insurance still does not ‚cover‘ life as such. It presupposes the fragmented lifestyle and the lateral, non-vertical, orientation. For an individual, it may seem to be a long-term safety, a kind of a ‚payable hope‘. It should secure, control, and cover the lateral fragments of life. But it is far from the understanding of life as a whole, the understanding which would bring all the fragments together into a meaningful whole. In the situation of a fragmented and instant life, with the swift exchange of the fragments, it is possible not to pose the question of hope at all.

3. Calculability and Risk: The Loss of Faith in Science

The mentality of contemporary people is under the influence of modern natural sciences and technological rationality. The instrumental rationality implies calculability, but it would be wrong to assume that calculability means predictability when it only means probability (Bauman 2006, 10). In this misunderstood and simplified scientific calculability, there is no space, or at least there should not be much space for uncertainty. The scientific mind is based on empirical research. Object-oriented thinking seems to be practical for life. It is therefore not surprising that over the past century the authority of science has replaced the authority of religion. But Beck is aware that there is a problem in applying the scientific way of thinking to the possible risks connected to the technological progress:

»Risk determinations are *based* on mathematical *possibilities* and social interests, especially, if they are presented with technical certainty. In dealing with civilization's risks, the sciences have always abandoned their foundation of experimental logic and made a polygamous marriage with business, politics and ethics – or more precisely, they live with the latter in a sort of ‚permanent marriage without a license‘.« (Beck 1992, 29)

If the constant discourse on security and safety (lifestyle, i.e., the way of living) merges with instrumental rationality and the belief that everything can be predicted and calculated (the way of thinking), it may, as a result, create the conviction that the control over life and its security are possible. But the stronger the need to achieve that goal, the more obvious it is how insecure human life basically is. The utopian view that society and the world can be regulated by eliminating all danger, among other things, induces a culture of fear (Strahovnik 2013, 97). Its consequence is an »apparently paradoxical rise in insecurity during the phase of unrivalled safety« (Mythen 2004, 137). It is an ambiguous situation: the stronger the belief that everything can be calculated and controlled, the stronger the experience of powerlessness before what eludes human control. And the dangers one tries to protect oneself from are actually the result of what is consi-

dered as progress. That is why Ulrich Beck does not hesitate to assert: »Along with the growing capacity of technical options (*Zweckrationalität*) grows the incalculability of their consequences.« (1992, 22) The place that was expected to represent security and protection has become the source of insecurity.

Instead of the expected certainty and clarity, science offers probability and a vague possibility. There is no doubt that the scientific way of thinking has brought many blessings for humanity and has made life easier in many areas of human life. The instrumental, object and calculable goal-oriented rationality enables planning, planned development, and improvement of the quality of human life and society. Thanks to the scientific achievements based on instrumental rationality, health care and life expectancy have improved. But can life itself, which is basically unpredictable, be calculated, and then, in the further step, totally controlled and secured? Furthermore, more measures undertaken to achieve safety often mean less freedom (Bauman and Leoncini 2018, 77). More freedom means more risk, so it can be said that the fear of risk ultimately turns into the fear of freedom. It is therefore justified to examine whether the feeling of limited safety and security is worth losing freedom, especially since the restriction of freedom, especially the freedom of speech, is obviously related to the actions of the culture of fear (Furedi 2018, 130). The greatest challenge seems to be finding the right balance between safety and freedom. All the more so because the safety and protection that people seek do not exist and because all the actions they take to ensure and protect themselves also increase their awareness of permanent life insecurity. At the same time, the widespread scientific attitude of naturalistic reductionism also does not contribute to it. In more concrete terms, if people are reduced only to the body, their body and physical health become of utmost importance, i.e., the only thing they have or the only thing they are. In the context of naturalistic reductionism, fearing for the body and the need to preserve it become people's main preoccupations with almost quasi-religious elements (Malović 2016, 135–148), and striving to 'save' the body makes people ready to compromise on matters that challenge the foundation of their humanity. In addition, naturalistic reductionism raises the question of human freedom and responsibility, but that topic goes beyond the scope and aim of this paper.

Considering a promise that cannot be completely fulfilled, science and the related technology, as well as the state (Bauman 2006, 4), confront people with a contradictory situation. Individuals need to make a decision about their own lives, relying on the promoted scientific principle of calculability, yet knowing at the same time that it generates new and unpredictable risks. For an individual, every decision is like a 'small death' without the possibility of assessing what is on the other side of that decision. If we agree with Beck's claim (1992, 155) that »Science is *one of the causes, the medium of definition and the source of solutions* to risks«, then mankind is trapped in a closed circle of risk in which each attempt to eliminate risk results in new and potentially greater danger. Perpetuating such a situation over time turns into suspicion, with the perceivable need for »the application of scientific scepticism« (155) to science itself. However, sincere scientific self-criticism only deepens and wi-

dens the area of uncertainty, as relativizing science implies losing the final refuge and source of defence against possible threats. The original purpose of the natural sciences – mastering nature and improving the quality of human life – has been only partly achieved and has created new difficulties and uncertainties. Science is no longer just a source of solutions, but also a source of problems (156), followed by a loss of confidence that people can do some good in terms of global problems (Furedi 2002, 169). In his essay „Wissenschaft und Sicherheit“, Beck (1991, 140–146) focuses on the issue of faith in the image of science that has been established since the Enlightenment. Beck views science primarily from an epistemological perspective (Van Loon 2002, 46) and argues that science has lost its cognitive monopoly today, while the scientific belief in progress has been exposed as dogma without evidence. The natural sciences have become a kind of ‚new metaphysics‘ (Beck 1991, 143); they are no longer based on experience but on calculations, while research and education in the natural sciences have turned into a personnel school on how to close one’s eyes when faced with the dangers they themselves create (144). Yet the political agenda still has high hopes in regard to the development of digital technology, so it should come as no surprise that people, taught by experience, view the promise of a better world with a level of distrust and doubt, regardless of what digital algorithms might suggest. In any case, the belief in the possibility of accurately calculating the consequences of human decisions and actions based on the model of scientific instrumental rationality has proved to be unjustified in recent years. A clear connection between cause and effect is no longer visible, i.e., the consequences are impossible to predict. For alienated individuals, this has created space for additional sources of risk and uncertainty, especially since decisions are made without those individuals, even though they are the ones bearing the consequences of those decisions.

Even after the realization of scientific ignorance, when social crises occur, politics still insists on and refers to science as an unquestionable and certain authority, creating confusion and disorientation as well as increasing fear, the source of which is increasingly difficult to determine. The inability to clearly define risks and sources of danger, accompanied by individual threatening incidents, creates anxiety and exacerbates the general atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty. »The cloak of anxiety which hangs over the risk society, leaves individuals in a state of permanent watchfulness. In short, our minds become ‚factories of fear‘.« (Mythen 2004, 138) The greatest danger does not come from what fear is directed at, but from what that fear can turn into, including the impression that things are out of control (Altheide 2009, 57). In such a situation, the fear narrative uses the language of invisibility to further increase the severity of the danger and present the lack of evidence of danger as evidence that the danger is greater than it was originally thought (Furedi 2018, 104; 108). The pressure becomes even stronger when moral panic arises and the question of threat is turned into a moral question.

»Though fear appeals draw on the authority of science they are not simply dispassionate statements. Paradoxically, the contestation of moral authority, and the weakening of the moral consensus about what to fear,

intensify the tendency to moralize threat. The imperative of moralization plays an important role in the culture of fear. Moralization seeks to interpret problems and threats symbolically, giving a moral quality to problems that may otherwise seem to be relatively trivial technical matters.« (115)

Moralization, especially when supported by the authority of science, allows pressure to be exerted on those who disagree with the official narrative, turning them into irresponsible enemies of society. Relying on the authority of science and moral language, i.e., the connection with good and evil proves to be particularly convenient for scaremongering. The reference to ‚the Science‘ is closer to a pre-modern reference to revealed truth than to the standards of scientific methodology. »‚The Science‘ serves a moralistic and political project.« (118–121; 129)

4. Politics of Fear and the Role of Media

When discussing fear and anxiety as features of contemporary people, the role of the media and politics as well as their contribution to creating an atmosphere of fear cannot be overlooked. Alienated individuals who have no roots and no control over their own lives are a suitable field for sowing the culture of fear, providing the political elites with the opportunity to use fear as a means to strengthen their position of power and control. Since it is clear that creating a zero-risk society is not possible, there is always something to fear. Even completely regular phenomena and life situations turn into a source of fear, the fear of the worst (Furedi 2018, 133; 142). Moreover, fear has become an instrument of social control. Political fear does not arise by chance – it is ‚created and maintained‘ with the intention of implementing a particular political practice, though it can also be abused (Svendsen 2010, 145; 152). The politics of fear did not begin following the events of 11 September 2001; fear has always been associated with crime (Altheide 2009, 63). It is more about possible threats that can create the impression of real and imminent danger when combined with a weakened individual. The main problem is not in the danger itself, but in the fear of it even when there is no danger. In this perspective, Svendsen analyses the fight against terrorism in the context of ‚common‘ dangers in the USA, revealing a certain unconvincing story about the fight against terrorism. The fight against the proclaimed cause of fear actually produces even more fear, and it can be said that a government that exaggerates in it actually terrorizes its citizens and abridges their freedom. Combating possible dangers is not a sufficient reason to neglect human rights. This means that a state that drives citizens to obedience out of fear actually loses its legitimacy as it denies the freedom that is a precondition of democracy. Freedom in political thought must take precedence over fear. (Svendsen 2010, 157–159)

The most loyal ally of politics in spreading fear is the media. By emphasizing danger on a daily basis, the propaganda of fear creates a climate that not only

justifies but even expects political encroachment on individual freedoms and human rights (Altheide 2009, 64). Fear sells, it is »a commercial capital« (Bauman 2007b, 28) and can be used not only to gain economic, but also political profit. In fact, it is all about the interest network of economy, politics and media: »while the display of threats to personal safety has become a major, perhaps the major asset in the rating war of the mass media, constantly replenishing the capital of fear and adding still more to the success of both its marketing and political uses.« (2007a, 12–13) Bauman seems to have predicted what would happen in the world in 2020 and 2021. He was ‚wrong‘ only in that uncertainty is not ‚endemic‘ (4), but ‚pandemic‘. The media not only transmit information, but »innovate and popularize new terms inviting people to fear.« (Furedi 2018, 22) Every event, even the weather forecast, is presented using dramatic vocabulary and intonation. The media have become an extremely powerful institution that suggests to the general public how to understand and react to threats, not so much creating as nurturing and promoting a state of fear. Although research shows that the media are not the main cause of fear and that there are other factors to it, such as personal circumstances and emotional conditioning, they still play a key role in mediating fear as the predominant »cultural script with dramatic content and powerful symbols«, popularizing the »rhetoric of fear« (17–21). Media action particularly facilitates maintaining and increasing pre-existing anxiety about personal security, which is the result of the process of individuation (193).

Known and unknown, justified and unjustified causes of fear further intensify the already existing existential anxiety »due to the fundamental nothingness of oneself and the world in which one exists« (Tolvajčić 2021, 521). »The quest for personal safety is not simply a response to external threats, but a reaction to the internal turmoil associated with existential insecurity.« (Furedi 2018, 194) Individuals are isolated in a fragmented society of short-term life episodes, weakened social ties, left to political manipulations of fear and the onslaught of media that use fear as the best-selling agent. Fear is also privatized and individualized, and instead of solidarity, it intensifies fragmentation (195). Instead of being a place of security and protection, the community turns into a place of threat. Individuals whose lives take place only within such a milieu ultimately begin to interpret their lives and the whole reality from »the perspective of fear«, which became »a cultural outlook for explaining and understanding reality«. (127) When fear becomes the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of reality, then literally everything can turn into a reason for fear. At the level of interpersonal relationships, this means that others always represent a danger and are to be viewed as such, with also their actions interpreted from that perspective. Even when they have no intention of endangering us in any way, they can do so unknowingly and unintentionally. A special term coined to describe it, ‚micro-aggression‘, serves as proof that this phenomenon does not occur only sporadically. Micro-aggression only shows the fundamental existential insecurity, isolation and anxiety of individuals in a society of fear (195).

5. The Perspective of Hope in Lieu of the Perspective of Fear

Given that anxiety affects people at a deeper level of their existence, it can also serve as a stimulus for contemplating one's own existence, even spurring positive changes. The solution cannot be a convulsive rescue of life fragments, but an attempt to understand the bigger picture, to see the whole of life in terms of meaning and openness to others. To be more concrete, community and understanding of common history enable people to transcend themselves and become open to the future (Petkovšek 2016, 507)

Christian hope is a transcendent category that, as such, demands trust and courage and cannot be calculated and insured by means of scientific tools. Existence in transcendence is possible only as courage (2013, 77). Hope implies a vertical orientation of faith. It is crucial that individuals are able to recognize and understand the whole and the meaning of life. Without the understanding of the sense of the whole, the purpose of its fragments cannot be understood, and the meaning of the fragments can be misunderstood.

The objection against Christian hope could be raised in the context of Christian hope being a primarily eschatological category. As a result, it may carry passivity in this life, which is not compatible with the modern lifestyle. Quite the opposite! The very core of hope is the trust that life as a whole is, so to say, 'secured and safe'. That viewpoint makes living, even those fragments of life, without anxiety and fundamental insecurity or worries possible, and enables community and solidarity. Although the epistemological state of hope does not imply rationality in the sense of mathematical certainty and calculability, it offers a profound understanding of the meaning of life as a whole, avoiding the reduction of life to the mere current fragment dependent on a single success or catastrophe. Precisely that is the point where Christian hope offers a broader view of life, which can certainly help contemporary people not to sink into the endemic uncertainty.

In addition to verticality, another important element of hope is the ability for communion, which includes tradition as a transmitter of hope (Pevc Rozman 2013, 162) and openness to others. The purpose of it is common good (Žalec 2021, 832) and that is why community and communion are important. The COVID-19 pandemic and the political management of it put three characteristics to the fore: »disincarnation of love; its reduction to the protection of oneself and others; contagion as a model of all communication.« (Hadjadj 2021, 74). 'Inverted quarantine' was also promoted (Furedi 2018, 203), which, instead of the standard procedure of isolating disease, isolated healthy people and fortified the fear of others. On the other hand, communion that includes solidarity breaks the exclusive fixation on one's own threat (193). Such communion is important because it nullifies the mentality of the fear of others, forming the framework in which a system of meaning is created. In an uncertain world without a system of meaning encompassing fear, fear turns into a perspective for interpreting the world (101). In lieu of the perspective of fear, the perspective of hope should be assumed. Hope is not

an escape from reality, but rather a purifier of the lens revealing what is right, and a cure for existential fear. Hope exceeds all rational forethoughts and contains certain insecurities, therefore requiring courage. Hope is more ‚despite of‘ than ‚because of‘, and it is connected with the vertical dimension of people, expanding the horizons of human existence. Vertical hope unleashes the potential for horizontal love and kindness. Individuals are not captured by fear – they receive a foundation for solidarity with others. This is possible precisely because life in faith, hope and love opens people to the infinite and shows meaning (Klun 2021, 794).

Assuming a vertical perspective in the interpretation of life will not change the circumstances in which people find themselves, but it will change their attitude towards the world and mobilize them to do what they can because that makes sense. That is why hope has not only eschatological but also pre-eschatological existential value, as it does not allow despair, resignation and being blocked by fear, liberating people for action. Hope is at the same time transcendent and transcendental (Štivić 2021, 852); it does not nullify fear but frames it, determining its extent and creating space for action. Hope provides the freedom to act because people are not fixated on what is calculable. The freedom that is the possibility of possibility can become a source of fear as it opens up a field of insecurity due to the incomputability. In that perspective, supporting freedom without fear is rather important as one role of faith. Without hope that is vertical and transcendent, stability is difficult to find. Christian hope is not just superficial optimism (Malović 2016, 160) and cannot be understood without faith in God and the love of neighbour. Moreover, love that includes a readiness to sacrifice »is a necessary condition for overcoming fear« (Žalec 2013, 56; 51). The perspective of the three theological virtues allows for a better understanding of the life situations in which people find themselves. Such hope is firmly grounded and »transcends all nostalgia and all utopia« (Hadjadj 2021, 27). Hadjadj argues that our time marks the end of progressivism and political utopias that fed on the faith in progress and the alternative hopes that progress offered, and that we need to return to the eschatological dimension, i.e., hope (32–34). The meaning of life in hope is not only its preservation, from which the ‚therapeutic state‘ sought distancing, which brought humanity back ‚below the level of barbarism‘, but life without any hesitation towards the core of metaphysics: »A being is created for action, not just mere existence.« (77) Not only does hope eliminate existential anxiety, but it also gives courage to »expose life for good« (79). That way, eschatological hope becomes »tangible« (Mijović 2021, 515), concrete, palpable and active. This, in turn, is love, the third theological virtue that gives meaning to life.

6. Conclusion

The extensive analysis of fear and the unmet need for security yielded two key elements of the fear pandemic affecting contemporary people. The first represents the loneliness and powerlessness of a self-centred individual as a result of

the process of individualization. This self-referencing occurs on the basis of a fragmented life in which the vertical perspective of life, i.e., understanding the whole and the ability to think long-term, got lost. This undermined people's faith in the calculability of their own decisions and the associated consequences based on the paradigm of scientific consideration. Another important consequence of individualization and fragmentation is the weakening and severance of traditional social ties, whereby individuals have lost their horizontal support. These two weaknesses make them unprotected from the real and possible threats they perceive as threats to their lives or lifestyles. Such a perception has been reinforced in recent years by the exploitation of fear for political purposes promulgated through the media which also see fear as a commercial opportunity. As an antidote to the 'pandemic' existential anxiety thus created and supported, Christian hope is offered as the direct opposite of anxiety. Hope 'fixes' both the vertical and horizontal elements of that state. Emerging from faith, it relies on the vertical perspective of understanding the meaning of life as a way of thinking. The consequence of such an attitude towards reality spills over on the horizontal level into effective love that restores communion.

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