



Belief Is Impossible and Necessary.” Crisis of History and Eschatological Hope in Sergio Quinzio

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Abstract: This article offers a philosophical reading of Sergio Quinzio's thought as a radical interpretation of the crisis of contemporary humanity. Starting from the deferral of the Christian eschatological promise, it analyzes the erosion of the meaning of history and of the possibility of conceiving the future as a space of transformation. In Quinzio, the non-fulfillment of salvation does not constitute a theological anomaly, but rather the site in which the dramatic truth of historical experience emerges: the rupture between promise and fulfillment, between hope and despair. Through a reflection on the Cross, on the theme of failure, and on a critique of the dominant narratives of modernity, the article shows how Quinzio's discourse situates faith as a potential bearer of an eminently critical function, preventing the present from being absolutized. Hope, deprived of any guarantee, thus takes shape as an experience of risk and as resistance to meaninglessness, making Quinzio's thought relevant for a philosophical understanding of the anthropological and symbolic crisis of contemporaneity.

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Introduction:

“Weeping together is the kingdom”
(Quinzio, 1993, p. 19)

“Faith has become impossible, yet it is also impossible not to believe, to live in the world knowing by now that neither certainty nor meaning is possible, but only cynicism or despair” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 19¹). With these difficult, harsh, and suffering words one can summarize one of the most characteristic aspects of Sergio Quinzio’s thought. Quinzio was born in Alassio, Liguria, in 1927 and died in Rome in 1996. He was one of the most original Christian theologians, whose thought bears strong philosophical and existential implications. The great question that tormented him was that of salvation: the horizon of Christ’s return and the establishment of the Kingdom. The promise of salvation that emerges so powerfully from the Sacred Scriptures is, in Quinzio’s view, dramatically delayed: “if the Lord does not

save us now, very soon, we have no possibility of enduring any longer, but are condemned to resign ourselves to nothingness. This is the last possibility for the kingdom, resting upon the weakness of our shoulders, upon which weigh all the millennia of disappointment and betrayal” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 21).

This delay causes suffering—suffering for Quinzio, suffering for humanity as a whole, testing faith itself to the point of bending it fatally; and yet it is precisely in this way that faith cannot cease to sustain human beings. As the sole capacity to endow the world and life with meaning, faith remains, in an apparent paradox, the only possibility of living in a condition that would otherwise be radically desperate. The Bible seems to testify, in its entirety, that the closer salvation appears to be, the more terrible its price becomes, increasingly bound to death: “and yet for this very reason it becomes ever more necessary and urgent, ever more desperately sweet. The death-

¹All quotations from Quinzio are translated into English from the original Italian texts.

rattle expresses an infinite need for life, like Adam's first cry (Genesis 2:23)" (Quinzio, 1974, p. XXV).

Quinzio's reflection is particularly significant for investigating the forms of crisis traversing contemporary humanity. Salvation from God is delayed and, after two thousand years, has not arrived. According to Quinzio, this is why human beings have sought other idols in which to find salvation. Hence the "modern curse," which arises because human beings have turned their backs on God, but which "derives from Christian hope, in the sense that we are now experiencing the tragic failure of the anti-Christian attempt to build the kingdom of God on earth, the perfect *regnum hominis*. Must we then conclude that the outcome of Christianity is the destruction of the world? I am convinced that New Testament prophecies indeed say this, that they imply a link between the crucifixion of the Messiah and the final catastrophe. The historical failure of salvation implies this" (Quinzio, 1993, p. 149).

Among the forms of crisis of modern humanity there thus

inevitably appears an eternal present in which nothing has meaning or significance, in which nothing possesses the potential for change. Hope in the future is constantly sabotaged. And what, after all, is the future if not the dimension in which "something meaningful can still happen?" (Quinzio, 1992, p. 79). Today this dimension has been eradicated from human vision, and the future can no longer even be thematized: "if [the current cultural horizon] were to deny the possibility of a different future, it would manifest its hidden absolutist claim; if it were to affirm it, it would clearly reveal its own insignificance" (Quinzio, 1992, p. 79).

Quinzio's radicality does not consist in a negation of faith, but in the refusal of every pacification of it. His thought arises where eschatology no longer consoles and yet cannot be abandoned. In this sense, his theology is not a response to the crisis of contemporary humanity, but the full assumption of that crisis as the very site of believing thought.

2. Hope and Despair

The relationship between hope and despair is intense, constitutive, inseparable. This relation—by which hope cannot exist without its counterpart and vice versa—is articulated by Quinzio in the most decisive and coherent theoretical forms. It offers perspectives for reading the human condition today not only to Christians, but to all those who critically question the scenarios defining contemporaneity, which seem to undermine the very possibility of rigorously envisioning, without fatalism, a salvation and a future of redemption, emancipation, and liberation.

But why despair? And what hope? The despair of which Quinzio speaks does not coincide with a nihilistic surrender, but with the experience of a hope that has lost every guarantee. It is an inhabited, vigilant despair, born from the impossibility of renouncing the promise without renouncing the human itself. In it, hope does not oppose despair, but passes through it and is traversed by it.

Quinzio moves from a very

strong perspective of faith. He is a Christian who confronts the promise of redemption contained in the Bible, verifying that it has been awaited for millennia. He observes that biblical-Christian faith is born from the concrete expectation of a historical salvation never accomplished, marked by the failure of visible promises and culminating in the scandal of the Cross, which later tradition progressively spiritualized in order to render it bearable—thus transforming the tragedy of an unfulfilled redemption into a consolatory theology that mitigates the unbearable shock of the Incarnation as total sharing in human death and suffering (Quinzio, 2015).

Certainly, one may interpret the eschatological dimension in a strictly transcendent and spiritual way, thus preserving the idea of salvation. But according to Quinzio, the Bible contains a promise that also addresses immanence, human beings of flesh and blood, their earthly life. It is the promise that Christ will return to establish his Kingdom, doing justice to pain and suffering. Pain is faced head-on by Quinzio, without self-reassuring fictions: “we

dress acceptance of pain and death in austere Stoic garb, or in ardent heroic attire, or in resplendent aesthetic vestments, or in the mantle of serene and trusting abandonment to providence. But it is instead a squalid, poor, and shameful mystery, bearing the odors of decomposition, from which we are compelled to avert our eyes. It is an acceptance perfected in anguish and despair. Peaceful a priori acceptance is self-deception, because it is already alleviation; it is incompatible with seeing the terrifying abyss of suffering and nothingness" (Quinzio, 1993, p. 11).

Two thousand years have passed, and this liberation has not occurred; today the shadow of the most terrible despair seems to loom over contemporary humanity. If "the realization of God's justice appears only beyond death and a terrible end-time" (Quinzio, 1992, p. 29), what remains of the visceral need to be freed from oppression here and now? Human beings cannot but understand the promise of salvation as addressed to their integral humanity, made not only of soul but also of body, of flesh (Quinzio, 1992, p. 30).

The resurrection of the flesh is the heart of the Christian proclamation, forgotten and metaphorized (Quinzio, 1995, pp. 15–16). And the body dies; therefore, the promise of salvation must be thought as pertaining to the present, even though it has not been realized for two thousand years (Quinzio, 1992, p. 29). Moreover, nature itself groans with humanity, as the Apostle Paul writes (Romans 8:19–26), so that the worldly and the otherworldly cannot be sharply separated within the horizon of salvation (Quinzio, 1992, pp. 26–27).

But what hope truly remains for contemporary humanity? Every trust in the future seems defeated, faith itself as well; and yet "however defeated, and indeed precisely because it is defeated, it still possesses that residual fragment of strength that makes possible a reading of the history of defeats and disillusionments to which we belong" (Quinzio, 1992, p. 79). Without some preservation of faith—and, broadly speaking, of trust in the credibility of hope—the theologian observes, even the interpretation of our history, marked by bitterness and

disillusionment, would be impracticable. The present manifests itself in its obscene nakedness: a weary, meaningless repetition of the same.

Indeed, “history implies something beyond history, insofar as it makes no sense to speak of history without a ‘consideration of history,’ that is, without considering the totality of events in time as a unity. To establish the unity, mutual relation, and meaning of events as a whole is already to judge history. Without judgment upon history, there is no history. ‘Judgment’ has an emergence over events that enables it to found history. In fact, the philosophy of history is born before history. Categories such as originality, validity, progress, decline, obscurantism, renaissance, development, evolution, involution, civilization, culture—without which history would lack any meaning and thus would not be—are evidently not contained in individual events occurring in time; no historical law can therefore arise from the chain of events, which are in themselves absolutely insignificant. A historical sequence constitutes a

‘development’ only for those who agree to consider as a ‘unity,’ for judging that selected set within certain limits, a given criterion, in relation to which the *point ad quem* will then appear superior to the *point a quo*” (Quinzio, 1996, pp. 183–184).

In this scenario, faith survives despite defeat because “it still has the strength to impose meaning upon the world” (Quinzio, 1992, p. 97): “we are not in a post-Christian age,” he emphasizes; “the believer knows that human beings cannot live without God, and we are indeed witnessing their end: the end is itself still a Christian idea, and therefore the faith that miraculously survives is the only instrument for interpreting the present condition of the world” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 69).

For Quinzio, the very idea of history arises from the Christian matrix that orients time toward fulfillment; when this eschatological tension collapses—reduced to myth along with progress—history fragments into isolated facts devoid of meaning and reduced to sociological explanations of the instant, leaving

contemporary humanity incapable of grasping a unitary significance because it has lost that transcendent vision which alone renders historical facts and the present inhabitable (Quinzio, 1964).

Faith designates the capacity to confer meaning upon history and to withdraw it from mere acceptance. Faith thus allows one to unmask as normalized violence what, outside of it, appears obvious and necessary. The “eternal present” of the end of history coincides with the naturalization of domination and relations of subalternity, removed from temporality and therefore from the possibility of being overcome. In this way, what exists imposes itself as without alternatives. Faith—understood as active hope—introduces an eccentric gaze with respect to common sense; anyone who thinks human liberation and emancipation assumes, knowingly or not, this same perspective.

3. Hoping within the Crisis of Contemporaneity

In this sense, Quinzio’s reflection offers a decisive interpretive key for

understanding the persistence of hope in a time of defeat and crisis. “[...] the believer can think only starting from the hope of the advent of God’s justice, a hope in which the meaning of his very life is safeguarded; yet precisely from this perspective the believer can no longer help thinking that everything is about to fall definitively into meaninglessness. This thought still lies within faith” (Quinzio, 1992, p. 97). Nor should this apparent ambiguity of faith surprise us: “to entrust oneself to a promise of salvation means to suspend one’s life over an abyss” (Quinzio, 1992, p. 97).

For Quinzio, history is constituted in the gap between a salvation promised and never fulfilled. The modern myths of progress thus appear exhausted, replaced by a despair without outcome. In this context, every theology of fulfillment—like every triumphalist philosophy or politics—proves inadequate. The theology of the Cross, by contrast, assumes the persistence of evil and unredemption as fundamental data: it offers no definitive answers, but renders historical anguish thinkable and

inhabitable. Its value lies in the *not-yet*, in the refusal to absolutize the present and transform it into destiny (Quinzio, 2015, pp. 132–146): “Hope is difficult, because it is the serious thing, which has passed and continues to pass through the Cross” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 13).

Contemporary humanity is constantly, apparently, waiting for something—news, a sports result, a winning lottery number. But having lost trust in the future, it truly waits for nothing. True waiting is hope; it is openness to change (Quinzio, 1998, p. 11). Advent, the period of preparation for Christmas with which the Catholic Church begins the liturgical year, proclaims “that something truly decisive may occur” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 11). Yet it is difficult for this to be genuinely felt as such. After all, “the very fact that we continue to repeat it demonstrates that visibly nothing decisive, definitively salvific for us, has occurred” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 11).

The Gospels describe Jesus healing the sick and even raising the dead. What has become of all this today, Quinzio asks? Should we understand it all as

“signs in themselves inessential of something that alone is truly essential, because spiritual and ulterior, but which precisely for this reason we can neither see nor touch, so far above our poor miseries to be healed?” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 18). Yet Jesus’ words are clear, as is the expectation of the Apostles. Salvation concerns our flesh as well; Christ’s return is near, and all promises will soon be fulfilled (Quinzio, 1998, pp. 18–19): this is the “fundamental character of Pentecost as a new beginning, the beginning of new life in the perfect messianic kingdom” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 91). This timely expectation has not been satisfied. “Even the word ‘salvation,’ like the word ‘redemption,’ has become distant and foreign to us” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 29).

Modern and contemporary humanity have replaced the need for a Savior with the idols of progress and fashion, the theologian denounces; we were to save ourselves, but “precisely in these last years it seems that everything is falling back upon our heads, forcing us to recognize that this is not so, anywhere in the world” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 30). Christ is

a *sui generis* Savior: “he can save us precisely because he himself knows the suffering from which one must be saved, because he himself, in Gethsemane and on the Cross, invoked to be saved” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 31).

What, then, is this salvation? “Salvation, redemption, is the overturning of our reality, not its correction, its adjustment” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 36). If we accept this awareness with radicality and rigor, we realize how disconcerting it is. Salvation is not found in the ordinariness of things. According to Quinzio, salvation is not “normal,” because it is not within our possibilities; it is beyond us, coming from God and from God alone (Quinzio, 1998, p. 36). The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is the establishment in the world of divine justice that saves beyond every human capacity and possibility, a Kingdom preached as imminent, rendering conversion urgent. Quinzio emphasizes that this salvation also strictly concerns immanence, as the Bible repeatedly underscores: it is “a very concrete joy” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 36).

For Quinzio, the crisis of contemporaneity is not a historical accident to be overcome, but the form assumed by time after the failure of the great salvific narratives. What collapses is not only trust in progress, but the very possibility of thinking a future that is not mere repetition of what exists. In this condition, Christian hope does not add itself to the present as a corrective, but radically contests it.

4. The Christian Mystery of the Redeeming Cross

The Italian theologian recalls a prophecy of Jesus, expressed in the Gospels in interrogative form: when the Messiah returns to earth, will he find true faith? (Luke 18:8). And Quinzio notes bitterly: “two millennia have passed, and Christian faith has not changed human history” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 43). Despite vast regions of the world being defined as predominantly Christian, despite billions of people identifying as followers of Christ, the righteous are very few. They are the “small remnant” prophesied by Scripture, “who bear their poor

witness” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 43; cf. Quinzio, 1981, p. 219). Quinzio’s words are harsh and painful: all that remains is this poor witness, but it “exists nonetheless” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 43).

“Nonetheless”: it is noteworthy how Quinzio traces in Scripture the prophetic signs of what he considers the drama of contemporary humanity. In the Bible there is a tension, one might conclude, between the promise of imminent salvation and traces of a harsh reality in which the horror of the status quo remains dominant for a long time within the immanence we inhabit. Yet it is precisely in this dialectic “between death and life, suffering and joy, between redemption from sin and its persistence across the centuries as if nothing salvific had truly occurred” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 55) that Quinzio identifies “the supreme Christian ‘mystery’ of redemption through the Cross” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 55).

The Cross remains difficult to comprehend, both for Christians and for those of other religions or none. It is a scandal that breaks established patterns, overturns every form of reasonableness. Yet it is

precisely in that scandal—in that shattering contradiction of a Cross that saves, of unparalleled pain that brings an end to suffering, of death that opens onto life in its fullness—that a meaning emerges which says something decisive about humanity and its crisis. Thus Quinzio writes that this mystery “must not cease to unsettle us, if we truly intend to live it and to live within it the tragic condition of humanity, rather than passively enduring it as a familiar obviousness that, in the end, leaves us untouched” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 55).

For Quinzio, the Cross is not an answer to the problem of evil, but its unmitigated exposure. It does not explain suffering, but renders it inescapable, preventing any justification of it. This is precisely why the Cross remains scandalous: not because it promises an easy redemption, but because it forbids any evasion of the seriousness of pain.

5. Faith and Contradiction

Once again, faith is tested to the point of nearly losing all space; yet in this reduction of its possibilities it becomes

indispensable and necessary—the sole chance, as noted, to confer meaning upon the course of the world and every event. Faith bestows meaning upon everything, even though believing appears to conflict with reality itself. This contradiction penetrates the most intimate and constitutive dimensions of the believer, who is called to believe with fidelity and even with a kind of apparent madness (Quinzio, 1998, p. 67): “to believe has now become impossible and necessary. The more impossible it becomes, the more necessary it becomes” (Quinzio, 1996, p. 142).

What, then, is faith, and how does it relate to the chronic instability of human life, when contradictions between expectations and realizations, promises and outcomes generate disorientation and laceration? Faith must be lived, Quinzio maintains, “not as a system of guaranteed knowledge, but as the risk undertaken in the inner certainty that God will save us from the horror of the world and of death” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 70). The theme of risk is central to Quinzio’s discourse and contributes to defining the ways

in which human beings inhabit the world. Within this risk, faith potentially plays an essential role, recalling the demand identified by Horkheimer to refuse that the executioner should be right over the victim (Horkheimer, 1970); in this Quinzio sees the true meaning of the resurrection of Easter (Quinzio, 1998, p. 70).

To live the risk, preserving faith and safeguarding a certainty of salvation that ultimately appears on the verge of madness, is to inhabit an inevitably dramatic condition. Christians, in Quinzio’s view, have lived for two millennia a “very long disappointment,” in which they are “crucified with the Lord” (Matthew 10:38; Quinzio, 1998, p. 73). This lacerating dialectic between light and shadow is represented by that “play of absences and presences, of expectations and realities in act, of substitutions and superimpositions” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 85) that underlies the Christian vision of history after Christ.

“Comforter” *menahém*, is Christ the Messiah; yet Jesus, as the Gospel of John reports, takes leave of his apostles leaving another Comforter, the

Holy Spirit. Why must the first *menahém* die, promising that the Father will then send the Paraclete? Quinzio reflects on this problem and opens a brief comparison with Islam: “it is no longer Jesus who is the Consoler, but the one who will come after his death. On the basis of these verses Muslims will interpret Muhammad as the definitive Consoler, and Islam as the final, unsurpassable form of divine revelation” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 83). And how should Christians interpret the difficulties posed by this problem so arduous for the human mind? Certainly, Quinzio writes, Trinitarian doctrine becomes the conceptual framework within which to situate this dynamic among what Christianity understands as divine Persons. Nevertheless, “one cannot fail to see, it seems to me, the suffering of these continual deferrals” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 84).

The authenticity with which Quinzio, as a Christian theologian, confronts his own faith is striking and unsettling. Jesus promises that he will return, speaking to his apostles gathered at the Last Supper, the

final meal before his arrest and crucifixion. It was reasonable to expect his return within the apostles’ lifetimes, but this did not happen, and another two millennia have passed: “a waiting that has become terrifyingly long” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 84), he writes, conveying how heavily this time weighs upon his existence.

Thus the question returns: what is faith? The answer once again takes shape precisely within the terrible pain human beings are led to inhabit: “the believer [...] nonetheless truly experiences the hidden presence of a consoling truth; he experiences, at least at some moment in his life, that the Lord truly manifests himself to him, so that he lives on the threshold between the presence and the absence of his God” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 85). Here Quinzio opens onto an understanding of a fundamental consequence of Christian eschatology—so complex and unsettling—for the fabric of believers’ existence, who are called to a full “participation in his death, in his historical failure” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 102).

Once again, Quinzio’s terminology is harsh and

painful, yet powerful enough to shake the reader and compel a radical thinking that makes no concessions. This deferral of salvation, according to the theologian, makes the Kingdom appear less plausible than it did in the earliest years following Christ’s death. And yet it is precisely now that its necessity increases: “Certainly, the reasons that render the kingdom of God and its perfect justice credible are today far less powerful, far less valid, than those available to believers twenty centuries ago. Certainly, today the kingdom is less possible than yesterday. But today we need it more, because the disappointment that has come, the time that has passed, the oblivion that has grown, have created a more bitter pain, a drier weariness, a more absurd confusion. Only now can a miserable creature invoke salvation and the kingdom, desiring within himself the very desire of God, unable to do without it any longer. This is the mystery of these twenty centuries, which pour upon the Savior our awareness of not yet being saved, and which cannot but possess a meaning at least as great as their obscure tragedy”

(Quinzio, 1993, p. 12).

The distinctly Christian choice is to live and die in the hope of resurrection, as promised. True baptism, Quinzio recalls citing Paul, is into the death of Christ: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3). As Jesus rose from the dead, so too will those who have believed be raised in the future (Quinzio, 1998, p. 102).

Faith thus exists and develops, according to the theologian, in patience. “The teaching is that of patience.” But this patience is first of all God’s, who tolerates injustice and pain over a time that appears unbearable to us. Nothing threatens God’s power, and this allows for supreme patience and forbearance. Quinzio’s question then concerns human beings: what patience can we have, fragile and mortal as we are? But what if weakness were also present in God? This is not blasphemy in Quinzio, but a theologically anguished yet attentive reflection. Is it not written that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible

groanings” (Romans 8:26)? Are the groans, then, even God’s? Is the suffering that causes groaning also God’s? (Quinzio, 1998, p. 110). Is this dimension not emphasized precisely in the surprising reality of a Messiah who is not as Israel expected, but a “suffering” Messiah, whose recognition and understanding require rereading the book of the prophet Isaiah, describing the sufferings of the “servant of the Lord” (Quinzio, 1998, pp. 128–129)?

“This,” Quinzio notes, “is what is difficult, or even humanly impossible, to think: that the one who was to save us suffered the horrendous torment of the Cross, and left us in the same condition of suffering that humanity has always known in the world, or perhaps even worsened it” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 129). Can hope remain within such a faith?

In Christianity, to lose one’s life means to find it in the future, when Christ returns in the glory of God the Father to judge humanity and repay each according to their lives (Quinzio, 1998, p. 129), according to an order of justice that does not coincide with the human one, animated by a logic

that escapes our sense of equity and appears paradoxical to us: hence the last shall be first and vice versa, in so radical a way as to be unfathomable and often even to appear “unjust” to our eyes, including prostitutes and sinners (Quinzio, 1998, p. 139). Salvation is announced for few, though many are called. Humanity must remain vigilant, Quinzio reminds us, because it is unknown when Christ will return (Quinzio, 1998, p. 159). To remain vigilant, in watchful waiting, after two millennia is dramatically difficult, but “our faith has become even more difficult than the already very difficult faith of the beginnings. The believer must be aware of this, and yet preserve it jealously as the only possible hope against the definitive triumph of cynicism” (Quinzio, 1998, p. 160).

6. Failure, Meaning, and Salvation

Christians find in their Scriptures the perspective of a salvation destined for a small group of faithful who remain such authentically to the end: “Is this not the prophecy of the failure of God’s work, which in the end manages to save only a

minimal remnant by associating it with the cry that from the perfect abyss perfectly invokes his kingdom? As if the Lord were placing the work of salvation in the hands of our pain, consuming us in the same will for the kingdom, incapable of willing anything else” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 14).

Quinzio’s theme of God’s failure, of God’s defeat, recurs throughout his work—not as a concession to impiety or atheism, but as a form of desperate theological consideration that remains faithful to God, discerning in the folds of failure the deepest and most significant traits of the divine work, if not of the divine nature itself. One element strikes the reader more than others: the emergence of God’s tenderness—“to place consolation in place of pain is a work greater than creation, which placed being in place of nothingness” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 21)—from the very reason at the origin of our despair: “the delay of salvation obliges the Lord to create an ever greater consolation, fuller of tenderness. Consolation is God’s masterpiece” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 17).

Even here, the lacerating difficulty of fully recognizing such tenderness in a life marked by pain is evident, yet Quinzio returns to it often and with conviction. Nevertheless, the terribleness of existence never disappears in his vision; it is structurally connected to the crucifixion: “Everything is terrible; but if God dies crucified, everything cannot but be terrible” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 20).

For humanity, however, there is not only the necessary participation in this crucifixion for the sake of salvation. The human being who loses Christ—the incarnate God who dies—experiences an additional, deeply disconcerting pain: “Beyond the Cross, there is also the loss of this final participation in the good that is suffering by losing him. I am convinced that this, more than crucifixion, this loss-oblivion of the Lord’s suffering, is the meaning of these twenty centuries. It is not only the Lord who dies on the Cross, but his word that dies in history, until its most complete erasure” (Quinzio, 1993, pp. 20–21).

The meaning of history thus becomes an unparalleled pain,

unfolding in the progressive loss of the divine word as promised salvation is deferred and despair grows. Here lies the scandal that fills the Christian's life, according to Quinzio: "what scandalizes me, what drives me to despair, is not so much the apostasy and corruption of human beings, but rather God's impotence, the fact that God does not save" (Quinzio, 1993, p. 34). It is no coincidence that after a historical season of great optimism, we have today renounced the meaning of history (Quinzio, 1964, p. 7).

But can this sense of history also give meaning to life? If salvation were still credible, proclaiming it would give meaning to our lives. Yet it is not; and this very fact is, according to Quinzio, a gift. The Kingdom is necessary because a world without the Kingdom is impossible; its absolute necessity emerges precisely in the impossibility we perceive of finding meaning and a still-credible historical possibility of salvation. In this horror, faith, which becomes impossible, thereby becomes indispensable; the Kingdom, which seems impossible or defeated,

becomes necessary; the proclamation of salvation is absurd and precisely for this reason expresses a perspective that cannot but be given, because its opposite—"what is not kingdom"—is certainly impossible (Quinzio, 1993, p. 24).

What, then, can Christians proclaim? Once again, this fascinating paradox: "One must place at the center of the Christian proclamation the supreme mystery of its failure" (Quinzio, 1993, p. 35).

The death of God on the Cross is difficult to think through even for Christians themselves. Yet according to Quinzio it is necessary to learn truly and radically to believe this datum of faith: "after two thousand years of silence, the time has come truly to believe fully in the death of the Lord, that is, in the humiliation of his power, to love him even if he could never save us again: the time not to adore him for his power, but to love him for his humiliated and impotent compassion" (Quinzio, 1993, p. 39). Yet he adds that if God does not save, if God does not fulfill his promise, it makes no sense to speak of the need to love God

beyond the effectiveness of the salvation promised. “These are terrifying abysses, which it would be blasphemous to reduce to the dimension of rational doubt. Perhaps despair is a trial, perhaps it is the dark night of which the mystics speak. But can a trial, to be truly such, truly decisive between life and death, be experienced as such while knowing that it is only a trial?” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 46).

If the meaning of all things is bound to the Kingdom, to doubt the Kingdom would be to expose oneself to total meaninglessness. “That the kingdom might not come is not a hypothesis,” he writes, “but a mortal anguish, a cry—the cry of Jesus on the Cross. To be with him implies being with him above all in this, which is the bottom of the abyss. While he died in terror that the kingdom might not come, we cannot consider ourselves with him if we believe we can live waiting for the kingdom to come and confirm the life we are living” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 56).

The language of failure is not rhetorical provocation here, but the extreme attempt to save meaning without betraying it.

To speak of God’s failure is to refuse a theology of power that neutralizes suffering and dissolves waiting. It is a fidelity that passes through the maximum risk of thought.

7. Existence, Meaning, and the Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is what confers meaning upon everything; only in it do things find sense. The Kingdom comes through the catastrophic subversion of all things; therefore, what occurs in our lives is meaningless now, but will find meaning. Quinzio recalls an episode from his early life: an encounter with his beloved wife Stefania, taken from him by illness. “What does it mean that, eleven and a half years ago, I met Stefania at the corner of Piazza della Sapienza, while I was coming from Via delle Stimate and she from Via di Santa Chiara? It means nothing, until the day comes when things will have meaning” (Quinzio, 1993, p. 57).

Seeking meaning in life while living it is thwarted by its continual change, which prevents lingering over things and forming a truly meaningful judgment: “Life changes its

appearance so rapidly that I do not know what value any thought might have that seeks to grasp its meaning. It would be like asking whether the weather, taken as a whole, is good or bad.” If the need for meaning persists, what can one find other than pain? If no meaning can be found, pain itself becomes the only remaining meaning (Quinzio, 1996, pp. 25, 75).

Yet there is a potentially fruitful bond between pain and hope, because “if human beings knew true pain, they would necessarily believe in true consolation; if they knew despair, they would believe in hope” (Quinzio, 1996, p. 30). Indeed, hope itself is the mother of pain, “because one hopes for what one suffers not to possess” (Quinzio, 1996, p. 187). Without hope in God it is impossible to live, but also impossible to die; whoever seriously confronts this perspective could never accept it without annihilating themselves: “The idea that one could live and die without hoping in God plunges existence into an abyss of solitude that can be accepted only by those who cannot conceive it” (Quinzio, 1996, p.

72). To have no hope is the true “sin of the world” (Quinzio, 1996, p. 123).

8. Conclusions

Sergio Quinzio’s reflection allows us to think the crisis of contemporary humanity without reducing it either to a psychological problem or to a mere historical phase. It appears rather as a crisis of meaning, history, and hope, affecting the human in its entirety. In this context, faith does not take shape as refuge or symbolic compensation, but as radical exposure to the absence of guarantees. Christian hope, far from being a reassuring promise, becomes the most demanding form of resistance to meaninglessness: a hope that survives only by accepting the possibility of its own failure.

To think with Quinzio means fully assuming the delay of salvation, without neutralizing or sublimating it. It is precisely this delay that constitutes the place in which the human is called to measure itself against its own fragility, its exposure to pain, and its inability to ground meaning by itself. In this way, crisis is not simply what must be overcome,

but what makes the question of salvation still necessary. Contemporary humanity, stripped of every progressive certainty and any sudden immanent redemption, thus discovers itself once again consigned to waiting—not as possession, but as an open wound, within which, despite everything, the possibility of the Kingdom continues to resonate.

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