

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE IN *THE KNIFE OF NEVER LETTING GO* AND *THE ASK AND THE ANSWER* BY PATRICK NESS

CẢM QUAN KITÔ GIÁO TRONG ĐỪNG BAO GIỜ BUÔNG DAO VÀ CÂU HỎI ĐƯỢC TRẢ LỜI CỦA PATRICK NESS

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Abstract - Religion and literature have long maintained a parallel, intertwined, and mutually influential relationship. The two novels *Chaos Walking 1: The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *Chaos Walking 2: The Ask and The Answer* by Patrick Ness, are set against the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic world. Through this narrative, the author reflects on pressing societal issues, highlighting that concerns about the future of the world are not only religious but also humanistic. Utilizing an interdisciplinary comparative approach, this paper explores the influence of Christianity on Patrick Ness's novels. By drawing parallels with original myths found in the *Book of Genesis* and *Revelation* in the Bible, the study aims to classify and conduct an interdisciplinary evaluation of literary archetypes. The paper will also reference Christian theological thought where necessary to analyze these unique archetypes in greater depth.

Key words - Patrick Ness; Chaos Walking; Dystopia; eschatology; apocalypse; theology of hope; post-apocalyptic

1. Introduction

Today, readers are no longer unfamiliar with the name Patrick Ness, an American writer, journalist, and screenwriter. He has received several literary accolades for children and adolescents, including two Carnegie Medals. In 2016, the work *A Monster Calls* (translated by Vu Thu Huong and published by the Writers' Association Publishing House) was introduced to Vietnamese readers and received numerous positive feedback. In 2021, the first volume of the book series *Chaos Walking* was converted into a movie of the same name and attracted a lot of attention. The movie was directed by Doug Liman, written by Patrick Ness and Christopher Ford. However, the introduction and research on the Patrick Ness phenomenon in Vietnam are still quite limited, partly because of prejudices that fantasy and adventure literature are only for entertainment. But right from the first pages of the book, the author grabbed the epigraph from the famous fictional novel *Middlemarch* by Geore Ediot: "IF WE COULD SEE OR HEAR all the aspects of ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the heartbeat of a squirrel. We would die from the roar on the other side of silence" [1, p. 7]. That is to say, if we only consider the stories that the author brings as second-rate literature for entertainment, it is fairly shortsighted.

Chaos Walking 1: The Knife of Never Letting Go (2008) and *Chaos Walking 2: The Ask and The Answer* (2009) are two novels in the Chaos Walking trilogy. These works of speculative fiction recount the survival journey of a boy

Tóm tắt - Từ lâu, tôn giáo và văn học tồn tại mối quan hệ song song, đan xen và ảnh hưởng lẫn nhau. Hai cuốn tiểu thuyết *Hỗn mang 1 - ĐỪNG BAO GIỜ BUÔNG DAO* và *Hỗn mang 2 - Câu hỏi được trả lời* của tác giả Patrick Ness được xây dựng trên bối cảnh thế giới sau ngày tận thế. Qua câu chuyện, tác giả đã phản ánh những vấn đề tồn tại của xã hội, vấn nạn về tương lai của thế giới không chỉ là vấn đề tôn giáo, mà còn là vấn đề của nhân loại. Sử dụng phương pháp so sánh liên ngành, bài viết tìm kiếm dấu ấn ảnh hưởng của Kitô giáo đối với tiểu thuyết của Patrick Ness. Bằng việc đối chiếu với huyền thoại gốc là các câu chuyện trong *Sách Sáng Thế* và *Khải Huyền* của Kinh Thánh, qua đó hướng tới phân loại loại hình và đánh giá liên ngành các kiểu hình tượng văn chương. Bài viết cũng sẽ tham chiếu tư tưởng của Thần học Kitô giáo ở một số điểm cần thiết để phân tích sâu một số kiểu hình tượng độc đáo này.

Từ khóa - Patrick Ness; Hỗn mang; phản địa đàng; cảnh chung; Khải Huyền; Thần học hy vọng; hậu tận thế

named Todd in a dark and chaotic post-apocalyptic world. With a dystopian and eschatological perspective (two themes rooted in the Book of Genesis and Revelation of the Bible), Patrick Ness skillfully incorporates specific and intentional Christian thought into his works. By examining the novels from a religious perspective (primarily based on Catholic theology), the analysis aims to evaluate and explore literary archetypes and highlight the influence of Christian ideology on the author's work. Thus, the *Chaos Walking* world created by Patrick Ness not only contains captivating stories, but, upon closing the book and reflecting, readers can discover profound meanings.

2. The Dystopian Perspective: From the Book of Genesis to Fiction

"Utopia" or "Dystopia" are not new terms in life and literature. These terms were first known around 1450s–517s BC, in the first book of the *Old Testament - the Book of Genesis*. (It is the first book of the Old Testament, specifically, and the Bible, generally. The book consists of 50 chapters, primarily focusing on the origins of the universe and humanity, especially the Jewish people). The material in chapters 1–11 covers the tale of God creating the universe and placing the first humans living in the "Garden of Eden", a beautiful, happy paradise, until humanity committed sin, and led the "first apocalypse" of mankind.

If Utopia directs readers to a desirable society, Dystopia describes a dark, crisis-ridden world. Essentially, this is associated with the characteristics of the science fiction

genre (Sci-fi), dystopian literature as opening up a vision of humanity's future, a fulfilled prophecy. During the research process, we realized that the study of dystopian literature primarily focuses on the characteristics of the genre and what it "expresses", such as concerns about society, politics, economics, the environment, human nature, etc. In the article "The theme of epidemics in contemporary Korean literature and films", published in Non Nuoc Magazine, Nguyen Phuong Khanh pointed out the characteristics of dystopian fiction. These characteristics are frequently associated with issues such as: the government's attitude toward control and dominance in an attempt to create a perfect society (Government control); the destruction of the environment leading to disasters or epidemics (Environmental destruction); the loss of human power over the technology that they themselves created (Technological control); the survival instinct (Survival) and the loss of individuality, freedom, and self-alienation (Loss of individualism) [2]. In this article, we explore the work by comparing it with the meaning of the original myth, specifically the stories written in Genesis chapters 1-11, in order to clarify the influence of religion on this literary genre and to analyze the work objectively. This is a new approach to dystopian literature.

2.1. The "forbidden fruit" symbol

The story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden is widely known as a myth (*Genesis* 3:1-24). According to Christian belief, God created and gave the ancestors of mankind the authority to manage the Garden of Eden. They had the right to eat all the fruit in the garden, with the exception of the tree in the center (the tree of knowledge of good and evil). But when Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's temptation, "*For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (*Genesis* 3, 5). Most of us mistakenly believe that the "forbidden fruit" is the apple (possibly influenced by the myth of the *Golden Apples of the Hesperides*). Properly understood, the "forbidden fruit" symbolizes human choice, as it was through pride and the desire to be equal to God that our ancestors sinned. Adam and Eve's fall led to "original sin", an act of "anti-Eden" According to biblical scholars, "the essence of original sin is the pride, disbelief, self-satisfaction, and disobedience of humanity. All evil begins with pride" [3, pp. 97-98]. From this perspective, author Patrick Ness has crafted the character of Mayor Prentiss to embody the traits of a dystopian person.

Mayor Prentiss sees himself as the creator and establisher of a "new Eden" in the New World. With his oratory skills and leadership abilities, Prentiss propagates populist ideas such as "We are creating a new world. Finally, this world will truly live up to its name" [4, p. 24], "We will build a community to be proud of to welcome them to the new Eden" [4, p. 50]. This seemingly noble goal, however, betrays his desire to become president of the New World and to identify himself as a divine being. Without thinking twice, Mayor Prentiss made the church his own house and brashly proclaimed, "I am the savior of you all" [4, p. 51]. Just as God prepared a plan for the

salvation of humanity, Mayor Prentiss also prepared for the "salvation" of mankind, saying, "The plan has been in the making for years, just waiting for the day the last boy in town became a man" [1, p. 201]. By forming an army of men, the horrifying reality is that "the way a boy in Prentiss Town becomes a man... is to kill another man" [1, p. 392]. Prentiss believes he is on par with God's creative power by destroying human nature "to annihilate the good inside, the part that doesn't want to kill" [1, p. 236], thereby turning people into emotionless war machines. In this way, Mayor Prentiss "creates" new humans, and he becomes God. "If he could make every boy in Prentiss Town into a man in his way, then he's God, isn't he? He created all of us and controls everything" [1, p. 349]. The forbidden fruit that humanity's ancestors ate in the Garden of Eden symbolizes the arrogance of thinking that humans-the created beings-can be equal to God-the Creator. The story of the Tower of Babel tells of humans wanting to build a tower to the sky. The author of the *Book of Genesis* uses the imagery of the Ziggurat towers of Mesopotamia to illustrate why humans became divided and scattered. The symbol of the Tower of Babel is used to represent the arrogance and pride of humanity, when they sought to rely on their own strength and abilities to defy God, rejecting God and deciding for themselves. The character of Mayor Prentiss is also symbolic of the Tower of Babel in the Bible (*Genesis* 11, 1-9), representing human arrogance, folly, and defiance against the Creator. This is the same "slap of awakening" that *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley) [5] delivers to those who believe that humans possess unlimited power and claim the right to replace the role of God.

Facing a dark, powerful force, the boy Todd must constantly fight to survive and maintain his moral integrity. The detail of the knife that Todd always carries on his journey is not just a weapon, but it is likened to the "forbidden fruit" in the Garden of Eden. The "knife" and the "forbidden fruit" symbolize human choice: "A knife is not a thing. It's a choice. It's something you do. A knife says yes or no, cut or not, die or don't" [1, p. 80]. On the brink of life and death, Todd must repeatedly struggle with the decision to "kill or not kill" Todd's journey is a sacred battle, a fight to preserve his conscience. In adversity, the knife is a weapon for physical survival, but choosing to kill means killing the soul, erasing one's humanity. Facing the "mystery of evil" (a favored phrase of Gabriel Marcel), people often have a legitimate reaction of rejection and discontent. Whether we want to or not, this mystery "surrounds" us, even if we try our best to escape it [6]. Todd constantly has to run, not knowing why he must run, just as people cannot explain why suffering and misfortune come into their lives. The forces of evil see Todd as a symbol, as explained by the character Aaron: "You're the last test. The last one to make us whole. With you in our army, there will be no weak link. We will be blessed. One falls, we all fall" [1, p. 395]. Todd is seen as a symbol of Adam in the Bible, where the fall of one person leads to the death of all humanity. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man" (1 *Corinthians* 15, 21). The arduous battle against the power of darkness has always persisted throughout human

history, from the dawn of the world to the end of days. Thus, people must continually commit and fight tirelessly to uphold the good within themselves.

2.2. *The spread of sin - a world of suffering and darkness*

Many people believe that Eden is a peaceful place with picturesque surroundings where people can live happily ever after. But the right interpretation of the Bible teaches that there was never such an Eden. The author of the *Book of Genesis* portrayed a good world devoid of evil, suffering, and sin by using imagery that contrasted with reality. The idea was to portray the First World as magnificent and joyful. It was “not God but humanity that has brought the world into its current state” [3, p. 82]. *Book of Genesis* chapter 4 tells the story of *Cain killing Abel* (a brother killing his younger brother) to announce the miserable state of humanity without God and the spreading of sin among people. “Cain’s sin highlights the discovery of crime in each generation and its spreading among the human community” [3, p. 124].

In his work, Patrick Ness also uses the motif of a man killing a man: “One man falls, one man rises” [1, p. 393], sharing the same theological significance with the story of “brother killing brother” in the Bible. Patrick Ness wants to show a sinful and suffering humanity. The author’s description of a dystopian, crisis-ridden world is easily recognizable. Todd’s hometown, Prentiss Town, where he was raised, has “a population of 147 and decreasing... 146 men dying every day” [1, p. 25], and throughout the town, there is only the chaos of the Noise, “Ugly Noise, the kind of Noise that’s angry, images of you in ways you don’t want, violent images, bloody images” [1, p. 30]. The dreadful thing is that there are no females in sight, given that all the women in Prentisstown have been killed by the men. Readers become frightened by Patrick Ness’s Gothic horror description of Prentisstown, a town filled with sin. Apart from Prentisstown, other New World settlements were not as perfect as people thought; they had to deal with the Noise disease by taking drastic measures like playing music all day and night to block out the noise, having men sleep in one area and women in another, and having everyone wear masks so no one can see each other’s faces; or “In one place, where all they do is sing all day long and go mad. And another place where all the walls are made of glass and no one wears clothes” [1, pp. 273-274].

It appears that all of the problems will be solved when Mayor Prentiss, who sees himself as a god sent to rescue humanity, rises to the position of president of the New World. Instead, he transforms Haven—now known as New Prentisstown—into a chaotic area akin to the previous Prentisstown. His despicable political beliefs and autocratic rule included things such as: “Men and women are kept separate, and there are new taxes, more laws about how to dress, a long list of books to be confiscated and burned, and going to church is now mandatory” [4, p. 113]. As a result, there is division among the populace, and there are frequent violent bombings that cause suffering. “And there are too many people being imprisoned, hundreds of women being kept, chained together underground, starved, and dying in droves” [4, p. 113]. Instability and crisis

spread throughout the world, portraying humanity as realistically overwhelmed by loss and sorrow. Eden can only exist if people are able to positively shape it; whether Eden is beautiful or not is dependent on how well people work together. The delightful Eden will soon become a deadly desert if people do not know how to preserve and care for it.

2.3. *The damage to interpersonal relationships*

As far as the author of the *Book of Genesis* is concerned, “Eden is not a location. Wherever there are humans, there is Eden because fundamentally Eden is a state of happiness” [3, p. 83]. According to the Bible, the “state of Eden” is manifested through the relationships between humans and God—with others and with oneself. When humans fall, these relationships are destroyed, leading to the consequence of the “loss of Eden” (the state of anti-Eden).

Eden is a gift from God to humanity in terms of the relationship between them and the Creator, but it is also a responsibility to protect and develop the world in a way that benefits all living things (Genesis 2, 15). “Humans connecting with God, which brings about the peaceful connection of humans with the universe” [3, p. 83] is how this is made manifest. Author Patrick Ness imagines a world devoid of God, one that is rife with conflict, misery, and death. The Monster, the planet’s native species, and humans fought each other in the first war in the New World. Humans defeated the Monster and made them slaves using contemporary weaponry. “We defeated them and killed thousands. Though they outnumbered us, we had more advanced weapons and greater resolve. We kept some as slaves to rebuild the city after the war” [4, p. 468]. Humans, through scientific advancement, conquered nature, but instead of caring for and preserving it, they destroyed the initial good order created, which goes against the Creator’s will. The inhabitants of the New World believe that Eden is a place where “you can live safely and peacefully with God as your guide and love for your fellow man” [1, p. 364], and they often pray in the church: “Help us, save us, forgive us, take us out of here, I beg you, God” [1, p. 32]. Sadly, humans cannot converse with God as Adam and Eve did in the old Eden, and “no one heard the Noise back from this God-guy” [1, p. 32]. Instead of believing that “God is the guide”, people in Prentisstown believed in those who claimed to be God or His representatives. “They let themselves be persuaded by Mayor Prentiss and Aaron’s preaching, who kept saying that anything hidden must be evil. They killed all the women and all the men who tried to protect them” [1, p. 345]. People chose to place blame for their misfortunes even though the Noise disease is the root cause of chaos on this planet. While the men of Prentisstown choose to kill the women because they cannot stand their silence, the New World settlers think the disease was brought by the Monster. It can be seen that the “blame culture” has been passed down from Adam and Eve to their descendants today (Genesis 3, 8–13). (After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, when God questioned them, Adam blamed Eve for giving him the forbidden fruit, and Eve blamed the snake for seducing her. This shows the vicious cycle of sin,

which destroys good relationships). Thus, the divine relationship is destroyed when humans rebel against God by creating war and violence.

If the original paradise described in the *Book of Genesis* was based on the relationship between the man Adam and the woman Eve, the woman was created by God by taking the man's rib (the bone next to the heart) (Genesis 2, 18–25), which is an implicit symbol that the man has a duty to love the woman; the woman serves as the man's "assistant" in building a good world. When mankind fell, the bond between men and women was destroyed, resulting in "the stronger side dominating the other" [7, p. 37]. Patrick Ness also brings up the gender problem in his writing, arguing that human tragedy results from the concept of "male rule" According to Mayor Prentiss's character, "The New World makes men forget their place, and that means men must stay away from women until each of them remembers who they are and what they must become" [4, p. 55]. Facing such extreme thoughts, the women are compelled to rise up and fight back, resulting in a battle between the two factions of Answers (headed by Mrs. Coyle) and Questions (led by Mayor Prentiss). Thus, humanity entirely wrecked the paradise that everyone hopes for, where there is "love for fellow human beings".

The act of degeneracy not only results in the "death" of the connection between Deity and humanity, but it also leads humans to bear the "guilt of original sin", which is the destruction of their correlation with themselves. Degeneracy corrupts human nature, including intelligence, emotions, desires, and behaviors. At this moment, humans are unable to perceive their own humanity and have forgotten their enormous dignity. In the story by writer Patrick Ness, the main character, a youngster named Todd, is thrown into a chaotic, dark world and must continually strive to survive. Todd's suffocating survival journey nearly shattered the thirteen-year-old boy to the point where he hoped he would die to escape the anguish he was going through. "I wish Aaron's knife had gone through me, that I had died like the Monster, that I could stop falling into the black hole, falling, falling, falling forever until there's only darkness left, down into the void where there's no more Todd to blame or mess up, and I could fall into oblivion forever, never to think again" [1, p. 254]. Todd's struggle not only takes place on the outside but also takes place strongly from the inside, which is vividly shown through the chaotic, overlapping lines that stretch across many pages of the book, which the author refers to as Noise throughout the novel. "There are hundreds of Aarons from hundreds of directions, all around me, all speaking, all growling. 'Coward,' they say. All of them. 'Coward' over and over again" [1, pp. 286-290]. When confronted with life's challenges, many opt to deny themselves and avoid reality. According to writer Patrick Ness, no crisis is greater than the crisis of conscience. In addition, the author is also looking for answers to questions about human existence and meaning, as well as the surrounding world. "Who am I to resist? Who am I to change this if the world wants it so badly? Who am I to stop the end of the world if it keeps coming?" [1, p. 412]. Humanity has long been searching for answers to the question, "Who are

people? What are people? Where is the world and humanity going?" According to René Latourelle SJ's perspective, people are constantly eager to explain themselves and find solutions to human life's issues, which is especially important given the current crisis and instability in social life. In the process of discovery, people are often stunned and experience the fragility of themselves as well as things. [8].

From Utopia to Dystopia is not only a mythological story written in the Bible; it is also an exploration of images and symbols to understand the message intended by the author of the Book of Genesis. With a dystopian perspective, writer Patrick Ness has fully and vividly expressed the profound meanings of religious faith through his own imagery and literary style.

3. The eschatological perspective

3.1. The Apocalyptic Perspective

During the Middle Ages, when numerous calamities, epidemics, and wars occurred, people at this time made many eschatological inferences predicting the end of the world, from which they pondered the fate of humanity. The Jews believed that the world only existed for a finite duration; hence, there could be no eschatology without collapse. The Apocalypse is one of the most typical themes of eschatology; it has two aspects: disaster (Katastrophentheorie) and illusion (Utopie). In the Bible, the devastation often mentioned in the Apocalypse includes wars, conflicts, epidemics, famines, natural disasters, disruptions of the natural moral order, and other calamities. All of these disasters, like a vision of the Apocalypse, have become a reality and serve as the foundation for the end of the world.

Literature has exploited the material of the Apocalypse as a theme; it is not difficult to recognize the Apocalyptic perspective in the world of *Chaos Walking* by writer Patrick Ness. The calamities mentioned are as follows: "Life is hard and getting harder across the New World. Crops are failing, disease is spreading, and there's no prosperity or paradise anywhere. This is certainly not paradise" [1, p. 343]. The people of the New World are faced with a plague called the Noise, "Noise is just noise. It's the clanging, the whispering, and it often just turns into a mass of sound, images, and chaotic thoughts" [1, p. 46]. This makes the New World wondrous when "Everything on this planet talks to each other" [1, p. 343], animals can talk and humans can see each other's thoughts. The humans on this planet are overwhelmed and driven insane by the uncontrollable information from the Noise, but only the men are infected, not the women, which is also the objective cause of division and chaos in the New World. "Bacteria were here when we landed. A natural phenomenon in the air, everything chaotic. Chaotic and bewildering, and Noise and Noise" [1, pp. 342-343].

Writer Patrick Ness also uses the language and symbols of Revelation to convey hidden meanings. For instance, the number 13 in the work represents the time convention of the New World: a year includes thirteen months, and a boy is considered a man when he reaches the age of thirteen. As explained by the character Todd, "It's the tradition of

the New World. Apparently based on the Bible, it symbolizes the day humanity ate from the Tree of Knowledge and transitioned from innocence to sin” [1, p. 204]. According to tradition and the *Book of Revelation*, the number 12 denotes perfection and completion [9], whereas the number 13 represents abnormality, sin, and sorrow. Furthermore, Patrick Ness uses the detail of having two moons on this planet to indicate the period when night lasts longer than day, when there is more darkness than light, showing a dark world and the reign of evil. The author concludes the story *Chaos Walking 2: The Ask and the Answer* with an open ending, making the reader curious about what will happen in the future, which is the image of the Beast army advancing towards the town and the war about to happen. “The third and final horn sounded. A whole army of Monsters is storming down the town. Some of them, the ones at the front, are riding huge beasts covered in what looks like armor and with a single, fierce, curved horn sticking out of their snouts. Behind them come the soldiers” [4, pp. 466-468]. It can be seen that the details that Patrick Ness used were influenced by the visions of Saint John the Apostle in the *Book of Revelation (Vision of the Seven Seals, Revelation chapters 6-7)*. The meaning of symbols such as “the trumpet blast” and “riders on strange beasts” is to announce the terrible disasters that are about to happen, which according to the Bible is called “the Day of the Lord’s Wrath”; “the horn” means strength, and “detachments” represent war, predicting that the New World is facing the end of the world, when the power of evil is now dominant.

In the context of a world where “everyone can hear each other’s thoughts” [1, p. 342], humans can still deceive and scheme. It can be affirmed that it is not disease, natural calamities, or war, but humans themselves that are the subjective cause that pushes humanity to the end of the world. “Why look for somewhere else to live? Because the place you left behind is no longer livable. The Old World was filthy, overcrowded, and full of violence; people divided, hated, and killed each other; making everyone miserable was the only way to be satisfied” [1, p. 148]. The earth became corrupt and full of violence, and sin became more and more serious, which led to the first apocalyptic catastrophe in human history, the account of Noah and the great flood (Book of Genesis, chapter 6). “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (*Genesis 6, 5*), “So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created - and with them the animals, the birds, and the creatures that move along the ground - for I regret that I have made them” (*Genesis 6, 7*). Writer Patrick Ness uses the apocalyptic discourse as a warning to humanity that the end of the world might be a very certain and precise future, rather than a comprehensive view of future history.

3.2. The journey metaphor from the perspective of Christian theology of hope

The novel *Chaos Walking* by writer Patrick Ness is not simply about the adventure journey of the boy Todd in a dark

world, but through the story, the author wishes to convey faith and hope for a human world. The journey to Haven of the characters Todd and Viola is a metaphorical journey to find paradise (Haven is similar to Heaven or Eden, meaning paradise). Haven is a place that Todd has never seen; the thirteen-year-old boy had to try, and persevere with the belief that there is a shelter from the pursuit of the army, and that there is a cure for the Noise disease. On the dangerous and arduous journey, Todd sometimes doubts his own beliefs: “But what if we’re walking all this way for nothing? What if our hope at the end is the same illusion as my mother’s hope?” [1, p. 368]. Although Haven is a vague destination, born from Todd’s inner desires and baseless speculation, it is not naive, cheap, or worthless optimism. As the character Ben mentions, “You two have traveled farther than most people on this planet travel in a lifetime. Do you think you could have gone that far without hope?” [1, p. 330]. The meaning of the journey is not simply the destination, but the way we travel. From the perspective of the Christian theology of hope, “Hope is different from optimism, which is the attitude of believing that everything will turn out all right in the end. Hope goes much further. It is an expectation directed towards the future; it affirms that inequality, injustice, evil, and suffering will not have the last word and will not be the end of all things. Hope assumes that reality opens up to a better future” [10, p. 12]. Although the journey to find the Garden of Eden is vague and ambiguous, the author, Patrick Ness, wants to transmit the message that “There is hope waiting at the end of the road. Always remember that” [1, p. 351], and our task is to “Just keep moving forward, just keep going on and on” [1, p. 203].

Beyond the dark side of the *Chaos Walking* world, Patrick Ness also paints a picture of hope. “The New World, and it is made entirely of hope” [1, p. 364]. With the mindset of “recreating paradise”, the author describes the New World as the ancient Garden of Eden: “The sky here is so big and so blue, and the trees are the same. In this world, animals know how to talk, to really converse, and even to respond. There are too many wonders in this world” [1, p. 365]; “It was a beautiful and joyful time; the sun never set, men and women sang together, lived and loved together, never knowing sickness, never knowing separation or death” [1, p. 39]. Humans always wish that “tomorrow will be brighter”, hence hope is inherent in human nature. The sensation of existential anguish and the desire to escape it by imagining a perfect world show that humans constantly yearn for “the return of paradise”.

Imbued with the hope of Christianity, Patrick Ness guides humanity to seek salvation in the new, “to seek a new life, a life clean, simple, true, and good, a life wholly different from the Old World in every way, where people could live safely and peacefully with God as their guide and with love for their fellow man” [1, p. 364]. If we define hope as belonging to the future, towards a good that, while difficult to achieve, is inevitable, it can be affirmed that “Christian hope is the driving force behind all earthly hopes, permeating them and supporting them to achieve their fullest potential” [11, p. 187]. That is the motivating force behind the actions-the search for solutions to realize the dream of

“recreating paradise” in this world. Patrick Ness also lights up for readers the image of a “star of hope” in a world that is sinking into the darkness of decline; that is the character of Todd’s mother—the woman of hope. “Full of love, that woman, full of hope in the goodness of humanity” [1, p. 346] Todd’s mother is only known through the diary she left for her son and through Ben’s narration, both of which show an example of hope and the great love of a mother for her child. “Mother promised to raise you only with love and hope. Mother promised that you would see a better world” [1, p. 367]. It can be seen that the image of the Virgin Mary in religion has been recreated by Patrick Ness through the portraits of mothers in literature, which are “women of hope” or “mothers of hope”.

Hope is not an “opium” that enchants people; it is an eschatological virtue as well as a driving force for changing the world for the better. When humanity is facing a crisis of faith, hope is the guiding light that helps people perceive the value of reality and strengthens the human spirit.

4. Conclusion

With captivating and exciting plots, the novels *Chaos Walking 1: The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *Chaos Walking 2: The Ask and the Answer* by writer Patrick Ness immerse readers in the crazy and breathtaking survival journey of the character Todd. However, it is not simply a dramatic adventure story; deep inside is a journey to discover the reality of the world. It is a dystopian world in which the author raises questions about the future of humanity. Hope and efforts for good things are always the light that guides people in a world immersed in the darkness of crisis. It can be seen that the author uses stories in the Bible and their theological meaning to build his story and characters. Exploring author Patrick Ness’s works through the lens of Christian theology opens up a direction for researching dystopian literature with religious science, allowing for a more in-depth evaluation of the work. According to Brian Stock’s theory of literary reception, there are two categories of readers: mediative readers and

analytical readers. In this case, the mediative reader is the one who goes beyond the common meaning of language to seek healing or to demonstrate religious beliefs, which shows the harmonious and humane interplay between religion and literature [12].

In the present world, the globe is facing a great flood of economic, political, and social recession, as well as the rise of war, violence, and pain, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused people to fall into a serious crisis of faith. However, it can be affirmed that, in a period of numerous unstable changes like today, people are in great need of “salvation” from religion and literature. They are seen as a source of strength, spiritual support, and a “rope” to save people from the abyss of a crisis of faith.

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