

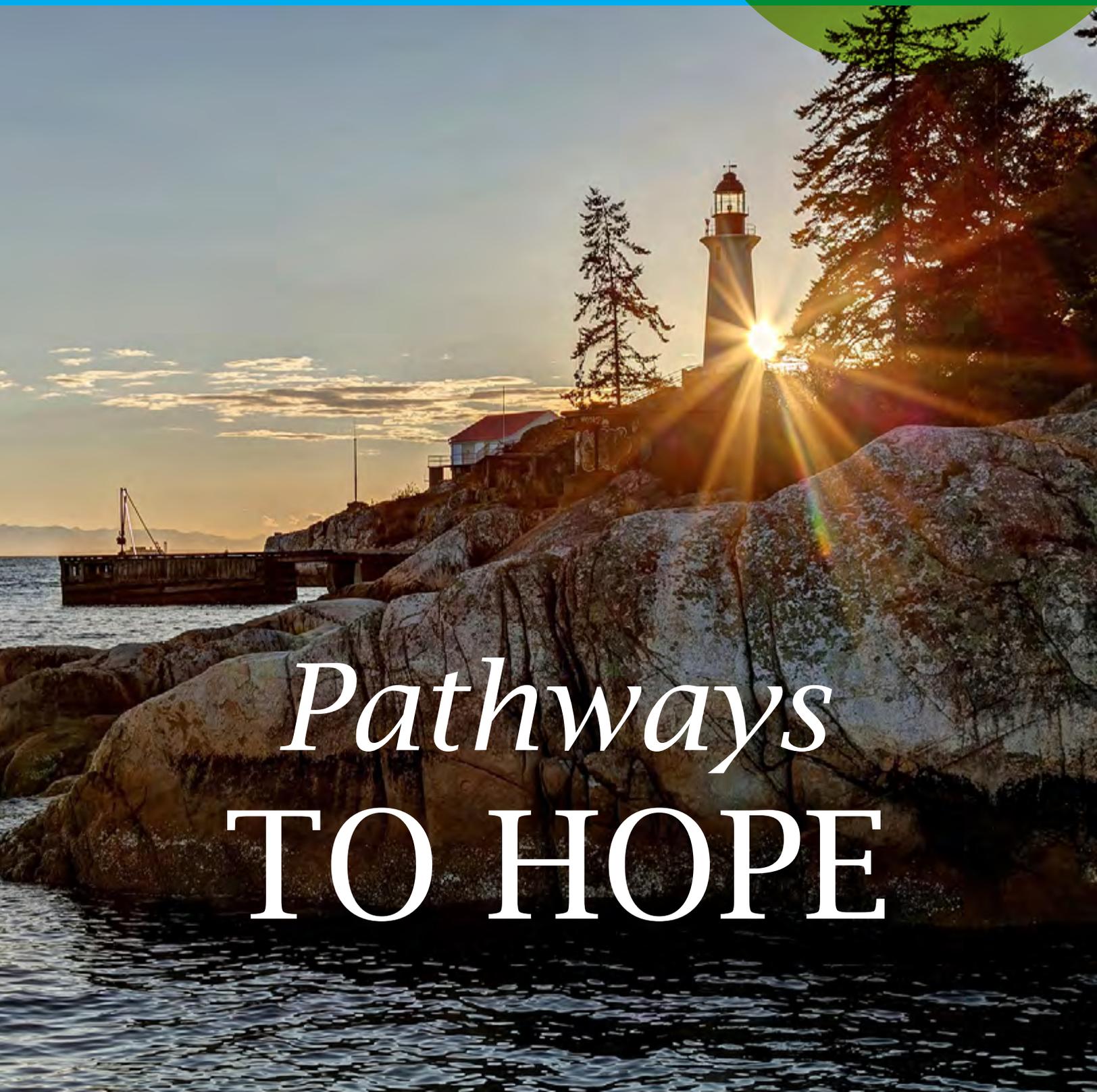


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TO HOPE

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Suivez-nous!



Do Not Let Yourself Be Robbed of Hope!

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In a meeting with young people – and not so young people – on the first Palm Sunday after his election, Pope Francis stated, “We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world. Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope, do not let hope be stolen, the hope that Jesus gives us.” In this same meeting, Pope Francis also cited his predecessor’s encyclical *Spe Salvi*, a work he frequently references. So what is this hope that is the focus of the following articles, and that is a thread running through recent papal addresses and documents?

The virtue of hope is of special relevance to Christianity, and humanity needs to be reminded of its value. It is a life-giving dynamic for living a full Christian life and a vital resource for the life of the Church and the world. It is not just that hope is a good virtue for which to strive; it is a necessity for human salvation.

Why Do We Hope?

Throughout the whole of *Spe Salvi* the question arises always new and always current: Why do we hope? The image of the journey of hope towards our goal of Trinitarian life synthesizes and crystallizes the integral vision of Christian hope that Pope Benedict offers us, because hope and salvation are inseparable. *Spe Salvi* presents hope as a dynamic reality, in a personalized, comprehensible form, and in open and current dialogue with each person and our contemporary world.

Aware of our finitude and the power of evil and sin in the world which we are unable to overcome; hope is centered on the God who is able to vanquish sin because God personally entered into history in the person of Jesus Christ whose redemptive love takes away the sin of the world.

“Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world’s healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope—not yet fulfillment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of the good even in seem-



ingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.”¹

Hope Embraces all Spheres

Perhaps the most original aspect of this encyclical is the fact that it demonstrates hope in its integrity, embracing all spheres. First, it addresses time, including the past, the present and the future, looking toward eternal life.

Then, it talks of the various ways in which one can come to hope: through prayer and particularly contemplative prayer. Through action, because all serious and right action of humanity is hope being enacted. Through suffering, and this is in no way to glorify suffering in a narcissistic form, but to emphasize that suffering forms part of every human existence. We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it. What we do with suffering can, by God’s grace, transform our experience and lead to creative interior growth both for ourselves and for others.

Presentation of the Articles

The articles that follow also demonstrate hope in its integrity. Father Louis Riverin draws deeply from the tradition with reference to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. He sees hope as both a theological virtue and one with infinite possibilities. Fr Louis also emphasizes the importance of desiring to hope and not only for ourselves but for others for whom we can be a source of hope.

Sister Lorraine d’Entremont shares insights from contemporary authors she has found hopeful particularly in the context of individual and communal discernment and planning for the future. Planning hope, imagining hope and the emerging future of hope are the keynotes of her piece.

In the light of the Benedictine tradition and the vow of stability, with reference to contemporary inspiration, Sister Patricia Brady gives a specific and very personal example of planning and imagining hope. She shares her own and her community’s experience of moving toward Abbeyfield St. Benedict House, Nanaimo, B.C.

Father Michel Proulx provides for us an experience of being confronted by the demoralizing effects of a degenerative disease and the powerful effect of sharing the scriptures, which brought a real sense of hope to a brother. This way of accompanying another is exemplary of the kind of accompaniment that Pope Francis calls us to espouse.

A darker but no less important note is sounded by Father Antoine-Emmanuel who calls to our attention the prevalence of corruption and indifference in the world and within consecrated life. His hope is that we shall take up Christ’s invitation into his redemptive work where we may, through God’s mercy and the offering of our prayer and suffering, contribute to the health of the Church and the world.

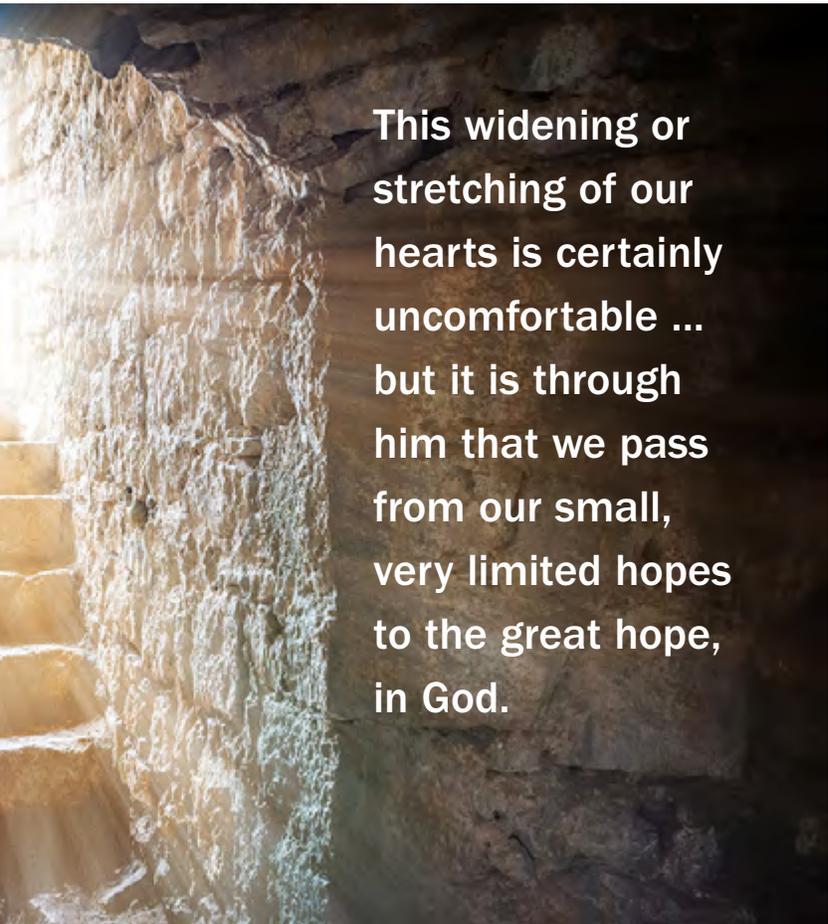
Finally, Sister Gaétane Guillemette gives us a contemporary psalm as she writes of an experience of darkness, when God seems absent. She speaks of a hope that can exist in suffering. The hope inspired by a loving and faithful God – a redemptive hope – of which we should never let ourselves be robbed!

The questions that accompany each article are meant to assist ongoing reflection. Enjoy Reading! ■

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, (Saved in Hope) Encyclical Letter, November 30th 2007, no. 36.



Becoming Hope



This widening or stretching of our hearts is certainly uncomfortable ... but it is through him that we pass from our small, very limited hopes to the great hope, in God.

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Hope is a virtue for which we have great need in navigating through the various challenges that we are facing these days, in the Church as well as in our communities. However, are we always aware of the beauty that our experiences of hope open up to us? All that is required is that we accept to go beyond what we hope to catch sight of the horizon that hope opens up to us.

One Can never Hope too Much

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us that hope, as a theological virtue, has God as its object: it is not, therefore, governed by the doctrine of the mean that characterizes the other virtues. For example, the virtue of courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness. It means you can never hope too much, nor is it possible for you to believe too much or to love too much! The object of virtue is God, who is infinite, “so that we can never love God as much as He ought to be loved, nor believe and hope in Him as much as we should.”¹

Perhaps we too often see hope as a necessary evil, an evil from which we will be healed as soon as possible by attaining the object of our hope. It is not comfortable to be reaching-out for that which is not within our grasp... And yet, it is not this tension, this extension beyond ourselves that is the most important part? That is what St. Augustine asserts:

Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity, you will have to put in it and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is to be given to us.²

Therefore, it seems that it is not the abundance of God that might be lacking, but rather our “capacity to receive!” This widening or stretching of our hearts is certainly uncomfortable ... but it is through him that we pass from our small, very limited hopes to the great hope, in God. This may lead us to find ourselves in the same situation that St. Paul and his companions found themselves, “subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair.” (2 Cor 4:8, NJB translation)

¹ Even if, for us, hope must be appropriate to our “condition” and in this sense consists in a mean, “there can be no excess of hope in comparison with God, whose goodness is infinite.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, IIae, Q. 64, a. 4, rep. and sol. 3)

² Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the First Letter of John*: we can find this text in the Office of Readings for Friday of the 6th week of Ordinary Time.

Hoping for All

To remain in hope also opens our hearts to the men and women who are our companions of hope, perhaps those whom we have not seen up until now. It is not the fact of having too many desires that closes us off from the other, but the fact of not having any! That is why Scripture reproaches those who shut themselves away with their riches to be “nations without shame” (Zeph 2:1) that crush the poor and cause them to say, “We have had our full share of scorn of those who are at ease, of contempt of the proud.” (123:4, NRSV)

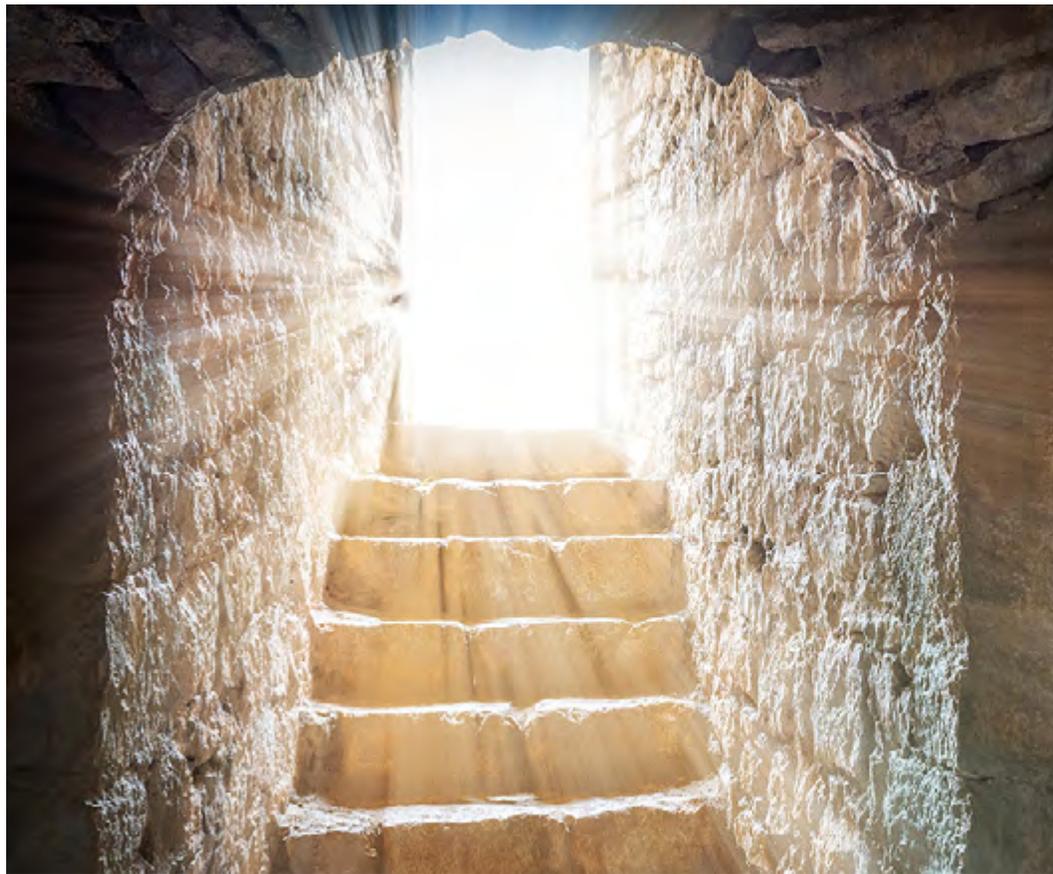
To hope, not only for ourselves, but also for all! “Too often,” in fact, “we conceive of hope in a way that is too individualistic,” whereas in reality it “concerns the salvation of all humankind — and it is only to the extent that I am drawn together with others in community that it concerns me.”³ For my brother and sister, this support and communion can be a reason to hope and so, for any given person, I become hope.

Being Transformed by Hope

Becoming hope is also letting oneself be transformed. For hope is not first and foremost an attitude on our part, but rather a (Divine) Person, it becomes “the hope which is stored up for you in heaven” (Col 1:5). It is already present; it is Christ among us, “the hope of glory!” (Col 1:27).

Hoping does not leave us unscathed... and it is precisely this point that is the purpose of the exercise. We are called upon to let ourselves be stretched to the dimensions of an ever-greater hope, towards a horizon of which Thomas Aquinas speaks about to us so admirably.

³ Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1953, p. 340.



*When we have attained perfect happiness, it will not only be the desire we have of God that will find its rest, but also rest will come for all our other desires. The joy of the blessed is therefore absolutely full, and even more than full... However, since no creature is capable of a joy of God worthy of him, it must be said that this absolutely perfect joy is not contained in man, but rather it is He who penetrates, according to this passage in St. Matthew (25:21): “Join in your master’s happiness.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Ila Ilae*, q. 28, a. 3)*

For further reflection:

Have I ever had experiences of hope that have transformed me?

Am I capable of hoping with the poorest, to recognize myself in their hopes, and to recognize them in mine? ■

HOPE *Beyond the Challenges...*

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Planning is an act of hope. This short sentence, heard from a speaker addressing religious some thirty years ago, opened the door for me to understand planning not just as good administrative practice, but as an action undertaken in the context of hope. My recent reading on hope and future visioning for religious congregations have expanded and deepened my notions of both planning and hope. In this article, I share snippets of these readings 'hoping' they will offer insight and inspiration.

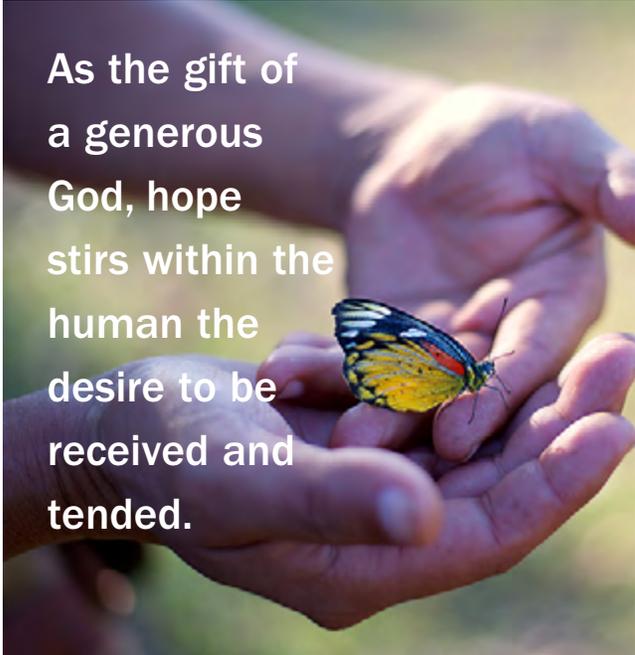
Hope as Grace and Choice

In the book *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment*, Colleen M. Griffith has an essay entitled *Hope, a Grace and a Choice*. This title highlights the dual dynamic of hope. She states: "Christian spirituality recognizes hope to be a powerful resource, something that is both gift and choice....As the gift of a generous God, hope stirs within the human the desire to be received and tended. As a choice made within the context of human freedom, hope remains ultimately something to be embodied and practiced."¹

Therefore, hope is a living gift, not something to be stowed away and retrieved as the need arises. Choosing hope involves ongoing turning to the God of hope, attending to the movement of God's spirit in specific situations, and responding to the call of God when we recognize it.²

Attending to the inbreaking of the Spirit requires the practice of discernment as understood in Christian spirituality. Good discernment enables us to move through individual assumptions and concerns toward fashioning something in common. It also enables us to recognize not only what is, but also what could be.

"Being able to use our imagination by looking forward to possibilities is a central aspect of a discernment process."³ Thus discernment, in addition to providing confirmation and direction for our particular context, will draw



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us into the realm of future possibility, the realm of the reign of God which is present and also 'not yet' or 'to come'. "People of hope move toward and act on behalf of a life-giving future in ways that help bring it to birth."⁴

Imagining Hope

In the same book, Philip Browning Helsel draws on insights from pastoral care and counselling to explore the role of imagination in accessing and sustaining hope. He explores how the process of accessing one's hopes reflects the breaking in of a future yet to be experienced. He describes a process employed in pastoral counselling for identifying hopes on an individual, personal level. He shows "how the exploration of one's future involves more than planning: it is an encounter with the future-self-held-by-God occurring in an atmosphere of imaginative discernment."⁵

Helsel connects future oriented questions in counselling with eschatology. He explains that eschatology, which was traditionally understood as the branch of theology describing final things, has been reoriented in the last fifty years to an examination of how the reign of God is breaking into the present. As such, it is an appropriate theological concept for questions regarding imaginative discernment of present change needed for future betterment.⁶

The imaginative personal discernment questions and process described by Helsel are similar to some of the future visioning processes I have experienced communally in congregational assemblies and chapters, which we know can be taxing as we strive for a common vision. When we are in the midst of these processes, might we be centered and refocused by welcoming them as the inbreaking of the reign of God?

The 'Emerging Future' and Hope

Carole Shinnick, SSND applies the insights of Otto Scharmer's *Theory of U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* to communal discernment in religious congregations.⁷ Scharmer speaks of 'noticing the arrival of your highest future possibility.'

Shinnick invites us to imagine what might happen if the task of communal discernment was reframed in these words. "This anticipatory wording opens up much more than it closes down. Could it be that even in our obvious diminishment the God of the future is still calling us to fresh horizons?"⁸ She notes the unexpected new life and energy she has observed in communities that have discerned their historical mission is coming to closure. I would add that the 'highest future possibility' approach would be helpful for meeting challenges in newer and thriving congregations as well.

Deep listening of the group is part of Scharmer's transformation process: listening with open minds, hearts and wills. Sustaining an open will is the more challenging piece of this process; it is the step toward 'letting go and letting come' (Scharmer), and the time for considering what is emerging. It requires time for reflection, "to await the tiniest hints from the future that echo our foundational stories."⁹

Scharmer also advocates acting soon on what is emerging from the group by creating a model or prototype, and acting on it, so as to explore, learn and clarify a way forward. Shinnick observes that religious congregations are not particularly adept at this, for fear of putting forward something that is not quite perfect.¹⁰

She concludes about Theory U: "...There is something very rich here to complement support and even excite us in our discerning quest. If we try to notice the arrival of our highest future possibilities, I am sure we will ultimately hear a familiar voice saying to us: I know the plans I have for you...plans for peace and not disaster...to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)¹¹

Conclusion and reflection

These three short samples barely do justice to their authors. However, I think I have captured the kernel of their thought, and that their reflections can offer fresh perspectives to deepen your understanding and enliven your hope.

As you reflect on these writings, what attracts you about hope as presented here?

What challenges you?

What affirms my/our journey in hope? ■

¹Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, eds., *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment* (Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2013), p. 4; ²Ibid., p. 6;

³Ibid., p. 8; ⁴Ibid., p. 9; ⁵"Imagining Hope: Insights from Pastoral Care and Counselling" in *Hope: Promise, Possibility...*, p. 70; ⁶Ibid., p. 71; ⁷"Noticing the Arrival of your Highest Future Possibility: The Power of Deep Listening," *The Occasional Papers LCWR Summer 2017*, p. 8; ⁸Ibid., p. 8; ⁹Ibid., p. 9;

¹⁰Ibid., p. 9; ¹¹Ibid., p. 10.





STABILITY: Beacon of Hope

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Promise of Stability

In Chapter 58 of his sixth century Rule, St. Benedict wrote, “Do not grant newcomers to monastic life an easy entry, but, as the Apostle says, *Test the spirits to see if they are from God* (1 Jn. 4:1).” Only after being clearly tested and told of the difficulties that lead one to God, should a novice promise perseverance in stability, conversion of life and obedience.

Stability is rooted in God’s unchanging fidelity. It is faith in God’s eternal enduring fidelity that empowers Benedictines to accept whatever adverse circumstances may come their way.

The concluding rite of their monastic profession reflects this. Then the newly professed chants the *Suscipe* three times and the community standing with her responds with the same verse: “Sustain me O Lord as you have promised that I may live, disappoint me not in my hope.” Now this is her home until death. Here together with her monastic community she journeys to God in hope during good times as well as trying ones.

Hope in Times of Adversity

Beginning around the year 2009 my community worked with a facilitator for several months in our initial future planning process. A key question we faced was: Did we have a future together? Would we remain as a Benedictine community? Become non-canonical? Transfer to other Benedictine monasteries?

Once we decided to stay together as a canonical Benedictine community, as part of the Federation of St. Gertrude, and to age in place, we could make other long-range decisions. This was a difficult time for all of us, but in our hearts, we placed our hope in God and he continues to see us through.

After this, the next decision, which we made, was to explore an Abbeyfield model, (see: www.abbeyfield.ca for more information). This was providential because Abbeyfield homes provide affordable board and lodging for seniors who want a sense of community while maintaining their own independence. After much prayer and discernment,

we decided to approach Abbeyfield Canada to see if we were a viable fit. We had the land and the building. Were they willing to admit us first as a provisional and eventually as a full-fledged Abbeyfield house?

Meanwhile, we worked with Jack Anderson, our eco-friendly architect, to renovate the monastery in an appropriate manner should we finalize our decision to become an Abbeyfield house. Since the monastery consisted of two separate houses, we joined the houses together. This joining together made it safer in winter ice and snow to move from one to the other inside rather than going outside. Then we remodelled the facility so that each person would have a self-contained suite of bedroom, sitting room and a handicapped equipped bathroom as well as a door to the outside.

Jack held an open forum of oblates, associates and friends of the community to glean creative ideas for kitchen, dining room and a live-in-manager's suite. He also suggested heating the building with water and including a solarium for growing vegetables year-round. With renovations completed, we continue to move forward.

Essential Work Remaining

First, we must complete the documents that will allow us to become a provisional Abbeyfield house in anticipation of becoming a certified part of Abbeyfield Canada. Why Abbeyfield? It embodies important values that Benedictines hold such as communal living and care for the elderly. Our hope is that these values will be continued in Abbeyfield St. Benedict House, Nanaimo, B.C. when all of us have passed on.

Next, we must write constitutions and bylaws so that an Abbeyfield society may be established and charitable status applied for. In order to safeguard the interests of the Benedictine community, proper legal documentation will have to be drawn up. With all of this happening, the bylaws and constitutions of the Benedictine Sisters of Nanaimo will also need to be updated.

Stability and Eternal Hope

In all of this, we have the active support and encouragement of our Federation and Abbeyfield Canada. It seems like an endless task but throughout we are sustained by the hope that God is with us and we are doing his work. "How awe-inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:17).

Discussion Questions:

What challenges have you encountered in the recent past?

Did your community also experience these challenges?

When has your community felt hopeful after experiencing adversity? How and when did hope occur?

Is the place where you and your community live really a house of God, the gate of heaven? Describe how this is so or not so. ■



The Best is Yet to Come!



The Stalemate of Medical Conditions

That was precisely the case of Brother Yves, who was affected by a type of Parkinson's that was increasingly limiting his autonomy. One fall day when I went to his room, I found Brother Yves completely discouraged. In fact, his Parkinson's had progressed quite a bit over the course of the previous month and his doctor had advised him that he could expect his condition to continue to worsen.

I had before me someone who was desperate, who could not foresee anything other than a very dark future. What could I do with a man in such a state? What could I say? I found myself a bit overwhelmed. What pastoral attitude should I adopt? I could not say, "Don't worry, it'll be better tomorrow!" The unfortunate man had a degenerative disease and therefore his affliction would inevitably progress. As I sat face-to-face with him, I felt myself at a dead end.

The Hope Communicated by the Holy Scriptures

No doubt thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, two biblical texts suddenly sprang to mind. First of all, there was this magnificent passage from Revelation in which John of Patmos intends to describe what life will be like in the new world of the resurrection:

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For a little over ten years, I was extraordinary confessor at the provincial infirmary of a community of teaching brothers. Once a month, I visited about twenty ailing religious who lived there. I found myself in a wide-range of situations. For example, there would be very elderly brothers with advanced-stage cognitive losses and there would also be relatively young brothers suffering from degenerative diseases.

Photo: ROME, ITALY – The central part of fresco of The Glory of Heaven (1630) in main apse of church Basilica di Santi Quattro Coronati by Giovanni da San Giovanni. (Shutterstock)

“They will never hunger or thirst again; sun and scorching heat will never plague them, because the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Rev 7: 16-17)

Then, there was the passage in which St. Paul reassures the Christians of Thessalonica by writing to them that, when the Lord returns, they will be reunited with their deceased friends and family to enjoy eternal life with them:

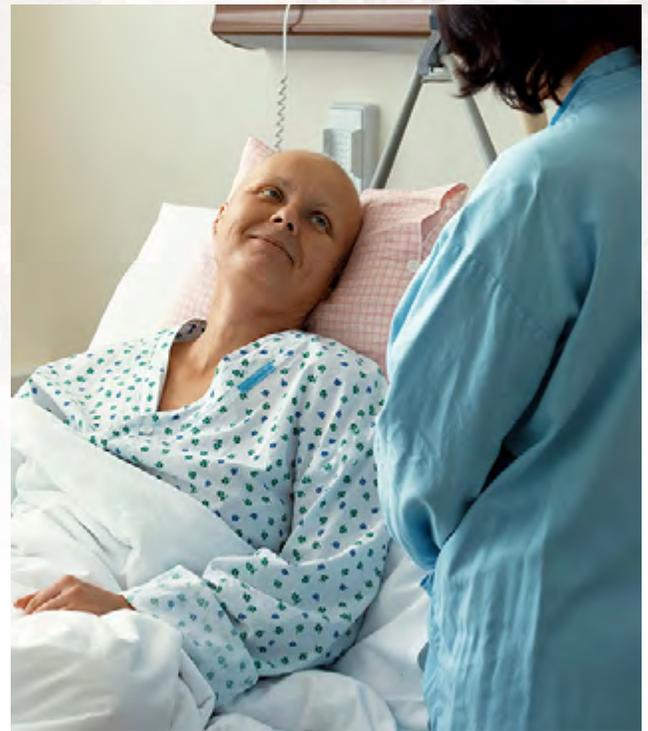
“... do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope....those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise; and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord for ever.” (1 Th 4:13, 16-17)

Enlightened by these two testimonies from the Holy Scriptures, I have the audacity to say to the religious: “Brother Yves, do you realize that the most beautiful part is before you?” The brother stared at me with a questioning look. Was this some kind of joke? Do I really understand what is happening to him? This man did not see anything on the horizon but degeneration and the loss of his capabilities. So I went on: “Imagine what it will be like when you awake in the resurrection with a strong body and you will be able to frolic again like a young spring colt! Imagine what it will be like when you can dance again and celebrate with your deceased loved ones that you have rejoined!”

Seeing Beyond the Human Predicament

It was then that I saw a large tear slowly trickle down Brother Yves’ cheek. Shaking my hand with all the energy he could still muster, he said: “Thank you, Father Michel. I was so wrapped up in my present sufferings that I had completely forgotten my future resurrection. My current situation made me blind to the hope that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus brings us.” Together, we had just overcome what seemed, from a human perspective, to be a dead end.

When I left his room, this religious had regained a deep peace, even if he knew that his health was still going to deteriorate. In effect, I had put him back in touch with what Pope Benedict XVI had called, in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, our great hope. Essentially, I had invited this man to look through a longer lens and to perceive the hope of Life that awaits him beyond his period of illness.



The Benefit of Accompaniment

This meeting with Brother Yves was very instructive for me. It taught me how biblical scriptures can be bearers of hope when we find ourselves in situations where things seem at a dead end and hopeless. It also made me discover the importance of spiritual accompaniment and support.

I saw how suffering can obstruct our view and even make us forget what we know. In those cases, we need a brother or sister who can tell us: “The most beautiful is yet to come!” We need someone who can remind us of the hope that Christ raised by his resurrection and which animates the Church even today.

For Further Reflection:

How can we help the sick in our community keep in touch with the “great hope” of the Church?

What means can I give myself, starting now, to make sure that I do not lose sight of the hope of resurrection when setbacks occur? ■

Facing Corruption:

DARING TO HOPE AGAINST ALL HOPE

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One can no longer count the number of occasions that Pope Francis has warned us about “corruption,” that endemic evil whose virulence in both society and the Church he is constantly denouncing, and has done so in every corner of the world. He describes it as a *tear, break, decomposition and disintegration*¹ that affects the human heart and, from there, contaminates society.²

“Corruption” — or When One Wearies of Transcendence

Corruption begins with small privileges granted by those who have fallen into the trap of *dialoguing with the devil*.³ Pope Francis often describes the *slippery slope of sin that leads to corruption*. If sinners become aware of their sin, he tells us, they make changes, draw on the Divine Mercy and do their best not to relapse. Corrupt people, on the other hand, no longer see their sin; they are used to it, like the rich man who no longer saw Lazarus lying at his gate. Sinners even glorify their sin; they consider it a success, a form of acquired honesty. They no longer see that their choices destroy the social fabric and hurt the poor, the *modern Naboths*⁴ (cf. 1 Kings 21).

Such an attitude is a particular threat for those who exercise power, be it political, economic, or religious. The situation of personal power reinforces the confinement in corruption, as happened to King David before Nathan made him see his sin.

None of us is immune to the futility that comes from being weary of transcendence. Hearts that are sure of themselves are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests,⁵ because there came a time —

often irreversible — when sin became corruption. Only a *culture of mercy*⁶ will enable us to leave behind this deadly confinement. Then the soul that is internally suffocated without even knowing it can regain life.

Are We Immune to Corruption?

How are we, people of consecrated life, to receive this warning? Are we immune because we are consecrated people? Certainly not!

The Pope keeps reminding us that no one is immune to corruption. For example, Pope Francis tells us, if we become accustomed to the presence of beggars in our streets, if we get used to the stories of all kinds of violence on the news, we are already on the slippery slope of indifference and corruption. In addition, the more we are in positions of responsibility, the more corruption in all its forms will be waiting for us.

Hence, we are called to vigilance. But we are also called to action. Pope Francis is providing us with his own example through all the gestures and many speeches he gives denouncing social and ecclesial corruption. Just think of all his denunciations of human trafficking.

The Pope does not stop there. He invites us to “ask forgiveness” from the Lord for all the corrupt people of our time, to ask the Lord to “grant them the grace to repent, so that they don’t die with a corrupt heart.” And the Pope adds... “to condemn the corrupt, yes; to ask for the grace not to become corrupt, yes;” but “also to pray for their conversion!”⁷ Hoping against all hope...

¹Cf. Pope Francis, Foreword to the book *Corrosion* by Cardinal Peter Turkson, 2017; ²Cf. *The Joy of the Gospel*, § 60; ³Cf. Morning Meditation of February 10, 2017; ⁴Cf. Morning Meditation of June 16, 2017; ⁵Cf. *The Joy of the Gospel*, § 97; ⁶Cf. Foreword to the book *Corrosion* by Cardinal Peter Turkson, 2017; ⁷Cf. Morning Meditation of June 17, 2014.

The Lord Entrusts Us with the “Pranzinis” of Our Time

Our prayer, that is the offering of our lives and the offering of our sufferings are of great value. Like all infirmities, both old age and illness can effectively repel the corruption of our time. I am thinking here of the hope of the young Thérèse praying for Pranzini. She was so grateful when she heard that this man who was damaged by corruption had wanted to kiss the crucifix before being guillotined! The Lord entrusts us with the “Pranzinis” of our time because these ‘souls in danger’ are being strangled by corruption. He wants us all to be artisans of his Mercy.

Let us remember the words of the apostle Paul: “It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Col 1:24). Paul has an astonishing conviction: however numerous might be the trials he has already gone through because of the Gospel, he has not yet come to an end, whether that be in his “flesh,” in his fragile humanity, in his participation in the Passion of Christ, in his participation in the work of Redemption.

With Mary, Working for Redemption

Before Paul, the first to be closely associated with the work of Redemption was the Virgin Mary. Who could describe the suffering of the Virgin at the foot of the cross throughout Holy Saturday? She is the mother of the crucified and her heart is immaculate, therefore her union with the Passion of Jesus is the perfect union, the fully fruitful union.

It is thus with and through her that we too can fully associate ourselves with the Redemption. We can be like John, who on Calvary did not stand near the cross, but rather stood near Mary, who was standing at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn 19:26).

If we clearly recognize that Jesus is the One Redeemer, that He is the Redeemer of the Virgin Mary herself, we can then name and contemplate the Marian mystery of union with redemption. We can come to recognize that the sufferings we offer associate us with this mystery, especially in view of the salvation of all those who are now locked in corruption.

The Humble and Loving Offering of Elderly Consecrated Persons

May the humble, loving and hopeful offering being made by the elderly consecrated men and women in our communities, who bear our world with entrails of mercy, be fruitful! Men and women religious who suffer are the Mary-at-the-foot-of-the-cross of our time. They are so precious – our brothers and sisters who suffer – for it is through their prayer and offering that they take care of the most lost. They silently extend their hands to them on the way to heaven!

Jesus has accomplished everything in his Incarnation and in the overabundance of love, that is his paschal mystery. Everything! However, a God who is communion cannot save us without associating us with his divine work. And when, along with Mary, we say ‘yes’ to this offering of ourselves, especially in favour of the most corrupt, heaven is being woven here on earth. Through this offering of self in the darkness of suffering and pure faith, the communion of heaven is already being woven.

Can one enter heaven without desiring that everyone succeed in entering? Certainly not! We do not enter heaven just by burning with mercy but by ardently wanting the most remote, the most wounded and the most corrupt to reach it. Heaven is communion: we enter it only by letting God expand our heart to a communion without measure. “In heaven, the blessed will be a heaven for one another,” theologian François Durwell once shared with me.

How can one not be filled with gratitude for those who accompany others and accompany us on the way to heaven through their passion and prayer? Great and beautiful is the dignity of our aged consecrated brothers and sisters who unite with the Passion of Jesus, burning with desire that all may enter into the joy of the Resurrection! This is a powerful intercession! United at heart with the Virgin Mary, they will one day be able to make of their death itself an offering for the salvation of all. This will in turn become the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit who consecrates our offering and makes it astonishingly fruitful.

For our Personal or Community Meditation:

What forms of corruption should I be watching out for? What forms of corruption are there for my community?

Am I aware of the value of everything that I offer to the Lord for the salvation of the world?

Have I ever looked at my death as an offering to Love? ■



HOPE: *A Trail of* LIGHT *in the Night*

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*In the sunken trough of the abyss,
on the path of despair
I moan, I am out of breath
I am troubled and my mind questions*

*God, will I see your kindnesses
in the land of the living?
Do you forget to have pity?
Why do you remain deaf to my call?*

*Absent God, Hidden God, I persevere in hoping
From the depths of darkness,
your silence becomes presence
I believe. My Defender is alive*

*In the struggle of faith, overcoming doubt
Advancing with you, completely raw Hope
Being silent, hoping against hope*

*The darkness crushes me
But darkness is changing into light
And night is illuminated like day*

*Suffering extends over my entire being
And although suffering continues to envelop me,
within me arises a song of praise
The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away.
Blessed be his name*

*Hope in suffering
Getting out of oneself,
allowing oneself to be pruned, hurt
Opening oneself up to the other's suffering,
having compassion, suffering for love*

*Suffering shared, awakens hope
Makes being-with in solitude
Way of humanity where love attains the beyond*

*Hope, you make a promise to yourself
Whoever hopes in the Lord,
will never be disappointed
His Word never returns to him
without having achieved what it was sent to do*

*Hope of all hope
In faith, you make me walk farther than fear
Towards the light at the end of the darkness*

*Redemptive hope
I recognize you in the face of Jesus-made-man
Where the Spirit of the Father
has revealed Himself Love*

*Whoever hopes is touched by Love
Burning with an inner flame
That nothing can separate
from the love of God in Jesus Christ*

*In my flesh, I complete what is lacking
in the trials of Christ
Let your will be done and not mine
Father, into your hands I commit my life*

*With the strength of the Spirit, my will leaves itself
With a free and poor heart,
charity expands and purifies itself
In communion with the All Other and with others*

*Hope of God, loving and faithful
Conduit of the eternal covenant in Jesus Saviour
This is my blood, the blood of the new and eternal
covenant spread wide for you*

*With you Hope, death is dead in the sepulcher.
Love has killed it forever
The light passes through the shroud,
the sun radiates in the night¹
Certitude of eternity in the love of the risen Christ!*

Pour aller plus loin

Biblical texts: Psalm 26; 76:4-10; 138:11; Job 1:21; 19:5; Isaiah 49:23; 55:10-11; Luke 22:42; 23.46; Romains 8:39; Colossians 1:24; Mathew 26:28.

Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*,
(on Christian Hope), November 30, 2007.

¹ Jacques Gauthier, « Jusqu'à l'extrême de l'amour », dans *Les croix du chemin*, éd. Du Passage, 2007, p. 62.

THE CRC AT A GLANCE

Mission Statement

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

“The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”

Mission statement adopted in 2010

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

CRC Publications

Published three times a year, the *CRC Bulletin* presents reflections on different aspects of consecrated life in relation to the orientations and objectives of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Issued monthly, the *CRC Newsletter* (formerly *Le Lien CRC Link*) provides information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious congregations, on the life of the Church and on community groups involved in social justice.

