

COVENANT

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Emerging from Darkness

By Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D, C.Psych., R.Psych.



Dear Friends of Southdown,

When I wrote my contribution to *Covenant* in Spring of 2020, I would have been hard pressed to believe that a year later, we would still be in the midst of the pandemic. But here we are, fatigued, exhausted, overwhelmed, coping the best we each can with the whiplash of COVID-19, as one Toronto Lay Pastoral Associate aptly called it in a recent Southdown Community Wellness workshop. We keep moving ahead, and I pray that we all find ourselves supported by loved ones, feeling a sense of community in the process, identifying the hope that carries us through, and renewing our gratitude for the blessings of each moment.

One of the many lessons learned from this past year is the reminder that human beings are vulnerable to cognitive distortions, such as catastrophizing, black and white thinking, and generalizations, especially when faced with anxiety provoking distress. The sheer endless supply of pandemic-related conspiracy theories and other fear-mongering efforts bombarding us on a daily basis prompts me to emphasize the importance of **Evidence-Based Practice**. Together with many other disciplines, psychology over the past two decades has made a concerted effort to integrate “the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences” (APA, 2006, p. 273). Just as we have learned that it is best to allow solid, public health data guide our pandemic response, it is the same with our practice of psychology. A solid integration of science and practice is essential, and I am proud to say, at Southdown, we have made that integration of science and spiritual practice an integral part of our day-to-day work.

The Canadian Psychological Association reminds us that “evidence-based practice relies, first and foremost, on research findings published in the peer reviewed scientific literature” (2012). Contributing to the body of knowledge by way of conducting research is an integral, but often less known, part of our work at Southdown. Please allow me to express my gratitude to the Southdown team members who contributed to the recently published article, **Underdeveloped Affective Maturity and Unintegrated Psychosexual Identity as Contributors to Clergy Abuse and Boundary Violations: Clinical Observations From Residential Treatment of Roman Catholic Clergy at the Southdown Institute**, which appeared in the APA peer-reviewed journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 302-309. In addition, Southdown is currently collecting data as we investigate **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Psychological Well-Being of Catholic Priests in Canada**. I am grateful that our team at Southdown not only accompanies clergy, vowed religious, lay pastoral ministers, and lay individuals by way of assessment, psychotherapy, spiritual direction, consultation, and education, they also contribute scientifically-gathered data to the conversation through our research initiatives.

In this season, let us continue to embrace the evidence of the Easter Gospels, namely the messages of hope instead of despair, light instead of darkness, and life instead of death. Strengthened by these truths, let us be resilient people who accompany and strengthen one another on our shared journey.

Sincerely,

Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D, C.Psych., R.Psych.
President and Chief Psychologist

References:

American Psychological Association. (2006). Evidence-Based Practice in Psychology: APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice. *American Psychologist*, 61, No. 4, 271-285 DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.271

Canadian Psychological Association. (2012). Evidence-Based Practice of Psychological Treatments: A Canadian Perspective. Retrieved March 28, 2021, from: http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Practice/Report_of_the_EBP_Task_Force_FINAL_Board_Approved_2012.pdf

Did you know?

1 In the early months of the pandemic, Southdown seamlessly migrated our assessment and outpatient psychotherapy services to a secure virtual video platform, enabling us to reach a wider population in more geographical areas. If you, or someone you know, is searching for spiritually-integrated assessments, psychotherapy, counselling, or spiritual direction, please share the good news with them that Southdown is online and here to help.

2 Southdown is now fully registered/licensed to provide all psychological services in Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia (more to come). If your province or state is not included here, please still contact us, as temporary registrations can be arranged in numerous jurisdictions.

3 Our assessment services, as well as outpatient psychotherapy services, are offered in English, French, and Spanish.

4 A growing number of dioceses/archdioceses/eparchies, religious communities, permanent diaconate programs (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other denominations) choose Southdown to conduct their candidate/vocational assessments.

5 Southdown frequently collaborates with KAIROS Psychology Group in Oakland, California, as a trusted West Coast partner for assessments, psychotherapy, and consultation. We are grateful to Rev. Bede Healey, OSB Cam, Ph.D., the lead psychologist at KAIROS, for his generous contribution as our guest writer in the Spring 2021 edition of *Covenant*.

The Importance of Hope In Seemingly Hopeless Times

By Rev. Bede Healey, OSB Cam, Ph.D.



As I sit here and write this, we have just passed the one-year anniversary of the lockdown related to COVID-19 and the ensuing pandemic. We have experienced an entire liturgical year under restrictions and limitations, and will experience the Easter Season, again, in restricted ways, but with the added experience of having endured an entire year of the pandemic and all the issues associated with it.

What has this year been like? What issues have arisen—in ourselves, our families, our communities, our parishes—and in a larger perspective, our Church and the world?

Many have commented that the inability to gather, in person, to celebrate the sacraments, the Eucharist, to participate in prayer groups, and partake of all the other gatherings of their church faith community. There is often a dislocation in their experience of life in the pandemic. Further negative experiences include the disruption in the grieving process related to the lack of opportunity to attend funerals, the inability to celebrate with family and friends at weddings and commencements, and the many other events we gather for, to celebrate and honour people important to us.

There is a great resilience in us, and there are many adaptations people have made to make life in the midst of the pandemic less distressing. For the insights, experiences, and relationships that sustained us, we certainly express our gratitude and thanks. But what about the other experiences—loneliness, anxious moments, sadness and depression, interpersonal conflict, futility, hopelessness—we all have also endured, to a greater or lesser degree? Cumulatively, these experiences are assaults against hope, and threats to our capacity to believe. So, going forward, emerging from these assaults and threats, how do we address hopelessness? How do we face the reality with which many of us struggle; that is, as one writer puts it, not believing in anyone or anything for any length of time?

This has been a traumatic year, in the sense of trauma, leading to a sense of fragmentation, the loss of meaning, the disruption of our most important relationships. As one writer puts it, we cannot escape trauma. We are mortal beings—injury, sickness, and death will mark our lives, and the lives of everyone we know. No one is spared from traumatic experiences.

When hope goes astray.

We are all familiar with the sense of hopelessness, the sense of impossibilities. We have all experienced, to some degree, the distortion of our capacity to imagine, the loss of purposeful action and an overwhelming sense of futility. We come to believe we lack any inner resources, are unworthy, inadequate, unacceptable, and valueless, that life is frustrating and inadequate, and we find ourselves full of anger and resentment. Hopelessness leads to despair, anguish, and remorse. Despair is a dark defeatism, resulting from the loss of, or failure to, hope. Hopelessness is essentially a failure to wish, to desire, to have ambition, to plan. This is not the life we are called to live by God.

How can we understand hope and believing?

We know faith and hope, along with love, are theological virtues. They are also dynamic processes essential to our functioning in the human as well as spiritual realm. The Jesuit psychoanalyst William Meissner¹ has thoughtfully considered these processes, and it is from his ideas we will begin our exploration of the contours of psyche and spirit.

1 Meissner, W. W., SJ MD (1987). *Life and faith*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Un. Press.

Faith and hope are intimately connected. Faith, especially understood as our capacity to “believe in” many things, is sustained and given purpose by hope, allowing us to live and cope effectively in this world. Together, they are an adaptive resource and an elemental strength of ours for efficacious and realistic coping. Certainly, our capacity to hope and to believe is based on God’s gift of grace, working in our human condition. We live in the nitty-gritty of the intersection of the reality that is now, and the reality that is not yet. Hope is not wishing or wishful thinking, wishing our problems would go away, or wishing we would win the lottery. Rather, hope, is above all else realistic, based in our real, concrete everyday lives. It is from the perspective of our current reality that hope seeks, imagines and shapes the reality of our future. Hope is essentially an active, continuing process and does not give up imagining, the imagining of what is not yet, but possible and attainable. Our hope-filled imagination needs to be oriented to real situations and real persons.

Hope is an act of mutuality, of shared imagination. It is built by, sustains, and is sustained by a community. When hope is lost, so also is the capacity for shared imagination. This mutuality is crucial, because separation and alienation lead to hopelessness, while connection and community sustain hope. That is, hope supports the possibility and availability of meaningful change as well as the radical human freedom to bring it about.

So, hope sustains and supports our faith, our capacity to believe in a future and work to bring it about. This desire fuels our purposeful actions and intentions. Indeed, some say that this fact is the prophetic function of hope—prophetic in that it proclaims a reality that is not yet achieved. Hope enables the sense of the possible, encourages creative living, while at the same time not denying life’s pains, losses and very real disappointments.

In our day-to-day lives, we have many hopes, and we find that any number of them are riddled with ambivalence and conflict. As adults, we have come to accept reality and have come to terms with the fact that many of our private hopes are irreconcilable with our life in this world. However, these varied and conflicted hopes can be woven together. This requires recognizing the limitations and imperfections of people in general and ourselves personally, acknowledging the unavoidable ambivalence we have of relating to others. As adults, we need to grow in the freedom to hold gently our current situation, to let some or all of it fall away, so as to be able to see and grow in the possibility of what the future can bring for ourselves and others.

Hope and faith support our imagining and allow a sense of future possibilities, even in the face of long-standing fears, disappointments, loss, and failures. Our experiences of faith and hope remind us that we have the capacity to envision a realistic and realizable future.

How do we recover our ability to hope and believe?

We need to find hope in the realities of our current situation. We need a re-balancing, and especially a re-engagement with others. We need to re-discover what is positive in ourselves and others and remember that we have trusted others in the past and can do so again. Indeed, it is through our re-engagement with others, supportive and caring others, that we find a basis for hope that is rooted in truth. In a way, it is all a matter of encouraging each other to our fullest growth, remembering that we have at least the rudiments of hope in the sense of a real human possibility. This instillation of faith and hope is, in essence, a profound expression of real care, a cure, if you will, of the diminishment of life, and the disruption of meaning experienced in the pandemic.

The experiences of disconnection with our faith communities and the difficulty or impossibility of gathering together point to the sustaining roles of religious and spiritual rituals, as well as the sense of diminishment when they are no longer available to us. As the restrictions imposed on us begin to lift, what will it mean to be able to return to our faith community gatherings?

Whether we realized it before, we certainly understand now the power of ritual in our lives, and the way that engagement in group rituals strengthens us, both individually and as a group. When we repeatedly enact these rituals, we find that we experience higher levels of emotional strength, resilience, the capacity to recover from loss and, above all, hope.

So, as we begin to be able to gather as women and men of faith, let us not take this for granted! Let us take the time to recollect the losses, dislocation, and diminishment that we experienced in our separation from our faith community. As we re-engage, let us understand the deep power of believing and hoping, what power does for ourselves, our communities, and the world. Let us help each other recover our hope, strengthen our capacity to believe. Perhaps this Easter Season can have added meaning—new life, an increased capacity to hope and an ever more lively faith. And may the re-enkindling of hope-and-belief-based care be the cure, the source of healing we all need. ■

Rev. Bede Healey, OSB Cam, Ph.D. is a Camaldolese monk and Prior of Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley, CA. As a clinical psychologist, he has written and presented widely on psychological and spiritual issues, including fostering spiritual and psychological growth throughout the lifespan, treating religious professionals, and working with religious issues in therapy. Bede currently provides spiritual direction, has a small private practice, and is on staff of the KAIROS Psychology Group, which provides a variety of services for religious and clergy, seminaries and formators.

Contemplative Theological Reflection

By Greta DeLonghi, MA, DSD



A woman once shared with me about having to tell an ageing elder in her care that this individual would be moving to a new home, in the midst of a pandemic. This encounter was a heartbreaking and difficult moment for both of them and I invited the woman to reflect theologically and contemplatively on her experience.

Contemplative theological reflection is a way to come to a deepened awareness of the presence of God in our lived experience—and to respond from that deepened awareness. It is a staple spiritual practice for me, both personally and in my work as a spiritual director. “They can see the brokenness in the world, but they also see the hope of God for humankind,”¹ writes Kathleen McAlpin, a Sister of Mercy and formerly a professor at Regis College in Toronto. Theological reflection can strengthen hope, nourish faith and be a means of finding “meaning in a culture gripped by meaninglessness.”²

It is a practical process—and a transformative path for ongoing conversion—with four main components, as based on McAlpin’s model for contemplative theological reflection.³ The process begins with our lived experience and then we bring this experience into conversation with its context, then our faith tradition and finally our spirituality. Responding with some new action out of the insights from those reflections can lead to transformation. It is a stance that can help one begin to live with an awakened heart.⁴

As I guided the woman through the process, she described the key moments of this charged experience, her thoughts and feelings, and what she thought the heart of the matter was for her; that is, how to do something really hard in a loving way.

She then brought that experience into conversation with its context. Context means the world surrounding it; for example, its socio-economic location, the historical, geographical place, cultural values, symbols and movements, as well as family and other interpersonal dynamics. In this experience, the context included a global pandemic, with its toll on maturing adults, and a cultural tendency of ageism. It also involved valuing the wisdom of elders, compassionate care in this particular relationship, and the Catholic Social Teachings.

In applying the third step, which involves reflecting from and with our faith tradition, the woman sat for a time in silence, during which the words of Jesus to Peter (John 21:18) came

to her mind: “Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” Her reflection on her experience, in conversation with this gospel moment, surprised her as she had never expected to be the one fastening a belt around anyone. The Gospel story also helped her to see and more fully appreciate how important it had been for her, in that difficult moment, to listen with compassion and respect and to uphold the dignity of the ageing elder.

In the fourth step, the woman reflected on the spirituality—understood as a lived expression of faith—of her experience. That is, she reflected on how compassionate listening had enabled her to do something hard in a loving way and in keeping with the Catholic Social Teachings on respecting human life as sacred, and the dignity of every human person.

Finally, out of the insights of her reflection, the woman came to a conscious decision for transformed action. McAlpin writes that the action may be a decision to reflect more on the experience, to respond in compassion for the suffering of another, or a change in attitude.⁵ The woman decided to focus on listening with compassion and openness, especially when attending to hard realities. “A response to this process,” writes McAlpin, “is a summons to transformation.”⁶ And that is cause for celebration.

The contemplative theological reflection process can be practiced individually or in a group setting. Many years ago, in developing her model, McAlpin discovered that contemplative theological reflection is enriched by the sharing of reflections—and celebrating our responses—in a group setting.⁷ Contemplative theological reflection can be a process that helps bring us to the integrity and wholeness our hearts so desire—and that God desires for us. ■

Greta DeLonghi has been a spiritual director at The Southdown Institute since 2017. She studied at Regis College, the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at the University of Toronto, and graduated with an M.A. in Ministry and Spirituality and a Diploma in Spiritual Direction in 2011. In May 2021, Greta is presenting a virtual two-hour experiential workshop on the Contemplative Theological Reflection Process. For more information and to register, please visit the Southdown Community Wellness Services page at www.southdown.on.ca.

1 Kathleen McAlpin. *Ministry that Transforms: A Contemplative Process of Theological Reflection*. Novalis, 2009, p. 12.

2 Ibid, 4.

3 Ibid, 24-25.

4 Ibid, 21.

5 Ibid, 25.

6 Ibid, 9.

7 Ibid, 26.

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