



LUKENOTES

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Hope Matters

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Perhaps it is not coincidental that Pope Benedict chose to write a recent encyclical on Christian Hope (*Spe Salvi*) or that the theme of his recent visit to the U.S. was Christ our Hope, or that candidates running for elected office at this time are calling on us to support them as bearers of hope. We are living in a highly anxious time, a time of paradigmatic change, uncertainty, suffering and disappointments and are perhaps in need of some new insights to help us to thrive, not merely survive. Understanding hope, and what it takes for a human person to hope, are worthy then of exploration as we try to make our way in this in-between time, this transitional time, a time when individuals and groups are especially in need of support and healing.

Hope is commonly described as the desire for something together with the expectation of obtaining it; it is a hunger for a future good with the possibility of attainment. Hope is not to be equated with denial of reality, or with optimism, but rather is about spiritual and psychological transformation. From a theological perspective, God is the foundation of hope—the faith-based assurance that strengthens individuals to entrust their lives to God. Although psychologists have been slow to explore hope, they have, nevertheless, linked hope to healing (Menninger) and to effective psychotherapy (Frankl). Today, however, there is a greater interest in hope, most likely in response to the highly anxious time in which we live.

Anthony Scioli, Ph.D., has developed an integrative theory of hope, incorporating contributions from psychology, anthropology, philosophy and theology. He describes an amalgam of three key human motives or fundamental human drives: attachment, mastery, and survival, which give rise to the emotion we call hope. Scioli explains that nurturing these motives, results in a “hopeful core,” consisting of an attached or connected self, an empowered self and a resilient self capable of surviving. He further suggests that it is by abiding in hope that individuals are able to achieve true success, develop loving relationships and secure a genuine sense of peace.

Underlying Scioli’s theory are two important principles: balance and the social nature of hope. True hope is based on connection, attachment and engagement. It is not a private resource from within an isolated individual. In addition, individual efforts should be balanced between achieving certain goals (mastery), cultivating loving relationships (attachment) and seeking comfort and relief from anxiety (survival).

Anthony Scioli’s insights regarding hope are helpful in understanding what happens here at Saint Luke Institute. For those who come for therapy and for educational workshops, we are

hope providers. What is it that we do here that promotes hope? First, we encourage balance, the development of all aspects of oneself. In our educational workshops, we frequently talk with participants about making good choices, self-care, and how to foster healthy relationships with themselves, others and God as they learn to be more effective in ministry. Our clinical program integrates mind, body and spirit, often addressing the lack of balance in client's lives, especially their overworking and their isolated, disconnected living. The caring, consistent presence of therapists encourages openness in the exploration of issues, both past and present. The support and guidance offered by therapists assist our clients to pursue goals and dreams for a fuller, freer life. The sense of shared power in the client-therapist relationship is the backbone of good therapy. In addition, our clients learn that being in healthy relationships is central to the healing process. While here at SLI, many women and men have a first-time experience of friendship, an integral part of their healing and transformation. As they return to health, many learn to have honest, intimate conversations with God as well.

In the Education Department, we engender hope are by our availability, presence and clarity. As workshop participants, especially formators and vocation directors, prepare to leave, they often say, "I feel so hopeful," which I believe is directly related to their experience of both availability and presence. For example, as we talk about healthy, integrated sexuality from a psycho-spiritual perspective, we try to be an available and sensitive presence, open and respectful to participants' needs and to all questions. We strive to be consistent in our approach, sharing input and inviting conversation and integration. Experiencing availability from another person helps individuals to have a "taste" of God's incredible availability. Presence encourages openness in persons as they seek truth, wholeness and the quality of presence to oneself and others leads to personal and communal wholeness. In our workshops, the atmosphere we create helps participants to experience the "essence of presence" (Scioli): focus, congruence and safety. Finally, we strive to be clear in what we offer and what we expect, in our educational endeavors as well as in our clinical practice. Clarity helps in the development of trust which is indispensable in the formation of hope.

With the experience of hope come certain beliefs, feelings and actions: a sense of being empowered, having strength from within, feeling supported in goals and dreams, and having the ability to seek help when necessary. Hope does matter, and we here at SLI know only too well, that "the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life" (Spe Salvi).

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