

Monastic Scribe XXII: March 4, 2022

THE SKY IS FALLING!

Just Like Chicken Little in the old nursery tale, some people are running around, sinking in fear, claiming that the sky is falling! You hear about pandemic exhaustion or depression, the increase of mental health problems, inflation insecurities, pessimism about the future, young parents afraid to have children, the increase of hate crimes, and so much more including the climate crisis. And now we hear of the madness of a war in Europe. Fear leads to irrational behavior and the seeking of easy solutions. But if fear is catching, so is hope. But where is our hope? As Christians, we believe in the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Have we lost hope? I am grateful to hear some voices of hope in our day. Let me comment on a few.

In a recent Glastonbury Lecture, we were privileged to hear Rabbi Dr. Ariel Burger of Boston. He was a disciple of Eli Wiesel who handed on his hope as well as his sorrow. Wiesel lost all his family in a Nazi death camp. Then he committed his life, his teachings, his mentoring of young people to a life of witness, remembering, and peace. Rabbi Ariel suggested that hope is not a feeling but a choice. He has given himself to choose life, to look for the ways to transfer suffering into hope. All of this especially means not giving up on the world. He had a wonderful approach of how to deal with opposition. It included the three prong program of Word (scripture and dialog), Silence, and Music. He left me with a lot of hope.

A second source of hope comes from the Reverend Michael Dowd, a UCC Minister and Ecological Theologian. His work is aided by his wife, Connie Barlow, a science writer. They now host a website called "Post Doom". They claim that doom is the dread that has fallen on many humans in the face of chaos. Post Doom opens up "when we remember who we are, accept the inevitable, honor our grief, and prioritize what is pro-future and soul nourishing." (see website). Dowd has interviewed about 78 people with their messages of hope. I have listened to only Johanna Macy and Richard Rohr. The latter asserts that getting back to the gospel means we can't live anymore to expect progress of, "everything is getting better and better," and need to get beyond a trivial idea of God and the world. Our ego prefers conspiracy theories but reality requires something deeper. Rohr, in fact, says that "the fear of human extinction has no power over me." This is faith, this is real hope. It calls for living meaningfully, compassionately and courageously no matter what.

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Finally, I find great hope in the work of theologians who find in science the understanding of the world as it is with evolution and the new cosmology. Building on the insights of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, such Catholic theologians include John Haught of Georgetown and Ilya Delio of Villanova. A key belief is that our God, the creator God, is a God who calls us into the future. The creation of the world is on-going but clearly rising, over millennia, to a new level of being and consciousness. We know that there have been three or four periods of mass extinction of life forms but new life has always followed. Evolution means we live in a world that is not finished, is not perfect. The new cosmology means we are part of a gigantic cosmos with billions of galaxies and that we are all related. What happens in the cosmos happens on earth and in me. We need a bigger vision.

Science, John Haught tells me, confirms the biblical stories. God, indeed, is the God of the future who is calling us forward, who keeps God's promises to us and asks us to commit ourselves to help the world and the cosmos to really keep evolving and coming to greater spirit and mind consciousness. It is faith that allows us to take this stance and upon this faith we have hope.

Salvation History began with Abraham who was asked to leave all behind, set out and trust God in the future. It would take years for the fulfillment of that promise. Other periods of "doom" followed – slavery in Egypt, years in captivity, the destruction of temple worship. But God has always called people to new life - Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, survival, witness, when all seemed lost. Jesus' death and resurrection stand out, for Christians, the power of God to call us forward even when all seems dark and hopeless.

Is not God calling us to go forward today? Humanity has made great technical, medical, human advances. The climate crisis, a potential disaster, has also called forth commitment to renew the earth. People are seeing the need to simplify their lifestyle and live in harmony with the earth. This is especially evident in the younger generations. And it is they to whom we must turn in the future to find new ways for human living. We will need our children and grandchildren to bring forth new advances. But they need our witness of our joy in living with God and not centering our lives on materialism and comfort.

You may find all of this confusing and a new way to think about reality. But hope is not a wish. It is the expression of faith in God's promises and our commitment to live so as to make the present world better. The present signs of chaos may be

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the call to change and simplify our lives, to learn how to live the human story in a new way.

We must avoid playing Chicken Little and be overcome with fear. We must choose hope! Does any of this help you to be more hopeful? You can share your thoughts with me at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.