

## *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment*

Ed. Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid

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**I**n the early 1990s, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War gave some cause for optimism about the state of the world. Yet, just a few decades after, we are confronted with the existential threat of climate change, as well as the extraordinarily complex and threatening set of conflicts in the Middle East, with all their implications in terms of terrorism, ethnic cleansing and multitudes of refugees. The short-lived span of this optimism reminds us of the fundamental and permanent importance of hope for the Christian life, and for humanity as a whole—hope as a theological virtue and gift of God. *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment*, edited by Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, is a book that reflects on the character and promise of hope in ways that will give invaluable assistance to the theological community and the church. It is a collection of essays all written by members of the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College, and the editors are to be highly commended for their work in fostering a writing and consultation process among their authors that has produced a carefully structured and integrated book, in which the various essays explore facets of the general topic of hope in ways that complement and reinforce each other’s insights. Each essay is headed by a helpful abstract of its contents.

The book is divided into four sections: *Grounding Hope*; *Nurturing Hope*; *Sustaining Hope*; and *Living Hope*, with each section including a number of essays (17 in all), drawn from a wide range of theological disciplines, including systematic theology, Biblical studies, religious education, pastoral counseling, practical theology, liturgical studies, Catholic social teaching and moral theology. From the perspectives of these different disciplines, the various authors address some of the most pressing questions associated with hope in the contemporary Church and world. Space regrettably necessitates selectivity, although all the essays in the collection deserve appreciative mention and repay careful study. Richard Lennan’s essay “The Church: Got Hope?” confronts the reality of clerical sexual abuse and the failure of many church leaders to respond to it in a morally responsible way. In this light, Lennan argues that a “Yes” to the Church is itself an expression of hope, which cannot be “an assertion of the church’s perfection or self-sufficiency, but an acknowledgement of the God who, through Christ and the Spirit, is the source of the church” (50). Thomas Groome’s “Is there Hope for Faith?” reflects on the decline of Catholic belief and practice, in the Western world in particular. Although the logical order of the theological virtues is from faith to hope to love, Groome argues that there are times when “our greatest need may be to have *hope for faith*” (84). Groome responds to this challenge by emphasizing that “the most hopeful heart of Christian faith is Jesus Christ” (87) and that, like Jesus, himself, catechesis should “lead people from life to faith to life-in-faith” (90). Hosffman Ospino discerns “Glimpses of Christian Hope along the Migrant Journey” through reflection on the personal narratives of migrants from Latin America to

the United States. Ospino identifies three moments of the migrant journey—preparation, transit and arrival—and considers how each “provides glimpses of human and religious hope” (101), enabling “many Christian migrants to reconnect with the depths of their faith not only as a source of hope, but as a practice of hope” (104). Christopher Frechette’s “Happy are those who fear the Lord’: Hope, desire and transformative worship” draws on Old Testament studies to consider the relationship between desire and worship, and the ways in which this can liberate human beings from compulsive attachments. The time-honoured Biblical phrase “Fear of the Lord” expresses desire for God, and emotionally-engaged communal worship can support the process of letting go of compulsive desire and “allowing for honest acknowledgement of the fear, sadness, or anger that the necessary relinquishment of desires can elicit” (133). Like the Psalmist, the Christian worshipper can lament the loss of the objects of compulsive desire, and be healed by hope in the true God.

The integrated character of *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment* is achieved not only by the frequent cross-referencing by the authors to relevant insights in other contributions, but by the key themes that recur in the book. Dominic Doyle studies Aquinas’ definition of hope as the “desire for a future, difficult, yet possible good” (17), and this definition becomes a starting-point for a number of other reflections, including Ospino’s interpretation of migrants’ hopes for a better life that can only be attained through the hardship of migration. Colleen Griffith emphasizes that hope is both “a grace and a choice”, and the theme of hope both as a gift and a response of freedom is explored, for example, by Andrea Vicini in his essay “Hope Springs: Shaping the Moral Life”, which argues that grace and choice can come together in our moral lives in a moment when “hope springs”, when “we grow in awareness, clarity, ability to act, goodness, and succeed in living what was previously out of our moral reach” (172). The theme of the Kingdom as both present and the object of future hope is explored with great insight in a number of fine essays, drawing from Biblical studies, Catholic social teaching and liberation theology, including Nancy Pineda-Madrid’s “Hope and Salvation in the Shadow of Tragedy”.

These comments give only a very partial account of the great range of perspectives offered by this volume. For this reviewer, the only noteworthy omission is some consideration of hope in a contemporary interfaith perspective. *Hope: Promise, Possibility and Fulfillment* is an excellent work that draws on the best of contemporary English-language theology and owes a particular debt to Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes*, whose significance and message it creatively interprets. It will be of great value to upper-level undergraduate and graduate students as a comprehensive introduction to the theology of hope in contemporary Catholic theology, to pastoral activity of all kinds, and to theological scholarship.

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**Reviewer:** Robert Gascoigne is an emeritus professor of the School of Theology, Australian Catholic University. His publications include *The Public Forum and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge 2001) and *The Church and Secularity: Two Stories of Liberal Society* (Georgetown 2009).

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