

*Possibilities
in a Synodal
Church*

Richard Lennan Boston
College—Clough School
of Theology and
Ministry

FORMING FOR
HOPE



Hope

Christian hope is [not] a desire. It is the certainty that we are all travelling, not toward something that *we want to be there*, but something that is *already there*.

- Pope Francis, *Hope*, 252



Hope: Theological Foundations

- *God addresses humankind as friends and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into [God's] own company* [Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, “Constitution on Divine Revelation,” #2]
- *The living Christ is the source of true freedom, the foundation for a hope that does not disappoint, the revelation of the true face of God and humanity's ultimate destiny* [The Synod, *Final Document* (2024), #14]



The Primary Threat to Hope

LIFE

1. God /others / history not subject to our plans /desires
 2. Our own integrity / courage / faithfulness can fail
 3. Doubting our capacity to manage, let alone thrive
- *Hope-less-ness* fuels isolation / fear / competition / no future
 - Without hope: no community / creativity / generosity / vision



The Gift of Hope

Only the great certitude of hope that *my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love*, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only *this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and persevere*.

- Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, “On Christian Hope” (2007), #35



Living Hope

To those who are still pilgrims and still have the path of faith to travel, to those who are more keenly aware of the death and the futility which is present in their human lives than of the glory that is indestructible and eternal, a gentler and more modest Easter joy is also permissible.

- Karl Rahner, "Hidden Victory" [1957], *Theological Investigations* (vol. 7), 155



The Goal of Formation

[Developing] the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common.

The Synod, *Final Document* [2024], #141



Presumptions of Formation

- i. We are “unfinished”; pilgrims rather than programmed
- ii. Grace meets us where we are; not where we “should” be
- iii. Conversion is possible: the exercise of graced freedom
- iv. Community/mutuality as norm, not exception
- v. Whole-person activity: intellect, emotion, body, action
- vi. Formation must be ongoing: we change; needs change



Formation: The Synod's Framework

Authentic Formation is ...

- ❖ ***Integral, ongoing, and shared*** (FD 143)
- ❖ An exchange of gifts between different vocations
[**communion**]
- ❖ Directed to a service to be performed [**mission**]
- ❖ Stimulus for “*differentiated co-responsibility*”
[**participation**] (FD 147)



Formation: Synodal Perspectives

- “Unless accompanied by focused formational processes” (FD 141) the synodal church will remain unrealized
- Formation requires “suitable and competent formators” **AND** investment in the “formation of formators” (FD 143)
- “Human formation” is the priority: intellectual, affective, relational, and spiritual (FD 143)
- Authentic ecclesial formation is the work and responsibility of “the church”: the community of the baptized



Pope Francis on Discernment

Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do ...

Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia ... so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord

- Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), #137



“Content” of Formation

- “**Every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source**” (FD 1): *tradition enlightens the present for the sake of the future*
- Listening to Christ, in the Spirit, requires attention to Scripture, the *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God, and “*the wounds that continue to bleed*” in the world (FD 2)
- “*We are required to open ourselves to a genuine relational conversion that redirects each person’s priorities ... attending to relationships is not merely a strategy or a tool for greater organizational effectiveness*” (FD 50)



Revisiting Pope Francis on Hope

If Mercy is the name of God, Hope is the name that [God] has given to us—the name that responds to our deepest reality, to our truest essence. We are made of life and for life. We are made of love and for love.

- Pope Francis, *Hope*, 257