

Hope

For years, I have drawn motivation from two quotations that speak about hope.

The first stipulates: For a Christian, the meaning of the Resurrection is that hope is stronger than history.

The second comes from Benedict XVI: The one who hopes lives differently.

Given the violence (South Carolina, Paris, Brussels, San Bernadino, Baghdad, Bangladesh, Istanbul, Orlando, Baton Rouge, Minnesota, and Dallas) batters, stuns, and horrifies us, I find it hard to access hope right now. But I try to hold fast to it nonetheless.

We are walking in the valley of darkness; with apologies to the Psalmist, I am afraid. (For me, the fear is violence will get worse.) But that is not inevitable. So my hope is that “we,” the wide “we” of our nation, will resist and prevent that.

How? Each of us, I think, has to develop a personal response and action.

Speaking only for myself, what has lately been key for me is listening to African-Americans still willing to speak about the Black experience, although as my Black colleagues and students tell me repeatedly, I need to understand how *exhausted* they have become from all this.

Key for me in my ministry at Georgetown University has been learning from our Task Force on “Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation.” Faulkner nailed it: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” For twenty-odd years, I had been walking around this campus with no idea of that past. It is staggering to discover how I have benefited from that evil—and to realize I should have known.

Key for me as an educator has been reading Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* (2015), Bryan Massingale’s *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (2010), Robert Putnam’s *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (2015). Next on the list, I guess, is *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in The Age of Colorblindness* (2011).

As for where I find some sources of hope, one is from inter-faith and inter-racial worship services. The other is from my students. I think of my students from Newtown who working on Gun Safety; my students “UndocuHoyas” who work fearlessly for Immigration Reform despite the risks they run of deportation; the mix of students who signed up for a semester seminar on prison reform offered by the Prison Justice Initiative that took place within a prison and when half the class membership were “incarcerated citizens.” It is fair to say these young women and men work, in substantive and empirically grounded ways to ensure hope may be stronger than history. And they both humble and strengthen me.

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