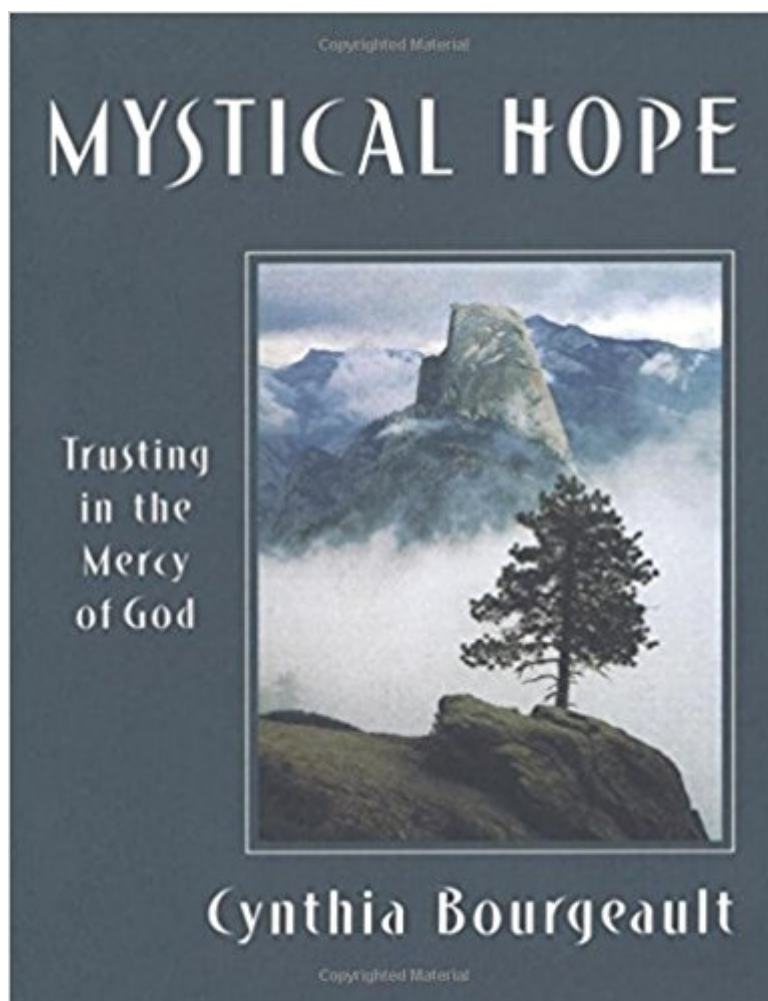


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# Mystical Hope: Trusting In The Mercy Of God (Cloister Books)



## Synopsis

In five interwoven meditations, *Mystical Hope* shows how to recognize hope in our own lives, where it comes from, how to deepen it through prayer, and how to carry it into the world as a source of strength and renewal.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a grace-filled book for those who are learning to swim in the deep waters of God's mercy and love—waters in which we already swim but hardly know it. Cynthia Bourgeault shows us the road to a deep and lasting hope (Alan W. Jones, Dean Emeritus, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco; author of *Soul Making*) It is unusual to encounter a book that brings together to this degree metaphysical depth, practical spirituality, and sparkling writing. True to the dynamic of the spiritual life, Cynthia Bourgeault follows the path of hope inward to the center and then back outward to the world. (Bruno Barnhart, OSB Cam.) Dr. Bourgeault, an experienced guide to centering prayer, offers some profound and amazing insights into an inner joy that can be found in the midst of personal disappointment. She reveals friendship as living together in hope, which she experiences as God's "warm-heartedness." (Beatrice Bruteau) Compelling! This is the one book I asked the entire parish to read, and it has initiated us into the deepest part of our spiritual vision of how to live with meaning with one another. Provocative and insightful, this book partners the head and heart in such a way that real transformation in daily living is not simply a possibility, but the longing from which

one cannot escape. Ms. Bourgeault has captured a sense of Wisdom here that brings the Teacher into the lived moment. Hope and Mercy are no longer marginalized words, lost in an over-worked and trite lexicon of simplicity. They bounce and dance with life, and make sense for practicing this great faith we so desperately seek. (David E. Stringer, Rector, All Saints Episcopal Church, Corpus Christi, TX) This is a lovely little book that invites the reader to undertake an inner journey that can be transformative if one gives oneself to its demands. [Mystical Hope] remains a thought-provoking book likely to be of interest to those who practice centering prayer as well as to those who are serious seekers after God. In a time when hope is frequently threatened and is seemingly more necessary than ever, it is good to hear her encouraging words: . . . hope, the hidden spring of mercy deep within us . . . flows out from the center; . . . we discover within ourselves the mysterious plenitude to live into action what ordinary hearts and minds could not possibly sustain. (M. Zita Wenker, OSB Cistercian Studies Quarterly) A highly condensed book by an experienced guide to the practice of Centering Prayer as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating. The book will be of enduring interest to mature meditators seriously committed to contemplative prayer. (Schola) In this illuminating volume on the dynamics of hope, Bourgeault suggests a new way of envisioning this Christian virtue that plays a major role in the Biblical account of God's dealings with humankind. . . . The author challenges the church 'to become a sign of hope in a broken world,' to walk the talk of love, compassion, forgiveness, and compassion. (Values and Visions Reviews Service) This short book is easily read, but putting its teaching into practice is the work of a lifetime and I, for one, will be happy to spend the rest of my life in practicing what Cynthia Bourgeault so gracefully preaches. (Salt, The Monthly Newsletter Of The Anglican Parish Of Salt) Mystical Hope is an inviting, warmhearted, and reflective introduction to Christian mysticism.... Bourgeault's book beautifully balances teaching with illuminatingly illustrative autobiographical anecdotes. (H. Talat Halman, Central Michigan University)

CYNTHIA BOURGEAULT has studied and taught in a number of Benedictine monasteries in the United States and Canada. An Episcopal priest, she is well known as a retreat and conference leader, teacher of prayer, and writer on the spiritual life. She is the author of a number of books, including *Centering Prayer* and *Inner Awakening*.

As a contemplative, Cynthia Bourgeault happens to be a teacher dear to my heart. This book, though little, has within its pages vital information for anyone who desires a more intimate relationship with God. For me, its contemplation on the Mercy of God carried the day. As she

describes it, it felt like the boundaries of my soul were being stretched to imbibe new life from a boundless tank of the purest possible air. It brings home the long-suffering, compassionate and loving nature of God to go to the nth degree to bestow on any trusting pilgrim complete restoration to the fullness of life. Such is mystical hope!

I used this book in a college Mysticism course and the students raved and thanked me for a book that reached them and that they savored. *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God* (Cowley, 2001) is an inviting, warmhearted, and reflective introduction to Christian mysticism by Reverend Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal Priest who leads contemplative prayer retreats across the U.S. and Canada. She is a genuine contemporary mystic and minister who is not only deeply immersed in and committed to her Christian tradition and its contemplative practices, but has sincerely and richly studied Sufism (Mystical Islam). For years Cynthia Bourgeault worked closely with Centering Prayer's promoter Father Thomas Keating. *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God* is a short book running only 106 5" x 8" pages, including its beautiful opening epigraph, a poem by St. Symeon. But it is a deep text that holds the potential to intersect into one's contexts of faith and practice with long-lived potency. Her exploration of the meaning of mercy in the Hebrew Bible, English, Latin, Hebrew, and French fruitfully yields a vivid evocation of "mercy" as "a fierce, bonding love," and "the power that binds one person to another in the covenant of hearts" (p. 25) Bourgeault outlines a vision of "mystical hope" that as "a life of its own" goes deeper than a response to positive outcomes, is found in a space of "presence...an immediate experience of...communion..." and characterized by "an 'unbearable lightness of being' from within." (pp. 9-10) And Bourgeault brings us to its shores in many ways, especially in two evocations of the Voyage of St. Brendan who in sailing to find the Land Promised to the Saints, finds it not by navigating in the physical world, but rather, at the moment his "inner eye opens." (p. 18) She describes a hope that runs deeper than "external circumstances and conditions," (p.9) a hope that springs and sings. And Bourgeault skillfully extracts the subtle shifts of meaning that Scripture attests to of that mystical hope. Turning to Habakkuk, she takes us through his passage from an experience of barrenness to his shift into rejoicing and proclaiming that he has found a "spring to his step" (p.6), or as Habakkuk expresses this, "...He [God] makes my feet like that of a deer." (Habakkuk 3:19) Bourgeault then turns to Jesus sitting with the Samaritan woman at the well, promising her that his water will be a "spring...of eternal life." And then she reminds us that underneath the devastating sufferings of Job ran such a "singlehearted yearning to see God face to face" (p.8) that Job voiced the ultimate "triumphant statement of mystical hope." (p.9) As Bourgeault writes, Job "sings" (p.8) these words (that George

Frederich Handel so beautifully set to music): "I know that my Redeemer lives, and...yet in my flesh I will see God." (Job 19:25-26) Bourgeault's "mystical hope" is not something you receive as it is the place from which you stand, the ground of being itself. Mystical hope, as Bourgeault's examples from Jesus, Job and Habakkuk model, is the context in which one can create what people ordinarily think of as "hope." Bourgeault's book beautifully balances teaching with illuminatingly illustrative autobiographical anecdotes. One most memorable and helpful is that of her experiences navigating boats in the Maine fog as a metaphor matching and illuminating such mystical motifs as the "Cloud of Unknowing" and the "Dark Night of the Soul." Her refrain, and especially its setting in her fog-navigation anecdote, underscores that contemplative prayer as the practice of hope is to "sit in the presence of God," and maintain "inner availability to God" sounded deeply in my soul. Bourgeault emphasizes themes and examples from Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Father Bede Griffiths, Meister Eckhart, and Jacob Boehme. I found her occasional quotes from contemporary Sufi master Kabir Helminski and Thomas Merton's writing on Sufism also appealing. Her quote from Gerald May that the universe runs on the energy of agape (p. 30) deepens her meditation on "the Mercy." Her selection of this passage from Kabir Helminski is inspired: "Whoever makes all cares into one care, the care for simply being present, will be relieved of all care by that Presence, which is the creative power." (p. 12) And Bourgeault integrates ideas and images from the new physics with balance, justice, and discernment. But the main thrust of her offering here is decidedly and devoutly Christian and when she makes her comparisons, she affirms the distinctive beauty and richness of the Christian revelation -- so much so that her descriptions of Centering Prayer and lectio divina, sacred contemplative reading (p. 60) should inspire people to follow up by reading and practicing the teachings in her book devoted to the practice of Centering Prayer. Bourgeault's accounts of meditation give enough detail to motivate many to follow the intimations of how simply (even if not often easily) one might establish this beautifully simple meditation practice of Centering Prayer. In a beautiful passage on Gethsemani (Matt 26:52-53), she writes: "When Jesus, the living truth, yielded himself faithfully into the Mercy; when he who was the Mercy dissolved into the Mercy, in that exact moment the Mercy became one with the body of Christ. From then on and ever hereafter the Mercy wears a human face -- and that is the face of Christ." (p. 74) Her excellent chapter on death, "Dying Before You Die," presents an accessible understanding of apocatastasis ("the final restoration of all things 'at the end of time' "). Bourgeault writes of an experience of her daughter riding a ferry that became for her a vivid personal moment of apocatastasis. Experiencing the scene as a moment in which "it was all present already, all contained in a huge, stately now" led her to see how "all our times are contained in...the Mercy itself." (pp. 63-64). It was her discovery

that one can taste of apocatastasis in everyday moments in which "all is fulfilled" when one stands in the Mercy. A train riding image she culls from Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilych* on the shift Ivan Ilych experiences of accepting his own death is also illuminating. (pp. 68-69) Another motif that traces through these pages is one Bourgeault calls "the body of hope," (p. 14, 32 et al.) a lesson she learned from a special teacher she had -- and continues to learn from even after death -- a Benedictine monk named Raphael Robin ("Rafe"). Bourgeault's earlier autobiographical account of her journey with Rafe (*Love is Stronger than Death*) (Lindisfarne Books, 1997) is truly a book that echoes in one's consciousness, a book on a Platonic love and mentoring relationship that continues after the death of one of the two people! Adapting poetic images inspired from physics, she describes what her mentor Rafe meant by the "body of hope" as a coherent field" and "a luminous web." Taking a terms the Greek patristic fathers used, she calls it "the intelligible universe." (p. 32) In *Mystical Hope* Bourgeault is probing -- and maybe even provoking -- us to look in our faith for a hope deeper than one by which one "can fix anything," and instead to find the "ground of hope" (p. 59). This ground of hope rests as she points out in a realm literally "beyond the mind" -- metanoia (p. 53). I appreciate her evocation and improvisations on Jacob Boehme's term for mercy as "warmheartedness," (*Barmherzigkeit*), which she elaborates as "that 'river of God' running like the sap through the tree of life. Another important motif Bourgeault sustains in these meditations is Merton's term for entering mystical unitive experience, which he described as *le point vierge* (the virgin point.) In one sense, as a point vierge, Bourgeault's book can be a sweet, warm and fast read; at a deeper level, the "ground of hope" (p. 70) and its evocation of the "protecting nearness" (p. 59), it calls one repeatedly back to reflect on its meditations more deeply and contemplatively.

Makes clear how we receive the indwelling of Christ. Great for individual thought and community building. I recommend this to Christian formation groups highly. Puts into harmony the strands of meditative and contemplative aspects of Christian living, melding into living with God given integrity. In simple fashion it cuts to the core allowing for a lifetime of fulfillment.

arrived in great condition

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I LOOOOOOVE THIS BOOK!! am ordering a second copy. Honestly, this slim little book has such deep insight, it took me a couple of weeks to read it, because I needed to let each quote, each page

sink in. The context she creates for Merton's 4th and Walnut epiphany is quite rich. I had been looking for a new direction in Christian meditation and this is definitely it! In particular, I have found it truly enriched my understanding and practice of the Divine Mercy. If you are interested in Christian meditation and understanding how it is we can most truly open to God, then this book is for you. You will not be disappointed.

This is a book that I return to often. Cynthia Bourgeault is an excellent writer on the contemplative life and has valuable things to say about the inner joy that can be found through meditation and contemplation. I would highly recommend all of her books. I have just recently purchased a Kindle edition of *Mystical Hope* to use as a reference and have enjoyed having it in such a convenient format.

It leads you deep into the mystery of the Divine Mercy that is God. Cynthia packs huge amounts of thought, reflection and prayer into a small book. Read it prayerfully and carefully--and do this over and over again. Each time you will be led to discover new spiritual riches.

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