

# Resilient leadership

How the virtues of hope and patience can become essential elements for leadership in uncertain times

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## ABSTRACT

Today's society faces many uncertainties at the economic, financial, relational, and psychological levels caused by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, global poverty, wars, environmental pollution, and the climate crisis. As a result, the call for sustainable leadership is growing louder these days. A key aspect of sustainability is seen in resilience, which is understood as the ability to adapt to and cope with constantly changing situations and the uncertainty of future developments. This applies to organizations as well as to leaders on a personal level.

This paper will discuss the extent to which effective and sustainable leadership must be based on virtues and how hope and patience, in particular, play a fundamental role in building resilience. After a brief overview of the interpretive history of these virtues, philosophical, ethical, psychological, and especially biblical and theological insights are utilized to identify transcendence, emotional well-being, and responsibility as key features of hope and patience. It will be shown that these virtues are important components of the so-called "psychological capital" as they look beyond present difficulties by holding on to a greater narrative and generating unwavering and persistent endurance despite difficulties. Thus, hope and patience are essential components of the individual resources of every leader, fostering an attitude of humility, protecting against burnout, and leading to responsible action in uncertain times.

**Keywords:** Hope, patience, virtue, sustainable leadership, resilience, psychological capital.

## INTRODUCTION

"*Andrà tutto bene!*" - "Everything will be fine!" This phrase begins to echo throughout Italy in March 2020 during the Corona crisis. It seems almost as contagious as the virus itself and can be found almost everywhere, from social media to painted bed sheets hanging from balconies to post-its on church doors or house entrances: Children in all regions of the country have painted rainbows with this phrase, which was meant to spread one thing above all: Hope.

Now, little more than three years after the Covid-19-outbreak it is clear: no, not everything is fine, neither in Italy nor on a global level. On the contrary, we have witnessed to an estimated 6 million deaths worldwide, the psychological pressure of social distancing and isolation, the closure of many branches of economy and industry. But, especially, the long-term social, psychological, economic, and political consequences cannot yet be assessed, reaching from the high level of stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescents and elder people, an alarming increase of burnout symptoms among health care workers (Agrusta et al., 2020) to the quarrels about restrictions and vaccinations dividing nations, organizations, churches and individuals.

Given these consequences, the question comes up automatically to what extent a slogan like "*Andrà tutto bene!*" makes sense in crisis situations like the Covid-19-pandemic. In other words, does hope mean to close one's eyes to reality or can it be considered a crucial virtue for leadership in difficult times? Indeed, today's society is challenged not only by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, but by many other uncertainties: The 17 UN sustainability goals aim to transform the world in times of global poverty, wars, environmental pollution and climate crisis, but does it make sense to speak of hope under these circumstances and does it merely mean a denial of unstoppable disasters?

"*Pazienza!*" - "Patience!" is another exclamation often used in Italy, usually accompanied by a deep sigh. It is used in situations regarded as difficult or burdensome and which, have to be accepted due of necessity, since there is no hope to change them. During the pandemic, governments and doctors often admonished the population to be patient when it became clear that the Covid-19-pandemic was more than a short interlude, but a worldwide problem no one knew how long it would last. Is patience really only a devoted acceptance of adverse circumstances or can it be defined as a necessary leadership virtue in times of crisis and adversity?

Due to the numerous economic, political, climatic, and health emergencies worldwide, the call for sustainable leadership is getting louder these days. One essential aspect of sustainability is seen in resilience, which is understood as the capacity of handling difficulties well, "actively resisting destructive pressures, and rebuilding positively after adversity" (Titus, 2006, p. ix).

In this paper, I would like to discuss how the virtues of hope and patience play a fundamental role in creating resilience and how they can help especially leaders to better manage times of crisis and uncertainties. In fact, in recent years, various authors have stressed the important role of hope and patience in the modern leadership discussion. David Sluss, for example, emphasizes the existentially necessary ability of a patient leader not only to face times of crisis calmly, but also to convey calm and composure to his staff, especially when there are no quick solutions to problems (2020). Similarly, Collins defines "fierce resolve" and "professional will" alongside humility as the crucial qualities that make good leaders excellent (2001). These are strongly linked to the attitude of patience as we will see in the next pages: it is precisely the virtue of patience that gives people strength and iron will in times of crisis to hold on to a goal and to pursue it despite adversity.

Hope is another virtue increasingly discussed in the last years: at a more philosophical level Eagleton distinguishes optimism as a simple “quirk of temperament” without rational foundation from the virtue of hope which is “underpinned by reasons” (2015, pp. 2-3). In the context of leadership theories, hope is mentioned as a central motivational element that gives the leader himself strength and perseverance on the one hand; on the other hand, the leader's task is defined as passing on precisely this hope to his followers in order to foster resilience in them in times of crisis (Jones-Schenk, 2020, p. 203; Walker, 2006, p. 541).

However, to understand more deeply the role of patience and hope in leadership in uncertain times, a clearer understanding of these qualities is needed (Helland & Winston, 2005, p. 43). To this end, this article first provides a brief overview of the interpretive history of the virtues of hope and patience. Secondly, biblical statements are analyzed and compared to philosophical, ethical and psychological insights to identify some key features of hope and patience that promote resilience in the area of three fields of tension and thus generate psychological capital for times of uncertainty. Finally, a third section draws conclusions on how the insights gained can be practically implemented for sustainable leadership.

## LEADERSHIP AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Before the importance of hope and patience in times of crisis can be discussed, it is first necessary to understand the meaning of virtue ethics in general, and secondly to ask whether hope and patience can be considered virtues at all and what other interpretations are conceivable.

The first section of this chapter, therefore, discusses some basic concepts of Aristotelian virtue ethics, which already point to the practical relevance for individuals and leaders. A second section briefly outlines the history of how hope and patience have been defined.

### Leader – to be or to do?

What have virtues to do with leadership? Different leadership theories underline not only the importance of competences or knowledge, but the essential role of character, integrity, and therefore ethics for leadership to be “good” (Williams, 2013; Newstead et al., 2018). Or, as Arjoon puts it, “true leadership is ethical leadership” (2000, p. 171).

In this context, virtue ethics plays a fundamental role. Based mainly on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, the main issue is more about “being” a good or virtuous person than about “doing” the right thing (Williams, 2013, p. 23). Virtue can be defined as the “human inclination to think, feel, and act in ways that express moral excellence and contribute to the common good” (Newstead et al., 2018, p. 610) and that is what leadership is about. Virtue means those character traits which permit the individual to accomplish their task well (Arjoon, 2000, p. 162).

However, according to Aristotle, in order to be a person of good character, who consequently also acts well, *phronesis* is of decisive importance. This concept of practical wisdom serves as a kind of regulator for the correct implementation of virtue-based ethics: first of all, for Aristotle, virtue is the result of moderation and therefore represents the golden mean between the possible excess of “too much” and the deficiency of “too little” of a character trait, whereby *phronesis* helps to find this correct degree. Furthermore, this practical wisdom enables one to choose the appropriate virtue from the totality of possible attitudes in a specific situation. Virtuousness is thus not determined by rules and regulations, but rather describes a person's wise basic attitude to find the golden mean between two vices and is lived out in practice depending on the situation. In this way, according to Aristotle, *endaimonia* (“happiness”), the

flourishing life, is achieved as the goal (*telos*) of human existence (Kristjánsson, 2021, Oxenham, 2019, pp. 107-108, Tocha, 2018, p. 39, Lautermann & Pfriem, 2006, p. 3).

The second part of this article will show how the specific virtues of hope and patience can be features of practical wisdom, especially in uncertain times, and what their golden mean is in different areas of tension.

### **Hope and patience – virtues or not?**

“There is no life without hope”. “Patience is a virtue”. No doubt, a lot of popular sayings recognize the vital importance of both hope and patience for the human life. Nevertheless, these two attitudes in history not always have been acknowledged as virtues.

It is therefore worth taking a look at how hope and patience have been interpreted differently over time. In doing so, it becomes clear how the Christian message in particular brings a new perspective on these two attitudes.

#### *Hope*

Aristotle, for example, didn’t include hope in his classical catalogue of virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics, but rather described it as an "affect" or a "passion". As such it carries a certain danger, as it possibly contradicts reason and creates deceptive dream worlds (Krafft & Walker, 2018, p. 44). Consequently, the hopeful person may even appear courageous, as they rely on their supposed strength, for instance, and thus face dangers with confidence. However, this force quickly is shattered when confronted with reality (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1926).

Similarly, the teaching of Stoicism sees in hope (as well as in fear) an anticipation of the future, which ultimately produces only unnecessary and harmful worries. Therefore, in contrast, the *ataraxia*, the "unconditional mental calmness", was proclaimed as a true virtue and the goal to be achieved. Building on these ideas, in the following centuries hope sometimes was even considered "folly" (Bollnow, 1955, p.1) and still today many consider hope more a feeling than a virtue with moral value (Palmer, 2014).

It is only with Aquinas that hope, based on 1 Corinthians 13:13, is included, together with love and faith, in the so-called “divine” or “theological” virtues (Krafft & Walker 2018, p. 256). So, to some extent, we can define hope as a typically “religious” or even Christian virtue. As Eagleton points out, hope, in order to be defined as a virtue, needs a reason on which to base it (2015, 3). As we will see in Part Two, from a biblical perspective, this foundation is hopeful confidence in the divine promises that give rise to positive expectations of a desirable future. This connection with trust and faith is still echoed today in some modern definitions of hope, such as "to expect with confidence" (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

#### *Patience*

Like hope, patience in history has not always been accepted as a virtue, rather on the contrary. For example, it is hard to find any mention of it in the works of Plato, Spinoza or Kant. From an Aristotelian point of view patience can be defined as the absence of anger in situations of injury or offense, which, however, is seen in a negative connotation. Not to speak up when insulted is understood as being servile and behaving like a doormat (Bommarito, 2014). Centuries later Marx and Nietzsche, too, considered patience as a “sign of weakness” (Schnitker, 2017, p. 268).

In a positive sense, patience could be interpreted as an element of the cardinal virtue of fortitude (Müller, 2009), which requires steadfast perseverance in battle. But, in any case, the Aristotelian ethics never defined patience as a virtue in its own right.

The same ambiguity is found in the Roman idea of patience and in the meaning of the Latin word “*patientia*”. The possible translations of this attitude range from “endurance” and “patience” to “forbearance,” “passivity” and “submissiveness.” On the one hand, it has to do with the ideal image of the Roman soldier who resists with vigorous boldness in a world full of difficulties. On the other hand, however, especially with regard to interpersonal relationships, the focus of *patientia* shifts to an undesirable quality. In the sense of total subordination, it is an attitude expected above all from slaves, who cannot exercise free will (Kaster, 2002).

Over centuries, at best, patience was often seen as an instrumental virtue, that is to say as a useful means to reach other goals, which from an ethical point of view can be either “good” or “bad”. Therefore, patience often was not considered to have a moral value itself, but only as an “auxiliary” or “second-order” virtue (Kupfer, 2007, p. 277-279; Bommarito, 2014; Vigani, 2017).

Similarly to the interpretation of hope, more and more attention is paid to patience as a moral virtue on its own only with the emergence of the Christian thought (Bollnow, 1955): although it is not one of the three theological virtues, it is typically strongly connected to the idea of theology and has a long history in the Christian context (Lee, 2021). Interestingly, the Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines patience as “the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties”. In this article we will see how the Christian idea of patience doesn’t imply a passive expectation of the end of current hardships, but, in connection with hope, the capacity to persevere in times of crises moving actively towards a promised joyful future.

This brief historical overview shows how the often negative definition of hope and patience is based on their interpretation as absolutes, thus without considering the golden mean based on *phronesis*. A decisive change happens here in the context of Christian faith. The second part of this article will therefore look more closely at how hope and patience can be defined as virtues from a Christian perspective and how they are linked to each other. Special attention will be paid to some areas of tension that arise in times of crisis and within which the attitudes of hope and patience are particularly important in order to exercise the right moderation between two polarities.

## HOPE AND PATIENCE – TWO VIRTUES BETWEEN POLARITIES

Times of crisis are often tense moments, which is precisely why the virtues of hope and patience are particularly effective here, as they have three crucial characteristics that move between two opposing polarities that are of critical importance in adversities. In doing so, however, they transform the negative aspect of the respective tensions into a positive attitude that enables a resilient handling of uncertainties.

Thus, the quality of transcendence takes present difficulties seriously, but focuses attention beyond these towards a larger narrative. Furthermore, patience and hope produce emotional well-being even in times of crisis by not denying situations of suffering, but at the same time already evoking joyful confidence regarding the future. Finally, patience and hope not only counteract paralyzing passivity and hasty action, but also help to create the attitude of a well-considered, responsible approach to hardships.

In the following sections, these three characteristics of hope and patience will be discussed in more detail in the respective areas of tension in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of these virtues.

### **Transcendence – the polarity between current hardship and the bigger story**

As we have seen, both hope and patience distinguish themselves from other virtues like courage or justice by their connection to Christian faith. More generally, transcendence represents an essential characteristic of these two attitudes. It can be defined as the “capacity of individuals to stand outside of their immediate sense of time and place to view life from a larger, more objective perspective” (Piedmont in Schnitker, 2017, p. 266). Thus, transcendence needs a narrative, a story bigger than the single individual, in which the present situation of hardship and difficulties can be embedded. Consequently, neither hope nor patience neglect reality, as is often stated. They rather reframe reality, offering with the frame of a transcendent narrative the opportunity not always of an explanation, but in any case of a different interpretation and therefore a new meaning of the current situation (Schnitker, 2017; Puzicha, 2021).

The transcendent narrative described above can be given by secular theories, a specific philosophy, political ideas, but especially by religion (Schnitker, 2017). As we will see, especially the Christian faith offers an ideal frame for hope and patience.

### *Hope*

In the following, some central passages of the great abundance of biblical statements on the virtue of hope will be singled out and analyzed.

Abraham, the progenitor of the people of Israel, is presented in the Old Testament as a great model of hope. In the Letter to the Romans 4:18 Paul says of Abraham: "Hoping against hope, he believed" (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021). At first glance, the paradox expressed here might suggest a false kind of hope, the deception or even self-deception that hopes where there is no reason to. However, in the story of Abraham, hope is closely connected to another theological virtue, that of faith. Thus, it becomes clear what the specificity of the Christian virtue of hope consists in: Where human beings cannot see possibilities any more (Abraham and his wife were too old to beget children any more), trust in the divine promise of an inheritance opens up the confident view of the future. Hope does not mean shutting one's eye in face of difficulties (too old to have children), but to fix them on something or, in this case, someone (God) bigger than them.

But the greatest hope of all, from a biblical point of view, is based on the resurrection of "Christ from the dead", which becomes a "living hope" for the believer (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021, 1 Peter 1:3). While Aristotle still describes death as the most frightening thing, since it puts an end to everything (ca. 350 B.C.E./1926), the Christian faith goes beyond this in triumphant confidence, since it has hope in an eternal life after death (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). That is why the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer could also speak of a "festival of hope": "Whoever knows Easter cannot despair" (in: Bedford-Strohm, 2015, p. 1).

It is precisely this event of the resurrection, which transcends everything natural and explainable, that has concrete effects on the human life here and now. As Peter in his first letter puts it, hope causes the believer to be able to endure now already, in uncertain times of crisis in view of the „unfading inheritance" to come (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021, 1 Peter 1:4). Several other biblical passages point out how hope in the divine future promises reframes our daily experiences and makes it possible to face even severe life situations cheerfully:

„Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer“ states the apostle Paul in Romans 12:12 (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021).

Referring to these connections, Jürgen Moltmann describes in his "Theology of Hope" the Christian faith as the only one that is based on a God who comes towards the human beings from the future (2009, 208) and meets them in the person of Christ. While Eagleton emphasizes that real hope always needs a justified foundation (2015, 3), Moltmann sees this foundation from a biblical perspective in the life and redemptive work of Christ: in him, the memory of the past, his death and resurrection, comes together with the future hope of his return and changes the present of the believer despite all adversities (2009, p. 211).

And it's exactly at this point that the connection between hope and patience becomes evident.

### *Patience*

As the philosopher Bollnow underlines, what is crucial for patient endurance in painful experiences is the hopeful trust in the future that awaits an end to suffering.

"Patience, then, always presupposes a believing relationship to the sustaining ground of being, no matter how this may then be constituted in detail. Patience is thus in its ultimate ground a religious virtue" (1955, p. 6, translation by the author).

Once again, we can see here the polarity between the immediate current story and the bigger narrative. The broader frame of the transcendent story leads to a changed understanding of time that does not stop at the here and now, but includes also a vision of the future (Becker and Mulligan, 1997, 731). It seems that especially religious people have a greater time horizon due to their hope and belief in continuing life in eternity, which promotes a willingness to wait and be patient in the present (Fowler & Kam, 2006). Grounding patience in a theistic worldview enables its consideration as a specifically Christian virtue (Vigani, 2017) and encourages a consideration of the biblical and theological evidence on the topic, analyzing some examples of the rich treasure of biblical statements on the virtue of patience.

In the biblical findings, first of all, God himself is presented as the model of patience, both in his relationship with humankind and in His suffering in the person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the believer is now called to imitate this virtue, as well in relationship to God and His promises as in his experiences of suffering (Afflerbach et al., 2014).

As for the patient attitude of human beings regarding God, this always refers to His intervention and the fulfillment of His promises. "Wait for the Lord!" (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021, Psalm 27:14) is an exhortation often repeated in the Old Testament, encouraging the believer to patient endurance even in often seemingly hopeless situations and assuring him that God will surely intervene. Similarly, the New Testament repeatedly points out that patience is an indispensable quality for experiencing the fulfillment of divine promises (Hebrews 10:36).

Consequently, patience in the biblical sense strongly connects the idea of "waiting on the Lord" with perseverance in adverse circumstances. The encouragement to carry on in the immediate context of suffering or hardship is given each time by the view and the hope of the divine action respectively the future fulfillment of His promises. While the ideal of the Greek and Roman philosophy was that of a hero or soldier who endures hardship and battles due to the strength and courage he finds in himself, the biblical account invites the believer to persevere by looking to the transcendent reality of God.

### **Emotional well-being: The polarity between suffering and joy**

In order to analyze another polarity of hope and patience, let's turn to the already cited verse of Romans 12:12: "Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer" (*New Revised Standard Version*, 2021). It becomes evident that both virtues are connected as well to suffering and hardship as to some kind of emotional well-being like joy. The biblical narrative includes at the same time a very realistic view of adversities and difficulties and an encouraging joyful attitude of hope and patience right in midst of these situations.

As we have already examined, the transcendent perspective of any current difficult experience leads to a reframing and consequently to a cognitive reappraise of the hardship, a new interpretation of it and, especially, to emotional regulation (Schnitker, 2017). On the one hand the "bigger story" creates the joy- and hopeful vision of a brighter future, while this hope, on the other hand, reinforces the virtue of patience with positive emotional consequences also in the here and now.

#### *Hope*

Jones describes hope as "happiness in expectation" despite a current challenging situation (Jones, 2017, p. 457). Especially positive psychology recognizes more and more the essential role of hope. On the one hand, it emphasizes the destructive effects when this positive outlook on the future is missing: "Learned helplessness" is used to describe a situation of adversity that is perceived by those affected as beyond their control. Since they do not see any positive effects of their behavior, this can lead to depressive states (Doehring 2021). On the other hand, Antonovsky's salutogenesis approach emphasizes the importance of a positive, hopeful attitude towards oneself and one's environment: the so-called "sense of coherence" helps people to feel confident that they have the necessary resources to overcome difficulties (Egger 2011). This is why Scioli and Biller (2009) call hope even the "most important virtue" "in the age of anxiety". Based on their research, hope constitutes the "most powerful predictor of well-being" in the face of hardship (Palmer, 2014, p.16).

In the concept of virtue ethics, virtue is defined as the middle-way between two vices (Schnitker, 2017). Following the concept of Aristotle hope, thus, is the golden mean between despair on the one hand and false optimism, illusion or self-deception on the other (Bollnow, 1955). It has, therefore, "salutary consequences" (Cobb, 2015, p. 269) and a shielding function against desperation, depression, and resignation. Simultaneously, it protects against an attitude which closes its eyes to reality or denies facts, just like the phrase "*Andrà tutto bene*". Hope doesn't mean that everything will be fine, but, as Cobb affirms, "only the well-tuned hope can be a virtue" (2015, p.269). Hope therefore needs a solid ground and foundation, which from a Christian point of view can be seen in the divine promises and assistance.

#### *Patience*

Similarly, patience is always linked to some kind of hardship. The Latin root "pati", in fact, means "to suffer" (Schnitker, 2017). But as a virtue patience, especially in connection with hope, goes beyond the current difficulties and includes also the firm conviction of a brighter future to which to strive to (Lee, 2021). Consequently, research in the field of psychology of religion underlines that patience, in the sense of endurance, leads to strategies of adaptive emotional regulation in the present, protecting from despair and producing a calm reaction to daily hardships and, therefore, to personal well-being in the long term. Patience doesn't ignore times of hardship but helps to handle and integrate them as part of the good life (Lee, 2021; Schnitker, 2017). From the point of view of the Christian narrative, Lee states: "Patience

declares that despair and nothingness are not the final word, casting its vision instead to God's good intention for the world" (2021, p. 48).

### **Responsibility: The polarity between passivity and overactivism**

In conclusion, a third polarity characterizing hope and patience is the tension between waiting and being active. Both virtues refer to a future solution for current hardship which is not yet realized, but this transcendent expectation encourages concrete steps towards this goal today in the here and now (Jones, 2017; Cobb, 2015).

#### *Hope*

In history, Christians often have been blamed for their attitude of awaiting future promises not yet fulfilled. It was defined as a hope which puts people off, condemns them to passivity, prevents them from fighting in order to change difficult or oppressive situations, so that they would just submissively wait for some meager future consolation. Not at least for this reason, religion was also called the "opium of the people".

But, on the contrary, the biblical idea of hope as "happiness in expectation" (Jones, 2017, p. 457) implies an active anticipation of this brighter future yet to come. The theologian Wright points out that hope is more than a guarantee of "going to heaven." Instead, it is realized in a responsible action for the world already today and is expressed in the "Christian character" and the "Christian virtue". When the goal is clearly determined by hope, this also influences the way of walking and acting on the way to that goal (Wright, 2011, pp. 9, 64-67). Similarly, current positive psychology defines hope as the "belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use these pathways" (Herbert, 2011, p. 71).

We already have defined hope as the contrary of a paralyzing despair or dull apathy which would prevent from any activity in a hardship perceived as meaningless and, in the truest sense of the word, hopeless (Bollnow, 1955). Hope, however, offering meaning through a transcendent narrative, frees from passivity and creates new motivation, energy, and creativity for pursuing future goals whatever the circumstances are (Cobb, 2015).

But, as we have already seen, hope is also the opposite of deception (Bollnow, 1955), or false optimism, which denies reality and can result in overhasty actions which are by no means virtuous and instead only worsen crises. Therefore, hope blocks dangerous overactivism as well as resignation in the face of hardship (Palmer, 2014). It is the "golden mean" of responsible action with a bright future perspective which at the same time takes current hardship seriously – and that is what we need in our uncertain times.

Historical examples of living out these truths are leaders like Martin Luther King and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose living hope enabled them to commit their lives against racism and national socialism.

#### *Patience*

Research in the area of psychology of religion shows that patience does not only include the idea of waiting in times of adversity, but also the calm reaction to daily hardships, personal well-being on the long run and a better achievement of goals. It seems that people who are more patient neither engage in pursuing a goal in the wrong moment nor completely quit in times of hardship but are able to wait for the right moment to engage with even more effort (Schnitker, 2017).

This idea is also confirmed by the New Testament which uses two different words for patience. While *makrothymia* underlines the idea of endurance and therefore of waiting during hardship, *hypomone* intends a more active dealing with suffering while remaining strong and steadfast. Patience, therefore, can be defined as the middleway between impatience on the one hand, which would lead to irresponsible action, and sloth, disengagement, lethargy or apathy on the other (Flynn, 2019; Schnitker, 2017), which would mean passivity. Like hope, patience encourages well-thought, responsible, and constant actions in the right moment and despite difficulties.

As we have seen, the biblical understanding of patience in no way negates present crises or challenges and the experiences of suffering that go with them. Rather, it takes them seriously, but places them in the context of a much larger, transcendent story in which God himself is the agent. This is possible in that it is closely related to the virtue of hope, which diverts our attention/focus away from immediate distress towards the joyful expectation of the future.

Christian hope thereby is completely different from any kind of optimism in the sense of a confidence in the human potential to successfully overcome times of crisis through one's own efforts, but it is founded in the person of Christ: in him, the despair of oppression and death is combined with the joy of his resurrection and the hopeful expectation of his future return. Therefore, biblical hope is not based on human possibilities, but on the promises and the faithfulness of a loving and unlimited God. Beginning with the cross it promises a new future especially for seemingly desperate situations and therefore calls for an "active attitude of patience", which expresses itself in perseverance and steady progress towards a promised goal (Moltmann, 2009, pp. 211-217).

A healthy understanding of the connection between hope, patience and the necessity of a concrete, responsible, confident and courageous action is thus crucial in dealing with the global challenges of our time such as climate change, energy crises, and pandemics and has important implications for leadership.

## HOPE AND PATIENCE AS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL OF SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

What has been discussed so far already showed the value of hope and patience in times of crises, how they can build resilience and, therefore, serve as important resources for sustainable leadership. However, it is worthwhile to conclude by elaborating on some aspects of the relationship between hope and patience with leadership.

As we will see in this third part, hope and patience are qualities that help leaders live out that *phronesis* that first transforms their being and then leads to good action appropriate to times of crisis. In fact, these two virtues are fostering humble yet confident leaders who, in dependence on God, nurture co-workers, have the larger goal in mind and move forward in spite of adversities without burning out.

### Transcendence and humility

First, patience and hope imply another essential virtue, especially for uncertain times – humility. We have already defined unrealistic optimism as a negative extreme (vice) of hope. In this sense we can say that false hopes „often occur in contexts where agents possess false beliefs (...) about their abilities to secure the object of their hope” (Cobbs, 2015, p.275). This is

specifically true for our secularized Western society. Here leaders often are used to success, thriving for big goals, relying on their own resources, strengths, and competencies. We fall prey to the belief that human beings and science can do everything and that we don't need a transcendent reality above us. Hence, with Aquinas we can state that one false extreme of hope is not only illusion, false optimism or naivety, but also presumption (Cobbs 2015:279).

But the Covid-19 pandemic proved us wrong, showing us our limits and that we cannot do everything we would like to. It has been just a "little" virus which stalled our economy, relationships, and everything we called "normality". Moments of hardship reveal the brokenness of our reality, our own human fragility and the limitedness of our resources (Lee, 2021; cfr. Puzicha, 2021). And that is exactly why we need a transcendent narrative, a story bigger than us which tells us that it is not all about us. This story can give us hope for the future but also reminds us that we have not to count only on our own, limited resources, but that we can depend on something, or better on someone more powerful than us in order to endure in hardships. The Protestant reformer John Calvin stated that patience makes "you more (...) aware of your own incapacity, (...) that you may transfer your trust to God" (in Schnitker, 2017, p. 268).

To put it in a nutshell: Leadership is not only about competences and abilities, but also essentially about narrative – a narrative that on the one hand tells us about our dependence on God, but at the same time also shows the important role of the other actors in this story: Already at the beginning, reference was made to the work of Collins, who, in addition to professional will, points out the importance of humility as a central characteristic of excellent leaders. However, he refers primarily to interpersonal relationships: Collins discusses that the success of outstanding executives is based on the fact that they are not focused on their own personal history and achievements. Instead, they have the big picture and the future development of the organization in mind and therefore recognize the vital contribution of other leaders and nurture their skills (2001, pp. 72-73). From the perspective of the Christian narrative, it can be said that it not only emphasizes human dependence on God, but also promotes humble acknowledgements of the resources of co-workers and their God-given abilities (Romans 12: 3-11).

### **Emotional well-being and burnout-protection**

The message that we cannot and we do not have to make it all on our own is a difficult message in a society where the spotlight often is on the successful, competent and self-confident leader. But at the same time, it can be a very protective and healthy virtue in a time where too many leaders fall in the trap of burnout and, as they expect too much from themselves, running out of their resources they believed to be unlimited (Lee, 2021). Especially in times of hardship when failures and frustration arise, leaders risk to overengage, investing all their strength but without reaching the desired goal. A downward spiral sets in which ultimately leads to exhaustion.

Therefore, as psychological research confirms, hope and patience can be seen as a buffer against burnout (López-Núñez et al., 2020), counterbalancing frustration and despair with joyful anticipation and producing a calm waiting for the right moment to act. Putting the expectations not only on ourselves in times of crisis, but interpreting the current situation from a transcendent perspective can prevent exhaustion.

It protects the minister from the despair that would otherwise cause them to give up (...). Thus, eschatological patience allows the minister to continue their work in the hope that it has a purpose and a telos. Furthermore, eschatological patience frees the

minister from the temptation of believing it is ultimately their job to make the Kingdom of Heaven arrive. (2021:55)

What has been said here relates primarily to the context of leaders in the ecclesiastical-spiritual context. For them, it seems easier to frame their agency in a transcendent perspective than for leaders in the purely secular sphere, where economic pressure, power struggles, financial crises or fierce competition in the here and now act as overriding forces. Nevertheless, studies among elite athletes, for example, indicate that even in situations of competitive struggles, religiously based meaning found in a bigger story that goes beyond the tangible present is a decisive protective factor in the case of defeat and adversity (Schnittker et al., 2020).

### **Responsible action in uncertain times**

Leadership in the common understanding is about being productive, achieving goals, getting things done – in other words, it's about acting. Speed and immediacy are required, the challenges and crises of our fast moving and fast changing world often demand fast answers. In this context the virtues of hope and patience enable the leader to responsible action for their own and the common good.

The long-term vision of hope helps not to fall prey to manifold pressures like instant results or the temptation of short-term gain and success, but to search for long-term, sustainable solutions (Shaw & Ronald, 2012, Smurthwaite, 2011) in any kind of crisis – economic, political, climatic. Patience and hope together build the psychological capital which permits the leader neither to give up in crises nor to overengage when under pressure, but to “persistently do good over a long period until the good is attained” (Gratsch in Smurthwaite, 2011, p. 90):

Patience is a much-needed virtue in our current world: (...) Now, our leaders need to demonstrate and exemplify the self-control, endurance and selfmastery advocated by Aristotle, the fortitude, perseverance and constancy advocated by Aquinas (...), the discernment required to assess what we are waiting for in the context of the common good. (Smurthwaite, 2011, pp. 92-93)

### **From psychological to spiritual capital**

The important role of hope and patience as central elements of a psychological capital for leaders, as just explained, suggests that we should rather speak here of a specifically Christian "spiritual capital". Malloch describes this as "the fund of beliefs, examples and commitments that are transmitted from generation to generation through a religious tradition, and which attach people to the transcendental source of human happiness" (2010, p. 756). Through this definition, the connection with the Christian virtues discussed in this article already becomes clear: the biblical narrative transmitted through the centuries points to a hopeful, transcendent future that already conveys joy in the here and now and thereby encourages patient endurance.

According to the concept of spiritual capital, the attitudes and virtues imparted by leaders become a "philosophical underpinning that also makes organizational life meaningful for those associated with" (Martinez et.al., 2011, 159) by directing attention beyond immediate economic difficulties to other values. Malloch discusses how virtue-based spiritual capital is a critical factor in successful leadership: By determining the fundamental values of organizations, companies and their members, it leads to positive moral behavior in an increasingly competitive society, and motivates at the same time courageous and confident perseverance even in times of crisis (756-759), as it creates an environment of safety in all uncertainties and opens

up the possibility of positive responses to adversities through transcendent reference (Martinez et.al., 2011, 167; 171). This makes spiritual capital "a most critical element of organizational life" and "a source of competitive advantage" (Martinez et.al., 2011, 158).

This shows that virtues such as patience and hope are not only crucial attitudes for the respective leader to cope with crisis situations, but also have a decisive impact on their relationships. Jeanrond (2022) emphasizes the close connection of hope with the virtues of faith and love (1 Cor 13:13). Thus, on the one hand, hope in the biblical sense is based on trust in the divine promises; on the other hand, God is a God who turns to humanity in love. Therefore, hope must be defined as "relational", affecting relationships with fellow human beings: thus, it not only creates connections and communion with those who have already received this hope, but because of its universal meaning, it also invites us to reach out to those persons and areas where hopelessness still prevails.

In this context, Anthony Kelley (2006) invites an "inter-hope" dialogue that engages in conversation with other faiths. However, it remains to be emphasized that among all human, secular and religious ideas, Christian hope occupies a unique position by referring to the redemptive work of Christ, which through his resurrection overcomes even the most hopeless situation of death. Following Lear (2006), it could therefore also be called the "most radical of all hopes", which makes it possible to face even the greatest challenges with courage, perseverance, and patience.

## CONCLUSION

Hargreaves and Fink stress that "sustainable leadership acts urgently, (...), is resilient under pressure, waits patiently for results, and does not burn people out" (2006, p. 369). As we have seen, the virtues of hope and patience, linked together like two sides of a coin, are crucial resources to enable this kind of attitude. The perspective beyond the present difficulties by holding on to a greater narrative creates a psychological and spiritual capital for the leader which is crucial to succeed and persevere in adversity while proceeding towards future goals (López-Núñez, 2020).

Therefore, on a personal level transcendence permits the leader to act with a "deep sense of purpose" also in times of uncertainty and allows him to communicate an "inspired vision" to those following (Chen, 2012, p. 15). By definition, we as leaders are called to influence others – our organization, church, city, or nation. We are living in a society which mostly tries to ignore the idea of suffering (Schnitker, 2017) as well as transcendence. Maybe, right now, in a time where our whole continent continues to be scattered by various crises on the economic, political, or climatic level, it is our responsibility as Christian leaders to communicate a somehow countercultural narrative which realistically acknowledges hardship and adversity (Schnitker, 2017), but also offers the frame of Christ's bigger story and a new interpretation of current challenges. Or, like Lee puts it, our task is to help people to live and interpret their own lives from the perspective of "God's ongoing activity in the world" (2021, p. 53).

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