

LIVING HOPE



PASTORAL LETTER 2013

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LIVING HOPE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. “In hope we were saved”, says Saint Paul to the Romans (Rom 8: 24) “and likewise to us”, observed the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, (Spe Salvi, No1).

2. My beloved people of God, it is a great privilege for me to address this pastoral letter on Christian hope to you after the pastoral letter of 2012 on the Dignity of Human Labour. We thank God for the favorable reception of the pastoral letter on human labour and pray that God will continue to redirect us to the immense blessings he has bestowed on us as a nation, not least on account of the creativity of human labour. Our choice of themes is done with the conviction that our faith should permeate every aspect of our life. In fact, being faithful Christians and adhering to the teachings of the Gospel and the Church entails progressive improvement of life in the temporal order, preparing us gradually for the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth and the eventual salvation wrought for us by Christ our Savior.

Retrospection and Gratitude:

3. Let us first give thanks to God for the many grace-filled events of last year in the Archdiocese of Onitsha. Among these must be counted the Thanksgiving celebration of the 80th birthday of His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze. The sacrifices, the generosity, the solidarity and the Christian piety exhibited by some of you are lessons to take home and a great encouragement towards positive striving in the Lord’s ministry. From the deepest recesses of our heart, we thank all who contributed in any meaningful way to make the huge but modest success that the event recorded in the Archdiocese of Onitsha.

4. Also, we gratefully remember the grand celebration of the 10th anniversary of my Episcopal consecration and installation as the Archbishop of Onitsha. The outpouring of solidarity, good-wishes, prayer, etc were so overwhelming that it cannot but lead one to appreciate deep faith of our people, both the priests and lay faithful. I remain eternally grateful to God and to all of you, while pledging continued service, dedication and commitment in the vineyard of the Lord; asking for your prayers for increased assistance in spite of my unworthiness.

5. It is with the same disposition of gratitude to God that I recall the life of Bishop Emmanuel Otteh whose pain of passing away we experienced during the year. May his soul rest in perfect peace, Amen. Bishop Otteh was former Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha and Emeritus Bishop of Issele-Uku. He was one of our most hard working pastors and formators, a great builder and organizer, a shining example of the life of total dedication to God. We are grateful to God for his Life and his work, and to all our Christians for their support and prayers. The letter to the Hebrews (13:7) enjoins us to remember our leaders who preached the word of God to us, and as we contemplate their lives, we should imitate their faith.

6. Another reason to be grateful to God and to all the people of God in the Archdiocese of Onitsha is the completion of the new Archbishop's House, built and donated by God's spirited persons. This house is located near the shore of the Niger and the path through which Father Joseph Lutz and his team of young missionaries arrived to start the momentous work of evangelization in our region. The completion of this house is like a return to the land of birth. We note with gratitude that this house was completed by the wonderful generosity of a few members of Christ faithful led by a family. May God's favours come down upon them in abundance. The great significance of this house lies in the fact that in the past, our great Bishops lived in different places. It is an ode to their simplicity and modesty. But it also affords some obvious advantages to have a humble but befitting and somewhat permanent Archbishop's House for some years to come. To God be all glory, honour and praise forever.

7. In a similar way it is our joy to recall the beginning of St. Joseph's Special Science and Seminary School, Awka-Etiti, the progress in the Holy Family Youth Village Hostel project, Amansea-Awka, the one year anniversary of Radio Sapientia, Onitsha, the on-going rehabilitation of the schools returned to the Church, the successful hosting of the youths event here in Onitsha both at the national and Archdiocesan levels and many other joyful events within the pastoral year. To God be thanksgiving and never ending praise for ever.

8. With heavy hearts we recall the flood disaster which took place in our country last year and which was experienced in many parts of our Archdiocese. I sincerely sympathize with all those directly affected by this great challenge. It is a natural calamity that caught many of our faithful off guard, rendered many homeless and destroyed many valuables. It robbed many persons and families of their dignity. We prayerfully unite the sufferings of the victims to that of Christ asking for divine consolation and blessings. As a local Church and family of God, we responded to the emergency situation with material, emotional and spiritual assistance. On a personal visit to the sites, I made a commitment on behalf of our great family to the provision of the most basic needs to the victims providing sleeping materials, food and medical attention. The entire Archdiocese raised money worth tens of millions to assist the victims. These though cannot wish away the untold suffering those families were subjected to, as they are like nothing compared to what is actually needed to rehabilitate the victims. I therefore call on the Government to look into the causes of the disaster to prevent any future occurrence and in the present, do well to rehabilitate and compensate the victims. We call on the victims to have hope.

CHOICE OF THEME

9. I have decided to reflect with you on the significance of CHRISTIAN HOPE with the title; LIVING HOPE. We may recall that in 2006, we addressed the faithful on Faith with the title "If only you have Faith". That was earlier preceded by The Measure of Love, in 2005, which underlined the supreme importance of love in the economy of salvation. The theme of this year's pastoral letter completes the circuit of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. The reason for reflecting on the theological virtues is on account of their incomparable importance in the life of grace.

10. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, declared this year as the year of Faith. By dwelling on hope as the last of the theological virtues we are reflecting on within my episcopacy, we are joining

the Holy Father in underlining the importance of these virtues for our Christian life. The interconnection and the inseparability between the three virtues of faith, hope and charity entails that this pastoral letter on hope will be a furtherance of our understanding of our Faith in line with the Holy Father's intention.

11. The specific significance of hope for us in Nigeria is that we live in a situation which can very easily lead to crisis of hope or even sins against hope. On the positive side hope imbues us with confidence and trust even in the temporal order since all creation belongs to God, and God's reign must be made to sway over all of them.

12. Moreover, I have noted with dismay (though comforted by faith) how many of our people wallow in despair, resignation to fate, faintheartedness as they carry on the journey of life. There is much superstition even from the circles of those who are supposed to know better and be part of the solution. There is much confusion and frustration which are signs of the absence of hope and faith which form the rich heritage of Christians. Being confronted with the responsibility of awakening my people, I therefore invite you to reflect with me on this all important virtue, hope, and to appreciate its importance with the hope that it will exert positive effect on our spiritual and temporal life.

CHAPTER TWO

HOPE AND HUMAN VIRTUES

13. Notion of Hope: It is good to explore a general notion of hope before we come to hope as a virtue. In the most general sense, hope is not a virtue but an affection. Hence, people can hope for good health, for freedom, for success in examination, for success in the field of play, for a better future for one's family or one's country. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, hope is a desire for a good that is hard but not impossible to obtain. (cf. S.Th. 11a-11ae. q17a.1).

14. Some others define hope as "a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment. (cf. Webster.com an online dictionary). Still for some, hope is the emotional state which promotes the belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. In other words, it is the feeling that what is wanted can be had; or that events will turn out for the best, or looking forward to something with a desire and reasonable confidence. (cf. Wikipedia.org an online dictionary).

15. Note that in this general sense hope is specified as a desire accompanied by the expectation of fulfillment. It is the desire of something together with the expectation of obtaining it. What is central in all these definitions is the inner self assurance of the desired goal. A more comprehensive definition of hope in a general sense, comes from Otto Hentz who says; "Hoping is the reach of the human person for a future that is possible, desired, but beyond the person's ability to achieve it. The reach of hope, unlike mere wishing, is at the heart of personal life. It is a reach for what defines our very selves. Thus hoping is an active reach by which we move into our future with courage and perseverance." (Otto Hentz; the hope of a Christian, the liturgical press, p. 7).

16. Therefore hope is part of the human condition. It is an essential condition of human life. People live in desire for a better state of life. This desire is never fully perfectly fulfilled as the fulfillment of one leads to the desire for the next state. People live in hope.

However, hope in general is different from Christian hope which is a virtue. Though it is not of the essence of hope that its object be morally good, it is so of the essence of the virtue of hope. Hope becomes virtue only if it is unwaveringly directed towards what is morally good and lovable. Christian hope is of this nature. (cf. Karl H Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, vol II,p. 70).

17. The scope of this pastoral letter limits our emphases to Christian Hope which is a virtue. We recall that virtues are good habits. Virtues according to Aristotle confer goodness on its owner and make his acts good. For St Augustine, virtue is a good quality of the soul enabling man to live well, which no one can use for evil, produced in man by God without man's assistance. Virtues can be acquired or infused depending on their origin that is if man acquires them by his own acts or God infuses them together with sanctifying grace. Acquired virtues are moral virtues namely; Prudence, Fortitude, Justice and Temperance. These four fundamental ones are called cardinal virtues. Infused virtues are Theological Virtues namely: Faith, Hope and Charity.

HOPE AND THE HUMAN VIRTUES

18. In the old Explanatory Catechism of Christian Doctrines, hope is defined as the supernatural gift of God by which we trust that God will grant us eternal life and all the means for attaining it if we obey his commandments. While this definition contains some of the essential meanings of hope, it excludes the fact that hope is a virtue. A Virtue is the constant and steady will to do what is good. Virtue is akin to power (Latin, *virtus*-power). As power it can be inborn, acquired or infused, but it is increased, strengthened and perfected through practice. That is why Virtue is also called habit, (*habitus* in Latin). It entails the steady inclination to do what is right.

19. Habit is retained and strengthened by repetition. The virtuous person is not a person who performs good acts sporadically but one who constantly grows in the habit, and thus gains a certain type of automatism towards the good.

20. The moral virtues are acquired and strengthened by human efforts. They direct the human intellect and will towards the good. The moral virtues are very important in the execution of human acts. Without them the human being cannot condition his being, especially his passion to do the good at all times. But constancy in doing good is very vital in the economy of virtues. That is why St. Augustine defines virtues as good quality of the mind by means of which nobody can do evil (*qua nemo male utitur*) . For St. Thomas Aquinas, the conditioning of the moral virtues is necessary because the human being is among other things a creature of passion. The mere intellectual recognition of something as good is no assurance that the will is drawn automatically towards it. Aquinas explains that the human will is rebellious towards the intellect and thus has to be molded or trained to be amenable to the prodding of the intellect. This molding is achieved by means of repetition of the good act. The moral virtues are also defined as the mean between two extremes of excess and defect. Thus generosity is the mean between profligacy and miserliness, while courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness.

21. Of special importance in the human acts are the cardinal virtues. They are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. They are called cardinal virtues because in a way all the other moral virtues hinge on them (Latin: *cardo*-Hinge), and cannot stand without them. In order that the good

will constantly be the focus of the virtues, the cardinal virtues are prerequisites. They are needed for the exercise of the good act, more especially in conflict situations and for the striking of the mean between excess and defect of the virtues in act.

22. The human being is endowed with the two faculties of the intellect and the will. The moral virtues have the will as their seat. There are in addition intellectual virtues seated in the faculty of the intellect. These are wisdom, understanding and knowledge. For both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, these intellectual virtues are superior to the moral virtues since they serve as light or guide for the moral virtues towards the good.

23. These virtues operate on the natural and horizontal level. Even though the horizontal level of human existence has important spiritual significance since it was created by and belong to God ultimately, still it is the vertical level that links the human person directly to the beyond. It is what leads the human conditions to their perfection. The human virtues are thus perfected by God's grace. It is in view of this perfection that we have the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. These are gifts of God, and even though like virtues in general, they can be increased by constant exercise, their origin is quite apart from the origin of the other human virtues, since God grants them to the human person.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church thus defines hope as “the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (ccc 1817).

24. This definition underlines hope as a theological virtue. It highlights the element of desire for salvation seen as the possession of God's kingdom. It designates the attainment of this kingdom as our ultimate happiness, and thus surreptitiously, it relativises all other forms of happiness that might be attractive to the human being. The confidence in desiring for this ultimate end is the promises of Christ, not just our own inclination. And given the lofty height of this virtue, unaided human strength is far from being capable to attain it, and thus the human person needs the help of the Holy Spirit to attain the object of this hope.

CHAPTER THREE

HOPE AS A THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE

25. The theological virtues, faith, hope and charity are given as gifts by God to perfect his purpose where the human being is concerned. While these are not identical virtues, their interconnectedness teaches us something very important about hope. The letter to the Hebrews defines faith as, “the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things which for the moment remain unseen”. (Heb. 11:1). By charity we love God above all things and our neighbours for God's sake, (CCD, p. 407).

26. One clearly sees how the definition of faith involves hope, but this faith if it will not be mere words must involve love (James 2:17). Hope is therefore some sort of dynamism of the theological virtues, it gives the other two virtues their effectiveness. It is because of hope that faith does not become mere dead letters, or mere formulars, but rather remains a virtue that translates to effective human activity. Faith is often presented as a scheme of well defined truths. It is often seen as a catalogue of beliefs in an established theology which enables us to hold to abiding truths. But the Christian faith is ultimately belief in the one who is in himself the fullness of truth. It is belief in a person towards whom our whole Christian life tends. In that respect our definitions can never be the full truth. Our definitions are so to say in a pilgrimage situation marching towards their full realization in Christ who is our salvation.

27. Given that the Christian awaits the final coming of Christ, our revelation remains somehow incomplete. As St. John says, “We shall see him face to face” (Rev. 22:4). It is the same savior who has revealed himself in the incarnation, his life, death and resurrection, but all these are done in view of the final coming. It means that our Faith cannot in any guise be said to be complete. Christ’s work of salvation continues in history in different guises. The Father continues to work and Christ himself is working too (Jn. 5:17). Hope is what sustains this attitude of constant engagement in view of the ultimate end. Hope engages the believer with the God of history, while expecting his constant coming which enriches life here and now and points to the ultimate salvation.

28. Hope in the Christian sense is not just a learned act or product of a habit, but a quality of the Christian soul who according to the catechism of the Catholic Church, has been imbued with the confident expectation of divine blessing and beatific vision of God (cf. CCC 2090).

29. Christian hope is based on the person and mystery of Jesus Christ who is the ground of our hope. It is hope that is divinely rooted and thus it is an infused virtue. It is a virtue that empowers us to expect the fullness of the blessedness we have in Christ and the means for attaining such full blessedness. In a way, hope sustains faith.

This means that Faith involves a dynamism towards better knowledge of God in increasing trust. Thus the nature of Faith is hope. Faith itself gives assurance to our hope of salvation since God’s revelation of himself does not consist in abstract ideas but rather in the truth of salvation that inspires trust. This process is historic because in each age God shows the way that leads to his salvation. Hence Faith has two clearly traceable essential dimensions: an affirmation marked by thankfulness to what God has done and revealed, as well as openness marked by trust; and expectations of more things he will reveal and do, being constantly watchful about what God wants in every actual situation. It is therefore through hope that the believer focuses his salvific gaze on the history of salvation.

30. The interconnection between hope and faith extends naturally to love. One clear mark of identity which Our Savior gave to his disciples is love. “By this love all men will know that you are my disciples” (Jn. 13: 34). The disciple has faith in the Lord, and this faith is proven, shown, made real by love for the Children of God, which is in turn founded on the love of God (1Jn 4:20-21). It is the same thought in the letter of St. James, where he states unequivocally that “faith without good work is dead” (James 2:26).

31. Good work is thus seen as faith in action, and thus faith in action is love. Love, like hope enters into the definition of Faith. All these are not isolated, they form a seam whose totality is the eventual salvation starting from the temporal and perfected in the eternal. One can now understand why Bernard Haring describes faith in the following manner:

Faith is really defined by a response in love, an initial response and a growing response to God revealing Himself, His love and His design to man as to lead him on towards the final and full concelebration of His love. Therefore it implies a faith that is alive, marked by hope and growth, openness and love". (Hope is the Remedy, p. 54). The response of faith which is love thus remains open for the final fulfillment, the "full concelebration". The Christian trusts in God's promise of salvation and realigns all his act towards that end that gives meaning to his life. This act of expectation in faith that is put into practice by love is sustained by hope.

32. Hope is made possible and necessary by the temporal nature of human existence. We live in time and are circumscribed by time. God on the other hand lives in the eternal now which is supra-temporal. That is why the Church is a pilgrim Church. Our faith in the promise of God, our love which consist of putting it into practice, is sustained by trust (or hope) that our final destination is assured when God will be all in all. Bernard Haring thus defined hope as "Faith and Love on pilgrimage". Again, "hope is the internal dynamism of faith and love" (cf. opcit p. 43). Because we are the people of God on a pilgrimage, we live between time and eternity, hope is given to us by the all loving God as sustainer. Hope is faith and love in this in-between time.

33. We see from this brief explanation how intimately connected the theological virtues are. We see how none of them can stand or be meaningful in the economy of salvation without the other. While remaining individual theological virtues, we observe unity in action, we also see how they resemble the trinity of the Godhead. It can be said that faith is notionally the most fundamental, love is the greatest and the most important, but hope is the hub of all the three. Without the hub, a wheel cannot function as a wheel, therefore without hope, faith and love cannot sustain since the promise of God is not for this earthly existence only. In fact its fulfillment is necessarily anchored on eternal salvation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FEATURES OF HOPE

34. Despite the interconnectedness mentioned above between hope, faith and love, the virtue of hope has its distinctiveness and its characteristics. Like other theological virtues, it is a freely given gift of God. Like others it can be maintained and sustained by human endeavor as exemplified in the parable of the talent (Lk 19: 11). Still hope is marked by some of these features:

35:1 Hope Answers Aspiration to Happiness:

Philosophers and theologians since antiquity have identified happiness as the ultimate end of human action. For the Greek Philosopher Plato, even when human beings do evil, they do so in an ironic sort of way on account of the illusion of gaining happiness through the object of their evil. For Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, happiness is the ultimate end of human life. However, it goes

without saying that this happiness cannot be fully obtained in the temporal order of our existence, and God in all his wisdom and care for his children gives them a possibility of fulfilling this natural desire to the full. Only in God can the human desire for happiness and beatitude come to fulfillment. Without hope, the anchor of the human being on the promise of God's salvation which is our only possibility of fulfilling our inborn desire for eternal bliss is shattered.

35:2 Hope purifies Human Activities:

Because hope is supernatural, and has eternal salvation in God as its ultimate object, it purifies the engagement of the human being with the temporal world. Hope is the virtue that gives all human endeavor its aim of being reconciled in God. With hope human actions assume other worldly dimension.

35:3 Hope Sustains in Troubled Times:

The Lord affirmed clearly to the apostles in his farewell address to them that "in the world you will have troubles" (Jn 16:33). But he adds an immediate consoling word to the effect that they should be happy since He has overcome the world, hence he says, "Take courage I have conquered the world" (Jn16:33). Overcoming the world entails victory over all forces that tend to divert human beings from the ultimate goal of eternal salvation in Christ. They include the troubles of worldly existence, the problems of evil: moral, social and natural. In all these, the Christian has his hope focused on the lasting city while not forgetting to ameliorate the difficulties of this present life.

35:4 Hope Fulfills the Desire of Christians:

Christian Hope fulfills the desire of Christians for a better future starting from the temporal world to the eternal and timeless one. God's Kingdom which Christ instructs us to pray for on earth should be felt in our temporal world. "Thy will be done on earth" (Mtt 6:10), entails an affirmation that the earth belongs to the world and that the victory of the Children of God is all encompassing.

35:5 Hope is An Antidote to Selfishness:

Hope sustained by charity prevents the Christian from seeking only his own well being. He is aware that God's salvation is not meant only for one individual: That God intends all men and women to be saved, and the beginning of this salvation here on earth includes the hand of help we extend to our fellow human beings, especially in moments of need.

35:6 Hope is Evident in the Beatitude:

Christian hope is announced in the beatitudes at the beginning of Christ's preaching. They announce what happiness belongs to the Children of God when they persevere to the end and hold on to the ideals of God's Kingdom. The beatitudes proclaim the salvation which our savior wrought for us through his salvific mission.

35:7 Hope provides Anchor for the Soul: (Heb. 6:19)

Hope is a veritable anchor in the world full of hazards and temptations. Since we have a promise of inheritance, and have here no abiding city (Heb 13:14), we should be unhindered in concentrating intently on God's promise of salvation. Hope therefore serves to anchor us to the aim for which God created us in the first place that is, to enjoy eternal salvation with him in heaven.

35:8 Hope is a Source of Joy:

The salvation which we hope with trust in the power of God for whom all things are possible becomes a foretaste of joy. The Epistles insist on this joy, and thus St. Paul instructs the Philippians to be always happy in the Lord (Phil 4:4). Again, Romans 12:12 tells the Christian to rejoice in this hope. The ultimate reason for our happiness is the hope of eternal salvation based on absolute trust in God's promise.

35:9 Hope: An Indispensable Weapon of Salvation:

Because hope places before us an incomparable treasure in heaven (cf. Heb 6:10), a homeland which is eternal, prepared for us by God, it becomes a veritable weapon in our fight to obtain the salvation which is our inheritance in the Lord. Thus hope and other theological virtues are described in military terms by St. Paul who says, "let us put on the full armor of God...Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with breastplate of righteousness in place" (Eph 6: 13-14).

35:10 Hope is Nourished in Prayer:

Prayer, the activity that raises the mind of the Christian to God expresses and nourishes the virtue of hope. This is exemplified in the prayer of the Lord, Our Father. It prays for the coming of God's Kingdom, prays for obedience to his will, and for the well being of the human being which is fulfilled in heavenly beatitude. According to the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, "prayer is hope in action". In addition, a first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me. (cf. CCC 2657).

35:11 Hope is Eschatological:

Finally hope is eschatological. The human being tends towards an end. It is said that the human is teleological. Only in God does man find his final station that will lay all his yearnings to rest. But while still on this earthly pilgrimage, he is sustained by hope to keep steadily fixed on the goal; to persevere to the end; and to obtain the heavenly inheritance.

36. In summary, from the above features we can say in a nutshell that, Hope is not wishful thinking. It is a sort of thankful thinking. While it gives thanks for favours received, it lives in openness and anticipation for what still lies ahead in the future beyond man's immediate possession. Hope is not mere optimism. While optimism is a type of temperamental disposition, hope is on the other hand

faith in the love of the eternal Father; Faith about the future irrespective of how gloomy it appears, this faith is on account of God. Genuine hope starts where optimism stops.

Hope builds up the strength and intelligence to know that since the future is in the hands of God, it is in good hands.

Christian hope inspires drive for and leads to the realization of one's life vocation as a child of God. It helps one to acquire an adequate Christian anthropology that having been created and redeemed, one has an eternal value and should not live worthless existence.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

37. Hope is founded on the scripture and theological sources as well as on the nature of the human person created in the image of God. We shall now briefly show the anthropological, theological and biblical basis of hope.

I. ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF HOPE

38. Hope is first of all nature's gift to all humans but it only acquires a new degree and perfection at the inauguration of Christian life of each person at his/her baptism. Man as man experiences life as constant longing and striving. Man transcends the daily limitations and challenges of his life in anticipation of a better future. This constant longing, striving and desire for a better future with confidence in its realization is called hope. It is in the nature of man, everyman. In fact anthropologists claim that without hope a person cannot exist.

39. Since it is in the nature of man to anticipate tomorrow, his desire for the future is intrinsically linked to his desire for perfection and happiness. Though this desire cannot be fully fulfilled or realized by human nature alone unaided, nevertheless the initial impulse comes from the nature of man as a rational being. Man is open to the infinite. Being a transcendental being, he goes beyond the material, the ordinary, the immanence. That is where he needs grace and Christian hope comes in. Hope ordinarily is based on the nature of humans.

II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

40. The logic of hope is to be found in God, the blessed Trinity. God is the foundation and object of our hope, without Him every hope is vain, illusion and hallucination.

God the Father revealed himself to us through his son. God is revealed as one who is love. He is the creator, the redeemer, the liberator. To hope is to entrust our future, our history, our destiny in the hand of he who owns, makes and masters history. If he gave us Christ his son, there is never a thing he cannot give to us or do for us.

41. Pope Benedict reminds us that, "God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God, who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety

(Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 32). He teaches that God is the hope of mankind, whose “love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect (*Ibid.* n.31). In fact as Children of God whom he loves, our hope is rooted in the fatherhood of God.

42. Again Jesus Christ is the center of our hope. The mystery of the incarnation, the birth, death and glorious resurrection of our lord Jesus Christ is not only a foundation of our hope but also a confirmation and promise of our hope. Jesus Christ having consummated our hope by rising from the dead, by that fact also gave a firm foundation and promise to it. The promise is that where the head has gone the body will follow. There will be a reunion of the head that is Christ and the body, the Church. That gives a strong foundation to our hope. Therefore, Christ’s ascension is the promise of our hope. Jesus Christ is our hope. Similarly, the Holy Spirit can be seen as the foundation and sustainer of our hope. He is the promise of the father and the fulfillment of that promise. According to the theologian, Raniero Cantalamessa, the Holy Spirit is the one who, in particular makes it possible for us to abound in hope; “May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15: 13) (cf. R. Cantalamessa, *Come Creator Spirit*, Minnesota: the liturgical press, 2003, p. 214).

43. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to call God, Abba Father, He prays for us when we cannot pray, in groans deeper than words (cf. Rom 8:26-27), he comes to the aid of our weakness, the spirit causes divine intimacy between us and God the Father. In fact, “when the Holy Spirit is present it is impossible not to abound in hope”. (cf. R. Cantalamessa, *Ibid.*)

III. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

In general language, the word hope is taken to be akin to confidence and trust. The usage of the word in the Old Testament departs significantly from the Greek usage which applies the word to both good and bad expectations. The Hebrew usage of hope always refers to the expectation of what is good in the future. The pivotal role of hope in the religious life of the Israelites is anchored on the fact that the Old Testament religion was based on a covenant which consists mainly of promises. Hope becomes in this context the confident expectation of the positive actions of Yahweh in favour of his people as part of the fulfillment of the covenant. That is why hope is closely related to faith in the OT, and in some places two of them are seen to be parallels. (Ps 78:22).

45. The Promised Land (Canaan) was the chief object of hope for the Israelites (Deut. 1:8). In practice, this imbued them with such a confidence that no matter how their possession of the Promised Land was threatened, they retained assurance of the protection of Yahweh. In line with the idea of hope, the Israelites looked towards the Day of the Lord, which will usher in redemption and definitive deliverance from every evil as well as the commencement of a period of affluence and bliss. Such presumptive hope was combated headlong by the prophets, since the sins of Israel rather merited God’s punishment than blessings. When the predictions of the prophets were fulfilled and the two kingdoms of Israel were destroyed, the hope of redemption reached another high point especially in the prophecies of the Major Prophets (namely Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah). This hope of redemption depicted the restoration of a new covenant, with Yahweh as the

definitive King of the whole world, including Israel. From this point, hope assumed eschatological feature in the Old Testament.

46. Ecclesiastes underlines the importance of hope in the life of humans. Hope lives while the human being lives, and when hope is lost, all is lost (Ecl 9:4). Thus the one who has no more hope is as good as dead (Is. 38:18). The book of proverbs depicts the righteous man as having a future and a hope (Prov. 23:18), and this hope will not be in vain because God is its foundation (Ps. 28:7). He can call Yahweh his hope (Jer. 17:7). The poor and the oppressed can trustfully hope in God's help and protection. The repentant sinner hopes for the forgiveness of his sins (Ps. 130:1-8).

47. In later Judaism, the eschatological note of hope becomes more evident. The pious hope for immortality (Wis 3:4), the resurrection of the body (2Mcb7:11) and salvation with God (2Mcb. 11:6). There is no hope for the sinner (Wis 3:18).

48. In the New Testament (NT), the entire message of Jesus is one of hope. The Good News of salvation brought about and realized by Jesus Christ is always the announcement of the future Kingdom of God which is essentially other worldly, but is also already at work in the person of Jesus. Jesus promises the possession of the salvation of God's kingdom to the poor, the humble, the oppressed who put their trust only in God. The beatitudes announce to such the future fulfillment of their hope.

49. In the letters of St Paul, hope includes expectation, trust, and confidence. In the new covenant, the hope of the faithful is distinguished from that of the members of the old covenant in the sense that it is based on redemption which has been fulfilled in Christ. The Christian who possesses the Spirit already has salvation, redemption from the shackles of sin, divine Sonship and an heir with Christ to the inheritance (Rom 8:14-17). Such a person also enjoys justification which brings life and glory (Rom 5:9, 17), and the Spirit who is the principle of eternal life and the resurrection of the body. (Gal 6:8)

50. Christian hope is therefore based on the possession of what already pertains to the Kingdom of God which is therefore present as well as future. He (the Christian) is saved in hope and expects the complete revelation of his divine Sonship and glorification (2Cor. 4:17). He therefore hopes in the Kingdom of God: the coming of Christ; the resurrection; eternal life; participation in Christ's glory, and every aspect of salvation which the Gospel proclaims which are laid up for him in heaven. Christian hope is directed to God who is faithful to his promises (1 Thes 5:24) and attached closely to Christ who is the hope of Christians (1 Tim 1:1), it is hope for glory; it does not disappoint and is the source of joy, boldness and peace. Hope is closely bound up with faith and love (1 Cor 13:13) all of which constitute the inner life of the Christian (Rom 15:13). It is the sign of separation from the Gentiles who have no hope (1 Thes. 4:13).

51. In the writings of St. John, hope is the basis of the purification which is necessary for the believer to be as pure as God is (1John3:3). Since eternal life has been bequeathed to the whole man he still awaits the resurrection on the last day (Jn 5:28). Though the Christian is already a Child of God, what he will be has not yet been revealed (1 Jn 3:2) since he will be like God by seeing Him as He really is (Jn1:12 and 1Jn 3:2). Furthermore the Apocalypse is written with the

aim of strengthening the Christians of Asia Minor through hope in the triumph of Christ's Church over her enemies.

The pivotal importance of hope is therefore evident both in the Old and New Testaments. Some of the features of hope which we have outlined especially the eschatological dimensions earlier noted, are evident in different epochs of the Old Testament. The New Testament emphasizes the salvation wrought by Christ who is the hope of the Christian, distinguishing him from those who have no hope. It is on account of its hope that the Church is confident of triumph over all her enemies.

52. Finally, going through the entire Bible, one can describe the message of the Holy Scripture as a story of hope for mankind. The prophets stand out as messengers of hope. The kings and Judges come across as promoters and projectors of hope. The Psalms are songs of hope and the New Testament is an assurance of our hope in Christ. No doubt the Christian hope finds a firm foundation in the Holy Scripture.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SINS AGAINST HOPE

53. The salvation of man is based solely on God's love. This love is such that it cannot but elicit a response, since love is reciprocal. But God's love is so immense that the human being cannot respond to it in any adequate manner without the grace of God. It is therefore necessary that he trusts the source of his being and the origin of this love to endow him with the necessary grace to reciprocate his love and obey his commandments. Hope is therefore necessary for the human person to acknowledge and purify his humanity. It is the confidence that his creator and his redeemer will give him all the necessary help to attain the purpose for which he created him in the first place, which is to enjoy the beatific vision with him in heaven.

54. However, the natural obligation of loving God and striving to see him face to face entails the avoidance of what will offend him. Since God's love is beyond comparison, offenses against it are also serious breaches in the natural obligation of the human being towards a loving God. Hope therefore entails the confidence in obtaining the heavenly inheritance from God; the confidence that the architect of this inheritance will also assist us to obtain it. It also entails the avoidance of offense against this love. Hope can therefore be explained as the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God's love and of incurring punishment. Failure to respond adequately to God's love and to trust his immense goodwill towards us is the cause of the sins against hope. These are the sins of despair and presumption. These can also be called dangers to hope as they lead to loss or abandonment of hope.

55. DESPAIR: Despair is the very antithesis of hope. It simply means loss of hope. The person who despairs has lost faith in God's goodness to grant him the promised salvation. It is the loss of confidence in the goodness and mercy of God as well as his assistance to obtain salvation. Despair can come as a result of personal inability to muster confidence in God, or a personal doubt of God's ability or readiness to grant pardon for one's sins. Despair is like failure to believe or trust in God's goodness, it is like calling God a liar by not believing that he will be faithful to his promise

56. PRESUMPTION: Presumption is the second sin against hope. It involves trust in one's own ability to save himself. It can also manifest in an unwarranted expectation of help of divine order. The presumptuous person believes that he does not need God's grace to be saved. It is the sin of pride that over values one's own ability. The presumptuous person believes he does not need help from above. Presumption may come in other guises. The person who believes that he has received so much of God's gift that he does not need God's direction anymore, or that he has become a law unto himself is also guilty of the sin of presumption.

Presumption can also manifest when man takes God's mercy for granted. In this sense, the presumptuous person does not think he needs to be converted in order to receive forgiveness. He presumes that God will pardon his sins and save him without making any serious attempt to change from his former ways. He believes that he can obtain the salvation of Christ without any merit at all.

57. Akin to the sins against hope is what we can call false hope. False hope occurs when human beings refuse to make salvation in God their ultimate end. In its place, all forms of deceptive and ephemeral satisfactions are switched for the promise of God's beatitudes. Prominent among such deceptive hope is hope in money or wealth. "The love of money is the root of all evils" and the Christian who is eager to be rich will wander away from the faith and pierce himself with many pains" (1Tim 6:10). Another example of false hope is found in all instances in which the human being decides to forget God either on account of spite or pride. The Bible warns that "the hope of the godless shall perish" (Job 8:13).

58. It is argued that the capital sins also constitute a danger to hope. This is because being often the foundation from which other sins take root, they generate other sins including the sins against hope which are despair and presumption. The capital sins are slot, gluttony, avarice, lust, anger, pride and envy. In the same way, what has come to be known as social sins as called by Mahatma Gandhi can easily lead one to sins against hope.

The Social Sins Include:

Religion without Sacrifice

Science without Humanity

Education without Character

Pleasure without Conscience

Wealth without Work

Politics without Principles

Commerce without Morality

These can lead one astray and away from the right path.

59. The bottom-line is that in God alone is the fulfilling hope. The Christian cannot repose his hope on any created thing, not on himself, not on wealth, fame, power, etc. He should not be despondent in any circumstance, nor should he be presumptuous that he can save himself without God. Hope establishes a beautiful balance in the attitude of the Christian before God, before his very being, and before all other created things. It enables him to know his ultimate goal and end, and also to trust in God's willingness and ability to grant him the necessary help to its attainment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD

60. The theological virtues are necessary to perfect human activities, to redirect them to their origin and their proper end. Hope is very vital in that it is an antidote to nausea, to tastelessness, fruitlessness or to frustration in the course of our earthly pilgrimage. Hope is necessary to secure the fecundity of God's endowment; to ensure that the gifts of God continue to have their necessary dynamism or effectiveness. It is necessary to underline that the emphasis on the eschatological feature of hope does not diminish the responsibility of the hopeful Christian towards the world. The reason for this is that the whole of what exists belongs to God as the originator, the sustainer and the goal of all of them. The ultimate aim of God's creation is that at the end God will be all in all. While this is not a formula for making everything godly (pantheism), it is a call to submit to the salvific design of God in all things. The prayer of the Lord is enough pointer to this fact. The Lord taught his disciples to pray for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. The structure of the Our Father is also very instructive. We are told to first invoke our heavenly father and then to pray first and foremost that his Kingdom comes to the world, and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

61. The eagerness for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth is the realization that our salvation will start from our milieu. Salvation does not come to man in a foreign land. It comes to him in the specific context in which he lives. This salvation which is eschatological embraces the human being in his totality. It not only embraces the whole community of the Children of God, it also affects radically the present locus of their lives. It is therefore of utmost importance that the human and worldly community be sanctified and be imbued with the ideals of the Christian hope. The attitudes, the dynamism we associate with the virtue of hope must also be seen to affect positively our earthly existence. It is not that this existence becomes an end unto itself, it is just that God's saving activity in favour of his Children cannot be limited, or excluded from this material world. Hope of salvation and God's assistance towards its attainment must necessarily impact positively on our world.

62. The first dimension of this is that God does not expect isolated and brave individuals to save only themselves, and thus enjoy the fruit of God's gift of hope all alone. God is very solicitous for his people, for the community of his Children all of whom he wants to be saved and to come to the knowledge of salvation. Here we can borrow an analogy from the history of Buddhism. Initially Buddhism was very individualistic. The monks and other holy individuals were intent on saving themselves through the practice of detachment from all material things and also from all human beings. The symbol of "small boat" was developed. This boat represents the holy monk who is alone in his small raft, and rowing to the nirvana or eternal happiness. He is all alone, having left

all other human beings behind. There is then the example of the “big boat”. This was introduced by Bodhisattva the monk, who on reaching the gate of heaven with his small boat realized he was standing there all alone having left behind other human beings. Instead of entering nirvana alone as he arrived, Bodhisattva asked God to permit him not to enter nirvana at that point in time and to allow him to go back, and bring to his brethren the good message that life is not mere negative; that life fullness is in brotherhood. Bodhisattva thus abandoned his small boat for a big boat which connotes salvation for many and for all.

63. The hope of the Christian is not to be saved alone. He is a citizen of the New Jerusalem where all are gathered and where everyone is a first born Child and a citizen of heaven (cf. Heb. 12:22-23). The best in the Christian hope is that it is meant for all the Children of God. That realization imposes on the Christian the enormous task of improving the earthly condition of all God’s children. In this respect, Bernard Haring writes of earthly hopes:

“Those who have committed themselves to the hope of everlasting life must work to strengthen all worthy earthly hopes: hope of justice, goodness, mercy, peace, brotherhood and so on” (cf. B. Haring, *Hope is the Remedy*, p. 94-96).

That these are called earthly or human hopes do not however indicate that they are completely isolated from the virtue of hope which is eschatological. They have the quality of “*analogia Spei*”, (hope by analogy). In other words, they have a hidden presence, and can serve initial manifestation of the greater hope, and longing for greater realization of God’s presence among his Children. Hope for the realization of all these worthy and admirable human qualities are pointers to and whet our appetite to their full realization in Christ.

64. It has thus become a great concern of Christian life today to consider how best to relate everlasting life, our hope of seeing God face to face with the reality of our present existence, with the fears, the joys and the hopes that are perceptible in spite of the obvious difficulties of the world. That is why Christian hope is viewed as a gift, a talent granted by God to his Children, a task of reconciling the world in which they live. Christian hope therefore implies a commitment to the world, the temporary world.

The problems of this world can become signs of genuine hope if believers embark on renewal in form of personal conversion and a combined engagement in improving their milieu. Salvation can thus become visible in the community of the faithful who are intent on building a better world.

65. In summary what we are hoping for is the new heaven and the new earth. It is clear that only God’s transforming power can bring us this hope for new heaven and new earth. But, we also know that in the normal run of things, human beings do not persevere in hope without making appropriate effort to obtain what they hope for.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOPE AND THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

66. From the foregoing, it is clear that hope and other supernatural virtues are affected by the human condition. God who wants all humans to be saved and to come to the knowledge of salvation does not desire that they be saved outside their own locus of existence. The wonder of God's gift is that he desires to save us where we are and provides the necessary means for the human faithful to work for his salvation. In our own specific instance, it means that the hope of the Nigerian Christians and all believers must be kindled, and its dynamism sustained within the Nigerian context.

67. This Nigerian situation is one which has obviously noticed some improvements here and there, but we do not need to hide our head in sand like the ostrich and pretend that our country has been doing very well among the community of nations of the world. In all, our country can be said to be headed in the wrong direction in many aspects of our life. This realization sits perplexingly with the fact that Nigeria is also acclaimed as one of the most religious countries of the world. It can easily be asked whether our religion, our Christianity includes living hope? One can easily say that the God who gave us faith also endowed us with hope, but our hope appears to be continually asphyxiated by a context that is obviously dysfunctional.

68. One of the results of our country's dysfunctional system is the over-concentration on material things. Our country is like a falling house in which most people are intent on saving their heads, by securing their lives. They have no trust in the future of the country, and also none in the public order. That is why those in privileged positions among us are most often intent on first and foremost in corruptly amassing as much wealth as possible. There appears to be a scramble in all aspects of our public life and public service, such that those placed to be custodians of our common wealth have turned out to be greatest bandits in the nation. Both local and foreign researchers and writers have written extensively on the situation in Nigeria. In 1983, the famous writer, Chinua Achebe wrote the book, "The Trouble with Nigeria," castigating the then budding and profligate style of leadership in the country. Since then a noticeable improvement has not been observed rather the situation has cascaded and become much worse. About twenty years after Achebe's book was written, Karl Meier wrote another book on Nigeria with the title: "This House Fallen". And, some years after, an American anthropologist, Daniel Jordan Smith followed up with another, "The Culture of Corruption." The titles of these books alone are indicators of the context they are describing.

69. The greatest aberration of the situation in Nigeria is the extent of public and private religious practices and expressions of religious faith. Instead of the hope for salvation and eternal bliss transforming and improving our temporal existence, the reverse seems to be the case. The attitude exhibited by many of our people in service appear to attest to the picture that all our hope is on this life, and that we believe that ultimate happiness is commensurate with worldly existence. Paul's letter to the Corinthians tells us however that "if our hope in Christ is for this life alone, we are the most unfortunate of all creatures" (1Cor. 15:19). Again, many Nigerians seem to have perfected the attitude of riding to private safety in their "small boat", while neglecting the vast majority of their brethren. The reality of our existence in Nigeria is that our situation continues to

deteriorate, almost inexorably. This includes most spheres of human existence: education, infrastructure, public service, political situation, job situation, agriculture, security, and many other areas. All these are fallouts of habits and attitudes which are antithetical to “Living Hope”. Such attitudes include; selfishness, arrogance of power, greed, dishonesty, lawlessness, terrorism, and all of which generate a situation of anomy.

70. A temporal order that is so dysfunctional tarnishes the gift of God’s hope. It tends to indicate that our hope has not been very effective. But real hope cannot exist as gifts of God without having functional and positive effect in our lives here and now. It may mean that we need to fan the hope which God has given us into embers. We have to be fervent in hope and thus transform our tarnished hope to living and effective hope.

CHAPTER NINE

LIVING HOPE

71. The Hope Father, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that, “Human life is a journey. Our Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by- people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way” (cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 49).

We are called to be that light of hope close to our people. We are called to be that star of hope accessible to the poor, the lonely, the unloved, the marginalized, the forgotten, the less privileged and the less fortunate. Be that light which will guide and lead others to the true and eternal light Christ the Lord so that the Children of God will have life in abundance. (Jn.10:10)

72. In spite of the many challenges in our country we should know that all hope is not lost. Our God lives. God is faithful and there is hope. Please keep hope alive. Live in such a way that your hope which is alive and active will manifest your faith and such faith will show itself in love which bears fruit of good works. The good works will transform the environment and renew the face of the earth.

73. If you are a politician, a civil servant or one in a position of power, work in such a way that would convince and demonstrate your hope in eternal rewards. If you are in any ministry, let your work show your belief in the goodness of God’s Children, your readiness to contribute to the glorious transformation of the earth and your hope of a reward from God which does not end in this present life. True, effective and living hope should be eschatological as well as impact positively on our temporal order.

74. The Church has been commissioned to be a pillar of hope and the Church in this part of the globe has not failed on that mission. On this note, I salute the courage of our early missionaries who came here in 1885, Fr. Joseph Emilia Lutz C.S.Sp, Brother Hermas, Brother Jean Ghotto and others who came after them, Bishop Shanahan and the rest. Their lives and activities show a living hope. Temporarily, they hoped that there would be converts, that Christianity would take roots,

grow and a great church would arise over their bones and the project will succeed. Eternally, they knew that their efforts whether they bore fruits or not, assure a good reward in heaven. They believed that their faithfulness in the work of the missions will bring harvest of conversions, most likely assure eternal salvation of the Souls of their converts and presently improve the physical and social life of their converts. They built schools, hospitals, Churches and made the people civilized. One hundred years after, people are still reaping the social and spiritual benefits of their missionary work. Their living hope has been vindicated.

As the Church continues in her ministry of hope today, though we cannot solve all the problems and resolve all the challenges and difficulties of life, and it is not necessary we do, but we must always point to the solution, we must give hope.

75. As the bastion of hope, the Church engages in her ministry to teach, show good example, inspire confidence, live our faith, show love and give hope. These are the underlying motif in all the ministries we respond to, be it in the educational sector, health sector, social services, cultural encounters, economic activities, capacity building and empowerment programmes. The Church is called to be a light of hope and through our ministry people are taught what good life should be and are challenged to work hard in order to make it happen.

76. The Saints and martyrs are lights of hope as well as heroes of faith. Our blessed Mother Mary has been acclaimed as a star of hope for us. With her “yes” she opened the door of our world to God himself. (Spe Salvi, 49). We are called to join this noble course. Stand up and be counted as you live in such a way as to become a light of hope for others.

CHAPTER TEN

RECALLING THE THREE THINGS THAT LAST

77. St. Paul concludes his odes to love by indicating that the theological virtues of faith hope and love are the three things that last. Paul dwells on the relative importance of these virtues taken in isolation and concludes that the greatest of them is love. We have seen that the most fundamental is faith since it is the basis of all others, and without faith our love and hope cannot be genuine. We have also described hope as the hub of the rest of the theological virtues, and as the dynamism of faith and love. That indicates its importance. But above all, we have seen that the theological virtues are deeply interconnected. Hope enters in the definition of faith, and love can be said to be faith in action. Hope sustains both faith and love in this in-between time and gives them their effectiveness, their dynamism.

78. Awareness of the importance of these three theological virtues and of the fact that they are gifts of God should inspire us to pray for their abundance in our Christian life. The realization that faith, hope and love should have serious positive impact in our temporal life should also encourage us to nurture these gifts of God to enable them have the desired and positive effect in the improvement of our situation in Nigeria. Without a serious change of direction, our people will continue to be given more and more to despondency. But living hope is the dynamic gift that sustains our expectation of God’s promise of salvation, inspires us to positive actions to attain it, and helps us to give the same hope to all our people, and so be able to stand before God one day

in the “big boat” of eternal salvation in Christ. To achieve this we must be prepared as Blessed John Paul II wrote, “be prepared to cross the threshold of hope, not to stop before it but to let oneself be led by God himself” (cf. Crossing the Threshold of Hope, p 223-224).

PRAYER

79. Show favour, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that made fervent in hope, faith and charity, they may be ever watchful in keeping your commandments. Through our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the Unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. (From the Collect of the 16th Sunday in ordinary time).

Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, On 13th February, Ash Wednesday, in the year of our Lord, 2013.

– the Eleventh Anniversary of our Episcopate.

+MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE

Archbishop of Onitsha