

THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE



LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER 2004

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INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE

WITH gratitude and love I present to you my maiden Lenten Pastoral on one of the most central themes on the mission of our Redeemer – who came that we many have life and have it to the full. (Jn.10:10).

Our deepest gratitude is due to Almighty God whose graces to us in the Archdiocese of Onitsha and Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province has been in abundance. Ours exemplify to a reasonable extent the biblical seed that fell on good soil which produced fruit a hundredfold. (Lk. 8:8).

With humility and joy, we thank God that the Good News is spreading especially in Onitsha and in Nigeria. We still enjoy numerous vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. In the recent past, we witnessed two Episcopal ordinations, the creation of Nnewi diocese, the Episcopal Silver Jubilee of our Archbishop Emeritus and his successful retirement, the ordination of over eighty Deacons – the first fruits of our new Major Seminary – the Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary and many other events of grace. To God be all honour, glory and never ending praise forever and ever. With deep reverence and gratitude, we remember our great - early Christian Missionaries whose sweat, blood and toil enrolled us in the register of the people of God. Neither the barriers of language nor colour, wild animals nor men, mosquitoes nor early death could slow their zeal nor stop them from passing on to us the life in Christ, the patrimony which is now ours. May the Lord be their reward.

We equally thank our elder brothers who first received the faith from the White Missionaries. These include our Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful. With the Missionaries they were separated by continents but united in the blood of Christ, separated by colour but united in zeal for the Lord's work, separated by language but united in the mission of the Redeemer. Through their total commitment they won for us a legacy that is unrivalled, a royal patrimony, and a golden heritage. May Almighty God reward them both here and hereafter.

With fraternal affections I extend my immense gratitude to the members of Onitsha Archdiocesan Presbyterium. Your sacrifices for the spread of God's Kingdom on earth are

worthy of praise. Your evident love and loyalty as well as the massive support you are giving to me are very encouraging. May God be gracious to you.

My warm and sincere gratitude also goes to the religious men and women, all members of consecrated life working in the Archdiocese. With joy and enthusiasm, prayer and hard work, you have lived out your different charisms manifesting the different phases of the Lord's saving grace. May His glory ever shine in your lives and works. To the lay faithful, I owe undying thanks. I always remember the happy words of the Holy Father which states clearly that there is no such thing as an "ordinary" lay person: As God's holy people, you are called to fulfil your role in the evangelization of the world.¹ This role of yours, you have been fulfilling through great sacrifices. Words are inadequate to express my sentiments of appreciation to the members of the CMO, CWO, CBO, CGO, the various pious organisations, the CYON, and the Holy Childhood Association (HCA). May God's blessings be yours in abundance.

My dear priests, religious and lay faithful, I feel very encouraged by your faith, commitment and hard work. I feel inspired and indebted. As I promise you my prayers, love and service, I pray that God will continue to shower His graces on the Archdiocese for future strides in His services – all to His glory. And may His Kingdom more abundantly flourish in our time through Christ our Lord.

REASONS FOR THE CHOICE OF THE THEME

2. In his beautiful encyclical on the sacredness of human life, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II states inter alia:

“The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture.”²

The above statement by His Holiness reminds us that central to the mission of Jesus is the good news of life. Christ himself summarised His mission in the statement: “*I came that they may have life in abundance.*” (Jn. 10:10). It absolutely means that service to life furthers the mission of Christ.

And, desirous to further the mission of Christ, since He is the one and only high priest of the New Covenant in whose priesthood we share, and inspired by His spirit, I chose as my motto for my episcopacy, *Ut Vitam Habeant* - “*That they may have life.*” I feel obliged in this first pastoral letter to dwell on it and explain it further. It is an opportunity to explain

¹ John Paul II, Homily at Limerick, 1 October 1979

² John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, I

the meaning of life especially as Christ meant it. What is life and how do we possess life in abundance? What are the obstacles to the fullness of life? Are there solutions to the problems that attack life? How can we respond to God's invitation to have life in abundance? These and other related topics, which we will discuss in this pastoral letter, make the theme relevant.

3. Also, this theme is in line with human nature, which naturally seeks life and seeks to preserve it through the most fundamental instinct of self-preservation. The Igbo culture like many cultures affirms the primacy of life in human values. Such names like *Ndubuisi* (life is supreme), *Ndukaku* (life is the greatest wealth), and *Uzuakpundu* (the artist cannot make life) show the acceptance of life as fundamental. The Holy Scripture not only confirms the primacy of life in all that we do but also portrays life as the basis of all other possibilities. Remember the words of the Prophet which says, “*Death cannot praise you...the living thanks you as I do this day.*” (Is. 38:18-19).

Battista Mondin in his work on philosophical anthropology summarises the importance of life as he writes:

“of all the forms of human action, the most elementary and fundamental one, and the one which at the same time emerges as the most complex and rich with content is life.”³

Yes, life is simple, yet complex; it is the most elementary yet the most fundamental and the basis of any other thing we do. This is truly so because life itself is God. (Jn. 14:6). Life comes from God (Jn. 1:4). Life has infinite value because it came from life itself (Gen. 2:7). Remember God blew into the nostrils of man the breath of life so man became a living being. It follows then that every human person is a living image of the Creator. Life is and a gift; it is an invitation to freedom responsibility.⁴

4. If life has tremendous value then one is amazed at realising how life in all its dimensions is trivialized in our country, Nigeria and our State, Anambra. The economic, political and social situation today in our country makes it very difficult for people to preserve their lives and live wholesome lives. This situation calls for concern and action. And, it is my hope that this short pastoral letter will lead the faithful and all men and women of goodwill especially in our State to appreciate life in its fullness as a special gift of God, and hence feel the obligation to preserve and nurture it to God's greater glory.

ORIGIN, MEANING AND TYPES OF LIFE

Meaning and Types of Life:

³ Mondin, B., *Philosophical Anthropology*, Rome: Urbaniana Press, 1985 p.25

⁴ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83.

5. Life is the principle, which essentially differentiates organic and inorganic things. The difference between a stone, a piece of wood on the land and a tree, a dog and a human being on the other hand is that the former is not living while the latter is living. We say in ordinary language that a stone is lifeless and that a human being is a living creature. This means that a stone cannot move, eat, or drink, but a human being can do all these things.

Life is the principle, which makes it possible for human beings to move, to think and to sense. It is also the principle that makes such activities to be possible in all grades of living beings.

TYPES OF LIFE:

Vegetative, Sensitive and Rational Life:

6. From our common experience it is clear that things powered by life principle are very different. A plant can sprout, grow, bear fruits and die. This is called vegetative life. An animal, on the other hand, can do all a tree can do, but in addition has senses and can move from place to place without being rooted in one place. This is called sensitive life. Much more complex than the others, a human being possesses vegetative life, sensitive life and in addition to all these, he can also reason. This is called rational life. The human person therefore has rational life. So we can talk of vegetative, sensitive and rational life on the natural level.

Spiritual and Material Life:

7. Besides life on the natural level, there is also spiritual level. On the spiritual level we can talk of spiritual life, that is, life in the spirit. The human person is not an aggregate of matter nor made of material visible body only. The Sacred Scripture tells us that, "*God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him.*" (Gen. 1:27). Again, the bible tells us that this man who is the image of God, the visible picture of the invisible God, is endowed with the "Breath of life" when the Lord formed man...He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and so man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7).

8. It is this divine quality in man that is called the human soul. This is the life of God in man, which makes him a thinking being different from ordinary animals. Soul is not material but spiritual. When life refers to the soul or to the spiritual side of man, it is called spiritual life. The spiritual life does not mean that which has no influence on the material side of man, on the contrary it means that which is the pivotal side of man's life; it is at the centre of life because it controls every act of man as man. The human being is both material and spiritual. The spiritual side of man is the image of God in man since God is spirit. The spiritual side of man makes him a special creature, makes him a unique being. "*Men and women are unique in this world; we alone can appreciate the wonder of creation, can love, can choose, can seek grasp the meaning of life and can come to know the God who made*

us.⁵ Again, the human person is unique in that he resembles the angels and material beings. He is the link between the spiritual and material world. Man is important in the scheme of things because God has made him so. More wonderful again is the fact that the Creator speaks to human beings as friends and invites us into a personal relationship⁶ with him.

9. Man is the only creature on earth that can pray and contemplate the divine. Man shares and enjoys the life of God even while on earth. This is spiritual life, which gives strength and direction to man's entire life. Since God invites man to personal relationship, man's life is important to God and should be to all God's children.

Heavenly and Earthly Life:

10. Heavenly life refers to life in heaven, while earthly life refers to life on earth. Human beings are not given direct knowledge of the former, we can only infer from this earthly life. But the Scriptures give enough indications to support our faith in the existence of heavenly life. Jesus Christ assures His disciples at the Last Supper that He will come to take them. (Jn. 14:3). Saint John tells us that we shall see God as He really is. (I Jn. 3:2). This implies an experience of God, which makes us share His life intimately in a higher plane. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that all our fathers in faith were expecting life in the heavenly Jerusalem. (Heb. 11:14-16).

11. Human reason and divine revelation tell us that man's earthly life is a preparation for his heavenly life. Our destination is heavenly life, for here we have no lasting city. Nevertheless, that does not mean that earthly life is useless. Not at all, since, it is through our performance in this earthly life that we gain admittance into the heavenly. So earthly life is very important for all the children of God. The earth itself is God's property; it does not belong to man.

Origin of Life:

12. The problem of the origin of life is as old as man himself. According to Battista Mondin,

"To the problem of life's origin, scientists (but not only scientists) have given many solutions which yet can be reduced to four fundamental types:

- 1) Direct creation on the part of God;
- 2) Evolution according to a plan stabilized by God;
- 3) Spontaneous generation

⁵ Irish Episcopal Conference, *The Wonder of Life*, (2003) pg. 1

⁶ cf. Vatican II *Dei Verbum*, on *Divine Revelation*, 2.

4) Generation or evolution by pure chance,"⁷

Ordinary human reason helps us to discern that of the four solutions presented, the rest of the solutions are dependent on the first namely: that God created life. Life came from life since God is life itself.

13. In addition, the fundamental part of Christian faith teaches us that life originates from God. The doctrine of creation teaches that God created the whole of existence out of nothing. One of the things He created is life. Strictly speaking, creation does not mean fashioning one thing from another material as people sometimes imply in common language. Creation is a very specific concept, applicable only to God.

14. Human beings can fabricate, invent something new from something else, but to create means to bring from non-existence to existence. It means to bring something where there is nothing at all. It is clear that only an infinitely powerful being can do this. So creation is a specific act that only God can perform because He is all-powerful. Life, therefore, is part of this immense power. In ordinary life, we observe generation of new life in animals, in plants and in human beings but this type of secondary generation is due to the capacity God has already created into these beings to increase and multiply. Consequently, it means that if God is the ultimate origin of life, then life is His OW: God has a patent on our lives. We are "really our own. We are responsible to some other person for the gift of life. Such a tremendous gift belongs not to us but to God.'

15. In the book of Genesis the Creator rejoices in the abundance of life on earth as after each day of creation, "*God saw that it was good.*"

The climax came after the creation of human life in the image and likeness of God. It was only then He saw everything He created and it was very good. (Gen. 1:31).

GOOD NEWS OF LIFE IN CHRIST: LIFE IN ABUNDANCE

16. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God, each bears the "breath of life" of God, each is invited to a personal relationship with God thus each person is infinitely precious to God as each shares a part of the Infinite Being. From the beginning of creation God created and invited man to participate in the fullness of divine life starting from his earthly existence. The Holy Father reminds us in these words:

"Man is called to the fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of life even in its temporal

⁷ Battista Mondin, op. cit. p.41

phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. "⁸

17. Sacred Scriptures attest to the fact that God provided abundant life for man even in the temporal sphere. Thus the Scripture says: "For God did not create death, He takes no pleasure in destroying the living." (cf. Wis. 1:13-15). Again the book of Genesis narrates to us how God provided for man in the Garden of Eden, causing to grow every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden.... (Gen. 2:8-9).

18. For a while the human person enjoyed fullness of life in God's presence but did not heed God's warning not to eat of the fruit of good and evil to avoid death. (Gen. 2:17).

So the gospel of life proclaimed in the beginning when man was created in the image and likeness of God for a destiny of full and perfect life is contradicted by the painful experience of death, which enters the world and casts its shadow of meaninglessness over man's entire existence.⁹

19. God did not abandon man rather through His chosen people He renewed His promise to give man life in abundance. The Exodus event, the deliverance of God's people from slavery to freedom were steps towards fulfilling this promise. In the fullness of time, God spoke to us through His Son (Jesus Christ) whom He made heir of all things and through whom He created the universe. (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ came into the world to teach us how to live this life to the full. He came to save us and teach us the way back to His Father, after the first derailment from the intention of God in the sin of our first parents. His salvation includes a supreme offering - the offering of His life to give us fullness of life. He first became Emmanuel (God-with-us), offered himself for us, even while we were still sinners, went about teaching and doing good. All these He did in order to teach us how to live, how to nurture the life we have received from God. Jesus cared very much for the continuation of this life. He left us the Sacraments and other wonderful means of holiness so that we can possess fullness of life in Him.

20. Jesus Christ, the God from God, the Light from Light, the True God from True God is the source of the life of God in man. Through Him, with Him and in Him the life of God took flesh in man (Jn. 1:14) and dwelt with man full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:17). Jesus Christ is the way of the life of God in man, He is the truth of the life of God in man; He is the resurrection of the life of God in man (cf. Jn. 14:6; 11:25).

⁸ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 2.

⁹ cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 7.

21. Beloved in Christ, Jesus Christ has reconciled us with God and enjoined us to live like Him. He is our model. It is the extent to which we actualise this modelling to Christ that we are living the life of Christ, the true Christian life, which ensures life in abundance. When we live in Christ, we are new creatures (II Cor.5:17); the Spirit is poured into our hearts crying Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6); we will abide in Him and bear abundant fruit (Jn. 15:5). Christ's life is life to the full, it is not partial life, it is life in abundance. Being life in abundance, no aspect of life is excluded from its sanctifying influence. Since Christ's life is life in its fullness as well as a life of reconciliation and transformation, it follows that in Christ, all Christians have inherited the ministry of reconciliation

22. In our own case, the appeal which God is making to us is: be reconciled with the life of the Father, through the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that the face of our great Archdiocese, our State and our Country be renewed by the power of the love and light coming from the life of God. When we live the life of Christ and reconcile others to do the same, we will have life, our society will be transformed and God will be glorified.

23. The problem is that some Christians very often confine the Christian life to the special moments of prayer, of worship, of praises and so on. Such attitude is totally wrong. Life in Christ is like a leaven, which grows and fills all available spaces. If we properly live our life in Christ, all facets of the society as well as all aspects of human existence, social, political, ecclesiastical, economic, etc, must feel its positive influence. It is only false Christianity that abandons the principles of faith in normal daily life, only to resurrect the same principles in the Church premises.

24 Genuine spiritual life must have sound influence on material life. Life in full must include how we live here and now with our neighbours, our children, our parents, our business-partners, our environment, our state, our country, in fact, it includes everything that concerns us as human beings. The life of Jesus is the life of God, which is the light of men. Hence the Scripture says: "what came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light shines in the darkness, a light that darkness could not overpower." (Jn. 1:4-5). Indeed, when we live or participate in the life of Christ our lives will become light to the world. It is when we have lived that life genuinely here and now that the same goodness of life will extend to the heavenly plane. This fulfils what Christ himself said to Martha "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, even if he dies, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (Jn. 11:25-26). For the Christian, life is not terminated even at death, it is only changed. Christ remains the truth and the life (In. 14:6) whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16). This belief must show in action, in the way we live. Our earthly life is important to God; we cannot therefore live anyhow and hope thereafter to gain eternal life in heaven.

25. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II emphasizing that all aspects of our life must be involved if we hope to gain from the abundance of life in Jesus, reminds us that.

When Jesus presents the heart of his redemptive mission, He says: "I come that they may have life and have it abundantly." (In. 10:10) in truth, he is referring to that "new" and "eternal life which consists in communion with the Father, to which every person is freely called in the Son by the power of the sanctifying Spirit. It is precisely in this life that all aspects and stages of human life achieve their full significance."¹⁰

In all, Christ came from the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit to make us shares in the life of God, the extent to which we appreciate this precious gift and live it out faith, to that extent we are living life to full.

OBSTACLES TO FULLNESS OF LIFE IN CHRIST

26. The venerable Fathers of the Second Vatican Council enumerated some obstacles to the realisation of fullness of life, ways through which life is deliberately destroyed or irresponsibly endangered. Hence, they said:

"The varieties of crime are numerous: all offences against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and wilful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offences against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like the Fathers described as criminal acts which poison civilisation and debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honour of the creator."¹¹

The Nigerian society is very familiar with most of these crimes and many more not mentioned by the Fathers. In fact, one of the main problems in Nigeria is failure to value life in its fullness, the type Christ wants for us and failure to appreciate life as a gift from God and nurture it.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, I.

¹¹ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 27

The many obstacles to the realisation of full life in Christ in Nigeria show itself in of death in Nigeria manifests itself in various ways, which include:

The Culture of Violence:

27. This can be seen in the readiness of people to turn violent or take laws into their hands in dealing with other people. It shows itself in the absence of patience, violence at the least provocation, disregard for due process, violent demonstrations, distrust for the legal order, etc.

Armed Robbery:

28 The culture of death shows itself in the rampant cases of armed robbery, hired assassinations, politically motivated assassinations and other violent crimes. These lead to insecurity, undue deprivation and very frequently to the loss of innocent lives.

Disrespect for the Life of Others:

29 The lack of courtesy and respect in dealing with fellow human beings, in speech and in action is seen in every area of our public life. This attitude of disrespect is common in family circles especially in its extended form, in public areas like institutions, in the schools and in the media – both print and electronic media. These days it does not seem to be part of our upbringing to teach children how to speak with due respect and deference to all human beings. Also disrespect for the life of others is seen in our careless driving, high rate of fatal accidents on our roads, frequent capital punishments and lynching of suspected offenders.

Sins Against Children:

30 In our society children are very manhandled under the pretext of Spare rod and spoil the child. We should know excessive use of force in correcting child can never yield positive results. W children do, they often learn from adults Examples should speak louder than words Adults are often not better even in the aspects where they take it upon themselves to punish children corporally. Whenever the need compels one to use corporal punishment, it should be done with moderation. This rule applies to all children including house helps who are often meted with inhuman treatment.

Poor Health Services:

31 Failure to value and respect life shows itself in our very poor health services. This is observable from the many ill-equipped and dirty hospitals, costly health services and las drugs, not a few deaths result from these.

Against the Unborn:

32. The practice of abortion in all its types and ramifications is "permissible" in Nigeria, This often tantamount to compromising the life of the unborn for the comfort or well-being of others, both men and women. The Pope has often called on all men and women of goodwill to ensure the protection of human life from its conception to its natural end,

We in Nigeria cannot hope to achieve fullness of life when we have utter disrespect for life and when we encourage the massacre of defenseless unborn children,

Denial of Hope:

33 Hope is toner to life. It is the last thing, which anybody would like to be absent or dead in a human being. Hope helps to instil zest in human being, but especially the young. The situations where the young, are made to lose hope for better future is a frontal attack to the fullness of life. It leads to despondency and aimlessness.

34 Not a few Nigerian graduates are roaming the streets without work. Many young people cannot gain admission into higher educational institutions, those who have gained admission are disturbed/interrupted in their quest for higher education by constant strikes, union unrests and political instability. While, many who have graduated have no hope of self-employment or government employment. Moreover, many states in the country have no clearly defined programme for the youth. This can be very disheartening. The gospel of life is a gospel of hope, which offers a promise that is more powerful than any suffering or hardship.¹² It is very difficult to achieve a meaningful life without hope.

Denial of Proper Dignity:

35 Nigeria has been described as one of the countries where human right is constantly abused. Insecurity, poverty and frustration have increased acts of inhumanity to man. Disrespect for human right and rampant violation of the same is a common occurrence. People are often forced or made by circumstances to subject themselves to conditions that are inimical to life, conditions that are unworthy of any human life. Such conditions include poor and unhealthy living conditions, jobs that are very difficult and very poorly paid for and dependencies based on exploitation. In all, whatever degrades human dignity cannot generate quality life.

¹² cf. Irish Episcopal Conference, op. cit. p.10

Mismanagement of Common Good:

36. Selfishness, together with abuse of power has led to gross mismanagement of the common good. There is evidence of lack of sense of priority in dispensing the common good. This is a huge obstacle to life in abundance.

Corruption:

37. In spite of the many laws against corruption, Nigeria has been classified as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption remains a bane of our society. There is sometimes outright misappropriation of public funds. The society is so corrupt today that some public office holders are so dubiously rich that their legitimate earnings cannot account for one percent (1%) of their wealth. Yet the society lauds them as successful sons and daughters and confers Chieftaincy titles on them. This attitude encourages people to do the same, which leads to the frittering of public funds that would have been used for the enrichment of the life of the populace.

Political Gangsterism:

38 As Nigeria continues her journey of democratic experimentation, different types of crimes are noticed in the political arena. These crimes range from stealing of electoral mandates by rigging, to outright murder of political opponents; from abduction of political office holders with the aid of the powerful in the society to the control of the mass media and all that. All these and the like prevent the people from exercising their democratic rights that will lead to the improvement of their lives.

Extortion and Misuse of Public Office:

39 Public office meant to promote and protect the common good and enhance the quality of life of the people is often abused. It is seen as a position of power and privilege meant for exploiting the masses. Misuse of public office to extort from the people can easily be seen from the attitude of the Police (who sometimes blame accidental discharge for their failure to control their anger) the Customs, and different offices meant to improve different dimensions of our public life.

Poor Educational Opportunities/ Facilities:

40 The deplorable state of education especially in the Eastern States leaves much to be desired. Just a few years ago, Anambra State was the only state in Nigeria where primary and secondary schools closed for one full academic year. No satisfactory reasons were given except perhaps the political convenience of the ruling class.

Poor educational opportunities and facilities lead to failure and frustration among the youth, increases the number of school dropouts and never-do-wells, diminishes hope, endangers life and property as well as slows down the speed of progress in the society.

Economic Stagnation:

41 The poor state of our economy for so long, now have engendered no real improvement in the material life of the people, Consequent on this, poverty is increasing even in the midst of wealth, economic growth is very minimal and crime is indirectly encouraged. This situation frustrates the journey to fullness of life, it leads to emptiness and loss of meaning.

Discrimination in Public Life:

42 The practice of discrimination based on ethnicity or religion seems to be part of our public life. Whenever such discrimination shows itself in appointments and promotions, it leads to frustration and backwardness with a blow on the culture of excellence. When such is prevalent, the society loses, the individuals maltreated are bitter; patriotism suffers and life in common becomes increasingly difficult.

Inadequate Religious Upbringing:

43 Failure to act based on the demands of Christianity can sometimes be the result of insufficient catechesis. When people have shallow knowledge of the demands of the Christian faith, they do not see that their faith is implicated in what they do.

The compartmentalization of life into the religious and spiritual, the material and worldly, with each side being on its own can many a time reveal ignorance of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

LIFE: A GIFT AND A RESPONSIBILITY

44 Human life is a precious gift from God. It is a participation in the life of God; it is also a responsibility to share love and to serve. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II emphasises this point when he reminds us that life in its deeper meaning is utter gratuitous, it is a gift, it is beautiful, and it is an invitation to freedom and responsibility."¹³

When we accept life as a gift we discover and accept the responsibility that goes with life, which is the duty to preserve and improve it. This responsibility is more on the part of the individual but also a duty on the part of the Family, the Church, the Society and the Government. The Holy Father summarises this gift and responsibility when he says:

"through the works, the actions and the very person of Jesus man is giving the possibility of knowing the complete truth concerning the value of human life from this "source," he receives, in particular, the capacity to "accomplish" this truth perfectly, that is, to accept and

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83,

fulfil completely the responsibility of loving and serving, of defending and promoting human life. "¹⁴

45 Truly human life is a gift to be protected, preserved and improved but above all, it is a gift to be lived. When God created our first parents providing them with life in abundance, He advised them not to eat from the tree of good and evil (Gen. 1:17) when they disobeyed and ate the fruit, God drove them out of the garden so that they may not eat of the fruit of life (Gen. 3:22-23) and perpetuate evil forever.

46 In the New Testament, in our own days God has provided us with the tree of life in the tree of the Cross of Christ. Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified on the cross where He destroyed our sin and death to give us life. Now it is our turn to crucify the life of the flesh with its evil and sinful inclinations at the CROSS, so as to exchange it for the life of Christ, which is life in its fullness.

47 It is when we live the life of Christ we can say with the great apostle Saint Paul. “ have been crucified with Christ, yet I am alive, yet it is no longer I but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living subject to the limitations of human nature, *I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Gal. 2:20-21). If we model our lives after the life of Christ, living the life of Christ and respecting our own lives and the lives of others including friends, relations, neighbours and strangers, living the life of pure religion (Jas 1:27) then we will be fulfilling our responsibility towards life and responding adequately to the gift and wonder of life.

48 THE FAMILY has a tremendous responsibility towards life. The family is the cradle of life. It is where life begins, in fact, where all of us began. So great is this family origin of life that God himself obeyed it. Jesus Christ the Son of God began His life in the Holy Family of Mary and Joseph. The family therefore remains the domestic Church where we must be good nurturing wood upbringing, good moral and religious instruction about life learning its origin and its demands, The Holy Family of Nazareth, which placed God first in all their endeavors, should be the model for all the families.

49 THE SOCIETY is made up of many families. The Government has the delegated Done of the individuals, families and groups to take care of the society. It is the duty of the Government to provide security of life and property, security of freedom of religion and belie, and improvement of the quality of life through the common wood.

50 THE CHURCH is the People of God made up of families from communities of society. It is the mystical body of Christ of which we are members. It is the duty of the Church to give us the holy instructions about the life of God. The Church has the privileged responsibility to instruct the human person on the way to the fullness of life in Christ. Also,

¹⁴ Ibid. 29

the Church shows by example how to realize this fullness of life, being involved in education, in health services, in communication, in making peace and above all, in providing the Sacramental life for the people.

The Sacraments provide life in abundance. Christ instituted the Sacraments to nourish true life in the believers. He assures us that unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will have no life in you (In. 6:53). Again He says, that unless a man is born again by water and the Holy Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). Baptism, the Eucharist and other Sacraments, Christ provides us through the Church to nourish life in abundance and ensure eternal life. Faith is absolutely needed to benefit from this life of God, which the Father gives us in the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Church.

Nevertheless it goes without saying that life is a collective responsibility of the individual, the Government, the Church and the Society.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS THAT ATTACK LIFE

51 As a way of achieving fullness of life, we hereby propose some solutions to the problems, which attack life and frustrate God's loving design for the human person even in this earthly sphere.

Going Back to Christ:

52 Saint John tells us “This is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (Jn. 17:3). The life of God, which is passed on to us in Baptism, invites us to nourish it constantly by responding to it faithfully, both individually and communally through prayer, the celebration of the Sacraments and evangelical witness. We have to learn from our model, Jesus Christ, the perfect image of the Father, how to live a life of sacrifice. We have to ask ourselves why we have so many Christians but little improvement and much evil in our society. Part of the reason is that we have not allowed our Christian religion to have reasonable effect in our lives. Through imitating Christ, our lives will be changed and our society transformed.

Upholding the Ideals of Service:

53 The Scripture testifies, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.” (I Jn. 5:11). Whoever does not possess the Son of God does not have life (I Jn. 5:12). The life of the Son of God is the life of service, the life of one who came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for others. The life of every Christian should be the life of offering for his brothers and sisters just like the life of Christ. Leadership for the Christian should be an opportunity to do good works for the betterment and well-being of his fellow men and women.

54 Two years ago, 2002, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in his Lenten Message warns us, that since we have received this life freely, we must in turn offer it freely to our brothers and sisters. This is what Jesus asked of the disciples when He sent them out as His witnesses in the world. And the first gift to be given is the gift of a holy life, bearing witness to the freely given love of God. When we as believers respond to the impulse to give ourselves and services to our brothers and sisters, we experience profound interior satisfaction, which leads to the fullness of life.

Value Human Life:

55 God created us in His image and invites us at the end of this earthly life to share with Him eternally, the glorious life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christ loved us so much that He gave His life for us. Through His incarnation we became the adopted sons and daughters of God. If we understand this, we should know that our life belongs to God. This demands absolute respect for our own life and that of others.

If we value the treasure and gift that is life then we should defend human life and the dignity of the human person in the unborn, in the young, in the sick, in the poor...in all humans and at all times.

Promote Brotherly Love:

56 Christ gave His followers a new amendment and by this commandment which is to love one another, all will know the disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). No doubt, cultivating this virtue of love will help to solve most of the problems that make life difficult in this country, Nigeria and the world at large.

Saint James reminds us that true religion which is undefiled before God the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself uncontaminated by this world. (Jas. 1:27). Also brotherly love implies promoting works of mercy like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and being missionary in action that is proclaiming the good news to our brothers and sisters. These will give life in abundance.

Accepting God's Will:

57 God's love for us invites us to filial trust and total resignation to the paternal and providential designs of God in our lives. Life on earth is problematic, it is finite, it is imperfect. This is so because we have here no lasting city. There are problems endemic to life here on earth since our true home is in heaven. It is our duty to improve life but God has not promised to remove all the problems for us.

The promise of the prayer houses and miracle homes to solve all human problems is to say the least vain and deceptive. While we work for the wholistic improvement of life, we must be humble enough to accept God's will at all times. In his will is our peace! It is clear that

if we accept God's will with faith, we will realize life in abundance. God is able to provide for us at each point in time, by means of His power working in us, He is able to do so much more than we can ever ask or even think of. (Eph. 3:20).

58 God created all things out of nothing, liberated His chosen people from bondage and slavery, fed His people in the wilderness with manna from heaven, quenched their thirst with water from the rock, ...came to us in Jesus Christ to give us life and promised to be with us always till the end of time (Mtt. 28:20). What else can He not do for us? Christ has advised us "do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me" (Jn. 14:1). Faith in the God of life and total surrender to His divine will, will fullness of life for us both here and hereafter

Continued Growth in The Knowledge and Practice of the Faith:

59 Faith is a gift from God. But knowledge of the rudiments of the Christian faith is an ongoing process. We can adapt the words of the Scriptures and ask, how can one know unless he is taught and how can he be taught unless he decides to learn? It is very necessary to understand our faith through continuous study, reflection and meditation. Both infused and acquired virtues need constant practice for their internalization and retention. We need to practice our faith by making use of all the means of growth in the spiritual life namely the Sacraments, the Sacramentals and in a special way devotion to Mary, the Queen of Peace.

SOME PROJECTS OF THE ARCH DIOCESE IN SERVICE OF LIFE

60 Faith without good works is dead, the Scripture says. And any theory that cannot be translated into action is at best utopian. Therefore, in pursuance of the demands of the gospel of life (which is at the heart of Jesus' message) the Archdiocese has placed at the service of the people, many projects meant to improve life.

Sacraments and Sacramentals:

61 The Church in the Archdiocese has continued to improve on the great foundation of our ancestors in the faith by making more efforts to provide Sacraments and Sacramentals for the people. This year we have carved out eight new parishes to bring the priest and Sacraments nearer to the people. We have encouraged the building of more Chapels of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration so that the Eucharistic Lord will be closer to the people. Please make more use of these facilities.

Improvement of Educational Facilities:

62 We have made a priority the improvement of educational programmes. This will not only help to liberate the youth from ignorance but will help them to know more about life

in general and their faith in particular. Better education will give a great future to the youth, give them hope and better life.

Improvement of Health Services:

63 There is planned and consistent effort to improve the Archdiocesan Health Services in terms of administration, drugs and other facilities.

Communications Services:

64 This is the age of communications (information) technology. Communication is very important in the education of the masses. The Archdiocese will be more and more involved in the communication services. Modern means of communication as an instrument of evangelisation can be a vehicle of truth and service to the people in the face of half-truths and dishonesty, which sometimes come from the public media. To teach the truth is in consonance with the mission of Christ who came that they may have life in abundance.

Appeal and Gratitude:

65 We appeal to all the sons and daughters of the Archdiocese both those at home and those in diaspora to give their maximum cooperation to the new administration so as to fulfil Christ's mission to the people. We appeal to the priests and religious working in the Archdiocese as well as all the friends of the Archdiocese for prayers and cooperation. We thank all of you once again for your great encouragement and cooperation.

ARCHDIOCESAN SYNOD

66 May I seize this opportunity to announce to you the First Archdiocesan Synod which will be inaugurated this year 2004 and concluded next year 2005. We request your prayers and active participation.

PRAYER

67 May the Blessed Trinity, the God of love and life, who created man in love and redeemed him in the wonder of the incarnation and life in Christ, grant all of you His peace, His love and His life in abundance through Christ our Lord. And may the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, the Queen of Peace, the Mother of Christ intercede for us so that we may have the fullness of life which her Son came to give us.

Given this day, the 25th of February 2004, Ash Wednesday, At Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha, Nigeria.

MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE

Archbishop of Onitsha.