

THE MEASURE OF LOVE



PASTORAL LETTER 2005

OF

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THE MEASURE OF LOVE

INTRODUCTION

1. The holy season of Lent affords me another opportunity to address you my beloved brothers and sisters, sons and daughters in the Lord, through this pastoral letter dealing on a great and vital theme of our Christian life and relating even to the very identity of God Himself.

Our theme this Year of the Holy Eucharist is: THE MEASURE OF LOVE. The Scripture tells us that, "God is love" (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8). Love is also the evidence that we know God, since "whoever does not love does not know God" (cf. 1 Jn.4:8).

In his Apostolic Letter "Mane Nobiscum Domine", the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II states inter alia "It is not by chance that the Gospel of Saint John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the "Washing of feet" (cf. Jn.13: 1-20): By bending down to wash the feet of His disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally" (cf. Mane Nobiscum Domine No. 28). And, this washing of the feet Jesus concludes with a new commandment as if to explain it more clearly, And now I give you a new commandment, love one another (cf. In.13: 34). According to the Master, Love is what will identify us as His true disciples (cf. In.13: 35).

Love is the nature and message of the Holy Eucharist, love is the identity of God, and "love is our Christian vocation" (cf. Autobiography of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus in the Office of Reading October 1: Memorial of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus).

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2. With humility and deep sense of gratitude, I hereby acknowledge the help, cooperation and solidarity, which I received in this ministry from you - the priests, religious men and women and Christ's lay faithful –in the past one year. Your appreciation of my maiden Lenten Pastoral through writings, words of appreciation and copious use in schools and Churches has been a source of encouragement to me. I thank God for what He has done for you with that Lenten Pastoral and pray that He will do more for us with this recent pastoral.

3. We recall with immense gratitude the enthusiasm and approval with which you welcomed and followed the pastoral initiatives, activities and events of the past year. Some of these include: the On-going Spiritual Formation for priests, the spiritual and corporate retreats, your support for Archdiocesan projects, the reorganization of the Health Services system and CWO Administration, your active participation in the Cathedralicum to mention but a few. Can I forget the way the Archdiocese welcomed my reception of the Pallium from the Holy Father? I remain grateful. Your loving support encourages, stimulates as well as

challenges me. May the boundless love of God continue to envelop you, sustain, bless and manifest in all your actions."

GIVING THANKS!

4. To God Almighty, the giver of all good gifts, the sustainer of goodness whose grace enables frail, fragile, unworthy instruments to work for His worthy cause, to Him be glory, honour and never-ending praise forever and ever -Amen! We are no less grateful to all through whose instrumentality God has made the progress possible. May God bless you all.

We are to be further grateful to God for His superabundant graces on the Archdiocese of Onitsha and Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province. The vocations to the Catholic priesthood, active religious life and monastic life are still on the increase. Services to the poor in parishes and institutions are becoming a welcome culture and devotion to the Eucharistic Lord is spreading to more communities. Many more of them are building Chapels of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. We thank God for His love.

5. We reaffirm our indebtedness to our hero-Missionaries past. Their lives, labour and toil have not been in vain, for over their bones God has built a mighty Church."1. May their total commitment ever spur us to become worthy ambassadors of the love of Christ; the love they professed with their blood.

THE ARCHDIOCESAN SYNOD

6. This year of the Lord, 2005, the Archdiocese is having her first ever Diocesan Synod, which was already inaugurated last year. The Synod is a permanent institution in the Church. The origin of Diocesan Synod can be traced back to the fourth century it is therefore, not a new invention or a new phenomenon.

MEANING:

7. In simple terms Synod can be defined as one of the administrative organs in the Church. But unlike Synod of Bishops which involves only a group of Bishops selected from different parts of the world to meet and promote the close relationship between the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops as well as assist the Roman Pontiff in his administrative work (cf. C. 342), the Diocesan Synod is an assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ's faithful of a particular Church which, for the good of the whole Diocesan community, assists the Bishop in the administration of the Diocese (cf. C.460).

AIM/PURPOSE:

8. The aim of the Diocesan Synod is to help the Bishop in carrying out his ministry:

- by adapting the laws and norms of the Universal Church to local conditions,
- by indicating the policy and programme of apostolic work in the Diocese,
- by resolving difficulties encountered in the apostolate and administration,
- by giving impetus to general projects and undertakings, and,
- by correcting errors in doctrine and morals.²

In a word, the aim is to assist the Diocesan Bishop spread the love of God through the Church.

THE THEME:

9. The theme of our First Archdiocesan Synod is “EVANGELISATION IN ONITSHA ARCHDIOCESE TODAY.” In other words, how far are we continuing the mission of the Redeemer who out of love for sinful man gave His life for His friends (cf. Jn.15: 13). How far are we carrying out the mandate of the Lord, “Go teach ye all nations?” (cf. Mt.28: 16). How far are we fulfilling the new commandment "love... as I have loved you?" (cf. Jn.13: 34). These make the Synod theme relevant

But how has Christ loved us? What is the measure of love? What is the true meaning of love? Are there different kinds of love? Is love really fundamental in our lives? What can contribute to the absence of love? What then can increase the presence of love? These and other related issues we are going to discuss in this Pastoral Letter.

REASONS FOR THE CHOICE OF THE THEME

CENTRALITY OF LOVE

10. Love is central in our lives as children of God more so as Christians. In the history of creation, the mystery of the incarnation and the economy of salvation divine love manifest itself. We can summarise all as the story of divine love in action.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

11. "God's very act of creation is His primary act of loving, of freely expressing His own value and goodness in the created world".³ Thus, God created us out of love. The free expression of God's love reached its climax in the creation of humanity hence "In the image of God He created them" (cf. Gn.1: 27). In the history of creation, covenant and election of the people of Israel divine love is also manifested. Man's inadequate response to the invitation to love God and neighbour attracted the expression of divine love as the justice of God. But that justice moves reality into the loving, transformation of human failure by divine forgiveness and mercy, which are further expressions of His creative, love, *Emphasis mine*). This triangular movement of God's love is expressed in the preface of the Mass - *In love You created man, in justice you condemned him but in mercy You redeemed him,*

12. In Jesus the incarnate expression of divine love and mercy we are taught the centrality of love in our lives and our relationship with God. Jesus teaches us that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), whoever loves is a child of God and knows God (cf. 1 Jn.4.7). He gives the Apostles and all His followers a mandate to love one another, this is the sign of discipleship since by "*this all men will know that you are my disciples*" (cf. Jn.13: 35). Saint Paul elaborating on the teachings of Christ explains that love is the highest and best of virtues (cf. 1 Cor 13:13).

URGENT NEED

13. Since love is very central in our lives, the aim of the theme is to bring Christians back to their roots. It is to call us back to love otherwise we may be beating about the bush by losing the fundamentals of what we are doing and of who and what we are. In our Nigerian context today, this theme becomes more relevant giving the growing culture among many Nigerians to dwell on and be lost in the superficial and peripheral. It is necessary to counter this attitude. Again, given that our authenticity as Christians depends a lot on how much we are near to the fundamentals of our being as followers of Christ, especially how much we

obey the commandment of love this Pastoral Letter is aimed at encouraging Christians to continue striving towards perfection by loving God and neighbour in accordance with God's command.

14. Yes, this Year of the Holy Eucharist, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, (in his message for the World Day of Peace) calls us to win the world with the weapons of love. He reminds us with the Fathers of the Vatican Council that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love.⁷ The need for this virtue love', in our world today cannot be overemphasized.

THE MEANING OF LOVE

15. Words such as 'Love' that are so much in popular usage end up acquiring several shades of meaning. Love is a term which today is very much misunderstood, very much used and abused. Very often, some use the word love in reference to members of the opposite sex; sometimes, the word is perverted to mean lust.' Again, many a time, people use the word love to signify passion, desire, friendliness, intimacy, attachment, satisfaction, esteem or mere emotion. Some of these can express aspects of love when situated and understood in their proper context and perspective. But none of the above is the meaning of love.

16. True love is a virtue. True love involves altruism and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the other. The ultimate other is God Himself. True love finds its origin and fulfilment in God, since God is love. If we understand this scriptural statement that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), then every other aspect of love will be properly situated in its real perspective.

17. To understand more, love is a completely positive value. Positive value is one that never leads to any negative consequence. Love is also an absolute value. An absolute value is contrasted with relative value, whose beauty or goodness depends on circumstances or contexts. Absolute value entails that the value cannot lead to negative effects or consequences. It follows that when something negative is mixed with love, then it is detraction from the beauty of love. In real terms, what is good is integrally so, while, what is bad is so because of some defect. ⁸ The good is wholly good, the bad is bad because of some defect in what is good. Love is wholly good it cannot contain an admixture of what is not positive or good if it is to be true love.

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LOVE'S MEASURE

18. As finite and limited human beings, we cannot really love too much, given the nature of love. Since God is love, love is thus limitless (like God), it is a dynamo whose force cannot be measured hence the measure of love is that it is without measure. The meaning of love is that God is love (cf. 1 Jn.4:8), we are participating in His being since He created us in His image (cf. Gn.1: 27). To the extent we participate well to that extent we are authentic and real beings in our essence. Love is therefore, the measure of our lives. God is the measure of love. God is infinite, without measure. The measure of love is clear: it is without measure!

KINDS OF LOVE

19. Love as a word is very rich in meaning. It has many dimensions. Due partly to its importance, its necessity, its centrality and its absolute nature, love is sometimes highly misunderstood and misapplied. In popular usage love is a very wide and sometimes, nebulous word. Often, many not so positive actions, desires, tendencies and some completely negative ones go in the name of love. Philosophical and theological studies have elaborated on the word, term and concept of love. Thus, it is necessary to specify not only the meaning of love but to distinguish between different kinds of love and to delineate the type of things, emotions, feelings, etc that can be designated by the term love.

20. The most elaborate and yet simple classification of the word has been made by the Greeks. They distinguished four kinds of love, namely: Storge, Eros, Philia and Agape.

[01] STORGE:

This is affection based on a natural bond such as blood ties and family relationship. It is love between family members that is love for one's nearest, and dearest based on blood ties. It is generally called brotherly love referring to that love which exists between members of a family because they are blood relations.

[02] EROS:

This is passionate or possessive love. It is instinctive, irrational, sensuous love which man shares with the animals and it is geared to satisfying the needs of biological life. It is intimate relationship between a man and a woman. It can be called sexual desire.

[03] PHILIA:

This is love between friends, not related by blood and not passionate as in eros. This affection based on friendship is characterised by mutual fondness or enthusiasm for one another based often on common interest. It goes with respect for each other. It also involves intimacy and tenderness. It is friendship.

[04] AGAPE:

This is love in the true sense of the word. It is charity, the quintessential Christian love. Agape is the unconquerable benevolence towards others. It is completely selfless. This is a completely good quality without any lack, without any bit of evil in it. Agape can only be achieved by the conquest of self whereby we develop an unconquerable caring for other people. This is love as a Christian virtue. This level of love enables people to seek the good of others no matter what others do or say to them. It is the triumph of the Spirit.

21. From the above classification, it is clear that Agape is love in its true and most complete sense. Agape is the distinctively Christian love, which originates from God, empowered by God and sustained by Him. All other kinds of love are at the service of Agape. When storge, eros, and philia are properly put at the service of Agape, they are transformed to be at the service of God and neighbour. But when they are not properly put at the service of Agape, they degenerate into mere emotions, instinct and desire. Agape is the love we are discussing.

FUNDAMENTALITY OF LOVE

22. Love is basic in our lives as humans. This is because the most significant and positive actions in being, in our lives and in creation are founded on love. God who is love (cf. 1 Jn.4:8) made man His creature in His image. So man created in the image of love can love supernaturally both here and hereafter. By freely creating man, God acts as He is, that is, communicating Himself gratuitously out of love. God makes man in His own image (Gn 1:27), makes him a free being, member of a community, whose fundamental driving force is love (Saint Thomas Aquinas ST.1a, 60.1). Further, this driving force constitutes in man both a tendency to unite with God and men in personal relations or communion and a tendency to be enriched by God and to possess God as his Supreme Good. (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas ST. 1a 2ae 26.4).

The human community as it were is meant to participate in the communion of love of the Triune God by being assumed to adoptive sonship as Christ's Body (cf. Ep. 1:16). In fact, to love makes us most in tune with our nature, as human beings who are children of God, because we all have our origin in God Himself. So, our fulfilment through love is founded in God Himself. Consequently, the most central events of our being are owed to love.

23. The fundamental nature of love can be further expressed in God Himself, in creation, in salvation, in Christian life and the human society.

IN GOD:

24. God is love, there is no speck of hatred in Him. The Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas gives us his inspired reflections on the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Father, God of love (cf. 2 Cor.13: 11) communicates Himself to the Son. The Son is the product of the Father's knowledge of Himself, and the common love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. What is however clear is, that the three Divine Persons is a communion of love.

IN CREATION:

25. God has no need to create. God's very act of creation is His primary act of loving. Creation is out of love. It is God's nature to love and this naturally produces goodness. That is why God's creation is all good, hence He found all He created good (cf. Gn.1: 31). God's expression of His love through creation reached its climax when He created man in His own image and He saw it was very good. God's love creates and sustains otherwise we fall back into nothingness.

IN SALVATION:

26. God's love for His creation is the ultimate ground of salvation. The Christ event is an act of divine love. The mission and ministry of Christ, His life, death and resurrection constitute the loving act of salvation. Christ paid the supreme and selfless sacrifice by His blood in order to save man and creation. Hence greater love than this no man has, that a man should give his life for his friends (cf. Jn.15: 13). And, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...that man may not perish but have everlasting life (cf. Jn.3: 16). Saint Paul is very clear on the fact that Christ died for us when we were still sinners (cf. Rm.5: 6-8). Suffice it to say that salvation means God out of love making us His own again after the fall of our first parents.

THE CENTRE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE:

27. Love is central in Christian life. Christian life is a response to God's love. The Sacred Scriptures tell us we are to love because He loved us first (cf. 1 Jn.4: 19). In being good Christians, we are responding to God's love - who loved us first.

Christian life means that in His love God has adopted us as His children through baptism. Therefore, with love and through love, God has given us a new birth in Himself. The Bible reminds us: "See what singular love the Father has for us, we

are called children of God and that is what we really are” (cf. 1 Jn.3: 1). By responding in love we become children of God that know Him since “Every one who loves is born of God and knows God. Those who do not love have not known God, for God is love” (cf. 1 Jn.4: 7-8). To be a Christian therefore, means to be initiated into and to live in God's love.

FAMILY LIFE:

28. Love is the foundation of family life. God created them male and female in His image. (cf. Gn.1: 27). Therefore, from the beginning God made them partners of divine love. They are to love as God loves since they are of divine image. Saint Paul writing to the Christians at Ephesus advised husbands and wives to love each other as they love themselves (cf. Ep.5: 21-33). Again, Paul compares love between husband and wife with the love between Christ and His Church. In effect, Paul is saying couples should love as Christ loves.

HUMAN SOCIETY:

29. Love moves the human society. Society is kept together by the love that exists between its citizens. Love enhances the solidarity which is essential for peace and progress in every society more so in a society where the social structures are not yet fully developed, where each person needs the help of the other. The African extended family system where mutual help is the rule is a good example of where acts of love sustain a given society.

IN LEADERSHIP:

30. True and Christian leadership is service (cf. Lk.22: 22-27). Proper leadership is putting one's talent, time and entire life at the service of the society one is meant to serve. Good leadership involves sacrifice, involves giving and not counting the cost and only true love can sustain such leadership. Right and true leadership is the product of love. Hence, love is fundamental in many aspects of our lives if they are to be meaningful.

IN FOLLOWERSHIP:

31. Where there are good leaders, there are generally good 'followers. "Followers have obligation to their good leaders. They should respond to the good examples of such good leaders through objective and charitable assessments of the leaders, through contributions to the common good and through discharging of their civic duties. Often these cannot be done without love. Love is therefore, the bedrock of good followership.

LOVE OF NEIGHBOURS:

32. Love is so fundamental in human existence and interpersonal relationship that Jesus used one of His most beautiful stories in the New Testament to illustrate the necessity of love towards the neighbour. In the context of Christ, teaching on love as the greatest commandment, a lawyer asked our Lord, “And who is my neighbour?” (cf. Lk.10: 29). Rather than go into definition, Jesus placed the answer of whom to love on a dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho. By this Jesus explains that love is an action not a definition. My neighbour is whoever is in need of my help not some nice people around me. It is always very easy for us to love those we know, those who are our friends or relations and those from whom we hope to obtain some favour. But Jesus places the story of love on a dangerous road to teach us that love is a challenge, it sometimes involves risks.

Love includes all, especially those in need. Charity or love begins at home but does not end there. Those immediately in urgent need have special demand on our love. These include: the poor, the needy, the sorrowful, the bereaved, the disabled, and the disadvantaged.

LOVE OF ENEMIES:

33. This is a special characteristic of Christianity. Love is the triumph of the Spirit but love of enemies is the apex of love. This is the unique teaching of Christ, which clearly does not give room for hatred, revenge, violence and war. Love of enemies makes for peace among men in all facets of the society. Any society with love is a peaceful society. Love of enemies is possible with the grace of God.

ABSENCE OF LOVE: BANE OF THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

34. One can easily observe that most of the evils of our society are traceable to the absence of loving disposition towards our neighbours. It is the root cause of many of our problems. Because of the Christian demand of love, this condition is a challenge to all Christians. Lack of love shows itself in many vices and evils that are rampant and are multiplying in our society in geometrical proportion. Some of these vices and evils include:

GREED:

35. In simple terms, greed can be called the excessive quest for material wealth. The Scripture warns that love of money is the root of all evil (cf. 1 'l'm.6: 10). Greedy people are ready to do anything against their fellow men and women and against their society if only what they do will bring them material benefit. Saint John reminds us that the love of the Father cannot be in anyone who loves the world (cf. 1 Jn.2: 15). Greed is a clear sign of the absence of love.

SELFISHNESS:

36. Selfishness is the opposite of love. The selfish person attends to himself first before others. Sometimes, he totally forgets others as soon as he finishes attending to himself. He does not care about the good of other people once his own well being is assured. This attitude, which is incompatible with love, is rather rampant in our Nigerian society today.

CORRUPTION:

37. Corruption is fed by dishonesty. It clearly goes against the Christian demand of love in the leader. The corrupt public servant takes what belongs to the society he is expected to work for and uses this for himself alone. He does not care about the evil repercussions of his dishonesty,

Self-serving leadership is another level of corruption. The Lord tells us that leaders must be servants (cf Lk.22: 22-27; Mt.20: 25-27; Mk.14: 17-21), But the leader without love is there to serve himself. His purpose for being in a position of leadership is squarely for his own selfish ends. Love is absent in such situation.

ABUSE OF POWER:

38. The abuse of power, which many a time manifests itself in the flaunting of power, is a syndrome of self-serving leadership. The behaviour of our leaders in public is sometimes embarrassing not to say shameful. The siren blaring officials, who in their speeding cars, surrounded by gun and club-wielding policemen are very poor examples of leaders that are servants. Most of such loud behaviour's are perpetrated in the name of security. But with the assassination of our political leaders in recent times one wonders if there are no better methods, perhaps, more effective but less oppressive. It is because our leaders are intent on flaunting their power before the people that they behave disrespectfully to those people they should be serving.

BRIBERY:

39. Bribery is the demand for inducement in order to do the service for which one is paid by the society or by his government. It is dishonesty that fuels this in our society. But behind it all is lack of consideration for the other and his convenience. It is the will to extort from those whom one should serve and it is squarely against the most beautiful ideal of Christianity, which is: the command of love.

LUST:

40. Lust, which can be described as excessive attachment to venereal pleasure, is classified by Christian Tradition as one of the seven capital sins. This is because of several vices to which it leads the human person. Such vices include blindness of mind, rashness of judgement, and excessive attachment to material world. Lust manifests itself in our society in many ways. Today in our society, many people in high positions demand carnal pleasure from fellow human beings especially women and girls before they render them services due to them. This shameful behaviour is spreading wide in our society as poor economic conditions and corruption spread.

Such acts are very much contrary to love which we owe all human beings, men and women alike as children of God.

NEPOTISM:

41. This is giving special benefits or advantages to somebody who is not qualified for this benefit, just because he or she is related to the holder of power and position. This is worse where doing so deprives others of their right. This attitude, which is well spread, goes against the virtue of love.

SECTIONALISM:

42. Sectionalism is nepotism in a wider scale. It is giving advantage and benefits to a less qualified or totally non-qualified person just because he or she is from my village, my town, my state of origin or my religion. In each case the rightful person is dismissed and the advantages given to the wrong person. INJUSTICE:

43. Injustice is denying one what is his due while justice is to give to everyone his due, (*iustum cuique tribuendi*). Sectionalism and nepotism are forms of injustice. There are many other types of injustice practised in our midst based on tribe, gender and religion. In each case, when we deprive people of their due, it is not only unjust, but the act makes a nonsense of the love we owe them as children of God.

VIOLENCE:

44. Physical violence is turning into a culture in our world today. This violent attitude includes violence in the homes, at school, on the streets, against marital partners and in some extreme cases involves armed robbery, murder and assassination. In all cases, violence goes against the respect and love we owe to our fellow human beings. Violence destroys love.

DECEITFULNESS:

45. Dishonesty in dealing with one another is becoming if not acceptable then obviously well tolerated in the Nigerian society. This attitude shows itself in our dealings with one another, among family members, among business partners, during examinations, during elections, in the law courts to mention but a few.

Deceitfulness is the opposite of truthfulness and where there is no truth, there is no love.

UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD:

46. All these evils already mentioned and many more are rampant because our love of God is not genuine. The Bible is very clear that when we do not love God as we should we cannot truly love one another. Whoever does not love does not know God (cf. 1 Jn.4:7-8). Moreover, if you say I love God while you hate your brother, you are a liar. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your brother whom you see (cf. 1 Jn.4:20). The command that Jesus Christ has given us is this: whoever loves God must love his brother also (cf. 1 Jn.4:21). It is unfaithfulness to our calling as Christians, which is ignoring our biggest responsibility towards God and our neighbour that is the cause of many evils in our society.

OBSTACLES TO LOVE

THE IMPERFECT NATURE OF THE HUMAN PERSON:

47. Human nature after the fall of our first parent was wounded by sin. The pristine condition of our first parents, which was a state of innocence, purity and love, was destroyed by sin "Then there came the effect, the result of which is our lower nature against the higher nature; of passion against reason, of nature against grace. The fall is the origin of selfish tendencies in man.

48 Saint Paul regretted this situation in his letter to the Romans when he says "I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do" (cf. Rm. 7:19). Paul wonders at the level of depravity and slavery of human nature. But there is a way out, Christ liberated us from sin and slavery. He therefore, gave us the possibility of freeing ourselves from the conditions of our wounded nature. However, the struggle continues against the lower and base tendencies of our human nature. This we do through prayers and fidelity to the teachings of Christ our Saviour and Liberator. Our behaviour and lifestyle should be redirected in the light of Christian ideals.

LACK OF COMMITMENT TO GOD:

49. The Lord tells us "if you love me keep my commandments" (cf. Jn.15:10). We cannot be God's children if we are not committed to our identity as children of His. We cannot truly belong to God if we give vent to hatred since love is the first and the highest commandment of God and the one that encompasses all others. Our lack of commitment constitutes a great obstacle to the life of love.

SHALLOW UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY:

50. Our poor understanding of Christianity militates against the life of love. Some of our people think that Christianity is a magical problem-solving creed. Christianity for some is sing, pray and have your problems solved. For them Christianity has little or nothing to do with how you live your life and what you are doing after praying, singing and perhaps, dancing. This is false understanding of Christianity since faith without good works *is* dead and love shows itself in action, Christianity has answer to all our problems but we must first of all understand what means, To understand Christianity is to understand the demands of love, We may not live in wickedness and still profess Christianity, To understand Christianity is to do what it teaches and to do.. is to love,

EGOISM:

51. This vice, which we have ready mentioned in another content, is, went obstacle to love, The egoist thinks of human only, He does not think primarily of God 254 does he think of the well being of his fellow men and women. The worst egoist is the free rider egoist who always permits himself all that, is not good and forbids others the same,

PREJUDICE:

52. Prejudice is a great obstacle to love. Prejudice is the attitude of not treating people fairly due to preconceived notions. By not giving people the chance, they deserve because of preconceived ideas, by judging or condemning them without calling up extrinsic cum objective criteria, the prejudiced person makes a mockery of human Christian love. Love permits others the chances he would want to be given. Prejudice destroys love.

PRESUMPTION:

53. The presumptive person does not want to understand anybody but believes everybody should understand as well as bear with him. Th" presumptive person believes his own acts lack of love do not count. He deceives himself in believing that all will still be well without any effort from his side. This is a very negative trend, which does not favour the life of love.

NEGATIVE PRESSURE FROM THE SOCIETY:

54. Societal pressure can be good if it is positive but can be very destructive if it tends towards evil. In a society where objectively. acclaimed evils, are tolerated, virtuous, men and women are at risk. For example, where selfishness, self-serving leadership, corruption and greed are tolerated, altruistic people are often made to look like fools. Where abortion is legal and contraceptives are distributed free, chastity is made to look like the property of the uninformed. Negative pressure is often mounted on virtuous people to be like the rest. The societal pressure is often the line of least resistance. This is a great obstacle to love, which is sacrificial and selfless.

THE FORCE OF HABIT:

! 55. Whatever we do as human beings, whatever act we perform has an inherent tendency of being repeated. When we repeat any act several times it develops into pattern in us called second nature or habit. If the act repeated is good we form a good habit – generally called virtue, while if the act repeated is evil we form a bad habit also called vice.

That is why it is said that the human being is a creature of habit. It means that he should strive constantly towards what is good, and avoid what is evil. Since when good acts are repeated with frequency, the habit of doing good is formed and when evil acts are repeated with frequency the habit of doing evil is formed, it means that the frequency of acts against love in any society, also means the, witting down of the force of love.

BAD EDUCATION:

56. This is one of the greatest obstacles to love. Since education gives one orientation in life and moulds one's character, understanding the fact and role of habit in the human system should make a responsible society to be wary of how it brings up its young ones. It should make sure it gives them the best education possible. : :

57. In Nigeria, our educational system is almost in shambles. And, to our children. learning is nothing to write home about. It can best be described as reading and writing without what the Master Confucius will call quality of life, authenticity and refinement. This is education without morals and proper culture. If this remains so, we cannot in good conscience expect much from the younger ones in the future.

58. Good education should teach children love, honour, respect, responsibility, truthfulness and such like virtues. These are qualities that are demanded everywhere where human beings live and work; in fact, qualities that show one is cultured, refined and above all, educated. Bad education is an obstacle to the habit and life of love. Without proper education love becomes an uphill task:

IN PRAISE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

59. Love - agape or charity - could be called the *magna moralia* of Christianity. Before Christianity no ancient religion was recorded as teaching the love of God for man or man's love of God. No god or goddess in classical religion had any love for mankind rather they were busy avenging on the human race for the injuries and infidelities perceived to have come from men.

Love therefore, is a very special feature of Christianity. It is the nature of God and the image of God as revealed in Christ. Christ teaches us that God loves us so much, made us in His image, has adopted us in Christ, that we have the right to filially address Him as "Our Father in heaven" (cf. Mt.6:9). Love is taught by Jesus as the first and greatest of all the commandments (cf. Mt.22:37-39). This love Christ tells us is the measure of our discipleship.

60. Christian love is so excellent that it becomes the condition for admittance into God's Kingdom (cf. Mt.24). Christian love is forgetfulness of self but it is such a marvel that it extends unequivocally to all including enemies. Thus, where love exists, there must be that peace which only God can give (cf. Jn.14:27).

61. It is clear that where there is love (there is God, since God is love) all things are possible. In the context of our world today and Nigeria in particular, we need love. In terms of improving the world even with little resources. with love a lot can be achieved. Real love will enable those at the corridors of power to do all that can be done to improve the conditions of

life of the people.

62. Where love reigns it is there that leaders are servants, it is there that the talented toil day and night to make a better society, it is there that everyone who is in a position of responsibility tries to make his mark in the services he delivers to the people who need them. It is where there is love that followers appreciate services and revere their leaders, even post mortem for their selfless sacrifices.

63. Where love reigns, the poor and the disabled are valued and cared for, because they are fellow human beings and bona fide children of God. It is there – where love reigns - that married partners are faithful, businessmen are honest, politicians are dedicated and humble, votes of the populace are counted, people speak their minds without sycophancy and without fear of being oppressed for their opinion, where fraternal corrections are freely given and all enjoy that freedom which is God's gift to His children. Such a society where love reigns is a society that is turned resolutely towards the ideals of heaven, the ideals of God since God is love.

64. Saint Paul has these beautiful words in praise of love: love is patient and kind, it is never jealous, love is never boastful or conceited, it is never rude or selfish, it does not take offence, it is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sin but delights in the truth, love is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes (cf. 1 Cor.13:4-7).

65. Love makes a soul great. It is the product of great minds. It frees the mind from bitterness, hatred, inferiority and fear. Love gives the fruits of the Spirit, which include peace and joy.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER: THE CHALLENGE OF LOVE

66. Christ our Saviour and Redeemer teaches us that the greatest and first commandment is to love God while the second is to love our neighbour (cf.

Mt.22:39). At the same time Saint John the Apostle tells us that we measure our love of God by our love of neighbours (cf. 1 Jn.4:20). Since love is basic and fundamental in every activity of our life, it follows that the authenticity of our lives depends on the extent of our love. To the extent we love, to that extent we are Christians, to that extent we are human and to that extent we are children of God. Love therefore, is the measure of our life.

67. But what is the measure of love? To what extent are we expected to love? The Scripture tells us that God is love. If God is love then the measure of love is God. Again, God is the measure of love because He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (cf. Jn3:16) that man may have life. God is the measure of love because greater love than this no man has, to lay down his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13). Yes, God is the measure of love because He commanded us to love one another as He has loved us (cf. Jn.15:12).

By the command of love, we are called to live the life of Christ the Lord who called us, who loved us and gave His life for us. The command of love has obvious implications and many challenges, these include: detail

LOVE IN THE FAMILY:

68. The family is our basic social unit. It is the domestic Church. When there is love in the family each child of the family becomes an ambassador of love. The love is carried to the society, which will become a better place. Love in the family starts with love between husband and wife. Our world today is dented by broken marriages, broken families as divorce and counter divorce are spreading everywhere. In some parts of the world same-gender marriages and many forms of aberrations are fighting for legal and popular acceptance. We need to enthrone love in our families if we want a better society.

LOVE IN THE SOCIETY:

69. The society takes over from where the family stops. We are products not only of our families but also our societies. Because we are dependent beings, we need each other for survival. In the market forum we buy what we need from others who have them and sell what we have to others who need them. There is the distribution and exchange of goods and services.

70. In the society at large there is the general struggle for survival, for solving the social problems like crime, hunger and power control. Without love our societies will turn into a nursery for crime and injustice. With love we can evolve human societies and culture, which will be founded on truth, built on justice and

enlivened by love. Such an order finds its source in God. Without love the human society will become a theatre of violence and hate.

LOVE IN POLITICS:

71. In his book, "The Trouble With Nigeria", Professor Chinua Achebe made it clear that the trouble with Nigeria is the problem of leadership. There is hardly any sincere person who will not agree with Professor Achebe. So, one can say without fear of contradiction that good leadership, that is good administration of men and resources is our problem.

Love is what turns a leader into a true servant. We make bold to say that until the sons and daughters of divine love become leaders or the leaders adopt the principles of love, there will be no end to the troubles of our states and nation. The leadership of love is servant leadership. Such is a leader who serves his people, who create lasting values, who leave behind a culture of excellence, who loves wisdom and knowledge and teaches his people to appreciate lasting values. Such is a leader who is selfless, interested more in what he can give than what he can get out of office. A servant leader rules with love. It is our challenge to vote only such men and women to electoral offices.

LOVE IN OUR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES:

72. Many are undoubtedly dissatisfied and unhappy with the quality of education given today in our schools and universities, Today people acquire education without proper character, acquire knowledge without wisdom, learning without morals. Consequently, education today does not prepare our citizens for the good life of virtue. We turn out year after year from our educational institutions, intellectual giants who are at the same time character dwarfs.

73. Until lecturers and students alike evolve the culture of love where lecturers will not exploit students and where students in turn will work very hard, the system we are lamenting may not change. If we enthrone love in our institutions of learning we will excel in character and learning.

THE CULTURE OF LOVE

74. What we are calling for is a culture of love. There may not be easy solutions to the many problems of life as long as we continue to abhor the virtue of love. There may be no end to wars and tumults among the nations, there may be no end to destructions of lives and property; there may be no end to shamelessness, foolishness and ignorance; there may be no end to the culture of impunity; there may be no end to armed robbery and such destructive tendencies, yes, there

will be no end to the troubles and cares of our lives until we live lives of love or allow love to influence the principles of our existence.

75. The culture of love is what will transform the world into a true and universal brotherhood. The Venerable Fathers of the Second Vatican Council called for this transforming culture of love when they stated *"The word of God, through whom all things were made, became man and dwelt among men (cf. Jn1:3): a perfect man, He entered world history, taking that history into Himself and recapitulating it (Ep.1:10). He reveals to us that "God is love" (cf. 1 Jn.4:8) and at that time teaches that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all men (and women) and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood will not be in vain.'*¹⁰

76. The Council Fathers further made it clear that this love has to become a habit, a pattern of life, in fact, a culture when they insisted that this love is not something reserved for important matters, but must be event above all in the ordinary circumstances of daily life.¹¹ Since love is the law at the same one the habit or attitude, which will both, perfect and transform us, we are calling for this culture of love.

THE ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE

77. This simply means living with the consciousness of God's loving presence. It means living with the authority of the presence of God who loves us, and being ready to do whatever we do on account of the love of God. When every decision is based on love then we are living in the atmosphere of love. Sometimes, we observe some "pastors" on the televisions advising their followers to live in the atmosphere of miracles. Today, I enjoin you to live in the atmosphere of love. That is all that is required for true miracles to happen.

78. You would love to know that living in the atmosphere of love has been the secret of the authority and success of great saints and many men of God. From Saint John the Apostle to Saint Francis de Sales; from Saint Francis of Assisi to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. from Padre Pio to Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, living the life of love and living in the atmosphere of love was their authority and strength.

Living in the atmosphere of love made it possible for the saints to live beyond hatred, to live beyond oppositions, selfishness, and revenge. For the saints such negative attitudes do not exist. And, whoever confronted them with such attitudes

failed. Living in the atmosphere of love equipped the saints with selflessness, endurance, patience, forbearance, humour and equanimity.

79. If it worked for the saints, it can also work for us today. Living in an atmosphere of love is a culture of life, which we can all embrace. If we make it the culture of the life of our Archdiocese, our Province and our personal lives then it will make us live with the authority of the loving presence of God. Consequently, nothing will be impossible for us. If we live in love, we live in God and God will live in us.

80. The time has come for us to put on love and enjoy the fruits of the Spirit of God. Living in the atmosphere of love is living in the atmosphere of prayer. It is the atmosphere of communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Living in love is the atmosphere of service, compassion and self-realization. It is the atmosphere of honour, power and glory. It is the atmosphere of immortality.

82. When Saint Paul the Apostle attained this level, he exclaimed, it is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me (cf. Gal. 2:19). Always remember that love is the fulfilment of the law. Love is the summary of all the laws and the prophets (cf. Mt.22:40). Love is the measure of our life and God is the measure of love. We are to love as God loves. So, the measure of love is to love without measure.

CONCLUSION AND PRAYER

GOD'S GRACE IS NECESSARY

83. For us to love as God really wants us to, God's grace is indispensable. We should pray constantly for this grace in order to counter our selfishness and also to withstand the constant negative forces of our corrupt society. Love as a habit can be achieved by human efforts but love as a supernatural virtue is a gift from God. We therefore, need to humbly pray Almighty Father, the giver of all good gifts to fill us with the virtue of love.

84. We need to pray Our Blessed Mother to intercede for us and obtain that virtue of love. We need to visit Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of His Love, the Holy Eucharist and pray Him "Lord increase our love."

PRAYER

85. Father, guide us as you guide creation, according to Your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life prepared for us. We make our prayer 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. Amen.¹²

Given in Onitsha, at Holy Trinity Cathedral, on February 9, Ash Wednesday in the year of our Lord 2005, the third anniversary of my Episcopacy.

MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE

Archbishop of Onitsha

END NOTES

1. cf. Prayer of the Early Missionaries,
2. cf. Dictionary on Pastoral Ministry cited in Canon Law, Letter and Spirit CLS Borán and Ireland p. 257.
3. Komonchak, J. A., et al The New Dictionary of Theologi, Bangalore Theological Publ India, 1966. p. 604.
4. Ibid. p. 605.
5. Preface 1 of the Holy Mass Weekdays of Ordinary Time.
6. Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2005 2
12
7. G.S. 1.38 Quoted by the Pope. Ibid.
8. Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quecumque defectu The good is wholly good, the bad is so because of some defect.
9. Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, AAS 55 1963, p. 266.
10. Vatican I Gaudium et Spes, 7 December 1965, No. 38.
11. Ibid.
12. From Roman Missal, Collect for the 25+ Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B.