
SUFFERING AND HOPE

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ABSTRACT:

Suffering and death as punishment for sin originated from the sin of our First Parents Adam and Eve. But God gave them hope by his promise of redemption through one of their progenies. Yet desperate humanity was ravaged by sufferings and death until Jesus came and redeemed the banished human race through his excruciating passion and death on the Cross three times prophesied by him to his apostles. His resurrection restored the lost hope for eternal life to the perishing human race. Endurance of suffering with hope is educative, reduces helplessness and stress, increases happiness and improves quality of life. In, with, and through Christ all sufferings for him and our neighbour with persistent hopeful prayer are veritable most powerful means of salvation and eternal life. Faith-based hope in vicarious sufferings bestows incomparable radiant glory on all because “all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed to us” (Rom 8:18). In this hope we suffer with righteousness, for Christ and neighbours and are saved.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: In our society today, prone to depression caused by suffering, there is great need to bring up the aspect of hope. Suffering is part and parcel of our daily lives as it is a result of the original sin. It is how we handle this suffering that will make a difference and make suffering salutary.

Suffering is caused by the original sin of our First Parents Adam and Eve with death or murder as its evil effect (cf. Gen 3), but it can also be a trial permitted by God as in the classic case of Job (cf. 1 & 2). Since the fall of our First Parents and their punishment by God, suffering and death became the evil portion of all beings.

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Yet God's promise of a Redeemer by their offspring that would bruise the head of the deceitful tempter serpent or devil (Gen 3:15) kept hope alive for all their descendants. Cain's gruesome murder of Abel his brother and his severe punishment by God added a worse dimension to the afflictions from our First Parents passed on to all generations (cf. Gen 4 & 6). Suffering and death are experienced worldwide in variety of forms, from the daily ordinary little infirmities and diseases to scorching famine, hunger, abject poverty, crimes, total deprivation of essential needs and mortal perils. In response the Church teaches that "our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it" (CCC, no. 164). Christ and his Church preach the consolatory message of hope and trust in God as the Redeemer of all the afflicted.

We will expose the history of suffering and hope from the Scriptures, Magisterium and Martyrs of the Church. Then we hint on Christian attitude to suffering and hope, the power of hopeful prayer in suffering. In the end all sufferers are urged to place their hope in God and unload their worries to Him as their provident God (1 Pet 5:7)

2.0 NOTIONS OF SUFFERING AND HOPE: *Suffering*, physical or psychological or spiritual or all three together, is the serious state of pain, distress or hardship in one's body, mind or soul. Physical suffering hurts the body while mental or moral suffering pains the soul or spirit. Physical suffering therapeutically curable but moral suffering is less reachable by therapy². Synonyms for suffering are adversity, affliction, aches, agony, anguish, difficulty, discomfort, dolors, excruciation, grief, hardship, heartbreak, hurt, misery, pain, misfortune, ordeal, sorrows, torments, torture, throes, woes, etc. **Hope** is a feeling of desire and expectation that things will go well in the future³. **Ordinarily speaking** hope is a feeling of wanting something to happen or be true and believing that is possible or likely⁴. Hope "is a vital condition of human life.... a permanent companion of

² Pope Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris* (SD), no. 5.

³ PONS Collins *Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, p. 700.

⁴ Longman: *Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 784.

temporal life”⁵. In *Christian sense* “hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, no. 1817). Hope is “the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God’s love and of incurring punishment” (CCC, no. 2090). St. Thomas Aquinas defines hope as “a desire of a good which is hard but not impossible to attain” (*desiderium boni possibilis ardui*). Hence Christians hold fast their confession of hope (Heb 10:23) and wait with eager longing for their future glory and redemption (cf. Rom 8:18-24; 1 Tim 6:17; Heb 3:6).

3.0 SUFFERING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: The OT does not differentiate between physical and mental suffering (Hebrew: *make’ob*; LXX Greek: *algos*) because both forms can be caused by the same evil. The OT Israel believed in a moral order guided by human destinies and regarded suffering as a divine punishment for sin or evil. The prosperity of the wicked must be punished (cf. Job 21:23-33) for God’s righteous anger and judgment must surely descend on them⁶. The Israelites were impatient with God if he delayed his furious wrath on the prospering wicked⁷ and even queried him for the suffering of the upright. Some found solace in the hope that God would surely vindicate their cause⁸ and severely punish the oppressors and enemies of the upright⁹. Others put their hope in the “*Day of the Lord*” when all will be rewarded according to their deeds¹⁰. Many others accepted suffering as a divine education and admonition to lead them away from their worldly way of life to God’s way of seeing human events, from their sinful lives to obedience to him¹¹. But the problem of suffering of the righteous still remains. Why do the good suffer and sometimes

⁵ Peschke. *Christian Ethics*, Volume Two, Alcester and Dublin (1978), p. 51.

⁶ Cf. Psa 7:15-16; 37:1-3; 52:1.5; 73:12-20; 92:7.

⁷ Cf. Jer 12:1-4; Hab 1:2-4; Mal 3:7-15; Eccles / Qoh 7:15-16.

⁸ Cf. Psa 22:19-20; 31:9.21; 34:6; 17-19; 37:1-3; 55:22; etc.

⁹ Cf. Psa 35:8-10; 37:1-2; 40:13-14; 58:6-7; etc.

¹⁰ Cf. Isa 3:14-15; Amos 1-2; Dan 12:1 etc.

¹¹ Cf. Psa 20:6; 39:7; 46:10-11; Isa 49:25; Jer 9:24; Job 5:17-18, 33:19-30; 2 Chr 20:9-10 etc.

even worse than the bad people?¹² The answer lies in the atoning vicarious suffering of God's Servants in solidarity with his people.

4.0 SUFFERING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: In the NT suffering (Greek: *pathema*; Latin Vulg: *dolor*) is synonymous with trouble, distress, hard circumstances (*thlipsis*). The Christian faithful took up all the OT views on suffering but modified them with regard to the vicarious voluntary passion and death of Jesus who repeatedly taught his disciples that his suffering was a divine necessity laid on him to redeem and save all¹³. Christ Jesus is our role model and epitome of suffering in the NT. His acceptance of suffering produced its wondrous atoning effect as the sinless one¹⁴ who gave up his life for sinners in perfect obedience to his Father's will¹⁵. The Early Christians followed on his footsteps in suffering for his sake. Their deep understanding of human sinfulness led to the recognition of suffering as the adroit fate of all in this evil age¹⁶. Believers who accept suffering serve Christ's cause and are united with him as members of his body¹⁷. In making up "all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ" (Col 1:24) Christians participate in the atoning vicarious suffering of Jesus¹⁸. Their confession (*homologia*) of Jesus as the Christ would earn them persecution or martyrdom¹⁹. In this way the NT almost completely removed the responsibility of the individual in suffering²⁰. The destined suffering of believers also brings into focus the suffering of the world and purges faith from the dross of self love. Suffering contradicts the aspirations of the secular authorities who hate Christians as they hated Christ. Satan employs the suffering of the flesh to destroy their desire for the new life in Christ²¹. But their acceptance and overcoming of

¹² Cf. Jer 8:18-21; 15:15; Psa 44:23.

¹³ Cf. Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:26; John 17:1.

¹⁴ Cf. Rom 3:25; Heb 9:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rev 5:6.

¹⁵ Cf. Rom 5:6-8; 1 Pet 2:4; 3:18; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8.

¹⁶ Cf. Rom 8:18; Eph 5:16; 6:13; Gal 1:4.

¹⁷ Cf. Phil 1:29; 3:10; Rom 8:31-39; 12:4-21; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10-11; Col 1:24; 1Thess 2:13-16; 1 Pet 4:12-13.

¹⁸ Cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 12:26; Phil 1:29-30; 3:10; 1Thess 2:14; 2 Tim 3:12; etc.

¹⁹ Cf. Mark 13:12-13 etc; Rev 17:6; 20:4).

²⁰ Cf. Luke 13:1-5; John 9:2-3; 1Cor 11:28-32.

²¹ Cf. Matt 10:28; Rom 8:36; 2 Cro 4:10; 1 Thess 3:3; Rev 2:10.

temptation as a divine education help to reduce their trust in themselves²² and boosts their confidence in Christ, strengthens their inner selves, serves as evidence of Christ's triumph²³ and unmasks the wickedness of evil²⁴. Suffering "for the name" of Jesus is a privilege (*charis*) and a sign of divine election²⁵, but self-inflicted suffering is worthless (Col 2:23). Christians should patiently, fearlessly, calmly, humbly and without anxiety endure all forms of suffering²⁶ as temporary evils²⁷. Christ's ultimate victory over suffering assures the Christians of their triumph over all evils.

5.0 SOME WISE QUOTES ON SUFFERING: "I have trodden the winepress alone" (Isaiah 63:3). "It requires more courage to suffer than to die" (Napoleon). No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross no crown" (William Penn). "We are healed of suffering only by experiencing it to the full" (Marcel Proust, *The Sweet Cheat Gone*) [See: Lewis C. Henry (Ed.), *Best Quotations for All Occasions*, p. 221-2].

6.0 HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Hope (Hebrew: *batah*; *hamah*; *yahal*; *qawah*; *shabah*) are all translated in the LXX by the Greek noun *elpis* and the verb *elpizo*. Hope *ordinarily* signifies a present condition of being confident and at ease with security and prosperity that brings a feeling of self-sufficiency and complacency²⁸. But hope that is not firmly grounded gives rise to shame, disappointment and disaster²⁹. *Theologically* the OT has a faith-based hope: Yahweh is "the hope of Israel, its Saviour in time of distress" (Jer 14:8; 17:13). "Hope is the trust in the God of the Covenant, the expectation and hope of his help, the taking refuge in his love, and an absolute holding fast to him and his

²² Cf. Rom 6:4-8; 2 Cor 4 17; 7 10; 12:7; Phil 3:7-16; 1 Pet 4:1; Jas 1:2; Rev 2:10.

²³ Cf. Mark 13:9; 1 Cor 1:26; 2 Cor 4:16; 6:4; 12:9; 1 Thess 3:3-4; 2 Thess 1:5.

²⁴ Cf. Matt 10:26 = Luke 12:2; Mark 4:22 = Luke 8:17; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Thess 2:3.

²⁵ Cf. Matt 5:12; Acts 5:41; 1 Cor 11:32; 2 Cor 6:4-5; 11:23-29; Gal 3:4; 1 Pet 2:19-21; 4:12-16.

²⁶ Cf. Rom 5:3-4; 1 Thess 3:3; 1 Pet 2:21-23; Matt 6:25-33; Luke 12:4.7.32; 1 Cor 7:29-32; etc.

²⁷ Cf. Luke 11:22; John 16:33; 1 Cor 15:27; Rom 8:37; 1 John 2:13-14; 2 Tim 3:18; Matt 13:21; etc.

²⁸ Cf. Judg 18:7-10; Isa 32:9-10; 47:10; Zeph 2:15; Prov 23:18; 24:14; etc.

²⁹ Cf. Psalms 25:2,20; 31:1; 71:1; Isa 32:9-14; Ezek 37:11; Prov 10:28; et.

words”³⁰. Faith is interchangeable with hope. One believes in God before hoping in him. The believing sufferer takes refuge in God as one’s Saviour: “*Why be so cast down, why all these sighs? Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God*” (Psa 42:5.11). As the arch exponent of hope in God, the Psalmist outlines the four attitudes of Israel to him: (i) they trust him, commit their cause to him, hold fast to him and live in serenity and peace under his protection (*batah*)³¹; (ii) they eagerly and readily take refuge in him from their enemies and rely in him for swift deliverance (*hamah*)³²; (iii) in adversity they patiently wait with courage for God to bring them promised help and salvation (*yahal*)³³; (iv) they confidently expect from him well-being that occasions rejoicing (cf. Psa 13:5; Prov 10:28; 11:23). The life of the upright Israel was defined by hope as a living, present bond between the God of hope and the hoping people. This hope frees them from anxiety but not necessarily from patient endurance. Their hope in God is compatible with their fear of God as their only ultimate source of security and confidence.

7.0 HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: Hope (NT Greek: *elpis*; Latin Vulg: *spes*) *ordinarily* denotes expectation about the future that accords with one’s desire and serves as a basis for action or speech³⁴. But one can lose hope even when one’s desire remains. Hence expectation becomes the decisive constituent of hope. *Theologically* hope is expectation expressed in faith, confidence, trust, patience, endurance and eagerness. Hope is Israel’s expectation of the Messiah their Redeemer. This expectation sustained the loyalty of the disciples of the Lord Jesus to him and was the reason for their despair at his death (cf. Luke 24:21). But his resurrection resuscitated their hope as the response of God’s people to his activity among them³⁵. Hope is grounded, sustained and directed by God as its author and source, as its sustainer and unseen yet certain object within which human beings

³⁰ Schnackenburg, R., *Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, p. 35.

³¹ Cf. Psa 9:10; 22:8-9; 40:4; Job 11:18; Jer 17:7; Isa 26:3; Prov 22:19.

³² Cf. Psa 5:11; 7:1; 16:1; 17:7; 18:2.30; 25:20; 36:7; 37:40; etc.

³³ Cf. Psa 31:24; 33:18-22; 42:5.11; 69:3; 71:12-24; 119:14-16; 130:5-6; Isa 51:5; etc.

³⁴ Cf. Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 9:10; Phil 2:19.23; 2 John 12; 3 John 14; etc.

³⁵ Cf. Acts 2:26; 24:15; 26:6-8; 28:20.

and creation dwell (Rom 4:17-21; 8:20). It is mediated by the Gospel that proclaims one promise and one calling that constitute the expectancy of faith³⁶. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God conveys to his people the power to hope. As the first fruits of the Spirit, hope is the assurance of the full harvest (Rom 8:23-30; Eph 1:13). The object hoped for continues and completes the work of the Holy Trinity in the form of sharing the divine glorious liberty of his children, the redemption of their bodies and righteousness, their being changed into his likeness and possession of his inheritance. As human response to God's activity, hope is associated with peace and love, rejoicing, unshakable confidence, steadfast endurance, boldness, freedom³⁷. Hope, faith and love are often presented as the famous everlasting triad of the mutual, interacting gifts of the Holy Spirit³⁸. Hope is conveyed by the Spirit, deals with the unseen by human eyes, and thrives on trials and experience of sufferings³⁹. In hope Christians in their weakness share in the futility and bondage of creation (cf. Rom 8:18-27). The inner power and structure of hope are derived from Christ's victory over death by his own death and resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-58; 1 Thess 4:13-18). All sharers in the new life of Christ as the 'New Adam' are bonded together in this one hope.

8.0 SOME WISE QUOTES ON HOPE: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12). "Come back to the fortress, you prisoners waiting in hope" (Zechariah, 9:12). "Who against hope believed in hope" (St. Paul: Romans IV.18). "To the sick, while there is life there is hope" (Cicero). "Hope is the poor man's bread" (Thales). "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" (Pope, *Essay on Man*). "Youth fades, love droops, the leaves of friendship fall; A mother's secret hope outlives them all" (Holmes, *A Mother's Secret*). "Hope for the best but prepare for the worst" (English Proverb). "Hope says to us constantly, 'go on, go on' and leads us thus to the grave" (*Mme De Maintenon*). "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here" (Dante, *Inferno*) [Lewis C. Henry (Ed.), op. cit., p. 108]. Latin Adage: "*Dum spiro, spero*" (while I live, I

³⁶ Cf. Rom 5:2; 12:12; Eph 1:18; Col 1:23; 1 Thess 5:8.

³⁷ Cf. Rom 4:18; 5:1-5; 12:12; 8:25; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Cor 3:12; Phil 1:20; Gal 5:5; Eph 2:13ff; etc.

³⁸ Cf. Rom 5:1-5; 1 Cor 13; Eph 4:1-6; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8.

³⁹ Cf. 1 Cor 2:9-16; Rom 5:1-5; 8:17; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:3-7.

hope). “The hope to enjoy is little less in joy than hope enjoyed” (*William Shakespeare*).

9.0 SUMMARY OF SUFFERING AND HOPE IN THE OT AND NT: The theology of Suffering and Hope courses through all the Scriptures but their arch exponents are Job, Jeremiah, the Psalmist, the Gospels (Christ Jesus), Saints Peter and Paul. **Job** patiently bore his excruciating torments and blessed God for permitting horrible disasters to befall him. He suffered in hope that his Redeemer lives and will rise as his Defender and set him close to himself (cf. Job 19:25). His classic submission to the crucible of affliction is: “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh*” (Job 1:22). Yet his terrible suffering goaded him to curse the day of his birth (cf. Job 3:1-26). **Jeremiah** suffered so grievously that he also cursed the day of his birth (cf. Jer 20:14-18) but lamented his fate with strong hope in God (cf. Lam 3:21-24). The **Psalmist** has incomparable hope in God: In danger he prays with hope to God (Psa 25); hopes in him as his Saviour and God (Psa 43); takes refuge in him as his strength and helper (Psa 46); prays to him as his deliverer (Psa 41); appeals to him as the just judge (Psa 54); prays to him when slandered (Psa 55) and trusts in him as one’s ready rescuer from ferocious enemies (Psa 57). The Psalmist hopes in God, trusts in him as his refuge, stronghold, deliverer and rescuer (Psa 56:10-11). For the Psalmist faith and hope are interchangeable because the believer also hopes in God for the best. For Christians **Christ Jesus** is the archetypal role-model and epitome of suffering with hope (cf. Heb 5:7-9). Thrice he foretold his passion to his apostles that he must grievously suffer and gruesomely die on the Cross and on the third day resurrect from the dead⁴⁰. If God did not spare his own Son, will he spare us his adopted children? (Rom 8:32). His apostles followed Christ’s path of suffering for the most radiant glory (Matt 17:1-10; etc; Acts 5:40-41). **St. Peter** urged all Christians to follow Christ in suffering innocently and vicariously for his sake and neighbours (cf. 1 Pet 2:21-25; 4:12-19). **St. Paul** expressed his strong faith and hope in God’s power to encourage (*paraklesis*) and support us in sufferings (*pathemata*), distress, dangers, and hardship (*thlipsis*) so that we can encourage the afflicted (cf. 2 Cor

⁴⁰ Cf. Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19 & parallels)

1:3-7). He was “glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions, and distress for Christ’s sake” (2 Cor 12:10). Entry into God’s Kingdom is through many tribulations (cf. Acts 14:22). As joint heirs with Christ, “all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed to us” (Rom 8:17-18). Our temporary slight afflictions shall surely gain us an utterly incomparable eternal weight of invisible glory (cf. 2 Cor 4:17-18; Rom 5:5). With faith and hope in epitomic interchange, sufferers pray for God’s rescue from evils and glorify his infinite power that works marvelously in them (cf. Eph 3:20-21).

10.0 THE MAGISTERIUM ON SUFFERING AND HOPE:

From the Apostles to our era, the Church teaches us “hope of glory” through suffering and updated since the past fifty-five years by the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI: The **VATICAN II FATHERS** in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS)⁴¹ discussed *inter alia* suffering and hope: “The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well”. (GS, no. 1). The suffering and hope of the worldwide human family are those of Christians who bear its travails, failures and triumphs in a world created and sustained by God and saved from the strangleholds of the evil one by the crucified and resurrected Christ. The Fathers lamented that despite the abundance of natural resources, wealth and economic well-being, huge numbers of people are plagued by hunger, and abject poverty while countless others are totally illiterate (cf. GS, no. 4). This deep seated imbalance and dichotomy in the world order give rise to deeper fundamental questionings about humanity, the meaning of suffering, evil, and death not eliminated by human development and progress. Other questionings focus on the purpose of the achievements at so high a price, on peoples’ contribution to, and expectations from, the human society and on the end of earthly life. The Church’s response to all the failures and questionings lies on faith and hope in Jesus Christ who died and rose for all. In him

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes: GS*), 7 December 1965, nos. 1-11.

is their ultimate foundation and through him will all human problems and sufferings be tackled or resolved (cf. GS, no. 10).

11.0 POPE JOHN PAUL II in his classic Apostolic Letter on Suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*⁴² gave a new impetus to the Vatican II's teaching by borrowing a leaf from the vicarious joyful sufferings of St. Paul who made up in his body "all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24). "*The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*" lies in denying oneself and taking up one's cross daily to follow Jesus. Suffering deeply rooted in humanity is an integral part of earthly existence (cf. SD, no. 3). Physical pain is the hurting of the body whereas moral suffering is pain of the soul (SD, no. 5). Suffering comprises natural disasters, epidemics, catastrophes, upheavals, and social scourges like a bad harvest, famine and war (SD, no. 8). *What is the cause, the reason and purpose of sufferings?* The Book of Job states that suffering has a meaning only as a punishment for sin but it equally strikes the innocent. As discipline suffering has educational value (SD, no. 12). Christ's Love that overcame suffering by his death is the fullest source of answer to the question on the meaning of suffering. For God so loved the world that "he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Pope adroitly noted that Christ drew closest to the suffering humanity by his teachings, good deeds and sensitivity to the poor and afflicted by feeding them, healing all manners of physical disabilities, casting out demons and restoring the dead to life. "He was sensitive to every human suffering, whether of the body or of the soul" (SD, no. 16). By his way of teaching and acting and his ultimate vicarious laying down of his life on the Cross at Calvary, Jesus gave the best hope and encouragement to the hopeless and sufferers of all times. Human suffering culminates in the Passion of Christ (cf. SD, no. 18). Pope John Paul notes that *the eloquence of the Cross and death* is completed by *the eloquence of the resurrection* in which God's people find a completely new light that helps them endure the crucible of humiliations, doubts, hopelessness and persecutions. In the same measure as they share abundantly in Christ's sufferings,

⁴² Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, Rome, on the Liturgical Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 1984.

they also share in his comfort and glory (cf. SD, no. 20). Witnesses to his Cross and resurrection handed on to the Church the salvific power of Gospel of suffering and its significance in his messianic mission. Christ demands from all self-denial and the cross as prerequisites for being his disciples. All should be ever ready with courage, fortitude and joy to suffer persecution and tribulations for his name (SD, 25; cf. John 16:33; Acts 5:41). In every century many have united themselves to the salvific suffering of Christ with hope in his resurrection. Though an experience of evil, “Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely, the good of eternal salvation” (SD, 26).

12.0 POPE BENEDICT XVI follows up John Paul’s *Salvifici Doloris* with his Encyclical Letter on Salvation in Hope (*Spe Salvi facti sumus*)⁴³ where he succinctly links up suffering with a faith-based hope; “*Faith is hope*”. “‘Hope’ is a key word in the Bible and in several passages the words ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ seem interchangeable”. The *Letter to the Hebrews* closely links the ‘fullness of faith’ (10:22) to ‘the confession of our hope without wavering’ (10:23} [Spe Salvi, (SS), no. 2]. *St. Peter* equates ‘hope’ to ‘faith’ (1 Pet 3:15). Faith is linked to hope as “the substance (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for; the proof of the things not seen” (Heb 11:1). People without hope are without God. A hope-less person is a God-less person (cf. Eph 2:12). To know God by faith is to receive hope.

One who hopes has the gift of new life in Christ and must not grieve like others without hope (cf. 1 Thess 4:13). With this faith-filled hope, the Early Christians suffered all sorts of contumelies, humiliations and violence with patience and perseverance (*hypomene*). They “not only shared in the sufferings of those in prison, but “accepted with joy being stripped of your belongings, knowing that you owned something that was better and lasting” (Heb 10:33-34). With patience, perseverance, constancy and faith-filled hope in eternal life Christians fearlessly persevered in sufferings. As upright pilgrims with hope in the future abode, they never timidly drew back until their souls were saved (cf. Heb 10:39). “Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is

⁴³ Benedict XVI, Pope, *Spe Salvi* (Saved in Hope), Encyclical Letter, Rome, 30 November, Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, 2007.

necessary for the believer to be able to ‘receive what is promised’” (Heb 10:36)⁴⁴. One may entertain all kinds of great hopes but if the one does not know God, the one is ultimately deprived of God, the great hope that sustains all life unto eternity (cf. Eph 2:12). Christ died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died (cf. 2 Cor 5:15)⁴⁵. Pope Benedict outlined the three “**settings**” for *learning and practicing hope* as prayer, action and suffering and judgment: (a) “**Prayer is a school of hope in suffering**” for we hopefully call upon God if we are deserted and all helpers and comforts flee (SS, no. 32); (b) “**Action and suffering are settings for learning**” because every serious, upright human conduct is hope in action. Suffering as part of our human existence stems from both our finitude and sinfulness over the centuries till date. (SS, no. 35-40); (c) “**Judgment is a setting for learning and practicing hope**” for we believe that Jesus will come again in glory to judge and reward all living and dead (SS, no. 41). “The image of the Last Judgment is not primarily an image of terror but an image of hope; for us it may be a decisive image of hope, a frightening image that evokes responsibility, an image of that fear of which Saint Hilary spoke when he said that all our fear has its place in love. God is justice and creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope”⁴⁶. In suffering in hope we prayerfully look up to Mother Mary, the comforter of the afflicted and the Star of our hope (SS, no. 49) and complete in our flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his Body, the Church (Col. 1:24).

13.0 CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO SUFFERING AND HOPE:

Suffering with hope has meaning for Christians only if they suffer for Christ and neighbour in hope for the best from it (cf. Rom 8:18-19). In Baptism they are configured to Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-5) and struggle with him to the end (cf. Rom 7:21-25) by their self-control and penance (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; Eph 4:22; Col 3:5). Hope in eternal reward urges Christians to endure all indignities and undertake voluntary vicarious sufferings and austerities to ward off temptations (cf. 1 Pet 5:8)⁴⁷. As all

⁴⁴ Idem, *Spe Salvi*, no. 10.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 25-27.

⁴⁶ Idem, *Spe Salvi*, no. 44,

⁴⁷ Cf. Riga, P., Christian Attitude to Suffering, in: *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol 13, p. 776.

creation groan in labour pains, all who have the first fruits of the Spirit are “waiting with eagerness for their bodies to be set free. In hope, we already have salvation... and we wait for it with persevering confidence” (Rom 8:23-25). Redemption through suffering is offered to all given trustworthy hope⁴⁸. Christian faith sees in sufferings a means to unite a person to Christ in all his sufferings from Gethsemane to his crucifixion to the glory of his Father God. As a man of sorrows familiar with sufferings, he was despised, rejected, ridiculed, wounded for our rebellion, crushed for our guilt yet we are healed by his bruises (cf. Isa 53:3-5; 1 Pet 2:23-24). “Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). So it is with anyone who like Christ perseveres to the end. Therefore Christians should consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon them (cf. Jas 1:2-4). Perseverance is supported by the hope of the great blessings and the crown of life promised by God to those who love him (cf. Jas 1:12). Bearing insults for the name of Jesus and being persecuted for righteousness bring abundant heavenly blessings and glory (cf. Matt 5:10; 1 Pet 3:14; 4:12-14). All should be joyful in hope and persevere in affliction (cf. Rom 12:12). But when suffering reaches its peak in the death of beloved dead ones, hope comes into the strongest interchange and interplay with faith: all should grieve like people with hope and faith in the resurrection of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 5:1) and not like those without hope (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-14). The fruits and challenges of hope are endurance in suffering by squarely confronting it, by openness for the future, looking forward for the best in spite of all the difficulties, and bracing up to transform the world in the perspective of God’s creative plans and salvific goals⁴⁹. In all sufferings Christians should bow down in hope before the power of God, unload all worries to him so that in due time he may raise them up (cf. 2 Pet 5:6).

14.0 MARTYRS OF LOVE AS EXEMPLARS OF HOPE IN SUFFERING: Suffering with hope in eternal life can urge Christians to joyfully undergo martyrdom of love daily. *Generally* a martyr (Greek: *marturion* or *marturia*) is a “witness to someone or something, one who bears witness or testifies to or affirms

⁴⁸ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus*, no.1.

⁴⁹ Cf. Peschke, C. H., *Christian Ethics*, 57-60.

something good”. In the *technical theological sense* a martyr is one killed for bearing witness to Christ unto the shedding of blood. But martyrs of love do not necessarily shed blood in witnessing. They are those who with strong hope in eternal life witness to their faith in God and tirelessly labour for Christ with love that is “*strong as death*” so that he makes of them martyrs and confessors in their sufferings. Martyrs of love yield themselves completely to God so that divine love pierces the hidden recesses of their inmost selves and divides them from their souls. Martyrdom of love cuts one off from things dearest to one “just as completely and effectively as if a tyrant’s blade has severed the spirit from the body” as Jane Frances taught her *Daughters of the Visitation*⁵⁰: “I do not think. that the martyrdom of love can be relegated to a second place, for love is as strong as death. For the martyrs of love suffer more in remaining in this life so as to serve in testimony to their faith and love and fidelity” (ibid.). Likewise Bishop Baldwin of Canterbury taught that “our love for Christ is also as strong as death, because it is itself a kind of death, destroying the old life, rooting out our vice, and laying aside dead works”⁵¹. Also St. Peter Chrysologus avowed that “Faith and piety, not death, make a martyr. And as it is virtuous to die on the battlefield for love of one’s king, it is virtuous to face trials day after day till the end. A martyr is not one killed suddenly, but one tried into rejecting his faith. It is the greatest thing, brethren, to condemn the present life for the Lord’s sake, if necessary, but it is as great to condemn the world with one’s life at one with the king⁵²”. St. Augustine eloquently reiterated: “I tell you again and again, my brethren that in the Lord’s garden are to be found not only the roses of martyrs. In it there are also the lilies of virgins, the ivy of wedded couples, and the violets of widows.... Christ suffered for all....”⁵³ And “however distressful death may be, the strength of love ought to

⁵⁰ St. Jane Frances de Chantal, “Love is as Strong as Death”, in: *the Liturgy of the Hours*, IV, p. 1165-1166.

⁵¹ Baldwin of Canterbury (Bishop), “Love is as Strong as Death” from Tract. 10, PL 204, 513-514, in: *the Liturgy of the Hours*, IV, pp. 66-67.

⁵² Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 128. CCL,24 A, 780-791.

⁵³ St Augustine, Sermo 304, 1-4: PL 38, 1395-1397: “*He Ministered the Sacred Blood of Jesus*”, in: *the Liturgy of the Hours*, IV, p. 1153.

master the distress”⁵⁴. If from greatest love Christ laid down his life for his sheep and made many martyrs of them, “then how much more ought Christ’s shepherds to fight for the truth even to death and to shed their blood in opposing sin?”⁵⁵ A martyr of love has a very intense desire to die for Jesus or for one’s neighbours and this greatest of love is as strong as death that overwhelms even Death or Sheol or Netherworld (cf. Song, 8:6-8) or even stronger than death swallowed up in victory by Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55) because love is of God and from God, and God is love (cf. 1 John 4:7.16e⁵⁶. Generally all Saints whether killed for their faith or became Saints through their piety are “martyrs of love” but the most pre-eminent is our Virgin Mother Marry renowned for her Seven Sorrows as Co-Redemptrix with Jesus (Luke 2:23-25; John 19:25-27)⁵⁷. Others are: St. Paul who “died daily” and “was crucified with Christ”; St. John Chrysostom; the three Stigmatists: Sts. Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio); Sts. John of the Cross, Rose of Lima (Peru), and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

15.0 THE POWER OF HOPEFUL PRAYER IN SUFFERING: Prayer with hope in suffering is salutary and a most powerful means of overcoming depression and enlivening hope. It can be a remedy or panacea for every affliction. When all helpers and comfort flee and hopelessness overwhelms us, the only remedy is refuge to God through intense supplication. Every afflicted should borrow a leaf from the OT People of God, from Abraham up to our NT Jesus the Son of God, his Apostles and the Earliest Christians down to our own Century: Melchizedek’s prayer delivered Abraham from his enemies (Gen 14:19), Abraham earnestly prayed for the doomed Sodom (Gen 18:16-39) and for the sinning household of Abimelech (Gen 20:17). Moses prayed for the rebellious Israel bitten by fiery serpents (Num 21:7). Barren anguished Hannah’s prayer gave her Samuel (1 Sam

⁵⁴ Idem, Treatise on John: Tract. 123, 5; CCL 36, 678-680: “The Strength of Love Ought to Overcome the Fear of Death”, in: *the Liturgy of the Hours*, I, pp. 1042-1043.

⁵⁵ Idem, Treatise on John, in: *the Liturgy of the Hours*, I, p. 1043.

⁵⁶ Cf. Mbachu, H., *Who Shall Climb the Mountain of the Lord?* Pp. 50-51.

⁵⁷ St. Bernard calls B. V. Mary “more than martyr” “since the effect of compassion” in her “has gone beyond physical suffering” [Sermo in dom. infra oct. Assumptionis, 14-15].

1:10-28). Elijah's prayer raised to life the dead son of the widow of Zarephat (1 Kgs 17:17-24). With prayer Elisha resurrected the dead son of the woman of Shunem (2 Kgs 4:29-37) and struck sun-blind the hostile fiery Aramaean band (2 Kgs 6:18). At Hezekiah's prayer God decimated the Assyrian army under Sennacherib (2Kgs 19:15-37; Isa 37:15-20; 2 Chr 32:20-23) and saved him from premature death (Isa 38:1-8). Judith's prayer saved her people from rampaging Assyrians (Judt 4: 9-15). Esther's prayer saved Israel from the plotted annihilation by Haman (Est 4:4:1-19). Daniel's prayer saved him in lion's den (Dan 6:11-25). The Psalmist is our best exemplar of hopeful prayer in anguish, ordeal, agony, sorrow, danger, distress, peril, trouble or persecution⁵⁸. Jesus as the Lord of persevering prayer, taught us to pray hopefully in distress (Luke 18:1-8) and in his agony prayed intensely for deliverance from death (Matt 26:36; Mark 14:32)⁵⁹. He urged his apostles to watch and pray lest they fall into temptation (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:45). God instantly answered the prayer of the persecuted apostles and Christians (Acts 4:23-41) and rescued them from prison and death (Acts 5:17-21; 12:1-17; 16:16-39). In Malta Paul's prayer healed the sick father of Chief Publius and many others (Acts 28:8-9). James exhorts sufferers to pray with faith (Jas 5:13-15). St. Paul's counsel summarized the Bible's endless Litany of praying with hope in suffering: "Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship, keep praying regularly" (Rom 12:12). Our Pilgrim Church of hope liturgically celebrates suffering in the Passion Week of Jesus, the feast of the Exaltation of his Cross, of Our Lady of Sorrows and of Martyrs

16.0 SINS AGAINST HOPE: *Presumption* and *despair* are sins against hope: "Presumption is the unwarranted expectation of goods or helps of divine order. It rashly assumes that fulfillment will be obtained. Presumption is directly opposed to the fear of God which is an essential element of theological hope"⁶⁰ (cf. CCC, no. 2092). Presumption is superlative arrogance. "By *despair* man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God,

⁵⁸ Cf. Psalms 3; 7; 13; 22; 25; 31; 35; 38; 42; 51; 55; 56; 57; 59; 60; 70; 74; etc, etc, etc.

⁵⁹ "In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44).

⁶⁰ Peschke, C. Henry, *Christian Ethics*, p. 60.

for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins. Despair is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice – for the Lord is faithful to his promises – and to his mercy” (CCC, no. 2091). Ahitophel (cf. 2 Sam 17:23) and Judas Iscariot (cf. Matt 27:3-6) committed suicide due to extreme distress, frustration and despair.

17.0 SUFFERING AND HOPE IN NIGERIA: Nigeria bedeviled by diverse sufferings and depression is a miserably desperate country derided and mocked by the Wealthy Nations as “*the poverty capital of the world*”. With millions of poorly paid workers, joblessness, skyrocketing prices of commodities, endemic corruption and innumerable victims of terrorisms, ethnic conflicts and premature deaths, millions are despondent. This misery is exacerbated by the ravaging *Corona Virus* pandemic. The traumatized citizenry vainly hope for rescue from the insensitive, stiff-necked, wicked, cattle loving presidency and cohorts. Innumerable are victims of trepidation, despair and suicides⁶¹.

17.1 At the POLITICAL Level: Nigeria's Federal character now toyed with must be rescued from the virulent, ethnocentric, arrogant Fulani *RUGA* or *Open-Grazing* presidency that values cattle more than humans. Justice, fair play and equity must prevail over the callous marginalization that ignites incessant, agitations, conflicts, violence and despair⁶².

17.2 At the SOCIO-ECONOMIC Level: Swift remedy for societal decay must replace mere words for economic well-being. Job creations for the teeming population are urgent. Over forty heinous crimes and rampaging criminals with impunity must be expunged⁶³.

⁶¹ Nigeria has the highest suicide rate in Africa, sixth globally: [See: www.researchgate.net.>publication; wikipedia.org. >wiki>Suicide [World Health Organization (WHO), 9 Sept 2019].

⁶² Cf. Bishop Callistus Onaga of Enugu Diocese at the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) states categorically that “Marginalization, Selective Justices are the cause of agitations”, in: THE FORUM [Newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of ORLU], Vol. V No 721, 29th August – 4th September 2021, p. 1..

⁶³ Cf. Hilary Mbachu: ‘Heinous Crimes of Nigerians Flout God's Commandments With Impunity’, in: THE FORUM, Vol. V, No. 667, 26th July to 1st August 2020, p. 13, exposes the forty heinous crimes of Nigerians.

17.3 At the EDUCATIONAL Level: Urgent reform is needed for the very poor education system plagued by banditries, kidnappings and numerous school drop-outs at all levels of the so-called “free” education boom. Half-baked, corrupt teachers and lecturers should be sacked from the poorly equipped institutions of learning to reduce the rising number of fake, “educated illiterates” in order to restore hope to despairing families.

17.4 At the MEDICO-HEALTH Level: Nonchalant presidency and health ministry should urgently renovate the ragtag hospitals and health centres, adequately remunerate all the medics on strikes for unpaid wages and allowances for their hazard tasks in this *Covid-19 pandemic* era. Stop sack threats against them. Good health care system for the masses is long overdue. Ban wealthy people from luxury medical tourism at nation’s expense.

17.5 At the RELIGIOUS Level: Moslem fundamentalists are bitter against Christians due to the crude presidency’s open agenda of marginalizing Christians. Rage and fury heat up as fanatics kidnap innocent Christians for ransom. The embittered, persecuted, depressed ones rightly agitate against the insensitive, ethnic bigotry of the wicked rulers.

17.6 At the PSYCHOLOGICAL Level: As the traumatized citizens deprived of their basic needs helplessly watch their heartless rulers in provocative shows of extravagance, their mental health is extensively impaired by anxieties, worries, insecurity, lack of essential needs, utter helplessness and hopelessness.

17.7 These *dehumanizing and agonizing* melodramas must stop forthwith. Nigerians have suffered enough from heinous criminalities. Now is the time for lasting remedies to them and restore hope to the desperate, languishing folks.

18.0 CONCLUSION: The sin of Adam and Eve brought untold sufferings and death to them and their descendants. God’s immediate promise of redemption through one of their progenies restored the lost hope to everyone. By his excruciating death on the Cross Jesus the New Adam paid the ultimate painful ransom for all. His resurrection restored the hope for eternal life and glory to every generation (cf. 1 Cor 1:15-17). Yet physical suffering and death unabatedly ravage the human race. All sufferers are urged to

hope in God as their Saviour (Psa 42:6), to taste and see his goodness (Psa 34:8), to take him as their refuge and fortress (Psa 91) and to unload their worries to him as their provident God (1 Pet 5:7). In every hopeless case like Abraham and Sarah's childlessness in old age (cf. Rom 4:18), faith-based hope exhorts us not to be solicitous of tomorrow (Matt 6:34). Hope in eternal life is our sole solace in all our afflictions. "If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable" (1 Cor 15:10). Hope in suffering will not let us down because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom 5:5).