

Hope Founded on Justice: A Critical Reflection on “Spes non Confundit”, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025

Olisaemeka Rosemary Okwara¹

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Abstract

Spes non Confundit: “Hope does not disappoint” taken from Romans 5:5, is the title of the Pope Francis’ letter of announcement of the ordinary jubilee of 2025.² The letter indicates that hope is the central message of the coming Jubilee.³ The perspective of hope

¹ Olisaemeka Rosemary Okwara is a member of the *Daughters of Divine Love* religious Congregation. She holds a doctorate degree in systematic theology and religious studies, and a diploma in academic teacher training programme in religious education from KU Leuven, Belgium. Presently, she is doing a Habilitation in fundamental theology and comparative religious studies at Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Germany. Her research focuses on Christianity’s understanding of divine revelation, Christian anthropology and Vatican II’s theological hermeneutics in contemporary postcolonial and cosmopolitan theological formulations from the perspective of identity, diversity, ethics, soteriology and dialogue. In her view, Christian mission today involves the promotion of authentic human well-being, dialogue with cultures and integral education. Some of her research publications could be found @<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5384-6873>.

² Pope Francis, “Spes non Confundit”: Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html, accessed, August 25, 2024.

³ “The coming Jubilee will thus be a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society,

according Spes non Confundit is that hope is not passive, rather hope challenges one to live out the faith which is believed. Rooted in Vatican II's theological hermeneutics of signs of the times and a view of human existential issues as locus of faith and its praxis, the Holy Father discusses hope in its different facets as human and religious value that could also be resourceful in the challenging ethical, economic, religious, and socio-political issues of our times. The question that would guide the present paper is: Why is hope relevant for the ordinary jubilee 2025 and how does the Pope's views offer a sure pathway of hope for our times? The paper's argument is that the Pope's mandate on hope offers insight to the human society by way of its understanding of hope as rooted in ardent faith, solidarity and justice.

Introduction - “Spes non confundit” – Hope does not Disappoint
“Spes non Confundit”, the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 is the Papal announcement letter of the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 given on 9 May, 2024 (henceforth as *SNC*). This letter of announcement of the 2025 ordinary jubilee, premises the theme of St Paul's Letter to the Romans, “Hope does not disappoint” - *Spes non Confundit*. It presents the virtue of hope and a guide for its implementation in practical human experiences in view of the jubilee. This practice of locating hope and its praxis in the context of our times is premised on the perspective of Vatican

in our interpersonal relationships, in international relations, and in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation. May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pet 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises” (nr.25).

II's theological hermeneutics of *the signs of the times*.⁴ *SNC* demonstrates this perspective vividly by presenting some of the human situations challenging the Christian faith and hope. Furthermore, it presents existential issues as the antithesis that could be transformed into signs of hope.

SNC requires a critical reception given above all, its creative focus on existential issues as “signs of hope”; meaning that although these issues pose challenges, hope leads to a proactive engagement with them. The existential issues which feature greatly in the Popes *SNC* has found resonance in two significant contexts. The *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*, of the Holy See, equally takes the approach to *doing theology from the existential peripheries* as its major focus and engagement. Secondly, a renounced Jesuit theologian recently emphasizes that the *peripheries* are “places where the Spirit is at work, places we are constantly called to reach out.”⁵ Hence, the question of human existential contexts has emerged as a critical question for theology and Christian faith.

The reflection in the present paper is based on the foregoing critical place of *SNC* as it presents itself within the existential challenges to hope through the practical role of faith and justice. It will reflect on the contents of the *SNC* in line with its view of faith, hope and solidarity as they emerge within the existential contexts of our

⁴ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), nr.4.

⁵ Michael Simone, “The Future of the Theological Field—through the eyes of the first African Jesuit dean of theology in Berkeley”: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/05/21/orobator-jesuit-school-theology-berkeley-247933>, accessed August 25, 2024.

human society today. The author adopts the view that justice could be a critical way to active hope rooted in faith. Could the Pope’s invitation to hope and its view of *human existential issues as signs of hope* advance justice and solidarity in our world today? The paper will first give a general review of the letter emphasizing its contents and prospects. Then, it will discuss the existential issues featuring in the Pope’s letter in line with its invitation to a pilgrimage of hope. Finally, the paper will advance the letter’s path to hope focusing on faith, justice and solidarity.

Hope – A Basic Human and Christian Virtue

Hope according to *SNC* is the ability to expect a favourable turn of events even in the midst of challenging situations. Aptly put: “In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring” (nr.1). Just as human beings have the innate aptitude to hope, they are also prone to and could be swayed away from hope. Hence, the Pope takes cognizance of this ambiguity: “Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt” (nr.1) This tendency to give in to the despair is the reason according to *SNC*, that we often “come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness” (nr.1) Hence, we find that hope is an important quality of human life and yet, hope could be a special gift of God. In *SNC*, hope is not a state of being, it is rather a state of action. Hope is our striving to resist the obstacles we encounter and the ability believe that these would be surmounted. The proactive perspective to hope provides

the background for the Holy Father's profiling of hope and prayer, and the Jubilee as an opportunity for people everywhere to be renewed in hope.

If hope is very significant for meaningful human existence, the pursuit of it then can best be described as noble and profitable. Hence, another significant question emerging in *SNC* is: where and how do human beings find or cultivate the hope they so very much desire and deserve? One of the resources of hope according to *SNC* is built on contact with God gained reflection on God's words and God's ways. It says: "God's word helps us find reasons for that hope." This is clearly, why the Pope chooses the Apostle's letter to the Romans as its building block for his jubilee announcement letter. Furthermore, hope is born of God's love: this is the heart of the apostles' letter to the Romans. "Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:1-2.5)" (nr.2). Furthermore, the love that nourishes hope, according to St Paul, is rooted on the import of God's love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:19)."

Hope does not disappoint because of the love of Christ that is poured out for us and the consolation of the Holy Spirit which is a gift of God to all who believe. Hence, the Holy Father surmises that hope "becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God's grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit." (nr.2). The Holy Spirit is the one who makes hope vivid in the life of the believer. If hope is born of love because of the love of

Christ for us and our justification through faith, the Holy Spirit keeps hope alive in us as a persevering attitude in the midst of uncertainties. God’s Spirit that is given to us in creation and baptism “illuminates all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives” (nr.2).

Hope is filled with the word of God spoken from eternity in God, in creation, in the incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Hope is the grace that is given to those who believe. *SNC* points to the conviction of faith and hope rooted in the faith on God’s promises: “Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35.37-39)” (nr.2). Here we see the reason why hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life. Referring to Saint Augustine: *SNC* affirms: “Whatever our state of life, we cannot live without these three dispositions of the soul, namely, to believe, to hope and to love.” (nr.3).

Perseverance in hope is founded on faith: the light of faith must stay burning – day in and out even in the oasis of tribulations. *SNC* thus points out that hope is nurtured by patience and contemplation. This expression of patience, aligns with and recalls the quality of faith as “assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen”

(Heb. 11,1). It is thus obvious that hope is intertwined with faith and is nurtured by it. Yet, *SNC* takes cognizance that the vagaries of life are challenges to hope. Above all, the life dedicated to God and evangelization are often filled with trials and tribulations. A life of virtue is not freed from persecution. Indeed, the Bible is filled with evidences of such tribulations in a life of faith beginning with Abraham through Job, the Apostles and Jesus Christ. Yet, hope is tested and nurtured in trials and tribulations. Trials enable people to build endurance and hope is nurtured through it. St Paul's letter which *SNC* follows closely, is clear about this. St Paul knows that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Even so, he can write: "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom 5:3-4). For the Apostle, trials and tribulations mark the lives of those who preach the Gospel amid incomprehension and persecution (cf. 2 Cor 6:3-10).

SNC features the notion of pilgrimage to designate the jubilee of hope. It is a journey of hope for our times and reminds us that the Christian life is a journey. Although the life of faith and evangelization of the gospel is marked by incomprehension and persecution, "yet in those very contexts, beyond the darkness we glimpse a light: we come to realize that evangelization is sustained by the power flowing from Christ's cross and resurrection. In this way, we learn to practise a virtue closely linked with hope, namely patience" (nr.4). The interplay of hope and patience according *SNC* makes us "see clearly that the Christian life is a journey calling for moments of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our

encounter with the Lord Jesus” (nr.5). The events of our times are catalysts for hope even as they are equally and at the same time hindrances to our faith, hope and love. The question then is whether and how to acknowledge these challenges and how they are to be surmounted.

The sacramental life of the Church and of faith are sure strongholds for enduring challenges. Above all, the intercession and efficacy of the prayers of the saints, of the sacredness of particular times, places and events could be sacramental paths to hope. These are aspects that build faith and hope and their concrete application. When for example, one does a great charity to the poor who has been asking for a need on a particular celebration or occasion such as Christmas as the gift of Gods’ humanity and time of God’s visit for his people. These make faith believable and keeps hope alive. In the ancient times, the jubilee is marked by such acts of grace and favour: of forgiveness, and favour. According to *SNC*, in reference to such sacramentality: “It is good that such “dispersed” celebrations of the Jubilee continue, so that the power of God’s forgiveness can support and accompany communities and individuals on their pilgrim way” (nr.5).

Furthermore, *SNC* pleads for concrete expressions of the sacramentality of the quality of a jubilee as a time of freedom and renewal of mind and body. It suggests “Journeying from one country to another as if borders no longer mattered, and passing from one city to another in contemplating the beauty of creation and masterpieces of art, we learn to treasure the richness of different experiences and cultures, and are inspired to lift up that beauty, in prayer, to God, in thanksgiving for his wondrous works.” When such openness takes place, the Jubilee Churches along the pilgrimage

routes and in the city of Rome can serve as oases of spirituality and places of rest on the pilgrimage of faith, where we can drink from the wellsprings of hope, above all by approaching the sacrament of Reconciliation, the essential starting-point of any true journey of conversion. In a more spiritual sense of the renewal, special care should be taken to prepare priests and the faithful to celebrate the sacrament of Confession and to make it readily available in its individual form.

The Pope's Message of Hope for Our Times

Signs of Hope Amidst Contradictions

The underlying assumption to *SNC* is that the existential questions of our time could be signs of hope, although they represent a challenge to hope. In engaging these questions, the document samples *our fast-paced world*, in which people prefer immediate satisfaction as the greatest challenge to hope. This concern for fast results reduces the ease human beings enjoy by having the time for the little things that make hope possible. For instance, time simply to be with others; families in order to enjoy one another's company is drastically reduced. The Pope laments that "Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness" (nr.4). Contact with nature and appreciation of creation are possible ways of retrieving genuine engagement with life. Importantly, the Pope urges that interacting with nature has its ways of revealing things to those who find time to engage with human beings, trees, animals; either by way of service, nurture, presence or in meditation and praise of God the creator. Patience is also a gift to faith and hope since one requires

patience to follow God’s ways and understand his plans in every circumstance. The lack of which manifests in frenetic search for solutions, despair and loss of faith.

Though challenging the Pope sees the contradictions to hope as signs that challenges people to make options for hope and its promotion. Since the solution to a problem begins with its recognition as the adage “a problem known is half solved” demonstrates, uncovering the *signs of the times* within the existential questions of our times is one of the bases of *SNC*. The document builds its reflection on the signs of hope on the conciliar note of the signs of the times: “In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us.” As the Council observed in the “Constitution on the Church in the World of Today,” *Gaudium et Spes*, nr. 4: “In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.

In focusing on the issues of our times as a language adapted to every generation, the Church hopes to “respond to people’s persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other” (*SNC* nr.7). Hence, rather than taking a negative approach or description of these challenges, the Pope calls them signs of hope: “We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence” (nr.7). Furthermore, “the signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope” (nr.7). This approach to hope that looks at the positive aspect of the challenges to hope offers us hermeneutics of hope.

Taking the existential signs of hope in turns, the first in the rank that the desire for peace is the sign of hope against the tragedy and ordeal of war. War in our world concerns the signs of hope considering that in the course of war many peoples become prey to brutality and violence, a situation begging for an alternative thus emerges in the context war. Could the desperate plea for help motivate world leaders to resolve the numerous regional conflicts in view of their possible consequences at the global level? What does the future hold for those peoples, who have already endured so much? *SNC* falls back on the beatitude to provide an alternative: “the peace makers will be called children of God” In the context of war and violence, the lack of peace challenges us all, and demands that concrete steps be taken. Among them diplomacy and “commitment to seek, with courage and creativity, every opportunity to undertake negotiations aimed at a lasting peace” (nr.8).

The enthusiasm for life and a readiness to share it stands as a sign of hope against the loss of the desire to transmit life. *SNC* laments the aversion for procreation of the human species dotted with an alarming decline in the birth-rate existing in a number of countries. This aversion for propagation of life stems from “today’s frenetic pace, fears about the future, the lack of job, security and adequate social policies, and social models whose agenda is dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships” (nr.9). According to *SNC*, this aversion for procreation contradicts the hope the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters as a sign of the fruitfulness of their love. On the one hand, the procreation and sustenance of the human species “is a matter of hope: it is born of hope and it generates hope” (nr.9).

On the other hand, it is true that openness to procreation must be accompanied by responsible parenthood since irresponsible multiplication of human species without adequate parenting and parental care could be inimical to hope in the future. The book Genesis affirms the goodness creation: procreation is marked by praise of God. Procreation that warrants unnecessary poverty and suffering could mock the beauty of it and cause a mockery of creation. Two situations are clear for both the sign of hope and its denial in this question of life. One lies at the option for consumerism and self-centredness whereas the other lies at a critical hope that knows that Children are blessing from God and require a good life condition. Knowing the drawing line between the two would be a practical sign of hope for our world.

Kindness and liberation are signs of hope against the deprivation of freedom. The Pope focuses on prisoners in this context, nevertheless, the question of liberty extends to all who, are deprived of their freedom, who experience the harshness of detention and its restrictions, lack of affection and, in more than a few cases, lack of respect for their persons. Many people in our world today live at the deprivation of their freedom. Freedom of opinion, of expression, of the joy of life and expression of faith. Daily, situations militating against genuine freedom exists including unjust laws and bad governance. Freedom according to *SNC* requires “Initiatives aimed at restoring hope; forms of amnesty or pardon meant to help individuals regain confidence in themselves and in society; and programmes of reintegration in the community, including a concrete commitment to respect for law” (nr.10). In today’s world, the quest for liberation in the postcolonial contexts have emerged as theological approaches to justice, and restoration of the dignity of

people. These theological approaches are rooted above all in the justice of God in the Scriptures practiced by Jesus's own ministry. *SNC* makes this biblical perspective vivid:

“You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev 25:10). This institution of the Mosaic law was later taken up by the prophet Isaiah: “The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Is 61:1-2). Jesus made those words his own at the beginning of his ministry, presenting himself as the fulfilment of the “year of the Lord's favour” (cf. Lk 4:18-19).

The call for freedom as a sign of hope demands that in every part of the world, believers, should be one in demanding dignified conditions and respect for human rights as a provision of Christian hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.

Liberation and the pursuit of authentic human wholeness is one of those concrete and complex questions for Christian praxis touching on the cords of justice and/or injustice. At present the question of justice has become eminent for the Church's teaching and praxis. How is the Christian faith attuned to justice? This question is even more challenging in the recent debates on diversity, freedom and signs of the times in the Church. The question being asked are: Whose times are recognised in the signs we proclaim and whose justice is favoured? How does governmental policies exhume a genuine concern for freedom and justice? How should liberation be addressed to avoid a binary that vitiates the centrality of humanity

and creation? What are the concrete signs of hope and a future for the marginalised?

The sick, the aged, the disabled, the migrants, the young people and the poor are in their unique challenges to our times credible signs of hope. The works of mercy for the sick are also “works of hope that give rise to immense gratitude” while care given to the disabled and the weak “is a hymn to human dignity, a song of hope that calls for the choral participation of society as a whole” (nr.11) The young people who sadly, often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated are further sign of hope for the society. The future depends on them, yet “it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school” (nr.12). As a sign of hope, the Jubilee should inspire the Church to reach out to them. The Migrants offer a sign of hope when their expectations are not frustrated by prejudice and rejection and are welcomed with respect which embraces everyone for their dignity, accompanied by a sense of responsibility and a dignified existence. Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution that they can still make are signs of hope for the aged people and grandparents. Finally, the poor, who often lack the essentials of life are signs of hope when we keep in mind that they are almost always the victims, not the ones to blame, and when their poverty challenge unjust socio-economic and political systems and policies and we they make us to rethink our options.

Appeals for Hope – Faith and Charity as Strongholds of Hope

Pope Francis' appeals for hope strikes on the sensitive cords of injustice and demands socio-political and economic choices and actions that make the signs of hope realizable. His position is grounded on the presupposition that hope is also made possible through acts of justice and fraternal communion. On making hope concrete, the Pope makes honest references to how the jubilee offers hope with regard to the noted *signs of the times*. Taking suffering as a case point, the Pope offers that the Jubilee “reminds us that the goods of the earth are not destined for a privileged few, but for everyone. The rich must be generous and not avert their eyes from the faces of their brothers and sisters in need.” Reflection on human suffering with *SNC*, here I must refer to my description of the notion of *violence of everyday life* as a challenge to humanity.⁶ I commend the assertion of the Pope that “hunger is a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, and it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience” (nr.16). The Pope renews his appeal in *Fratelli Tutti* that with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, “the world could establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory situations, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life” (nr.16).

More than a question of generosity, *SNC* regards the offsetting of debts owed by poor countries to affluent nations as a matter of

⁶ Okwara, Olisaemeka, R., Witnessing the Identity and Mission of an Institute of Consecrated life in the face of Crisis and Violence in Nigeria, in: *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*, 14 (2018), 117-127.

justice. According to him, forgiving the huge amounts of debts from our poor debtors is made all the more serious today by a new form of injustice which we must be increasingly recognized. Namely: that “a true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time” (nr.16) The Pope finds scriptural support for his position that: As sacred Scripture teaches, the earth is the Lord’s and all of us dwell in it as “aliens and tenants” (Lev 25:23).” He thus argues that “If we really wish to prepare a path to peace in our world, let us commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry.” As an appeal for Hope, the Pope asks that the affluent nations acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them (nr.16).

Furthermore, appeals for hope are anchored on the heart of the Christian faith and reminds Christians of the need to renew and hold on to their faith. In the view of the pope, “Hope, together with faith and charity, makes up the triptych of the “theological virtues” that express the heart of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3). In their inseparable unity, hope is the virtue that, so to speak, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers while faith nourishes it. As such, every aspect of the Christian proclamation of faith, especially, regarding the questions of existence: life, death and afterlife are aspects supporting the pilgrimage of hope which Christians undertake in their life. The problems of life and death, of guilt and suffering cause humans to despair, above all when they do not anchor their life on the Christian hope. How can human beings

generate hope in our world today? The Christian hope is built on the hope of resurrection and the victory over sin and death that Christ by his life, death and resurrection secured for those who believe (*SNC*, 20).

Hope in Christian parlance is a necessary virtue for the practice of faith and charity. The Apostle Paul affirms this: Surely we need to “abound in hope” (cf. Rom 15:13), so that we may bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts; that our faith may be joyful and our charity enthusiastic; and that each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope” (nr.18) Yet what is the basis of our hope? To understand this, let us stop and reflect on “the reasons for our hope” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Belief and hope in the future of humanity provides that human beings are not crushed by the existential questions and life is not lived in despair. The advantage of the Christian hope rooted in the hope of resurrection is that human beings conquer the tendency to reduce human life in the mere present, which often occurs in a mere evolutionary humanism. Rather, with Christian hope human existence could find meaning and hope in the human salvation.

Christ’s humanity, especially, his suffering and death, is a sign of triumph over despair as it offers a practical path to hope. Hope is central to the Christian believe that Jesus identified with our humanity in his death so that his death might offer us the hope and courage for our own life and death. The Christian baptism is a concrete way of articulating the union with Christ’s death in hope while the sacraments and the community of the Church keeps faith active. The end of life according to Christian faith in the belief in

God’s love and the kindness we ourselves have shown those in need – the teaching on the last judgement – assure believers of hopeful end. Hence, appeals for hope are made for preparation for the course of earthly and end of life with the help of the sacraments – of penance, especially in this jubilee year. To say that we believe in God requires some sort of conviction rooted in what we know about God. “Hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life” (SNC, nr.24). The image of the anchor in *SNC* is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death.

Faith and Justice as Companions of hope

As I pointed out in the introduction, the underlying assumption to *SNC* is that the existential issues of our times harbinger hope when properly addressed and when we hearken to the appeals for hope through them. The perspective of faith, hope and charity emerge from St Paul’s letter to the Romans as well as in Pope Francis’ view that hope is not passive nrs1&2. Surmising *SNC*, one can say that hope is call to action—to make a change while faith is the stronghold for its realisation. A renewed appreciation of the virtue of hope would benefit the individual and societal realms. Saint Paul often speaks of hope in the context of our need for perseverance and confident trust in God’s promises (Rom 15:5). The promise of God is echoed by St Paul: that faith and hope will not fail us. The first action required for hope is ardent faith while justice is its handmaid, together with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who sustains

our hope and strengthens it as a virtue and a way of life nr.4. How then should the Church be active carriers of hope in the context of our world today, propagating faith that is generous and anchored on justice?

The Church's pilgrimage as sign of hope for our world may be described as faith and justice – justice to the earth, the marginalised, the minority, to freedom, against war and violence, justice for peace and to human wholeness. *SNC* strikes on some of the ethical issues of justice with reference to forgiving debts, ending wars, desisting from violence and a global liberation through elimination of abject poverty. The question of justice as constituent of hope has been perennial. Pope John Paul II already referred to “Structures of sin” in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and the 1971 Synod of Bishops – *Justitia in Mundo* describes “a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and fraternal world.”⁷ At what point should orthodoxy be transformed to orthopraxis? Are the contemporary Christian communities, laity, priests and religious largely oblivious of the enormity of evil of injustice taking root around them? Has the dominant missionary, prophetic, ecclesiastical orientation to human wellbeing and solidarity been drowned by the mystical-spiritual re-enactment of the salvation of Christ's passion and death that call for justice and salvation in the present has been stifled, influencing a scandalous neglect of a pile of injustice and suffering holding many of God's children captive?

⁷ John Paul II. 1987. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, (1987) nos. 36-40.

In different parts of the world, from Europe to America and to Africa, the culture of political unruliness has created unimaginable miseries and unparalleled oceans of conflicts and scandalous wars. This situation has destroyed basic virtues of trust and hope as well as creating a vicious circle of *violence of everyday life*. Social violence, namely, the violence that oppressive structures and unjust social orders bring to bear on human experience is the commonest and most neglected aspect of violence. This includes the devastating conditions provoked by suffering such as unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, exclusion, powerlessness, misery hunger, pain, disease and death.⁸ The *violence of everyday life* have aggressive effects on the body and the moral order. These effects consequently impact on how people understand themselves and their ability to engage in with life. Thus, in the description of her book, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, asks: “When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? When assaulted by daily acts of violence and untimely death, what happens to trust?”⁹

When justice is thought of internationally, then the Pope’s plea for forgiving of debts would demand, as it stand, a critical question on why the debts are incurred in the first place. What sort of solidarity and justice could Europe and America offer through their developed sense of rule of law to a continent such as Africa in the fight against corrupt leaders other than imposing of their personal interests and

⁸ Arthur Kleinman, “The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence,” in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das et al (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 227.

⁹ Excerpt from the online University of California press website book description <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520075375>

agendas on the continent? Charitable organisations, agencies of emancipation, and promoters of human well wellbeing abound on international levels. Nevertheless, their approach often portrays one that is a far cry from the concerns for justice and the promotion of the common good of all. Intentionally or unintentionally, when charity replaces justice, it leads to an uncritical solidarity that is incapable of offering a lasting undoing of poverty and does not critically engage with neither self-reliance nor true interdependence of the poor in an international level.

The Pope thus strikes a sensitive cord in view of socio-economic and political injustice, especially, with regard to the debts of poor countries to affluent ones. According to him, these debts, rightly analysed, are not to be reckoned with; given the unjust handling of economic policies and political contexts warranting the indebtedness and dependency existing in the relationship of the poor and the rich. In analysing this concrete situation, I take the view of hope built on structural approach to justice and solidarity as the heart of *SNC*. Hence, while I praise the Pope's critical view of the matter, I advance it further with a call for a critical justice and solidarity. My point of view is that, the concern for justice should not only address the forgiving of debts by creditors, but also warrants an understanding that there is an existential meeting point between injustice and lack of solidarity on the one hand, and socio-political and economic issues on the other hand, challenging the virtue of hope of many today.

Uzochukwu Njoku makes this structural view of solidarity and justice even more vivid. He asks: "Is Europe's fight against high immigrations from Africa and other Third World countries unrelated to the excruciating socio-economic difficulties of the former

colonies? Is the threat of terrorism removed from the increasing dominance of Western inspired socio-political and economic systems?”¹⁰ Njoku refers further to a structural-experience approach. He uses the parable of the rich lawyer and the widow. How long can one withstand the cry of the suffering Other? Hence, a continuous cry of the oppressed for help and critical engagement with the *powers that be*, structured along the lines dialogue and not mere indictment and based on the necessity of concrete human redemption, justice and solidarity might be a more resourceful approach both in the local concern for justice and in international pursuit of it. What would happen when the so-called underdeveloped and rich countries take a structural approach in dealing with just distribution of wealth or in their relationship with the so-called third-world countries?

Addressing hope from the regional and internal levels aspect equally warrants actions by both the Church and the political leaders. Could leaders of the so-called poor countries stand up to the call for justice in their dealing with the resources of their lands? Here I point to the *violence of everyday life*: of hunger, of war, of racism, of exclusion, of corrupt government and leadership and of the weight of victimization and selfishness on the human spirit and the suffering bodies as a point for the appeal to justice and solidarity. In a Country such as Nigeria people are divided in the pursuit for their freedom and justice along the lines of religion, race, ethnicity and tribe. Hence, the evil leaders get away with their marginalization,

¹⁰ Uzochukwu Njoku, “Rethinking Solidarity as a Principle of Catholic Social Teaching: Going Beyond *Gaudium et spes* and the Social Encyclicals of John Paul II,” in: *Political Theology* 9/4 (2008): 525-544, 536.

discrimination, embezzlement of public funds and other impoverishing actions because of disunity and divided house.

On an international level, Europe and America focus on pursuing their personal interests of gender and migration politics. These socio-political issues are important for the strengthening of their lands and the political interests of their people. Nevertheless, the international body eaten up by war, conflicts and poverty is deeply seated and drastically affected by lack of solidarity in the pursuit of justice. People—the rich and the poor, regardless of religion or race must unite in authentic pursuit of justice and against wars, poverty, discrimination and lack of freedom.

Hope founded on justice underscores a planetary justice and solidarity, namely, it concerns all and extends to all and sundry with equal emphasis and intensity. This planetary justice according to Namsoon Kang demonstrates that the weakness of a part implies the weakness of the whole, and that there should be no hierarchy in the question of injustice.¹¹ In dealing with exclusion, discrimination and injustice, all must realize that there no hierarchy to oppressions and injustice, discrimination, exclusion exists. My idea is that injustice and oppression in one place is tantamount to its existence in another irrespective of the gradation that one sets on them or who is involved. People in advocacy movements tend to establish a hierarchy of oppressions. However, one must not limit the many injustices that occur every day in the world due to gradations based on numbers or who is involved. The same spirit of self-centeredness, exclusion and violence that generates even the minutest war and violent conflict

¹¹ Namsoon Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology: Reconstituting Planetary Hospitality, Neighbor-Love, and Solidarity in an Uneven World*, (St. Louis: Chalice Missouri Press, 2013), 4.

are also the root cause of the most gruesome wars that eat up the planet.

For a legitimizing foundation for a pursuit of hope based on justice, I adopt Paul Ricoeur’s political hermeneutics of otherness: “the other is like me (mon semblable) though he is not me.”¹² Njoku extending this view argues that “We are different but often share similar concerns, which cause our paths to cross.”¹³ This approach gives room for solidarity but also provides for links through experiences and aspirations in life. Since the other that is not me is like me, his/her wellbeing and suffering ought to be affected in the same way as mine. The Pope’s approach is soundly supported with the existential questions framed on the structural and anthropological emphasis on human suffering and could also facilitate more solidarity. The suffering of Christ should not be merely re-enacted for its sake, rather, it should provide the ground and argument against oppression and human suffering. This standpoint challenges religious consciences and theological reflections to evolve patterns of thought and pastoral praxes which can assist in dispelling the evils militating against true hope.

A Proclamation of Hope

Spes non Confundit - Hope does not disappoint! It may be true that because human beings live in the world, the socio-political aspects equally shape the state of faith. Nevertheless, the Christian conviction holds that hope, faith and love are theological virtues

¹² P. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” in *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricoeur’s Ethical Order*, ed. H. J. Opdebeeck (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 11–30, 14.

¹³ Njoku, *Rethinking Solidarity as a Principle of Catholic Social Teaching*, 537.

acquired through ardent and authentic spiritual life. The existential situations and state of things may influence faith and hope, nevertheless, a person of faith can withstand these human tribulations. This testimony of hope is based on the confessions of faith in the bible. The resources of faith, hope and love and the understanding of how to cultivate and sustain hope in times of trials and difficulties lies with a life lived in acquittance with word of God. Hence, Biblical metaphors offer instances that could assist a person in hope even in trials and tribulations.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines hope as a theological virtue that enables us to place our trust in God's promises and to rely not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is the ability to trust in the promises of God and his faithfulness that he will fulfill these promises: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10,23). Hope keeps the human person from discouragement; it sustains him/her during times of abandonment. Furthermore, Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God: "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations" (Rom 4,18). Christian hope unfolds in Jesus preaching in the proclamation of the *beatitudes* (Matt 5, 1-11). Hope as Jesus preached in the beatitudes proclaims the blessings of perseverance in good deeds and trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus to a hope that does not disappoint. Hope is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, it

affords us joy even under trial: Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation be constant in prayer (Rom 12,12).¹⁴

Hope is a sensitivity to the ways of God’s ways: of God’s self-revelation and salvation. But hope and trust are the most difficult virtues as *SNC* rightly says because they require patience – a very difficult aspect of faith. But why do we lack patience? Biblical metaphors underlies that ardent hope and trust are often expressed in times when faith is put to trial. The conduct of faith that corresponds to my view of hope and trust are contained in the words of Prophet Habakuk 3, 17-18: “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.” Indeed, the life of faith is a pilgrimage of hope, as Pope Francis rightly defines it. We are in a pilgrimage of hope. Faith bespeaks the sure hope that, amid the tempests of this life, God comes to our aid, sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope and trust. This hope, “which transcends life’s fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called” (*SNC*,25).

The second biblical metaphor that represents the journey of hope in Isaiah, chapter 7, concerns the God’s promise to Jerusalem during the Syro-Ephraimite war of 735–732 B.C, a crisis period in the history of Judah and Jerusalem. Earlier in the book of Samuel, (2 Sm

¹⁴ Cf., CCC nrs.1817-1820.

7:12–16) God had chosen and made a commitment to David’s dynasty and his capital city Jerusalem: “Judah and its Davidic dynasty should trust God’s promises and not fear the combined armies of Israel and Syria; within a very short time these two enemy states will be destroyed, and David’s dynasty will continue.” Nevertheless, sixty-five years was too much a time of waiting for the people. Time became a constraint to their hope. As a sign of his faithfulness to his promise, God tells Ahaz through the Prophet Isaiah in today’s reading to ask for a sign that will prove God’s faithfulness. Ahaz the king, however, exhibited firm trust in God. He said to the prophet: I will not ask for a sign. “I will not tempt the LORD!” Then the prophet proclaimed the prophecy of the birth of Jesus. He will be Immanuel, God with us.

These biblical stories while offering insight on faith, hope and trust, also underlie some remarkable ambivalence which characterise hope as a religious virtue that can be encumbered by human situation. We think that God is not enough, or would want concrete and immediate results for things hoped for. Hence, the tendency to short-cut the pilgrimage of hope and to sail off to a closer shore. In some cases, people turn to solutions in search for miracle and other human idols. Others may boy court their true destiny and goals and prefer to choose other caveats. The excitement for the future in God’s plan for humanity urges us humans to secure a meaningful future by enduring tribulations and working towards a betterment of our world through justice. To a large extent, I think that contemporary theological thought and religious orientations are caught in this quagmire. Christians all over are caught up with poor socio-economic situations, dysfunctional family, issues of health, or poverty. But

how do they go about these realities of life as people who have faith, hope and trust?

Faith is the seedbed of hope. If only we have faith as little as the mustard seed we could tell the mountain to move and it will obey. But faith like hope and patience are among the difficult virtues for our people today. Because it warrants a waiting on something we are not in control of or sure of. If we well recall the encounter between Prophet Elijah and the woman of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, 8-17, the poor widow had only the last drop of oil on the Jar and the last piece of bread. Nevertheless, she trusted in God’s word through the prophet and through her obedience to God - a worship of heart and soul that invokes God’s blessings—she received an abundance of blessings and her meagre food was multiplied. This story offers the true freedom of the spirit that also liberates humanity from unnecessary worry, fear and the tendency of lack of generosity and trust. Like Elijah in the Old Testament, Jesus showed that two loaves of bread and five fish were sufficient and even surplus with a leftover of twelve baskets at the feeding of the five thousand in the Gospel (Mtt 14.14. Mk 6, 30-44). Hope tells us that God can multiply the little we have and change our situations. The only condition for God’s blessings the belief that God is faithful to his promises and being steadfast in doing our own part while awaiting God’s fulfilment of his promise. The little justice we do could be the miracle that would transform our world. The fulfilment of God’s promise demands creative and critical engagement with hope as sign of social reconstruction, justice and communion. The profession of Christian faith is not a mere fulfilment of the vows of baptism. Christians, in light of their ardent faith, charity, patience, hope, trust,

communion, solidarity and dedication to divine providence, are a sign of hope for the redeemed people of God.

Conclusion

Faith and hope are mark of true Christian virtues for those who believe. Human beings, but above all Christians have the task of propagating hope and trust in the world both in the active aspect of justice and in the act of faith and trust in the fulfilment of God's promise. The Pope has exposed the socio-political and human existential issues challenging humanity's hope in God's promises. War militates against the promise of peace, hunger and poverty against abundance and fullness of life, lack of love and aversion for creation and life militates against the beauty of creation and its propagation. But hope assures us that God's promises shall come to pass. The aversion for God and new forms of life that militate against Christian hope can raise anxiety and doubt for believers. But perseverance in faith, hope and love would enable us to see the promises of God in their fulfilment. This is why the Pope's message of hope for the ordinary jubilee of the year 2015 is well timed and felicitous.