

The Moorings of *Spe Salvi* in the Letters of Saint Paul

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On February 19-23, 2009, I was in Rome for a conference. On February 22, I made a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Saint Paul *Extra Muros* and prayed before the tomb of the Apostle of the Gentiles for a fruitful Theology Week 2009 and in particular for its organizers, participants and speakers.

On the occasion of Theology Week 2009 entitled *Journeying with St. Paul Today*, I have been kindly asked to speak on “The Moorings of ‘*Spe Salvi*’ in the Letters of St. Paul.” On the terms used in title of this lecture, we explain briefly: *Moorings* refer to anchorage, sources, or foundations; ‘*Spe Salvi*’, to the second encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, and the *Letters of St. Paul*, to the letters written or inspired by the Apostle and included in the canon of the Catholic Church.

I develop said topic in three parts: In the first part, I speak of the papal encyclical on hope, ‘*Spe Salvi*’; in the second, I talk on the presence of Saint Paul in this encyclical, and finally, I add some personal notes on hope in St. Paul’s Letters.

Allow me to point out at the start a claimer and a disclaimer: I am a teacher of moral theology and not of Sacred Scriptures. I was invited to be with you this afternoon because I continue to be attracted by the fascinating charm of the virtue of hope.

1. THE ENCYCLICAL '*SPE SALVI*'

The title of the encyclical is made up of its first two words in Latin: *Spe Salvi*. The full phrase is: "*Spe salvi facti sumus*" – "in hope we were saved" (Rom 8:24). Composed of fifty numbers in seventy five pages, *Spe Salvi* (SS) was signed by Pope Benedict XVI on November 30, 2007.¹ Marked only by subtitles, we may divide the encyclical on hope in two main sections. After the introduction, Benedict XVI speaks, in first section, of the nature and development of hope, and, in the second, of certain "settings" for learning and practicing hope today.

1.1 *Nature and Development of Hope*

In the first section of SS, its author describes a *faith-based hope* rooted in the New Testament and early Church teachings. He mingles the teachings masterfully with examples of saints who witnessed different aspects of Christian hope.

Christians are asked to give a reason of their hope, or faith (1Pet 3:15). Our hope has a past, a present and a future. Christ has redeemed us and, therefore, we have a future and a present. The life of a Christian who truly hopes will not end up in emptiness (cf. Eph 2:12, 1 Th 4:13; SS, no. 2). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows us the way.

Hope is stronger than suffering and transforms life and the world from within. This hope is exemplified in St. Paul's *Letter to Philemon* (Phlm 3:20; SS, 4).

Christian hope, a hope-filled faith (SS, 8), is a "*new hope*," a *new "substance"*, a new foundation, a new freedom (Heb 11:1). Its object is not only the "not yet" of the future but also an "already" of the present, a now. The mere existence of the future changes the present. The martyrs, religious women and men, St. Francis in particular "prove" that a future awaits us, a future already present which shows us "what life is and where it is to be found" (SS, 8).

¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007). Philippine Edition: *Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI on Christian Hope* (Pasay: Paulines, 2007). Hereafter we quote the encyclical *Spe Salvi* by its initials SS, with corresponding number in parenthesis, and within text of article.

The new hope of the Christian is an “expectation of God,” who reveals himself in Christ who is present and will come again. In the Spirit, we look forward not in fear but with courage (2 Tim, 1:7 ; SS, 9).

The author of *SS* asks: *Do we really desire eternal life or just the present life? Will eternal life be not monotonous, unbearable and burdensome?* (SS, 10). Eternity, heaven is life, and life is, in Christian tradition, “the blessed life,” simply happiness. In truth, eternal life is “unknown” or “knowing without knowing” (SS, 13), but still it drives us towards it. (I am reminded of the classic book *The Cloud of Unknowing*.) And yet, we do not want to lose this life (SS, 12).

With its technical achievements, the modern age created a new religion in which “redemption” does not come from Jesus Christ but from reason and science (SS, 16-17). The faith of Christian hope becomes thus faith in progress, faith in the ideology of continuing development of science and technology (SS, 17). Christian hope, then, is replaced by human hopes, and religious faith, by simple rational faith. This kingdom of reason and freedom – the new kingdom of God (Kant) – is opposed to the dominance of faith and the Church and has revolutionary potential, as it was proven by the French Revolution (SS, 18-19).

This rational and scientific kingdom of God will come through a social change brought about by the industrial proletariat. The social change will come not simply from science but from politics – from the communist party (SS, 20). In this context, Benedict XVI praises “the great analytical skill” of Karl Marx and underlines Marx fundamental error, *materialism*: Marx forgot man and his freedom (SS, 21).

Detached from its ethical dimension, progress may be “progress from the sling to the atom bomb.” (Cf. Ephesians 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 4:16; SS, 22). Reason and freedom of man need God. Without God, man can have no hope (Eph 2:12): a hope in a “kingdom of God” without God cannot but end in a “perverse end” (SS, 23). Reason and faith need and help each other to grow and fully satisfy. Social structures are needed to help freedom, but they may marginalize it. Moreover, freedom must be won continually “for the cause of good” (SS, 24).

Human hopes need also “real” hope, the “great hope.” These “lesser hopes” cannot fully satisfy by themselves. Christian hope longs for total liberation at the end, but a liberation that includes human liberation on the way, too. *SS* puts before us the example of St. Augustine whose faith-based hope helped him build the city. The Bishop of Hippo writes: “The needy have to be helped, the oppressed to be liberated, the good to be encouraged, the bad to be tolerated; all must be loved” (in *SS*, 29). Thus, Christians must contribute to the improvements of the world. However, contributing to the promotion of a better world is not sufficient hope. This contribution, moreover, must concern us personally (*SS*, 30).

Man will not be redeemed by science. Redemption through science only amounts to a “deceptive hope.” Science can make the world and humankind better, but it can also destroy the world and humankind (*SS*, 25). Hereafter we find one of the striking points made by Benedict XVI in *Spe Salvi*: “It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love,” that is, by the unconditional love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39), who has redeemed us (*SS*, 26). Therefore, “whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what ‘life’ really is,” and what hope really is: hope in life, that is, eternal life (*SS*, 27). This life is relationship with Jesus and therefore with others: individualistic hope is a “false hope.” As *Christians*, we have to be – like Jesus – “beings for others” (*SS*, 28).

Jesus is the foundation of our hope, “the God who has a human face and has loved us to the end.” It is this love that makes God’s kingdom present. It is this love that helps us go on the journey of life day by day. It is this love that spurs us on by hope (*SS*, 31).

1.2 “Settings” to Learn Hope

The second section of *Spe Salvi* is entitled “*Settings for Learning and Practicing Hope*.” Benedict XVI speaks here of three “settings,” namely, prayer, action and suffering, and the Last Judgment. He tells us that in these three settings, “we can learn in practice about hope and its exercise” (*SS*, 31).

The *first setting* is *prayer* as a school of hope. Prayer is “essential ‘setting’ for learning hope” (*SS*, 32). Radically, hope results from “a real encounter with God” (*SS*, 3). This encounter with God

awakens in my conscience “a capacity to listen to Good itself” (SS, 33). Good prayer purifies us and strengthens us. When I feel utterly alone, when nobody seems to listen to me, God is always there. Like hope, prayer is also prayer for others. It opens us to God and, therefore, also to our fellow human beings (SS, 33). True prayer includes personal and public prayer as well (SS, 34).

The *second “setting”* for learning hope is *action* and *suffering*. All true human behavior is hope in *action*. Truly, heaven – like love – is a gift above our merits; still, “our behavior is not indifferent for the unfolding of history.” As St. Paul teaches us, the saints contribute to the world’s salvation (1Cor 3:9; 1 Th 3:2). Our good deeds generate hope not only for us but also for others as well. However, only the “great hope” encourages us and directs our actions properly. Moreover, our hopes and our hope are strong by reason of the “indestructible power of love, which gives them meaning and importance” (SS, 35).

We also learn hope in *suffering* (SS, 36-40). Suffering is part of life, and God is merciful (Ps 136 (135)). As much as possible, we fight suffering by the weapons of justice and love and hope: hope encourages us to do good. In the midst of suffering – of the terrible suffering of the martyrs (e.g., Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, who died in 1857), hope is the anchor and the star (SS, 37). Meaningful suffering is a journey of hope, a path of purification and growth. Here Benedict XVI gives us an innovative and consoling thought: accepting our suffering in love, enables us to accept the suffering of others. Then, he adds, the other’s suffering becomes a “shared suffering.” Then, sharing in the suffering of the other becomes a “consolation” to him or her: being with the other in his/her solitude so that it ceases to be solitude! When we suffer, God’s consolation – the consolation of God’s compassionate love – is always with us: God cannot suffer, but He suffers with us in Jesus, in his passion and death for us. A key text of SS: “To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of the truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves – these are fundamental elements of humanity” (SS, 39).

The *third “setting”* for learning and practicing hope is the *Last Judgment!* (SS, 41-48). Believing in the Last Judgment is part of our faith: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and

the dead” (Creed). Traditionally, the Last Judgment has been for Christians a criterion to order their lives, a summons to their conscience – and hope in God’s justice (SS, 41).

In the modern era, however, the idea of the Last Judgment faded away. And yet, it is still a powerful force even to fight for justice. Atheists say: “Since there is no God, let us create and establish justice.” This, the Pope says, is not possible. This world cannot guarantee that the cynicism of power will cease to dominate the world (SS, 41). “A world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope.” In fact, the question of justice is the strongest argument in favor of eternal life (SS, 43). A world without God is, as St. Paul tells us, a world without hope (Eph 2:12).

Believing in the Last Judgment implies believing in hope. The image of the Last Judgment is primarily not an image of terror but of hope: “It may even be the decisive image of hope” (SS, 44). God, our consolation, our hope, is also our justice. God is our justice, St. Thomas tells us, with a justice that is just and compassionate: a justice without compassion is cruelty; a compassion without justice is foolishness.

We pay for our injustices – in hell (God forbid!), or in purgatory. (The main reference here is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, and nos. 1033- 1037. Also St. Paul’s 1 Cor 3:12-15; SS, 46).

Encountering Christ, Judge and Savior, is, according to some contemporary theologians “the decisive act of judgment.” The Last Judgment is hope because it is justice as well as grace, which permits us all to hope for us and for others (SS, 48).

Benedict XVI concludes his second encyclical with some thoughts on Mary as the Star of Hope (SS, 49-50): She is *Stella Maris*, Star of the Sea.

Spe Salvi is a remarkable encyclical on Christian hope. We could say that it represents a summary of the major points of a theology of hope for today. In a very clear, pedagogical, logical, pastoral and clear language, Pope Benedict XVI does, of course, good theology. SS’s main sources, or moorings, are the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition, including a few texts from the *Magisterium* of the Church, the Fathers of the Church and other theo-

logians. As he did in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), Pope Benedict XVI also quotes from other helpful aids, such as philosophers and writers.

2. MOORINGS OF *SPE SALVI*: THE LETTERS OF ST. PAUL

Part two of our reflection is also divided into two sections: section two speaks of the presence of St. Paul in *Spe Salvi*, while section one, of the other moorings of SS.

2.1 *Moorings of Spe Salvi*

The main specific mooring of *Spe Salvi* is the Sacred Scriptures. The other sources make up forty footnotes (or endnotes). We believe that the Pope writes this encyclical as a personal theological meditation on Christian or theological hope for our time. This explains why few magisterial documents are quoted. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is quoted seven times, mostly in the second part of SS and regarding the third “setting” of hope, the Last Judgment.

Among the Fathers of the Church, the author of SS quotes *Gregory Nazianzen*, who tells us charmingly that Astrology came to an end after the Magi were led by the Star. Now – he adds – all the stars move in the orbit of Christ (SS, no. 5, footnote 2). The text of the Nazianzen illustrates Col 2:8, where St. Paul contrasts life according to Christ and life according to other religions under the dominion of the “elemental spirits of the universe.”

St. Hilary is quoted by the Pope to underline that the image of the Last Judgment is not primarily an image of terror, but of hope. All our fear, St. Hilary affirms, has its place in love (SS, no. 44, footnote 35).

St. Ambrose is also quoted once (SS, no. 10, footnote 7). Benedict XVI is defining eternal life as the object of hope. He asks whether eternity, immortality will not be ultimately unbearable. The Pope answers: “Without the assistance of grace, immortality is more a burden than a blessing.” Then he quotes the great Ambrose, from his funeral discourse for his deceased brother Satyrus: “Death is, then, no cause for mourning, for it is the cause of mankind’s salvation.”

As he did in *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI quotes often *St. Augustine*, not only quantitatively (8 times), but also qualitatively. The Bishop of Hippo helps him explain basic concepts and ideas connected to hope and life. Discussing eternal life the Pope asks: What do we desire and want when we pray? In his *Letter to Proba*, *St. Augustine* answers: "We only want life, the blessed life, simple happiness."

Another basic point of Benedict XVI is on the social character of hope. Again, he quotes *St. Augustine* (SS, 14, footnote 11). Speaking of the true shape of Christian hope, Benedict XVI underlines the connection there is between love of God and responsibility for others. *Augustine* writes this consoling text for us, sinners: "My weaknesses are many and grave, many and grave indeed, but more abundant still is your medicine" (in SS, 29, footnotes 22-24). The author of SS, quotes *Augustine* to underline the close relationship between prayer and hope, and also *St. Paul's Phil 3:13* (SS, 33, footnote 26).

Maxim the Confessor is also called (two times) by Benedict XVI to illustrate his teaching on the social dimension of hope, particularly as hope in God through communion with Jesus who commits us, according to the Pope, "to live for others." *Maxim the Confessor* writes: "The one who loves God cannot hold on to money, but rather gives it out in God's fashion... in accordance with the measure of justice" (in SS, 28, footnotes 19-20).

Another theologian mentioned by Benedict XVI is *St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (SS, 15, footnote 12). Speaking of eternal life, or the "blessed life," the Pope takes words from *St. Bernard* to point out that neither hope nor salvation are individualistic, but social in character. Indeed, the blessed life is mainly concerned with eternal life, but not exclusively; "it has to do with the building up of this world." *St. Bernard* and his monks, the Pope writes, prove it, too. They were *contemplantes* and *laborantes*: "Tilling the soil" also prepares for Paradise (SS, 15, footnote 12). To stress the communal character of salvation and of hope, Benedict XVI also quotes modern theologian *Henri de Lubac*: (in SS, 13-14, footnote 10).

St. Thomas Aquinas is quoted once, with a substantial idea related to hope. The Pope quotes the essential text from the Letter to the Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for,

the proof of things not seen.” St. Thomas translated *hypostasis* as *substantia*: “Faith then is “the substance of things hoped for.” St. Thomas, within the scholastic theology explains *substantia* as *habitus* (in SS, 7, footnote 4).

Benedict XVI also mentions a good number of philosophers, most of them in connection with his theological/historical development of hope through the modern age. These are: *Francis Bacon* (SS, 16 and 25, footnotes 14-15), *Immanuel Kant* (SS, 19 and 23, footnotes 17-18), *Friedrich Engels* (SS, no. 20), *Karl Marx* (SS, 20-21), *Theodor W. Adorno* (SS, 22 and 42, footnote 30), *Max Horkheimer* (SS, 42). Among the writers, the Pope paraphrases a text from *The Brothers Karamazov* of *Dostoevsky*: “Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened” (SS, 44). Right after this text, the Pope makes reference to *Plato* who says that “in the end souls will stand naked before the judge” (*Ib.*).

In closing his meditation on prayer, Benedict XVI brings up the words and life of another theologian/pastor he loves much: the late *Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan*. The good Cardinal is quoted within the “setting” of prayer as a school of hope. Imprisoned for thirteen years, he suffered much. Prayer empowered him, as recorded in his precious book *Prayers of Hope*. When he was unable to pray other prayers, the Vietnamese Cardinal held fast to the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary* and prayers of the liturgy (SS, 34, footnote 27). Benedict XVI presents Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan as a witness of hope for the whole world (SS, no. 32).

2.2 *Moorings of Spe Salvi in the Letters of St. Paul*

In this part of our reflection, we consider on the presence of the Letters of St. Paul in *Spe Salvi*.

Paul tells us that “everything written before our time was written for our instruction, that we might derive hope from the lessons of patience and encouragement in the Scriptures” (Rom 15: 4-5). Benedict XVI grounded his theology of hope on St. Paul’s *Letters* and other Sacred Scriptures writers, particularly of the New Testament books. Not only St. Paul, but the other scriptural texts on hope must also be taken into consideration. After all, as

Joseph Ratzinger states in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, “We have to read individual texts of the Bible in the context of the whole.”²

Hope is indeed “a keyword in biblical faith; at times, the words “faith” (“*pistis*”) and “hope” (“*elpis*”) seem interchangeable (SS, 2). Hope is a basic word and concept in both Testaments of the Bible. From Old Testament, Benedict XVI quotes particularly from the *Psalms* (seven times). We are told that in the New Testament, hope is mentioned about 56 times (not counting other terms closely connected to hope), most of them, by St. Paul.³

The other scriptural moorings of SS are the *Gospels*, in particular *St. Luke's* (seven times from Gospel, once from *Acts*) and, *St. John's* (six times). *St. Peter's First Letter* is quoted once (1 Pet 3:5). After Paul, the most influential sacred writer in *Spe Salvi* is the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (quoted more than ten times).

When I was asked to speak before you on “The Moorings of *Spe Salvi* in the Letters of St. Paul,” the first thing I did was to read again the encyclical on hope, for two reasons: first, to be able to write a synthesis of the encyclical and, second, to jot down the references of St. Paul in *Spe Salvi*. In all, St. Paul's Letters are quoted about twenty four times (all Pauline Letters are quoted, with the exception of Paul's *Letter to Titus*). The second thing I did was to read again, one after another, the *Letters of St. Paul* (and also the *Acts of Luke*).

As we have already seen, St. Paul is very much present in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*. Even the title of SS comes from St. Paul: from *Romans* 8:24: *Spe salvi facti sumus* – “in hope we were saved.” Redemption, salvation is offered to us as trustworthy hope. With this hope, we can face the present that leads to the goal (SS, no. 1).

The first subheading after the introduction is *faith is hope* (SS, 2-3). St. Paul writes that the *Ephesians* before they encountered Christ were “without hope and without God in the world”

² Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, Trans from German, Adrian J. Walker (USA: Doubleday, 2007), XIX.

³ Vicente Borragán Mata, *En el manantial de la esperanza* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2008), p. 61.

(Eph 2:12; SS, 2). To the *Thessalonians*, the Apostle asked “not to grieve as others do, who have no hope” (1 Th 4:13; SS, 2).

St. Paul contributes to Benedict XVI grounding and development of the subheading the *concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament* (SS, 4-9). This hope changes the believer from within, internally, though not necessarily externally (legally) – as in the case of the relationship between *Philemon* and his slave Onesimus, who by reason of his faith-hope is “no longer a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother” (Phlm 10-16; see Phil 3:20; SS, 4).

This new hope is hope in Christ, in the presence of Christ in our journey (cf. SS, 26). Jesus Christ, the Apostle tells the *Galatians*, “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20; in SS, 26). Paul speaks of wisdom and the folly of the cross (1 Cor 18:31) and urges the *Colossians* – and us – not to be seduced by empty philosophies of the world (Col 2:8; SS, 5). Hope is the “expectation of God.” Do not be afraid, Paul advises *Timothy*: “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7; in SS, 9). He will continue loving us until the end – until all is “accomplished” (Jn 13:1; 19:30).

The Pope considers eternal life under the subtitle *eternal life – what is it?* Do we really know what we desire? Do we really know what to pray for? With St. Paul, he answers: “The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26; SS, 11).

In the next subheading, the author of SS asks: *Is Christian hope individualistic?* (SS, 13-15). He grounds his negative answer on St. Paul who says that our aim is “the love that springs from a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5; SS, 14). As Christ lived for others so must also his disciples (2 Cor 5:15; SS, 28).

After studying hope in the New Testament and in early Christianity, Benedict XVI discusses the *transformation of Christian faith-hope in the modern age* (SS, 16-23). After presenting modernity’s faith in progress and his critique, the author of SS asks Christianity for self-criticism, for the true meaning of progress and the need of inner growth, as manifested by Paul in Eph 3:16 and in 2 Cor 4:16, where we read: “We do not lose heart,

because our inner being is renewed every day even though our body is being destroyed at the same time" (2 Cor 4:16; SS, 22). A third time Benedict XVI quotes Paul's Ephesians 2:12, this time to illumine true faith in Christ as the medicine against faith in progress: "Remember that you were without hope and without God in the world" (SS, 23).

Now the author of SS is ready to speak of the *true shape of Christian hope* (SS 24-31). What can redeem man? Not scientific and technological progress but unconditional love – the unconditional love of Christ. He quotes Romans: "For I am certain that neither death nor life, nor angels..., nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39; SS, 26).

Human hopes may be good, but without hope in God they are really no hope (again Eph 2:12 is quoted; SS, 27). Hope in God is hope in Christ whom God sent to the world to redeem it: He gave himself up as ransom for all (1 Tim 2:6).

Paul's *Letters* also ground some of the major points made by Benedict XVI on the "settings" of hope. Speaking of *prayer*, Paul's Letter to the *Philippians* is quoted. Paul speaks of himself as one "straining forward to the things that are to come" (Phil 3:13; SS, 33). Regarding *good deeds and sufferings* as "settings" of hope, we are told that heaven is a gift but our actions, our behavior do count something. St. Paul tells us "we are God's co-workers" (1 Cor 3:9; 1 Th 3:2; SS, 35).

The third "setting" to learn hope today is the *Last Judgment* (SS 41-48). Quoting again Ephesians 2:12, Benedict XVI concludes: "A world without God is a world without hope" – and without justice (SS, 44). Envisioning the encounter with the Lord after death, we realize that "the way we live our lives is not immaterial" (Benedict XVI), and we work for our salvation, in the words of St. Paul, "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), and hoping with God's grace (SS, 47). Speaking of heaven, purgatory and hell, the Pope quotes from 1 Cor 3:12-15: "fire" will test the quality of each man's work. We may receive "recompense," or suffer "loss", or be saved "*quasi per ignem*" – "as one fleeing through fire" (1 Cor 3: 14-15).

3. SOME NOTES ON HOPE IN ST. PAUL'S LETTERS

A personal *letter* is a form of communication that replaces oral communication and takes us to the writer. The *Letters* of St. Paul show us Paul as the passionate lover of Christ, the great apostle, the ardent missionary, the itinerant preacher, the eminent teacher, and the man of prayer. In his Letters, the Apostle appears, at times harsh and at times tender. (St. Augustine says that the Apostle of the Gentiles is both father and mother to all he preached the Gospel of Jesus.) The Pauline Letters possess great power. They have "historical coherence, internal cohesion," and incredible "freshness."⁴ Paul's Letters manifests Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman influences. His morals, in particular, have concepts coming from the Stoic school.

In the last part of our reflection, part three, we add some personal notes first on hope in St. Paul and, second, on Christ as the hope of the Apostle.

3.1 *Hope in St. Paul's Letters*

The grounding of SS in St Paul is substantial. Obviously, however, SS was not meant to be a study of hope in St. Paul. Allow me to add other texts from St. Paul's *Letters* that influenced my understanding of hope and of life.⁵

As a Jew and a Pharisee, Paul hopes with the hope of Israel (Acts, 28:20). After his dramatic change on the way to Damascus, his hope in God continued, but now through Jesus Christ. Israel's hope is accomplished in Christ.⁶

Hope is an essential element of the Gospel and the ethics preached by St. Paul, who boasts of this hope (Rom 5:3) – a hope

⁴ Senén Vidal, *Iniciación a San Pablo* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2008), pp. 99 and 112. See George Kaitholil, SSP, *Paul. Guide to Christian Living* (Bombay Saint Paul Society: St. Pauls, 2nd ed., 2008).

⁵ Cf. D. Luigi Fedele, *La speranza Cristiana nelle lettere di S. Paolo* (Neapoli: Pontificia Facultas Theologiae S. Aloisi ad Pausilypum, 1960); Edouard Cothelet, "Le dynamisme de l'esperance chez saint Paul," *Esprit & Vie*, No. 203 (November 2008), pp. 15-21. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, Reprinted 2008).

⁶ Cf. Edouard Cothenet, *l.c.*, pp. 18-20.

in the Blessed Trinity. For St. Paul, God is “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13), Christ is “our hope” (1 Th 1:1), and the Spirit, the power of our hope (Rom 15:24). God, One and Triune, then is the *motive of hope*. Hope is hope in *God* (2 Cor 1:10; 2 Tim 4:10), hope in *Christ* (1 Cor 15:19; Eph 1:12; Rom 15:12), and hope in the *Spirit* (Gal 5:5; Rom 5:5 and 15:13). Christian hope is based upon the Holy Spirit and his gifts (Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14). The Spirit of the Father and the Son cries out in our hearts “*Abba*,” “Father” (Gal 4:6). Without the Spirit, we cannot even say “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3).

In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI connects the three theological virtues. Paul writes marvelous texts on the connections and differences among the theological virtues. “There are three things that last faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13; 1Thes 1:3). Indeed, what matters most is love, a love that hopes (1 Cor 13:7). Hope does not disappoint “because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (Rom 5:5). Hope is grounded on faith and nourished by charity.” Faith and love are based on what you hope for” (Col 1:5). As Alfaro says well, hope is “immanent to faith by a common link” to both, namely, trust or confidence, and this confidence implies loving the one in whom we trust.” Thus, “justification by faith” is “salvation in hope” (F. Prat). This justification by faith does not exclude “good works” but only to glorify in good works as if they were ours (Rom 3:27, 4:2; 5:2).⁷

Writes Borragán Mata: “St. Paul does not speak much of the virtue of hope in itself, but of its object and fruits; he did not focus on the man who hopes but on the God and the life we hope for.”⁸ The main object of hope, of “blessed hope” (Tit 2:13), is eternal life, which is a gift of God (Rom 6:23; Tit 1:2) “to those who do right” (Rom 2:7); an “imperishable crown” (1 Cor 9:25); the glorification of the Lord and the glory of the Father (Rom 5:2; 2 Cor 3:7-12; Eph 1:18; Col 1:27); salvation (Rom 5:9; 1 Th 5:8; 1

⁷ Cf. Juan Alfaro, *o.c.*, pp. 41-44; F. Prat, *Saint Paul* (Paris, 1922), 130; quoted by J. Alfaro, *ib.*, p. 42.

⁸ Vicente Borragán Mata, *o.c.*, p. 66. See Carlo Ghidelli, *Un anno con San Paolo*, Lettere dell'Arcivescovo per l'anno dedicato a san Paolo, 2008-2009 (Milano: Paoline, 4th ed., 2008).

Tim 5:10), and the manifestation of this glory also in our glorious body (Rom 8:18-23; 1 Th 4:13; Phil 3:21). Heaven, the kingdom of God (Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Tim 4:18) is our home (2 Cor 5:1). Then and there, we shall see “face to face”; then “I shall know as I am known” (1 Cor 13:12). It is said that the best text of Paul on the future of our hope is 1 Cor 15:20-28, it underlines the resurrection of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, the messianic kingdom of God to be inaugurated at the end.⁹

The Christian, a pilgrim, is like an athlete running towards heaven (1Cor 9:24-25). On the journey, there is need to make sacrifices, to abstain (1 Cor 9:24-26), to endure (1 Th 4:18; 2 Th 2:17), to work in hope (1 Cor 9:10). Christian hope is the beginning and the anticipation of the glorious life after the resurrection: “In baptism you were not only buried with him (Christ) but also raised to life with him because you believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12; Col 3:1; Eph 2:6).

Our dignity as Christians is this: We are children of God and, therefore, “heirs of God, heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so as to be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17; cf. Eph 1:4-5; Tit 3:7).

The hope of the pilgrim is the expectation of God, waiting for him (Rom 8:23-25; Phil 1:20). This hope is *patient* and *persevering*, especially when facing suffering (Rom 5:3-5, 8:25; 1 Th 1:3; cf. Heb 10:26). A key Pauline text: “I consider the sufferings of the present to be as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Christ gives meaning to the Apostle’s suffering and death. Vatican II tells us that only Christ illumines “the riddle of suffering and death.”¹⁰ We find consolation in the text where St. Paul puts Abraham as a model of faith-hope: like him, we are asked to hope, at times, “to hope against hope” (Rom 4:18).

For St. Paul, hope is *trustful*: it trusts in God’s promise through Jesus (2 Tim 1:12; Rom 4:18; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 1:10; Gal 5:5). Hope is *courageous* (Rom 5:2; Phil 1:20; 1 Tim 3:13), *humble* (Rom 2:17, 3:27; Eph 2:8-10; Gal 3:22), *peaceful* (Gal 5:22), and

⁹ Cf. Senén Vidal, *o.c.*, pp. 171-174.

¹⁰ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

joyful: "*In spe gaudentes*," joyful in hope (Rom 12:12; Phil 4:4), always joyful (2 Cor 6:4-10): "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord" (Phil 4:4-7). The joy of hope, however, is not opposed to suffering: "It makes me happy to suffer for you" (Col 1:24).

Hope is, from the part of God, *certain*: He does not fail us and fulfills his promises. But the same hope, from our part, is *uncertain* and fearful: Will I endure until the end? *Nunquid durabo?* St. Albert asked himself. The hope of the pilgrim is certain (1 Pet 1:3), but a certainty mixed with certain fear (Phil 2:13) and a certain insecurity: "The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12). The uncertainty of hope urges us to pray, to ask God Our Father, through Jesus our Savior, in the Spirit our sanctifier, for help; in particular, help from the *Eucharist*. The Eucharist is great nourishment for our journey of hope and it orients us towards the future. St Paul says: "Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26); cf. Jn 6:54). Indeed, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, *spes orat*: hope is *prayerful*!

Pauline hope is also *cosmic* hope. St. Paul's main chapter on hope is *Romans 8*, where we find – according to E. Cothenet – "the basis for an ecology which is respectful with nature entrusted to man, who ought to be the faithful steward and not the despot predator that stains the heritage that he will transmit to future generations."¹¹ The Holy Spirit strongly motivates our hope. He groans in us and in creation – all waiting with patient endurance (Rom 8:18-27; cf. Tit 3:4-5). Paul tells us that creation is good (1 Tim 4:4) and that it "awaits the revelation of the sons of God" (Rom 8:19). The whole creation will share "in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21; Rom 8:22; Eph 1:10; Phil 2:10-11). In the mystery of Christ – in his, incarnation, death and resurrection – our salvation and that of the whole creation is guaranteed. The created world will also participate in the glorious life of Christ. (Rom 8:19-23; Eph 1:10; Col 1:12-20). Paul preached a cosmic hope, which is, according to De Lubac, "the liberation of

¹¹ Edouard Cothelet, *l.c.*, p. 21

the whole creation, the consummation of all things in the unity of the body of Christ.”¹²

Christian hope is also *personal* and *communitarian*. St. Paul teaches clearly the communitarian aspect of hope as common inheritance of the children of God (Rom 8:16-17; Eph 1:14; Gal 4:7). Today we say that the act of hope is both: I + You = We. The human person is an individual and a social being, interiority and relationship.¹³

Christian hope is also *eschatological* and temporal. SS – and St. Paul – underlines the eschatological dimension of hope. Hope orients us towards total and definitive liberation. This liberation includes also human, social liberation, that is, cultural, political and economic liberation. Hence, it is also *temporal*. It is concerned not only with the hereafter but also with the here now; with the “already,” but “not yet.” St. Paul encourages us to be generous like Christ and live simply (2 Cor 8:9; 1 Tim 6:7-8).

Paul, a “servant of justice” (Rom 6:18), urges us to give up the sins of injustice (Rom 1:28-32), and be committed to loving our neighbor, which is the summary of all commandments (Gal 5:13-14); cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15; Lk 19:18). Like other Christian communities (Acts 2:42, 44-45), the communities of the Apostle shared what they had with the poor (Gal 2:10; Rom 12:13).

Our hope today, therefore, is not just “a pie in the sky,” but also “hope for the resurrection of our potato-hopes” (R. Jenson). Hope, connected to justice and charity, is also transforming, libe-

¹² H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux de dogme* (Paris, 1947); quoted by Fausto B. Gomez, O.P., *Dimensión comunitaria y personal de la esperanza Cristiana*, unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Manila: UST Faculty of Theology, 1971), p. 79; cf. also Juan Alfaro, o.c., pp. 35-39, and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life, l.c.*, pp. 240-246.

¹³ Before the Second Vatican Council, some theologians discussed the communitarian dimension of hope. SS cites Henri de Lubac among the well-known theologians who criticized the individualistic approach to hope – and of salvation and prayer – prevalent in textbooks of theology. With De Lubac, other theologians were Pierre Charles, Jean Danielou, Roger Hasseveldt, etc. St. Thomas Aquinas article on the communitarian dimension of hope (II-II, 17, 3) became the topic of my licentiate and doctoral thesis. (Cf. Fausto Gomez, O.P., “Christian Hope and Human Liberation,” in his book *Social Ethics: Doctrine and Life* (Manila: Santo Tomas University Press, 1991), pp. 23-37.

rating from all slaveries. Thus liberating hope – as understood today – helps us make an option for Christ and, therefore, an option for the poor.¹⁴

3.2 *St. Paul's Hope: Hope in Christ*

In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) says that the New Testament writings show “a many-layer struggle to come to grips with the figure of Jesus.” He adds that in spite of their differences, they present “a deep harmony.”¹⁵ St. Paul, in particular, struggles powerfully to point out Jesus to us. When we read again for this lecture, *St. Paul's Letters* with (almost) “empty hands,” that is, before going to the apostle's commentators, what struck me most is the Apostle's fascination with Jesus Christ, his faith in Jesus, his unconditional love that comes from Christ and proceeds from the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

The constant point of reference of Paul is his personal encounter with the Lord on the way to Damascus (Gal 1:13; Eph 33: 1 Cor 4:6; Phil 3:12). After his profound change (Acts, 9:3-9), all Paul wants is to imitate Christ (Phil 1:23), who suffered and died on the cross (Rom 5:6-11) and rose from the dead (Rom 8: 31-34). Jesus Christ is the new man par excellence (Eph 2:15-16), the redeemer and reconciler (Col 1:12-20), the savior (1 Th 5:10). Christ is Paul's hope, which is *hope in Christ* (Eph 1:12; 1 Thes 1:3), who calls us to “a great hope” (Eph 1:18). The Apostle's incredible power comes from Christ, who fills him and enlightens him (Phil 1:17), who sustains him in his sufferings and persecutions (2 Cor 1:8-10). He believes totally in him: “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim 1:12).

¹⁴ Cf. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, *The Futurist Option* (New York: Newman Press, 1973), p. 99. See also Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr., *Jesus Goes Public* (Manila: Gift of God Publications, 2009), pp. 45-55. Some authors would have liked a more explicit and committed stand of SS to hope as culturally, politically and economically liberating. (Cf. José Ignacio Calleja, “Esperanza encarnada y, por tanto, histórica y social,” *Vida Nueva*, N. 2.593, 15-21 diciembre, 2007, p. 34).

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth, I.c.*, p. XXIII.

¹⁶ Cf. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., “Christian Ethics according to St. Paul,” in his book *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. 110-125.

The Christ St. Paul imitates is the total Christ: the incarnate Christ, who lived among us, died and rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and will come again at the end of time (cf. Tim 3:16; Phil 2:6-9), who is the only mediator (1 Cor 8:6; 1 Tim 2:5).¹⁷

Christ is the center of Paul's life and preaching (1 Cor 2:2), only Christ (Phil 1:21; cf. Heb 4:12), "who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). For St. Paul – and likewise for the other New Testament writers – what matters most is Jesus. Hans Urs von Balthasar says that Scripture is the word of God that bears witness to God's Word. Christianity is not a "religion of the book," but a "religion of the Word," as St. Bernard says, of "a Word incarnated and living."¹⁸

St. Paul's Letters – his words – lead us to imitate and follow the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the post-resurrection Jesus, who is the same as the historical Jesus of Palestine. Paul knew well the historical Jesus, but not directly; this is why he does not talk about the Man from Galilee. Commenting on the two weeks meeting of Paul with Peter (Gal 1:18-20), Jerome Murphy O'Connor says that Paul was not talking with Peter about the weather, or Peter's mother-in-law, or of Peter's love for fishing. Of course, they were talking of Christ, the Christ Peter and Paul knew well.¹⁹

After his radical change – or "enlightenment" – on the road to Damascus, Paul's life "is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20), for us (Eph 5:12). St. Paul speaks more of *imitation* than of *following* of Christ. Imitation is an internal following from the heart and under the action of the Holy Spirit. It is "being conformed to Christ."²⁰

¹⁷ Luigi Fedele, "La speranza cristiana nelle lettere di S. Paolo," *Aloisiana*, n. 1 (Neapoli, 1960), pp. 32-34.

¹⁸ Cf. Ramiro Gallo, FMVD, *Missiology: An Assessment of its Nature and Methodology*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Manila: UST Faculty of Theology, 2009), p. 106.

¹⁹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life*, l.c., pp. 130-157.

²⁰ S. Pinckaers, "La ley nueva, en la cima de la moral cristiana," *Comentarios a la "Veritatis Splendor"*, ed. Gerardo del Pozo Abejon (Madrid: BAC, 1994), pp. 491-492. See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 18 & 20. In this encyclical, John Paul II joins together the two terms, *following* and *imitation* – both rich in meaning in Christian tradition.

The specific motive of Paul's hope is *the resurrection of Christ* and, therefore, our own resurrection (1 Cor 15: 20-22; 1 Th 4:14). Paul speaks of the Crucified and Risen Lord (Acts, 13:32:40); his Christ is, above all, the Paschal Christ – with especial emphasis on the cross. The Resurrection of Christ is foundation and guarantee of our own resurrection: "God who raised up the Lord will rise us up also by his power" (1 Cor 6:14); "If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself has not been raised" (1 Cor 15:13); "If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men" (1 Cor 15:19). Paul wants only one thing: "To imitate Christ..., in the hope that I will be raised from death to life" (Phil 3:10-11).

Indeed, Christ is Paul's hope: "I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing" (Phil 1:23). The Apostle encourages us: "From now on, a merited crown awaits me..., and not only to me, but to all who have looked for his appearing with eager longing" (2 Tim 4:8); "I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead. My entire attention is on the finish line... – life on high in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). Christ came and He shall return in glory (1 Cor 15:23-24; 1 Thes 4:14-17).

Paul continues inviting us to hope in Christ, to be in Christ, that is, to live a *life in Christ*, to be incorporated into Christ, to put on Christ.²¹ Life in Christ means to be or become "a new creation," (2 Cor 5:17), to have or begin "a new life" (Rom 6:6), a life of love for Jesus (2 Cor 5:14-15). This new life entails giving up "the old self," or the old way of life, and to put on "a new self" (Eph 4:22), that is a life in Christ (Gal 2:20-21). The Apostle of the Gentiles urges us to be his imitators as he is of Christ, that is "as a servant of Christ Jesus" (Rom 1:1), on the way to full liberation or salvation, and moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13; cf. Gal 5:24-25).

Writes St. Gregory of Nyssa:

No one has known Christ better than Paul, nor surpasses him in the careful example he gave of what anyone should be who bears Christ's name. So precisely did he mirror his master that he became his very image! By a painstaking

²¹ Cf. Luigi Fedele, *La speranza cristiana...*, l.c., pp. 44-48.

imitation, he was transformed into his model and it seemed to be no longer Paul who lived and spoke, but Christ himself.

We who are called 'Christians' have been granted the honor of sharing this name; the greatest, the highest, the most sublime of all names ...If we are not to lie when we call ourselves 'Christians', we must bear witness to it by our way of living.²²

4. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Finally, we arrive at the conclusion of our reflection. Let me just nail deeper a few points that I consider important and relevant.

In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI puts forward an innovative distinction: "informative" and "performative." He writes: "Christianity was not only 'good news'. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only 'informative' but 'performative'." The Pope explains: "The Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known – it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing." One who truly hopes lives differently, for he or she has been given "the gift of a new life" (SS, 2). Our hope then has to be "life-changing and life-sustaining" (SS, 10).

Hope, as we explain it today, means to be faithful to the present, that is, to do what we ought to do with love – to put love in all our thoughts, words and deeds.²³

In his *Letters* – in his life –, St. Paul invites us today to love others as Jesus loves them – unconditionally! For this, we need to be followers, imitators of Christ. We need to be seduced by him, like Jeremiah was seduced by God (Jer 20:7), like Paul was seduced by Jesus Christ. We strongly think that this is the central message in Paul's Letters. We need to imitate St. Paul as St. Paul

²² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on Christian Perfection*, PG 46, 254-255; quoted in *Office of Readings: The Liturgy of the Hours*, III, Ordinary Time Twelfth Week Monday (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 391-392. Cf. S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, l.c., pp. 117-120.

²³ Cf. Fausto B. Gomez, O.P., "The Virtue of Theological Hope," chapter 2 of his book *A Pilgrim's Notes: Ethics, Social Ethics, Bioethics* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2005), pp. 15-41.

imitated Jesus. St. John Chrysostom tells us: "I urge you not simply to admire but also to imitate Paul's splendid example of virtue, for, if we do, we can share his crown as well."²⁴ We have to imitate Paul's shining example of Christian hope.

As Christians, as community of disciples, we are asked to give a reason for our hope (1 Pet 3:15; SS, 2), to pass on the hope (faith-hope) we hold in common (SS, 29). The best way to give a convincing reason for our faith-hope is to practice it in love, to witness faith-hope-love in our lives as individuals and as community. Of the first Christians, the unbelievers used to say, "Look how they love each other."

Our hope, then, is a hope that believes and loves. Love (always faithful and hoping love) is what matters most: a love rooted in faith and looking forward in hope. Indeed, our love in this life is "always ready to hope" (1 Cor 13:7). Hope is the virtue of life, of the pilgrimage or voyage that is our life. But hope without love cannot walk! As Benedict XVI says: "Love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack of it."²⁵ *Love is also the plenitude of hope.* St. Paul's hopeful words: "Eye has not seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

The other two theological virtues also need hope. Says Charles Peguy, the writer of hope: "Hope, little hope, move forward between her two big sisters but nobody notices her. It is hope that leads her two sisters – faith and charity." Hope – not faith nor charity – is unique in one special way: *hope surprises – it surprises God!* Peguy writes:

The faith that I love best, says God, is hope,
Faith doesn't surprise me.
It's not surprising. (...)
Charity doesn't surprise me
It's not surprising. (...)

²⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. 2 laudibus Sancti Pauli*: PG 50, 480-484.

²⁵ *Deus Caritas Est*, DCE (Vatican City, 2005), n. 15. See José-Román Flecha Andrés, "Una esperanza anclada en el amor," *Vida Nueva*, No. 2.593 (Diciembre 15-21, 2007), p. 34

But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me.
Even me.

That is surprising.

That these poor children see how things are going, and
Believe that tomorrow things will go better.

That they see how things are going today, and believe
That they will go better tomorrow morning.

This is surprising, and it's by far the greatest marvel of
Our grace.

And I am surprised by it myself.

And my grace must indeed be an incredible force.²⁶

St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles advises us today – as he did to the Ephesians of his time: “May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life” (Eph 3:17) – a hopeful life! For “we shall be saved in hope”: *Spe salvi facti sumus!*

May hope surprise us! □

²⁶ Charles Peguy, *Poem*; quoted by John J. Gilchrist, *Alter Christus. St. Paul Speaks to Priests* (Jesuit Communications Foundation, Inc.: Ateneo de Manila University, 2005), pp. 258-259.