

In New Encyclical, Pope Offers Hope to the World

Continued from page 1

"It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time – the before and after – no longer exists," he said. This is how to understand the object of Christian hope, he said.

The encyclical's main section examined how the emphasis on reason and freedom – embodied in the French Revolution and the rise of communism – sought to displace Christian hope. Redemption was seen as possible through science and political programs, and religious faith was dismissed as irrelevant and relegated to a private sphere.

While praising Karl Marx for his great analytical skill, the pope said Marx made a fundamental error in forgetting that human freedom always includes "freedom for evil," which is not neutralized by social structures.

In the same way, the pope said, those who believe man can be "redeemed" through science and technological advances are mistaken.

"Science can contribute greatly to making the world and mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it," he said.

The pope said that while Christians have a responsibility to work for justice, the hope of building a perfect world here and now is illusory. Hopes for this world cannot by themselves sustain one's faith, he said.

"We need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God," he said.

Learning Hope

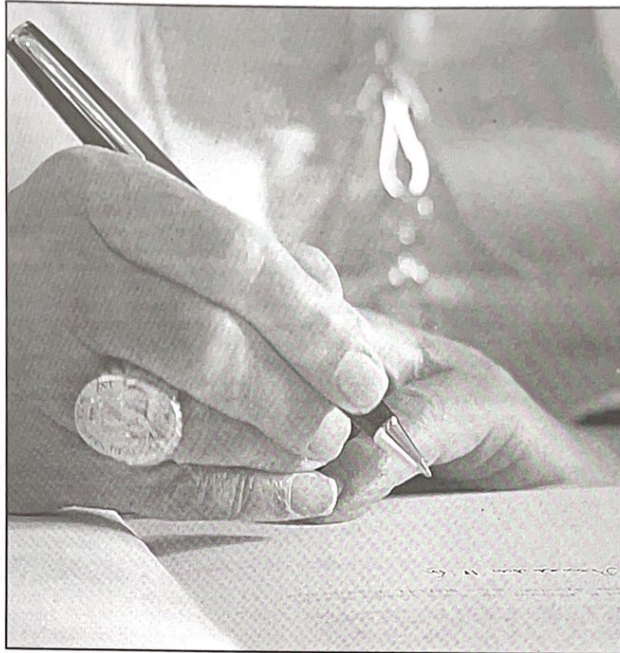
The second half of the encyclical discussed how Christian hope can be learned and practiced – particularly through prayer, acceptance of suffering and anticipation of divine judgment.

The pope called prayer a "school of hope," and as an example he held out the late Vietnamese Cardinal Francois Nguyen Van Thuan, who spent 13 years in prison, nine of them in solitary confinement.

In this "situation of seemingly utter hopelessness," the fact that he could still listen and speak to God gave him an increasing power of hope, the pope said.

He emphasized that prayer should not be isolating and should not focus on superficial objectives. Nor can people pray against others, he said.

"To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness," he said.



HANDS-ON: Pope Benedict XVI signs his encyclical, "Spe Salvi" (on Christian hope), at the Vatican Nov. 30.

"When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well," he said.

Suffering is part of human existence, and the sufferings of the innocent appear to be increasing today, the pope said. He said Christians should do whatever they can to reduce pain and distress.

Yet suffering cannot be banished from this world, and trying to avoid anything that might involve hurt can lead to a life of emptiness, he said. Instead, Christians are called to suffer with and for others, and their capacity to do so depends on their strength of inner hope, he said.

"The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope," he said.

The pope recalled that in the not-too-distant past, many Christians would "offer up" to Christ their minor daily disappointments and hardships. Perhaps that practice should be revived, he said.

The pope said the idea of judgment – specifically the Last Judgment of the living

and the dead – touched strongly on Christian hope because it promises justice.

"I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the essential argument, or in any case the strongest argument, in favor of faith in eternal life," he said.

It is impossible for the Christian to believe that the injustices of history will be the final word, he said.

The Last Judgment should not evoke terror, however, but a sense of responsibility, the pope said. It is a moment of hope, because it combines God's justice and God's grace – but "grace does not cancel out justice," he said.

"(Grace) is not a sponge which wipes everything away, so that whatever someone has done on earth ends up being of equal value," he said. "Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened."

The pope said the idea of purgatory, as a place of atonement for sins, also has a place in the logic of Christian hope. Heaven is for the "utterly pure" and hell for those who have destroyed all desire

for truth and love, but "neither case is normal in human life," he said.

Thus, the souls of many departed may benefit from prayers, he said.

Women Profiled

The pope began and ended his encyclical with profiles of two women who exemplified Christian hope. The closing pages praised Mary for never losing hope, even in the darkness of Jesus' crucifixion.

The encyclical opened by describing a similar sense of hope in a 19th-century African slave, St. Josephine Bakhita, who after being flogged, sold and resold, came to discover Christ.

With her conversion, St. Bakhita found the "great hope" that liberated and redeemed her, the pope said.

The pope emphasized that this was different from political liberation as a slave. Christianity "did not bring a message of social revolution," he said, but something totally different: an encounter with "a hope stronger than the sufferings of slavery, a hope which therefore transformed life and the world from within."

Encyclical on the Web

To read the full text of "Spe Salvi," Pope Benedict XVI's new encyclical, go to http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html

Encyclical at a Glance

- Jesus Christ brought humanity the gift of a "trustworthy hope" in salvation and eternal life, a hope that is directly connected with faith.

- In the contemporary world, however, religious faith has been replaced with faith in progress and technology, provoking a "crisis of Christian hope."

- Ideologies like Marxism tried to do without religion and create a perfect society through political structures. Instead, this led to the "greatest forms of cruelty," proving that "a world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope."

- Some have placed their hope in the mistaken belief that man could be redeemed through science – but science can destroy the world unless it is guided by religious values.

Queens Pastor Is Placed on Administrative Leave

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Queens pastor on administrative leave from priestly ministry after receiving allegations of sexual abuse placed on the diocese's telephone reporting line.

The bishop said that Msgr. George F. Zatarga, the pastor of American Martyrs parish, Bayside, since 2005, acknowledged the inappropriate behavior. He also wrote a letter resigning his pastorate and agreed to undergo counseling and treatment, which he has begun.

In a letter to parishioners read at the Masses Dec. 1-2, Bishop DiMarzio said: "Allow me to share with you that no information presented in the allegations involved any members of this parish."

Msgr. John W. Maloney, the territorial vicar for the Queens South Vicariate, read the letter at the four weekend Masses as the representative of the bishop.

When the diocese learned of the allegations, the information was immediately given to the District Attorney's Office of Kings County, "following our standard procedure," the bishop's letter said.

Bishop DiMarzio said that as a priest on administra-

tive leave Msgr. Zatarga is not permitted to present himself as a priest, wear clerical attire, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments. He is allowed to offer Mass privately.

After the Masses, Dominican Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, the Victims Assistance Coordinator, and eight members of the diocesan Healing/Intervention Team were available to parishioners to hear their "thoughts and concerns" about the news presented in the letter. A number of parishioners spoke with the team, she said.

Msgr. Zatarga, 65, became the pastor of American Martyrs in 2005 after serving as the diocesan Vicar for Senior Priests for six years. Ordained in 1968, he served as a parochial vicar at St. Frances de Chantal, Borough Park, and St. Gertrude's, Edgemere; pastor of Christ the King, Springfield Gardens; and chaplain at Bishop Loughlin M.H.S., Ft. Greene, and Archbishop Molloy H.S., Briarwood.

In his letter, Bishop DiMarzio asked the parishioners of American Martyrs to pray for all victims of abuse by

clergy, stating that "the courage of those who have come forward at this time should be especially respected and admired."

Saying that he was speaking as the diocesan bishop and on behalf of all in the Church, he apologized to the victims "for the emotional suffering they have endured." He said that "even the passage of time" has not dimmed their hurt.

Bishop DiMarzio also encouraged prayers for the former pastor, asking parishioners to "reflect on the good that Msgr. Zatarga has accomplished in his nearly four decades in the priesthood."

The bishop named Msgr. Edward J. Bottino, a retired pastor of the diocese, to serve as the parish administrator until a new pastor is appointed. He assumed his duties this week.

In his letter, Bishop DiMarzio said that anyone wishing to present an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by clergy should call the toll-free reporting number, (888) 634-4499. He said the caller would be treated "with courtesy and respect."