**Introduction**

1. “Spe salvi facti sumus—in hope we are saved, St. Paul tells the Romans (Rom. 8:24), and us as well.... But what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that we are redeemed simply because of it? And what certainty is this?”

**Faith Is Hope**

2. “Hope is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ seem interchangeable. A distinguishing mark of Christians is the fact that they have a future: It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they do know in general terms that their lives will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live in the present as well. The Christian message is not only ‘informative’ but ‘performative.’ This means that the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known; it also makes things happen and is life-changing.”

3. “But in what does this ‘redemptive’ hope consist? To come to know the true God means to receive hope. We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God and have grown accustomed to it have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that comes after a real encounter with God. The example of a saint of our time can help us understand what it means to have a real encounter with God for the first time: Josephine Bakhita, an African canonized by Pope John Paul II. She felt a need to extend the liberation she received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ; it had to be handed on to the greatest possible number of people. She could not keep to herself the hope that had ‘redeemed’ her.”

**The Concept of Faith-Based Hope in the New Testament and the Early Church**

4. “Can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us His face and opened His heart be for us, too, not just ‘informative’ but ‘performative’? Can it change our lives so that we know we are redeemed through the hope it expresses? Jesus brought a hope that transformed life and the world from within. Masters and slaves became brothers and sisters. Baptism changed society from within. Christians recognize present society as an exile; they belong to a new society that is the goal of their common pilgrimage.”

5. “Because many of the early Christians belonged to lower social strata they were open to a new hope. The old Roman religion had become fossilized. The divine was seen in cosmic forces, but a God to whom one could pray did not exist. Life ‘according to Christ’ overturned that worldview. And yet it has become fashionable again today. A personal God, not elemental spirits of the universe, governs the world and mankind; it is not
the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. We are not slaves of the universe and its laws; we are free. Life is not a simple product of the randomness of matter; within everything and at the same time above everything there is a personal will, a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love.”

6. “Christ is represented on ancient tombs principally by two images: the philosopher and the shepherd. In the early Church the philosopher was the one who knew how to teach the art of being authentically human—the art of living and dying. As the true philosopher, Christ holds the Gospel in one hand and a traveling staff in the other. With the staff He conquers death; with the Gospel He brings the living truth. Both uneducated and educated people found in Christ one who could tell them who man truly is, and what he must do to be truly human. Christ Himself is the way and the truth, and therefore the life everyone is seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death: only one who can do this is the true teacher of life. As for the shepherd, Christ is the only one who can guide us through the valley of death because He has conquered death and returned to accompany us. This is the new hope that arose in the lives of believers.”

7. “The virtues of faith and hope are closely linked. In the standard definition (Hebrews 5:1) ‘faith is the hypóstasis—the substance—of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.’ St. Thomas Aquinas explains that faith is an hábitus—a stable disposition—of soul through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. This presence of what is to come brings certainty even now. The Protestant Reformers, however, interpreted hypóstasis subjectively, as personal conviction, not objective reality. This interpretation, dominant in 20th century theology, is mistaken, for faith draws the future into the present by giving us even now something of the reality we are waiting for; it constitutes a proof of the things that are still unseen. The existence of this future touches the present.”

8. “This hope-filled faith is strengthened and related to daily life by another meaning of substance (Hebrews 10:34) as material possessions that provide security (hypárchonta). These two types of substance (the material basis of life and a basis that endures beyond life) are linked; faith gives life a new basis and creates a new freedom that enabled the early Christians to renounce the goods of this life—and even temporal life itself—in order to secure the promise of hope in a future (eternal) life. The history of the Church is replete with heroic acts of renunciation, leaving everything for love of Christ in order to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. The new life of faith is a substance that calls forth life for others, and is a proof for us that the things to come are already present. Christ is truly ‘the philosopher’ and ‘the shepherd’ who shows us what life is and where it is to be found.”

9. “Two more terms (Hebrews 10:36 and 39) help us understand more fully these two approaches. They are hypómone (patience, constancy) and
hypóstole (weakness, timidity). On one hand, patient endurance of trials undergone by the believer in order to receive what is promised shows a life based on the certainty of hope. On the other hand, shrinking back and hiding from adversity through lack of courage indicates the absence of a hope-filled faith.”

**What Is Eternal Life?**

10. “Can the persevering faith of the first Christians still sustain a life-changing and life-sustaining hope? Is it as ‘performative’ for us as it was for them? In Baptism a person receives a new name and asks the Church for faith as the way to eternal life. But what is it to live eternally? Today many people reject the faith because they find the prospect of eternal life unbearably monotonous; faith even seems to be an impediment to what they desire in the present life. Indeed, without grace, immortality would be more of a burden than a blessing, as St. Ambrose said.”

11. “To eliminate death or to postpone it indefinitely would place humanity in an impossible situation and bring no relief. There is an inner contradiction in recoiling both from death and from the prospect of endless life. So what do we really want? What really is it to ‘live’? And what does eternity really mean? It would appear, as St. Augustine pointed out, that what we call life is not really life at all. What we really want is a ‘happy life’; this is the true destination of our journey. It is profoundly paradoxical that we are ignorant of what this true life is toward which we feel compelled.”

12. “All our efforts to attain authenticity give rise to contradictory hopes for a life untouched by death. We attempt to imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us, and yet the idea of something interminable frightens us; if it remains unknown we end in despair. ‘Eternal life’ is intended to name this unknown thing that drives us. We sense that it goes beyond an unending succession of calendar days to a supreme moment of satisfaction in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality. It would be a moment without before and after, something like plunging into an ocean of infinite love. We can only attempt to grasp this idea of life in its fullest sense—a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being that overwhelms us with joy. But we must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, what it is that our faith leads us to expect.”

**Is Christian Hope Individualistic?**

13. “Attempts to represent ‘heaven’ as the object of hope have given many people the incentive to live by faith and even to lay aside the material substance that supports our lives. But this idea has been subjected to harsh critique in modern times as an individualistic abandonment of the world to its misery by taking refuge in a private form of eternal salvation.”

14. “Contrary to this notion is an idea of salvation as social, or communal, that sees redemption as the re-establishment of unity that brings mankind together once more in a union of believers already taking shape in this life: Only in this universal
openness can we gaze upon the source of joy, love itself—God.”

15. “While this community-oriented vision of beatitude is directed beyond the present world, it also has to do with the building up of this world according to different historical contexts. An example is provided by the monastic reform of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: Monks perform a task that benefits the world along with the Church and individual souls.”

The Transformation of Christian Faith-Hope in Modern Times

16. “The notion of a self-oriented Christian project excluding the service of others originated with Francis Bacon at the beginning of the modern age. His goal of a triumph of art over nature by way of a new experimental method includes a theological application: the re-establishment of man’s original dominion over creation.”

17. “Up to that time, recovery from mankind’s expulsion from Paradise was expected through faith in Christ. Now redemption is expected through a newly discovered link between science and praxis [its practical applications]. Faith is displaced onto the level of purely private and other-worldly interests and becomes irrelevant for the world. This program still influences the present crisis of faith, which is essentially a crisis of hope. Modern hope is faith in human progress, in a totally new world that is to emerge from scientific advancements—the Kingdom of Man.”

18. “The modern ideology of progress depends primarily on the dominion of human reason. ‘Progress’ occurs in overcoming all forms of dependency in the quest for perfect freedom, understood simply as human autonomy. The kingdom of reason is the new condition for the human race to attain total freedom: By virtue of their intrinsic goodness, ‘reason’ and ‘freedom’ guarantee a new and perfect human community that has overcome the shackles of faith and the Church. This ideology contains a revolutionary potential of enormous explosive force, as we see in the subsequent political history of the West.”

19. “The two principal stages in the political realization of that hope were the French Revolution and the institutionalization of Kant’s ‘Rational Faith.’ Both find their roots in the Enlightenment. French intellectuals sought to establish the rule of reason and freedom in a new political regime. Soon thereafter, German intellectuals sought to replace ‘ecclesiastical faith’ with ‘rational faith.’ The transcendent (other-worldly) Kingdom of God preached by Jesus is replaced with a new immanent (this-worldly) ‘Kingdom of God’ wherein ‘ecclesiastical faith’ is superseded by ‘religious faith’—a simple rational faith. Kant already saw that this could pave the way for a post-Christian kingdom of Antichrist.”

20. “The 18th century faith in progress as the new form of human hope prepared the way for the 19th century faith in a revolutionary ‘leap’ occasioned by rapid industrialization and the rise of an industrial ‘proletariat’ whose dreadful living conditions occasioned a call by Engels and Marx for all-encompassing change—over-
turning the entire socio-economic order. This definitive step toward 'salvation within history,' to be accomplished by a 'scientifically conceived politics,' was destined to replace 'the truth of the hereafter' by 'the truth of the here and now.' It took the tragic form of totalitarian ideology when the Communist Party attempted it in Russia.”

21. “In his confidence that ‘socialized man’ would ‘sort things out’ and proceed by themselves toward social perfection, Marx could not foresee the trail of appalling destruction that followed the revolution as a result of his fundamental error: the materialist premise that man is a product of economic conditions and capable of self-redemption.”

22. “The questions remains: What may we hope for? What does ‘progress’ really mean? What does it promise and what does it not promise? A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with the Christian concept of hope so that Christians, too, may learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they offer the world and what they cannot offer. A self-critique of modern Christianity is needed for a renewal of its self-understanding that sets out from its roots. This will reveal the ambiguity of progress, its possibilities for good and for evil. If technological progress is not matched by corresponding progress in ethical formation, then it is not progress at all, but a threat to man and the world.”

23. “When does reason truly triumph? Only when integrated with faith does reason become truly hu-
man, capable of differentiating between good and evil and freely directing the will along the right path. To put it very simply: Man needs God. Otherwise he remains without hope. A ‘Kingdom of God’ achieved without God, a kingdom of man alone, inevitably ends in perversity, as we have seen over and over. God truly enters human affairs only when He himself comes toward us and speaks to us. Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be itself. Reason and faith need each other in order to realize their true nature and fulfill their mission.”

The True Shape of Christian Hope

24. “Again, then, what may we hope for in this time of continuous progress toward mastery of nature without similar advancement in ethical awareness for moral decision-making, and when freedom therefore is compromised? Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning. This means: a) that structures alone can never guarantee the right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world; and b) that the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world because man always remains free, and freedom is always fragile. Freedom must constantly be won over to the cause of good.”

25. “Every generation must help to promote freedom and goodness in the never ending search for the right ordering of human affairs. Good structures are not enough because man is not redeemed from outside. Those who went along with the intellectual current of modernity were wrong to
believe that science alone would redeem mankind. It can make great contributions, but it can also destroy the world. Modern Christianity, on the other hand, has largely restricted its attention to individual salvation, even if it has continued to achieve great things in the formation of man and care for the needy."

26. “What redeems man is love. Every human experience of love is a moment of ‘redemption’ that gives a new meaning to life. But human love is fragile; what truly redeems is the unconditional love of God in Christ Jesus. Through Him we become certain of God’s presence in our lives.”

27. “Whoever does not know God is without the great hope that sustains the whole of life from the moment of Baptism. Whoever is moved by God’s love begins to perceive what ‘life’ really is. In its true sense, life is a relationship, and not something we have in or from ourselves. We ‘live’ when we form a relationship with the One who is Life itself and Love itself.”

28. “Communion with Jesus establishes our relationship with God and with each other: To live in Him is to live for others. This means that love of God leads us to participate in His justice and generosity toward others; we assume responsibility for them because our love for God gives us interior freedom from our material possessions. A good example is the life of St. Augustine following his conversion: When we love Christ we can be there, as He is, for others.”

29. “As it did for Augustine, the Gospel compels us to stop living only for ourselves and to pass on the hope we hold in common. He transmitted the hope that came to him from faith by setting aside his spiritual nobility to preach and act in a simple manner for the ordinary people of his city.”

30. “In the course of our reflections it has become evident that we need a hope that goes further than the many greater or lesser hopes we experience day by day at different times in our lives. Clearly, only something infinite will suffice, something that will always be more than we can ever attain. It has also become clear, however, that this hope is constantly receding in our time; Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in a kingdom of man that claims to be the real ‘Kingdom of God.’ We must be committed to improving the world, but a better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. The questions always arise: When is the world better? What makes it good? What are the paths that lead to its goodness?”

31. “Again, the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day are not enough without the great hope that surpasses everything else. The foundation of every hope is the God who has a human face; He has loved us to the end, each one individually and humanity as a whole. His Kingdom is present wherever He is loved and wherever His love reaches us. Only with His love can we persevere day by day in this imperfect world in a life that is truly Life.”

Settings for Learning and Practicing Hope:
I. Prayer as a School of Hope

32. “Prayer is the first essential setting for learning hope. An example is the late Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, who could listen and speak to God in a situation that seemed hopeless. This became for him an increasing power of hope that enabled him to become for people all over the world a witness to the great hope that does not wane even during long years of solitary confinement.”

33. “St. Augustine beautifully describes this intimate relationship between hope and prayer: Man is created to be filled by God; the smallness of his heart has to be stretched by straining forward to what lies ahead. To pray is not to withdraw into a private corner; our freedom is not only for God, but also for others. In prayer, we learn as children of God what we can truly ask of our common Father by undergoing inner purification that opens us to Him and to each other, that frees us from self-deception, awakens our consciences, and enables us to listen to Goodness itself.”

34. “For prayer to develop this power of purification it must be a personal encounter between the intimate self and the living God; it is constantly guided and enlightened by the liturgy of the Church and the prayers of her saints. As we speak to God and He speaks to us in this intermingling of personal and public prayer we become capable of the great hope and its ministers for others. Christian hope is an active hope, a truly human hope that keeps the world open to God.”

II. Action and Suffering as Schools of Hope

35. “All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. We can continue to hope even when the circumstances of life seem to leave nothing to hope for. Despite all failures, the great certitude that our lives are held firm by the indestructible power of Love gives them meaning and importance, and the courage to act and to persevere. What we build is the kingdom of man with all its human limitations. The Kingdom of God is a great and beautiful gift, the unmerited response to our hope. Our behavior matters to God and to the unfolding of history: By opening ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good, we allow God to enter the world and contribute to its salvation as the saints, God’s co-workers, have done. We can free our lives and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy it now and in the future. We can uncover the sources of creation and keep them unsullied. We can make a right use of the gift of creation according to its intrinsic requirements and ultimate purpose. Thus do our actions engender hope for us and for others while remaining based on the great hope in God’s promises that gives us courage and directs our actions in good times and bad.”

36. “Although we do what we can to relieve those who suffer—an obligation of justice and love—many forms of suffering, mental and physical, keep increasing. Hope for healing emerges from faith in God’s power to subdue the power of evil, the sins that lie at the root of suffering. This
hope gives us courage to place ourselves on the side of good, even as we know that sin remains ever present.”

37. “We can try to limit suffering, but we cannot eliminate it. Not by fleeing from suffering are we healed, but by accepting it, maturing through it, and finding meaning in it through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love. A letter from Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, a 19th century Vietnamese martyr, illustrates how suffering is transformed through the hope that springs from faith. In the midst of torments he was full of joy and gladness because ‘Christ is with me.’ The star of hope rose even in the hell of a concentration camp, and in spite of everything, his suffering became a hymn of praise.”

38. “Both for the individual and for society, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth, and justice is an essential criterion of humanity. A society cannot accept and support its suffering members unless individuals are able to do so, and individuals cannot accept the suffering of others unless they themselves are able to find meaning in it. Accepting one who suffers means sharing in that suffering as one’s own. Truth and justice must stand above comfort and physical well being or else life itself becomes a lie, for love cannot exist without this painful renunciation of self.”

39. “To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are necessary components of humanity; without them, humanity dies. Historically, it was the Christian faith that brought forth this new capacity, the example of Truth and Love in person who desired to suffer for and with us, and of the Christian martyrs, His witnesses. The saints were able to make the journey of human existence as Christ had done before them because they were brimming with great hope. In them we see once again that the capacity to suffer for the sake of truth is the measure of humanity.”

40. “A brief comment with relevance for everyday living: Not long ago it was common for people to ‘offer up’ the minor hardships of every day so as to give them meaning. To offer something up means to contribute one’s small sacrifices to the great treasury of Christ’s compassion so much needed by the human race. We may want to consider reviving this practice ourselves.”

III. Judgment as a School of Hope

41. “From earliest times the prospect of the Last Judgment has served as a criterion by which Christians could order their present life as a summons to conscience and as hope in God’s justice. This looking ahead to the hour of justice has given Christianity its importance for the present moment, even in the design of sacred buildings.”

42. “In the modern era, so dominated by the idea of progress, this component of the Creed has waned. Christian faith has become individualized and oriented primarily to the salvation of one’s own soul. ‘Judgment’ has become a moralistic protest
against the injustices of world history and even of God’s supposed incompetence in not ending centuries of suffering. Humanity now makes the presumptuous and false claim that it can establish the justice God was unable to bring. But a world that tries to create its own justice is a world without hope. The protests of the Frankfurt School help us to see that there can be no final justice without a resurrection of the dead.”

43. “God revealed His true face in Jesus Christ, in the figure of a sufferer who shares man’s God-forsaken condition by taking it upon himself. The innocent Sufferer attains the certitude of hope: God can create justice in a way we cannot conceive, yet we can begin to grasp it through faith: Yes, there is a resurrection of the body; yes, there is a justice that sets everything right. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope. I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the strongest argument in favor of faith in eternal life. The impossibility that the injustice of history could be the last word makes Christ’s return necessary for new life to become fully convincing.”

44. “Faith gives us the certainty that God creates justice, that He is justice, and so the Last Judgment is primarily an image of hope. A world without God would be a world without hope. By looking upon the crucified and risen Christ, we know, too, that there is grace in His justice. Grace does not cancel justice by making wrong into right, as Dostoevsky and Plato perceived. In the end, souls stand naked before the Judge. It no longer matters what they once were, but what they are in truth, as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.”

45. “As that parable illustrates, there is an intermediate state (Purgatory) where souls undergo purification and healing to prepare for communion with God. At death, one’s life choice has become definitive. Hell is for those who have lived in hatred by suppressing all love within themselves; their destruction of good is beyond remedy. Heaven brings to fulfillment the journey of pure souls in whom communion with God gives direction to their entire being.”

46. “As we know from experience, neither of those states is normal in human life; there is in the great majority of people an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, it is covered over by compromises with evil, but the thirst for purity remains and constantly re-emerges in each person’s particular circumstances. On the Day of Judgment each one’s work is tested by fire. If it survives, he receives a reward; if it is consumed, he suffers loss. All pass through this fire so as to become fully open to receiving God and able to take a place at the eternal marriage feast.”

47. “According to some recent theologians, this fiery encounter with Christ is the decisive act of judgment. As it sears, it transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. The impurities in our lives become painfully evident, but it is a blessed pain that allows us to become totally ourselves and totally God’s. Because of the interrelation between justice
and grace, the way we have lived matters, but defilement does not stain us forever if we have continued to reach out toward truth and love. The evil in the world and in ourselves having already been burned away in Christ’s Passion, we experience its power in ourselves at the moment of judgment. The pain of His love becomes salvation and joy. God’s judgment is hope because it is both justice and grace: The Incarnation has so closely linked the two that justice is firmly established as we go trustfully to meet the Judge, our Advocate.”

48. “The idea of intercessory prayer for souls in the intermediate state comes from the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the solace and refreshment of the Eucharist is added to prayer and almsgiving on behalf of departed souls. It has been a conviction of Christianity throughout the ages that love reaches into the afterlife. Our lives continue to be linked through innumerable interactions because no one lives alone—in this life and beyond. For this reason, our prayers play a small part in the purification of souls. As time is superseded in the communion of souls, it is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. This clarifies an important element of Christian hope: It is a hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for us.”

Mary, Star of Hope

49. “For more than a thousand years, the Church has greeted the Mother of God as ‘Star of the Sea’ (Ave, Maris Stella). Life is a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy. People who have lived good lives are lights of hope for us. Jesus is our true Light, the sun that rises above all the shadows of history. To reach Him we also need those nearby who reflect His light. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us?”

50. “Holy Mary, you were hoping for Israel’s redemption when the news reached you that it was you who would give birth to the One awaited. Through your ‘yes’ the hope of the ages entered the world and its history; you became the image of the Church that would carry that hope to all mankind. From the Cross you received that new mission as mother of all believers. Your faith communicated the certitude of hope to the followers of your Son as they spread the good news of His Kingdom of which there is no end. You, Mother of Hope, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to His Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!”

Authors and Works cited: