

AFRICAN MILITARY CHAPLAINS AND THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE

Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
University of Calabar, Calabar

Abstract

As non-combatant commissioned officers and members of the chain of command, chaplains belong to the military organogram. At the same time, they belong to the Church from which they came and to which they would return after their military services. In times of war and peace, chaplains carry out multiple roles not only as spiritual guides, but also as voices of conscience, morale-boosters, counsellors, sources of hope, consolation, and mercy in the midst of military officers, their families, and others. The article considers the implications that the Jubilee Year of Hope has for the life and ministry of African military chaplains, especially, Catholic chaplains in the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF), with particular reference to the Nigerian Navy. This is against the backdrop of insecurity, terrorism, kidnapping, piracy, ethno-religious violence, corruption, bad governance, ethnocentrism, unemployment, poverty, hunger, despair etc., that to a great extent define the Nigerian-African reality today. It found out that it, the Jubilee Year of Hope, calls them, among others, to a much more ministry of hope, presence, mercy and gratitude.

Keywords: African Military; Chaplains; Nigerian Armed Forces; Nigerian Navy; Jubilee Year of Hope; Implications

Introduction

One of the things that has come out of the history and historiography of the World War I (1914-1918), is the popular story of the war's 1914 Christmas Truce. According to the story, there was an impromptu ceasefire during which German and British soldiers crossed the trenches unto the No Man's Land to talk about the futility of the war, exchange gifts, and wished each other a "happy Christmas." Some have even gone ahead to say that the two warring sides played football that day, the famous "Christmas Day Football Match" (Weintraub, 2021). Speaking at the unveiling of a memorial marking the centenary celebration of that event in 2014, Prince William, the then Duke of Cambridge, had said that: "Football had the power to bring people together and break down barriers. It is vital that 100 years on we keep the Christmas truce story alive. For future generations this memorial will help ensure that not just football, but also a nation, remembers" ("Prince William Hails", 2014). And some days after his speech, and as part of the many events lined up for the centenary celebrations, the British and German army football teams played a football match. Venue was Aldershot Town FC in Hampshire, and the match ended 1-0, in favour of the British army ("WW1 Christmas Truce", 2014). But in recent times, some historians have come to question the historicity of the said 1914-Christmas Truce Football Match, especially, as it exists in popular imagination (Moss, 2014; Masters, 2015). They, therefore, have made a case for a much more nuanced presentation of issues thereof (Crocker, 2015, 19-20).

However, in *The Saturday Evening Post* of 1962, British writer and World War I veteran, Robert Graves (1895-1985), published his short story, "Wave No Banners", that creatively retells the story of the truce. This short story, under a new title, "Christmas Truce", would be added to his *Collected Short Stories* that came out a few years later (Graves, 1964, vi). Describing in particular the Truce football match in that short story, Graves has the following to say:

No man's land had seemed ten miles across when we were crawling out on a night patrol; but now we found it no wider than the width of two football pitches. We provided the football and set up stretchers as goal posts; and the Rev. Jolly, our Padre, acted as ref. They beat us 3-2, but the Padre had showed a bit too much Christian charity – their outside-left shot the deciding goal, but he was miles offside and admitted it as soon as the whistle went. And the spectators were spread nearly two deep along the touch-lines with loaded rifles slung on our shoulders (106).

Granted, this is a work of fiction and given the creative license undoubtedly employed in its composition, any strict sense of correspondence between it and what happened in reality at the Christmas Truce is surely ruled out. At the same time, however, it is the latter, that is, what happened in reality at the Christmas Truce, which hugely informed what is presented in the story (Amaefule, 2024, 239). Writers do not usually write from nowhere! Graves, as stated above, was a veteran of the war. Yes, among the things that immediately caught my attention in his description above is the person he said officiated the match – a Padre, most probably, the military chaplain. Linzey and Travis (2022, 4) confirm that “many service personnel call their chaplains 'Padre', which is the Spanish word for 'Father', and comes from the Catholic tradition.” Even at that time, this Padre was there with them, underscoring, as it were, the role that military chaplains play, first, during the war, and, of course, in times of peace. In both moments, they share the sufferings, sorrows, and anguish of the soldiers, and also their joys, hopes and successes. In them, the famous opening lines of Vatican II's document, *Gaudium et Spes*, seem to be greatly realized: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (1965, 1). Also, Rev. Jolly, the chaplain in Graves' account, is said to have shown “a bit too much of Christian charity” in officiating the match. Indeed, chaplains are positively also not without such Christian charity. Hence, the ease with which they attend to the spiritual needs of soldiers and, by extension, their families, whether or not they are of the same Christian denomination or, even faith, as they. And if anything should happen to any of those soldiers at the battlefield, it is usually the same chaplain that would hold the person's hands, anoint and pray for and with the person, help in burying the person, as Rev. Jolly would later do after the football match in the same story (Graves, 1964, 107-108), and then, carry the person's last words and wishes to his/her families, friends and loved ones.

Hence, by their presence in the midst of the soldiers and by extension their families, chaplains, in this case, Catholic chaplains, could be said to be not only spiritual guides, but also dispensers of charity, purveyors of mercy, voices of conscience, morale-boosters, counsellors, preachers, pray-ers, do-ers and companions of the last moments! In fact, what Blumenson (1994, xi-xii) says with hindsight about Catholic battlefield chaplains in the American Armed Forces during the World War II can, as well, be said of chaplains, today: “Chaplains fostered good morale in a variety of ways. They held religious services for soldiers and sailors and preached to them. They counselled and advised those who sought help. They were everywhere they deemed their presence to be necessary – in battle that meant with the combat troops and there the chaplains often acted above and beyond the call of duty. Under hostile fire, they risked their lives. They sought the wounded, the dying, and the dead who lay exposed and helpless. They succored them, rescued them, brought them back to medical aid stations, and prayed over them. They buried bodies and wrote to the families of the deceased.” Thus, like St. Paul, each chaplain can say: “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save all” (I Cor. 1:22).

More so, it was in 1946 that Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997), by this time, a member of the Sisters of Loreto, was on a train trip from Calcutta, where she was the principal of a high school, to

Darjeeling, still in India, when she received what she termed “a call within a call”(Amaefule, 2005, 245). That call would see her leave the Sisters of Loreto and eventuate in the foundation of her congregation, Missionaries of Charity in 1950(Amaefule, 2005, 248; Costa, 2000, 65). Like her, military chaplains are also recipients of a call within a call (O'Shea, 2015), a call alongside and within their priestly call that takes them from their own dioceses or religious orders to any place and location where they are needed. As the clergy on khaki (Snape and Madigan, 2013), theirs is a unique kind of ministry and apostolate. It sees them walk, at the same time, the two roads that open up before them, and do the walk with great faith, discipline and devotion. The first road leads them, khaki-clad, deep into the state's military organogram, wherein, as non-combatant commissioned officers and members of the chain of command, they obey the wishes of their superiors and commanding officers, and may be, sometimes, their whims. Although, it is good to point out that unlike the other military personnel, chaplains often bypass the chain of command in order to talk to and interact with personnel of any level of rank (Rennick, 2011, 90). This is because of their unique role as chaplains and the sacred trust that exists between them and any Navy personnel leading to confidentiality in communication (United States Coast Guard, 2017). But the second road leads them, with their cassocks on, and as those who act *in persona Christi Capitis* (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1548*), deep into the Church where they belong, and to which they will return after their military services (Crossby, 1994, xxv; Dung cited in John, 2024). In fact, they are more or less “on loan” from the Church, remain fully accountable to the Church, and continue thereof only through the ongoing endorsement of the same Church (Block, 2018). Thus, chaplains could be said to be connected and belong, as it were, both to the church and the military. Hence, Martin talks of how chaplains are doubly commissioned by the State and the Church (Martin, 1997, 149). While such dual belongingness often creates tensions, the so-called “two-collar problem”/ “two-collar dilemma” (Suitt, III, 2023, 25; Ott and Leslie, 2020, 164-165), an offshoot of the “eschatological tension” which all Christians face in the sense that all Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world (Davie, 2015, 39), the fact is that whatever happens, for instance, in the Church, both locally and globally, even while the chaplains are still in the military, will always have a way of affecting them. In this study, therefore, I shall endeavour to look at the implications that one of the things happening in the church, today, that is, the Jubilee Year of Hope, may have for the life and ministry of African military chaplains, especially, Catholic chaplains in the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF). The article is divided into five sections. Section one opens with the introduction. Section two attempts an understanding of Jubilee Year and then the Jubilee Year of Hope. Section three paints a picture of the state and situation of things in Nigeria. Section four considers proper the challenges of the Jubilee Year of Hope to Catholic chaplains in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Section five ends with evaluation and conclusion.

The History and Meaning of the Jubilee Year

The first of Jubilee Year in the history of the Church was proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII (c.1230-1303) in 1300 (What is a Holy Year?” 1997). Inspiration for this came from a then popular spirituality that included particular practices, pilgrimages, and indulgences, some dating even years before him (Francis, 2024, 5; O'Connell, 2025). Boniface VIII had also decreed that a Jubilee Year be observed every 100 years. But in the long history of the Church, this has not always been the case. From observing it every 50 years and even every 33 years, the number of years Christ lived on earth, it was, however, from 1475, that the Jubilee Year started to be observed every 25 years (Burton, 1828, 130). It was Pope Sixtus IV (1414 – 1484) who celebrated that particular Jubilee Year, even as it was his predecessor, Pope Paul II (1417 – 1471), who had sanctioned it (that is, the twenty-five-year-interval celebration of the Jubilee Year) in 1470 (“Jubilees Throughout History”, 2025). Among other reasons, this was to ensure that many more people had the opportunity of observing the Jubilee Year at least once in their life time (*The London Encyclopedia, 1829, 252*).

Life expectancy was too low at that time. Since then, this has been the tradition. Of course, here, one is talking of what is called “ordinary” or “regular” Jubilee Year so called because it falls after the set period of twenty-five years (What is a Holy Year?” 1997). The last ordinary Jubilee Year was observed in the year 2000, marking the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ.

However, apart from this once-in-every-twenty-five-years ordinary Jubilee Year, there is also what is called “extraordinary” Jubilee Year. This could be proclaimed by the pope when there are special occasions and need for them, and holds less than twenty-five years after the last one (Amaefule, 2016a, 89). It was from the 16th century that extraordinary Jubilee started to be called (What is a Holy Year?” 1997). Example of such extraordinary Jubilees in recent times are the Jubilee Year that Saint John Paul II called in 1983 to mark the 1,950th anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, as well as another he called four years after in 1987 to mark the Marian year (What is a Holy Year?” 1997). There is also the Jubilee Year of Mercy that the Pope Francis called in 2015 with the bull, *Misericordiae vultus* (Amaefule, 2016a, 89). Generally, during the jubilee year, also known as the “Holy Year” (What is a Holy Year?” 1997), the faithful are encouraged to visit Rome as pilgrims in order to carry out various religious exercises and to receive blessings/indulgences. For instance, among the many pilgrims that visited Rome for the Jubilee year of 1300, is the famous Italian poet, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). (Collins, 2017, 21). He would go on to make reference to the experience in *The Divine Comedy*, especially, in Canto XXXI of Paradise (What is a Holy Year?” 1997). However, in modern times, apart from the ordinary pilgrims coming to Rome, different groups in the Church have often had special days assigned to them.

Basically, the inspiration for the observance of the Jubilee Year is from the Bible. For example, in Leviticus 25:10-14, the instruction was given for the honouring of the fiftieth year and a proclamation of a Jubilee: “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you: you shall not sow or reap the aftergrowth or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a Jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. In this year of Jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another” (NRSV). There is also Is 61:1-2, where Isaiah talks of how he had been anointed by the Lord and sent “to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” (NRSV). In Lk. 4: 18-19, the above words of Isaiah would become fulfilled in the life of Jesus who made those words his at the beginning of his ministry (Francis, 2024a, 10). Thus, Jubilee year is usually a year of grace, forgiveness, liberation and empowerment (Amaefule, 2016a, 89). A year of conversion, reconciliation, personal encounter with God, social justice, and deeper interpersonal relationship with others. Little wonder, it has become an opportunity for calls for repentance, spiritual renewal, social transformation, cancellation of debts, improving the quality of life of prisoners, liberation of people from slavery, bettering of the environment subjected to various forms of degradation, as well as for closeness and tenderness towards those who suffer and are on the margins (Francis, 2024b; Francis. 2025a).

Understanding the Jubilee Year of Hope

The Jubilee Year of Hope is an ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025. It is the 27th in the history of the Church (O'Connell, 2025). **It was officially proclaimed by Pope Francis on May 9, 2024, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, with the Bull of Indiction, *Spes Non Confundit* (“Hope does not disappoint”).** Pope Francis would later inaugurate it with the opening of the Holy Door of

the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on December 24, 2024. The theme of this Jubilee is “Pilgrims of Hope” with Pope Francis praying that the Jubilee may be an opportunity for everyone to be renewed in hope (Francis, 2024a, 1). It, that is, the Jubilee Year of Hope, will be concluded with the closing of the Holy Door in the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on January 6, 2026, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord (Francis, 2024a, 1). However, following the death of Pope Francis on April 21, 2025, the closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope will most probably be carried out by his successor, Leo XIV, who was elected Pope on May 8, 2025. That said, the Jubilee Year of Hope was called within the time the Church was observing the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, otherwise, the Synod on Synodality (SOS). The latter, opened in Rome on October 9, 2021, with the theme, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission”, was concluded in October, 2024. With the word “synod” understood in its simplest terms and for the purposes of the paper here as “journeying/walking together”, synodality thus becomes the process and reality of walking along together of the whole People of God. It is, according to Wood (2025, 7), “a way-of-being church that adds specificity to the concept of a pilgrim church because a church on pilgrimage is travelling together.” Generally, such a travelling or walking along together implies hope, which is the central message of the Jubilee Year of Hope (Francis, 2024a, 1), given, as stated above, its theme, “Pilgrims of Hope.” In the first place, this is the hope that the walking along together makes for spiritual progress and conduces to a better future for the pilgrim Church, leading it, at least, to an encounter with Christ (Francis, 2024a, 5).

This becomes all the more interesting following the belief that the said walking-along-together in the hope of a better future is not without God's presence and guidance. And because God is involved, and because God loves us, obstacles and hindrances that are encountered on the way, as well as the stark realities of life, even death, become more bearable. Here, one sees the link between faith in God, God's love for us, and the hope for a better future. Hence, faith in God and in His love for us becomes the precondition or prerequisite for hope. The result is what Moltmann (2002, 5) calls a believing hope. And it is this believing, Christian hope that does not disappoint. “Christian hope”, says Pope Francis (2024a, 3), “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 [...]. Here we see the reason why this hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life.” Thus, the need for the faith community in particular and the people in general to be made much more aware of this hope and the importance of keeping it, no matter the situations and challenges they may face daily. While this could be done through words, one's ways and manner of life could also help even more. Hence, Pope Francis (2024a, 25) prays: “Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: 'Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!' (Ps 27:14)”

The State and Situation of Things in Nigeria Today

In the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, by the Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the protagonist and narrator, Kambili, tells of how her father's favourite title for intoning the Blessed Virgin was “Our Lady Shield of the Nigerian People”, and how it was he who made it up (Adichie, 2004, 15). According to her, the father, Papa (Eugene Achike), had told them that if people would use it every day, “Nigeria would not totter like a Big Man with the spindly legs of a child” (Adichie, 2004, 15). “Big Man with the spindly legs of a child! There seems to be no better way of capturing the current image and situation of the country than this. Popularly known as the Giant of Africa - thanks to its being the most populous nation in Africa - Nigeria, despite its remarkable human and natural endowments, currently walks about, as far as the indices of political and socio-economic developments are concerned, in the spindly legs of a child rather than those of a giant. Although, the country has since 1999 returned to democracy after many years of military dictatorship, not many of

the citizens will agree that they have reaped enough dividends of the same democracy. Politics is still being seen by many politicians as means of amassing wealth and lining of their pockets and those of their friends and cronies (Amaefule, 2016b, 37; Amaefule, 2019, 176). It is a kind of winner-takes-it-all, and elections are always a do-and-die affair, often marked with irregularities and lack of transparency even by the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, 2023). In high and low places, corruption is the order of the day (Amaefule, 2020a, 20). Neither is the economy in any better shape. The prices of basic things in the market keep on skyrocketing. Hunger and poverty stroll majestically through the land. Unemployment is widespread (Amaefule, 2022, 192). The few who are employed, including military personnel, are not well remunerated. Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected that inflation will rise up to 37% by 2026 (Tunji, 2025). The country's debt profile keeps ballooning. Many young people and even the not-so-young, teachers, bankers, tech experts, doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel, etc., troop out of the country in search of greener pastures anywhere else in the world, in what has been termed the *japa* syndrome, or even, *japalization*. (Oparinde and Makombe, 2024). The consequence is a health sector that is almost comatose, and an educational sector that has been left behind in many ways by many other parts of the world. Accompanying all these is environmental degradation, systemic ethnocentrism, and high levels of insecurity and terrorism (Amaefule, 2020b). Islamist terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), etc., leave, in their trails, violence, and deaths, especially, of soldiers, police, members of vigilante groups, and, indeed, the civilian population. Images of children, men and women being killed in their sleep by bandits and Fulani herdsmen in some parts of the country have become almost normal ("Where Is Your God?", 2025). Mass burials have consequently become almost a routine, and the country, a necropolis. Secessionist groups in the other parts of the country are not relenting in their drive. Kidnappings have become a lucrative business ("Nigeria's Abductions", 2024). Thanks to both ethnic and religious violence, particularly, involving Christians and Muslims in the northern part of the country, Nigeria has come to be regarded as one of the headquarters of ethno-religious violence in the world (Vaughan, 2016, 1; Falola, 1998, 1). Even recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that 20 million Nigerians, that is, about 20% of the Nigeria's population, live with mental health conditions ("20 Million Nigerians", 2025). Kukah (Cited in Auwal, 2025) sees a link between such mental crisis and, among others, violence, insecurity, and limited access to medical care. Military personnel and their family members are, no doubt, included in this number. In fact, Boff and Boff (1981, 25) had once talked of a "people for whom death is not a simple figure of speech but a daily reality thrust upon their attention in infant mortality, violent conflict, kidnappings, and torture." A great number of Nigerians today definitely fits such a picture.

Jubilee Year of Hope and the Catholic Chaplains in the Nigerian Armed Forces

The Nigerian Armed Forces is made of three branches: The Nigerian Army; the Nigerian Airforce and the Nigerian Navy. However, the paper will focus on the last, the Nigerian Navy. The Nigerian Navy came officially into being following the Act of Parliament No. 21 of 1964 ("History of the Nigerian Navy"). It is an offshoot of the Nigerian Marine Department of the Royal Navy (RN) established in 1887 to cater for the interest of the British in the West African sub region ("History, Roles and Organization"). However, it was the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as the Armed Forces Act CAPA20 and the National Defence Policy of 2006 that enlarged the legal and operational scope of the Nigerian Navy, enabling it to meet the obligations of a modern-day navy ("History of the Nigerian Navy"). The Nigerian Navy is headed by the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), the latter whose office, in addition to the office of the Navy Secretary, has six staff branches: Policy and Plans; Training and Operations; Administration; Naval Engineering; Logistics; and Accounts and Budget ("History of the Nigerian Navy"). The Directorate of Chaplaincy (Catholic),

or, simply, the Directorate of Naval Chaplain Services (Roman Catholic), falls under the Administrative branch ("History of the Nigerian Navy"). Its members are chaplains and chaplain assistants. While the chaplains are ordained priests, the chaplain assistants are lay people. In this section, I look at the challenges that the Jubilee Year of Hope may pose to the chaplains in view of the situations of things in the country, as pointed out above:

Towards a Much More Ministry of Hope

In the introductory part of this paper, it was stated that chaplains are sources and agents of hope. The Jubilee Year of Hope becomes a reminder and challenge to them to push this further or cultivate it all the more where it is lacking. Yes, apart from the aforesaid issues and more that define the existential reality of things in contemporary Nigeria, many people are also facing personal struggles and challenges. I remember recently how after Mass a certain lady came to see me and from her countenance, I knew that something was wrong. She was always cheerful. What was the problem? She told me that they had recently discovered a growth in her brain, and it was developing more aggressively as she had been having seizures lately and then her sight was also getting bad. She said that she had been asked to do another MRI Scan. She asked to know how God could have allowed such a thing to happen to her, and how she could go about the said scan given the pittance they paid her as salary where she worked. Not many days after, a woman who has a special needs child called to ask me what her offences were that God had treated her that way, given her, of all people, such a child, and that it was as if her prayers were not being heard by God. The child is her only child and yet, she was looking for another. But she did not forget to add that God would rather not give her another child if the child would be like the first. The other day she called to say that in recent times she had been entertaining the thought of killing herself and the child. The same suicidal thought was recently entertained by yet another woman who spoke to me. In her own case, she was on the verge of separation from her husband. These three are just representatives of many others who are dealing with one thing or another: illness, disappointment, betrayal, loss of dear ones, etc. While their circumstances were and are still different, one thing that they have in common, however, is the fact that their situations often led them, as would many, not only to come to cast doubts on the almightiness and kindness of a God in heaven (Moltmann, 1981, 47), but also to inquire if and why the same God had abandoned them.

The Jubilee Year of Hope, therefore, challenges chaplains to keep reminding people like these, reminding their own flock, and, indeed, many others, that God has not abandoned them, and never will; that God is rather right there in their midst. *He is right there in their midst not to provide arguments to explain everything, to explain away their sufferings, but instead to give their sufferings meaning by His accompanying presence (Francis, 2013b, 57).* Yes, God suffers with them, and never them without Him. He is a never a God of *a-pathia*, but a God of *sympathy*, a God who suffers with man (Kasper, 2012, 196). *As revealed and understood in Jesus Christ, He himself is never a stranger to suffering. St Martin of Tours is said to have one day encountered Satan who had appeared to him trying to convince him that he, Satan, was really the Christ. Martin, however, said to Satan, "If you are Christ, then where are your wounds?" Satan is said to have responded that he wanted to show Martin his glory and not his sufferings. But Martin answered him, "You are the devil; a Saviour who is without wounds, who does not have the mark of his suffering, I do not acknowledge."* (Atwood, 2004, 105). *God revealed in Christ has wounds, has the mark of suffering on his body. His wounds and sufferings not only authenticate his Saviour-ship, going by what Martin of Tours said above, they also demonstrate that He is never distant from those who suffer, those who are nursing their own wounds. He cares for them, cares for their suffering and pain (Yancey, 1990, 247-251; Gardner, 2007, 52).*

Yes, the story is told of how another Martin, Martin Luther, was once so depressed that none of the wife's counsel would help. The wife then decided to do something else. She simply put on a black dress. Luther noticed it and asked, "Are you going to a funeral?" "No", the wife, Kathrine, replied, "but since you act like God is dead, I wanted to join you in your mourning." Luther then, got the message and recovered (Markwald and Markwald, 2002, 139-140). What the wife simply did was to pass the message to Luther that God is still alive, and that he should place all his hope in him. He should never allow his hope to die. And that was what made him to recover! By reminding the people who are suffering and, indeed, the people around them, that God is still alive and not dead, and that he is with them and has not abandoned them, chaplains, like Luther's wife, help to enliven their hope; help to make their hope come back to life. This way, the people come to believe that yes, despite the struggles, sufferings and problems of today, they can still face a better tomorrow; despite the darkness that cover their way in the present, light will always appear at the end of the tunnel, and despite the death that hovers over them, the same death will never have the last word. This way, they come to understand that after all is said and done, there could be a certain meaning in what they are passing through, in their pains and suffering (Frankl, 2003, 65). Hence, Radcliffe (2024, 12) says: "Despair is not pessimism. It is the terror that nothing makes sense anymore. And hope is not optimism but the confidence that all that we live, all our confusion and pain, will somehow be discovered to have meaning."

While there are and could be many ways of getting about and strengthening, as it were, this important apostolate of theirs, of helping others to keep their hope alive, two at least ought to be underscored. One, when the Jewish Rabbi, Harold Kushner, lost his son, Aaron, to progeria, a certain illness that makes people age so fast, he was so devastated and could not make any sense of it all. He could not help but ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Writing eventually in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, he has this, among others, to say: "We can't explain it any more than we can explain life itself. We can't control it, or even sometimes postpone it. All we can do is try to rise beyond the question 'why did it happen?' and begin to ask the question 'what do I do now that it has happened?'" (Kushner, 1982, 81) So, chaplains are challenged to learn all the more how to accompany the people who are suffering or passing through pain on the journey of moving beyond asking the "Why" questions to trying to understand what they ought to do now that what has happened has happened. This is almost the same thing that Father Amadi, a missionary priest and character in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, helped the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Kambili, to do. With the death of Kambili's father who had been poisoned by the mother, and with her brother, Jaja, in prison for telling the police that it was he who killed the father instead of mother and thus spared the mother jail time, - an action for which he, Jaja, is often regarded as a Christ-figure (Amaefule, 2020c), and with the mother not being in the best of mental places, things were not all that easy for her. She, indeed, had many Why questions. But in the midst of these, Father Amadi, her friend, and then a missionary in Germany, often wrote to her, letters that she carried around. "Some months ago", Kambili notes, "he [Father Amadi] wrote that he did not want me to seek the whys, because there are some things that happen for which we can formulate no whys, for which whys simply do not exist and, perhaps, are not necessary" (Adichie, 2004, 303). Hence, Yancey (1990, 218) confesses: "Frankly, to me much suffering would remain meaningless if we spent all our efforts on the unanswerable 'Why?' questions."

More so, telling the people stories of individuals who actually had been helped by God to overcome the sufferings and challenges they were facing has a way of bringing the message nearer home. Stories make concrete ideals and realities that would have hitherto appeared distant. Granted, many of such individuals are in the bible; but many others also live around us even today. These are the icons of hope who cannot but inspire others to believe that they, too, can overcome. They are the

titans of hope that help people know that they are not alone in whatever they are passing through and that there are others who had been there and still there, but have refused to allow their conditions to overwhelm them. These are the giants of hope who help others make theirs the following words of Paul: “We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Thus, the following words of Pope Francis (2025a) to practitioners in the field of social communications cannot but be *ad rem*, here, as well: “I encourage you to discover and make known the many stories of goodness hidden in the folds of the news, imitating those gold-prospectors who tirelessly sift the sand in search of a tiny nugget. It is good to seek out such seeds of hope and make them known. [...]. May you always find those glimmers of goodness that inspire us to hope. This kind of communication can help to build communion, to make us feel less alone, to rediscover the importance of walking together. [...]. Tell stories steeped in hope, be concerned about our common destiny and strive to write together the history of our future.”

Towards a Much More Ministry of Presence

In the Jewish Talmud, the story is recounted of the encounter between Rabbi YOSHUA ben LEVI and Elijah the prophet. Elijah was standing at the entrance of Rabbi SIMERON ben YOHANAN's cave. Rabbi YOSHUA had asked to know when the Messiah would come. Elijah told him to go and ask the Messiah, himself. And when he inquired where he was, Elijah told him that the Messiah was sitting at the gates of the city. And as to how, then, he could know him, Elijah, among others, said, “He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds” (Nouwen, 2008, 81-82). In what is related to what is said above, while the Messiah, the story shows, has wounds, indicating, as it were, the sufferings and pain he bears, his “sitting among” the poor connotes, among other things, a presence, a caring presence. Yes, Pope Francis (2025b) notes how chaplains are in the midst of military officers, police and security personnel as the presence of Christ, walking at their side, to offer them a listening and sympathetic ear, to encourage them to set out ever anew and to support them in their daily service. This way, chaplains are mini-Emmanuel, mini God-in-our-midst! In a study conducted some time ago to assess the effectiveness of the ministry of priests in Eastern Africa, it was found out that over 97% of ordinary Catholics consider the availability of the priests for pastoral ministry to the people, otherwise their ministry of presence, to be one of the most important qualities of a good priest (Lukwata, et al cited in Nyenyembe, 2022). Transported to the West African zone, especially, Nigeria, and taking account of contextual realities, the results would still not be so different. Yes, people generally want to see their parish priest; they generally want to have him around; they want to chat with him, shake his hand, and get to know him. They expect him to be there not only at pivotal times such as births, weddings, sickness, trouble, and death, but even at less pivotal times as well (Dolan, 2000, 276). They simply want to have their parish priest around, with the priest saying by just being around: “I am here for you,” “You can count on me”. But even at that, such a ministry of presence has to do more with and is demanded more of chaplains by the Jubilee Year of Hope. They are to be “shepherds living with the odour of the sheep” (Francis, 2013a).

In the first place, apart from always being there to offer Mass, prayers and other sacraments to the soldiers, their family members and others, chaplains are often the first persons that service personnel, their families and, indeed, their flock, address their complaints about the authorities in their barracks and beyond (Micheal, 2006, 340). They are generally considered “safe” to talk to (Rennick, 2011, 167). Given the African context, the same authorities are often willing to listen to them, despite the reality of hierarchy in the military. Hence, by their presence, chaplains become their mouthpieces and carriers of their burdens to the authorities and of the outcomes of the same to the people. They act as intermediaries. This is a kind of prophetic ministry that they are challenged to undertake the more.

Furthermore, the story is told of the hyena who was once following the general direction of the aroma of barbecuing meat. He knew that when he got there, he would be given a share of the meat. However, it was not long that the path to the place divided into two. He was no longer sure which of the paths would lead him to the meat. In his uncertainty, he put his legs astride the two paths, trying to walk along both. And *boom!* He ended up splitting in the middle (Kinoti, 1999, 73). And by their presence, as well; chaplains help to direct the soldiers, their families and even those who come into contact with them to the path that leads to the meat especially when they are faced, in the journey of life, with indecisiveness, uncertainty, and ethical dilemmas. This is to help them avoid the fate of the hyena. It is recounted that the greatest complaint of St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, both Spanish mystics, was that they lacked each a spiritual guide to lead them along the right paths and enable them to distinguish between creative and destructive spirits (Nouwen, 2008, 37). The Jubilee Year of Hope challenges navy chaplains to be ever more conscious of this role, of their apostolate of presence and direction, of how they are spiritual and moral guides. Like the question, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”, which a certain rich ruler had asked Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (18:18), so also many people often come to the chaplains to inquire of such. They always want to know the will of God in the situations and challenges they face every day.

Again, the French priest, Charles Foucauld (1858-1916), was a missionary in Algeria. For the ten years he lived there among the Muslim Tuareg people, he is said to have baptized only two people - a child and old, blind woman (Bevans and Schroder, 2011). Towards the end of his life, however, he made it clear what manner of apostolate his was. “My apostolate”, he said, “must be one of goodness. On seeing me, they must say, 'If this man is good, his religion must be good.' If they ask me why I am good, I must answer, 'Because I am the servant of one who is so much better than I. If only you knew how good my Master, Jesus, is!' I want to be good enough so that they would say, 'If the servant is like this, how must the Master be.’” (Wright, 2022; Bevans and Schroder, 2011) Like him, by their mere presence, chaplains are challenged to announce Christ and His gospel, not so much by what they say, but by their way of life. Their lives should be the signpost that would lead people to God. Also, by the same presence, they are challenged to help in promoting dialogue among members of the different denominations in the barracks and beyond, as well as of the different religions, especially, African traditional religions, and Islam. This is important given the high level of suspicion, fears and misunderstanding that exist among the various denominations and faith communities in the country. All these would, no matter how little, conduce to greater peace and harmony in the country. Equally, by their presence, they help a lot in the mental healthcare of soldiers, their family members and others. The fact of trust and confidentiality makes it expedient that chaplains are often the first that service personnel come to, to help them bring the pieces of their life together and regain, as it were, mental equipoise. All this without the usual stigma that would have ordinarily gone with such (Pryce, et al, 2016, 41). And above all, they are challenged to be there all the more by their presence to console service personnel, their families and others when they are bereaved. Like in other areas, during such moments of trauma and bereavement, they are often the first to be called upon (Jasper and Inman, 2024, 1).

However, to better carry out the foregoing ministry of presence, chaplains must always deepen their own relationship with God. Jones (1977, 91-92) has talked of the impossibility of surviving on what he calls “a secondhand faith in a secondhand God” and how there needs to be a “personal word, a unique confrontation” if one is to be spiritually alive. Such a personal encounter with God is expected of chaplains as well. In fact, the directions that chaplains would help people to take and what they would help them to know will always be the product of their own prayer and encounter with God. No one gives what such a one does not have. They would also be helped by the studies

they would always undertake. In fact, they will have to drink from the well of their knowledge, their love of God and their deeper relationship with Him, in order to feed their flock better. Hence, Gregory of Nazianzus (Cited in Schaff, 1894, 219, n. 71) says: “A man must himself be cleansed, before cleansing others; himself become wise, that he may make others wise; become light, and then give light; draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, then hallow them; be possessed of hands to lead others by the hand, of wisdom, to give advice.” Nouwen (1989, 31) equally hints at the same issue when he remarks that, “Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and the need to find there the source for their words, advice and guidance.” Similarly, to remain, by their presence, agents of peace and promoters of ecumenical and interfaith relations, there is need for them to be properly trained thereof and thus be helped all the more in cultivating better intra/interreligious sensitivity, tolerance and cooperation (Moore, 2013, 258; Duke, 2018, 268).

Towards a Much More Ministry of Mercy

In a 2024-meeting with members of the Italian Catholic Action “With Open Arms Friends”, Pope Francis (2024b) had told them, among others, thus: “Friends, you will be all the more a presence of Christ the more you know how to hold and support every brother in need with merciful and compassionate arms.” This, however, could be said ever more in the case of chaplains, today. Chaplains make themselves all the more a presence of Christ by the compassion and mercy they show towards those who come in contact with them. In his book, *What is Amazing About Grace*, Yancey (2023, 3) narrates a story that a friend of his told him about a particular prostitute. Yancey's friend worked among the impoverished and addicted in Chicago. “A prostitute”, the friend begins, “came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her daughter – two years old! – to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit. I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. For one thing, it made me legally liable – I'm required to report cases of child abuse. I had no idea what to say to this woman. At last I asked if she had ever thought of going to church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. 'Church!' she cried. 'Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse.'” Yancey (2023, 3-4) notes that what struck him about the friend's story was the fact that while women much like the prostitute fled towards Jesus when he was on earth, and were welcomed by Him, today, however, people like her, and, indeed, many who are down and out, no longer feel welcome in the church and among the followers of Christ.

Thus, chaplains are challenged to help make their chaplaincies and then the church in general, places where people could come in, be warmly welcomed, listened to, counselled, prayed with and for, and thus enabled to leave loved, better, and not worse than they had come in. Of course, this does not mean condoning people's sins, but condemning such sins and still giving the people concerned back their dignity, hope and even, another opportunity. This is akin to what Jesus did, for instance, in the case of the woman caught in adultery who was brought before him by the scribes and Pharisees (Jn. 8:1-11). “Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn.8: 11, NRSV), he had told the woman, and by that very fact, gave her a second chance. It is reported of Rabbi Levi-Yitshak of Berdichev that he loved even the most sinful and ignorant of men and that the destitutes, the ignorant and the misfits sought him out. Reason: “His presence made them feel important; he gave them what they needed most; dignity” (Wiesel, 2013, 99). And of the letters that Father Amadi wrote to Kambili in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili notes that she carries them around because they remind her of her worthiness, they tug at her feelings and they also give her grace (Adichie, 2004, 303). The Jubilee

Year of Hope urges chaplains to know all the more how to let their welcoming presence give the people who come to them, or, even better, the people they seek out, no matter their sins and situations, their dignity and worthiness. It urges them to know that any encounter that diminishes the dignity of the other is actually not a good encounter. They should always be guided by the wisdom as expressed in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, that, “It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with his all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be”(Boa, 2001, 170). Hence, Pope Francis (2016, 49) maintains that, “In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy.”

Yes, the foregoing even calls to mind the encounter of the same Pope Francis with one Vinicio Riva in 2013. While moving around in his Popemobile after his weekly audience at St. Peter's Square, Rome, Pope Francis saw the then fifty-three-year-old Italian man who was suffering from a type one neurofibromatosis (NF I), a genetic disease he inherited from the mother that made him to be covered, from head to toe, with painful swellings and growths. His condition made some people to even shun him, often crossing to the other side of the road when they saw him. However, coming down from his popemobile that day, the pope embraced and kissed Vinicio, seated, as it were, on the wheelchair. The picture of that encounter would soon be splashed all over the world. Talking about the experience later, Vinicio said:

His hands were so soft. And his smile was so clear and open. But the thing that struck me most is that there has not been thinking about whether or not to hug me. I'm not contagious, but he did not know. But he just did it: he caressed me all over my face, and as he did I felt only love. First I kissed his hand while he, with the other hand, caressed my head and wounds. Then he drew me to him in a strong embrace, kissing my face. My head was against his chest; his arms were wrapped around me. It lasted just over a minute, but to me it seemed like an eternity (Roberts, 2013)

In life, it often does not matter how long encounters with others last. But it so often matters a lot the impression that such encounters leave on them. Vinicio's encounter with the pope, though brief, did impact a lot on him. It was an enriching, life-transforming encounter, marking a new beginning for him. Little wonder, he would later tell his aunt: “Here I leave my pain” (Roberts, 2013). Yes, the pain of not always being accepted; the pain of not always being drawn “in a strong embrace” like the one the pope gave him; the pain of not always feeling loved and welcomed! And until his death almost ten years later, in 2024 (Lubov, 2024), Vinicio never forgot the encounter. And neither have many people around world! While Ilo (2018) believes that, thanks to the meeting, Vinicio “felt a new experience of God's love, a new irruption of light in the darkness of his life, and a new experience of healing and recovery”, he also underscores the fact that the same Vinicio represents the many people around the world today carrying physical and spiritual wounds and in need of healing and the touch of God (Ilo, 2018). Pope Francis (Cited in Spadaro, 2013) notes why and how because of such physical and spiritual wounds that people carry today, the church has to become a field hospital. Hence, Ilo (2018) concludes that “in touching Vinicio, and allowing Vinicio to touch him, Pope Francis showed the healing power of a genuine encounter between people. Through a simple but meaningful one-minute encounter he showed that physical and spiritual wounds and the burdens that may people carry today in our world can be healed through a genuine act of love.” Little wonder, Pope John Paul II (1979, 10) states that, “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”

One of the implications of the foregoing is the need for chaplains to be all the more dispensers of God's mercy and agents of His embrace and grace. One of the ways they can do this, apart from what has been said above, is by their making out time to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation to the military personnel, their families and others. Yes, during the Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015, Pope Francis (2015, 18) had designated some priests as "Missionaries of Mercy", stating that they are "living signs of the Father's readiness to welcome those in search of his pardon" and "facilitators of a truly human encounter, a source of liberation, rich with responsibility for overcoming obstacles and taking up the new life of Baptism again." Chaplains should also be such missionaries of mercy. They are to remind the people always, as Pope Francis (2013c, 3) emphasized, that God never gets tired forgiving us, we rather get tired seeking his mercy. Chaplains are challenged to open the doors of their hearts all the more to welcome all who come to them in their day-to-day activities no matter their religion, ethnicity, gender, class, party, etc. This way, they will help make the church all the more "a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (Francis, 2013c, 114). But they cannot do this well enough, if, for instance, they themselves do not also make out time to go to confession as well. "In order to lead others along the path of Christian perfection", John Paul II (1984, 29) states in this regard, "the minister of penance himself must first travel this path."

Towards a Much More Ministry of Gratitude

After my licentiate during which time I stayed at our Generalate, that is, headquarters, in Rome, for my doctorate which I did in the Italian city of Naples, I was assigned to one of our parishes there, Parochial San Giovanni Battista, Soccavo. By the way, I am religious priest, belonging to the Society of Divine Vocations, otherwise, the Vocationist Fathers. It was in this parish that I met this particular parishioner; let's call him Antonio for the sake of privacy. Antonio, as he told me, had worked many years ago in Africa, precisely, in Libya. It was only when Muammar Gaddafi came to power that he, as well as many other Italians, were sent packing. But that was not what brought him to my attention. Instead, it was something he usually did when he came to receive communion. Normally, for communion, the priest would usually say: "*Il Corpo di Cristo*, the Body of Christ", and the communicant would say: "Amen." But, in his own case, he would always respond, "*Grazie*, thank you." That happened for a long time until I called his attention to it. He promised to respond accordingly. But no sooner had he said this than he got back to his "*grazie*". One day, however, he came to me after morning Mass and told me: "I am sorry Father, for not having done what you told me to do. I simply can't. It has become a part of me. But let me tell you one thing, the 'thank you' I say is not for you, but for Jesus, for allowing me to receive Him." I simply sat speechless. And we are talking here, not of a young man, but a man who, by the time I was there, had celebrated the golden jubilee of his marriage – although, he was blessed with good health. But that encounter with him is one I have never forgotten, and, of course, will never forget. And I came to the conclusion that that man simply did not want to take for granted the fact that he was receiving the Body of Christ. The Jubilee Year of Hope is and does provide, for chaplains, also, a *kairos*, an opportune moment, not to take for granted the fact that they have been called to serve God and his people as chaplains, as navy chaplains. It becomes a better opportunity for them to always say, like Antonio, "Grazie a Dio, thank you, God." In his novel, *Arrow of God*, the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe (1964, 3), has this to say about the protagonist, Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu: "Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam Feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman." The Jubilee Year of Hope challenges chaplains to appreciate all the more the immensity of the gift and the joy thereof of being companions on the way, despite their inadequacies, with navy personnel, their families, and others!

The story is told of the encounter between the fourteenth-century German mystic, Johann Tauler, and a beggar. Meeting the beggar, Tauler had greeted him, "God give you a good day, my friend." But the beggar answered, "I thank God I never had a bad one." Then Tauler said, "God give you a happy life, my friend." But the beggar said, "I thank God that I am never unhappy." Surprised, Tauler asked, "What do you mean?" "Oh well," said the beggar, "when it is fine, I thank God. When it rains, I thank God. When I have plenty, I thank God. When I am hungry, I thank God. And, since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?" Looking at the man in utter astonishment, Tauler asked, "Who are you?" "I am a king", said the beggar. "Where, then, is your kingdom?" asked Tauler. And the beggar responded quietly: "In my heart!" (Barclay, 2001; Green, 2001, 105) Yes, one thing that the beggar had mastered is the act of thanking God, in season and out of season, in good and bad times. It is the same thing that the Jubilee Year of Hope urges chaplains to master all the more. Granted, chaplains may not even be at the best of their moments all the time, or even, at a particular point in time; granted that they may still be battling with their own "demons" which come in sundry forms; granted that they may have various "wounds" and pains which they are nursing, they should learn how to do as the beggar did: Always see the need to thank God, the need to count their blessings in spite of such. And full of such gratitude themselves, they should also help the military personnel, their families and, indeed, others, to learn all the more how to do the same.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The paper has endeavoured to look at the multiple roles that military chaplains play both in times of war and peace. It noted how military chaplains are not only spiritual guides, but also voices of conscience, morale-boosters, counsellors, sources of hope, consolation, and mercy in the midst of military officers, their families, and others. Yes, the story is often told in Igbo-African folklore of the war that happened in the land of the animals, between the birds and the wild beasts. The war lasted for a long time, with no end in sight, and no victory for each side. However, as the war lasted, each of the animals took sides, except one: *Usu*, bat. He claimed that he was neutral. But when the birds appeared to be winning, *Usu* jumped *waam* over to their camp. Not long after, the pendulum swung to the other side, and the wild beasts started to gain the upper hand. Trust *usu*, he equally jumped *waam* over to their camp. In the end, however, the two warring parties made peace. But two questions remained on the lips of every one of the animals: "Is the *Usu* (bat) a bird or a beast?" "Where does he actually belong?" None of them could answer the question satisfactorily. So, they all came to an agreement that *usu* was neither a bird nor a beast, and, therefore, decided to shun him (Okeke, 1971, 22). The paper has equally shown how chaplains are neither ecclesial *usu* nor military *usu*. It has shown how, as commissioned officers and members of the chain of command, they belong to the military organogram and how, at the same time, as priests, they belong to the Church from which they came and to which they would return after their military services. It was made clear that whatever happens, especially, in this Church affects them. The paper considered the implications that one of the things happening in the church, today, that is, the Jubilee Year of Hope, has for the life and ministry of African Military Chaplains, especially, chaplains of the Nigerian Armed Forces, with particular reference to the Navy Catholic chaplains. It shows how it calls them, among others, to a much more ministry of hope, presence, mercy and gratitude.

While such "much more ministry of hope, presence, mercy and gratitude" is one, in fact, a dream, that chaplains have to work towards its realization, the fact remains that they are still here in the world, with their feet, like those of others, planted firmly on the ground. This reality is one that reminds me of a certain story I came across sometime ago. According to the story, a certain drunkard had a beautiful bicycle that he cherished so much. One day, he rode to the market and soaked himself

in alcohol, got so inebriated that he abandoned his beautiful bicycle at the market and staggered home. When he later became sober, he could not recollect where he left his bicycle. He searched everywhere for it until on the fourth day, it suddenly occurred to him that he had left it at the marketplace. He ran to the marketplace and to his greatest surprise, he found the bicycle at the very spot he had parked it. It was completely intact. Overcome with joy, he sped off to a nearby church to thank God for sparing his bicycle. On arrival, he parked the bicycle outside and went inside the church. For over fifteen minutes, he was thanking God and glorifying His name. He was so happy and could not wait to tell his family and friends what had happened. But when he came out of the church, he could not believe his eyes. His darling bicycle was nowhere to be found. He searched and searched until it dawned on him that they had stolen the bicycle (Igboaja, 1999, 24-25). He was so disappointed. He felt betrayed by God and asked how He could have allowed such a thing to happen.

Yes, such disappointments and betrayals, misunderstandings, failures, mistakes and even more may be encountered by chaplains on their way to realizing the dreams of having more and more a chaplaincy where, with gratitude to God, their presence would continue to show God's mercy to people and thus inspire hope in them. Although, the story did not say what happened to the man after the incident at the church, I want to believe, however, that he had gone home and decided not to allow the incident to change him for the worse. Rather, it became a stepping stone for his conversion and transformation. Hence, chaplains are challenged as well by the Jubilee Year of Hope never to allow the difficulties that will surely come their way in the course of their apostolate to break them. Instead, they should offer them to God in prayer, as I think that man eventually did. Such prayers and praying, generally, should be something they should never take lightly. They should believe that God knows what He is doing, any and every time, and that at the appropriate time, He will make all things beautiful (Eccl. 3:11). After all, as it is said in the Igbo-African proverb, “Chi nyere nwata ji awom, ga-enyekwa ya, mbazu o ji egwu ya” - the God who gave the Awom yam to the child, will surely give the child the stick to harvest it.

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