

**MERCY AND TRUTH SHALL MEET TOGETHER FOR RENEWAL AND
FIDELITY IN THE CHURCH:**

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increased general interest on the theme of practice of mercy and doctrinal truths taught in the Catholic Church in recent years. Sometimes, the discussion tends to emphasize, or even pit one against the other; or it gives the impression that mercy is a new theme in the Church. This article reflects on the theme of truth and mercy which, to use the biblical expression, will meet together or embrace (Cfr.Ps.85:10). The need for such meeting in the Church life and mission has become more evident in our time many call for renewal (or reform) or for faithfulness in the Church, whether as individuals, communities and structures. The reflection highlights the meaning, value and practice of mercy and truth, drawing elements from the Sacred Scriptures, the Church's teaching, the writings of Venerable Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri, and others. It also considers the relationship between mercy and truth, and indicates some of the specific spheres of life, the family life included, where mercy and truth embrace or should meet in action, in reality of life.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck;
write them upon the table of thine heart.” (Proverbs 3:3).

INTRODUCTION

There is a renewed interest on the themes of *mercy* and *truth* in Church today. These matters are explored by theologians and pastors. They have been special object of attention in the Popes' exhortations. Pope St. John Paul II² and Benedict XVI³ emphasized the necessity and value of truth. Particularly in recent years, Pope Francis reiterates and upholds the vital place and importance of doctrinal truths, but also highlight the theme of mercy and compassion of God and, therefore, the mercy that every human being, especially Christian,

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² For example, John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor* (Splendor of Truth). John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia* (*Rich in Mercy*), 30/11/1980.

³ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas In Veritate* On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth (29/6/2009); Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

should show to and receive from our neighbour in practical ministry and life.⁴ Both the Magisterium and theology have traditionally acknowledged that Truth and Mercy are vital and interconnected themes in Christian teachings, based on the Gospel message and Catholic tradition. Aware “that authentic understanding and genuine mercy are never separated from the truth”,⁵ pastors, Religious Superiors, and theologians have the duty to remind the faithful of the Church's teachings concerning not only the celebration of sacraments but also the day-to-day living of values and the apostolic mission of consecrated life as foreseen by the Constitutions of each institute of consecrated life.

Nevertheless, hearing or listening to some – and let me add this once and for all: it is surely not in *all* – discussions one senses a worrisome notion of “mercy” at play. In certain discussions, one gets the impression that mercy does exactly what the Karol Wojtyła the theologian insists it cannot – pretend that God’s Justice and Mercy are at loggerheads, the latter prevailing. It is claimed that an insistence on mercy distorts, contradicts or deviates from the truths the Catholic Church proclaims. This frequently led to name-calling. One group is sometimes tagged “liberal” and are accused of wanting to “change” doctrines, of “misleading” and creating “confusion” among the faithful, etc. The other are at times labelled “conservatives”, and alleged to be insensitive to the sufferings and pains of people, or accused of being ignorant and uncaring of the agony that real life and plights of persons, members of one’s religious institute, families sometimes imposes, and that, in a word, they lack mercy and compassion. Frequently, on either side of the aisle, there are oversimplifications, caricature or generalization of the other’s position, or in the assessments, sometimes fruit of prejudices and fears. Whatever evaluation one makes of such allegations, the impression is sometimes given that *truth* and *mercy* are opposed and are not interrelated values even in specific cases, such that one is expected to opt for either one or the other. So, for some people, the Christian community is or ought to be primarily or mostly concerned with upholding *truth* seen as the only thing that matters, while, for others, the Church should focus on the proclamation and practice of *mercy*, almost unilaterally emphasized simply as “the key” to Christian life, “the essence” of the Gospel. Is this true? A reductive and “one-way” approach may itself be deceptive, a misrepresentation or misleading, and hence an impoverishment of a complex matter. This has lead many to ask: are

⁴ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, MV, 1

⁵ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, n. 29: AAS 60 (1968) 501; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Pœnitentia*, n. 34: AAS 77 (1985) 272, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 95: AAS 85 (1993) 1208; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Letter To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church Concerning The Reception Of Holy Communion By The Divorced And Remarried Members Of The Faithful*, 14/9/1994, n. 3; The Final Report Of The Synod Of Bishops To The Holy Father, Pope Francis, Vatican City, (24 October 2015), n. 34: “The Christian message always contains the reality and dynamics of mercy and truth, which converge in Christ (...)”, n.36: “No matter how distant, every family can attain mercy and be sustained by this truth,” n.55: “Proclaiming the truth in love is itself an act of mercy”; Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016).

the teachings of the Church's Magisterium on mercy, as proclaimed through the centuries, not themselves a part and parcel of the "Truths" on faith and morals that the Catholic communities has always professed and practice? Are not the divine attribute and the virtue of mercy important aspects of the Truths the Catholic community believes in and that have practical social and moral implications? Isn't the proclamation of truths in love itself a demand and an act of mercy?⁶

In the following reflection, I only wish to highlight that Christians, including the consecrated persons, are called in their mission and situations to seek and witness, inseparably, both mercy *and* truth. Focusing on selected aspects of "Mercy" and "Truth", this article, first, notes that the "Truth vs. Mercy" talk is a recurrent temptation a false and misleading framing of the issue that tends to create an artificial separation. Then, it discusses the value and practice of mercy, followed by some considerations on the significance, search for and communication of truth, before presenting the relationship between truth and mercy; finally, it suggests *albeit* in broad terms some important areas and situations of life where truth and mercy meet or should embrace.

1. A RECURRENT TEMPTATION IN NEW ENVIRONMENT

Attempts to divorce *truth* and *mercy*, opposing one to the other or, at least, downplay or ignore either one in favour of the other, is not a totally new phenomenon. At the level of reflections and/or of pastoral practice, there had attempts to do so. The Catholic teaching on justice was sometimes pit against mercy. The doctrine in favour of life, as expressed in Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* had been interpreted as being against freedom to choose or the individual's human rights. Such setting of issue perhaps reflects a frequent expression of the temptation to separate "faith" and "life", "doctrine" and "life"/"pastoral", "theology" and "practice," this time around under a new pontificate, or a new theological and pastoral climate and sensitivity, a new form of being and expressing *Church*, or under a particular pretext or guise (e.g. pastoral care for marriage and family life; preferential option for the poor; the marginalized persons those in the "periphery"; climate change).

In the late 18th and first half of 19th centuries, the threats and impact of the theological movements like rigorism, laxism and Jansenism were still very felt at reflective and pastoral levels and they aggravated such temptation. In fact, today it is argued that new forms of these currents of thoughts persist. However, in the face of major threats and dangers to the life and mission of the Church, theologians and pastors, founders and foundresses of institutes of consecrated life, and other Catholic thinkers have emerged and, in their own ways, reaffirmed the value, vital place and need of both certain Christian truths

⁶ The *Final Report* of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis (24 October 2015), n.55, asserts: "Proclaiming the truth in love is itself an act of mercy".

and mercy in the Christian Message and in the Christian life. They did so through theological, spiritual, pastoral and philosophical writings and/or various forms of apostolate or pastoral choices – in some cases institutionalized through religious foundations. Reflecting on *mercy* and *truth* one cannot but make references to one or two of the many founders of religious institutes, as an example; some of their insights and attitudes on mercy and truth providentially find pertinence and relevance, to some extent, in the present-day context of the Church in our time, as one can see even from a glance at some of the recent publications and internet resources in the last few Years. At critical moments of the history of the Catholic Church, some founders have specially stood out as promoters and defenders of the Truths and Mercy according to Church's teaching. Take the St. Dominic (8 August 1170 – 6 August 1221), for instance:

“St Dominic's life was characterised by the practise of mercy and, ever since, his example has inspired men and women to follow him in the Order as Preachers of God's mercy. St Dominic's legacy to the Church is an Order that at its best faithfully lives its motto of *Veritas* (Truth). St Dominic realised that the truth was not merely something that we know, but a way of living which saves. He was acutely aware of how many people, even within Christendom, had not properly heard this saving truth and, motivated by mercy, he desired to share this truth with as many as possible. He saw the lie in any attempt to oppose mercy to truth.”⁷

A protagonist of his time is also Venerable Pius Bruno Lanteri (1759-1830), a theologian and founder of religious institute, who was profoundly familiar with the multifaceted epochal changes, the revolutions (e.g. French revolution, the Napoleonic era, Restoration/ “Risorgimento” periods), the principal theological movements and errors and their effects in the church and in the society of his time.⁸ It was Church with which, to some extent, the present debates concerns about Christian truths and mercy has resonance and analogy, though a quite distinct socio-ecclesial milieu in many senses. Lanteri saw the existence of a combat between what he calls “Catholic principles” and “philosophical principles”. He ponders on the effects of the recent “past revolutions” upon the faith and morality of the people. He saw the increase of Religious indifference or apathy. He notes that “errors” and “false principles”⁹ are spreading. He noticed Voltaire re-echo the grudges against positive religions while suggesting that people should accept the *natural religion* recommended by Bayle, Herbert de Cherbury, Spinoza, and Locke. The fundamental truths of the Christian Religion were defined by many of these thinkers as moral and social necessity, a social construct. The mathematician and philosopher, Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, claimed that metaphysics is a sphere of insoluble questions, therefore we do not

⁷ Bro. Tobe Lees, OP “ St. Dominic and the preaching of Mercy,” in: <http://www.op.org/en/content/st-dominic-and-preaching-mercy-0>

⁸ Cfr. Timothy Gallagher, *Begin Again. The Life and Spiritual Legacy of Bruno Lanteri.*

⁹ Org, 8052:T1 (CR);Org, 2262:T6,5.

know nor can we know the existence of God, the nature of the human soul, the existence of sensation of the body, of the thinking being, etc. In brief, in a work where he justifies his choice of “good books” as a means of fulfilling his mission, Lanteri describes the situation as follows:

“Since a systematic irreligiousness originating from false as well as evil principles promoted by the heretics of recent times has gathered to wage war against the Catholic Church, errors and vices have made too rapid progress. There is no village in Europe, where there are no woeful damages: the youth (...), persons that are well-to-do and those idle in any condition are the culpable victims; in many countries, the common people are infected of it; there are immense states where, with an unspeakable shamelessness, people bring licentiousness and irreligiousness to the public. Most of the areas of literature are spoilt by this poison; antichristian and obscene books, that caused the past revolution, were not as numerous then as they are today (...). Meanwhile, faith is extinguishing in thousands of hearts depraved by the masses and ill-famed person. (...). In summary, the spirit and the system, which dominates today, insolently outrage Heaven, corrupts the earth, and populates hell with the chosen ones. In the meantime, there reigns an absolute scarcity of good books to oppose so much evil, very many of these are exhausted, and one rarely finds the necessary books against current errors.”¹⁰

For Lanteri, a fundamental question is *truth*, the truths of Catholic faith and moral values – that were accepted, denied, distorted or ignored, and to be sustained and defended against “current errors”. He defended a point of view whose authority and proposition are, he says, “indisputable”. He wants to have as guide the “truths”, and not “opinions”.¹¹ He also saw the need in ecclesial communities to proclaim mercy, both in doctrinal teachings and in pastoral practices -- including sphere of the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation.

In our time, too, the theme of *truth* and *mercy* is critical. Today the Catholic Church and her particular Christian communities face enormous challenges. Truth is often subjected to negotiations, agreements reached merely through consensus. Many see the need and call for “renewal” (reform), while others insists on “fidelity” (or “faithfulness”) in the Church and Christian life. But what if the renewal is the way to guarantee and promote fidelity of the Christian community to Christ and His Gospel in our own time? What if the needed renewal is feasible, meaningful, healthy and productive if it returns to and is faithful the origins and sources of the Christian faith on which the Catholic

10 Org, 8069:T1-T2 (LANTERI, <<Motivi per cui si é anche presso per scopo particolare il far conoscere, e promulgare i libri buoni>>). The reasons he presents here are of the pastoral, moral and doctrinal (faith) character.

11 C3,339:T7 ; Cf. *Carteggio*, IV, 356; Cf. LANTERI, *MF*, III, 27; ID., *MF*, II, 153; and also *AOMV*, S.II Doc.266 f.547; *AOMV*, S. II doc 354.

community is founded? Or, in particular, if the desired renewal demands a return and fidelity to origins of the spirituality and charism of foundation a Religious Institute now awoken by the emerging needs and challenges of today?. Unlike the time of Pius Lanteri and other founders of the past, we live today in a new, pluralistic and more complex social and ecclesial context. Distinct but not separated, like *renewal* and *fidelity* in the ecclesial community, the theme of “mercy” and “truth” deserves to be properly understood.

2. THE VALUE AND PRACTICE OF “MERCY”

To understand *mercy*, we can begin by looking at faces. When you look into someone’s face, you can often see many things. Sometimes, you see serenity, peace, joy and satisfaction that reside in a person’s soul; or a worry or distraction, confusion or anxiety, wonder or hesitation, and so on. We can often see many things in the faces of others, things that are hard to hide. However, others can see many similar things in our own face. As St. Jerome says, “The face is the mirror of the mind and eyes; without speaking, they confess the secrets of the heart” (*Letter* 5). The Psalmist exhorts: “always look to the Lord and his strength; always seek his face” (Psalm 105: 4). The Book of Chronicles advises that we “rely on the mighty Lord; constantly seek his face (1 Chronicles 16: 11).”

When we seek the Lord’s face, we will find it most often in the face of other persons – who are in the family, in the religious community and in the religious institute, in the place of work, in the Formation House or Seminary, in the parish community, in the school, in the hospital, co-travellers in the means of transport, in the market, etc. When we seek and find the face of the Lord, what is it that we really see there? Pope Francis invites all to “seek the face of the Lord.” He believes that, at this point in history, the world needs to reflect upon the mercy of God. Therefore, Pope Francis states: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” “These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. Jesus of Nazareth, by the mercy of God”¹² “Mercy,” he says, “... reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”¹³ Convinced of the rich and unfailing mercy of God, Pius Lanteri recommends that everyone should always

¹² Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus, Bull Of Indiction Of The Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy* , 11/4/2015 (abbreviated: MV), 1

¹³ MV, 2

remind him/herself: "If I should fall a thousand times a day, a thousand times a day I will begin again, with new awareness of my weakness, promising God, with a peaceful heart, to amend my life. I will never think of God as if he were of our condition and grows weary of our wavering, weakness, and negligence. Rather, I will think of what is truly characteristic of him and what he prizes most highly, that is, his goodness and mercy, knowing that he is a loving Father who understands our weakness, is patient with us, and forgives us."

2.1. The Significance of Mercy

The dictionary defines *Mercy* as: "That virtue by which kindness, tenderness and compassion are shown toward one in need."¹⁴ The Catholic understanding and expression of faith begins with the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God, the primary source and foundation of revealed truth. The Bible often speaks of "mercy" (in Hebrew the term is "*hesed*"; in Greek the term is "*eleos*"). Scholars say that there are other scriptural words as well that are used to express the notion of "mercy" as this word is used today. However, here, we consider the Bible refers to "mercy" as something – an "attribute" the philosophers call it – rooted in the very nature and essence of God. For the Israelites "mercy" was, above all, one of the major attributes of God, especially revealed in His covenant with Israel (Deut 7:9). God was continually merciful to the Israelites, despite their many lapses into sin. The Israelites recognised the great connection between God's love and His mercy.

The New Testament tells us something about God's "nature and essence," when John writes, "God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him/her" (1 John 4: 16). Mercy is the love that God freely show to us, for He is the one who first reveals himself to us and makes his presence known and felt. We do not "earn" this mercy; we do not "deserve" it; we do not have a "right" to it. Mercy is a free gift of God that, when given, draws us into God's very being, making God present "to" us and then, "through" us to others.

In the context of the works of mercy, mercy¹⁵ is a virtue that influences one's will to have compassion for others and, if possible, to alleviate another's tribulations. St. Thomas Aquinas is frequently quoted as saying that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. Aquinas implies that in relation to His creation, God's actions essentially are merciful. Mercy, says St. Pope John Paul II, is the "most stupendous attribute" of God! Mercy reveals to us what God is like. It is "love's second name". The Bible, the tradition and the whole faith life of the People of God provide unique proof that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God¹⁶.

The Church calls us -- as does particularly the spirituality and charism of some institutes of consecrated life -- to keep in mind and make our own God's

¹⁴ *Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home*, Volume 7 (1965).

¹⁵ Cfr. Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., Pastoral Letter for the Holy Year of Mercy, *Mercy and Truth Shall Meet* (14/9/2015).

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy*, n.14

abounding mercy. Evidently, this goes beyond the celebration of a Holy Year itself or of a Lenten Season. The pertinence and importance of God's mercy is evident, because: With indulgence, we get nearer to Christ who committed no sin yet was wounded for our transgressions and by his wounds we are healed (Cf. Is. 53:4ff); Mercy helps us to seek our way to the Father through the practice of good works and by penitential expiation; Mercy obtains for us the graces needed to overcome sins; and Mercy keeps us holy and pure.

Consequently, let us make prayer and good works our constant practice so that we can gain the necessary graces which will secure our spiritual communion with the saints and with God the Father.

Pope Francis states,

As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other (VM, 9).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Jesus teaches: "Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy (Matthew 5: 7)." As we are, as we do, so shall we receive in and through the Church. Pope Francis emphasizes "intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living" with respect to mercy. If we consider the mercy that God shows us and are, as a result, simultaneously called by God to live out, then we should reflect briefly on these three "concretes" that Pope Francis identifies. First, "intentions." The dictionary defines an "intention" as a "determination to act in a certain way." Then, "attitudes": this word is commonly used to describe our "disposition" or "way of thinking or feeling about someone or something." Finally, our intentions and attitudes consequently lead to "behaviours" or "actions/conduct" in life. This "concretes" - intentions, attitudes and behaviours - guide us to look into our minds, hearts and souls to see if and how mercy of God can be found there.

However, to "find mercy" we must first know what we are looking for. As earlier mentioned, mercy reveals and expresses the "essence of God," the "very nature of God." A closely look at this may be helpful. In the Church the word "mercy" is used in many senses: the scriptural, theological, liturgical, and so forth. In simple terms, mercy is the love of God shown to us; it is his "self-revelation," received by us and shared by us with others. Mercy shows itself in God's care, concern, tenderness and compassion for us and, in turn, it is shown in our care, concern, tenderness and compassion for others in the concrete situations of their lives and in the forgiveness extended toward those who wrong us. Again, mercy is freely given and not merited.

The experience of most people seem to indicate that showing mercy lowers the defences of both the giver and the receiver, so that both parties can experience

life in God as God intended it to be. Mercy does not diminish, much less is it in opposition to, judgment or justice, as some suggest. Mercy recognizes what lies before us in life as it truly is and makes what it encounters better, more worthy of love, of compassion, of forgiveness. This is not because the one shown mercy has earned or merits any of those things but because we all need love, compassion and forgiveness to be what we ought to be; given our fallen human nature, only mercy can make that happen. Mercy sees the truth of God's creation as "good", although somehow wounded by the introduction of evil and sin into human experience. Mercy calls creation and our wounded humanity back to its origin and nature in God. Mercy sees the hurts and pain caused and in need of healing and it, above all, recognises and confesses the abounding power of God's grace and love and a fundamental trust in human person's profound capacity and need to begin again – to rise and walk again -- after a fall.

Mercy is God's love, revealed in God's intentions, attitudes and behaviours toward us. It is God's *love* that creates; it is God's *compassion* that sees and understands what has been broken in his creation, in our humanity; it is God's *forgiveness* that redeems his creation and our humanity, despite itself, and makes us whole again. And just when mercy seems beyond our undeserving grasp, at that very moment, God enters into his creation anew, enters into human experience again as the mystery and grace that is God's loving presence and mercy takes us in his embrace.

2.2. What Jesus and His Gospel say about Mercy

When we not turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who enlightens our minds, what do we hear him say to us, what do we see do? What do we learn about the value of His Mercy for people? Through his actions and words Jesus teaches many things about mercy. Mercy helps us to understand several aspects of the mystery of Christ and of His Church.

- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Incarnation.* Jesus came into the world, became human, because of God's mercy and love towards us. "The Word become Flesh and dwell among us" (John 1: 14) for a purpose: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3: 16-17)."
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Eucharist.* It is for a purpose that the Lord Jesus gives us his own Body and Blood as food and drink. Because of his mercy and love for us, Christ gave us himself, whole and entire, in the Eucharist. He does not want us to hunger and thirst (John 6: 35). He wants us to always remember him, he sealed a new covenant with us in his blood (Luke 22: 19-20).
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the forgiveness of sins.* The evangelist Luke narrates: "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9: 56). From the Cross, the Lord Jesus forgave those who offended him (Cfr. Luke 23: 24).

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- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Passion.* Jesus tells us: “Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).” And: “Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15: 13).”
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Resurrection.* Mercy gives rise to a hope that would not be possible had Jesus not risen from the dead. Peter teaches: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1: 3).”
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Church of Christ.* Jesus tells Peter: “You are Peter and upon this ‘rock’ I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16: 18-19).” Pope Francis reminds us: “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love (VN, 10).” And Paul writes that we “do not lose heart by the mercy of God (2 Corinthians 4: 1).”
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand Truth.* Authentic mercy always leads us to the recognition of Truth because mercy is based upon Truth. The Psalmist sings “Mercy and Truth shall embrace (Psalm 85: 10).” In Christ, mercy and truth embrace together. It is unmistakably clear in his intentions, attitudes and behaviours throughout the Gospels. I do not believe that we can experience authentic mercy without the simultaneous experience of Truth, because one really does not really exist without the other.

Jesus also teaches that:

- ❖ *Proclaiming the Gospel to the poor is Jesus’ first pastoral priority.* Announcing the jubilee year, Jesus describes in Lk.4:16-19 his mission is to announce the good news to the poor, liberating the captives and giving sight to the blind. In organizing our individual actions, priorities, plans and strategies of evangelization, we, too, should also make it priority the sharing of the Gospel with the poor. Pope Francis, in his *Evangelism Gaudier*, states, albeit with regret, “that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. A great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith (...); our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”
- ❖ *Mercy comes from God, who is our merciful Father.* The Parable of the Prodigal Son shows this fact. Upon welcoming h home his lost son, the father rejoices. Mercy brings joy to both the reconciled sinner and to God. It gives to the repentant sinner the courage to arise and begin again. And with this certainty, Ven. Lanteri says:

“Above all, I recommend with all my heart that you guard against discouragement, disturbance, and sadness. Seek always to keep your poor heart in peace, and encourage it, and always to serve God with holy joy.”

- ❖ *Jesus is the face of the merciful Father.* Jesus is the Good Shepherd who takes the first step to seek out and find those who are lost. He first meets with Matthew, the tax-collector who became an Apostle; from this encounter we learn that Jesus seeks to be with us sinners and help us return to the Father. He looked on Matthew with mercy and chose him for a great mission; similarly He wants to do the same with each of us. When he saw a large and hungry crowd, Jesus felt compassion and fed them. When the sick were brought to him, he healed them. Jesus was sent by God to reconcile us to the Father.

- ❖ *The true disciple of Jesus is the one who practices mercy.* In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, after the priest and the Levite pass by the beaten and dying man, Jesus tells us of the Samaritan who overcomes prejudice and existing cultural norms to care for the wounded man. The true neighbour is the one who shows mercy. Jesus concludes the parable, saying: “Go and do likewise”. As disciples of Jesus, we must strive to be a face of mercy with our families, parishes, religious communities, schools, places of work. Frequently, we can be quick to criticise, to pay back for offence received, to be cynical and to complain. We must practice mercy with those closest to us and be people of reconciliation in a world of such polarisation. At the same time, we ourselves need to, with trust and courage, open up to and receive mercy. Hence, Lanteri suggests: “Therefore, be of good courage. Let your heart be joyful, give yourself as completely as you can to God, banish any doubts, and tell God that you never wish consciously to do anything that would displease him. For the rest, do not be troubled. God is with you and will help you, and will not let you fall.”

- ❖ *The Father’s mercy and forgiveness are limitless and we, like the Father, should forgive others repeatedly.* When St. Peter asked him how often he should forgive and Jesus replied, “seventy times seven” times. Jesus then told Peter the parable of how the king had mercy on a servant who couldn’t repay his debts, forgiving him of what he owed. The servant then didn’t do likewise to his fellow servant who was in his debt. The king was furious, asking him: “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant, in the same way that I had mercy on you”? Lanteri explains that: “It is very important that we understand deeply how good God is, and not measure him by our own limitations or think that he tires of our wavering, weakness, and negligence. Our God is not such. Let us think of him as he truly is, filled with goodness, mercy, and compassion, and let us know him as the loving Father he is, who raises us when we have fallen, who never tires of forgiving us, and to whom we give great joy and honor when we seek forgiveness.”

❖ *Mercy and forgiveness will be ours if we practice it. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy". In the Our Father, Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses (debts), as we forgive those who have trespassed against us (debtors)". After teaching us that famous prayer, he taught those with him very directly that, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*

Mercy, therefore, is of great benefit to all, for it helps us to appreciate aspects of the life and mission of Jesus and His Church.

Practically, how do we in the Church, the family of God, show mercy? *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* reminds us of the long-standing practice of mercy in Christian tradition: the spiritual works of mercy and the corporal works of mercy:

"The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God" (CCC, 2447).

These are good, practical embodiments of what the Church encourages us to consider and practice throughout our Christian life. In addition, there are, of course, many other little or big ways we can show mercy in the various environments we find ourselves – be they in interpersonal relations, in family, in religious and seminary communities, parishes, schools, health care institutions, offices and other work places.

Consecrated men and women and the clergy are especially pastoral agents of God's mercy. As such they are called to be good shepherd, to promote conversion of other persons to know and follow Jesus Christ, and to live out the religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as witness of God's love and mercy to all.

It must be added, however, "terms and conditions apply", to borrow an expression from advertisement. There are conditions to be fulfilled in order to obtain the mercy of God. These include: (1) there must be repentance and conversion of heart. (2) Be merciful to others. (3) Forgiveness of others who offend us. (4) Complete trust in Jesus Christ. In this regard it is perhaps helpful to keep in mind the encouraging counsels of Lanteri:

- ✓ "Holiness does not consist in never failing, but in rising immediately, recognizing our weakness and asking God's forgiveness, and in doing this with peace of heart, without letting ourselves be troubled."
- ✓ "Say, then, with boldness, "Now I begin," and go forward constantly in God's service. Do not look back so often, because one who looks back cannot

run. And do not be content to begin only for this year. Begin every day, because it is for every day, even for every hour of the day, that the Lord taught us to say in the Our Father, 'Forgive us our trespasses,' and 'Give us this day our daily bread.'"

2.3. Renewing the faith in God's Mercy: Insights from Ven. Lanteri

Faith must always be kept new, live, and young. To achieve this, we must proclaim, celebrate and transmit joyfully new thrusts of faith; these will lead us to live, in words and actions, the fundamental truths of Christianity. Faith must be rooted in the heart of the people, such that they themselves will introduce it into the world of day-to-day living. Faith is fecund when rooted in the heart and it becomes culture. Inspired by St. Francis de Sale, Ven. Pius Lanteri¹⁷ recommends that the person who preaches should do it with "great devotion", proposing compassion and mercy¹⁸, which were the characteristics of Jesus¹⁹. Jesus shows compassion for both those with natural and moral defects²⁰. The preacher, therefore, must beware of discouragement and lack of trust, since "discouragement is the great error on the road to salvation."²¹ Further, Lanteri says:

"Be on guard against discouragement and lack of trust. Strive to do well all that you do, but do this with respect for your humanity, without striving for an impossible perfection, focusing simply on the day at hand. Remember that 'The just man falls seven times a day,' and so you will find blessing in beginning not only every day, but every hour."

He further recommends: "Do not let yourself be troubled by anything, not even by your own failings, taking care to overcome them immediately by an act of love of God."

Lanteri recognises that a person's soul is precious to God, and that God has a great esteem of it.²² He considers how Jesus publicly treated sinners with mercy and compassion.²³ One cannot otherwise promote the glory of God, nor can he love God otherwise. Everyone, especially clergy and consecrated persons, must have compassion of the danger of souls.²⁴

Intelligent and truly spiritual persons know that even the most delinquent person has some elements or points in him that are sensitive to good. There is an opportunity of salvation for everyone, for "there is no heart that is invulnerable."²⁵ Here, it is a question of reading the most intimate sentiments of the other person,

17 Some points in this section are based on the studies of the Church historian, Andrea Brustolon.

18 Asc,2278:T1,11.

19 Asc,2278:T4,16; cfr. Asc,2285:T12,2.

20 Pre,2314:T3,5.

21 C2,128:T6,8.

22 Org,2223a:T5,2.

23 Asc,2278:T4,16.

24 Org,2223a:T5,2

25 Org,2262:T6,1.

to discover and reawaken that element which is sensitive to good, especially through prayer, in order to draw from it unsuspected positive energies. Lanteri gave this line of conduct to his spiritual children: “never judge any heart invulnerable, but through continuous and fervent prayer and with industrious charity they will do everything possible to not let anyone perish.”²⁶ Priests in fact are not mere dispensers of sacraments: they must make visible, through sacraments, the fact that Jesus heals the wounds of humanity. They must make visible the merciful face of God.

To all priests Jesus says: “go...heal the sick. Resuscitate the dead”. These words are not restricted to the time of the Apostles and to the Early Church. Lanteri, too, was attentive to pray for the sick, to console those who feel in anguish, to cure the wounds of the heart, re-give life to those who have lost hope, to abandon himself to the will of God, etc. The Word proclaimed must be able to pierce the heart and lead to conversion. The preacher must touch the heart and the Word converts and heals. The ministry of Lanteri was specially a ministry of consolation and then of help to know how to accept suffering as a participation in, as St. Paul says, what lacks in the passion of Jesus.

The aspect of healing the sick is quite relevant for priests and consecrated persons today. Interior healing leads to true freedom also in priestly ministry, not to frenetic apostolic activity. Healed interiorly, one is ready to announce the Gospel – and with joy and passion.

However, it is with love that one is healed. Peter is healed when Jesus asked him three times: “Do you love me?” The more you love a person, the more you heal.

In his pastoral ministry, Lanteri tries to cast away every fear concerning the Mercy of God. He exhorts consecrated persons and the clerics to do same. He says:

“We have offended God the Father a thousand times; the prodigal son offended only once. But God the Father is Infinite in Mercy, while the father of the prodigal son wasn’t. Then, the prodigal son did not have -- as we have – the promise of forgiveness.

The Lord makes us understand this, with the parable of the woman who lights the lamp to search for money and with that of good shepherd who work hard to find the lost sheep; from these two parables we learn how greater His Goodness is than that which the parable of the loving father could express.

The Lord does not want even that we fear reproaches inasmuch as “None of the sins committed will be remembered” (Ez. 18:22). In His life Jesus gives us a proof in regard to Magdalene at His feet: He defended her; he did the same in relation to the Samaritan woman and to the adulterous woman.

26 Org,2262:T6,2.

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We experience the affection of admiration and of acknowledgement for so great goodness of God in stimulating us to return to Him. We also feel pain for our past obstination".²⁷

In explaining the Parable of the Prodigal son Ven. Lanteri invites us to consider "the goodness and charity of the Father in welcoming the son, indeed in seeking him, in bringing him on his shoulders, since the sinner was not capable of walking by himself".²⁸

In addition, there is today an increasing need for initiators, and of directors, that is, those who accompany others in the spiritual journey, as Lanteri himself and many others were, so that life may be more authentic, freer, more Christian, better ordered to the Lord. Thus, Fr. Lanteri learnt from Fr. Nikolaus von Diessbach, SJ, to dedicate more time to the sacrament of Reconciliation and to individual accompaniment in the spiritual progress, showing with words and with witness of life the face of God's Mercy. Following the example of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Lanteri particularly studied to imitate Jesus in welcoming and treating everyone, especially most needy, greatest goodness and tenderness. For Lanteri, "Human beings are nothing but misery, God is nothing but Mercy; the means of uniting misery to Mercy is confidence." Consecrated persons and the clergy are specially called today to this ministry of initiators and of spiritual accompaniment, while they themselves should be open to be initiated and accompanied by others.

The Church invites clergy to «rediscover our priesthood as mystery of mercy».²⁹ The medicine of fraternal love and of mercy is the only one in which the Church believes firmly.³⁰

St. Pope John Paul II calls on Christian communities to propose in a convincing and efficacious way the practice of the sacrament of Reconciliation.³¹ Today, too, there is need to firmly propose the ministry of Reconciliation (cfr. 2 Cor. 5, 18) entrusted by Jesus Christ to his Church.³² And this is in order that man, "renewed in the Spirit, may live in Christ the new life in the perennial praise of the Father and in the service of his brothers."³³

Most consecrated persons, clergy and laity share the conviction that, in the face of an image of a god of anguish, of sense of guilt, and of revenge, we should promote a pastoral of welcome and of mercy, and thus render oneself particularly available for the sacrament of reconciliation, and they are to be creative in

27 Pre,6201c:T4,4,2; Vol. 4, p. 3857.

28 Pre,2322:T4,1; Vol. 4, p. 2689.

29 Cfr. *Sacerdote, sei mistero di misericordia*, Prefazione.

30 Cfr. *Comunicare il Vangelo*, 52

31 Cfr. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte. Apostolic Letter at the Conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* (6 Jan 2001), 37

32 Cfr. Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment To Consecrated Life In The Third Millennium. Instruction* (19 May 2002), 27

33 Cfr. *Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation 1*; Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Decree of Approval of the Constitutions of the OMV (15 August 1987).

charity.³⁴ They desire to encourage a sense of confidence in the immense goodness and mercy of God that is revealed in Christ the Saviour. In this spirit Lanteri counsels: "In this especially you must grow in strength, in resolving to seek always to have an unshakeable hope, whatever may happen and however weak you may seem to yourself; because on our part, the basis of hope is our very weakness, and on God's part, his mercy, which is simply his heartfelt compassion for our weakness."

To achieve this he believes it is necessary to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary, throne of divine mercy and channel of all graces, requesting from her a likeness with Jesus. Like Mary, Christians should offer ourselves to care for the salvation of persons wherever they may be called to do so. The "sublime throne where our dear Mother stays is the throne of divine Mercy"³⁵ And St. Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort explains it in this way:

"It is the throne of the mercy of God in relation to us. In this mystery, in fact, one cannot come near to Jesus unless through Mary; one cannot see Him nor talk to Him if not through the Virgin, His Mother. It is Jesus who hears always His dear Mother, from that throne He concedes His grace and his mercy to the poor sinners: 'Let us come near, therefore, with confidence, to the throne of grace' (Eph.4:16)".³⁶ Confidence in the mercy of God opens hearts and helps us to see others' needs and practice mercy towards our neighbour.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE, SEEKING AND COMMUNICATION OF "TRUTH"

According to Pope Benedict XVI,

"It is obvious that the concept of truth has become suspect. Of course it is correct that it has been much abused. Intolerance and cruelty have occurred in the name of truth. To that extent people are afraid when someone says, "This is the truth", or even "I have the truth". We never have it, at best it has us. No one will dispute that one must be careful and cautious in claiming the truth. But simply to dismiss it as unattainable is really destructive.

"(...) We must have the courage to dare to say: Yes, man must seek the truth; he is capable of truth. It goes without saying that truth requires criteria for verification and falsification. It must always be accompanied by tolerance, also. But then, truth also points out to us those constant values which have made mankind great. That is why the humility to recognize the truth and to accept it as a standard has to be relearned and practiced again.

34 Cfr. *Epifania dell'Amore Misericordioso*, n.54; *Una vita per il nome di Cristo*, 49

35 Asc,2268a:T27,2.

36 St. Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary*, n. 248.

The truth comes to rule, not through violence, but rather through its own power; this is the central theme of John's Gospel: When brought before Pilate, Jesus professes that he himself is The Truth and the witness to the truth. He does not defend the truth with legions but rather makes it visible through his Passion and thereby also implements it."³⁷

3.1. *The Value of knowing Truth*

Why is it important to know the Truth? Word and truth are facts that together reveal themselves to human beings. Knowledge and word are means that render possible a human discourse in as much as they permit interpersonal recognition and promotion of the humanity of person. The diligent search for truth is at the service of human life. Knowledge is a means that permits a person to be and to act as human being, not simply oriented to existence. In this perspective of knowledge of truth, three fundamental factors characterize the desire and search of truth:³⁸

First, the desire for truth responds to *the need to live*. The human instinct is insufficient to confront the complex problems of the world which man must confront: e.g., problems of food, poverty, housing, communication, commerce, etc. To affirm himself and live in the world, a person needs to know nature. These needs led to the advancement of science and technology, scholastic instruction, scientific research, etc. It is the technico-scientific eros. The promotion of truth through science and techniques, poems and thinking does not mean only that a better understanding of the world is possible, but above all that it is possible to establish a dialogue, enrich ourselves with the experience of others, and communicate with others.

Second, the desire for truth responds to the need to *give a meaning or significance to existence*. In order to live in human way, it is necessary to know what man is and why he lives. The promotion of technical science must be oriented toward the realization of human being, not only toward the knowledge of the material world. It is necessary to clarify the significance of existence itself. This corresponds to anthropologico-metaphysical knowledge, which illuminates the fundamental significance of existence.

The third aspect is that the desire to know the truth refers to *judgment on ways to carry out human existence*. It is necessary to judge the concrete conditions in view of the fulfilment of man, in such a way that it is possible to act humanly. This is the field of ethics or moral science.³⁹

³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times - A Conversation with Peter Seewald*

³⁸ J. Gevaert, *Il Problema dell'uomo*, 120.

³⁹ Max Scheler proposes an analogous distinction, in relation to the approach to the search for the truth, using the categories of the sociology of knowledge. Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, reprinted in Basel-Munich (1960) distinguishes three types of approaches to the

These three aspects concern the actualization of the knowledge of the world and are always, in some way, presented together. However, they may present emphasis and proportions that are quite different. It is mainly the second and third aspects or reasons that concern us here, dealing as they do with religious and moral beliefs and practices.

3.2. *The foundations of Truth*

Most people acknowledge the need and responsibility of seeking and knowing truth. The human intellect has the duty of learning every useful truth; and truths are to be “comprehended and enjoyed.”⁴⁰ Truth has foundations. According to Lanteri, as far as truth is concerned, one must “reason seriously”; it must be proved, unless it is self-evident. Obviously, the type of reasoning will vary according to different sciences or fields of knowledge. The form of reasoning in theology or philosophy is distinct from that of social anthropology or empirical sciences like physics. But it is always the activity of reason. Such proof, he argues, must be founded on reason, on authority, and on “examples and similitudes.” Arguably, in Lanteri’s writings emphasis is placed mainly on *reason* and authority as the foundations of truth. *Reason*, because through it one can penetrate and comprehend religious truths as well. *Authority* (*auctoritas*) refers to the divine and ecclesiastical authority, that is, the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and teachings of the Pope and Magisterium of the Catholic

search for truth: 1) the knowledge oriented towards salvation (*Heilswissen*); 2) the knowledge of being, the theoretical knowledge (*Seinswissen*); 3. the knowledge that aims at dominion, control, the knowledge in view of dominion (*Herrschaftswissen*). From perspective of theology, the moral theologian Bernhard Haering, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol.1, pg.44-45, presents a critical explanation of these approaches: the *Heilswissen*, which is a search truth and testifying truth, is concerned above all with salvation insofar as it comes from God: in so doing it conserves respect for the whole person, the integrity and the integration of the person, caring for healthy relations before God and with a desire for a greater integrity and salvation. It implies trust in God, and it is characterized by a joyful and grateful faith as response to God who reveals himself as salvation. The second type of the search for truth (*Seinswissen*) refer to the “knowledge of truths in themselves”, to philosophical speculations concerning primarily the metaphysical categories of being and of beings. It treats the truths but referring specifically to salvation, to the integrity of person or to healthy human relations. However, as Haering noted, in history one meets also an existential philosophy that pays great attention to the ultimate significance of human life, to the dignity and freedom of person, to the aim of the community and of the society in view of human relations. This type of philosophy belongs to *Heilswissen* in the broad sense. Finally, the *Herrschaftswissen* is a knowledge that refers to the “structure of the society, especially the significance and aim of the authority and the authoritarian structure in its effective interaction with the global system of the economic processes, of the cultural relations and of the political structures. It pays particular attention to the problems of social justice and of international peace.” Haering further makes perspicacious observations about the knowledge of being or theoretical knowledge and about the knowledge that aims at dominion and control. The question of the types of knowledge or search for truth should lead us to wonder and reflect which type of truth *de facto* predominates in or underpins the theological and religious discourses and the pastoral attitudes and practices in the religious communities, parishes, Formation houses, educational institutions in Nigeria today .

40 *MF*, XI, 140; *ESL*, 122, 203-204.

Church. Lanteri considers that the authority of the decision of the Church constitutes a means of refuting errors, and of assuring the triumph of every truth. To this authority is “opposed the private spirit of the Innovators”, whom he sometimes describes as promoters of errors. He favourably quotes the observations of La Mennais who said Authority and Innovators propose opposing principles:

“One is the catholic principle which subjects all particular opinions to the authority of general beliefs, establishing a perfect society between the intelligences, and puts them in the fortunate necessity of conserving them at the same time for all the truths; the other is the philosophical principle, which subjects general beliefs to the caprices of particular opinion, establish an anarchy between intelligences and gives them a fatal freedom to adopt at their wish all errors.”⁴¹

Thus, in Lanteri’s view, the principle of the authority of the Church is a criterion or the guarantee of “all truths” [*toutes les vérités*]. Such affirmation might have sounded irritating and appeared arrogant to the ears or sensitivities of some modern thinkers who deemed it necessary to separate and recognise the fundamental and irreplaceable place of human reason. However, even St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that one thing is the question of reason when we speak about human knowledge, and quite another is the question of truth seen in the divine mind – in which truth is at the same time the *causa rerum*, the cause of things.⁴² Whatever may be meant by Lanteri’s “all truths”, he certainly upholds the principle that man must act in truth. *Act in truth*, since it is not sufficient to conceptually *know* the truth. Acting in truth must characterise one’s motivations and ideals or values of reference. This matter applies, for example, to various situations of marriage and family life, carrying out one’s professions; it applies to living the religious vows, community life and initial formation in consecrated life; and indeed to the following of Christ.

There are Truth and truths. Which truth are we talking about? Philosophers and theologians speak of various types of truth. For instance, scholars speak of ontic (or logical) truth, historical truth, metaphysical truth, religious truth, scientific truth, moral truth, etc.⁴³ Much of religious and theological teachings relate to metaphysical, religious and moral kind of truths. In his spiritual discourses, Lanteri sees, for instance, in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius a synthesis of all the principal truths of Religion, that is

41 Lanteri, *Memorial Catholique* 1. Année pag.6. La Mennais, *Defence de l'Essai sur l'indifference*, in fine.

42 THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, Q.2, a.14. In fact, for Thomas Aquinas, the concept of truth is not univocal nor equivocal but it is an analogy.

43 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.16, a.1c; P. GILBERT, *Corso di Metafisica*, 257-273; G. ROMITI, *Filosofia e Fede*, 1981, Cap.II.

to say, the truths to be believed and the truths to be practiced.⁴⁴ Truths are understood, for Lanteri, not simply as an abstract entity but in relation to human person; he believes truth is meant for forming and reforming a person. He sees truth in the perspective of fulfilment and perfecting of one's self and of other persons. In other words, truth is seen and understood in the perspective of salvation.

3.3. *What is Truth?*

We are all familiar with the tense moment of confrontation between Pontius Pilate and the Lord Jesus when Pilate demands "What is truth?" in response to the Lord Jesus' revelation: "I have come into this world to testify to the truth" (John 18: 37-38). Pilate was not the first to ask such a question, and the Lord Jesus was not the first to be subject to interrogation on this matter. "Truth" has been the subject of study, inquiry and debate throughout most of recorded history. Philosophers, theologians, scholars, students, people of faith, people of no faith have questioned and argued its meaning down through the ages. Sooner or later, we simply have to settle on an idea or definition of truth and go with it.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST), "truth is the conformity of the mind to that which exists in reality" (ST I.16.1). Note that there are two parts to his definition: (a) that which exists in reality --- in other words, that which *is*; and (b) the conformity of the mind, the intellect, to it. It is not the case here to go into the breakdown of philosophers' reactions over the centuries, both "pro" and "con," to Aquinas' idea, because it seems accurate to me and it is, in any case, the definition adopted in this article.

The disciples of Jesus are called to live in the truth. The Bible attests that *God is the source of all truth*. His Word is truth. His Law is truth. His "faithfulness endures to all generations."²⁵⁵ Since God is "true," the members of his people are called to live in the truth.²⁵⁶ (CCC, n.2465).

In Jesus, the whole of God's truth is revealed. The Lord Jesus says, "I have come into this world to testify to the truth." I earlier referred to Jesus' dialogue with Pontius Pilate. Elsewhere in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus reveals *himself* as "truth" when he says to Thomas, the Doubting Apostle, later in John's Gospel: "I am the way and the *truth* and the life (John 14: 6)." Truth is, as was acknowledged, that which is, and our ability to see, comprehend, understand and conform our minds to it as it actually is: in this case, the Lord Jesus.

As Catholic Christians, we believe the Bible is the "Word of God, the Word of the Lord" and, therefore, the truth. Scholars refer to this truth as the "inerrancy of Scripture." There are all kinds of literature and literary forms employed by the inspired authors of biblical texts, some which even differ from one another, but the truth of their revelation is not contradictory. They indicate the same reality.

44 Org, 2262:T. Thematically, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius reflect the sequence of the *Symbol* or the Catholic Creed.

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That is what we believe as Catholic Christians. Different literary forms or genres are used to make truth accessible and known to the human mind and intellect. Truth, therefore, has a claim on our human minds and intellects, which results in human behaviours and conduct that conform to it.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus presents himself as “the Truth”:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... all things came to be through him and without him, nothing is. What came to be through him was life, and his life was light for the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1: 1-35).

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. For no one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (John 1: 17-18).

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8: 31).”

The Spirit of truth has come. He will guide you into all truth (John 16: 13).

Sanctify them in truth, your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth (John 17: 17-19).

The Lord Jesus called to himself Apostles upon whom and through whom he established his Church. They, in turn, preached truth to the early Christian communities:

- ❖ And I tell you, “You are Peter and upon this ‘rock’ I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).
- ❖ If we claim to have fellowship with him (the Lord Jesus) and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth (1 John 1: 6).
- ❖ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3: 18).
- ❖ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1: 13).
- ❖ Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ (Ephesians 4:15).
- ❖ Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth (Ephesians 6: 14).
- ❖ We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4: 2).
- ❖ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved ...rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy: 2: 15).
- ❖ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 14).
- ❖ (God our saviour) wants all people to be saved and to come to acknowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2: 4).

In the Lord Jesus, we walk in truth. That has been and is the long journey of the Church, unparalleled anywhere else in human history.

As Catholic Christians, we believe that not only the Holy Scriptures but also the Church's teaching and Sacred Tradition are fonts of God's revealed truth. Knowing truth, trusting truth should make a genuine difference in our lives.

Certainly, the Catholic Church has had some hard times over the centuries. But there have also been many more positive developments and external changes over the ages, including the ways we express the truths of our Faith. Truth itself has not changed. The Lord Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8)!" The Lord Jesus has not changed his mind about the Catholic Church he established either. This Church is still responsible for revealing truth, presenting truth, teaching truth and witnessing truth, day in and day out, every day. We read in the Second Letter to Timothy:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4: 1-4).

St. Paul has gotten to the heart of the matter here. People have been "tickling the ears" of Christians sincerely seeking truth from the earliest days of the Church, setting themselves up as "teachers in accordance with their own desires," working for their own ends trying to turn faithful "ears from the truth" in favour of "myths" they propose instead. It still happens today. But, as Jesus cautions in the Gospel of Matthew, "the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:14)." The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us:

- ❖ In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest. "Full of grace and truth," he came as the "light of the world," he is the Truth. ... To follow Jesus is to live in "the Spirit of truth," whom the Father sends in his name and who leads "into all the truth." To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth ... (CCC 2466).
- ❖ Man tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honour and bear witness to it: "It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons . . . are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth (CCC 2467)."

- ❖ Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. (CCC, n.2468).
- ❖ The disciple of Christ consents to "live in the truth," that is, in the simplicity of a life in conformity with the Lord's example, abiding in his truth. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth."²⁶⁵ (CCC, n. 2470).

This is why the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" believes what it does, professes what it does, teaches what it does, practices what it does: the "deposit of faith", as it is known. This "deposit of faith" in the Catholic Church includes a comprehensive creedal statement of truth(s) as well as a set of valid moral teachings and expectations based upon it for a reason: to lead faithful Catholic Christians through that "small gate and narrow way that leads to life," away from "myths" and the "tickling of ears." Truth is not truth *because* we believe it. Truth is true whether we believe it or not. Truth is not true today and false tomorrow. Truth is not the object of whims; it is not the subject of opinion polls or majority votes; it is not the "stuff" of arbitrary decisions based upon what is easiest or most convenient to follow or what "feels good" at any particular point in time. Truth is the Lord Jesus dwelling among us in the Church he established. Truth is what the Church teaches based upon his revelation, unfolding in tradition from generation to generation. Truth is "Peter" upon whom the Lord Jesus built his Church so that, as he said, "what is bound on earth is so bound in heaven (Matthew 18: 18)."⁴⁵ So, in a sense, one could say that no one owned truth, but rather that truth advances toward individuals. Truth is not the fruit of reciprocal concessions. It is not an object of negotiation.

3.4. *The Causes of Error*

Human beings can err. Today, as in the past times (when current errors⁴⁶ were identified and confronted), the question of the possibility and causes of errors must be acknowledged and addressed. Error is opposed to truth: both are found in judgement or in the act by which the intellect affirms or deny a predicate of a subject; this judgement can be expressed by a single person or by an institution or by an authority.⁴⁷

45 Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M. Pastoral Letter for the Holy Year of Mercy, *Mercy and Truth Shall Meet* (14/9/2015).

46 The "current errors" of the time of Lanteri were of different nature, content and type; among them there were errors of the Movements (Gallicanism, Jansenism, Deism, Quietism, illuminism [*Aufklärung*], the Encyclopaedia, Jurisdictionalism, Febronianism, Richerism) and the doctrinal errors of ecclesiological character. Among the "current errors" the *Social contract* of Rousseau insinuated itself, inasmuch as it holds that authority resides in the Community and not in the Head of the Community, that is in the Church and not in the Pope: cf. *MF*, III, 19. I do not intend to speak about the individual current errors and their doctrines with which, historically, Lanteri addressed.

47 As a matter of fact, institutions, or authorities exists in concrete human persons who compose them, or are invested with or incarnate them: one can therefore say that only persons make

The causes of errors come from different factors regarding the intellect, the senses, the will, and other elements. We list here some of the basic causes of errors. Lanteri, too, recognises them. First, there is the limits of the intellect itself, together with the complexity of the object to be known. This is the principal cause, for human reason can find itself in uncertainty and in obscurity. Secondly, there can be ignorance and lack of sufficient reflection before judgement. Thirdly, a preconception or prejudice of an individual or social kind, etc.. Fourthly, particular mental form (*forma mentis*) such as excessive intellectualism or excessive empiricism, excessive politicization, and extreme ideological inclination about issues (such that almost any issue, including clearly religious issues, is interpreted from the prism, for instance, of either liberal or conservative, right-wing or left-wing, race, economic status). With this basic mental attitude or mind-set, almost every things will probably appear to the intellect and be read according to the colour or shade of the “lenses” or eye-glasses that one puts on. And fifthly, “To consider opinions as truth easily opens the road (...) to errors, to heresies.”⁴⁸ Errors are neither always nor necessarily due to bad faith, they are not always voluntary. On the other hand, man is capable of overcoming errors. Vincible and culpable ignorance can be corrected.

It is necessary to follow a process of formation that facilitates the search and knowledge of truth and creates an atmosphere that encourages a balanced critical thinking and that is healthy, less exploitative and contaminated by falsity, uncertainty and deliberate ambiguity. This is important in order that one may, in freedom, encounter He who is the Truth -- that is, He who liberates from errors and illuminates minds--,⁴⁹ the Way and the Life, and in order to promote and respect the dignity and rights of fellow humans.

3.5. Truth and Morality: Authority and Tolerance

There are practical issues connected with the recurrent and closely-related themes of truth and morality. One of the concrete problems concerns the question of human freedom. The issue of human freedom presents itself also in relation to conscience, opinion, thought, and religion. Two among the

judgement. Persons can have an authority that is given or evidently acquired, and therefore their judgement ought not to be easily put into doubt or rejected. The theologian Lanteri is convinced that the authority of the Head of the Church is given by God Himself and it is the most certain or sure; consequently, he recommends one “follows exactly” (“seguire esattamente”) her decisions or judgment (Org,2262: T3,1,1). At times, one’s “own” or “private” judgment is looked upon with suspicion, especially when it appears clearly different from that of the authority. Suspicions, however, ought not inhibit or prevent one from freely engaging in critical thinking, study and reflection. In any case, such intellectual endeavours require both humility (to listen, dialogue, learn or even to admit one’s own errors – if any) and the courage to search for and embrace the truth. The demands of honesty and mutual respect must be met on the path of the parties involved.

48 Lanteri speaks here with reference to matters of Dogma, though it could be applied to matters of Morals. Cf. Org, 8052:T1,4; LANTERI, *Riflessioni*, 102 nota 1, 111.

49 *MF*, XIII, 398.

fundamental problems concerning truth and morality relate authority and tolerance.

First, the issue of truth and authority. Truth is based on *authority [auctoritas]*. The concept of “authority” is pregnant. There are different kinds and levels of authority, each of which has different weight, as earlier mentioned. Lanteri is concerned, first of all, with divine and ecclesiastical authorities, and then with human reason, without ignoring, of course, also the authorities of conscience, of authors, of the civil State, etc. The worth and place of divine authorities and of the authority of human reason are clearly emphasized.

As regard Divine and Ecclesiastical authority, some theologians and thinkers taught the philosophico-political position according to which the source of authority resides in the community of believers, that is, in the Church, and not in the head of the Church, the Pope. (Thus, some claimed that the appointment of bishops, if not of the Pope himself, should be made, in some way, by the people of God and that their teachings should be approved or authorised by the community). Because they held such position, Lanteri would rebuke Jacques Rousseau and those whom he (Lanteri) judged as “incredulous Modern Philosophers”, “modern” or “false” politicians, and certain other authors. He reproached them because he saw in their positions an indirect or veiled denial of, or an implicit attack on the ecclesiastical (and on Religion) and civil authority and power. Rather, Lanteri considered valid the principle which says that authority resides in the head of the Church, a Christian Community, and not in the members of the Community itself. He taught that truth (that is, divine and ecclesiastic truth) must be defended by everyone, not only speculatively but also privately and practically.⁵⁰

Reason has an obliging power. Through it a person can really know truth, including religious truths. However, reason is limited. Reason needs divine light. In Lanteri’s view, human reason should be submissive to God.⁵¹

Second, truth and tolerance. Tolerance can be understood in the strict sense and in the broad sense. In the strict sense, tolerance is the practical attitude of a person that, though he condemns on principle the philosophical and moral convictions considered erroneous or reproachable held by others, he acknowledges them and does not attempt to suppress their legitimate expressions with his/her own attitude, much less by violence. Such position does not mean the approval of such convictions, nor an indifference concerning truth and goodness that must be sustained, and neither does it necessarily mean that one is agnostic.

Different motives urge one to tolerance. These factors include:

50 LANTERI, "Dell'obbligo di difendere le decisioni emanate dalla Santa Sede circa li errori correnti", In *MF*, III, 17-18. According to Lanteri this principle, already confuted by Bossuet, “was the cause of errors of the last Revolutions which saw the dominations of the Philosophers, the Heretics, the modern Politicians, the Richerists, the Febronists, the Jansenists that is those who recognise that the source of authority is in the community and not in the Head.” Cf. LANTERI, *Riflessioni*, 200-208.

51 *MF*, XIII, 411.

- Respect for the conscience and freedom of other persons;
- The indubitable fact and the greater understanding of the almost universal capacity of man to err, or of salvation;
- Motive of practical convenience or of lesser evil.

Therefore, tolerance is distinct from the acceptance of something (say, someone else's viewpoint, practice or attitude). Tolerance is an exigency of justice, which requires that to everyone we give what is due. Tolerance is not a right to error!. However, the human person who errs or that others think has fallen into error continue to deserve respect and comprehension due to any human being. No individual has a right to fall into error *as* error, but (s)he has a right to his/her convictions that comes from his experiences and knowledge.

In the broad sense, a meaning which is already common even at the time of Lanteri, tolerance means: to respect the freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, etc. When it is a matter of man's absolute and objective possession of truth, every tolerance towards what contradicts such truth, that is error, will theoretically be absurd; it is the case of *dogmatic* tolerance (which is an attitude of indifference towards dogmatic truths, or towards different or opposed religious beliefs); however, in this case, it would be possible to have a *practical* tolerance towards the person who may have professed or sustained an error.⁵²

Tolerance has its *limits*. The limit is found in an attack against the principle of tolerance: personal rights are, as a matter of fact, limited by the rights of other persons. For this reason, opposed to tolerance are all those activities which appeal to freedom of conscience or of opinion but in reality they are opposed, even sometimes aggressively and violently, to the rights of other persons and the society, even though, on the other hand, no one – normally – must be forced to act against the judgement of his/her conscience. Benedict XVI's expression of "dictatorship of relativism" easily comes to mind here.

The theme of tolerance is delicate and complex. Beyond the single acts of intolerance or of tolerance, in my view, Lanteri's attitude toward tolerance can be better understood if we keep in mind his firm adherence to St. Augustine's principle on unity, freedom and charity, a principle to which he frequently refers: "*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*". Augustine recommends that we seek unity in things that are necessary, freedom – and with this tolerance and mutual respect -- where there are doubts and things that are not defined or infallible, and in all things let there be charity. In the sphere of doctrines, it seems that Lanteri did not see reason to tolerate different opinions. In these matters (of doctrine) Christian teachers and thinkers should not tolerate indifference or apathy; they must profess full unity also in the Articles or Truth of Faith. They, like evangelisers, must be disposed to defend it in season and out of season, "even at the cost of one's own life."⁵³ However, in other cases, especially as regards the day-to-day life, relations and apostolatry, he encourages all to seek

52 Cf. Phil. Dict., 421-422.

53 Org., 2262:T6,5; *MF*, III, 19.

and practice tolerance and respect for freedom, opinion or views of other people, etc. This tolerance is necessary, he argues, in order "to conserve good harmony among all, and peace of heart with ourselves."⁵⁴

Therefore, tolerance is necessary and beneficial but only in certain areas and on appropriate conditions. The Catholic Christian must show tolerance and be welcoming in their concrete relationships, and living and working together with others, but they are clearly aware that they are not expected to nor must they twist, dilute or compromise the Catholic teaching in the name of tolerance and respect of other persons' opinion. Tolerance contributes to harmonious relation in community, but it cannot be promoted at the expense of the Christian faith and Gospel values of the community itself. The theme of tolerance introduces us to the question of the offences or sins against the truth, and the duty to bear witness to the truth -- that is, the communication and defence of truth.

3.5. Offences Against the Truth

The eighth Commandment states: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*. This commandment obliges us to use the power of speech according to God's plan, that is, to tell the truth. It forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of the holy people to bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth. Offenses against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness: they are fundamental infidelities to God and, in this sense, they undermine the foundations of the covenant (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [=CCC], n.2464). For this reason, the Apostle Paul says: "*Wherefore putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another*" (Ephesians 4:25). And the Apostle James admonishes all:

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, which defileth the whole body, and inflameth the wheel of our nativity, being set on fire by hell. For every nature of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of the rest, is tamed, and hath been tamed, by the nature of man: But the tongue no man can tame, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison. By it we bless God and the Father: and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." (James 3:6-10).

So, what are the sins against the eighth commandment, telling the truth? The main offences against the truth include:

⁵⁴ Org. 2262:TT5,1,2; Cf. Org,8052:T1,3 – T1,4

i) *Public Statements against Truth*: The disciples are to "put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander" (1 Pet 2:1). A public statement contrary to the truth has particular gravity. The statements include *false witness*, and *perjury* (cfr. Proverbs 19:9). These acts can condemn the innocent or exonerate the guilty, therefore they compromise the justice needed in judicial decisions. (CCC, nn. 2475-2476).

ii) *Unjust Injury*

Respect for the reputation of others forbids every attitude or words which inflict unjust injury, hurting someone's reputation. These include:

- ❖ Rash judgment . This assumes as true the moral fault of another without sufficient evidence.
- ❖ Detraction. This discloses a person's faults to another without any valid reason.
- ❖ Calumny (slander). This offence harms another's reputation by saying what is not true. (CCC, nn.2477-2479).

A disciple of Jesus avoids rash judgment by being careful in interpreting the deeds of another. "Every good Christian must be more ready to give a favourable interpretation to a person's words than to condemn them" (St. Ignatius of Loyola). Everyone has a right to their good name. Therefore, detraction and calumny (which destroy that reputation) are sins against justice and charity.

iii) *Some other Offenses against the Truth*

Every word or attitude, such as adulation, flattery which encourages or confirms a person in their evil deeds is forbidden. This adulation is grave if it makes someone an accomplice in a grave matter. Adulation is venial if done to be agreeable or to meet a need. Friendship (or any other reason) never justifies duplicitous speech. Boasting and bragging offend truth. Irony (aimed to hurt another by maliciously caricaturing them) also offends truth.

In addition, offences against the truth include: making known the sins of others; unjust criticism; judging another person without sufficient evidence; gossip; suspecting another without sufficient evidence; and insults (CCC, nn.2480-2481).

iv) *The Lie: a direct offence against truth*

A lie is a falsehood spoken with the intent to deceive. Jesus denounces lying as the work of the devil. "He is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44).

Lying - i.e., the attempt to lead into error someone who has the right to know the truth -- is the most direct offense against the truth. Lies injure man's relation to the truth, to his neighbour, and to the Lord. The gravity of a lie depends upon the truth which it deforms, the circumstances, the intentions, and the harm suffered by the victims. A lie is usually venial and becomes mortal when it does grave injury. (CCC, nn.2482-2484).

Lying has negative effects. Lying is condemned because it profanes speech which is meant to communicate truth. The culpability is greater if the lie entails the risk of serious consequences for those who are led astray. Moreover, lying

does violence to the other person by affecting his ability to know (which is a condition for every decision). It sows discord, destroys society, undermines trust, and tears apart social relationships. (2485-2486).

Reparation is demanded for lying: The person who lied must make reparation, even if this can only be done secretly. The victim must be compensated, or (if that is impossible) be given moral satisfaction. The reparation of harm or of a good reputation must be judged according to the extent of the damage inflicted. (CCC, n.2487).

Truth - A Correct Response

The right to be told the truth is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. The person must judge if it is appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. (CCC, nn.2488-2489).

Both truth and charity dictate the correct response to someone seeking information. Some reasons (safety, privacy, the common good) allow silence or discreet language. Avoiding scandal demands great discretion. The truth needs not be revealed to someone who has no right to know and at the appropriate time.

Special Cases (CCC, nn.2490-2492)

Not keeping secrets is an offence against the truth. However, there are exceptions or special exceptional cases. The priest cannot violate the secret of the sacrament of Reconciliation. "The sacramental seal is inviolable. It is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or any other manner for any reason" (CIC, Canon 983).

Professional secrets (known to office holders, doctors, lawyers, etc.) or confidential information given under secrecy must be kept secret unless grave harm to the person, to the confidant, or to a third party can be avoided only by divulging the truth. Private information prejudicial to another (even when not given under secrecy) cannot be divulged without a serious and proportionate reason. "Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning persons' private lives." (CCC, n.2492).

3.6. *Bearing witness to the Truth: the Communication and Defence of the Truth*

3.6.1 *Duty to bear witness to the Truth*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds everyone of the responsibility in this regard. Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he "has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth."²⁶⁶ The Christian is not to "be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord."²⁶⁷ In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul

before his judges. We must keep "a clear conscience toward God and toward men."²⁶⁸ (CCC, n.2471).

Every Christian has a duty to take part in the life of the Church. This duty obliges him to act as witness of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known. *Martyrdom* is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. (CCC, n. 2473).

3.6.2. *Communication and defence of the Truth*

What I synthesize here by the word, "communicate" (the truth) appears in the writings of Lanteri under various words or expressions; he speaks of: "announce" (or "proclaim"), "spread", "make known", "propagate", "defend", "combat", and other similar expressions. It involves bearing witness to the truth in words and actions. Lanteri acknowledges that one must highlight the nature, the necessity and the value of communicating truths. He knows that human being, particularly the Christian, has responsibility and commitment toward truth.

As regard the necessity and responsibility of communicating the truth, it is clear to him that truths must be "understood and enjoyed". They are subjects to be meditated upon:⁵⁵ this is particularly valid for truth of religious and moral kind, but it seems valid also for truths of other spheres of knowledge.

Some of the responsibilities or commitments that man has toward truth are indicated.⁵⁶ Lanteri proposes that, in general, the communication and defence of truth must be:

- at the speculative and personal level, as well as at the practical and public level;
- The duty of everyone: the clergy, consecrated persons, the laity, and other people.

In particular, toward the truth every individual has the following fundamental responsibilities:

a) *Knowledge*: This refers to knowing the truth about one's self and on other human person, on God, on our historical times,⁵⁷ on creation, and all that are oppose to such knowledge (the "errors", falsehood). This implies undertaking a "serious study" of the truth and related errors; in these areas too, as in every action, the intellect must "learn every useful truth" and arrive at seeing and judging everything according to Jesus and his Word.⁵⁸

55 Org, 2262:T2

56 For example, Cf. Org, 8052:T1,3 – T1,4.

57 Regarding the need for a knowledge of the time and of its evils, and on the reading of journals according to Lanteri, see A. BRUSTOLON, *Alle Origini della Congregazione*, 85-86, 86-88.

58 Org, 2262:T1,1,5 (pg.1857); *MF*, XI, 140.

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b) *Communication*: Communicate and spread the truth. There is an obligation of not keeping silent about the truth known. This could be harmful to everyone – persons, the family, religion, community the state, the society. “It is never licit to keep silent about the truth when one has the obligation to profess it when it is attacked and such persons (who keep silent) render themselves guilty of the baneful consequences, that is, of the very grave harm that there from results against the Church, persons and the State.”⁵⁹

c) *Unity in freedom*

We must seek and promote unity in relation to what the truth is. It is a grave and ineluctable responsibility. It does not, however, exempt from the duty of tolerance and respect for different opinions that other persons may have.

d) *Formation*

Another responsibility is to form or educate persons towards the search for truth in view of an efficacious and fruitful mission. Everyone is responsible for education to truth. Emphasis, however, may be placed in this sphere on the role of leaders of community, such as are parish priests, Rectors of Students’ Colleges, Formation Houses, of Religious Communities, presidents and principals of schools and other educational institutions, leaders of the laity and professional associations or organizations, all in addition, of course, to parents. Formation has many dimensions; it is a life long process and demands periodical renewal.

3.6.3. *Education of Persons toward the search for Truth*

It is a duty to educate people for truth. “It is necessary to be formed on principles that are certain and not on opinions”, Lanteri said in his Letter to Bishop Bigex (1822).⁶⁰ Perhaps this is in order ensure a solid foundation and not to create confusion and mislead the faithful. Still, beyond the context of polemics and apologetics, it is reasonably arguable today that, in general, certain thinkers and authors can, within their area of expertise, be quite helpful in education of persons in the light of Catholic teachings. At the same time, in addition to the formation of conscience, it is noteworthy that, in Lanteri’s view, the formation should be what could today be describe “holistic”, that is, it includes other aspects of the human person – the will and affections, the intellect -- , in short, the whole person. On this issue, interestingly, Lanteri uses the term “form”/ “reform”. The intention is to form persons in order “not to err”⁶¹ and, positively, to form or reform in view of one’s growth and maturity and of a better world.

59 LANTERI, "Dell'Obbligo di difendere le decisioni e condanne emanate dalla Santa Sede circa gli errori", In *MF*, III, 11.

60 *C3,339:T6* (pg.292)

61 For example, “form” / “reform” man (Pre, 2392b: T1,2, T2,4,1 (pg.3669), T2,6); “reform” the world (Pre, 2392b: T1,1, T2,1,2, T4), taking into account the aims and the means to be used (Pre, 2392b: T2,1,1 - T2,1,2) in order not to err.

3.6.4. *Some means of Education for Truth*

How can we educate for Truth? There are various means or ways of communicating truth. In Lanteri's view, these include but are not limited to the following ways: (a) the Spiritual Exercises according to the Ignatian method. This kind ("genere") of preaching is the preferred or privileged type,⁶² one of the means of spreading religious truths. They are a "true source of eternal truth," a "meditation of truth"; (b) catechesis; (c) Means of Social communication, including the print media and Good Books⁶³. The Catechism teaches that within modern society the communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion, and formation. The information that the media provides is at the service of the common good.²⁸⁵ Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice, and solidarity. (CCC, nn.2493-2494). In his famous classification of the Catalogue of "good press", he contemplates making the truth -- that is, religious truths, the Word of God, the teachings of the Church's Magisterium -- known to diverse categories of people.

3.7. **Attitudes and Dispositions of Communicating the Truth**

3.7.1. *Proclaim the Truth in Charity, Witness to Mercy in Truth*

It is one thing to know the truth, and have the instruments to spread it, it is quite another to possess the appropriate and necessary attitudes and dispositions to communicate it to others. Lanteri frequently refers to the idea of St. Paul when the Apostle teaches that we must always exercise the zeal for the truth in the spirit of love (Cf. Eph.4:15). He is convinced about the *motives* for which we must love our neighbour. In communicating what we believe to be true there is need, in addition, to highlight the *qualities* of this love; it is also necessary to ensure one practices them towards our interlocutors. Some of the qualities of this love are universality, totality, reality, and sincerity. Love is universal, because it must be extended to all and it refers to the integral good of the person. It is real and sincere, because, as regards the means, it is necessary to adopt every real

62 One must make an observation on the significance of the word, "genere", which Lanteri frequently uses, also in relation to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The term "Genere" (from *genus, genera*) is a philosophical term, though it remains part of a common (Italian) vocabulary; it has various meanings or nuances. Lanteri very often uses it in its philosophical and common sense to indicate a type, a sort, kind, a quality or a species (of something, or persons), theme, topic, matters. A comparative study of the use of this term ("genere") shows that the word was used in these senses in many of Lanteri's writings, as is evident, for instance, in the *ESL*, where the word "genere" is used with reference to different elements, relating to: "study", "moral matters", "of doctrine", Truth/current errors, the good that others do, "politics", "politics and of government", "of Institute", "matters of the probable" (opinions), "preaching". See *ESL*, pp. 142, 143, 148, 149, 150, 191, 204, 248, 225; Lanteri, *Riflessioni*, pp. 101, n.1. 102-103. However, the term ("genere") was also used to mean "general", as in "in genere", that is, "in general": for instance, see: Pre,2392b:T4.

63 Org, 8052:T1,4; Org, 2262:T6,3 Art.1, n.2).

instrument, use all the faculties of soul and body, demonstrating interest not only in the temporal good but also in the spiritual good of the neighbour.

Different methods are proposed in order to ensure and maintain a love and peace that facilitates the communication of truth. Giving instruction on false teaching, St. Paul suggests that Christian evangelizer do not fight over or dispute about words, but should be eager to “impart the word of truth without deviation” and “avoid profane and idle talk.” “avoid foolish and ignorant debates,” believers “should be gentle with everyone, able to teach, tolerant, correcting opponents with kindness” in the hope that “God will grant them repentance that leads to knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:14-25). Along the same line, first, one must acknowledge that there are things that do not favour honest communication of truth in charity. These include doing harm to another person on the basis of honour and money, speaking ill of others, brood hatred or grudges, nourishing suspects or prejudice. Earlier in this reflection, we saw some offences against truth. In order to communicate truth in charity, Lanteri suggests that our concern must be to practice a mutual love which is “cordial, affable, anticipating, enduring” and that knows how to forgive offences. One should interpret all in good faith, and should excuse the other person’s intention from one’s heart and in the face of other people – even though the act itself is reprehensible and perhaps not excusable -- and without seeking contrasts or conflicts with other persons. Nevertheless, since there are diversities of opinion, it is important to know where and how to dialogue, always proposing one’s own reasons with clarity, firmness, modesty, gentleness and humility. Thus, in communicating truth with charity, one strives to conserve good harmony and peace. Still, precisely for the sake of love, one is duty-bound to fraternally correct a person who errs.⁶⁴ For this reason, Lanteri recognizes that charity is an *inestimable good*, a noble virtue. It is so precious that it is better to sacrifice everything rather than break or offend it.

From this perspective of truth in love, Lanteri recommends that it is more important to seek to first win the heart before the intellect, making the interlocutor to love the truth itself which one presents and defends. Truth of Christian religion need not be imposed on, but one must propose it to others. On the question of proclamation and defence of truth, especially religious truth, it is relevant to reread the Vatican Council II’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious (December 7, 1965).

3.7.2. *The Exposition of the Truth*

⁶⁴ Pre, 2313a, *passim*; Si veda anche *Org*, 2262:T5 – T 5,1,3

In presenting the truth, in addition to charity or mercy, it is necessary to also take some pedagogical criteria into account.⁶⁵ For Lanteri, such exposition must be made with: (a) simplicity, (c) clarity and (c) *serious reasoning* on truth: “giving it, proving it with reason, with authority”, “with examples as well as with similitudes”. The expected result is that the intellect of the hearer will remain convinced and impressed. Moreover, it is suggested that, in the communication of truth one should use *opportune* and *calm* reasoning or arguments. (d) Apply truth to morals and customs, relating to practical life of the people;⁶⁶ (e) Propose solutions for the future, and overcome the difficulties.

According to Lanteri, one must not present doctrinal propositions founded on systems and human opinions, or on “expressions of the Sacred Scriptures that are isolated and too literal”, or are not founded on the universal teachings of the Church. However, he also advises against presenting propositions or teachings that in practice serve more to pull people away from God rather than to draw people nearer to the love, service and mercy of God. That is why he advises that one must instead present arguments that are “*certa et perspicua*” (certain and evident), and not “doubtful”. Consequently, to achieve this, some ways are suggested. First, persuasion: it is necessary to persuade persons, that is, whoever is listening. Second, a profound study: one needs to undertake an in-depth and critical study of the pertinent field of knowledge in question (e.g. Sacred Scriptures, dogma, moral theology, culture, philosophy, theology, etc.), examining well “the principles and the reasons.”

The point is this. The Church can be truthful without being merciful. But she can't be merciful without being truthful. Our task as bishops at the synod this month, and frankly what God asks from every Christian all the time, is to speak the truth with patience, humility and love. Truth without compassion wounds and repels; mercy without truth is a comfortable form of lying. Thus, as a proof of our love, we still do need to speak the truth. Then we need to live it in our service to our families, to society and to the Church. We may now turn to briefly consider the relation between truth and mercy.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “TRUTH” AND “MERCY”

It is important to seek an understanding the balance of Mercy and Truth. As stated earlier, mercy appears in the forefront of many conversations in the Catholic Church today at almost every level. Sometimes we are given the impression that the expression of mercy is something “new” in the Church. What “tickles the ears” in many of these conversations is the notion that if mercy

⁶⁵ Although Lanteri speaks here in the context of preaching the Ignatian Exercises, the criteria indicated have a wider sphere of application.

⁶⁶ This orientation is a reflection of the constant interest and concern of Lanteri for a moral life, that is the real behaviour of persons, and from which the communication of truth must not dissociate itself but rather continually take into account. |

prevails, “anything goes” and “everything is all right.” It does not matter who you are or what you believe or say or do, mercy is a guaranteed safety net that you can count on when you fall. This kind of “tickling” suggests that the Church’s teachings should be tempered with mercy – perhaps even changed or eliminated – so that the “sting” will be taken out of them. In this way, the teachings do not inconvenience or offend anyone, nor appear as a discrimination to anyone; they do not cause anyone to be singled out or made to feel different from the rest of society, or community; so that we can better “tolerate” and get along with each other, no matter what; in this way, we can better “co-exist”.

Those thoughts do “tickle the ears” but, unfortunately for those who propose or believe them, they are “myths.” They misrepresent or, at the least, exaggerate the idea of mercy as we have come to know and understand it here. Simply stated, they do not express truth. For example, could the joy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus have ever taken place without the suffering of his Cross, the ultimate truth of Divine mercy? “Whoever wishes to be my disciple must deny himself, pick up his cross and follow me (Matthew 10: 38; Matthew 16: 24; Luke 14: 27),” the Lord Jesus said. In the life of the Catholic Christian, adherence to the truth is often the cross we bear and mercy, the consequence of carrying it.

From what has been said in these pages, and as experience shows, there are few things more difficult to navigate in our Christian walk than this beautiful dance between mercy and truth. This is clear in that moment, for example, when we encounter a friend or stranger who lived a wayward lifestyle clearly full of sinful, destructive activities; or we meet a wounded family, or encounter member of one’s religious who for a too long period had chosen to *practically* separate him/herself from the Religious family and “set off to a distant country” (Lk 15:13) where he/she lives at the margin or outside of the Institute-- therein ignoring his/her vows. Then, in either case, he/she meets with you and presents an inviting laugh hoping that you will reciprocate and affirm his/her behaviour. In those moments, it is an absolute art to know how to show grace and mercy to that person in their broken state while also not condoning the behaviour but tell him/her the truth.

The Psalmist proclaims “mercy and truth shall embrace” (Psalm 85: 10). What happens when they do meet together? Do they recognize one another as coming from the same source? Do they embrace one another and work together in search of what is good and right, beautiful, unites and just? Or do they cancel one another out, as some suggest, or exist in some competitive hierarchy where truth is acknowledged as good but mercy is better, preferable, presumed to be even “more Christian.”?

Mercy and truth are sometimes presented as an “either/or” proposition, as if they are competing. In the Catholic Church, the same type of argument is often made regarding what the Church asks and requires of Catholics in her law and policy versus what is perceived as “more pastoral.” How can something truly “pastoral” or “merciful” not flow from what we profess and believe?

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The word “mercy” appears as many as 276 times in the Bible, depending upon what translation is used; the word “truth” is used almost as many times. In the Gospels, there are numerous accounts of the Lord Jesus – who revealed himself as “the truth (John 14: 6)” – extending mercy to those who crossed his path. The Gospel story of the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8: 1-11) seems one of the narratives that best highlights how “mercy and truth embrace.” Here, an angry mob lead by the Scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had committed and was caught in adultery, and Jesus’ response reveals a perfect balance of truth and mercy. The law of Moses required that such a woman should be stoned to death. The Lord Jesus knew the law and its demands and was well aware that those leaders were testing him. He remained quiet in the face of their accusation and test, bent down to write something on the ground, and became the focus of their persistence. He stood up, glanced around at the crowd and uttered his famous words, “Let the one without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.” No stones were lifted, the crowd dispersed and in that moment, in the encounter of the Lord Jesus with this sinful woman, mercy and truth met. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reportedly once said, “It’s not enough to help hurting people; you must also stop the things that hurt them”; in the Bible, we call this the balance of truth and mercy. In fact, the Lord Jesus looked at her and asked, “Has no one condemned you?” “No one, Lord,” she answered. “Neither do I condemn you.” “Go. From now on, sin no more (John 8: 10-11).”

God has always expected similar, make mercy and truth to meet together. God commands that His followers show mercy by helping wounded or hurting people (cfr. Lam.3:22-23; Prov.14:21; Lk6:36-37; Mt.5:7; 9:13; 18:33; 25:31-46; James 2:13; Ps.40:11-12; Ps.23:6), yet He also requires that they expose the things that hurt them, and offer fraternal correction and admonishment (Cfr. Prov.6:23; Ps.15:1-3; 34:13; 43:3; Zechariah 8:16; Mt.18:15-17; Prov.12:17; Gal.6:1; 2Thess.3:15; 2Tim 3:16-17; Jn. 8:32; 17:17-19; 1Jn.3:18; Ex.20:16; Eph.4:15, 25), so they can be led to the truth. As humans, this requires supernatural balance, because there are ditches on both sides of the road if you err to the extreme of either side. To be all merciful and yet refuse to speak the truth is like building a hospital at the bottom of a cliff without also installing a guardrail at the top. Certainly, you had help plenty of wounded or hurting people, but you would stop no one from falling off. To be all truthful and yet lack mercy would be like installing a guardrail without also building the hospital. You would definitely prevent a lot people from hurting themselves, but you would have no way to help those who fall.

Human nature is to err to the extreme of either side of truth or mercy – to be all one and very little (or none) of the other. It’s just hardwired into us because of sin. But Jesus’ life clearly shows we that can – and must – be both.

Although Jewish law called for stoning as the punishment for infidelity, Jesus had mercy and removed the punishment for the woman’s sin. Yet He still upheld the truth that her actions were indeed sinful. He protected the person while upholding the principle. Because Jesus was filled with mercy for this woman He protected her life. Yet He also spoke the truth to her about her lifestyle.

In today's culture, people have been led to believe that rejecting someone's lifestyle is a rejection of them as a person. To tell a person that his/her practices of adultery is evil is considered rejecting, indeed not loving him/her as person. To tell a person who practices homosexuality that his behaviour is wrong is interpreted as rejecting, discriminating him/her as a person; to caution (rather than covering up) a consecrated person or a clergy man provably involved in the practice of a sexual relationship contradictory to his/her chosen state of life is wrong, or to denounce that his/her stealing or embezzling the community's fund is evil, is construed as rejecting and not wanting him/her well as a person. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus didn't reject people, nor should we.

But embracing a "life of sin" (as Jesus puts it) by not speaking the truth about it is also not fully following Jesus. Jesus didn't abandon the truth, nor should we. Telling the truth in love is itself an act of mercy, just as to show mercy to neighbour is an expression of the truth of the Jesus's Gospel and of nature of God who is love and mercy (Eph.2:4-8). Jesus helped wounded people, yet He also exposed the things that hurt them. And, as a result, some people despised Him for it. Jesus said, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify that its works are evil" (Jn. 7:7).

The same thing happens today, so it's all right to be hated for speaking the truth. It happened to Jesus - it will happen to us. But what is not all right is to be hated for showing no mercy. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy" (James 2:13a). One Facebook message puts it in this way:

Mercy without Truth is a cheerleader without a team.

Truth without Mercy is surgery without anesthesia.

Truth without Mercy is mean and

Mercy without Truth is meaningless.

We need both of them.

We need to be kind in what we say but,

we need to speak the truth.

Our lives should be characterized by a deep desire to help wounded people while also stopping the things that hurt them. And the only way to perfectly balance the two is to walk in the Spirit of God and not the flesh. "I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want (Galatians 5:16-17). Although our flesh pull us consistently to err to the extreme of either side, we must be a people of the Spirit, walking in the balance of truth and mercy. This is one way we can help wounded or hurting people today while also stopping the things that hurt them.

So, what is the glue that brings these two apparently opposite values - mercy and truth - together and makes them dance together so beautifully? The answer is unconditional love. This is the same love that God showed for us when He sent His Son to die on the cross. While we were still sinners in opposition to

God, and in no way deserving of His mercy, He showed it to us anyway. That is the reason that Jesus could look at Peter and call him satan, or look at the Pharisees and call them vipers, and be doing it out of complete love. He knew that He had been sent to save them, and His motive with every single word was 100% love for them and a desire to see them set free.

It is the same love that he shows to the woman brought to him so as to be stoned to death. Notice that the law was clear. The Lord Jesus did not deny the truth of its demands nor did he change the "law." Notice, too, that the aforementioned adulterous woman did not deny the truth of the accusation and asked for nothing. She did not earn forgiveness or even ask for it. The Lord Jesus, however, did not condemn her as he confronted the truth of her situation. The Lord Jesus showed her mercy. And then he sent her on her way, without compromise, reminding her to follow truth, to act in truth. "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them around thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart" (Proverbs 3:3).

What does this mean for us? It means that the condition of our heart is one of the most important elements of our own dance with mercy and truth. If our heart is in the right place, then we can speak truth to others mercifully and out of love, perhaps persistently. If our heart is in the wrong place, we could be speaking the truth with the wrong motives, such as a desire to manipulate and control, humiliate and for self-aggrandizement. So, each one today may take a few minutes to stop and ask God where his heart is. Ask God to help us fix our heart, our gaze in Christ, so that we not only have the right motives and attitudes but also receive the strength to live truth and mercy in every sphere of relationships, actions and situations.

5. TRUTH AND MERCY MEET IN ACTIONS AND SITUATIONS

The Holy Year of Mercy concluded as a celebration. The liturgical Season of Lent comes and goes. We conclude the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Indeed, at the end of each celebration of the Holy Mass where we acknowledge our sins and confess them to Almighty God and to our brothers and sisters, listen the Word of God and are nourished by the Eucharist, we hear the priest by saying to us (according to one of the formulas): "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We are always offered the opportunity for a new beginning, for a new life. We make resolve. With hope, we begin again. We have with new opportunities and occasions for growth.

However, there challenging call to live truth in mercy, to witness to mercy in truth, continues. The witness to mercy and truth is a multifaceted and on-going commitment, expressed in words and action, with freedom and faithfulness in Christ in different spheres of our lives. Here, rather than examining one or two selected and specific practical cases or situations in some areas of consecrated life where truth and mercy shall meet or should unite -- and that could be another interesting area of studies, with all the information and discernment that would need to be involved -- , I wish here to briefly list some vital spheres or settings of life where Christians

must strive to ensure that truth and mercy meet, not opposed, if we want to love and serve God and our neighbour. Surely, truth and mercy shall meet in our pastoral mission and ministry. There are, as a matter of fact, many particular environments and situations where truth and mercy meet or shall meet, even in the face of serious crisis, difficulties and at times pains and sufferings. Truth and mercy shall meet in our own encounter with the Lord Jesus and in our personal witness and style of life. Truth and mercy shall meet in our schools and other educational institutions. Truth and mercy they shall meet in marriage and family life when they married couple live in unity and happiness, or educate their children or even when they experience the situations of, say, separations, divorce, divorce and remarriage, polygamy, or have members with homosexual tendency. Truth and mercy shall meet in the life and mission of consecrated life, and as their members strive to live the exigencies of: religious vows, a fraternal life in common, the formation of candidates, an administration (governance), and any apostolate within the Institute. Truth and mercy shall meet in the administration of the sacrament of reconciliation; to this sphere, too, applies the exhortation to “believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” Truth and mercy shall meet in the education of students, and in the medical and health care services and institutions; truth and mercy shall meet in the legal and judiciary practices, as well as in other workplaces and environments. Truth and mercy shall embrace, because they remain a basis of the justice, healing and peace so much need and desired in our family, in religious communities and institutes, in the parish communities, places of work, and in the Church as well as in the society today.

CONCLUSION

This reflection started with the recognition that the theme of “mercy” and “truth” has featured prominently in recent times in the debates and polemics surrounding the pastoral care. The discussion is frequently around the pastoral care that should be given to wounded families, and to persons in the existential peripheries of church and society. This issue is not less present and relevant in Consecrated life and in other spheres of Christian life. However, as was noted, “mercy” and “truths” are sometimes presented as if one is pitted one against the other; “mercy” shown in pastoral care appeared as opposed to “doctrinal truths,” as an appeal to dilute ecclesiastical practice. The emphasis on the value and necessity of proclaiming “truth” is presented as to sometimes give the impression that its sustainers to care less, if at all, about the pastoral implications of the divine attribute and the virtue of mercy in specific practical situations that humans experience.

The paper, therefore, tried to explore the theme of *truth* and *mercy* in order to show that, if well understood, both are inseparably connected and complete each other. “*Truth* is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy,”⁶⁷ a message Pope Francis has reiterated on several occasion. The study invites the reader to

⁶⁷ Pope Francis, Twitter message, 8 Sept. 2017.

consider the full significance and the relationship between both values. Truth and mercy, which are attributes of God, converge in Christ, who taught them in words and action. Mercy and Truth meet in the Church, in the family, in the Consecrated life, and in every pastoral situations and spheres of Christian life.

Some implications or demands of the meaning “truth” and “mercy” were suggested, considering what Jesus and His Gospel teach us about mercy. Mercy is not merely an abstract and lofty doctrine: it has practical requirements in every sphere of life, in relationship with other persons, and in apostolate. Well known are the works of mercy. Everyone, especially consecrated persons, has the responsibility to bear witness to truth, that is, to communicate and defend truth, but also the need to acquire the necessary attitudes, dispositions and ways that are appropriate to communicate the truth.

In addition to raising awareness about the causes of some errors and the offenses against truth, the important question of the relation between truth and morality was touched upon, especially at it relates to the fundamental and recurrent issues of authority and tolerance, which are still relevant and hot-button issue today.

The persistent great challenge today is to overcome the dualist dangerous tendency to create an artificial and, at times, radical divorce between “faith” and “life”, “doctrine” and “pastoral practice”, “theology” and “pastoral”: in other words, a dichotomy between “truth” and “mercy” in pastoral mission and generally in evangelization. At both the level of reflection and of pastoral practice, an adequate understanding of truth and mercy must take both values into consideration and harmonize them and their particular demands in concrete cases, while pedagogically respecting the law of graduality in the growth and maturity of individuals. After all, from the mouth of the Lord Jesus who said the “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32) came also commanded that his followers should: “Be merciful, just as your father is merciful”(Lk. 6:36; cfr. Mt.5:7). The inclusive or integrating understanding of *mercy* and *truth* aims, not at dominion and control of persons and their consciences, but at the authentic and integral liberation and at Christian maturity of the whole persons, such as to be set free from the obscurity that leads people into errors and to various forms of slavery, manipulation and oppression and, on the other hand, to be faithful in Christ, that is stand firm in freedom for service (cfr.Gal.5).

The fear of even a radical and annihilating subjectivism and relativism that tyrannize and its sometimes intolerant and dictatorial tone ought not intimidate and compel the Christian to fall into the opposite extreme of a abstract, alienating and lifeless absolutism, with a rather arrogant and a cold and dry attitude that, notwithstanding its rhetoric, practically tends to asphyxiate human persons and divorce them from the God of unceasing love and mercy and, consequently, separate such persons from fellow humans and their

own concrete real life situations which is sometimes dramatic, agonizing.⁶⁸ Instead, the experience of the joy of consecrated life, like the joy of love, is obtainable when truth and mercy meet together.

Also, it is necessary to build on the Christian teachings and on a holistic African vision of life, human persons and its authentic values. On this basis, African theologians, pastors and consecrated persons can contribute to intensify and enrich Catholic efforts to promote and sustain a holistic or inclusive and balanced understanding of *truth and mercy*, as Christian evangelizer encounter persons and strive to address their particular pastoral situations. While emphasizing that theological and pastoral reflections in Nigeria need to draw from truly African and truly Christian roots, values and traditions, it is also pertinent and helpful to always keep in mind this Augustinian principle: "*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas* – that is, "unity in things that are essential, freedom in things that are doubtful, charity in all things."

Evidently, many are the teachings that the Church presented to us as the truths of the Catholic faith and morals. Theologically, there is an hierarchy of truths. Not all Catholic teachings have the same degree of doctrinal authority, value and weight; not all command an identical degree of obedience and assent of the faithful (as one can see LG,n.25; Formula of the *Profession of Faith*, 29/6/1998). Some of them are, indeed, difficult to hear and accept for some peoples. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Some of them are, indeed, difficult to follow and obey; they are crosses to bear. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Some of them run counter to popular opinion or prevailing social practices. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Luke tells us in his Gospel "there will always be temptations to sin" (Luke 17: 1). At the same time, we must remember the words of the Psalmist: "put your hope in the Lord because with the Lord there is mercy and unlimited forgiveness" (Psalm 130: 7). Truth is mercy that binds and obliges us.

The medieval philosophers and interpreters of the law already reminds that: "no one is bound to the impossible." Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, however, "with God, in God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19: 26). St. Paul reminds adds: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor.10:13) We should never abandon what is true simply because it is not easy, convenient or popular. In the Lord Jesus, all things are possible, mercy *and* truth are possible. The Holy Year of Mercy reminded, as does the Lenten Season and the Sacrament of Reconciliation we celebrate, that Christians are to put our faith, trust and hope in Christ, in his mercy, in his truth.

68 African scholars and decision-makers must avoid the risk of being entangled, again and almost forced, as it were, into unwittingly opting for either one or the other camp of the new kind of "cold-war"; this appears as a far-reaching ideological and, one may add, anthropological battle between supporters of contemporary "relativism" and "absolutism" movements in the world and in the Church.

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Noteworthy, also, is that the teaching of Lord Jesus Christ on mercy – and proclaimed by the Church -- is truth, it is message that engages all areas of our life, be it of married or celibate persons. And, as Ven. Lanteri puts it, “there is no heart that is invulnerable.”⁶⁹

In the Lord Jesus, mercy and truth meet together. In the Catholic Church that he established, mercy *and* truth embrace. “Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible.”⁷⁰ In our daily lives as Catholic Christians, as well as in our specific vocations, mercy *and* truth embrace. Truth and mercy meet together in Consecrated life, whether in the specific spheres of initial formation, community life, apostolic mission, administration (governance). This article has tried to highlight that everyone has the duty to communicate and defend the truth, a responsibility that is vital for the life and mission of Christians. For us, as Catholic Christians, truth always allows for mercy, not as a replacement, but as a consequence. And authentic mercy always includes and never denies truth. Thus, as Lord says, “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.” (Proverbs 3:3).

Let us, therefore, humbly and without fear acknowledge the necessity to stress God’s mercy so that, through an experience of that mercy, people would come to know God’s truth. And to tell the truth in love is itself an act of mercy. It is within that dyad of truth and mercy, closely interrelated, I suggest that we should read and absorb the rich teachings of the present pontificate of Pope Francis, especially on the pastoral mission of consecrated persons and of the clergy, on the pastoral care of family, on the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and on the poor and marginalized persons and people in the existential peripheries in the society and in the Church of our time.

69 Org,2262:T6,1.

70 Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et misera*, At the Conclusion Of The Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy (20/11/2016), n.1.