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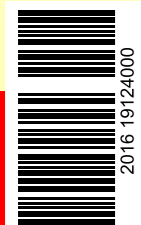


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THE VOICE

THE CHURCH AS A SIGN OF GOD'S MERCY IN THE WORLD

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**THE CHURCH
AS A SIGN OF
GOD'S MERCY
IN THE WORLD**



St. Leo Catholic Church

Ikeja, Lagos



Felicitates

with the Rector, Catholic Major Seminary of SS Peter & Paul,
Members of the Formation Team and Editorial Board of the



on the Publication of the 56th Edition

*May God continue to strengthen the faith
you are building amongst God's people. Amen*



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Editorial

More Mercy, Less Misery. Peace not War!

The prevalent culture rests, unjustifiably, on two false fundamentals.

The first is this: “if I disagree with someone’s lifestyle, I must fear or hate them”. The second is: “to love someone translates to being in agreement with everything they believe or do”. These are, clearly, outright fallacies. You do not have to compromise convictions to be compassionate.

Today, on account of these widespread misconceptions, we are confronted with an almost daily violent incidents borne out of misogyny, racism, ethnocentrism, and different shades and brands of phobia. When you switch on the television, log on to social media, or use the internet, you are immediately inundated with the steam of vitriol, and simply appalled by the degree of heart wrenching cases of hate, revenge and acrimony orchestrated in full public glare. This is pervasive and prevalent. Some on a national scale, others on a global level.

Before the world could process the Truck attack on French Riviera, Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray Catholic Church Paris was attacked and the elderly parish priest killed. While still under the shock, the ugly horror of the Stanford rape case, the massacre of the Orlando club, the Christmas massacre in Germany and so on, reared their ugly heads. On the Nigerian national scene, Boko haram that continues to cause mayhem on innocent people especially in northern Nigeria, the so-called Fulani herdsmen perpetuated untold misery on many in southern Nigeria, and now have moved their evil and malicious dealings, causing untold havoc on Christians living in southern Kaduna. And while I pen down this piece, the news of the clashes between some hausas and some yorubas in Ife and another between Igbo traders and hausas in Kaduna became headlines in the mass media. In most cases, these clashes



claim people’s lives. In all these, we see the devastating effects of hatred, acrimony and fear. Where indeed is our world heading to? How can we foil this self-annihilation?

The words of Pope Francis, in his Urbi et Orbi 2016 Easter message, provides a relief:

“before the spiritual and moral abysses of mankind, before the chasms that open up in hearts and provoke hatred and death, only an infinite mercy can bring us salvation. Only God who is mercy personified can fill those chasms with his love, prevent us from falling into them and help us to continue our journey together towards the land of freedom and life”.

The Church is called to manifest God’s redeeming mercy, to live it, to teach it and to encourage it. This is her mission, this is her mandate - to make concrete and sacramental the mercy of God to a world drifting away in hate and crime. She is, and must always be, a sign of this mercy to the world.

In this edition of the Voice magazine, we have taken up this discussion of the identity of the church as a sign of God’s mercy in the world. We seek to show the numerous ways God’s mercy reaches us through his church. In consequence, this edition of the Voice Magazine challenges us to cue into this mission as individuals and as an ecclesial community, using mercy as an instrument to save our world from

suffering and hate.

I bring you warm regards from the board, thanking you for the support these past years. As you go through the enriching articles featured in this edition of the Voice, I pray you experience psychological and spiritual healing, be filled with love and mercy, and unfold same to others. Happy reading



Umeh Benneth Chidiebere
Editor-in-Chief

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A couple of months into his pontificate, the Holy Father, Pope Francis in an interview published in the America Magazine on the 30th of September 2013, underscored the centrality of the service of mercy to the mission of the church. He said: “I see clearly that what the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm hearts of the faithful; she needs nearness and proximity (to her children). I dream of a church that is a mother and a shepherdess, the Church ministers must be merciful, taking responsibility for the people and accompanying them like the good Samaritan who washes, cleanses and raises up his neighbor. This is pure gospel.” Consequently, he declares the Church's Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016. And in the Bull of Indiction for the year of mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, he took the task of reminding all who have the responsibility for the care of God's people not to lose sight of the paramountcy of mercy in the ministry of Jesus and consequently, of the Church following Jesus' teaching in Mt 9:13, “Go and find out what this means: what I want is mercy, not sacrifice. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

It is important to say that mercy has always been at the heart of the gospel which was entrusted to the Church. It is not a new discovery of Pope Francis. He only draws our attention to pursue anew the central message of divine mercy in the Old and New testaments which cardinal Walter Kasper describes as being often forgotten and appears to be at the margins of the lexica and handbooks of dogmatic theology.

What does it mean to say that mercy is paramount in the mission of the Church? It simply means that mercy occupies the most important part in the mission of the Church. To be merciful means to be ready to forgive people and show them kindness. In Mt 5:23-24, Jesus asserts that, “if you are about to offer your gift at the altar and you

THE PARAMOUNTCY OF MERCY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH



OSHIOKE DAVID-JOHN

remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.” The Pope's *Misericordiae Vultus* presents God as a merciful Father as the parables devoted to mercy have shown. Another aspect of the Bull is for human beings to be merciful to one another.

All that is said above is an affirmation of the centrality of mercy in the mission of the Church. But what is the mission of the Church? In a nutshell, the mission of Christ is the mission of the Church. This is aptly captured in John 20:21 when Jesus affirms, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Here Jesus gave his mission to the Church. Mt 28:19 bears witness to this when Jesus says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples from all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” What is the meaning of the word “mission?” It is derived from the Latin word “*missio*”, which means “being sent.” It is about sending out people to accomplish a particular task. The mission of the Church finds its rightful meaning in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Therein, it is stated, “the Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of mission is to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son, in their Spirit of Love. (cf. no. 850). The mission of Christ is to bring all men and women back to God. This is what the mission of the Church is: to preach the Gospel to all nations,

peoples, races, colours, religions and languages. In their book, *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*, Brian Singer-Towns et al said that, "The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Good News that through Christ sin and death have been overcome and humanity's broken relationship with God has been restored." They further stated that, "The Church is the means God uses for fulfilling his plan because the people of the Church witness to Jesus Christ and his message. When Christians practice their love for one another and their compassion for those who are suffering and in need, they are doing so in the name of Christ. When they speak out for justice and advocate for moral issues, they are doing so for Jesus Christ." In addition, they affirmed that, "By practicing all the things that Jesus commanded—sacrificial love, forgiveness, prayer, the Eucharist, a just lifestyle, and so on—Christians are already experiencing the Kingdom of God here on earth." But at the apex of this mission is to preach the mercy of God to all men and women.

Mercy is of no mean standing in the mission of the Church. This is explicated by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19. Therein, Jesus declares publicly, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring Good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and to announce the Lord's year of Mercy. While the Church carries out Jesus' mission, she announces the Lord's year of mercy. The Church, from the

beginning has been dedicated to the mission of the Poor. In the Church, there is a Society called St. Vincent De Paul. Her work is to attend to the poor and the needy. This is outside the help that the ministers of God render to the poor in the society at different levels. This is seen when many poor people gather around Priests and Bishops during their office hours and any other time these people see them. The Society of St. Vincent De Paul takes care of the poor and the needy. Indeed all the structures of the church, societies and groups, all activities and engagements of the church must be driven and have their end in this very important identity of the church. We cannot



be said to be furthering the mission of the Christ and his gospel if we are deficient in mercy.

The sacredness of Mercy in the mission of the Church must be seen in her administration of the Sacraments. All of the different Sacraments beginning from Baptism to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are ways of showing God's mercy to his people. They must therefore be administered in a way that the aim is not obscured. We must not become too legalistic as to present these different actions as a burden to the people. The church must be a place of succor, relief and solace even for the most down trodden or the

perceived worst sinner.

Since the word "Church" is not just the physical structure but the assembly of people gathered together to praise and worship God, we are all called to show mercy to those around us. According to *Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 9, "in the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy." We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Father with two Sons (cf. Luke 15:1-32) ... Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of

the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true Children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardonning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians, it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus

who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (cf. Mt 5:7). As the Father loves, so do his Children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.

In all, to actually show that we are merciful to people, three things are involved: we must be patient with people no matter the level of frustration and disappointment; we must be humble irrespective of our positions and status in life; and we must learn how to forgive people no matter the enormity of their crimes.

Our unity as Nigeria is sacrosanct and must not be dampened or trampled upon.



AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS GRACE MOST
REV. DR. IGNATIUS KAIGAMA
ARCHBISHOP OF JOS

The President CBCN and RECWA

On Mercy and Forgiveness as Indispensable Tools for National Peace and Integration.

I sincerely was not sure I would be able to get Archbishop Kaigama to grant this interview. When I drafted his letter, requesting the Rector to sign it, I prayed he (the Rector) would not ask me how I intended to reach him because I did not have any idea of how to reach him. And when I went to Jos and did not meet him in town, I was almost certain the interview would not hold. Then, I called him, and this is what he said to me: “my son, I am awfully busy, but I will do something about it.” And that was it. The rest is what you have here, a chat with him on the topic: Mercy and Forgiveness as Indispensable Tools for National Peace and Integration. His Grace is a very busy person. That is clearly understandable. In addition to being the Chief Shepherd of the Metropolitan See of Jos, he is the president the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. And just recently, about a year ago, he was elected the President of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa. When I read his book, *Peace, not War*, I knew he was just the person for this topic. Below therefore are excerpts from the interview.

Your Grace, these recent weeks have seen continuous divisive events that continually cause a serious divide amongst ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria, and even

amongst races if we venture beyond our own shores. From the Boko Haram in the North, to the Militancy in the Middle Belt region, all the way to the IPOB in the East. So, the question that rises in the mind of an average Nigerian is: Is Unity a possibility in an ethno-religious dynamic society?

Unity is both theoretically and practically possible despite the serious divide amongst ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. With strong determination by our leaders, whether religious, political or traditional, we can live peacefully with one another. Nigeria is not the only country that is pluralistic in nature. There are many nations that have similar situations like Nigeria yet they are living peacefully. I think we can learn from them. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has a deep concern for unity, harmony and peaceful co-existence among the people for national development. We can live together devoid of rancour and savagery provided we explore civilized approaches in addressing real or perceived grievances. Former British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, for example, noted that Nigeria's incessant religious crises will end if the nation's politicians are ready to be leaders rather than politicians. Politics and religion should not constitute an essential component of our body politic, and no

religious platform should be used to feather political nests.

India, for example, is one country where we see relative unity without uniformity, and diversity without fragmentation. The people, though of many religions, races, cultures and traditions, live together without affecting each other's feeling and beliefs negatively. The Caucasoid (White), Mongoloid (Yellow) and Negroid (Black) races live in India with little tension. India has more than 2000 ethnic groups. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity are practiced freely in India. With the ethno-religious dynamism of India, they enjoy unity in diversity. We can also do it with determination and will power with God by our side. We have only 250 ethnic groups and only two major religions are practiced in Nigeria.

The Papal bull of Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, has been described by many as *ad rem*. Considering its counter cultural ideas and postulations. What are your thoughts on the document, and how it applies to our Nigerian Society?

“We can live together devoid of rancour and savagery provided we explore civilized approaches in addressing real or perceived grievances”

The Papal Bull of *Indiction*, *Misericordiae Vultus* is indeed apt and timely, and there is no

better time it could have come than now when we seek God's mercy and forgiveness. Here in our Nigerian context, we are still a country in distress. In every region of the country there is one problem or the other. Across the north, we have the marauding Fulani herdsmen now spreading across the south to contend with; in the South South, we have militancy in the Niger Delta, and agitations of Biafra in the South East. We have known the ravages of war, have been unkind to one another and unfaithful to God, our creator. This is the time to seek Jesus, "the face of the Father's mercy" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 1), who came not to call the righteous, but sinners (cf. Luke 5:32). The polarization of Nigerians, either along religious or denominational lines, and the over-emphasis of our differences, have had far reaching negative consequences that permeate and manifest in almost all facets of life. This portends a threat and danger to our national cohesion and remains a factor responsible for our recurring crises.

The document is very inspiring and handy in advocating for love, justice and peace in the world. The document is most relevant to the Nigerian situation with its Multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-party constitution. All these create tension. The document suggests that we close ranks and face challenges that are natural or man-made.

On Easter Sunday of this year, March 27, 2016, during the Pope's *Urbiet Orbi* (to the city and to the World) message after the Easter Mass at St. Peter's Square, he said and I quote: “Only Mercy can save the World”. Is Nigeria included? Can Mercy save our Country?

God's mercy has a universal scope, Nigeria inclusive. We, Nigerians, must show our readiness to cooperate with our merciful Father by being merciful ourselves. As a nation, we must be ready to address those issues bordering on injustice,

inequality and unfairness.

While we praise the government for fighting Boko Haram and diminishing their capabilities to thrive as a powerful terrorist organization, the same cannot be said of other areas. Sadly, insecurity is on the rise in other parts of the country, especially the Middle Belt and Niger Delta States. We learn of violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen in different farming communities around the country, the Niger Delta rebellion (*Avengers*) has reared back its ugly head, religious motivated murders of innocent citizens especially in northern Nigeria, kidnappings, assassinations, armed robberies, cultic and fetish practices, all leading to loss of lives. The Church tries to persuade the relevant authorities to pause and take action on emerging dangerous hate groups and communities. There are many groups like Boko Haram in their infancy. Nipping religious extremism and conditions that allow these groups to evolve in the bud will save society a lot of headache.

The world is sinking because of pressure from cruelty, indifference, selfishness and lack of forgiveness. Nigeria is not immune. We are witnesses to the gruesome killings by terrorists and unknown gunmen. We watch people dying of hunger and curable diseases without lending a helping hand. Selfishness is manifested in looting of public funds that has bankrupted Nigeria. Nigeria is in distress. But mercy can save our country.

Let those in public offices be merciful to Nigeria and Nigerians and appropriately distribute the allocated funds. Mercy is absent where people work and they are not paid or under paid. When people admit crime, and express their readiness to change and not to go back to their crime again, they should be granted amnesty.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, since his inception has been an outspoken and active reflection of Divine Mercy. In recent times, we see his warmth towards Muslims, especially refugees who have been displaced by War and strife. As President of the CBCN, how far has the Catholic Hierarchy in Nigeria gone in treading the steps of the Holy Father?

The Catholic Church in Nigeria has been very visible and in the front line in issues and struggle to overcome the multi-dimensional challenges facing the country, in tandem with what the Holy Father has been harping on. To reach out and be in touch with every aspect of the nation, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has put in place a functional Secretariat, with four departments and a directorate of Communication.

The Dialogue and Inter-religious department of the CBCN has initiated and facilitated interactive sessions with Muslims, apart from the ones organized by individual dioceses especially in the northern part of Nigeria. We can happily say that because of these cordial interactions with our Muslim brothers and sisters, there is a growing understanding among the leaders, women and youths of both faiths. The Catholic Church is an ardent believer in dialogue and reconciliation, and this we have emphasized at each of our meetings. The Boko Haram crisis has been a great source of concern to us. Thousands have been killed, millions displaced and inter-religious tension heightened. Rather than curse the darkness, the CBCN has lighted a candle of hope. Our Churches have played hosts to thousands of internally displaced persons, looking after them as best as we can irrespective of religious or ethnic differences. Many of the beneficiaries were Muslims who

crowded the Catholic Cathedral grounds in Yola and Maiduguri to receive humanitarian help contributed by Catholics in Nigeria. The Bishops of Maiduguri and Yola who are closer to the epicenter of this crisis have been together with their priests present to the displaced persons, praying for them, consoling them and supporting them materially. The CBCN sent a delegation of Bishops and priests to Cameroun to bring relief to the thousands of Nigerians who escaped to that country. Even now there are two or three priests of the Diocese of Maiduguri who are residing in the camps with the refugees in Cameroun, providing pastoral services for the people. The very kind and humane gestures of Pope Francis are an encouragement to the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, motivating us to transcend religious boundaries to do all that is good and noble for the good of humanity.

Through our administrative organs in the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has issued communiqués addressing national concerns. In addition, prayers have been composed and National prayer events also organized to pray for the country. In the past, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have visited the presidency to discuss the harsh economic situation where workers in many States do not receive regular salaries; many pensioners go for months without their pensions, while so many self-employed and non-employed persons and family dependents are struggling to make ends meet.

How can these values of Mercy and Forgiveness be practically applied by secessionists in the East; the Militancy in the Niger Delta, towards the attainment of a Unified Nigeria?

Despite the continuous divisive events ravaging the country, the Unity of Nigeria cannot be compromised. Despite the mind-boggling activities of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and the secessionists, militants and Boko Haram, we are hopeful that one day we shall sheath our sword, forget our differences and enjoy unity in diversity, that is, unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.

Our unity as Nigeria is sacrosanct and must not be dampened or trampled upon. There are constitutional procedures through which anybody who is aggrieved should follow to address such grievances. In Nigeria, when people are indicted, they make recourse to their ethnic groups, religion, party and the courts of law. People should make recourse to their hearts instead of the aforementioned. Ethnic, religious, or party courts of law may vindicate us, but we are still not free because our hearts are heavy. Let our sin speak to us and move us to conversion.

Pope Francis in the Bull of indiction for the jubilee year of Mercy powerfully appeals against organized violence and those who are advocates and accomplices, insisting that during the Holy year, there must be true conversion. "This is the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched when confronted with evil deeds, even in the face of serious crimes. It is the time to listen to the cry of innocent people who are deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings, and even their lives. To stick to the way of evil will only leave one deluded and sad. People should accept the invitation to conversion and submit themselves to justice.

The need of Mercy and Forgiveness, as a panacea to disunity in Nigeria is a largely invaluable movement.

However, do you think it should be a creed limited to the Christian World view?

Mercy and forgiveness are words that are used interchangeably. They are both generous responses to wrongdoing. Mercy is seen as a disposition to dispense forgiveness or to show great compassion. It is the ability to pardon or forgive something of someone that is seen as unforgiveable by others on a subject who deserves just punishment or discipline, the dispensing of leniency or the compassionate treatment of someone that does not deserve such treatment. In other words, mercy is what is withheld which they deserve. What they deserve they do not get.

Forgiveness, on the other hand represents a decision not to do what instinct and passion permit. It answers hate with a refusal to hate, animosity with generosity. It is the refusal to be defined by circumstances, it represents our ability to change course, reframe the narrative of the past and create an unexpected set of possibilities for the future. It is acknowledging that the past is past and must not be allowed to cast its shadow over the future, a realization that one has the power to choose an alternative response to revenge and violence.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, "Forgiveness means

abandoning your right to

pay back that perpetrator [wrongdoer] in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim." In other words, when we forgive someone, we are giving up the chance to take revenge on them with violence; but by giving this up, we are actually freeing ourselves.

In the Christian Scriptures, we see a litany of stories of people who received the mercy and forgiveness of God. The Scriptures are full of examples of the father of love and compassion who does not keep record of our sins but asks us to forgive seventy times seven times (Mt. 18:22); the one who overlooked the scandalous lives of men and women unacceptable to society but welcomed by him as in the call of Matthew (Mt. 9:9), or Zacchaeus, (Lk.19:1ff), the one who ate with sinners (Mt. 9:11), or allowed the woman with a bad name and reputation to anoint him and kiss his feet (Lk. 7: 36ff).

The Quran, as well, recounts stories and episodes of God's mercy. Those conversant with the Quran would note that 113 of its 114 chapters begin with the pronouncement of God's limitless mercy and beneficence. In fact, 'forgiveness' and 'mercy' are mentioned roughly 100 and 200 times respectively. Surah An-Nur 24:22 states that, "Let them pardon and overlook. Would you not love for Allah to forgive you? Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. Or when it says be merciful to others and you will receive mercy. Forgive others and Allah will forgive you (Sahih Muslim 2588).

This shows that the values of mercy and forgiveness should not be the monopoly of any creed, one group, people or religion. They are values that affect humanity. They belong

“Even now there are two or three priests of the Diocese of Maiduguri who are residing in the camps with the refugees in Cameroun, providing pastoral services for the people.”

to all humanity ready to accept it. Values which secure the protection of all and the safety of humanity. The values promoted by the UN are not in conflict by any standard to the value of mercy and forgiveness. The overall UN motto states by an Iranian poet Saadi, "The sons of Adam are limbs of each other, Having been created of one essence. When the calamity of time affects one limb the other limbs cannot remain at rest. If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human." This is a creed that should be spread into the veins of humanity and shared even by all natures being.

Who should play the primary roles in the dispensation of these values as a means to one Nigeria?

When we take a critical look at Nigeria, which is struggling

"If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human."

d, a country where a substantial percentage of office holders are far less competent and motivated towards doing good, than those they lead, a country whose growth has been arrested and stunted. We are paying for the insatiable and irresponsible appetite of some and with the wide oceans of inequality between public officers and the rest of Nigeria, violence and anger are the identity cards carried by the victims.

When it comes to playing of roles, to redress the situation, we must accept that each and every member of the society has some role to play. Some certainly more than the others. In the dispensation of values, leaders should take the lead as they influence the power dynamics and are the policy directors in shaping the direction of society. Traditional leaders, for example, shape the culture of communal behaviour; parents are key in shaping the minds of the younger ones, and help reorganize the kind of hegemony that continues to create a divisive world. Religious leaders, on their part, are ethical custodians of mercy and forgiveness and should also be at the forefront as forerunners and conscience of the society. They serve as primary dispensers of these values and should guide the others.

And so, when these values are trampled upon, the first custodians and duty bearers from the nucleus of the family to the blown society should be the first responders. These leaders should be able to meet the offended, even if they are the offended, and then others would learn. They should be the first to negotiate for peace even when tension is brewing; they should be the first to say that forgiveness and mercy would conquer always. Mercy and forgiveness free us all from the toxic bitterness of people who have hurt us; the

boss who did you wrong; the friend who betrayed you; the parent who mistreated you when you were younger; everyone, the living and the dead, and don't let the root of bitterness grow deeper and continue to contaminate your life. That was what freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

How can seminarians and priests play active roles in the propagation of Mercy and Forgiveness as means to save our country, unify Nigeria and save the world?

It is not in doubt that the two dominant religions in Africa, Islam and Christianity came to Africa as wounded enemies, and their battle for supremacy has not ended up to now. This hostile disposition has polarized them and created the fertile ground for unhealthy rivalry, feeling of superiority, competition for numerical growth and territorial expansion. Instead of cooperating to face issues of social development by living out concretely the life of love of God and neighbour, they are more concerned about how many adherents they have in their fold, how much territory they have acquired, and what strategies they should use to undermine, cripple and paralyze the growth of the other religion perceived as an enemy to be dealt with. Even within the religions themselves, factions emerge, fighting



themselves to the point of death! Religion, in some cases, has been used as a political tool or a weapon of violence and intimidation.

Seminarians and priests are bearers of God's mercy, called to heal others. Seminarians and priests by their training can play an active role by first of all witnessing with

their lives and then bringing potholes to be doors of mercy to those around them. In fact, the Church relies on them to make themselves available as the instruments of God's mercy to the wider society. Especially with the current war against corruption, more success would be made if ways and means are made for mercy for those who have derailed to repent and obtain God's mercy. With the faculties given to priests to absolve penitents some sins hitherto reserved for the bishops, this is an opportunity to regularize situations. It means they should be willing and ready to administer mercy and forgiveness as vessels of God's gracious gift. Seminarians, who are would be priests, and priests are the living personification of God's sacrament. Secondly, preaching this message at masses, is always the vital process of directing these messages into the hearts of men and women; thereby creating awareness and sensitizing people on the need to live daily by these values. The sacrament of confession is a permanent seat of God's mercy and forgiveness. The catechism classes too are ways in which these values could be extended. These lessons should be intensified, where young minds are nurtured and trained into the nature of Christ.



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on the Publication of the 56th Edition
May God continue to strengthen the faith
you are building amongst God's people. Amen

“ I am always conscious of the fact that nobody should suffer any discomfort because of the poor performance of my duty ”

INTERVIEW WITH HONORABLE JUSTICE MONICA DONGBAN-MENSEM

Presiding Justice Federal Court of
Appeal Ibadan Division

ON THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN MERCY AND JUSTICE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Socrates was acclaimed the wisest man that ever lived because he acknowledged his ignorance. Here is a woman, a legal giant who attributes her success to her awareness of her unworthiness to judge and stand for God the ultimate Judge. A woman who believes and recounts proudly instances when she turns to God for help in a legal case and miraculously, she comes out successful in degree that even amazes her.

Hon. Justice Monica Bolna'an Dongban-Mensem is the Presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal, Ibadan Division. She hails from Darok district of Shendam local Government area of Plateau State. She graduated from the ABU Zaria in 1979 and was called to Nigerian Bar in 1980. She did an LL.M with specialization in criminal and civil procedure law, taxation and international public finance as well as public international law. She got her post-graduate diploma at the institute of advanced legal studies, University of London, Russel square London, WC1B5DR in 1990 specializing in Legislative Drafting, Constitutional and Administrative Law and international commercial transactions. She is an accomplished legal luminary, the first female Magistrate in Plateau State and the first female in the whole of Plateau State and neighboring states like Benue, Nasarawa and Kaduna to rise to the seat of the Appellate Court. She climbed steadily on the different rungs of the bench ladder from Registrar of the High Court, Magistrate of various grades up to Chief Magistrate, Deputy Chief Registrar, Superior Courts and Protocol Affairs, Judge High Court of Justice and her present position as the Presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal, Ibadan division. She is a lecturer and a very devout woman, strong-willed and compassionate. After her son was abandoned by a

reckless and insensitive hit and run driver, she has continuously campaigned for consciousness and sanity for road users through her foundation launched in memory of her late son, Kwapda's Road Safety Demand (KRSD), a non-governmental organization committed to road safety campaign.

In this interview, she bears her mind on the interplay between mercy and justice especially in the legal system.

The Voice: Is there a provision for the exercise of mercy within the law? Can Mercy coexist with forms of legal justice?

P. J. Mensem: Mercy is a human concept that applies in all situations, and law is made by man for man even though we have divine laws. The concept of mercy and Justice are not just abstract ideas. When you talk of justice, you are talking of a legal system which has a body of laws, rules and regulations to guide the application of these laws and the users. Both the users and the applicants are actually human beings subject to the law and where we fall short of the law is when the legal system comes in and then the issue of justice is applied. Though in Nigeria where we have several legal systems and laws which could provide for the regulation of the conduct of the people, most especially when crime is involved, that is when one can start talking of mercy. We have the penal laws which have specific punishment for identified crimes. And if you take for instance, murder cases, where a murder is established, armed robbery and now kidnaping, the punishment is death. The judge does not have any



discussion in that. The best the judge can do is to ensure that all details are meticulously and fairly analyzed to avoid miscarriage of justice. This is where mercy comes in. In situation where the law provides that the judge uses his discretion, such judge should look at the matter and know how to justly apply mercy. I am talking practically and not jurisprudentially. There are some aspects of jurisprudence in the law and mercy and practice generally. To be practical, there is room for mercy even within the discharge of justice.

The Voice: Can mercy shown a criminal be just if it gives the criminal less punishment than he deserves; if the law treats his case differently from others like it?

P. J. Mensem: Every case in law is actually different. That is why sometimes people wonder whether courts are giving conflicting judgments. You know you give the sentence after hearing the evidence especially in the trial courts. Here we don't see witnesses; we only work on records unlike the trial court where the accused and the witnesses are seen. If one looks at the fact of the case, there are always peculiarities so that you cannot make a blanket sentence on all cases that are similar. But the details and facts of a case are what we follow to arrive at a particular judgment. So one cannot just make a plain statement that you

give equal sentence to the same offense because the offense may be the same in context, but the details normally differ, and it is the details that actually determine the outcome even at the point of prosecution. You know it is the police that carry out the investigation. When they investigate, they forward the files to the Ministry of Justice, to the office of the Attorney General who with his team of lawyers look at the facts and determine the kind of offense committed. Then they frame the charges before taking it to court; even though in the North and the South the procedures are a bit different. In the north, the magistrate or the court frames the charges, but in the south, the office of the Attorney General, (the Department of Director of Public prosecution) frames the charges, sometimes the facts that are presented to them determine what offenses to frame. Like in the case of armed robbery, it might seem to be arm robbery, but when the Attorney General looks into the matter properly and sees that certain elements are not available in the facts presented, for instance, the person must be armed, and all the sequence that follow, will now determine whether to charge the person for armed robbery punishable with death or arm robbery punishable with life imprisonment. And the court will take the evidence and determine which is the case. Ordinarily, a judge is able to convict an accused person for a lesser offense depending on the facts presented. In England, for instance, it could be said the case is not proven, but here we could convict for a lesser offense. For instance, if a man is prosecuted for murder punishable by death and the facts show that he actually did not have the intention to kill, maybe it was in self-defense but is such that he could have actually avoided the situation by one way or the other, the judge could consider giving a sentence for a lesser offence.

The Voice: If the role of the criminal justice system is deterrence, would not retributive justice be the ideal path? And does any concept of retributive justice condone leniency?

I would not say outright that the role of the criminal justice is retributive. There are different concepts of the purpose of punishment in the criminal justice system. We have retribution. Punishment is imposed on offenders to deter or discourage them from going back to that way, and sometimes you could impose punishment that could also deter others aspiring to crimes, if crime is something to aspire to. These are not very pronounced in our legal system,

but I think they are things we should try to encourage. Values, like community custody especially now that we are considering state police, we had all these systems before and they were very effective, so that people watch out for each other and families were conscious that they do not want to be associated with any negativity. So when a man is found guilty and convicted, he is sent back to the community to serve the sentence however that sentence is served. But the problem we are having in Nigeria is enforcement. We hardly have enough police to go round. So when you leave it to the community, the community can still find their way. They have their way of enforcing their norms, their rules and regulations. These are areas that our legislators could still look into in amending the laws to suit our present circumstances and ensure that the laws have meaning. We could consider restoration also, because presently if a man steals money and spends the money and is sent to prison, there is no satisfaction in that; but if he is made to work somewhere and to pay the money back, it might be more effective.

The Voice: There have always been cries from around the world, especially against systems or sentences viewed as excessive. A concrete example of such is the Bali Nine: a group of nine individuals executed by Indonesia amid public outcry and condemnation, just last year. More on the national scene is the sentencing of 54 soldiers to death by firing squad, last year, which was nonetheless commuted. However, this brings up the issue of the Death penalty; supposedly, the ultimate expression of justice without mercy. With your professional opinion, do you think the death penalty should be allowed or abolished?

P. J. Mensem: When I was appointed as the judge of the high court, one of my prayers was that I should never have occasion to pass death sentence, because I don't like it, and I believe life belongs to God. But when you look at the circumstances of our country now, the level of indiscretion and crime is such that it will be premature to take off the death sentence completely. It could be applied restrictively, but it should be there because throughout my service as the judge of the high court, God answered my prayer, I did not have to sentence anybody to death. but when I got to the court of appeal, I had to confirm death sentences, and I remember one that was particularly terrible. This was a case in the East. At the time, I was in Enugu division and there was a little quarrel.

Somebody wanted to do something and someone else said no, you cannot do it. And this group of young men got together, got hold of this man and pulled and thoroughly beat him through the village and killed him and hung his dead body on a tree and reported he hanged himself. Well, someone actually followed them from a distance until he saw where they hung him, of course, he went into hiding too because he was also afraid for his life. And when the fact of the man missing became public, and women were whispering, the police came in. Then the man came up and gave his evidence. What did the man do? Ordinary argument! Like someone said, life is very cheap in Nigeria. People feel they can just kill. This borders me. Look at what happened in Lagos recently; a young man was killed and burnt. There should be provisions to instill some fear in the heart of people. Left for me, life belongs to God but law is also

“If a man steals money and spends the money and is sent to prison, there is no satisfaction in that; but if he is made to work somewhere and to pay the money back, it might be more effective”

God's creation. So, I think death sentence should still be there, but we should be very slow in applying it unless the facts are really so compelling.

The Voice: With respect to the Justice System, does a “plea for mercy” mean “a plea for acquittal”? I ask this because in our everyday use of language, having mercy on someone for “hitting” your car is the same as letting him go without any charge or responsibilities. Is such definition of mercy found in the legal register?

P. J. Mensem: I will say no outright and explain. A plea for mercy in law is an indication that the person has accepted his guilt, meaning yes, I committed this offence, but please be lenient in punishing me. Of course, when people are appealing for mercy, if you acquit them completely, they would not mind, but within the confine of the demands of the law, you don't acquit completely. Justice is a three sided sword, you have justice for the person who commits the offense, you have justice for the victim and you have justice for the society whose law is broken. In law

when a person makes a plea for mercy, he pleads for a milder punishment. But if serious injury has not been done and the other party is disposed to forgiving, the person could get a lesser sanction. But the law is not about forgiveness or the disposition of the other party. Some crimes are handled by the state. For instance, when there is accident, it is the state that prosecutes the driver, the family or relatives can only decide to give or not give witness, but they do not have power within the law to forgive the driver in case of reckless driving.

The Voice: The Presidential pardon is a symbolic constitutional act of mercy. Is there a process to it or criteria to merit it? And, does it extend to all crimes?

P. J. Mensem: Strictly speaking, the presidential pardon can be extended to all forms of crimes depending on

“I take my work seriously and I know that as a human being, I am totally incompetent to pass judgment on any fellow human being. I know that God alone is the perfect judge, and therefore I seek guidance and knowledge from God in all matters”

the circumstances, but the president doesn't just walk into the prison yard and say he wants to release some people. It is the prison authority that is charged with the responsibility of managing the prisoners. They determine those to be released by way of observing their conduct, remorsefulness of the prisoner, how much they have been reformed. And some people might not have committed the offense at all. There is a committee that is set up. There are NGOs also that go to prisons, and they relate with some of these prisoners and they see their conducts and they recommend the review of their cases. So, the president, the governors, the chief justice of Nigeria, all of these people have their powers at limited levels to go to prison and consider recommendation for the total pardon of some offenders.

The Voice: Going through your profile, one thing cuts across and it is very significant to this interaction. That you are very uncompromising but compassionate woman. How have you been able to carry out your duty of dispensing justice and at the same time being compassionate?

As a compassionate person, that is exhibited in the way I approach my work. I take my work seriously and I know that as a human being, I am totally incompetent to pass judgment on any fellow human being. I know that God alone is the perfect judge, and therefore I seek guidance and knowledge from God in all matters. I do not take any case that comes before me for granted. That is where I apply my compassion and I try to do my best so that I will not perform my duty in a rush or rash manner. I am always conscious of the fact that nobody should suffer any discomfort because of the poor performance of my duty. Then when it comes to applying the law, when there is room for compassion, I apply it as much as possible. Where I have discretion to be lenient, I try to take advantage of that. Where I don't have discretion, then I try to ensure that all that is required to be done by the law is done so that humanly possible, we do not question or doubt whether what I have done is wrong. It is a tough duty because what comes to me in my position as a judge is something that has been acted upon by different people before it comes to me. But my consolation is that after me, there is the supreme court to then review what I have done but at my level, I try my best to ensure that I do not cause pain to anybody who does not deserve to suffer that pain.

The Voice: You mentioned a boy that was burnt in Lagos based on jungle justice. There is prevalence of jungle justice today. People think that the justice system is not doing enough and take laws into their hands. Do you consider this as a weakness or failure in the justice system?

Indeed, it is becoming prevalent but I will always want to say that before you accuse someone, accuse yourself first. Nobody has the right to take law into their hands no matter what. And then if you look at the system, I do not have statistics, but I doubt that we have sufficient security to go round all of us. I think the main thing is that we pay lip service to religion and our faith. People are so eager to take laws into their hands and then go all out to apply so much force on fellow human beings. Sometimes, even to kill a rat is not easy, most especially when you see it struggling for life, and then you kill a human being whom you have no authority or power over. Of all the scientific experiments so far, no body has been able to give life. No matter how poor our legal system may be, we should not be eager to take life away. The legal system is there to administer justice, and if one is not satisfied with the judgment of a particular court, he could take it to a higher court, but jungle justice will only cause more troubles as it is

said, an eye for an eye will leave everybody blind. There is no justice at all in what is called jungle justice. Meanwhile, there is no doubt that our justice system can be better.

I can't quarrel with the people that are discontented with the performance of our law enforcement agencies. I sympathize with them, because maybe they are acting out of ignorance, and for our law enforcement agencies, I think we don't really know how much, or how well equipped they are to carry out the enormous duty they have of protecting us. Sometimes too, we Nigerians, and the people that surround the unfortunate circumstances, do not act, Nigerians like to say that they are minding their business. You cannot mind your business where a life is involved. Most of us are religious people, yet there is not even one person who could condemn such acts, or say 'hey look, slow down.' The moment anything happens, people are willing to keep tyres ready and throw around the neck of anybody that they feel is a miscreant in the society. Some of us are too violent and we don't have that patience and that peace that comes with the true worship of God. Look at our Lord Jesus Christ, you can see how patient he is with us. Even on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who persecuted him and he committed the thief into paradise. I try to take this literally because there should be no limit to mercy in any person, in my individual existence; I think that 70 x 7 is even important. You have nothing else to do than sit down and count the number of times someone offends you. We are all God's creation and all that he did was good, He fed the hungry, He enlightened the ignorant. He raised the dead. No one went to Christ and went away empty handed except those who came with an ulterior motive even at that they were educated. In spite of all these, he was crucified. Sometimes, I try to stretch my hands the way Jesus Christ was hung. I see I cannot even endure the pain, because it is very painful, and then Christ still forgives. And then He died and went to hell to bring out those who were condemned. If we look at that, even though you are not a Christian, when you look at the story of Jesus Christ, in what manner you are as a person, just think of applying those principles to our daily existence, you will see that God is really merciful and in spite of all these, some of us are still bad. We have enough ample example to be humane and kind and accommodating.

Thank you very much my lord for granting us this opportunity. We are very grateful.

The Rector, Formators, Staff and Seminarians of
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Pope Francis and the Cultural Revolution of Mercy:

A commentary on the Apostolic Letter,
Misericordia et Misera, of the Holy Father Francis



Anumudu Henry

At this time, in human history, when a true display and manifestation of our shared humanity is crucial, the extended human community suffers from a general decline in authentic compassion. We are continuously inundated by the cries of men and women agonizing each day from wounds inflicted by man-made devices. Guns, the flying of shattered debris, and shrapnel piercing the mortal frame has become the sole-reality of majority of our brothers and sisters in many clans of the world. Sadly, the constant call of the name of God is couched, almost reverently, at the root of these tribulations - but with a reverence stripped of every divine attribute, and even of human value. Additionally, this war is not limited to battles against the corporeal, but also extends to a fight for the souls of men. The latter is grievous, for it is a cloaked assault under the guise of tolerance and compassion. This is why in the opening sentence of this article - I appended compassion with the prefix: authentic.

Thus, it is upon this back-drop that I make my brief commentary on the Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et Misera* of the Supreme Pontiff Francis.

Pope Francis begins his letter, interweaving the delicate relationship between love and mercy - which he surmised as "mercy of love" - the ideal recipe of authentic Christian compassion. And it is this compassion that the Church must teach and embody; a compassion that does not make hypocritical judgements over the sinner, nor seek to deride the reprobate. "Mercy cannot become a

parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence". The Church ought to be a refuge for sinners, and not a dwelling for self-righteous indignation. Those who have strayed should find amongst the people of God, an unconquerable hopefulness that uplifts the hearts and minds of the faithful to a new life in Christ Jesus. The repentant sinner should always find forgiveness in the Church of Christ. For "forgiveness is the most visible sign of the Father's love, which Jesus sought to reveal by his entire life". Nothing is excluded from God's mercy; therefore, any who identifies with Christ does not possess the right to make forgiveness conditional.

Sometimes we make mistakes, as we must, grave or mild, but then we realize these mistakes and seek reconciliation. We attain forgiveness from God, all the time; but we are never assured of the compassion of our fellow men. All who live and breathe are testimonies to the dreadful feeling that each of; and the simultaneous cry of wrath we expect from the next man. And our expectations are almost always justified. Beyond the judgment and vindication, we just desire understanding - a shoulder to lean on. We know our faults - we accept our sins - please grant us compassion then; I plead with all who withhold compassion when compassion is due, on behalf of all sinners, who accept the filth of sin and the purity of righteousness - to both categories, you the reader have a part. "The experience of mercy brings joy"; may we never rob others of this joy, which has its source in the love of God. "The profound sense of emptiness felt by so many people can be overcome by the hope that we

bear in our hearts and by the joy it gives". Therefore, we ought to cultivate a culture that births compassion in its fullness. To this end, Pope Francis calls for a pastoral conversion, one shaped daily by the renewing force of mercy. All Christians, hence, must actively be conscious that "in the sacramental life, mercy is granted us in abundance" and that "the bible is the great story of the marvels of God's mercy".

Addressing all priests, the pontiff iterates that "Priests ought not to act in ways that contradict the mercy penitents seek. The sacrament of reconciliation must regain its central place in Christian life", the Pope writes. At this point, it is stringent to quote Pope Francis' words in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy - *Misericordia et Vultus*. He challenges all priests to be concrete signs of the Father's mercy. He writes:

"Let us never forget that to be confessors means to participate in the very mission of Jesus to be a concrete sign of the constancy of Divine Love that pardons and saves. We priests have received the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and we are responsible for this. None of us wield power over this sacrament; rather, we are faithful servants of God's mercy through it. Every confessor must accept the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance...Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stand outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to him that his judgement is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the Fathers boundless mercy. May confessors not ask useless

questions, but like the father in the parable, interrupt the speech prepared ahead of time by the prodigal son, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy pouring from the heart of every penitent. In short, confessors are called to be a sign of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what”.

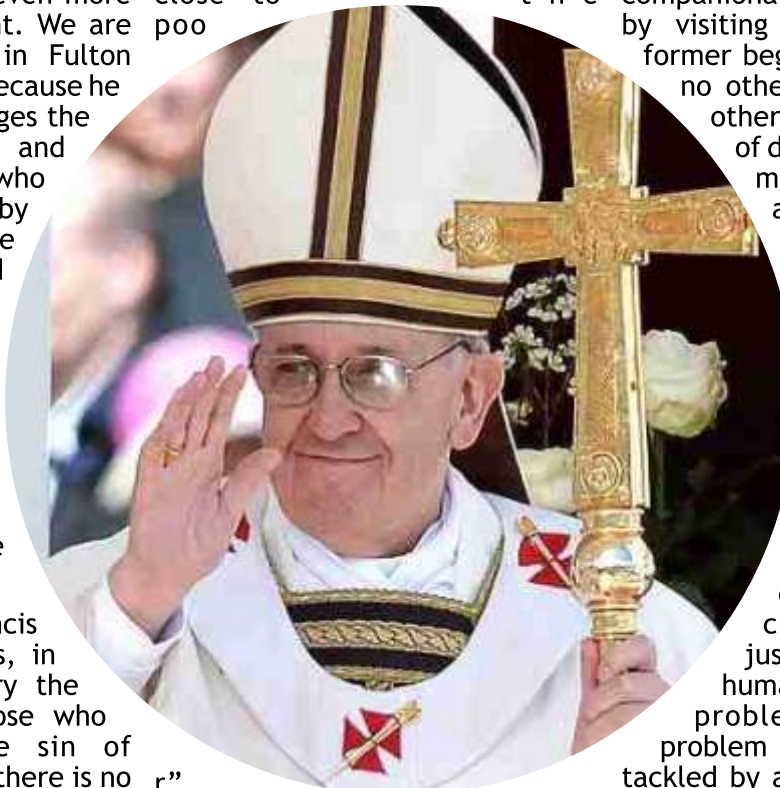
This quotation is a necessary part of a stream of consciousness in the Pontiff's counsel to priest. A fact to take home is this: We are the prodigal son, priests and laymen, we have been on a long exhausting journey, rich with challenges - even ripe with more. A journey where we have fallen even more than we can ever count. We are the elder son, who, in Fulton Sheen's words, 'sinned because he was too good'. Who judges the sinner, resists mercy, and murmurs against those who have been embraced by the merciful love of the Father. But beyond these, we are called to be the Father. This is our mission: to be merciful as the heavenly father is merciful; to be vessels of God's abiding grace full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.

Therefore, Pope Francis extended to all priests, in virtue of their ministry the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion. For there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking reconciliation. God's mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. Even regarding the unforgiveable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, Thomas Aquinas insists that the sin, when not understood as final impenitence, “does not close the way of forgiveness and healing to an all-powerful and merciful God, Who, sometimes, by a miracle, so to speak, restores spiritual health to men”.

“Mercy is inclusive”, according to Pope Francis, “and tends to

expand in a way that knows no limits”. Hence, he calls on humanity to advance a handcrafted work of mercy, which seeks new and newer expressions to the traditional works of mercy. We are all called to partake in the never ending spread of the endless love of God through a manifestation of the Father's merciful love to our neighbours and through closeness, affections and support.

Pope Francis invites us, to begin with him a cultural revolution of mercy, “shaped in assiduous prayer, in docility to the working of the Holy Spirit, in knowledge of the lives of the saints and in being close to



r”. A culture that “demands that we do not stand by and do nothing, that we banish indifference and hypocrisy, lest our plans and projects remain a dead letter”.

It beholds upon me, at this juncture to make few remarks on compassion stripped of reasonableness, and disjointed from its eternal fount - God - from whence it flows to the mind and will of men and women alike. What then becomes of a moral virtue, lost from its God? Is it moral still? Virtuous still? Or another deliberately formed human

emotional principle?

It is a rather curious irony - and lamentable - that a decline in authentic compassion led to an upshot in false compassion. A time when thousands are massacred in scores by their fellow humans, is also a time when movements are made and laws instituted to condone “mercy killings”, with thousands as victim. While a young mother in Baga, Maiduguri, is blinded with tears from the death of her 2-month-old mangled by the bullets of the dreaded Boko Haram; a mother in Long Beach, New York is fighting for right to kill her own child, in its second trimester. The latter seeks the right to be companionate to her unborn child by visiting death upon it; the former begs for compassion that no other child of hers, or of others, may suffer the agony of death. Never before has medicine enjoyed such advancements as now; never before has the end to human life been a matter of comfort, with regards to abortion; and palliation, with regards to euthanasia.

The cultivation of false sense of compassion, especially as a tool called up for the justification of unnatural human acts is a grave problem of our age. A problem which ought to be tackled by all men and women of goodwill through the propagation of mercy - a heartfelt sympathy for another's distress, impelling us to succour him/her if we can. Let us move beyond superficial pity, to authentic compassion which gives a helping hand, and also seek to move beyond misery by elevating it, partaking in it and offering it for a higher purpose. For only then can we reflect in our lives, manifest to others the Loving Mercy of the Heavenly Father. Only then can it be said: We have begun a cultural revolution of Mercy.

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,
THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY:
A REFLECTION ON MATTHEW 5:7
(The centrality of the 5th beatitude)**



Rev. Fr Paschal Aguinam

INTRODUCTION:

By its prefatory status in the first and longest of the five discourses of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Matthew, the beatitudes may well be regarded as a condensed charter of the Kingdom of heaven. It appears as a code of conduct for all those desirous of partaking in the divine regime announced and inaugurated by the life and ministry of Jesus. Its setting on the mountain top seems deliberately intended to ascribe to it some legislative character in the same style as Moses' reception of the Law on Mount Sinai. The poetic presentation of the beatitude gives it an even more sublime character. In its constant repetition of blessed (*μακάριος*, transcendent happiness, inner satisfaction), the pericope outlines a series of conditions that are meant to produce some happy results.

What is however striking at a first reading of the text is the apparent mismatch in some of the beatitudes; between the given conditions, their results and the promised blessedness. We may wonder, for example, why mourners or the poor in spirit are to be considered happy or how meekness qualifies one to inherit the land. Admittedly, the beatitudes express spiritual realities and must not be taken at face value. It is however the task of Christians, and theologians in particular, to be able to give an explanation for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). It is in this regard that the present article seeks to study the fifth beatitude in which it discerns the key to accessing the intelligence contained in the beatitudes as a whole and a means to a better understanding of this quintessential teaching of Jesus.

Firstly, it is to be noted that of all the beatitudes, the one on mercy, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy", comes to us as quite clear and

logical. We are able to perceive in it the balancing out of the condition of blessedness and the result thereof; like you give mercy, you get mercy. The passage from cause to effect is direct; we can easily make the connection and understand why it is considered blessed to be merciful. The simplicity of this beatitude therefore makes it a valuable factor in understanding the other beatitudes given that our reasoning ordinarily moves from the less complicated to the more complicated.

But perhaps more important to the exegesis of the text is the median situation of this beatitude of mercy. It comes fifth in a succession of nine declarations of blessedness pronounced by Jesus in Mat. 5:3-12. The four preceding beatitudes present the kind of attitude that the ideal disciple of the kingdom is meant to possess while the four succeeding beatitudes depict the concrete engagement of the disciple with the world around him. This distinction is made clearer in the way both blocks begin. On the one hand, we have Blessed are the poor in spirit (5:3) and on the other hand we have Blessed are the pure in heart (5:8). While spirit in Jewish thought represents the interior immaterial part of the human personality, the heart is a more active principle being regarded as the seat of volition. The Blessed are the poor in spirit therefore introduces a series of beatitude that portrays the inner disposition of the disciple, and the Blessed are the pure in heart announces the beatitudes concerning the disciple's involvement in the world.

Also interesting to note is the observation that elements of the first block are alluded to in the second block as if to suggest that the interior dispositions of the disciple ought to translate into lived experience. As such, the poor in spirit may become pure in heart; the meek become peacemakers; those who mourn for Christ's sake will rejoice in bearing witness to Him; and those who hunger for righteousness may not shy away from the persecution for righteousness' sake.

The beatitude of mercy is in the middle of all of this serving as a transition from one block to the other.

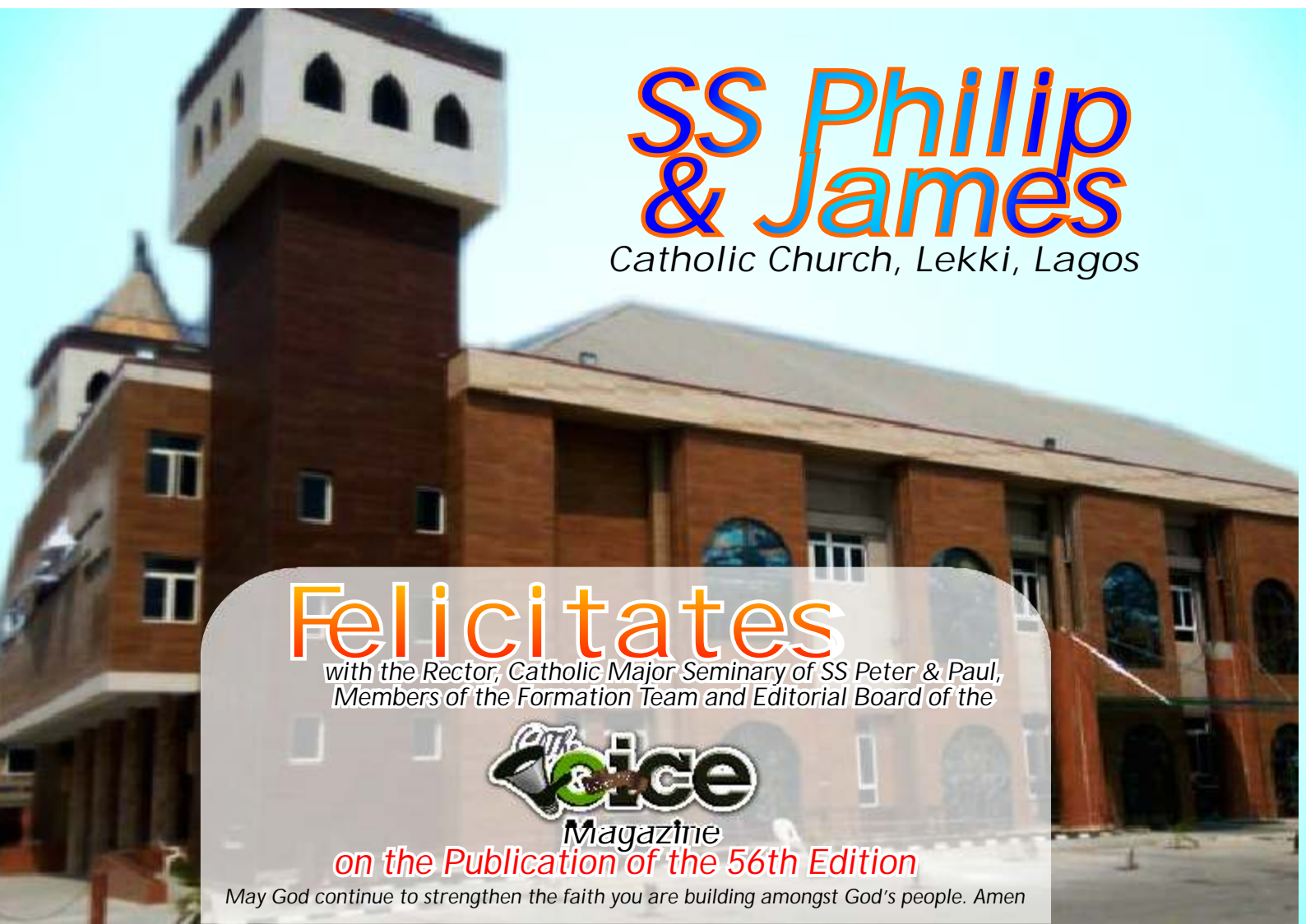
Whereas the first four beatitudes recognize the limitations of the disciple and his dependence on God, the later four show how the disciple, now enabled by grace, bears witness to God in the world. The position of the fifth beatitude is the position of the disciple who stands between mercy received and mercy to be given. Springing as a beautiful flower from the fertile soil setting of the preceding beatitudes, the disciple is enabled to bear the fruits expressed in the subsequent beatitudes.

When we take seriously the strategic pivotal positioning of the mercy beatitude, we are then able to understand it better. Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy does not mean, as might be thought, that we earn mercy by showing mercy. Surely, an earned mercy is a contradiction in terms; if mercy is deserved it is not mercy. So perhaps, better translation of the beatitude would be Blessed are those who have mercy (in them), they will have mercy (given to them). The mercy we have towards others is derived from the mercy that God has had towards us. It is in showing us His mercy (as expressed in the first four beatitudes) that we are enabled to show mercy towards others. We don't show mercy so as to receive mercy, but we receive mercy so as to show mercy. Pope Francis is right in noting that only those who have experienced God's mercy can share that mercy

with others. It is God's mercy that comes first not ours. The blessedness of the merciful does not consist solely of the mercy to be received from God but even more so on the mercy already obtained. Indeed, blessed are the merciful for they have received mercy.

Mercy is God's greatest attribute; the name of God is mercy. It is how He defines himself (cf. Ex 34:6). It is by God's mercy that He is identifiable as the Holy One of Israel. His mercy sets Him aside. By the same token, all who are called to the vocation of holiness must understand and pursue it in terms of mercy. The importance of the fifth beatitude is drawn from the identification of God with His mercy. The chapter of the beatitudes concludes with the lofty recommendation "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mat. 5:48). By breaking it down to Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful (Lk. 6:36), Luke draws our minds to the truth that the perfection of the heavenly Father is connected to His mercy, and that the perfection required of the disciple is only achievable through the action of divine mercy in the soul.

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on the Publication of the 56th Edition

May God continue to strengthen the faith you are building amongst God's people. Amen



INTRODUCTION

AMUNE PETER SIMPA

“In Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in His mercy; that is to say, there is emphasis on that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as mercy. Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God’s mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all, He himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in Him and finds it in Him, God becomes visible in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.”

“Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. In the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, God sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (John 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.” The quotation above literally captures the central focus of this write up which aims at giving a theological exposition on the meaning and nature of the Mercy of God vis-a-vis its relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING MERCY

“Mercy” is a concept integral to the understanding of God’s relationship with mankind. Etymologically, it derives from “*miseriordis*”, which means “opening one’s heart to wretchedness”. The most important expression for understanding mercy is *hesed*, which means unmerited loving kindness, friendliness, favour and also divine grace and mercy. *Hesed* therefore goes beyond mere emotion and grief at human deprivation; it means God’s free and gracious turning towards the human person with care. It concerns a concept of relationship, which characterises not only a single action, but rather an ongoing attitude and posture. Applied to God, the concept expresses an unexpected and unmerited gift of God’s grace, transcending every relationship of reciprocal fidelity that exceeds all human expectations and bursts every human category.

In other words, mercy refers to compassion or forbearance shown towards an offender. It flows from God’s attribute or goodness as expressed in His infinity and immutability. Hence, God is infinitely good and merciful. It is in the very nature of God to show mercy. “It is important to see that mercy

belongs not only to the realm of forgiveness for sins, but also for easing very difficult and even deadly afflictions”. In his letter to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome wrote that the Father, who is merciful and kind in all things, has compassion for those who fear Him; willingly and joyfully, He bestows gracious favour on those who come to him with simple hearts. Mercy is such an indispensable gift and virtue in our world. It heals broken relationships. This is evident in the covenant between God and the people of Israel when God continually showed mercy to them by being faithful despite their unfaithfulness. Throughout the scriptures, God illustrates His mercy and this is fully demonstrated in the coming of His Son Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

MERCY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The God of the Old and New Testaments is a God who lets his heart to be touched because He does not wish for a sinner to die, but to be converted and live (Ezekiel 33:11). The psalmist acclaims: “If you O Lord should mark our guilt, who would survive?” (PSALM 130:3). These words capture the abundance of unconditional love God has for his people and all humanity. His faithfulness endures forever from generations to generations. God shows himself ever rich in mercy, ever ready to treat his people with deep tenderness and compassion, especially at those tragic moments when infidelity ruptures the bond of the covenant, which then needs to be ratified more firmly in justice and truth. Here is a true love story, in which God plays the role of the betrayed father and husband, while Israel plays the unfaithful child and bride. We find the high point of the Old Testament’s revelation of God’s mercy in the prophet Hosea. The people broke the covenant and became dishonourable harlots, but God as in the case of Hosea (Hos 1-2) showed to what extent He wishes to bind himself to his people.

MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

God gave the Israelites instructions to build the Ark of the Covenant, the lid of which was called the mercy seat. The mercy seat was made of pure gold, and was the place where God communicated with Moses (Exodus 25:22; 30:6). The Greek word used to name the mercy seat is *hilasterion* (Hebrews 9:5), a word that also is used to designate Jesus (Romans 3:25) In a sense, Jesus is the “mercy seat” for Christians. His merciful sacrifice and eternal presence allow us to communicate with the Father (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:27), and through Christ we receive God’s mercy (Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Timothy 1:2; 1 Peter 1:3). The gospel writers have an interesting

presentation of Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ itself is a testimony of the loving mercy of God towards us. (JOHN 3:16). For Matthew, Christ's works are the healing and helping deeds of mercy. Jesus turns to all who have to carry heavy burden: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Jesus not only proclaimed the message of His Father's Mercy, he lived it himself. He has compassion for the many who are sick, (Matt 14:14) and for the people who are hungry, (Matt 15:32). He is moved by compassion when He meets a leper (Mark 1:41). Again and again, He meets people who cry out, "Have mercy on me or Have pity on us" (Matt 9:27; Mark 10:47), even on the cross, he pardoned the repentant thief and prayed for those who condemned him to death (Luke 23:34-43). God who is love has called and established us into fellowship with Himself and with Jesus Christ. God's mercy and goodness are manifested in his compassion on our suffering, says St. Maximus the Confessor. The parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the Good Samaritan show how our Lord Jesus Christ goes to any lengths to seek us out when we have strayed and heals the wounds that we cause to ourselves by our sin. Mercy as the effluence of divine love is thus, the sum of the gospel.

Jesus simply teaches us to be merciful as the heavenly Father in the beatitudes and throughout his teachings. In his letters, St. Paul also stressed the gift of Christ as the mercy God shows to us. "But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even though we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace we are saved. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his compassion to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:1-10).

As regards the parable of the Good Samaritan, Clement of Alexandria wrote: "Who more than Jesus has pitied us, who by the rulers of darkness were all but put to death with many wounds, fears, lusts, passions, pains, deceits, pleasures? Of these many wounds, the only physician is Jesus, who cuts out the passions thoroughly by the roots.

JUSTICE AND MERCY IN CHRIST

Justice simply means fairness or it refers to giving to each person his/her due. It also involves the dispensing of deserved punishment for wrongdoing, and mercy is all about pardon and compassion for an offender. However, these two attributes of God do in

fact form a unity. Many sincerely ask: "How could a merciful God allow souls to be eternally lost?" Some people conclude that mercy and justice must be mutually exclusive attributes of God. In God's dealings with humans, both mercy and justice are present, with the two attributes balancing each other. The justice and mercy of God have never contradicted each other. In fact, our perfect Creator balances the two attributes masterfully. If that were not true, the psalmist would not have been able to proclaim, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before your face" (Psalm 89:14). Romans 3:23-24 says: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. This means that even though He knows of our guilt, He doesn't always issue the punishment deserved. Simply put, we are all sinners and do not meet the standards of righteousness that God intends us to have. But, through His mercy and grace He provided a way for



our sins to be forgiven through our acceptance of Christ Jesus. Coupled with grace, mercy is shown because He loves us and only asks that we accept His Son by faith. God's justice and mercy were demonstrated by Christ's death on the cross. At the cross, God's justice was meted out in full (upon Christ), and God's mercy was extended in full (to all who believe). So God's perfect mercy was exercised through His perfect justice. The end result is that everyone who trusts in the Lord

Jesus is saved from God's wrath and instead experiences His grace and mercy (Romans 8:1). As Paul says, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him" (Romans 5:9).

MERCY AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD TODAY

Indeed the joys and hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the same as those of the followers of Christ. Within the framework of the above, in the light of the violent and vicious aspects of the twentieth century history, (the two world wars, abortion, euthanasia, genocides and human misery in all its various forms), the reason for the revelation of the Divine Mercy becomes absolutely clear: the merciless quality of modern life is the quality that Jesus the Divine Mercy addresses by calling modern people to receive his mercy and share it with every other person. These miseries elicited the compassion of Christ the saviour, who willingly took it upon himself and identified with the least of His brethren.

In The Mercy of God, St. Pope John Paul II continues his discussion of world problems which he began in his first Encyclical, Redeemer of Man. He taught that love informed by God's mercy is the only response to these situations and appealed to the world to turn to the mercy of the Father, and to find in God's love a refuge from the impersonal, technology-driven world they live in. The Encyclical, The Mercy of God provides the profound theological framework for the Devotion to Divine Mercy, based on the revelation of Jesus to Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska. St. Pope John Paul II extended the feast of Divine Mercy to the entire Catholic Church.

The paschal mystery uncovers the depth of God's love. In the redemption is demonstrated the fullness of justice and of love. Believing in Christ crucified means to believe that love is present in the world and is stronger than any kind of evil in individuals, society, or the world. Through the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance, the Church brings us ever nearer to the mercy revealed by Christ. By proclaiming mercy, the Church desires to offer the world, which has lost a sense of mercy, a path to the God of mercy so that his love may be shown to be present in the world and equal to any and all of the ills that plague humanity in the post-modern era. St. Pope John XXIII said, at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, that the church must, above all, use the medicine of mercy. This can happen in a threefold way: the church must proclaim the mercy of God; it must concretely provide people with God's mercy in the form of the sacrament of reconciliation; and it must allow God's mercy to appear and be realized in its entire life, its concrete structures and even in its laws. However, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis stresses this point: "The church must be a place of mercy, freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the gospel".

Mercy here must not be misunderstood and become a cheap grace; this is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant when he stated without mincing words that cheap grace means the justification of the sin and not the sinner. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Careful attention must be paid not to fall into this temptation. Church discipline is pertinent in keeping with the meaning of the Gospel; it must be interpreted and applied according to the sense and spirit of the Gospel. Such an understanding of church discipline as the bitter but necessary medicine of mercy conforms to a tradition that understood Jesus Christ. This therapeutic understanding of church law and discipline leads us to the fundamental issue of how to interpret and explain church law. That is a broad field that we cannot treat here in a comprehensive way.

Meanwhile in his Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, pope Francis added that the church's life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy; she knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great

hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Jesus asks us also to love and have compassion; to forgive and to give; to be heralds of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. His desire is that we become merciful as the Father. (Luke 6:36). St. John Chrysostom in his Homilies on Matthew wrote: "Do you want to honour Christ's body, then do not scorn him in his nakedness, do not cover him here in the church with silken garments, while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked." Pope Francis, in the General Audience of 9th November 2016, reiterated this point when he stated that Christians should reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and not be indifferent. For him, it will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. We must enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as His true disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit prisoners, bury the dead) and not neglect the spiritual works of mercy either (to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead). We cannot escape the Lord's words to us that these will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged. (Mt 25:31-45). But before these external obligations, we ought to first have an inner conversion and renew our relationship with God through the sacrament of reconciliation by making sincere efforts to have a metanoia for a better Christian life; then following the examples of Jesus, we must become instruments of God's mercy to restore joy and dignity to those who have lost it and to the world at large.

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Osamor Chike Michael

A MERCY THAT JUSTIFIES

The question of the relationship between justice and mercy is an ancient one that has marked the development of Western civilization from the outset. Every time that the mind has attempted to put order between adverse opposites, such as sin and punishment, recovery and redemption, the relationship between justice and mercy has arisen regularly. This relationship has, for the most part, been marked with antithesis in the Greco-Roman world. With the Christian understanding, justice and mercy are not antithetical. They are virtues that are not only interconnected but also indispensable to each other. And so, St. Thomas Aquinas, in *Lectura Super Matthaеum*, notes: "Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution [and] justice without mercy is cruelty".

But in our present society, this complementarity of mercy and justice has been undermined. Our society has come to understand mercy, simply as a virtue to forgive sinners, or those who are perpetrators of crimes, and justice, simply as the principle of meting out punishment to criminals commensurate with the seriousness of their crimes. Consequently, the two concepts are wrongly conceived by some people to be at loggerheads. The romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, for one, notes that the distinction between justice and mercy was invented in the court of tyrants. This view suggests that if justice and mercy are distinct, they cannot be conjoined. And in this

sense, posits that virtues do clash as justice and mercy sometimes do. This is not exactly correct.

In the conceptualization of justice and mercy, justice is seen as a concept that is based upon the principle of equality and fairness. Justice demands that people should get what they deserve. In all societies and cultures justice for all and equality before the law are the standards that are sought to be attained. Kings and governments try to be seen as impartial by applying the principle of social justice. However, in modern times, justice is based upon what is right according to law. There is retributive justice that demands an eye for an eye or life for life, as in criminal procedures. However, there is also restorative justice that seeks to give a chance to the offender, to repent and become a better human being. There is also distributive justice that is seen behind socialism, communism, and other social theories that demand allocation of resources equally among the people.

Mercy on the other hand is seen as a virtue that is similar to forgiveness and benevolence. A person who is kind is said to be merciful as opposed to a person who is cruel. Mercy is seen in acts of giving alms, caring for the sick and the wounded and providing means of relief to people facing natural disasters. Compassion and forgiveness are emotions that are integral to the virtue of mercy. However, when a criminal seeks mercy, he is, in fact, asking for a sentence that is less

than what he actually deserves. How then does mercy complement justice?

Talking about morality and virtue, the great traditional moralists, including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, taught that all true virtues are rooted in love. In other words, "love is the form of all virtues." Therefore, since virtue springs from a common and unified basis, virtues cannot clash with each other, any more than love can contradict itself. Perhaps the clearest and at the same time most dramatic treatment of how mercy and justice do not clash, but complement each other, is found in a play – Prince Frederick of Hamburg by Heinrich von Kleist.

The basis for the play is exemplified by the moral spirit of King Frederick William I (1688-1740). This German king once visited a prison where he listened intently to a number of pleas for pardon from prisoners who claimed to be victims of injustice. All swore they had suffered imprisonment on account of prejudiced judges, perjured witnesses, and unscrupulous lawyers. From cell to cell, allegations of wronged innocence and false imprisonment continued until the king came to the door of a cell occupied by a surly inmate who said nothing.

Surprised at his silence, Frederick remarked, somewhat sarcastically, "Well I suppose you are innocent too." "No, your Majesty," came the startling response. "I am guilty and richly deserve all that I get." "Here, turnkey," thundered Frederick,

“come and get rid of this rascal quick, before he corrupts this fine lot of innocent people that you are responsible for.”

In Kleist's play, the prince, son of Frederick William, the Elector of Brandenburg, disgraces himself in battle. He is subsequently tried and condemned to die by a court martial. The elector, as one can readily understand, wants to offer mercy to his son and thereby save his life. But he cannot dispense mercy to an unrepentant criminal. Nathalie, who is in love with the prince, intercedes on his behalf. Yet the elector is unwavering—mercy cannot negate justice.

Finally, the son comes to acknowledge the gravity of his crime and the validity of his sentence:

...now that I have thought it over, I wish to die the death decreed for me! . . .

It is my absolute desire; to glorify the sacred code of battle,

Broken by me before the entire army; with voluntary death

Now that the prince is willing to accept justice, he is eligible for mercy. When the elector hears these courageous words, he is overjoyed. He tears up the death sentence, pardons his son, and grants him permission to marry

Nathalie. The prince is thereby restored to life, honor, and happiness. This is much like the parable of the prodigal son in the gospel of St. Luke. The prodigal son having come to his senses repents of his prodigality. This is a development which I call justice. And returning home, the father sees and recognizes this development; the justice that brings his son home,



and showers him with boundless mercy.

Mercy must honor justice. It can be dispensed rightly only when the validity of justice is acknowledged. Similarly, forgiveness can be granted only when a transgression is acknowledged. Mercy “does not destroy justice,” as Aquinas noted, “but is a certain kind of fulfillment of justice.” Mercy lacks the heroic quality associated with virtues such as courage and determination. It does not possess the primacy

enjoyed by reverence and humility. Nor does it have the independent character of generosity and integrity. It is a complementary virtue, one that is destined to share the spotlight with a more fundamental good.

The nineteenth-century American clergyman Edwin Hubbell Chapin expressed it most eloquently when he wrote, “Mercy among the virtues is like the moon among the stars—not so sparkling and vivid as many, but dispensing a calm radiance that hallows the whole. It is the bow that rests upon the bosom of the cloud when the storm is past. It is the light that hovers above the judgment-seat.”

Taken together, justice and mercy both lead us to a holistic involvement in our relations with fellow human beings. Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy grows cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships. Mercy is a door, an opening, an invitation to touch a life positively, to make a difference consciously and intentionally. Mercy that doesn't move intentionally in the direction of development, that is, justice, is no mercy. It will end up doing more harm than good. In fact mercy is really mercy when it is a mercy that justifies.

Tribute to Fr. Chike Amaefule



Long life may not be good enough, but good life is certainly long enough. The quality of life here on earth does not depend on its longevity or brevity. Our faith teaches us that life is not ended but changed. It would seem Fr. Chike has lived so shortly, it would appear he died too quickly, but the soul of the righteous are in the hands of God and no torment will ever touch them.

Reverend Fr Chike Amaefula was ordained for the catholic diocese of Warri in 2014. During his days in the seminary, he served faithfully as a member of

the Voice Editorial Board and then as the sales manager for the 52nd edition of the Voice Magazine. He was a very simple and calm brother. He was always full of smiles and peaceful. When we reached out to him in the course of sickness, he gave us the assurance he would be fine, he sounded peaceful and calm as ever. His demise is a big loss to the church and to his family. While we mourn his demise, we are consoled and assured that God loved him like a son. As a priest of God, he had the privilege of celebrating the mysteries and making Christ known. Now, he is united with him whom he had served and proclaimed.

The voice family commiserates with his bishop and the entire people of Warri diocese, with his family and friends. We pray that God will continue to rest his soul in his bosom. Amen.



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*May God continue to bless and grant you all His abundant favours
for all your tireless contribution towards the development of knowledge
and the spread of Catholic faith.*

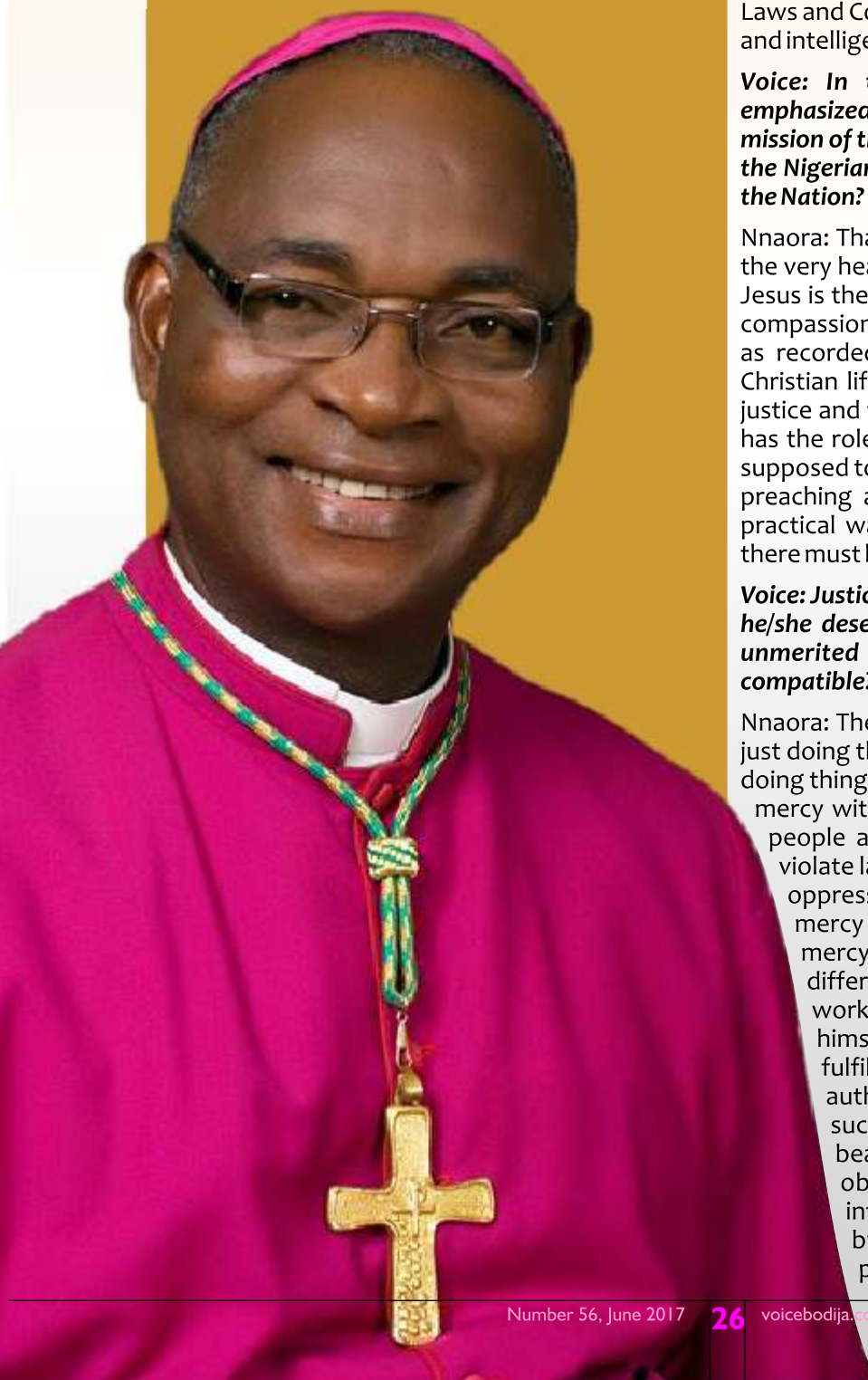
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"Laws will be empty and counter-productive if they do not spring from love, charity, faith and justice"

INTERVIEW

WITH

BISHOP HILARY OKEKE
OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF NNEWI



Nnaora, as he is fondly called by his people of the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi, because of his simplicity and availability to all, is a seasoned Canon Lawyer, a founding member and a onetime president and then secretary of the Canon Law Society of Nigeria. When I called him on Monday the 19th of September 2016 requesting for this interview, he simply said ok, my son, let us have it on Wednesday. When I got to Nnewi, I was amazed at the level of work going on and the number of engagements he had to suspend to attend to me. To say the least, I was humbled at his simplicity and humility. When I was ushered into his presence, I was awed by his aura and grandeur, and when I listened to him talk to me on the Relevance of Laws and Codes in the Mission of the Church, his candor and intelligence overwhelmed me. Hear him yourself!

Voice: In the recent times, the Holy Father has emphasized consistently the centrality of Mercy in the mission of the Church, how does the Church, particularly the Nigerian Church make concrete the mercy of God in the Nation?

Nnaora: Thank you for that choice of topic, mercy is at the very heart of Christianity, as the Pope reminded us, Jesus is the face of God's mercy and he wants us to be compassionate as the heavenly father is compassionate as recorded in Lk 6:36. Mercy is part and parcel of Christian life but it does not supplant justice. There is justice and there is mercy. In the first place, the church has the role to encourage people to do what they are supposed to do, to give each person what they deserve, preaching and ensuring justice therefore becomes a practical way of showing mercy in the country. Then there must be the heart to accommodate and forgive

Voice: Justice is often commonly seen as giving one what he/she deserves; on the other hand, mercy is a grace, unmerited and undeserved. Are these two really compatible? Or is there any antithesis between them?

Nnaora: The problem is that people think that mercy is just doing things without reference to any standards or doing things the way they like. No we must not confuse mercy with lawlessness. People think that by mercy, people are not supposed to keep the law, people violate laws in the name that God is merciful, people oppress others and think that they will enjoy the mercy of God when they have not shown such mercy to others. While mercy and justice are two different things, they are very closely related and work hand in hand. The church following Jesus himself who came not to abolish the law but to fulfil it insists on people obeying constituted authorities and established laws in as much as such laws are not evil laws. Jesus in the beatitudes teaches that the merciful shall obtain mercy, that is justice and mercy interfacing, one does not deserve mercy, but by being merciful himself, he stands in position to obtain mercy himself. Even in The

Bull of Indiction the Pope demonstrates that Mercy goes with justice. And if you follow the logic and thinking pattern of the Pope, you will realize that he already emphasized this link in his *LaudatoSi*, where he showed that when we take care of the environment, we are both merciful and just to nature and to one another. And in turn, human beings are safe, but if we do not take care of the environment, it has a way of getting back at us. Of course we are well aware of the saying that nature never forgives!

Voice: *In the introduction to the current code, it is specifically stated that the Code is in no way intended as a substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and especially charity in the life of the Church and of the faithful. What then is the place of law especially among the Christian community? How do laws, with particular reference to the Canon Law help in the mission of the church?*

Nnaora: The important thing is that the law is for discipline, but the discipline has to be on a foundation, that foundation is love, faith, hope but the discipline is there, so that the laws are not there to hunt and victimize people but to ensure orderliness and preserve everyone's right and justice. We must however emphasize that it is against this backdrop of faith, justice and love that people are supposed to abide by laws and discipline. Laws will be empty and counter-productive if they do not spring from love, charity, faith and justice. In fact, Aquinas asserted that any such law is no law and is not binding. In the church, there is what we call dispensation; the law is there, but if there are human and germane considerations that may prevent a person's observance of such laws, the church can grant dispensation and that is why we have the saying, "ecclesia suplex", that is, if a person does not meet up with a standard, the church supplies so that there is never a discrepancy or inefficiency on the things that do not depend entirely on human powers. What is meant by that introduction is that the church is not in favour of legalism or just the letters of the law, we pay more attention to the spirit of the law. When you think of the law, specifically the canon law, you think of mercy, love and justice as its backdrop.

Voice: *The whole juridical-legislative tradition of the Church has as its first source, the distant patrimony of law contained in the books of the Old and New Testament. However, St. Paul teaches that justification is not obtained by the works of the law but by means of faith (cf. Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). Does he thereby exclude the binding force of the Decalogue or deny the importance of discipline in the Church of God?*

Well, there is what I call the "level one approach" to the bible and it is what I have taken up to discuss in my letter to the people of God in my diocese. What I mean by "level one" is that when you go to the level of the cognitive domain of learning, you see the different

stages such as knowledge, comprehension, application and analysis, synthesis and then appreciation or assessment. These stages constitute a process. But most people remain at level one, and that is why you hear people saying "the bible says" without understanding the context and the circumstances surrounding such teachings in the bible. Half-truth and superficial reading of the bible are responsible for many aberrations we find in the application of the scriptures. Even Jesus says he has come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it. This doesn't imply the irrelevance of the law but not remaining at the level of law. Fulfilling the law as Jesus says implies working to perfect the law. So faith and law must be matched with work. St Paul says we

"The only relevant clearance needed for giving one Christian burial is that the deceased is a baptized Catholic, and that he is not an apostate or a public sinner who has not shown repentance. But we say no to those who refuse to bury a dead person because he or their relatives are owing"

must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And St. James reminds us that faith without work cannot save us. So while faith is important and rightly so foundational, it must be expressed in action and that is what St. John Paul teaches in *Fundamental Choice and Option* in his *Veritatis Splendor*. So, Paul brings us to what we already said that law is not to be seen legalistically but must be

pitched on love, faith and hope.

Voice: *There was an article written by Chimamada Adichie, titled "I never thought of Compassion as a tenet of the Catholic Church before Pope Francis". Therein, giving a few instances of situations where people are denied Christian burial on the grounds that they or their relatives are not financially up to date within the Christian community and some are said to be refused the Eucharist on such grounds as their children getting married to non-Catholics, she assumed a wrong aim of the code of canon law in the church and presented the church as a hard fist always wanting to strike, how would you respond to correct this erroneous assertion held by other people like this author?*

What she is saying on one hand is correct but she has wrongly assessed the matter. Again, she operates at level one approach of cognition as far as this matter is concerned. She is right to say Pope Francis is emphatic about mercy, that is obvious, (in fact I call him Pope of mercy) but that doesn't mean that other popes were not merciful or did not talk about mercy, as a matter of fact, Pope John Paul wrote very much on mercy and with his support and propagation of Divine Mercy, it will be totally fallacious to say that mercy was absent in the Church until Pope Francis. The Sacrament of Reconciliation we have in the church is a huge instrument of the outpouring of God's mercy bequeathed to the Church by Christ. Jesus taught about mercy and his disciples and (the Church) have always upheld this teaching and operated on the basis of it since then. Let us say Pope Francis is laying repeated emphasis on it and this you will agree with me does not mean he is the one introducing it. Meanwhile, it is Church's documents and teachings that he is using to

make his emphasis. Mind you, the Pope is not saying whatever you do is alright, of course he cannot say that. He is only emphasizing what we already know, that God requires mercy not sacrifice, and that we must have as our operative principle mercy and forgiveness. Then let us look at the instances she gave, now if a person sins, there is a punishment for such sins, and if a person connives with others, he participates in such sin and also has debt to pay for it. Even in civil society, an accomplice is guilty and has his own punishment. When Catholic

parents give their children away in marriage to non-Catholics and by that throw away the faith of such children, there are procedures to preserve the faith even when married to non-Catholics or to show that you have done your best to preserve that faith, if these procedures are not followed by the parents, if they knowingly just give away their children as if the faith doesn't matter, they have cooperated in someone throwing away their faith and the effect of such cooperation is stop participating in the communion in the meantime. You did as if the faith doesn't matter by not giving a damn about someone losing his/her faith and then still come back to become part of that communion, that is pretense and it doesn't make sense, and that is what people don't understand.

But the one we have to take more seriously is the one they call "clearance", we have insisted by words and writings that the only relevant clearance needed for giving one Christian burial is that the deceased is a baptized Catholic, and that he is not an apostate or a public sinner who has not shown repentance. But we say no to those who refuse to bury a dead person because he or their relatives are owing. When someone dies, the first thing the family should get from the Christian community is compassion, solidarity and support. If the family wishes to clear the debts of the deceased, fine, but that must not become an issue or a criterion for Christian burial.

Voice: The Holy Father has insisted on patient guidance and pastoral accompaniment to people who are erring referring to those living in irregular unions, what will constitute in practical terms this pastoral accompaniment? Does being merciful preclude speaking the truth and condemning evil?

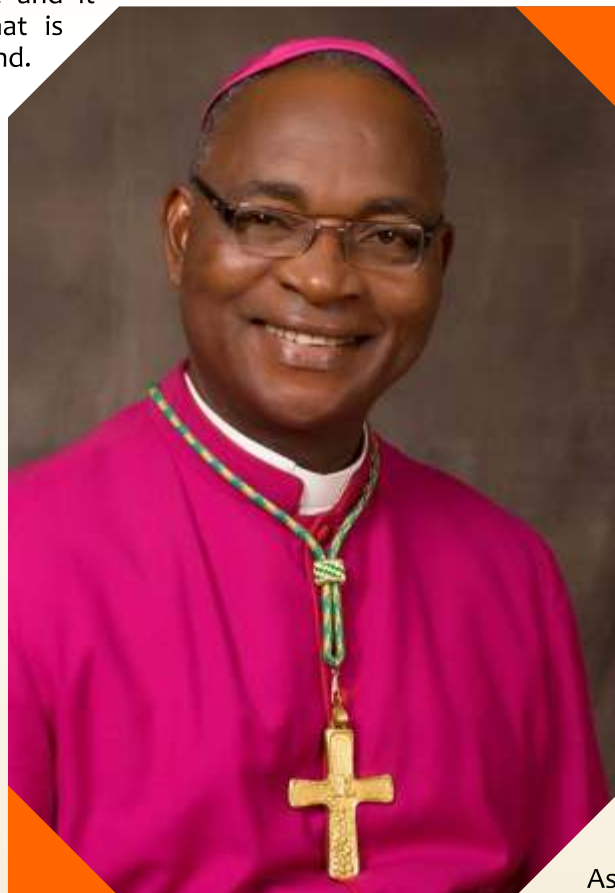
Nnaora: The particular situation and the pastoral agent

determine what form or style pastoral guidance will take. But what the Pope makes clear is that the person no matter what he does deserves to be shown love. Loving someone doesn't mean assent to whatever he does. You must also tell the person consistently the truth. While you show concern to the person, you must make them understand that the life they are living is not what God wants. It doesn't mean keeping quiet or the conspiracy of silence that has become prevalent in our world when people prefer to keep quiet about things

"People think that mercy is just doing things without reference to any standards or doing things the way they like. No we must not confuse mercy with lawlessness"

they know to be wrong so as not to appear old-fashioned or not to lose friends. You are not driving people away but you must teach them the right thing. The priests are always there to hear confessions and to help people get reconciled to God and his Church. We are not saying that the priest should say it doesn't

matter, just continue, come and receive communion, that is not what the Pope is saying, he won't say that because that won't represent Jesus' principle of "Go and sin no sscorrect state of conscience and heart, and he said one must examine themselves before coming for it. The law of God is for us to keep, it is loving one's neighbor even the sinners.



Voice: The salvation of soul is the ultimate law, what is the practical implication of this vis-à-vis promulgation of laws, sanctions and excommunication in the Church?

Thank you, the promulgation of laws, sanctions and excommunications are to help people to save themselves. The sanctions are not punitive really. When you go through the code, you discover that the Church doesn't emphasize the punitive aspects, of course they usually come last, but the corrective. When a person is sanctioned, it is to help the person to come back, to realize he has erred and that is why the church also says that when the person shows remorse, he is granted pardon and absolution. So these sanctions are a way of dragging people back as it were.

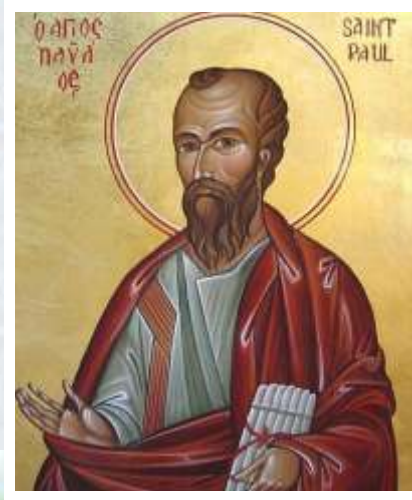
As I said, we look at the spirit or motivation of such laws and sanctions. So everything the Church does is to ensure the salvation of souls.

Voice: Thank you very much My Lord, the Voice board appreciates this opportunity and we wish you happy seventieth birthday anniversary!

ST. PAUL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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The Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Paul. B. Enow, Assistants, Rev. Fr. Peter Okoh,
Rev Fr. Samuel Michael Nnanga and Priests-in-residence Rev. Fr. Stephen Dumbiri, The
Consecrated Persons and the Entire Lay
Faithful of St. Paul's Catholic Church, Benin City

Congratulate

The Rector, members of Formation team, the Voice Editorial Crew and the Entire Student
body on their 56th Edition of



***We congratulate you on this great achievement and pray God's blessing for you on
your journey to the Priesthood.***

Keep the faith moving!

Rev. Fr. Paul B. Enow,
Parish Priest

“The Christian Association of Nigerian needs to be cleansed of this unwholesome political involvement that questions the authenticity of its motives”

AN INTERVIEW WITH REV. SR. DR. FLORENCE OSO



VOICE: Saint John Paul II suggested that reciprocal forgiveness was the preferred way for ecumenical movement to follow. He called for an examination of conscience for all involved in the ecumenical movement. This immediately implies sharing the blame of the division. What is the significance of such disposition for ecumenism in Nigeria?

SR. OSO: Actually, such disposition is very pivotal towards the desired goal of ecumenism. This disposition will enable Christians to put behind them all the wrongs and accusations they have against each other, also in all humility, to accept who we are, to accept our

history, to be able to live and work together as Christians in order to confront the problem facing us in Nigeria. This implies that everybody should take responsibility for whatever mistake that might have contributed to the shameful division we have in Christendom.

VOICE: What exactly is the aim of ecumenical movement?

SR. OSO: The aim of ecumenical movement is to achieve unity among those who bear the name Christians. This unity doesn't mean uniformity, we are not saying that all Christians will become Catholics and to remove all differences; rather, ecumenism seeks to ensure a ground for dialogue among Christian denominations, to ensure collaboration,

peaceful coexistence and of course, tolerance. It seeks to address the scandal of the division by providing a platform where some topical issues regarding the faith are discussed.

VOICE: We experience the springing up of churches everyday all around us. This proliferation is regarded by some people as growth in Christendom. Does not this trend jeopardize the prospects of ecumenism?

SR. OSO: Well, the proliferation of churches has become a part of the Nigerian entity. I do not think that it will stop anytime soon, and I do not think that the springing up of

churches will jeopardize the aim of ecumenism in Nigeria. It is certainly not a good sign, but we must understand that there are many factors that play out in the proliferation we experience. Chief among these factors is the economic or financial factor. But when we talk about the old mainstream churches, I do not think it jeopardizes ecumenical movement and its prospects. As long as the umbrella body for all Christians can evaluate these churches and accept them into the platform, then it is taken for granted that such churches have gained approval and acceptance, and should be able to enter into the ecumenical dialogue. They can fall under the churches that we can dialogue with. Catholic Church, for instance, has some level of ecumenical dialogue at different levels; for instance, we have ecumenical dialogue going on with the Anglican Church at a high level; Baptist Church at a very different level. When you speak of ecumenical dialogue with these other Pentecostal churches, the church is a bit reserved, these are churches who don't have history, and to have a fruitful dialogue with any denomination, there has to be historical survey to determine the point when the differences ensued so as to understand the real problem.

VOICE: The scandal and embarrassing consequence of division in the church and the implication of multiplicity of teachings sometimes contradictory seem not to be recognized by many Christians and church leaders. What could be practical steps to foster sincere ecumenism in Nigeria where there are varied motifs for the multiplication of these churches?

SR. OSO: The sincere practical way if we are to make any progress

is that these individual churches must be sincere and teach their people the truth. The idea of criticizing and condemning other churches should not be the aim of any church. We find men of God who use the pulpit to castigate other denominations all in the bid to deceive people and have more members and to keep their members without teaching them the truth. We see many of these churches criticizing the Catholic Church, but today, many of them keep borrowing the practices in the Catholic Church. So this whole idea of attack on other churches we must do away with. When the opportunity comes, we dialogue and address questions on issues or practices of particular denominations that another does not understand or is not comfortable with. This will help us to have a more enlightened discussion instead of painting one denomination evil without understanding properly what they do.

VOICE: Preparations are on course to celebrate 500 years anniversary of reformation. In the spirit of ecumenism, what should be the spirit and character of this celebration?

SR. OSO: The spirit and character of such celebration should be humility. Like Pope St. John Paul II said, everybody needs to have an examination of conscience and be humble enough to admit the part they played in that division, and be forthright in saying like pope St. John Paul II himself in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), "to the extent we are responsible to these painful memories, I ask for forgiveness." When you look at the history of the church and the events that led to that division, you would understand that a reformation was imminent in the church.

It was the process that was followed and the way it was led that was wrong and you could blame the person who led it, but the church must also look into herself to see where she veered

“ We find men of God who use the pulpit to castigate other denominations all in the bid to deceive people and have more members and to keep their members without teaching them the truth. ”

off the track that warranted that incident. It should also be done in joyful hope of realizing the objectives of ecumenism. There is also need for inner conversion;



people must be resolved to have an inner conversion and make a U-turn from falsehood and false teachings that have continuously caused more divisions and rancor. This will help to actualize the desired goal of ecumenism.

VOICE: It is the position of many that CAN that serves as an umbrella body for all Christians is at best just a pressure group, and in the recent times, hijacked for unwholesome politicking, not having any ecumenical target. What effects does this hold for the realization of the ecumenism?

SR. OSO: First and foremost, The Christian Association of Nigerian needs to be cleansed of this unwholesome political involvement that questions the authenticity of its motives. The Catholic Church must also get very involved in the activities of CAN. Whether we like it or not, CAN stands for the gamut of Christian religion in Nigeria. The best we can do therefore is to get

involved and be a voice to reckon with. When the Catholic Church pulled out of Can, many people thought it was necessary considering some scandalous events that were associated with CAN, but it is important that our Bishops finally decided to return to CAN. The truth is that many persons are looking up to the Catholic Church for direction and defense in this country. So we cannot afford to stand aloof while things go wrong. We must try to be the conscience of our society and to remind the leadership of CAN at every point of the primary concern it should be occupied with.

Voice: Thank you very much Sr. we are glad you granted us this opportunity.

THESE ARE THEY WHO HAVE



Adesanya Victor.
ABEOKUTA



Oni James.
ABEOKUTA



Anokhoya Emmanuel.
ABEOKUTA



Ochigbo Joseph.
ABEOKUTA



Adugba Emmanuel.
ABUJA



Aizebokhai Peter.
AUCHI



Enodiana Dennis.
BENIN



Daniel Gabriel.
BOMADI



Isodje Lucky.
BOMADI



Agada Raymond.
BOMADI



Jemisaye Patrick.
EKITI



Oluwadare Anthony.
EKITI



Okoji Christopher.
ISSELE-UKU



Otukpe Paul Mary.
LAGOS



Avoseh Emmanuel.
LAGOS



Mereh Kenneth.
LAGOS



Nougboe Matthew.
LAGOS



Ojogbane Moses.
LOKOJA



Oyinkolade John.
ONDO



Abiona Peter.
OSOGBO



Nwogu Nicholas.
OSOGBO



Odusawo Micheal.
OSOGBO



Ige Michael.
OSOGBO



Oyetunbi Simeon.
OSOGBO



Eboh Joseph.
UYO



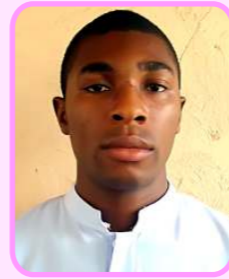
Ating Francis.
UYO



Oghorobada Francis.
WARRI



Onwuka Ferdinand.
WARRI



Okafor Anselm.
WARRI



Taiwo Samuel.
WARRI



Egwu Jude-mario.
REDEMPTORIST



Igwe Faustinus.
REDEMPTORIST



Ikpere Isaac.
REDEMPTORIST



Nzekwe Michel.
REDEMPTORIST



George Ekanem Paul.
REDEMPTORIST



Madu Simeon.
OSJ

RUN THE RACE...



Anazor Romanus.
AUCHI



Omunagbe Germanus.
AUCHI



Asamah Innocent.
AUCHI



Afolabi Callistus.
IBADAN



Areoye Christoher.
IBADAN



Ojokpe Felix.
IDAH



Ijeh Linus.
ISSELE-UKU



Odum Valentine.
ISSELE-UKU



Orjielebe Malachy.
ISSELE-UKU



Adegoke Edward.
ONDO



Adetiloye Peter.
ONDO



Ajiboye Michael.
ONDO



Akeju Pius.
ONDO



Aladesiun Emmanuel.
ONDO



Onuoha Anacletus.
ONDO



Berebon Gregory.
PORTHARCOURT



Fidido Fidelis.
PORTHARCOURT



Gbaamamu Boniface.
PORTHARCOURT



Abubokhale Francis.
UROMI



Isiraojie Benedict.
UROMI



Isuogu Emmanuel.
UROMI



Acheneje Charles.
SMA



Aimade Thierry.
SMA



Hovenahin Ulrich.
SMA



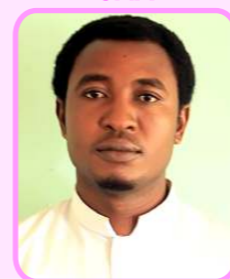
Koffi Elysec.
SMA



Tchegehu Sylvester.
SMA



Yamoah Joseph-mary.
SMA



Tiza Thomas.
OSJ



Erumetse George.
OMV



Edim Saviour.
VOCATIONIST



Aransiola Paul.
VOCATIONIST



Matthew Ojonugwa Joseph.
VOCATIONIST



Olewewe Benedict.
VOCATIONIST

**Congratulations
and farewell to
The Outgoing
Deacon Class**

WHERE IS GOD'S MERCY IN THE DOCTRINE ON HELL FIRE



ANAZOR BELONWU R.

It is not uncommon to find people, Christians inclusive, who reject or downplay the reality of hell. For these people, God is too merciful to behold the eternal torment cum damnation of his creatures. Besides this, they argue, there seems to be no logical coherence between divine mercy and hell. This probably accounts for why it is one of the least talked about, dreaded and reviled topics in many Christian assemblies today. In his 1994 book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that too often "preachers, catechists, teachers . . . no longer have the courage to preach the threat of hell." However, underneath this difficulty to reconcile hell and God's mercy is found a gross misunderstanding, confusion or ignorance at play. It is in resolving this misunderstanding therefore, that the paradox of mercy and hell can be adequately addressed. The expected result of this endeavour is first and foremost to banish misconceptions and instill a renewed consciousness of hell in the minds of Christian believers. And to alert obstinate sceptics of the danger ahead if they persist in unbelief.

ABOUT HELL FIRE

The Christian faith teaches that those who reject God by their obstinacy and death in sin will be eternally separated from Him. In the Holy Scripture, Jesus and the Apostles, time and again, instruct and warn us about the reality of hell (Mark 9:47-48; Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:8-9, Rev 21:8). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell. The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs" (CCC 1035).

Definitely, the Christian doctrine of hell applies to all people irrespective of religious profession. The fate of those who live outside the Christian faith is not different. It is either heaven or hell! This does not mean that "those who are uninformed or misinformed about Christ are unjustly judged by God." No. Rather, *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being saved" (no 22). Those who knowingly and willingly choose to reject the universal grace of salvation, reject God.

Therefore, hell is the abode and state of all those who reject God whether they are Christian believers or not. (Summa IIIa q.69, art 3). Here they undergo torment forever. In Revelation 14:11, we read: "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." In hell, declares the Angelic Doctor, there is no love, no repentance, happiness, beauty but perfect hatred and envy, and malicious desire to see others suffer the pains of hell.

GOD'S MERCY

St. Thomas Aquinas gives an insightful definition of mercy when he says, "Mercy is the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery; a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help that person" (Summa IIa IIae que. 30 art. 1). From this definition comes three insights. Firstly, compassion is the *kpim* of mercy. Secondly, mercy presupposes an obvious or perceived presence of misery. And thirdly, this compassion is actively outreaching and service-oriented. We see these three qualities at play in God's merciful relations with us. God's mercy inseparably flows from his everlasting love (Ex 34.6).

Who brought misery upon us?: Contrary to what the modern world wants us to believe, sin is the greatest human misery. It all began at the Garden of Eden when our first parents abused their freewill and disobeyed God. Before their disobedience, the voice of God was pleasant and inviting just as his presence was blissful. At the sad instance of their disobedience, Adam and Eve became miserable, and hid from his presence upon hearing his voice. There was a drastic reversal of fortune and attitudes! That misery continues to follow us and covers more whenever we commit sin. In sin we break our fellowship with God and hide from his presence. It begins in the earthly life of the sinner, and if he/she dies unrepentant, culminates in hellfire.

God's Outreaching Mercy

For some people God could have prevented this misery (which the sinner suffers but here and ultimately in hellfire). Yes, St. Paul responds: "God wills that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2.4). The Bible traces the history of God's merciful concern and outreach to his people right from the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve; to the Israelites right from their misery in Egypt, and through the desert to the Promised Land.

He ultimately revealed this mercy in the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. As Pope Francis rightly declares, Christ is the fullest and ultimate revelation of Divine mercy. The aim of his coming was unequivocal: to redeem the human race from sin and its eternal consequence, hell. It is not just to restore man to his original relations with God; but more than that, to 'divinize him'. Thus the incarnation and sacrificial death of Jesus reveals the malice and misery of sin, and the inexhaustible mercy of God.

God has been reaching out to humankind even in the recesses of our hearts. The unevangelized are not out of God's merciful outreach. Karl Rahner argues that if God seriously wills that every human person achieves eternal salvation then his grace must be at work in the hearts of the unevangelized. As we have

damned.

The sinners' postponement and eventual rejection of God's mercy is, according to Blanchette and Walls, rooted in the inherent self-deceptive nature of sin. As the sinner immerses himself or herself in sin, his/her will becomes more deformed and thwarted. It becomes more difficult for him/her to admit to wrongdoing and seek forgiveness. Holding on to his/her will gives the sinner a twisted sense of satisfaction. Paul alludes to the damage sin does to the perception and will when he writes, "the natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2.14). As the natural man, so is the obstinate/unrepentant sinner.



Sadly but truly, the damned when faced between the choice of the rigors of conversion and moral transformation, and the misery of hell, opt for hell.

CONCLUSION:

The logic of the seeming paradox of God's mercy in the doctrine on hell is grounded in the human will. The human will is free and respected even by God. Between hell and God's mercy, there is the role of human free will. The human will does not regulate mercy or hell; but determines which to accept. It cannot choose both at the same time because they contradict each other. It receives mercy when it admits its

demonstrated above, He does!

The Sinner's Rejection of God's Mercy:

The sinner, by his persistent sin, rejects the mercy of God and sinks deeper into misery. God though offers a remedy but does not force the human will to accept Him. He is the foremost respecter, upholder and advocate of human right. According to Kyle Blanchette and Jerry L Walls, God continues to pursue us and supply us with optimal grace irrespective of our geographical or situational accident, until we decisively and irrevocably reject Him. It is said that God even appeals to the sinner at the very point of death. The barrier to our salvation or damnation therefore is our decisive choice. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "The doors of hell are locked from the inside". If God were to force the damned into heaven, he/she will still be in torment. Just as Adam and Eve hid from God even so does the

misery. God's mercy heals the injuries of sin and protects the soul from eternal damnation in hell. To choose hell is to decisively remain and die in sin. This choice is a rejection of mercy. Poisoned by sin without the remedy of mercy, the soul dies eternally in hell.

Finally, Christians should be wary of false teachers and their doctrines (Mtt 7.15; 2 Jn 1.7; 2 Tim 3.5; 1 Tim 4.1; Luke 21.8; 1 Thess 5.21). Once, Padre Pio was asked to comment on those who don't believe in hell. He replied, "When they get there they will believe". Those who think rejecting the doctrine on hell or God's existence is an escape from the responsibility that comes with it, may need to think twice. The human choice has eternal consequence. We are free to do and believe whatever we like but not free from its consequences. The book of Isaiah 59.1-2 is worth reading.

CHURCH

THE CHURCH, TEACHING THE TRUTH AND NOT CONDEMNING

INTRODUCTION

Today, we are faced with a war that is exceptionally cruel, pointless, morally and politically ambiguous and yet seems to be dictated by the best of intentions- that of preserving freedom. Ironically, the crave for absolute freedom and independence has not only failed man, but has filled man's life with suspicions, pains, wars and hatred for one another. According to Bishop Ochiagha, "We live in a world where for many people you have no longer the right to say that something is wrong. It is either 'it depends on how one wants it', or 'there is nothing that is absolute'".

It is in the face of realities such as these, that the Church's role of sanctifying the temporal order can fully be understood. Hence, the Council Fathers aptly stated that "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well". By this very stand, it is to be understood that the Church not only identifies with the world, but also recognizes her indispensable role as a mother, a teacher and guide for the world.

THE CHURCH AS A MOTHER AND TEACHER OF THE TRUTH

By her very nature, the Church occupies and plays the role of a mother towards all peoples. Jesus entrusted to the Apostles the task of preaching the Gospel to every nation. As such, the Church today by virtue of her role fulfills this very obligation of the Apostles and this she does by the help of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who guides and aids her to the whole truth (Cf Jn. 14:17).

Following the command of the Lord in Matthew 28:19-20, the mission of the Church encompasses all men and women of the world. It should be pointed out at this juncture that the command in verse 20 is; "Go and teach all men to keep the commandments which I have taught you". In no way did Jesus



KAWEKWUNE FELIX ISIOMA

command that the Apostles should go and see if there were those who could not keep the commandments. No room was given for the Apostles to make people feel better or approve of their ways of life which were contrary to the Gospel message. Rather, they were commanded to preach the truth, the Truth which is Christ (cf. Jn 14:6), who alone can set mankind free (cf. Jn.8:32).

The Church as the bride of Christ therefore, is saddled with the responsibility of teaching and defending the truth of the Gospel of Christ today. Teaching the truth here, entails that which is "Consistent with the will, mind, glory, character, and being of God". This is because God being the ultimate Truth, any discussion about what is good, noble, true, free and proper, must have to appeal to Him as its source and foundation. As such, there is an urgent need for the Church to constantly and consistently, teach and guide humanity in its journey in the light of the Gospel truth.

TEACHING AND NOT CONDEMNING: WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL?

In the episode of the woman caught in the act of adultery, Jesus demonstrated what it means to fully condemn sin and not the sinner. According to the biblical account of that episode, after the teachers and the leaders of the people had stated their case against the woman, they passed her over to Jesus to pronounce the expected judgment of condemnation. However, the merciful Jesus took a decision that was least expected- rather than condemn the sinner, Jesus gave her a second chance by asking the one without sin amongst the accusers, to cast the first stone.

It is important to note that Jesus did not in any way or by any means applaud the adulterous act of the woman. Rather, he only gave her a chance to prove her accusers wrong. This goes to prove a point that truly, God is never interested in the death of a sinner

but that the sinner should repent and receive the gift of life. What a great joy and peace must have been felt by this poor woman upon hearing those words; 'neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus her head, the Church equally in carrying out her role as the sacramental sign of God's love and mercy to the world, does not stand to condemn anyone or the world at large. Her role is to teach the truth, instruct and guide the world and its people to their final end which is God himself. The Church as a mother condemns no one, she loves her children and like her Lord wishes that all men should be saved. As a result, she continues to call the world and its peoples to order at every moment when the quest for freedom leads men astray in their decisions and choices.

According to Thomas Merton, 'The church is not saying to the world, you are radically evil become good as I am but she is saying, you and I are suffering together from the consequences of our past actions and from our p r e s e n t misunderstanding...The threat of great evil hangs us both, but if we can be open and available to one another, we can together avoid the evil and instead realize the immense possibilities for good that are now within reach'.

The bottom line of the above quote is to buttress the fact that, the Church in carrying out her function of teaching the truth, does not present herself as a prophet of doom. Rather, it is the case that she recognizes the fact that she is on a journey in and with the world.

The Church has an obligation to teach the truth. And though her duty does not require her to judge persons, yet she equally possesses the right to judge the actions and teachings of people and weigh them always in the light of the Gospel truth. This does not in any way contradict the injunction of the Lord that we should judge no one that we may not be judged (cf. Matt.7:1). Far from being the case, this very injunction seems to have been misused or interpreted out of context as some persons have built upon it to argue that every person has a right to do whatever he or she thinks is right with no one having to stop or 'condemn them'. In the face of such a misrepresentation of the Lord's command, the Church must never allow herself to be silenced in the

face of the moral evils that have engulfed our world today.

TEACHING THE TRUTH AND NOT CONDEMNING: ITS CHALLENGES

In a world beclouded by materialism, unguarded consumerism, and the tragedy of relativism, teaching the truth is bound to be met with enormous challenges. Today, people tend to depend on number, statistics and propaganda as a means of determining the true value of issues ranging from religion to morality. Today, statements such as "Everybody is doing it", "The majority is always right", "I have a fundamental right to choose what I want", tend to pose a challenge to teaching and upholding the truth.



These statements above are either the bedrock or the results of such issues as abortion, euthanasia, dissolubility of marriage, intrinsic evil of contraception and homosexual acts. More often than not, the children of the Church are caught in a dilemma in issues of these sorts. At such moments, the Church as a mother and teacher of the truth, and following the example of our Lord continues to show mercy and compassion while upholding the truth of our faith, by condemning the evil acts but not the sinners. According to Pope Francis, the church would have to "Be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily

pass through it".

CONCLUSION

More than ever before, there is the need for the Church today to uphold and teach the truth as she has always done without compromise. However, being a mother, her approach should remain that of a mother who will not abandon her own, who chastises in order to embrace and whose compassion goes beyond the mistakes and errors of her children. At every moment of the Church's life her mission remains to preach the Good News and not a "nice news" to the world.



The Reality OF PURGATORY IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S MERCY AND JUSTICE



Ogoh Emmanuel

INTRODUCTION

Catholic doctrine teaches that the Church is divided into three parts, namely; the Church triumphant which comprises of the Saints in Heaven, the Church militant which is the pilgrim Church of Christian believers on Earth and the Church suffering which comprises of those undergoing temporal punishments for their sins in Purgatory. Of these three realities, the perfect Church that would exist in eternity is the Church triumphant, that is, the Heavenly Church that will comprise of the Angels and saints. The members of the Church on Earth and the Church suffering of purgatory all aspire to get into the perfect Church of Heaven to behold the fullness of the glory of God. While most Christian believers seem to agree on the reality of the Church on Earth and that of Heaven, some disagree and discredit the doctrine that supports the reality of the suffering Church in Purgatory.

The contention proposed by those who discredit its reality and teachings stem from the argument that the doctrine of purgatory is not biblical and also that its teaching misconstrues the Christian understanding of the mercy and justice of God. The doubters of this divine truth believe that the only realities or states one can attain after physical death are heaven and hell; hence, they posit that the Catholic teaching on purgatory is a fictitious doctrine and one that is not in line with God's divine plan. The question is always whether or not purgatory is biblical.

The word Purgatory which comes

from the word 'purgation' etymologically stems from the Latin, Purgare which means 'to cleanse' or 'to purge'. In line with this, purgatory according to Catholic doctrine is a temporary and immediate state of cleansing of sin and its consequences where souls of the dead who have not fully atoned for the sins they committed on earth are purified and assisted by the prayers of the living.

Is the Doctrine of Purgatory Biblical?

It is important to state in clear terms that the word Purgatory cannot be found anywhere in the scriptures. However, this does not mean that its teachings do not have biblical roots as there are many scriptural passages that point to the reality of purgatory and support it as a doctrine of faith. Those who tend to argue that the doctrine of purgatory is not biblical tend to read and study the scriptures either with a fundamental approach or in an isolated way. They do not study the scripture passages with a holistic view.

The author of the first letter of John tells us of two types of sins, namely, deadly and non-deadly sins. The author advises its readers to pray for those who commit sins that are not deadly. He clearly states this saying, "If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrong doing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal" (1 John 5:16-17). Mortal here means deadly and this

implies eternal damnation in hell. But the question that arises here is what happens if a person who commits a sin that is not deadly dies still in debt of that sin? Where will he go to? Hell or heaven? Presumably, not hell because his sins are not deadly, and not heaven, because he is still not cleansed of the debts of sin; for we are told in Rev. 21:27 that nothing unclean will enter the kingdom of heaven. So where will this poor soul go to? Since, this poor soul has not paid the debt due to his sins, the justice and mercy of God ensures that the soul be placed in a condition or state between happiness and suffering whereby the soul be purified before entering heaven. The fact that it was not specifically referred to as purgatory in the scriptures does not undermine the fact that the soul undergoes purification. This vindicates the biblical assertion in Rev. 22:12 that God will repay everyman for what he has done.

In the sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:26) and some other parables such as the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35), Christ made allusions to the reality of Purgatory by asserting that those who fail to reconcile with their brothers before going to the court and also those who fail to extend mercy to their neighbors respectively would be cast into prison until they have paid the last penny. The prison in these passages can't be hell because the sufferings in hell are eternal. On the contrary, this is a reference to purgatory since the suffering is temporary and spans until the guilty (sinner) has



fully atoned for his guilt, that is, until he has paid the last penny. Also in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:15) the reality of purgatory is implied in a place where lesser sins are purged away and the soul saved "yet so as by fire". Furthermore, the letter to the Hebrews distinguishes between those who enter heaven straightaway, calling them "the Church of the first born" (Heb.12:23) and those who enter after having undergone a purgation, calling them "the spirits of the just made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). Other scriptural passages that support the teachings of purgatory (with particular reference to praying for the dead) are seen in 2 Maccabees 12:13, Tobit 4: 17; Wisdom 3: 1-9. These are canonical books which many non-Catholics do not accept as canonical, however, they are ancient books of wisdom and the fact is that they recognized the reality of purgatory.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the reality of purgatory will not continue forever, for it is a temporary state of purification of souls in debts of sin. It will cease at the end of time. Christ has specifically revealed only two conditions or states that will exist at the end of time and they are; Heaven and Hell (Matt. 25:34, 41). To further understand the doctrine of purgatory, it is very vital to discuss it in the light of God's mercy and justice.

PURGATORY IN THE LIGHT OF THE MERCY AND JUSTICE OF GOD

In God, all His attributes are expressed in themselves, that is, they are coterminous with one another. Thus, His existence is the same as his essence, so too, His justice the same as His mercy. By saying they are the same, we mean they are explained in themselves, compatible and complementary with one another and are not mutually exclusive. This

goes to explain that in God, His justice is not opposed to his mercy and his mercy expresses his justice.

With respect to purgatory, doubters of the doctrine assert that it portrays God as unmerciful; punishing people even after they have confessed their guilt. This is a misconstrued way of idealizing God's justice. God does not punish us for any guilt we commit against Him or our neighbor; rather it is we who incur on ourselves the punishments due to our sins. Every sinful act endangers our soul by distracting and taking us far away from the hope of our beatific vision in Christ. It infects our soul with a disease that must be eradicated. Acknowledging our sinfulness and confessing them is a step towards our healing from this disease; it is not the healing. For instance, if a sick person opens up to the doctor about his bad health condition, he has taken a bold step to his healing. This would enable the doctor give the right medication to effect his healing. There would necessarily be a cost the patient would pay to enable his healing be effective which may be in form of taking some medical pills, taking some painful precautionary medications such as medical operations etc. In all these, the patient pays a cost similar to that being paid by the person who sins against God and his neighbor. When a patient receives a necessary

treatment to his healing that is painful, he doesn't accuse the doctor as being heartless or wicked; rather he is grateful to the doctor for mercy and assistance shown to him. This is the same with God.

However, in the case of God, He offers us quick healing by making available to us certain conditions whereby our healing would be facilitated. These conditions are called indulgence. One gets these indulgences by performing certain spiritual and charitable deeds of mercy. In a situation whereby a person dies without totally atoning for his sins or receiving the full dose of medication for his spiritual healing, he goes to purgatory for cleansing. Thus, the reality of purgatory reflects the mercy and justice of God.

CONCLUSION:

The souls in purgatory are in need of our attention and support. These souls like a patient awaiting the intervention of a surgeon are incapable of helping themselves. They suffer excruciating pains which are incomparable to any experienced in our world. Each day they cry out; my friends help me, I am helpless! Do you wish to listen to them or neglect their plea or existence as the rich man did to Lazarus? Or do you like the Good Samaritan wish to offer a helping hand to these poor souls? We owe it as a duty to pray for these saints who anticipate union with God.

AGAINST THE THE SIN HOLY SPIRIT: EXEGESIS OF MARK 3:28-30

INTRODUCTION

If God is merciful, as He has proven to us in our daily lives, what could make God to hold back His forgiveness from us? Was Jesus contradicting Himself when He preached God's infinite love at one time and went further to say there is a sin that cannot be forgiven?

The questions above may seem to be simple yes or no questions, but a close consideration of the implications of these answers will either prove to be helpful to our faith or it will make some to be obstinate in sin; a reality which will make one to feel relaxed in sin to the point of not considering repentance as a choice in life, leading to final impenitence. This is the case and possible dilemma of faith that one may fall into if one gives a misinterpretation of Jesus' teaching that the sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. If therefore, we fail to understand the point from which this teaching proceeds, our dilemma of faith will itself be a great one; we would in turn be in need of a faith re-awakening.

A CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit as presented in the Magisterium of the Church has its basis on the scriptures. It flows from the way the Biblical authors describe His mission in the Church and indeed in the lives of Christians. According to the Encyclical *Divinum illud Munus (On the Holy Spirit)* of Pope Leo XIII, all the actions of Christ were performed in the Holy Ghost and especially the sacrifice of Himself: Christ, through the Holy Ghost, offered Himself without spot to God. Considering this, no one can be surprised that all the gifts of the Holy Ghost inundated the soul of Christ. In Him resided the absolute fullness of grace, in the greatest and most efficacious manner possible; in Him were all the treasures of wisdom, and knowledge, graces gratis datae, virtues, and all other gifts foretold in the prophesies of old about Him (cf. *Divinum illud Munus*, 1897; §4).

Pope John Paul II, in the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, says that in the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally a gift, an

exchange of mutual love between the Divine Persons. It is the Holy Spirit who is the personal expression of this self-giving. In the same way, the Holy Spirit, while being consubstantial (i.e. being of one substance) with the Father and the Son in Divinity, is love and uncreated gift from which derives all gifts vis-à-vis creatures (created gift): the gift of existence to all things through creation; the gift of grace to human beings through the whole economy of salvation (cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 1986; §11).

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT: Exegesis of Mark 3:28-30

28“Truly, I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—30

If we are to understand what this saying means, we must first understand the circumstances in which it was uttered. In the preceding periscope, Jesus comes under serious attacks by those who were supposed to be the teachers of the Law. They in fact have said among themselves that “He is under the power of Beelzebul. By the prince of the demons he is driving out demons” (Mark 3:22). The Scribes and Pharisees had declared by the above statement that the cures Jesus performed were not by the power of God, but by the power of the devil. These men had been able to look at the incarnate love of God and to think of it as the incarnate power of Satan.

What could this mean for the mission of Christ? Having known what they had in mind, Jesus asks some pertinent questions: “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a nation is divided by civil war, that nation cannot stand. If a family divides itself into groups, that family will not survive. In the same way, if Satan has risen against himself and is divided, he will not stand; he is finished” (cf. Mark 3:24-26). The illustrations introduced here by Christ show the absurdity of the blasphemous charge which had been leveled against him. It was clearly absurd to suppose



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that Satan would be willing to destroy his own kingdom in this way, when in fact Satan goes around 'roaring like a lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Peter 5:8); someone to draw along with him, knowing that he is already condemned. It is on this basis that we will consider the implication of this periscope in context.

v. 28“Truly, I say to you.

In Judaism, the Hebrew *āmēn* (Greek; *Amēn*) which Jesus used at the beginning of this periscope (truly) was used to conclude a saying, and Jesus' use of it as an introduction is quite striking. Its presence in a saying renders support to the saying's importance and its authenticity. This could mean a deliberate emphasis use at the beginning of the statement to give more attention to the declaration that follows later.

Furthermore, the use of the passive (“shall be forgiven”) in 3:28 is an example of saying “God will forgive them”. But then this statement should not be interpreted as promising universal forgiveness of all sins and blasphemies, as 3:29 indicates, but rather as a promise that all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven. The expression *tois huiōis tōn anthrōpōn* (literally “sons of men”) is idiomatic for “humanity” (cf. Matt. 12:31; Ps. 21:10; 115:16). The saying thus adds a reference to the forgivable nature of sinning against the “Son of Man.”

vv. 29-30 Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

“Blasphemy” in this context is to be understood in accordance with the primary sense of the Greek *blasphemein* means “to slander, calumniate”. However, we must note at this point that the usage in v. 29 should not be misinterpreted as a contradiction on the part of Jesus in v. 28. It may seem to be a contradiction because of Jesus' usage of “whatever” or in some translations “all” blasphemies, and that going by this, Jesus could not have said all... but one sin can be forgiven. . In this form the

greater the first statement—"all" (3:28), the more forceful the exception—"but" (3:29). As powerful as the statement on universal forgiveness is, the exception in 3:29 receives even greater emphasis. Thus the focus lies not on 3:28 but rather on 3:29.

Further, in classical Greek this blasphemeo implies irreverence towards the gods and enmity against men, but monotheism in Judaism and Christianity invested the nominative blasphemia with an increased sense of arrogant defiance to God. Such defiance could also be employed against God's spirit, against His name and His will, and all could by extension be counted blasphemous. It is clear from v.30 that 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost' is the sin committed by those who attributed to the power of Satan the expulsion of demons by Christ. These miraculous works of



mercy were so clearly due to the beneficent operation of divine power that to attribute them to Satan was a calumny of diabolical malice. Unlike other blasphemies or sins which might be partially excused by ignorance, passion or inadvertence, this was a sin of willful malice and blindness to the light. As long as such a mentality persists, pardon is impossible, not because of any limitation on the power or mercy of God, but because those who are guilty of this sin refuse to respond to the promptings of grace; that is, they fail to obey the voice of conscience which always calls us to a reminder of the faults we have committed and by this they are led to even a more serious sin – final impenitence.

v. 30 but is guilty of an eternal sin or of an everlasting sin. This could be interpreted to mean that one who is

guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit is condemned already to eternal punishment. This is because the fact that one could blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is without gainsaying committing an ever lasting offence, and this offence is that which shall neither be remitted in this life, nor in the life to come. This does not undermine the reality of universal forgiveness, but the fact remains clear that this sin renders the heart of the sinner so hard that he does not see the need to turn away from sin. If that is the case then repentance is not possible and forgiveness is constrained.

COULD ONE BE FORGIVEN? WHAT HOPE LIES HERE FOR US?

When we blaspheme, we desecrate or defile an abintio Holy figure or being. Indeed the official view of the Church in line with the thoughts of St. Augustine and other Catholic Theologians is that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is nothing but final impenitence amidst; presumption, despair, resisting the known truth, envy of a brother's spiritual good and obstinacy in sin. This is seen when a person clings to particular sin and continually resisting the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Any sin that we are truly sorry for is forgivable, however if we turn our back on the voice of the Holy Spirit we begin to silence His convicting powers (this is also seen in the power of the conscience to convict an individual) and eventually we block working of God in our lives because we have reached a point where we cannot respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

On the basis of this, Pope John Paul II says this:

Against the background of what has been said so far, certain other words of Jesus, shocking and disturbing ones, become easier to understand...in connection with a particular sin which is called 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.' . . . Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit unforgivable? How should this blasphemy be understood? Saint Thomas Aquinas replies that it is a question of a sin that is unforgivable by its very nature, insofar as it excludes the elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place. According to such an exegesis, blasphemy does not properly consist in offending against the Holy Spirit in words; it consists rather in the refusal to accept the salvation which God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, working through the power of the Cross. (*Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem*, 46-47).

From our exposition above, what could we say is the true meaning of Jesus' teaching on the unforgiveable sin? What could be the implication of this saying that could instil fear in the heart of Christians? The fact is quite clear here; to attribute to the powers of evil what is manifestly the work of God is indeed blasphemous against God in his act of salvation. But on the other hand, there is a condition of forgiveness and that is penitence.

By repeated refusals of God's guidance, people have lost the ability to recognize God's mercies and goodness. Many people have misplaced their moral compass until they have a defective or twisted sense of judgement, even when they are confronted by their sins, they remain oblivious of them; repentance becomes farfetched and so it is with forgiveness. On the contrary, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived to believe in any false teaching or to become so jealous as to attribute to devil salvific works of God. We must not fall into despair which could lead final impenitence for these are the unforgiveable sin, unforgiveable because the one who falls into them has refused conclusively God's grace and prompting in him. So we should be on guard and at alert to overcome sins especially that against the Holy Spirit because such sin is a reality upon proclivity to do sin as corporal beings. If Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next, it is because this "non-forgiveness" is linked, as to its cause, to "non-repentance", in other words to the radical refusal to be converted. The remedy that flows therefore is to continuously believe in God's mercies and goodness through the power of the Holy Spirit. We must therefore pray constantly that obstinacy to sin especially blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be effaced from humanity.

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Polo Etaoghene Paul

WHERE IS THE MERCY IN "MERCY KILLING?"



Agbonkhese Lazarus

INTRODUCTION

We are faced today with a very prevalent culture, a culture of convenience, a trend of disposables and a current of death. Modern tendencies have made man to believe that his life is his personal property with which he can afford to do whatever he wishes without qualms. One sincerely wonders how human beings arrived at this self-annihilation. What has happened to our sense of sacredness and respect for the sanctity of human life? Did we not believe that no matter how difficult we perceive our lives to be, we should be thankful every morning when we wake and have one. While we were growing up, there was a popular song that says, carpenter, brick layer, the world is full of struggle and strife, but I will rather struggle than die. This encapsulated our idea of life. But then how did killing become virtuous that it is now defended under the ridiculous title of mercy killing. One pathetic feature of our age, a dangerous onslaught of secularism on our morality is the rebranding of evil and heinous phenomena with pleasant titles to make them appear acceptable and good. But as Fr. George Ehusani puts it in his poem, *Carnal Desire*, the name of the game is the same irrespective of the manifestation it assumes. Euthanasia remains a heinous crime and violence against God and humanity. But what exactly is this euthanasia?

Specifically, it is a contemporary expression devised mischievously by pro-choice adherent to refer to the practice of killing individuals who are perceived to be "terminally or irredeemably ill". The common reasons often put forward as the lame rationale behind this monstrous practice is that there is no hope of recovery, that the family members give up after exhausting available financial resources, when a person constitutes more of a burden than a benefit to the society or when the person undergoes a period of excruciating pain. This is to say that the value of human life is dependent on the individual's ability to be financially productive or beneficial, if such life is free from pain and suffering. When we begin to make distinction between a valuable human life and a non-valuable life, it is a clear indication of how much pragmatism had eaten deep into our morality.

There has been a ding dong affair regarding the morality of euthanasia. And there are different

shades of this matter. Basically, euthanasia can either be voluntary, non-voluntary, active or passive as the case may be. Voluntary euthanasia implies the termination of an individual's life after his/her consent must have been duly sought, and an agreement is often signed to this effect by the individual and the euthanasia executor(s). On the other hand, non-voluntary or involuntary euthanasia is when an individual's life is terminated without his/her consent but with the consent of his/her close relatives. By extension, active or positive euthanasia is an intentional act of shortening a person's life when he/she seems incurable or terminally ill by inducement of drug or even allowing them to die when assistance to prolong life is still very much possible and affordable. Passive or negative euthanasia is an indirect form of euthanasia which involves discontinuance or withholding of life support means. This may arise from the loss of hope of recovery of the patient in question or financial constraint of those who have been caring for such patient. It is therefore seen as a means of letting nature take its course. It is important to note that no matter the shade it takes, the point is that by euthanasia, man wants to be God thereby determine when life should end. Over the years, a host of arguments have been raised as to whether or not mercy killing is permissible. Here we can talk specifically of two fold arguments, namely the arguments of those who deem mercy killing as permissible in some cases and those of others who condemn mercy killing outright in all its forms and kinds.

Prior to the emergence of several philosophical and ethical theories like consequentialism, situationism, and utilitarianism all of which today tend to argue for euthanasia, it has been a general belief that human life owes its origin to God, and must therefore be treated with utmost care and respect. This notion has however been relegated to the background as many no longer regard human life as the basis of all good and the sine qua non of every human society, hence the indiscriminate culture of death. In this light therefore, questions pertaining to the sanctity and dignity of the human person in this heavily secularized world take a preeminent

status in moral and theological parlance.

Many scholars and indeed common sense underscore the primacy of life; the right to life is basic and the first of the fundamental human rights. Any violation of this first right has invariably violated the gamut of the fundamental human right. For what right is there for a dead man?. Theologians explain human life strictly as a gift of God to man that must be cherished and preserved by man as well. The Catholic Church in her teaching states unwaveringly that human life is sacred because it originates from God and it is to forever remain in a special relationship with the creator, who is the sole end. Again, God alone is the master of life and has the prerogative of directing human life to its final end.

who by the very nature of their profession and training are to take care and give hope to the sick and their families even in the most painful so called terminal stages. The expression mercy killing makes a caricature of the virtue of mercy which is genuine compassion for the misery and pain of others, and making effort to alleviate such pain or misery. In mercy killing, there is a wrong assessment of the matter, one's life is not the pain, attempting to take away one's life because he experiences pain is unreasonable. Therefore, whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable" (CCC 2277). This is no mercy at all, it is wickedness and selfishness. Rather, those whose lives are diminished or weakened by sickness deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible, they should be made to experience love and compassion from their loved ones so that they have no course sooner than expected to screw up and wish their own demise. This teaching of the Church is not a mere set of rules given by the magisterium, it is stemming from the creation account of Genesis 1:26-27. Here, we are made to understand that man as a being is dignified among all other creations as he was created in God's own image and likeness. Hence, it will be outright scandalous and disheartening to terminate the life of that which reflects divinity. It is therefore in adherence to the commandment of God, "Thou shall not kill", (Exodus 20:13) that the Catholic Church condemns any act of intentional killing whether by means of abortion, euthanasia, suicide or homicide. The scripture did not make demarcation regarding lives that have value and those that should be terminated. To this effect, every human person, no matter the degree of health deterioration is an image of God and deserves

the greatest possible dignity. When we make distinctions between valuable lives and invaluable ones, we tend to take the place of God and to adjudicate on what happens to the lives we did not create.

Frankly speaking, mercy killing has got no mercy or rational basis or justification. It suffices to state here that mercy killing is nothing but an outright devaluation, disrespect and disregard of/for the human person. Euthanasia is a betrayal of the genuine love and acceptance that should exist among relatives. Love should be made concrete at difficult moments of pains and misery. If then we kill all the elderly people whose lives have no material benefit on us and sick people simply because we want to save resources, our world will soon be deficient of wisdom and experiences. If we even decide to rule out the possibility of recovery for these people, we still are not justified to terminate their lives. Man is not the architect of life. No matter how bad he considers his life he should be thankful he still has it.



In his 1995 Encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope St. Joh Paul II asserts that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine based upon that unwritten law which man in the light of reason, finds in his own heart is reaffirmed by the sacred scripture and transmitted by the tradition of the church and taught by the ordinary magisterium. It is a gross disobedience to God himself who is both the author of life and the guarantor of that law. It is a contradiction of the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. Even when not motivated by the selfish refusal to be burdened with the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia must be called a false mercy and indeed a disturbing pervasion of the virtue of mercy. Genuine compassion must be seen in willingness to share others' pain and not in the culture of disposable in which we kill a person because he undergoes pain. It becomes even more ridiculous and pervasive when euthanasia is carried out by people such as relatives who should treat their loved one with patience and love; and doctors

“The first thing I do is to show that I am a Catholic wherever I am. If people are offended by that, well, I am sorry, I cannot help them”

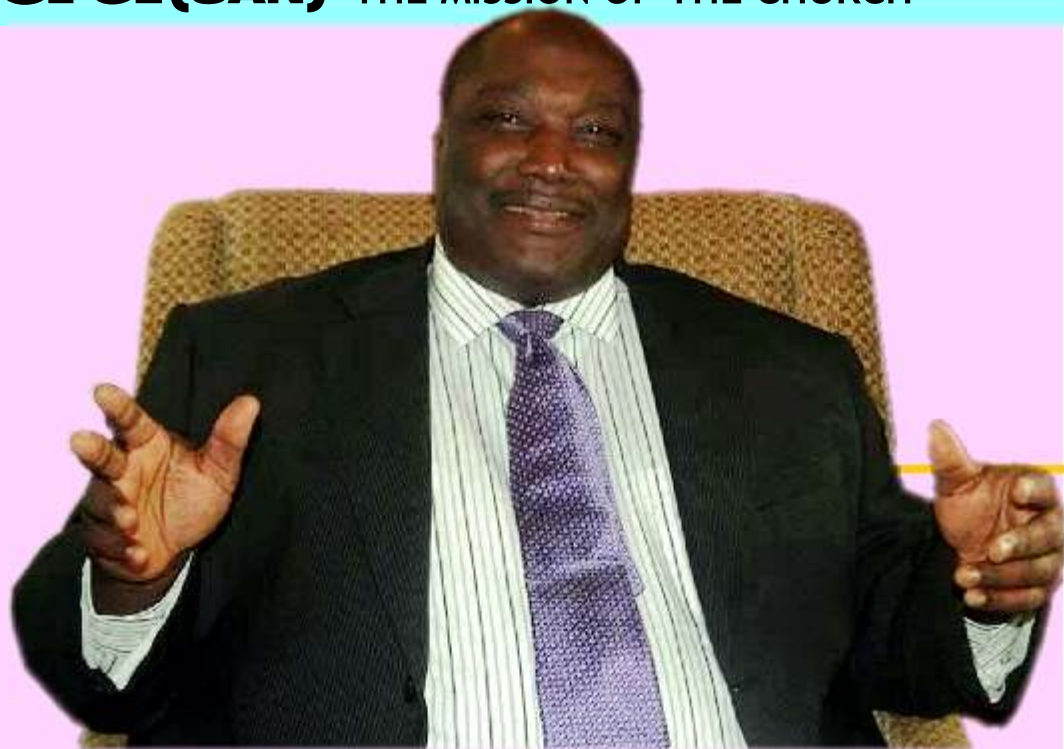
INTERVIEW

Mr. J. B. Daudu (SAN)

ON THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

My first real encounter with Mr. J. B. Daudu was indeed memorable and significant, I had hitherto known and seen him on the television once as the NBA President and then as counsel to the Senate president Bukola Saraki. Then, seeing him in real life, he was functioning as a member of Saint Vincent de Paul in the Church, hitting the box after mass and screaming, help the poor! This elicited in me sentiments of admiration and inspiration. And this is what he said, “everyone goes to the church to seek the face of God, to seek refuge and salvation. Your profession or social status is inconsequential. All that matters is that we save our souls”.

Mr. Joseph Bodurin Daudu is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria. He graduated from ABU Zaria in 1979 and was called to bar in 1980. In 1995, he was conferred with the coveted rank of SAN. A very celebrated and pre-eminent legal personality whose name and dominance in the legal system cannot be ignored. A specialist in the areas of criminal law, administrative law, appeals, constitutional law and election petition among others. He was one time the president of the Nigeria Bar Association. He is an associate member of American Bar Association and the Chairman Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee. He holds a post-graduate Diploma in international Commercial Arbitration, Keble College Oxford, United Kingdom (2007). He is Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators FCI Arb 2007. And Fellow, Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies 2013 FNIALS. He is a proud parishioner of Our Lady of



Perpetual Help, Galadima Gwarinpa Abuja.

The second Vatican Council underscored the fundamental equality between the clergy and the laity in the church and the paramountcy of collaboration. In what ways can professionals participate in Church's mission?

J. B Daudu: As you know, the church is made up of the clergy and the lay faithful. And the objective of everyone is the salvation of the soul. The rich, the poor, the professionals and the non-professionals, indeed, everybody goes into the house of God to seek direction and refuge. And though easy and simple, our faith also appears to be very complex, meaning that you can never fully understand what is required of you as a lay faithful. Speaking from that angle, the first responsibility lies on the priest to give good direction. Where the priest fails in his responsibility, the flock will scatter, the faithful are not likely to do much in the mission. The priest must be seen ready to

collaborate with the people. You have in many parishes now, seminarians, religious, catechist. The priest has the function to incorporate all these categories of people into the plan of the parish and encourage the lay people to take part in societies and organizations that are approved by the church. The priest has to set a platform where all the members are able to participate actively and partake in the functions of the parish. Saint Vincent de Paul, Block Rosary, Legion of Mary, Charismatic, and many other societies in the Church are avenues within which the laity can be part of the mission of the church. They must, however, be monitored and directed by the pastor. The people must also represent the ideals of the church in the society and wherever they find themselves.

How will you assess the involvement of the laity in this mission? Do you think a vast majority of our Catholics understand and appreciate their role as collaborators of the clergy?

Ib Daudu: I will simply give example with the parish where I worship here in Abuja, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. It is a well guided parish. Everybody knows what is required of them because there is an order already set down by the priests. But you know human beings can be selfish and like to evade responsibility. They would always want to give excuses for their short comings and not playing their part, not carrying out their function. Now a lot depends on what the lay faithful want by coming to church. Some people identify with the church as a matter of social obligation or association. This is where the

“To be born a Catholic is one thing, but to remain one is a decision one must make by oneself”

church has to educate the lay faithful on what should motivate their coming to church and the responsibilities they owe the church as its members. When the lay people understand that it is a matter of faith, they will count themselves fortunate to be part of the church. We are meant to believe that God is our maker and redeemer. Once we accept that, certain duties and responsibilities are required of us in the church. Now, we are losing some of our members to this Pentecostal churches because people lack this basic teaching. And some of our priests want to copy the way some of these pastors do their acrobatics, which by temperament does represent the mission of the Catholic Church. The other churches do that to attract people to their churches, and they do all sorts of drama, shows, programs to get people. The Catholic Church fortunately has refused to join that train, but she is interested in genuinely winning souls for Christ.

Answering your questions directly, the lay faithful actually know their roles and responsibilities, but you know that knowing the right thing and being able to do it are two different things. They therefore need constant pushing and instruction to be able to do what they know is their responsibility in the Church.

Last year, the Eighth Senate threw out of the floor of the senate the Gender Equality Bill sponsored by minority senate whip, Senator Abiodun Olujimi. The Senate President however ruled that the bill can be approved after some modifications. Catholic lawyers think the bill is highly dodgy and would legalize such anti-Catholic positions as abortion. What do you think about the bill? What is the situation of the bill?

J. B Daudu: Yes, you see, time and time again such bills will come up and they come up because there are gender activists who believe that the women should be allowed to do anything they wish with their body. Now, because we have these protagonists, these activists constantly try to put their position across. You will definitely find issues like this coming up again and again. However, any Catholic who understands the teachings of the church will not support the taking of life by abortion. It is a crime against God and Humanity. Some will even try to modify it to say, oh where the life of the mother is in danger, where there is rape, or where there is a passage of some very terrible disease through voluntary relationship with the mother, and then you can abort. However, it may be difficult, but my view is that every child from the moment of conception, God has a purpose for such child, and the child should be allowed to live because God has a purpose for every soul that comes into this world. It should not be for man to interfere and to violate the command 'thou shalt not kill'. Anyway, the bill in question was strongly condemned and rejected. Even the Muslims do not support the termination of pregnancy. In fact, common sense should tell anyone that abortion is not right. Meanwhile, if the bill is properly reworked and all the negative parts taken away, it can still be beneficial because it still contains areas which can help to empower and protect women. The provision of equal service to women, access to social services, to justice and the fact that they should not be denied, things that customary law denies them, like inheritance and other things. These are very good areas which are in keeping with the Nigerian constitution. Those areas are also supported by the dictates of our faith. But where

and when such bills contradict any of the cardinal pillars of the Catholic teaching, such as the sacredness of life, we will do well to condemn it. Happily, the bill was rejected and has been sent for overhauling and reworking after which it will be represented.

Thank you very much. You mentioned Muslims also rejecting the bill, and that brings me to the fact that it was actually Muslims that vehemently rejected that bill while Catholics were seen to be passive. What does this say about our Catholics who are professionals and in high places?

J.B. Daudu: Actually, not only Catholics. That demon called fear and cowardice affects Christians the most. If there is any turbulence here, the first people to run will be Christians. They don't seem to believe in martyrdom. And there is the problem of "it doesn't concern me". We find it difficult to come together and push forward our faith. We don't seem to realize, like the Muslims that Christianity is a way of life. So it is not surprising to me to find Catholics, and Christians generally in the house mute while Muslims vehemently rejected the bill. You discover that the Muslims are brought up knowing that they live for the faith and the community. They are not afraid of standing out for it. But we find ourselves rationalizing and not prepared to forego our self-interests, not even for the faith. So we must let our faith reflect outside the church. There is no point answering a Catholic when you cannot stand up for the ideals the Catholic faith upholds. If not, our Catholicism and Christianity is called to question. It is not about coming to church on Sundays to receive communion and sit for meetings. We should not be too careful not to offend people on account of our faith. You find some Catholics that are afraid of making the sign of the cross in public probably because there is one big imam, bishop or pastor from one Pentecostal church, and so he doesn't want to offend their sensitivity. Why will I not want to offend them, if expressing my faith will offend them? Yet, they don't pay any attention to you when they profess their own faith. If you are with a Muslim and it is time for his prayers, he leaves you without apologies to express his faith. The first thing I do is to show that I am a

Catholic wherever I am. If anybody is offended by that, well, I am sorry, I cannot help them. So I think it is important that we Catholics understand that people admire and envy us, therefore we should not be scared or shy to profess our faith by whatever means, provided we do not encroach into others' space.

The Voice: You are undoubtedly an accomplished legal luminary, and a staunch Catholic. How have these two identities interfaced? How has your Catholic identity helped in your decision making as a professional and successful legal practitioner?

J. B. Daudu: Well, I was born a Catholic, but you know to be born a Catholic is one thing, but to remain one is a decision one must make by himself. It must be a conscious decision you make by yourself and for yourself. Now I have taken my time to compare and analyze different religions and denominations, and I have come to realize that the Catholic Church does not place any burden on anybody. She allows you to make use of your God-given freewill. It is a matter of choice. Above all, there is no coercion, everything is about leading you to a mature faith and conviction. I have done very complicated cases. I have gone into the court confused. There are times when I have my questions prepared, but from the way the other party spoke, he just scattered my line of thought. Just a prayer, or the fact that I had my rosary and say a brief silent prayer, everything came out perfect. So it has paid off for me. It gives me peace of the mind. I have seen billionaires who cannot sleep in the night because they probably didn't incorporate their faith in their business. If we realize that our faith should affect the exercise of our professions, then Catholics should have the best doctors, lawyers, accountants, politicians, because our faith moderates and balances what we do. The most stubborn professionals you can have are Catholics. Once they make up their minds, they don't fret because they are convinced that they are doing the right thing and this is what they get from their faith. That is why they see us as fanatics. We won't compromise. It is the best thing that has

happened to me, that synergy between faith and profession.

The Voice: Finally, it is popularly believed that there are many innocent people in detention for many years who have never been tried. This is a violation of the fundamental human rights and a merciless dearth of justice. Whose duty is it to ensure that people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer get legal services? Does NBA have any responsibility regarding abuse of human rights, especially detention without trial?

J. B. Daudu: Detention before trial has acquired a very notorious angle in Nigeria, such that in detention centres you find out that there are more people awaiting trials than those already convicted which should not be the case. Constitutionally, when you are awaiting trial, you enjoy what is called the presumption of innocence. One is seen as innocent until proved guilty. Sometimes the bail term given are so stringent that they amount to no bail at all, and you find people, sometimes, innocent people languishing in prison and being treated like criminals when actually they should be free to attend to their trials. As a matter of fact, the idea of awaiting trials being in detention goes against the opportunity given to the accused by the constitution to properly articulate their defense. May be they have documents they need to access, or they have their own investigation to carry out so as to expose the real culprit, but then they are shut up in the prison. There is obviously a failure of justice here for these persons. Then it is the society which is the machinery of justice that reserves the responsibility to attend to such issues, and we are part of this machinery. But the problem now is that as a result of rumor mongering and gossip, we tend to brand every government official as thieves and anybody charged for corruption is already concluded to be corrupt. And if the person is later declared not guilty, people believe he has bought his way out, this is another aspect of injustice we need to stop.

More so, the method used in appointing those in charge of the affairs of the judicial system is sometimes unfortunately not on

merit or competence but such things as favoritism, tribalism, ethnicity etc., and consequently, you have the wrong people in these positions. But those who adjudicate on the rights of the people should be Godfearing people, competent and empathetic, so that they do not apply the things written in law books as though they were applying them to specimens in the laboratory but to fellow human beings. There are many organizations that have the responsibility of providing legal services to people especially those who cannot afford it. One of such is the NBA you mentioned. They provide free legal services to indigent persons. This is what is called "pro bono actions". It means that every lawyer has to provide free legal services to certain percentage of people without

Those who adjudicate on the rights of the people should be God fearing people, competent and empathetic, so that they do not apply the things written in law books as though they were applying them to specimens in the laboratory

which he cannot be qualified for a number of things. There is a department in charge of this pro bono. On the papers, it will appear everything is taken care of, but in reality, many things are not right. Therefore, we must be our brothers' keepers. The society must be sensitive to the plight of others. We find the social media useful, and some people are already making use of it. When people need assistance or are having legal issues, we should not do as if it is not our business, or convict them before the court even hears their cases. We should speak out, you never can tell, there could be someone willing to sacrifice for such person to ensure that the person is not unduly or improperly detained.

Thank you very much sir for this enlightening session with you, gratias!

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF TRANSFIGURATION

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on the Publication of the 56th Edition

*May God continue to strengthen the faith
you are building amongst God's people. Amen*

“It is just simple logic, if there is harmony in the family there will be harmony in the society”

AN INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP JOHN OYEJOLA

ON LOVE AND FORGIVENESS: VITAL BEDROCK FOR STABLE AND HAPPY FAMILY

Bishop John Akinkunmi Oyejola is the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo Nigeria. He holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Humanities (1998) from the All Hallows College, Dublin Ireland. He bagged Masters of Arts (M.A) in Pastoral Leadership in the year 1999, also a Masters of Arts (M.A) in Marriage and Family Therapy (MTF) from St. Mary's College, California.

The Voice is delighted to bring you excerpts from our chat with him on the topic: Love and Forgiveness: vital bedrock for stable and happy family.

Voice: More than ever before, the Family and Marriage Institutions are plagued today by myriads of ills. Which among these modern tendencies do you consider most threatening to the family existence and life at large?

Bishop John: In my opinion and from my experiences, modernity and advancement in science and technology constitute a very major and foundational challenge to family and marriage in our world today. You see, what people watch on the television, what they get on the internet or phone influences them a lot. I am not saying these things are bad, but my experience shows me that with them, maintaining sanity in the family and in marriage has become more difficult. Modern technology has brought about so much physical and emotional gap between husband and wife, and they have so much secrets to handle so much so that they are not even free to access each other's phones or email boxes because they have so much to hide there. Husband and wife are at table eating, each of them is receiving text messages, or chatting, breaking the communication, for hours they on the social media. We find spouses living their marital life solely on the social media. That is the only place they profess love for each other, they are working round the clock without sparing time for their relationship. So, technology is bringing families asunder. Our parents didn't have such problems. Then, they spent more time together, they ate together, they talked about issues together and families were better. But with



technology now, individualism, and the so called privacy, or sacred space, spouses are becoming strange bed-fellows to each other and this has far reaching ugly implications for marriages and families. Another is poverty. Families are tearing apart because they cannot afford the basic necessities of life, we see parents giving their children to stay thousands of miles away from home and the rest of the family members and not able to reunite with family for years.

Voice: The Synod on Family recently ended. One of the aims for which the Holy Father convened the synod was to look at the family and all the many ills that plague it in the contemporary times and proffer some practical solutions, how will you assess the achievement of that synod vis-a-vis the aims for its convention?

Bishop John: I think it's very successful on one ground, that everybody in the world knows that the Church cares. Our Church is aware of the trouble that is in the world today and it shows how much we care about humanity, about family and how much we can still do in the name of God to bring everybody

“I want us to go back to the past. Marriage was both sacred and everybody involved knew they had the responsibility to keep the couple together.”

together and keep the family focused. There is no one more important issue than the family. Family is very important, we can't throw it away. That is what Pope is trying to do now. It is part of what human beings need. Every human being in this world comes from a family. We all belong to families. So family is just indispensable. The Church is emphasizing the integrity of the family. Having seen the troubles and abuses creeping into the family in the name of modernity, she needs to take practical actions to salvage the situation.

Voice: There is today a trend of “cohabitation” and the “baby mama syndrome”, the terms husband and wife are fast eroding, what consequences do these trends hold for the sacredness of marriage?

Bishop John: We have today a culture of convenience. These trends are becoming widespread because some people are not ready to be committed or take responsibility. People are looking for easy way out, they are not ready to make any life-long commitment to responsibility and that is why they are taking into all these. I want us to go back to the past. How did our parents live it out, were they faithful? Yes! Where they committed? Yes! Marriage was sacred, and everybody involved knew they had the responsibility to keep the couple together. Then marriage was not just a union between two persons but two families, two towns, and sometimes two tribes. Today technology has taken away all that. People just begin to live together even without the knowledge or consent of parents. Our young people are more interested in self-gratification, satisfying their pleasure. They think fidelity is archaic or impossible. But the truth is that couples can be faithful to each other, and indeed there are many families and there are many Couples out there that are faithful to each other. So that's why we priests, bishops and those who are in the area of this formation of people must be committed. We must see ourselves as companions journeying with families. That is part of what the Pope said in the *Amoris Laetia*, patient pastoral guidance and support.

Voice: There is no perfect marriage. Couples are expected to constantly and mutually help each other by way of mutual forgiveness and

compassion, how much can these ameliorate the crisis of marriage today?

Bishop John: You cannot talk about forgiveness, without talking about love. You can not talk of love without forgiveness. If you love, you forgive, if you forgive, it is because you love. If I may ask you, do you offend your mum or your dad? Yes, do they forgive you, yes why? They love you. So, if couples love each other, they will always let go. Love is the basis. There is no limit to forgiveness. That is Jesus' response to Peter in Matthew 18:22. And this is what makes the difference. When you see a family or marriage that is stable, it is not because the partners do not offend each other; it is because they mutually forgive each other and agree to make things work.

Voice: Marriage is for better and for worse, are there any offences for which a partner is expected not to let go in marriage? Old wounds and scars affect a couple's relationship, what would be the panacea for such old serious scars?

Bishop John: There is no word like divorce in the dictionary of the Church. So, there is no offence or misdemeanor on the part of any of them that will make the Church to allow divorce. Nullity can only come if there are grounds to show there was no marriage ab initio. For instance, a particular union is founded on deceit and a number of other things that could nullify a celebrated marriage. Apart from this, there is no divorce. So the point is that marriage cannot be built on convenience such that it only holds when the going is easy. In fact, the authenticity of the love needed in marriage should be seen at trying moments. There is no reason, therefore, after a man and woman have come out publicly to promise before the people of God to be with each other for better for worse, and then one comes out after sometime to say he or she does not want the marriage because the other offended them. Again, the real point resurges, where there is love, forgiveness is boundless. The solution again is renewed love and constant forgiveness.

Voice: Finally, it has become common for people to prepare for wedding day, without preparing for marriage, what are the necessary factors and preparations for a successful marriage? What are your opinions regarding distressed marriages and troubled families vis-à-vis pastoral attention?

Bishop John: I am thinking about three things. The first thing is that we have to pay more attention to the preparation of marriage. We need to put more in preparing young people who are planning to enter into the marriage covenant. This preparation should be before, during and after the celebration of the marriage. Before, we must let them see what marriage entails, that it is not a bed of roses, and all the nitty gritty necessary for consideration before getting into such life-long commitment. We need to ask them what their expectations in marriage are, and you will be amazed at the level of ignorance and why many of such marriages do not survive even a slight stress. What are their criteria for choosing

their partners? I always tell young people to marry their friends, I mean someone that loves you, cares about you and will even tolerate you when you do not behave well. For instance, your mother is your friend, even when you misbehave, she could get angry with you, but she never lets you go. We have to begin to prepare the young people as early as possible. For me, as soon as they are out of secondary school, they should be told what marriage is about and what they need to know in choosing life partners. And not just talking to them, we need to listen to them too, and this is very important. They display a lot of ignorance at that tender stage. They do a lot of things without knowing why. I once listened to a group of girls who said they would not want to be pregnant before marriage. It sounded like a good idea, but upon further interrogation, it became clear that they would not mind sex before marriage, only that they would not like pregnancy to occur. And when I intervened, I discovered their shallow mindedness. I had to tell them that the problem is not pregnancy. The Church has not just said you should not be pregnant before marriage, the Church says, no sex before marriage and if you don't have sex, you won't be pregnant. Some of them were taught about contraceptives in school and they do not even understand that it is wrong. We must listen to them and know what their views are. Actually, intercourse

“Where there is love, there is forgiveness, where there is forgiveness there is love. And marriage must be built on love.”

is exclusively meant for marriage. And after they enter into the marriage, we also need to accompany them as they experience themselves more intimately and profoundly in the marriage. They probably begin to notice things they didn't know exactly and perhaps do not like. When we accompany them, they confide in us. We encourage them and let

them know that there is no perfect person. This helps to keep the marriage together. People are more likely to open up to people who show concern and identify with them. Therefore, we have to train people professionally in this ministry. We need some lay faithful trained for this special ministry for a wider outreach and coverage. We must safeguard the family institution and the sacredness of marriage. If we play with them, the world will suffer for it. Crime is already on the increase, an evidence of a grave dislocation in the family. It is just simple logic, if there is harmony in the family there will be harmony in the society and vice versa.

Voice: Thank you very much My Lord for granting us this opportunity. We congratulate you warmly on your episcopal ordination and pray that you have a bountiful harvest in the Lord's vineyard.

Cartoon Extra



THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE REVELATION OF GOD'S MERCY



IDAHOSA, Iguma Michael

PREAMBLE

Let me quickly accentuate the fact that the sinful and desecrated world of today is desperately in need of reconciliation, liberation at all levels of human relationships. It is only the Divine Mercy revealed in the person of Jesus Christ that can authentically raise the world from its degraded fallen nature. Thus, the various components of Jesus' activities in the world function as an effective means of realizing its end: salvation.

The will of the Father expressed in Jesus' intervention in human history is to enable mankind reach God, in order to carry on a blessed dialogue with him in eternity. Jesus Christ is the concrete and visible manifestation of the Father's love. He is the eternal act of self-communication. His intervention in human history wherein he reveals the father's love for the restoration of the disordered nature is seen within the broader context of the Lukan messianic declaration: "the spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ...proclaim liberty to captives ... sight to the blind ... proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk 4:18-19). These activities came to its zenith with the passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. These, the Church refers to as the *Mysterium Paschale*

REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

The phrase "Paschal Mystery" is used to capture the essential aspects of Christian redemption by many theologians and also the Council Fathers of Vatican II. It is an abbreviation for the Easter mystery

of the passion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The term "paschal" is from the Hebrew word *pasach* which points to the Israel's commemoration of the Passover in Egypt, a memorial of God's promise to the Israelites by which they were freed from slavery in Egypt. Mystery on the other hand as understood in the phrase "paschal mystery", comes in three perspectives; firstly, God's plan to save the world. That is, God in his wisdom and insight decided to save the world. Secondly, the Christ mystery demonstrated in his death and resurrection in which the mystery of God is finally and fully made manifest. Thirdly, it is the mystery of Christian liturgy which in the thought of the Council Fathers is not only the paschal mystery proclaimed but also it is actually accomplished in the liturgical celebration of the church. Paschal mystery in its simplest understanding then, is the redemptive act of Jesus reached in the events of the last supper to the climax on Easter Sunday. These events include: passion, death and resurrection.

The paschal mystery reveals the mercy of the father. It manifest the Father's will to restore all things to himself. The events of Good Friday and the event before that, in prayer in the Gethsemane introduce a fundamental change into the whole course of the revelation of love and mercy in the messianic mission of Christ. Through it, we all have been healed and our human nature has thus been restored. According to Pope John Paul II, the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it. In the passion and death of Christ—in the

fact that the father did not spare his own son... absolute justice is expressed for Christ undergoes the passion and cross because of the sin of humans. Therefore, God, as Christ has revealed him, does not merely remain closely linked with the world as creator and the ultimate source of existence ... he is linked to man with a bond that is still more intimate than that of creation. In the paschal mystery, the covenantal seal between God and man is expressed profoundly bearing in mind that the covenant that existed *ab initio* was broken due to man's action. Consequently, God's wish to make for himself a chosen people, a holy nation, a people set apart for the praise of Him was realized in Christ's paschal mystery. In it, the love and mercy of the Father for the world is at its apex. Find the zenith expression.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY IN THE CHURCH

The paschal mystery of Christ's cross and resurrection stands at the center of the church's liturgy. In fact, the Second Vatican Council says that in the liturgy not only is the paschal mystery proclaimed, it is actually accomplished. It is what the church's liturgy commemorates and celebrates. "Thus by baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with him, are buried with him... in like manner, as often as they eat the supper of the Lord, they proclaim the death of the Lord until the Lord comes". Similarly, Ever since the church appeared to the world precisely at Pentecost when the apostles first made the great convert, she has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things 'which were in all the

scriptures concerning him, celebrating the Eucharist in which the victory and triumph of his death are again made present...’ the paschal mystery of Christ and the church’s liturgy both constitute the one redemptive sacrifice. They are two inseparable realities. The celebration of the latter is re-enactment of the former; albeit, the latter is an unbloody sacrifice and the former a bloody sacrifice. The Holy mass as a memorial is not just the recollection of an event but a re-enactment of what happened in the past. It joins together the past and the present... a re-enactment is a privileged moment in this perpetuity of his death, the forgiveness of sin, the redemption, the reconciliation and restoration of the world to the Father. It is privileged moment because the divine mercy is once again made present and the church enters into a communion with Christ and receives eternal life, the fullness of life. The celebration of the paschal mysteries in the church brings about an unbroken link between the past, present and the future,

thereby continuing the work of transformation in the hearts of all who consciously and actively participate in it. Therefore, our historical redemption and salvation brought about by Christ is made present in the Eucharistic celebration. It is the memorial of Christ death.

mercy of God revealed in Christ, in the whole of his mission as messiah, professing it in the first place as a salvific truth of faith and as necessary for a life in harmony with faith and the seeking to introduce it and make incarnate in the lives of her faithful and as far as possible in the lives of all people of goodwill.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God’s mercy and this was perfectly revealed in the paschal mystery. That is, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faithful to the Lord’s instruction to celebrating this mercy of God in the Liturgy, the church constantly ponders on this divine mercy, applies and bears it to her faithful and she in a more particular and profound manner consciously bears witness in her whole mission to God’s mercy following the footsteps of her master and his apostles. In the words of Pope John Paul II, the church must bear witness to the

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SALVE REGINA, MATER MISERICORDIA



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INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Catholics all over the world have placed themselves under the care of the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of Mercy.” Any explanation of this Marian title, which is originally a part of that ancient prayer, Hail Holy Queen, must follow the simple logic that if Jesus is Mercy, then Mary is clearly the Mother of Mercy. “No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh” (Misericordiae Vultus, no. 24). Bearing this in mind, we can say that all our devotion to God through Mary can be summarized in St. Louis’ cliché: All to Jesus, through Mary our Mother. When we go to God through Mary, we are not doing something new simply because it was God who first came to us through her. When we seek the face of God’s Mercy through Mary therefore as Mother of Mercy, we only imitate God who chose her as Mother of Mercy incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.

GOD’S “MATERNAL” LOVE AND MERCY

In describing divine mercy, the books of the Old Testament use a unique semantic nuance in which the mercy of God is figuratively likened to a mother’s womb. We read in Isaiah: “Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even those may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Is. 49:15); we read also that “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you” (Is. 66:13). Here, God’s mercy is described in terms of maternal warmth; unconditional, intimate, and nurturing. However, the mystery of God’s “maternal” love is expressed with particular power in the Hebrew word *rahamin*. Etymologically, this word means “womb” but it was later used to mean divine compassion for man, God’s mercy. Of course, we know that the apex and culmination of God’s mercy and compassion for man is the incarnation.

Man was created out of the ‘surplus’ of God’s love and, while he was justly condemned, he was redeemed out of the abundance of God’s mercy evident at the incarnation. However, it was the womb of Mary that delivered to us God’s love and mercy incarnated/personified. In the womb of Mary, the Hebrew word *rahamin* came to its full realization as the channel of God’s love and mercy for man.

MARY, QUEEN OF MERCY

A story was told of a peasant wishing to gain the friendship and benevolence of the King. He went to the

Queen and presented her a fruit which was his whole revenue in order that she might present it to the King. The Queen, having accepted the poor little offering from the peasant, would place the fruit on a large and beautiful dish of gold, and so, on the peasant’s behalf would present it to the king. Then the fruit, however unworthy in itself to be a king’s present, would become worthy of his majesty because of the dish of gold on which it rested and the person who presented it.

According to St. Augustine, “the New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New.” Typology, as used by Scripture scholars, uncovers the hidden dimension to every page of the scriptures. Nothing is incidental or accidental in God’s providence. Old Testament events, therefore, find their fulfillment in the New Testament and so does the office of the Queen Mother.

In the Old Testament, the Davidic Monarchy adopted the practice of the office of a Queen Mother. Most of the gentile cultures of the time practiced polygamy. So, it was difficult for a king to pick which wife would rule with him. Instead of a wife as queen, he would choose his mother to be queen. As wife of the former king and mother of the present king, the queen mother embodied the continuity of dynastic succession. The role of the Queen mother is however, more lucid in Solomon’s reign. We read about it in the First Book of the Kings; “... And the king said to her, “make your request my mother for I will not refuse you” (Cf. I Kings 2:19-20).

Considering the above text of Scripture, we note the power of the Queen mother. There, the queen mother is considered an intercessor or an advocate for the people. Solomon rose from his throne when his mother entered. This makes her unique among the royal subjects even the king’s wives would bow to the king. Solomon bowed before her, showing further respect. After, he seats her in the place of greatest honour, at his right hand. It is notable therefore that Solomon’s power and authority are in no way threatened by the queen mother. Though he bows to her, he remains the monarch. He listens to his mother. This Davidic type is fulfilled with the reign of Christ. Solomon established the office of the Queen Mother in the Old Testament and Christ confirms it in the New Testament in the person of his Mother, Mary.

“The title Queen,” St. Albert the Great notes “differs from that of Empress, which implies severity and rigour, in signifying compassion and charity towards the poor.” Mary is Queen of Mercy because she intends only to win pardon and peace for sinners.

MARY, MOTHER OF MERCY

In the Encyclical Letter, *Veritatis Splendor* no. 118, Pope

St. John Paul II wrote that “Mary is the mother of mercy because her Son, Jesus Christ, was sent by the father as the revelation of God’s mercy (Cf. John 3:16-18).” Mary is also Mother of Mercy because it is to her that Jesus entrusts his Church and all humanity (cf. John 19:26-2). Thus Mary becomes Mother of each and every one of us, the Mother who obtains for us divine mercy (Cf. Veritatis Splendor, no. 120).

Fulton Sheen summarizes it thus: “As a physical mother watches over an ailing child, so does Mary watch over her erring children. The one word never associated with her is justice. She is only its mirror. As the Mother of the Judge, she can influence His Justice; as Mother of Mercy, she can obtain mercy.” Sheen, however, cautions that it is not to say that “Mary pardons - for she cannot- but she intercedes as a mother does in the face of the justice of the father.” God’s justice and mercy are intertwined in the sense that without justice, mercy would be indifference to wrong; without mercy, justice would be vindictive. Mary obtains mercy for us as mothers obtain pardon or forgiveness for their sons without giving them the feeling of “being let off.” This is also true in the story of the wedding feast at Cana in Jn. 2:1-12. The battle at Lapanto bears testimony to this.

MARY, MEDIATRIX OF MERCY

We know that from time to time God picks certain people to play a special role in his plan of human salvation: Abraham, Moses, David, and so on. Their role in God’s plan is a privilege, an act of God’s own grace. Apart from God’s grace, there was nothing special about Abraham, Moses, David and so on. They were special people and had a special role only because of the grace of God. The same is true of Mary. Everything that we hold special about Mary and her place in God’s plan came from God’s grace. This is what we call to mind when we re-echo Angel Gabriel’s words in Luke’s gospel saying; Hail Mary, Full of Grace. Whose Grace? God’s grace. This is why she is the Mediatrix of all graces because she possesses the fullness of God’s graces.

St. Louis Maria De Monfort, explaining the necessity of Mary in True Devotion to Mary quoting St. Antoninus said that “God the father made an assemblage of all the waters and he named it the sea (mare). He made an assemblage of all His graces and He called it Mary (Maria).” Mary becomes both the treasure of God and the treasurer of God’s graces. It is by her that He applies His merits to His members, and that He communicates His virtues, and distributes His graces.

This is of course in line with the papal teachings on Our Lady’s role as mediatrix of all graces. For Pope Leo XIII, Mary is one “through whom Christ has chosen to be the dispenser of all heavenly graces” (Jucunda Semper, 1883); for St. Pius X: “she is the neck of our Head by which He communicates to his Mystical Body All Spiritual gifts” (Ad diem illum, 1904); for Pope Benedict XV “...every kind of grace we receive from the treasury of the redemption is ministered as it were through the hands of the same sorrowful virgin...” (Inter Sodalicia, 1918); also, for Pope Pius XII: “God wishes us to have everything through Mary” (Mediator Dei, 1947). In his 1987 Encyclical, Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer), St. John Paul II wrote that: “Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her son and mankind in the reality of its wants, needs and sufferings

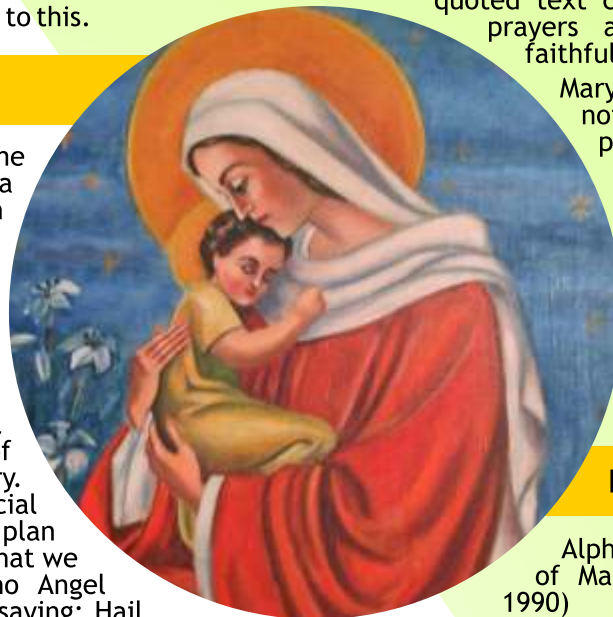
She puts herself ‘in the middle’, that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.” (Redemptoris Mater, no. 21)

We therefore would necessarily conclude that the title Mediatrix of Mercy is implicitly contained in the classic Marian title of “Mother of Mercy.”

CONCLUSION: RESPONSE TO CRITICS OF MARY’S MATERNAL MEDIATION

An objection to the Marian mediation that has surfaced particularly amongst the Protestant and Pentecostal brethren and even some Catholics concerns the classic Pauline text of 1Tim 2:5 “For there is only one God, and there is only one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” A proper understanding of the text presupposes a critical and fundamental distinction: that the one and perfect mediation of Jesus does not prohibit but rather provides and calls for sharing and participation by others in a subordinate and secondary way. Little wonder the preceding verses to the just quoted text call for human supplications, prayers and intercessions from the faithful (Cf. 1Tim 2:1-4).

Mary’s maternal mediation does not obscure the unique and perfect mediation of Christ. Indeed, after calling Mary ‘Mediatrix’, the Vatican II council is careful to explain that this ‘neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator’ (Lumen Gentium, n.62, cf. Lumen Gentium 60).



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THE RICH GET RICHER AND THE POOR GET POORER:

A PRODUCT OF A MERCILESS SYSTEM



Rev. Fr. Kenneth Ogonna Agwu

One of the viable indices for measuring the economic balance and social welfare in any society is assessing the gap between the rich and the poor in the given society. Economic inequality is a given. It is a certain feature in every given human society- that just as human beings come in different shapes and sizes and their physical and mental abilities differ, so also do their pockets come in diverse weights and their economic capacity differ. However, while poverty and affluence are constant features of every human society from earliest times, it is always a thing of immediate concern to see poverty grow among the population.

Similarly, while there are in every society, both poor and rich people who must live side by side in social interconnectedness, it is usually a thing of concern when the economic gap between the rich folks and poverty stricken ones gets wider, when the middle class is totally eliminated. It is a thing of intense concern when a few live in affluence, in ostentatious luxury, feasting

perpetually in purple robes like the rich man in one of Jesus' most famous gospel narrations, while a great majority live in squalor, below the poverty line, in inhumane conditions, oftentimes not assured of three square meals. It becomes economically, unhealthy, objectionable and worrisome when the middle class is completely eliminated as the rich grow richer, feeding and taking advantage of the misery of the poor, whom they readily exploit to gain even more economic advantage. The effects of economic inequality on any given society can be most devastating. The principal effect, of course is usually, a high crime

Christians. And it is nothing short of a moral scandal. Going against the social teaching of the church and the gospel ideal to be found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Poverty in the midst of plenty or the concentration of the common good in the hand of a few as the majority wallow in misery is senseless and selfish. It worries the Christian conscience to see people die as a result of neglect and unavailability and unaffordability of basic health care or people lacking in basic needs such as food, water, freedom and education all because they do not have the coins to buy these. Beyond the enclaves of particular countries, on the global



scene are countries where there is so much to the point that wastage has become a culture, existing in the same universe with other countries full of hungry children, illiterate youths and fading out elders.

rate, as social tension mounts. Just as it constitutes a serious concern for the economists, even more does it offend and worry our sensibility and morality as

question then is: what can be the cause of this massive gap? What reality is responsible for this most ungodly trend? What has made the rich folk careless of poverty and misery all around them and be

The

comfortable and at ease, even in the midst of heart rending poverty all over the place? What force will make those already rich, desperate to be richer, even if this means entrenching on the misery of others? What makes rich people sometimes blind to the Lazarus perpetually under their table begging for just the scraps? The answer is not far-fetched. It is mercilessness, losing touch of genuine human sympathy. Unfortunately, these vices have permeated our society and structures. It is survival of the fittest!

deplete?. These leaders have their children graduating from world class universities across the globe where annual tuition fees can build and equip a school, yet we have our schools on constant strike because of non-payment of salaries. Our educational system is best described as a heap of ruins. The once-called ivory towers and beacons of light have become tower of frustration and birthplace of mediocrity. Inconsistency has overtaken the whole edifice, today, schools are in session, and tomorrow students are forced to go on indefinite

indeed is a merciless system devoid of justice and compassion where selfishness and self-aggrandizement have been institutionalized, and totally incompatible with democracy we claim to be practicing. Ours is a replica of that city which Isaiah bemoans when he says: the city that was once faithful is behaving like a whore, at one time, it was filled with righteous people, but now, only murderers remain. Jerusalem, you once were like a silver, but now you are worthless, you were like good wine but now you are only water. Your leaders



are rebels and friends of thieves, they are always accepting gifts and bribes. They never defend the orphans in court or listen when widows present their case. (Is 1:21-23).

Mercy and compassion are the remedies

What can be more merciless than the experiences we have had in the country for sometimes now. A couple of months ago, some serving governors complained that they can no longer afford the N18,000 minimum wage because of the bad economic situation in the country. One really wonders if the same workers who receive N18,000 as wage are insulated in any way from the economic crisis. When many countries are reviewing minimum salaries upward to meet the increasing cost of living. Unfortunately, these political office holders are not considering reviewing their outrageous allowances and salaries, bloated overhead cost, inflated contracts and their exorbitant celebrations. Is there any of them whose wife makes a pot of soup for N18,000 or less? Or are they more human than these workers for whom N18,000 has become difficult to pay? Has any of these politicians thought of reducing the number of aids and advisors who are neither useful to the running of the state nor contribute to the economy they

strike. Our leaders go to Saudi Arabia, London, America and so on. for their medical checkups while our teaching hospitals supposedly producing the future medical personnel are good enough only for sight-seeing. In Nigeria, malaria and cholera still kill people as though they were incurable diseases.

A stroll through the streets of Asokoro district in Abuja where the Governors and Deputy Governors' lodges are located will break your heart. You would notice mostly uninhabited mansions reserved for these people who hardly ever live or go there; houses built and constantly maintained with money from the so-called bad economy while millions of Nigerians have no decent houses to live in. yet when they are on official assignment in Abuja, they take mind blowing hotel allowances. Ours

for these maladies. Any system or society deficient of compassion is monstrous, any leader without a human heart is a beast. Human beings must discover in their depths that genuine compassion and humaneness that is characteristic of their nature as image of God. If we are to confront the selfishness and inflated self-love prevalent in our world today, we must be true to ourselves.

Fr. Kenneth is a Catholic Priest of Abuja Archdiocese. He is an associate Priest at the Church of Assumption, Asokoro.



REV. FR DR. KENNETH ADESINA JOINS THE TEAM OF BODIJA FORMATORS



Rev. Fr Dr. Kenneth Adesina was ordained a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo on August 30th 2003 after he graduated from All Saints Seminary, Ekpoma in Edo state. After 6 years of various pastoral engagements in his diocese, he proceeded, in 2009, to the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome where he obtained a B.A, M. A and Ph. D in Christian and Classical letters. In addition, he has a diploma in Canonical Administration and Practice and a certificate of proficiency in Latin, Italian, French, Greek and Spanish Languages. It's interesting to note that Fr Kenneth won the University's Medal of Excellence in Doctoral Research and studies.

Fr Kenneth is a lover of young people and takes great delight in volleyball and football among other sports. He is the first and only alumnus of the Seminary of All Saints Uhielle to join the team of formators in great Bodija where he lectures in the Philosophy and Theology Departments.

His major research interests are in Latin composition and Literature, Patrology, Greek Grammar and History and has the following research theses among others: The Logical Problem of Identity in Gotlob Frege: A Philosophical Appraisal; The Ecclesiology of Saint Ignatius of Antioch: A Contemporary Means of Attaining Pastoral Effectiveness and The Hermeneutics of the Orator in Quintilian as a Paradigm for Youth Formation among the Yoruba. The Voice family welcomes you to great Bodija and prays you have a fruitful and fulfilling stay.

OUTGOING AND INCOMING



Magazine
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OUTGOING



CURRENT

MERCY

“AWAITING TRIAL” FOR

INMATES



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INTRODUCTION

I have never been inside a prison yard; the closest I have ever been to a prison is visiting a friend who was held behind the counter in a police station, and the testimony of persons who have actually been in prison as 'awaiting trial' inmates. None of these experiences was palatable. In this essay, we shall be exposing the inherent injustice in the practice of denying persons their right of free movement without taking the appropriate step of charging them to court. To be clear, this paper is not set out to chastise security agencies who work hard to keep our society safe; rather, it seeks to highlight the means used, in order to ensure that the society is merciful to all, especially those yet to be convicted by a competent court of law.

Criminal Justice in Nigeria

Every sovereign nation of the world has its criminal justice system and Nigeria is not an exception. The origin of Nigerian criminal justice system is traceable to our colonial masters, Britain. Criminal justice can be viewed as a system or a process. As a system, it is comprised of three components which are: the police, the courts and correctional facilities (prisons). As a process,

Lawrence Jaja (2003) defined it as a practice “when the different components coordinate their independent functions by processing the criminal suspect from one stage to the other”, until justice is served. In pursuant of justice, the accused is presumed innocent until otherwise declared by a court of competent jurisdiction. Thus, the one accused is never to be treated like a criminal until so proven.

Ordinarily, criminal cases begin with the arrest of a suspect by the police, acting on behalf of the state, often based on a complaint or report of criminal activities. Once a suspect has been arrested, it is the responsibility of the police to charge the person to court. An essential feature of the criminal justice system in Nigeria is that an accused is presumed innocent, until proven guilty 'beyond reasonable doubt'. Consequently, the burden of proof rests squarely on the prosecutor, as the maxim goes 'he who asserts must prove'. In the event that the prosecutor is able to prove their case, the accused, now declared a criminal, is handed a sentence. In situations where such sentence includes a jail term, the third component, the prison, comes into play. We must note that during the trial period, the court can request that the accused be remanded in prison custody, if his/her bail is

considered injurious to the society. In Nigeria, there is a maximum period during which the police can detain an accused without charging such a person to court.

Concept of 'Awaiting Trial'

The practice of holding people in police custody and other detention facilities without charging them to court has become common practice in Nigeria. It is not surprising anymore to find innocent citizens, who ought to be protected by the justice system, having their rights infringed upon by the same justice system. In Nigeria, this category of people has come to be known as 'Awaiting Trial Inmates' (A.T.I) and you are sure to find many of such persons. In fact, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) affirms that 70% of inmates in Nigerian prisons are awaiting trial, by far out numbering those who have been convicted. In its assessment report on the 7th of September, 2016, the Center for Crisis Communication (CCC) claims that over 80% of persons in prisons are awaiting trial. To be clear, those who are remanded in prison custody by a judgment of the court do not fall into this category, since they have begun the process of their trial.

Sadly, these statistics show the rot in our justice system. More

worrisome is the fact that a large chunk of these inmates who are awaiting their day in court have spent longer periods in detention than the maximum period they would have spent should they have been found guilty. These brothers and sisters of ours have become mere objects of statistics to be used by some persons to lay claim to allocations which do not serve their purpose. It is even likely that persons who have been declared missing are actually languishing in some facility awaiting their chance to prove their innocence.

One of the reasons people are

the three components of justice system, it would seem that the Nigeria Police is most culpable for the high incidence of 'awaiting trial inmates' in Nigerian prisons.

Awaiting Trial Inmates; a Cry for Mercy

All human beings deserve to be shown mercy; all people who have contravened the law and sincerely admit their guilt deserve some form of mercy, more so, those whose freedom of movement have been curtailed without an opportunity of a just trial deserve mercy. It is quite disturbing that

Conclusion

The sub-human condition which most people in incarceration are subjected to calls for concern. To be forced to live under such deplorable conditions without trial is most inhuman. One can only imagine their cry for help, asking the state to have mercy on them, just as Bartimeus called out, 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me' (MK 10:47; LK 18:38). We must make the point that this paper does not claim that all awaiting trial inmates are innocent; but the point is, the law, the criminal justice system holds

them as such, until otherwise declared by the courts, so let's treat them as such. Though they may not all be saints, they surely are not all criminals. Therefore, as the Blackstone's ratio holds, 'it is better that ten guilty



detained far beyond the legally permissible period is the claim that the police is searching for evidence with which to prosecute the case. While this exudes incompetence, it is also a mockery of the time tested and internationally recognized practice of gathering evidences before arrests are made. Conversely, whatever evidence that led to the arrest of the suspect should suffice to earn the accused a day in court, *ad interim*. Another reason is the claim that courts are congested or the paucity of judges makes it difficult to charge cases to court. Again, there is the recurrent problem of awaiting instruction from the complaint. The transfer of individuals connected to a case is also used as an excuse for delay. Of

we should plead mercy for those whose guilt has not been proven through no fault of theirs. Yet we plead mercy, not just for the awaiting trial inmates themselves but also their families and the society, who are denied of their presence, contribution and value. It is necessary to show mercy to awaiting trail inmates since their guilt is not certified. A concrete step in the bid to show mercy is to make conscious effort to ascertain the culpability of each one of them so that those that are innocent may be set free. This will have the ripple effect of freeing the innocent, decongestion the detention facilities and reducing the amount spent by the State, which could be channeled to some other productive areas.

persons escape than that one innocent suffers'. There can be no doubts that many innocents are suffering, languishing in prisons while awaiting a trial that may never come.

It therefore behooves on the three components of our criminal justice system to become proactive. They must seek ways of ameliorating the condition of people awaiting trial while also ensuring quick action on all those arrested. The police and the judiciary have a strategic role to play in seeing to the decongestion of our prisons by dispensing justice swiftly. Mercy is a gift we receive by giving; let us extend it to those awaiting trial in our detention centers.



FAKE AND EXPIRED GOODS IN THE MARKET: THE INHUMANE FACE OF HUMANS.



SIMON LOUGH

INTRODUCTION

“An interface is 'humane' if it is responsive to human needs and considerate of human frailties” - **Jef Raskin**

I remember as a child how much I loved and was inspired by the Professor Dora Akunyili, the woman who launched a full blown war against insensitivity, selfishness and wickedness orchestrated in the Nigerian market through the dissemination of fake, expired and substandard goods especially consumables. I remember her fondly today while she rests in the bosom of the Lord for her courage and resilience, resoluteness and fierceness. When she embarked on that onerous task of sanitizing Nigerian market of dangerous substances, she was branded a wicked woman, devoid of sympathy and compassion, but in truth, we may want to ask, who actually is merciless here, the dubious manufacturer who mixes together substances he is convinced are harmful and supplies it to the unsuspecting consumers? Unfortunately, today, years after she left the NAFDAC, we are still suffering because of the presence and pervasiveness of substandard goods in the market. Some of these goods are not just substandard, a good number of them are poisonous overtime in the human body and this accounts for the mortality rate and the variety of strange diseases plaguing our people.

According to the New 9th Edition of the Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary, the word “**FAKE**” indicates; inauthenticity, imitation or counterfeit. In other words, it means the state of not being genuine or appearing to be something which an item or person is not. On the other hand, the word “**EXPIRED**” further denotes being no longer valid.

The unbridled influx of fake, substandard and in most cases even expired goods into the Nigerian markets is overwhelming. Consumers are faced with about



an eighty percent (80%) chance of buying fake or expired goods in a market where second hand goods are patronized favourably as compared to the original. These goods include fake and substandard or expired food items such as canned foods, beverages, milk, vegetable oil and so on; adulterated drinks ranging from fruit juices and alcohol to even soft drinks; fake or expired hair and skin care products, fake shoes, toothpastes, toothbrushes, fabrics, phones, house hold wares, various types of bags and kids wears, wristwatches, necklaces,

adult wears; fake or substandard automatic voltage regulators; fake or expired tyres and other automobile parts; the list goes on and on. It becomes even more disheartening when these goods are sold in the guise of original at very exorbitant prices.

Pathetically, this soaring influx of fake or expired drugs are sold and distributed in high quantities mostly in the rural areas where ignorance and illiteracy reigns supreme, to poor people who are vulnerable. Greedy Nigerians in a bid to get-rich-quick therefore capitalize on the ignorance of these poor people, exploiting them and gradually sending them to their untimely death or early grave by destroying their anatomic system with the steady supply of harmful substances in the name of beverages and food. Take a trip to Kano, Onitsha, Aba, Lagos, Ogun State, Ibadan and many other States of our country where we have big markets

and you will marvel at the variety and range of strange products flowing around. The Director General/ Chief Executive of the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), Dr. Osita Anthony Aboloma disclosed in a recent interview that over eighty-five percent (85%) of products/goods in the country are substandard and studies have also shown that over sixty-four percent (64%) of anti-malaria drugs sold in Nigeria are either fake or substandard. This high level of disregard for human life caused by inordinate desire for wealth is grossly disheartening.

How in God's name does one explain this degree of insensitivity towards human life?

The immediate impulse is to blame it on bad economy, on widespread poverty and hardship. True, these factors have their own way of contributing to the sustenance of these goods in the market. You will notice that the sale and supply of these fake goods and products is normally on the rise especially during festive periods or seasons such as Christmas and New Year celebrations. All manner of goods flood the markets and other retail outlets in Nigeria and as the country's economy continues to wallow in the quick sand of recession, most citizens prefer to purchase commodities sold at cheaper rates which are often the substandard or expired ones because it is probably the one they can afford. People must eat and celebrate and so, exporters capitalize on the poverty and vulnerability of the people to smuggle all sorts of expired fake or substandard goods into the country. Just recently it was discovered the new version of rice designated as 'Plastic Rice' initially, they said there was nothing like that, and later, they came to tell us to be watchful. While in some cases, it is poverty that make people to go for these substandard and fake commodities, the same cannot be said of the distributors. The immediate reason that explains their action include greed, lack of compassion and insensitivity and inhumanity of man to man. This is the reason those who export/import, distribute or sell these fake or expired goods do not consider the various health risks or hazards posed to the consumers. Fake and expired tyres alone have caused the untimely and unfortunate deaths of many well-meaning citizens who are mostly involved in ghastly car accidents. Substandard food items have also resulted in the premature death of

some Nigerians; in most cases even innocent infants. To make matters worse, there is no remedy or hope for most of such sick or dying citizens for even the drugs meant to cure these illnesses are either fake or substandard.

The Church recognizing the plight of the poor and indeed the effects of these unwholesome practice to our world constantly calls for a change of heart and attitude towards worldly wealth. Pope Paul VI in his *Populorum Progressio* condemns corrupt acts



and actions and emphasized the need to uphold human dignity, solidarity and the common good. Pope Francis in his recent *Encyclical, Laudato Si'*, makes a worldwide call for human beings to be more sensitive and discreet in their dealings with one another and the environment. The Church standing as a sign of God's mercy and love calls for a change of heart for all who are involved in this and appeals to the consciences of each and every person to overhaul themselves of this get-rich-quick syndrome which is destroying us and making a mess of human life. On the other hand, she calls for more thoroughness on such bodies as the Consumer Protection Council (CPC), National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) and all other agencies and regulatory bodies in charge of border security and consumer protection to must make genuine effort to carry out their fundamental duties so as to bring to a halt this menace. Human life and health should not be used for petty politicking and favour seeking. Commodities seized

because of their unsuitability or potential dangers to life should not later be seen selling in the market or being distributed by people who supposedly declared it unfit. They should be burnt since they are not useful. It is therefore a clarion-call on the part of these agencies to put in a great level of effort and determination to greatly minimize the porosity of our borders so as to hinder the infiltration and also discourage the smuggling of fake and expired good into the country. The agencies in charge of consumer

protection must put in measures such as public awareness programmes to educate consumers on the means of detection of these fake products so as to enable consumers distinguish between fake and expired drugs. Border detection machines should also be put in place so as to ensure that all goods coming into the country are safe for consumption.

Honest traders and citizens must also play an important role by making genuine effort to avoid joining those who smuggle these fake and expired items and instead try to convert them by way of advice, prayers and good example for a Latin adage says - "*Corruptio optimipessim aest*" which means "the corruption of the best is the worst". In other words, evil thrives when the good join the evil band wagon. We all must strive to contribute our quota in making sure that the activities of the smugglers of these counterfeit items are minimized if not completely stopped and in so doing make our country free from these fake and expired goods.



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MERCY:

PANACEA FOR SUFFERING



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One practical and real enigma facing human beings today is the problem of suffering. Every one of us can readily relate to this problem, no one is insulated from it. We have all experienced suffering. It is not exclusive to any group of people. If there is indeed any variation at all, it is certainly not in its universality, inevitability or in the frustration it brings, the difference rather is in the varying degrees, colorations and manifestation it has taken in different persons, at different times and circumstances. Indeed our world is plagued by a disheartening degree of strife and suffering, sometimes, it takes the form of a severe incurable or protracted disease, gross insufficiency, poverty, disease, economic crisis, starvation, war, hatred, terrorism disregard for human life and myriads of instantiations of this phenomenon. The nature therefore, of human suffering, its causes, consequences, solutions or at least better ways of handling it have been a matter of sincere and eminent concern for people of all ages and faiths. This is important because today, atheistic questions about God have significantly evolved. Today, it is no longer about whether God really exists, the popular rhetoric is how to reconcile the idea of a good and omnipotent God with the reality of evil in the world. But more importantly, our world is broken by selfishness and hate, wickedness and strife. We need healing, and only mercy, compassion, forgiveness and love can save our world from relapsing into the annihilation of hate and acrimony.

Truly, Ours is a society where mercy is lacking, where hatred and greed are celebrated. A society, that operates on the Thracymachean ideal where might is just. It is a society of survival of the fittest. In our society, human beings have been exhaustively dichotomized into the high and the low, the latter at the mercy of the former. The suffering in our world today, if we must be realistic is to a great extent man-made, it is a pathetic product of man's inhumanity to man and gross insensitivity, lack of charity and unwholesome pragmatism. The rich get richer and the poor get

poorer. Little wonder, the United Nations estimates that more than 12 million people are enslaved and living in abject poverty today. Other organizations believe that true number is more than the estimated number. Time Magazine describes the situation thus: "Millions of people around the globe, including children as young as six, are working in bondage—in dangerous and degrading conditions that often involve 18-hour workdays, beatings and sexual abuse" (March 22, 1993). Many more, although not held against their will, live in virtual slavery, trapped by economic circumstances and long work hours while eking out a meager living. Such conditions crush the human spirit. Imagine a life that is bereft of joy, an existence in which people never enjoy such simple pleasures as the sound of beautiful music, the fun of good humour, the feel of a new garment or the comfort of a secure roof overhead. The question then is: How did we arrive at such massive gap between the poor and the rich? What is behind such a heart wrecking irony that some are living in an embarrassing affluence while others are languishing in so great a poverty? Why have the people entrusted with the care of the society become so merciless and callous?

How then can we respond to the prevalence and pervasiveness of suffering in our world? The truth is that the answer is not far-fetched. Humans need to rediscover that they are meant for each other. There is need for a total overhauling of the trends of selfishness and the craze of wanting to secure everything for ourselves. The system that gives undue advantage to the already highly placed is not only unjust but merciless and callous. Indeed, mercy will save our world. If the world leaders and people charged with the responsibility of administering world's goods at different levels can be genuinely compassionate and concerned about the appalling and wretched conditions of the people, our world will certainly be better. As a matter of fact, compassion and mercy have no boundaries. They are recognizable by everybody. When mother St. Theresa of Calcutta began her works of mercy among the poorest of the people, everybody

knew she was doing something to save our world. Interestingly, before she was canonized by the Catholic Church, the Hindus among whom she worked, and who usually have so many gods, there was already a statue of Teresa which was added to the numerous catalogue of gods that they have and honour, the point is that everybody understands the language of mercy and love. I was amazed when a Muslim acquaintance told me so much about mother Theresa. I must confess, he probably knows far more than I do about her and how she conquered hate and suffering with love and mercy.

Mother St. Teresa is a glaring evidence of the power of mercy and compassion to revolutionize our world and ameliorate suffering. She was so passionate in the care of the poor as she was not tired in showing mercy to them. She alleviated their sufferings and pains and gave them reasons to live, little wonder she was awarded the Noble Prize for Peace in 1979. The concern of this paper, Mercy as the panacea for suffering, was summarized by the Holy Father during his homily at the mass of canonization of Mother St Theresa when he said, "Mother St. Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defense of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded. She was committed to defending life, ceaselessly proclaiming that 'the unborn are the weakest, the smallest, and the most vulnerable.' And indeed, she saved souls!

She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime of poverty they created. For Mother St. Teresa, mercy was the 'salt' which gave flavour to her work, it was the 'light' which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering."

In the midst of this world's poverty and pain, Mother St. Teresa of Calcutta has shown the warm light of God's love and compassion on us all. This is what the Church affirms in raising her to Sainthood that it was his light we beheld in her. "You are the light of the world," Jesus told his disciples, in words that echo down to this day. "Come, be my light," Jesus similarly urged Mother Teresa at the outset of her mission. "Bring me into the dark holes of the poor. Come, carry me to the slums, they too deserve the gospel" she yielded unreservedly to this summons of Jesus by following him into the "dark holes" where Calcutta's poor huddled, living among them and like them, loving them in his name, and serving his hidden presence in them who bear the burden, and the sacredness of his cross. Throughout her life on earth, and now even more fully in the Kingdom, she stands as a beacon of light reflecting the heart of God to those who seek him, who seek signs of his nearness and care in the darkness of human suffering and sin. She has shown to us the much mercy can do to

save our world of suffering.

This kind of service, which Mother Teresa refers to isn't always about doing something for the poor, but being there in their suffering, sharing it with Christ. For her, the greatest treasure, God's greatest gift to her, was the poor people. Through them, Mother St. Teresa said, "I have an opportunity to be with Jesus 24 hours a day." All of us who bear the name of Christ have received from God a vocation to translate our faith into concrete acts of love and mercy. This will go a long way to making our lives meaningful and peaceful even in the midst of suffering and will indeed serve as panacea for suffering in our world. Pope Francis has said that, "There is no alternative to charity: those who put themselves at the service of others, even when they don't know it, are those who love God." Thus, let us remember that "at the evening of our lives, we shall be judged on love and mercy shown to our neighbours and those in need. Consequent upon this, when faced with an opportunity to be merciful, our greatest temptation is to look away. It is usually convenient. It's easy to rationalize that someone else is better placed to help than we (are). But

the reality is, when we turn away from someone in need, we are turning away from Christ Himself. If we want to be more merciful, we have to be willing stand beside the other person – even if it makes our own life more difficult and in truth, very often, it will.

The quality and meaning of our lives are largely dependent on how we respond to the misery and plight of people around us. Christianity, like every genuine religion that deserves the name, must not be a set of abstract ideas or a conglomeration of utopic reports of events that have happened in the past. Christianity is an experience; it is a way of life. We cannot be said to be Christians if in our daily lives we do not bring succour and hope to the people we meet. Our preaching and ideals as illusory as they may be,

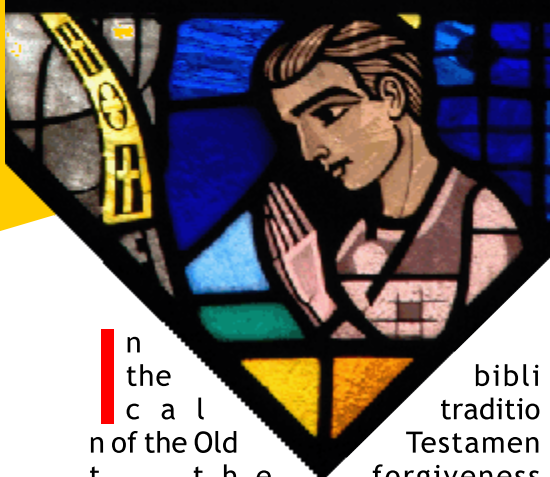
will lose their bearing and significance on real life experience if they are not lived out. As Pope Paul VI asserts, the world needs and listens to witnesses more than preachers, and if they listen to preachers, it is because they are also witnesses. Our eyes must be open today to the sufferings of the poor irrespective of their faith, colour, language, orientation - the common denominator is our humanity. Mercy and compassion will save our world.

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THE CHURCH AND THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS



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NWOBI EMMANUEL OMV

In the biblical tradition of the Old Testament, the forgiveness of sins is the sole prerogative of God (cf. Ex. 34:6-7; Ps 25:18; 32:1-5; Ps 51). In the New Testament, one of the difficulties the Pharisees had to grapple with was Jesus' claim of divinity and so they were usually astounded and furious each time Jesus made reference to his divinity. One of the ways he did was exercising power to forgive sins as he did when he told the paralytic man that his sins have been forgiven. One can understand the bewilderment of his audience because as already established, forgiveness of sin was an exclusive reserve of God. In teaching them therefore that he is God, Christ exercised this power continually during his life on earth. And Through the forgiveness of sins, Christ restored mankind to God.

Jesus Christ passed this power to his Apostles, first to Peter and then to all the Apostles. He said "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matt 16:19). The power conferred by Jesus on his Apostles is unlimited, synonymous to what is known as God's law. It is judicial and it will be ratified in Heaven because it embraces both binding and loosing.

However, Jesus Christ tied the forgiveness of sins to Faith and Baptism. He said "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved (cf. Mk 16: 15-16). Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it was given to take away the sin inherited from Adam (original sin) and the actual sins we personally committed before baptism. Also, it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, so that "we too might walk in the newness of life" (cf. Rom 6:4). In the same vein, when we made our first profession of faith while receiving the holy Baptism that cleansed us, the forgiveness we received then was so full and complete that there remained in us absolutely nothing left to efface, neither original sin nor offenses committed by our own will, nor was there left any penalty to suffer in order to expiate them. Yet the grace of Baptism delivers no one from all the weakness of nature.

Through the inexhaustible mercy of God, a different sacrament was created for sins committed after baptism and this is known as penance or confession or reconciliation, each word emphasizing one of its aspects. During his public ministry, Christ forgave sins, as in the case of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), the healing of the paralytic man (Mk 2:5-11) and the woman who anointed his feet (Luke 7:48) and several others.

However, it is pertinent at this

point to take a cursory look at how Jesus exercised his authority and power to forgive sins in his encounter with the paralyzed man, which appear in three of the four gospels. "He said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the Scribes were sitting there questioning in their heart, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His Spirit that they questioned within themselves, said to them, "why do you question this in your heart? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise, take up your pallet and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins". He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mk 2:5-11). He exercised this power in his capacity as the Messiah or Son of man, telling us that "the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Matt. 9:6), which is why the Gospel writer himself explains that God "had given such authority to men" (Matt. 9:8).

The statement "Your sins are forgiven" according to Scott Hahn in his book "Lord Have Mercy" states that Jesus is claiming for Himself a power possessed not even by the high priest of the temple. He is exercising a divine prerogative in declaring the total remission of someone's sins. For Jesus, healing the soul was a greater and more divine action than healing the body.

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic letter *Misericordia Dei* comments that Christ entrusts to the Apostles the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of conversion (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28: 18-20). On the evening of the day of his resurrection, Jesus granted the Apostle through the power of the Holy Spirit, the authority to reconcile repentant sinners with the Church. "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and

repentance, to declare that God has forgiven sins or to say He has given the Apostles power to take away only the penalty due to the sins is to do violence to both the texts and the content of which St. John was writing.

The power to forgive does not cease with the death of the Apostles. It was given to them in their official capacity as Bishops of the Church to be handed onto their

successors in office. The Apostles did not forgive sins in their names but in the name of Jesus Christ. More so, he was establishing them as Priests and Bishops to administer a sacrament, but also as judges to pronounce judgment upon the action of believers. Thus, He gave them power exceeding what had formerly belonged to the priests of Israel. Jesus was also adding another dimension to the power he transferred to his Apostles. He says "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in

This power of forgiving sins is handed down to Bishops and Priests and is the greatest and the most exalted of all the powers that can be exercised by man on earth. I would even say, among all the powers that could be communicated to any creature. It should suffice to say that this power is absolutely divine, and belongs to God alone, just as the power of creating, and that God has never communicated it ever to anyone, not even to the angelic spirits or to the holiest people on earth, outside the priesthood. St. Augustine corroborates this when he says "were there no forgiveness of sins in the Church, there would be no hope of life to come or eternal liberation". Let us thank God who has given his Church such a gift.

Gifts are unmerited and they deserve gratitude. Great gifts deserve even greater gratitude. The power of Forgiveness of sin granted by Christ to his Church, and dispensed especially in the sacrament of penance, deserves reference and admiration. It is Christ himself who forgives through the action of his priests. The priest is not his own. He is alter christus - another Christ. And so, the onus lies on us to take advantage of this great gift by always approaching a priest for confession knowing full well that he is acting in the person of Christ and it is Christ that is forgiving us of our sins each time we go for confession, not the priest.



if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn. 20:22-23). In other words, he was telling them that their mission was similar to that which he had received from his Father. Therefore, when he told them to forgive sins, they received the power He possessed. The words themselves are incapable of any other interpretation. To say that this incident merely gives the Apostles the power to preach the Gospel of

heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). This means that the Apostles' power is beyond the earth, it is incomprehensible. Like the adversaries of Jesus asked, "who is this man that can forgive sins," people still question today, the authority of the Church to grant pardon and cancel guilt. It was Jesus, who out of love gave the Church this wonderful power for the salvation of mankind.

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Campus Vist

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