

## Apostolate of the “charity of truth”

### Truth and charity

*The Truth.* According to two meanings in the Vocabulary of the Italian language<sup>1</sup>, truth is “that which corresponds exactly to a given reality”. “That which corresponds exactly to an abstract representation of the true and which is considered certain, absolute or irrefutable”. “Sincerity, good faith”.

When dealing with the subject of truth, the distinction between the Hebrew meaning and the Greek meaning is usually stressed. The Hebrew word for truth is *emeth*, the radical of which (*aman*) means *to hold something firmly so that it does not fall*. Among the synonyms accompanying or replacing *emeth*, the main one is *emunah*, fidelity.

For its part, the Greek term corresponding to truth is *alêtheia*, which – through its a privative – indicates the condition of unveiling, revelation of being. *Alêtheia* thus refers to two realities: what appears before us and the foundation of what appears or, we would say, “the real truth”. Thus, the Greek notion refers to the permanent, while the Hebrew one refers to a rather dynamic aspect. To indicate truth, the Greek says of something that is; the Hebrew says: *amen* (it is true)<sup>2</sup>.

In the Bible, truth is first and foremost faithfulness to the given word and the covenant. In this sense, truth is proper to God, who is faithful par excellence (Deut 7:9; 32:4), never fails (Ex 34:6; Nm 23:19), and manifests his faithfulness by his deeds (Ps 57:4; 91:3-4). St Paul uses the term in the sense we usually use, of correspondence to reality as opposed to falsehood, but he also uses it to indicate God’s faithfulness (Rom 3:3-7; 15:8). God has revealed the truth above all through his Son (Jn 1:18; Gal 4:4-5; Heb 1:2). Jesus is the bearer of truth (Jn 1:17; 18:37), and he himself is the Truth (Jn 1:14; 5:33; 14:6; Eph 4:21; Rev 3:7).

*The Charity.* According to the above Vocabulary, charity is “Love of God and neighbour, one of the three theological virtues”. “Psychological attitude, characteristic disposition of one who tends to understand and helps every person”.

Human *charity*, in which man manifests his will, his sympathy, his affection and his charity, always refers back to divine agape as the founding reality of human love. *Agape* is a term originating in Christianity that expresses a disinterested and detached love: the love that gives itself, does not impose itself, and does not want to gain life, but even risks losing it. In this it differs from *eros*, and also from the desire to possess or dominate, excluding self-love, *philautia*.

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<sup>1</sup> Vocabolario della lingua italiana<sup>11</sup>, di NICOLA ZINGARELLI, Zanichelli, Bologna 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 5.

Charity consists in allowing oneself to be carried by God himself in a movement of sympathy or com-passion, participation in the pain of others, which makes the other close or neighbour, recognised as an end in itself... The First Letter to the Corinthians offers the unsurpassable synthesis of charitable love (1 Cor 13): each of the virtues would be nothing without charity, because, in the final analysis, what makes them virtues is that they are rooted in charity. Of all the virtues, charity is the first. This is what Saint Paul affirms.

Moreover, charity is the master path of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and commitment is drawn from charity, which is the synthesis of the whole Law (cf. Mt 22:36-40). For the Church – instructed by the Gospel – charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as the encyclical *Deus caritas est* recalls: “from God's charity all things come, through it all things take shape, to it all things tend”.<sup>3</sup>

### **Charity and truth**

The relationship between charity and truth is a debated issue, and not always a peaceful one. There are those who think that affirming the truth is automatically failing charity, and that in order to show charity one must sacrifice the truth. Pope Benedict XVI's doctrine is different: in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, he offers a valuable reflection on the profound relationship between charity and truth. Of course, it is not that truth is an abstraction, a theory – while charity would be the concrete, the practical. This makes it more difficult to discover their unity. Both are inextricably linked, even if not identified, and it is not easy to distinguish between them.

Often the transmission of truth appears as a discussion, even a struggle; by allowing oneself to be convinced one has the feeling of being defeated: hence the resistance to truth. To make oneself true is to remove from oneself everything that is too much one's own and leads to confusing the truth with one's own desires, prejudices and resentments. And so charity is needed to make what is ours disappear and to make truth itself shine forth.

There can be no charity without truth, recalls Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*. And Pope Francis, speaking to the Roman Curia, proposed to “do truth in charity and live charity in truth”. And he continued: “charity without truth becomes an ideology of destructive goodness and truth without charity becomes blind judgmentalism”. Truth must be sought, found and expressed in charity, but charity in turn must be understood, corroborated and practised in the light of truth.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, we all desire the truth, even if we often deny it or fight against it... Weakness, comfort, fear of sacrifice, fear of the judgement of others or laziness, often drive us to seek accommodations. On the other hand, if love renounces judgement, it becomes an impotent feeling. This is the risk of love in a culture without truth, as ours is. Pope Benedict writes that “in

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. PAPA FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia romana*, il 21 dicembre 2015.

a culture without truth”, love is an abused and distorted word: without truth, one can even justify violence and arbitrariness in the name of love.<sup>5</sup>

In God, truth and charity are the same thing. For us, however, it will always be an arduous task to try to be charitably true and truly charitable, that is, to realise *caritas in veritate*, love in truth. They may seem to be antithetical realities and lend themselves to opposing interpretations. If one insists on the predominance of the truth, one can fall into an easy irenicism that ends up suffocating the radical nature of the Gospel in order to adapt it to the fashions and opportunities of the moment; one runs the risk of adopting a false form of respect for others based on relativism; or one falls into a harshness that wounds, into a formalism that, with the good intention of defending doctrine, the truth, intends instead to impose it, even omitting charity; one risks communicating not the liberating truth – Christ Jesus himself! – but one’s own hardness of heart, one’s attachment to precepts and rules as such.

If charity is over-emphasised to the detriment of truth, we arrive at an erroneous concept of charity: it is transformed into destructive goodness, into empty sentimentality, precisely because we think that mercy and charity must be put before doctrine, teaching, in short, the truth: we end up no longer having the courage and frankness of Christ Jesus, the liberating power of the Gospel message.

Both conceptions are wrong because they are insufficient and partial; because they turn distinction into separation, and see union as juxtaposition. Benedict XVI emphasises: “Intelligence and love are not in separate compartments: *love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love.*” The distinction is only one of reason. Truth is essentially love and love is necessarily true. “Truth without charity is nothing but an unreal abstraction. And charity without truth is nothing but superficial sentimentality. Christianity is characterised precisely by the indissoluble union of the sense of truth and the sense of charity”.<sup>6</sup> There is no intelligence without love, nor love without intelligence.

In biblical language, knowledge has a particular intensity: truth is always love (union). In fact, to know is to unite – the Hebrew verb *yada* (to know) is also used to refer to sexual union, that is, the union of the whole being—. To know is to become one with the known. To know a person is to love him. Only by loving a person can one truly say that one knows him or her.... By discovering and understanding the person, we know and love them, because we see God in them.<sup>7</sup>

A conclusion by J. Lacroix: “Some love people so much that they forget the truth, while others love the truth so much that they forget people”. This cannot be the Christian attitude. As we see in Jesus, it is not possible to separate truth from love for people. Charity and truth must necessarily be held together. This is possible if one is fully rooted in Christ, who is the revelation

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 30

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BENEDICTO XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 30

of the Father's love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (Jn 3:16), and he himself is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6).

### **Charity in Truth**

Love – *caritas* - is an extraordinary force, which has its origin in God, eternal Love and absolute Truth, and impels us to commit ourselves courageously and generously to the field of justice and peace. Defending the truth, presenting it with conviction and bearing witness to it in one's life are demanding and irreplaceable forms of charity. "Charity rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6). Offering the truth in charity sometimes risks misunderstanding, but it can be a necessary step towards finding the path that leads to the true good.

Ours is a time characterised not only by the "fake news", but by many other phenomena that relate to the crisis of truth: "post-truth", the attitude of believing nothing, which leads to believing everything; the absence of masters, which leads to relativising all knowledge; the inability to grasp complex messages, which leads to the deficit of critical thinking; the temptation of single-minded thinking, considering others only from self-interest; the superficiality of all and now, incapable of serious investigation; the lack of hope, which leads to the commitment to welcome reality, without confusing it with dreams, etc.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps never before as today, in this reality, has the need been felt for the charity of truth. The truth, in fact, can be hidden or distorted at various levels, with the risk that the alteration of facts – and of the capacity to know them in their true consistency – will inevitably lead to personal choices that, even if they are made in good faith, are objectively erroneous and harmful, because they are based on a false representation of reality.

To seek and offer *the truth in charity*, the starting point must be a sincere interest in the other person and his or her situation. Pope Francis insists on this: it is necessary to nurture in us a sensitivity charged with understanding and a willingness to question ourselves in dialogue with others. Moreover, adherence to Christian values is indispensable for the construction of a good society and integral human development. A Christianity of charity without truth can become a reservoir of good feelings, useful for social coexistence, but marginal. Without truth, charity is relegated to a restricted and private sphere, excluded from the projects and processes of universal human development, in the dialogue between knowledge and operations.<sup>9</sup>

It is often forgotten that "charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness..., is the main driving force behind the true development of each person and of all humanity.... In Christ, charity

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. CHIARA SCARDICCHIO, "What anthropological challenges for the proclamation of the Gospel today?", Conference of the Pauline Family "Give everyone the charity of the truth", Rome, 22nd October 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, encíclica *Caritas in veritate*, n. 4

in truth becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan. For he himself is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6)".<sup>10</sup>

Charity in truth is then a force that constitutes the community, it eliminates barriers. By its own strength alone, the community of men can never be fully fraternal nor become universal: the unity of the human race is born of the con-vocation of the word of God-Love.<sup>11</sup> Hence the need to combine charity with truth not only in the direction, marked out by Saint Paul, of *veritas in caritate* (Eph 4:15), but also in the inverse and complementary direction of *caritas in veritate*. Because it is full of truth, charity can be understood, shared and communicated in all its richness. "Truth, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos* and thus communication and communion".<sup>12</sup> Truth opens and unites minds in the *lógos* of love: it is the proclamation and Christian witness of charity.

### **The charity of truth**

Fr Alberione shifts the emphasis a little on charity, on "doing" the charity of truth, that is, on the apostolic dimension. He takes it for granted that the truth exists – in a most eminent degree it is the Master Jesus himself, the Truth with a capital letter–, and he is convinced that the world and its inhabitants absolutely need the truth - in the final term, the Truth. The problem that besets him is precisely the duty to give it to the world and to find the best and most effective ways of doing so.

It is not just a matter of doing charity *in* truth, as Benedict XVI's encyclical reflects, but of doing charity *of* truth. A charity directed to the mind, to the intellect; offering certainty to a world full of doubts; bringing clarity to a nebulous world; bringing light to a society living in darkness; giving security to a distrustful crowd; offering answers to a restless generation; guiding a society wandering aimlessly. It is like the light on a hill, or the lighthouse on the horizon. Doing the charity of truth means transforming communication into an instrument for spreading the truth. The charity of truth liberates, enlightens, enriches and generates new life.<sup>13</sup>

The origin of the expression "give charity of truth to all", typical of Antonio Rosmini, is not clear; Blessed James Alberione probably took it from him. He said that the first charity is precisely the charity of "speaking the truth of the Gospel", therefore a charity that touches the understanding, the mind. The charity of truth is the charity of helping people to find the happiness that lasts forever: paradise. So it is easy to understand the central theme of Fr

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<sup>10</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, enciclica *Caritas in veritate*, n. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, enciclica *Caritas in veritate*, n. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, enciclica *Caritas in veritate*, n. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. DARLEI ZANON, nel suo articolo "La carità della verità", pubblicato sul sito *Paulus.net*.<sup>13</sup>

Alberione's preaching.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the phrase could be traced back to the Apostle Paul himself, when he invites people to live "according to the truth in charity" (Eph 4:15).

The expression 'to give to all the charity of truth' sums up well the spirit of the Founder of the Pauline Family and the mission it is called to fulfil in the Church: the proclamation of the Gospel, of Christ the Master who is the way, the truth and the life, to the people of our time, in the culture of communication. "When one has souls and the glory of God in mind, one finds the ways and means to approach them, to enlighten them, to perform the highest charity: that of truth".<sup>15</sup>

In the book *The Publishing Apostolate*, the Founder makes some concrete and realistic proposals to carry out the commitment to do the charity of truth: "Seek all possible means to make the Catholic daily newspaper reach everywhere, bringing to everyone the expected charity of truth with peace and justice".<sup>16</sup> Speaking to the Daughters of Saint Paul, Fr Alberione reiterated that the charity of Truth is the most sublime of charities: "The apostolate for you is the life of charity, the apostolate is nothing other than the flower of charity".<sup>17</sup>

The unity between love and the proclamation of the truth was recognised by Saint John Paul II in his address to the capitulars of the Society of Saint Paul in 1986: "You Paulines... know how our faithful live in an age in which they hear doctrines taught and see practised that are often at variance with the Gospel message... You understand how your mission is becoming ever more urgent, important and delicate! You – like the Good Samaritan of the Gospel parable – must bend with love and extreme trepidation over these wounded and sorrowing souls, to bring the word of Truth, which gives light to minds, and the comfort of supreme certainties".<sup>18</sup>

God is love and also truth, which is why the encounter with Him "also calls into question our will and our intellect".<sup>19</sup> The service of truth is therefore a form of charity, of concrete love, a work of mercy. And it is particularly important today, in the society of communication, where even in the multiplication of information and messages, truth finds it hard to find space, suffocated by pressures and ideologies based on profit.

## Conclusions

Generally speaking, Christian charity is highly appreciated in its material face, even among non-religious people or in countries where Christians are in the minority: think, for example, of the work of St Teresa of Calcutta. It is a fact that where missionaries or religious institutes arrive,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. GIUSEPPE FORLAI, *Relazione al 10° Capitolo generale delle Figlie di San Paolo*, 15 settembre 2013.

<sup>15</sup> GIACOMO ALBERIONE, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, p 1041.

<sup>16</sup> GIACOMO ALBERIONE, *Apostolato delle Edizioni*, 290.

<sup>17</sup> GIACOMO ALBERIONE, *Alle Figlie di San Paolo* 1956, p. 420.

<sup>18</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II. *Discorso ai capitolaris della Società San Paolo*, 22 marzo 1986.

<sup>19</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 17.

hospitals, schools, universities, reception centres, etc., are born. These works are highly visible and highly appreciated by the people.

But there is another face of Christian charity that is less visible and therefore also a little less popular: the so-called “intellectual charity”. A face of charity that is a slow ferment, a painstaking work, wrapped in patience, gratuitousness and hope, waiting for the flower of faith to blossom and grow.

Of course, the two faces of Christian love are inseparable, as has been said: St Teresa of Calcutta herself, famous for her ‘material charity’, used to remind her sisters: ‘we are not social workers, we are the brides of Jesus Christ’. Thus, she made it clear that material charity is not the ultimate goal of their activity.

Benedict XVI writes: “At times there is a tendency to limit the term ‘charity’ to solidarity or simple humanitarian aid. It is important, however, to remember that the greatest work of charity is evangelisation, that is, the ‘service of the Word’. There is no more beneficial, and therefore charitable, action towards one’s neighbour than to break the bread of the Word of God, to make him a sharer in the good news of the Gospel, to introduce him into a relationship with God: evangelisation is the highest and most integral promotion of the human person”.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, to reduce the other person merely to a mouth to feed is to diminish his identity and to misunderstand his high calling. True charity, the fulfilment of practical love, is to open up to people the knowledge of the great mystery of the Father’s love for man, in Jesus Christ. It is to allow each person to say with the same sentiment as St Paul: “He loved me and gave himself up for me”. (Gal 2:20). It is to announce the true life, which Jesus sums up as follows: “This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Of course, the knowledge of which Jesus speaks is not merely a notional knowledge, but a personal knowledge that involves the whole man. It is part of the first commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength” (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27). A love that is a combination of charity and truth. Hence the Pauline formula taken up by Benedict XVI: *Caritas in veritate*.

The Pauline apostolate is called to do this charity: to bring to the brothers and sisters living in the digital areopagus, the Word of the Lord that echoes alive and life-giving in the Church of all times. We believe with the prophet that “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom 10:13). And we ask ourselves with Saint Paul: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom 10:14). Each one of us has felt this need in our hearts (the same need that the young Alberione felt: cf. AD 17), and the love of Christ has moved us to say like the Prophet: “Here I am, send me!” (Is 6:8). Send me

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<sup>20</sup> BENEDETTO XVI, *Messaggio per la Quaresima* dell’anno 2013, n. 3.

to proclaim the Gospel also in cyberspace, where so many brothers and sisters do not die of “not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” (Am 8:11).

It is in this context that the prophetic mission of Blessed James Alberione takes place. If the soul of the apostolate consists in “living for Christ in the Holy Spirit”, the nature of the apostolate is to “give Christ” as he presented himself: way, truth and life. “It is all here: to live Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life; and to give charity of Christ to those peoples who are deprived of it and hungry at the same time, giving the whole Christ, the way, the truth and the life”.<sup>21</sup>

After the promulgation of the decree *Inter mirifica*, the Founder wrote: “Pauline activity has been declared an apostolate, together with oral preaching”.<sup>22</sup> These words of the Founder give us the key to his apostolic work, which is repeatedly described as “the charity of truth”: a charity that is translated into written, printed and illustrated words, in order to effectively reach the greatest number of people.

In today’s confusion of sounds and images, will it be possible to see the face of Christ? This is the commitment to which we are called to give an answer. Perhaps we can find it precisely in “giving the charity of truth to all”, not hiding the demands and liberating power of the Gospel, having the courage to denounce injustice against the weakest; offering the truth in charity, that is, with the humanity and gratuitousness typical of the Christian.<sup>23</sup>

St John Paul II made a strong appeal to deploy a new “fantasy of charity” that would give a concrete response to the most urgent needs and be an expression of the ability to make ourselves close.<sup>24</sup> And Pope Francis told the Pauline Family: “The imagination of charity knows no limits and knows how to open up ever new paths to bring the breath of the Gospel into the most diverse cultures and social environments”.<sup>25</sup>

Fr Alberione certainly did not lack imagination. It is up to us to give body and life today to that creativity. We are invited to work with two complementary criteria: that of *truth* and that of *charity*. This was St Paul’s attitude in carrying out his mission. To always seek the truth of Christ, with the light of the Spirit that scrutinises the depths of God. It was Pope Francis’ recent recommendation to the Pauline Family: “In the context of the synodal journey we have embarked on, I ask you not to fail to make your contribution. That is why I encourage you to work together, in a network, each one contributing his ‘own’, according to the desire of Blessed Alberione”.<sup>26</sup> Let us live the “truth of charity”, and “charity in truth” in order to “do the charity of truth”.

*Don José Antonio Pérez, ssp*

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<sup>21</sup> GIACOMO ALBERIONE, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, 862.

<sup>22</sup> GIACOMO ALBERIONE, *San Paolo*, dicembre 1963.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. ANTONIO RIZZOLO, ssp, “La carità della verità” in *Consacrazione e servizio* n.11, novembre 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Novo millennio ineunte* n. 50.

<sup>25</sup> PAPA FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Famiglia Paolina*, Il 27 novembre 2014.

<sup>26</sup> PAPA FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Famiglia Paolina*, Il 27 novembre 2021.