



## The Christian Faith as Knowledge of the Truth and Love

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### ABSTRACT

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God's truth is not at odds with love. 1 Corinthians 13:6 tells us that love rejoices in the truth. Most people would say that truths about God's love, mercy, and forgiveness are loving. But they do not always understand that God's commands summarize what love is. The knowledge of the truth and love is indispensable to the Christian faith. As it were, the Christian faith is not just a function of an intellectual assent to some set of doctrines about particular religious beliefs. Instead, it is a personal encounter with God, who is truthful and loving. In Jesus, we have the full manifestation of God. Jesus Christ, as God, is truth and love personified in this wise. Thus, the Christian faith becomes that personal conviction of an intimate encounter with Jesus Christ, himself, the truth and love of God. In this article, we shall explain the concepts of truth and love. In doing this, the concept of knowledge, the hermeneutics of truth- the logical truth and the revealed truth; the hermeneutics of love, love as a theological virtue, and the Christian faith as knowledge of the truth and love shall be considered.

### KEYWORDS:

Knowledge, Faith, Truth, Love.

### INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of the truth and love is indispensable to the Christian faith. As it were, the Christian faith is not just a function of an intellectual assent to some set of doctrines about particular religious beliefs. Instead, it is a personal encounter with God, who is truthful and loving. In Jesus, we have the full manifestation of God. Jesus Christ, as God, is truth and love personified in this wise. Thus, the Christian faith becomes that personal conviction of an intimate encounter with Jesus Christ, himself, the truth and love of God.

However, truth and love have been used differently and in many contexts. They are misunderstood and misinterpreted today; the same can also be said of the concept of knowledge. Consequently, on the one hand, truth is reduced basically to whatever works, to whatever corresponds to other sets of facts or propositions, or to whatever is consistent with known or proven facts. On the other hand, love is simply dismissed as a series of fleeting emotions and momentary passions. It is often considered and expressed based on mere infatuations,

making love a more misunderstood concept than anything else.

### THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

To elucidate the concept of knowledge and in a bid to gain an understanding of it, it is very much apposite to have recourse to that branch of philosophy that has as its thrust the theory of knowledge, and it is rightly called so. That is Epistemology (or theory of knowledge). No all-embracing meaning is attained when conceptualizing knowledge is attempted from logical reason and syllogism. An understanding of it from a faith-based perspective will become consequential.

It is an undeniable fact that one of the most important branches of philosophy is epistemology (theory of knowledge). Over the years, philosophers and other great thinkers have attempted to discover how our knowledge is acquired, the extent of our knowledge, and the standards or criteria by which we can reliably judge the truth or falsity of our knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Epistemology as a theory of knowledge is preoccupied with investigating the processes of

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. POPKIN and A. STROLL, *Philosophy Made Simple*, William Heinemann Ltd, London, 1981, 167; S. STURGEON et al, *Epistemology, Philosophy: A Guide Through the Subject*, A. C. GRAYLING, (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, 9.

human cognition and all problems associated with its acquisition and justification.<sup>2</sup>

However, knowledge is traditionally considered 'justified true belief' (JTB). This conception of knowledge, no doubt, appears to express a necessary condition of knowledge. Traditionally, 'justified true belief' has gained credence as the sufficient condition of knowledge. Nonetheless, there are specific difficulties with this conception of knowledge, "especially about the kind of justification required for a true belief to count as knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

Many philosophers, like Plato, Socrates, A. J. Ayer, Quine, and so on, have attempted a definition of knowledge. For instance, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates and his interlocutors conceived knowledge as true judgment with an account. But, using letters, which he calls "the elements of language", Socrates points out that true judgment and *logos* cannot be taken as knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, several definitions of knowledge are proposed and rejected in the *Theaetetus*, implying that within the walls of philosophy, no satisfactory definition of knowledge is suggested.<sup>5</sup> Little wonder Edmund L. Gettier questions even the 'traditional account of knowledge' in his celebrated paper titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Here, Gettier shows the inadequacy of "Justified True Belief."<sup>6</sup> He did this using his two counter-examples, which featured the tripartite conditions for knowledge but, despite their presence, highlighted the problem of justification in epistemic claims. Put differently, Gettier's counterexamples against the tripartite conditions for knowledge established the insufficiency of Justification, truth and belief as constituents of knowledge.

Many theories have been propounded to conceptualize knowledge, including *foundationalism*, *coherentism*, and *contextualism*. But none of these can guarantee us true and adequate knowledge.

Some scholars have even argued vehemently that sometimes, our beliefs are true by chance. In such cases, they do not amount to knowledge, for if we know what we believe, it must not be by accident that what we believe is true. How can we capture what it takes to rule out such "accidentality"?

According to Fred Dretske, what rules out "accidentality" is the passion of conclusive reasons. Thus, Dretske holds that there could also be counterfactuals, knowing that P requires a conclusive reason for P. in such claims. Counterfactuals are claims about what would (or would not) be the case if things were different than they are.<sup>7</sup>

The above expositions simply point out that knowledge is more profound than one can conceptualize using philosophical argument or simple/complex syllogism. The term knowledge defies any definition that attempts to circumscribe it to a particular way of understanding it, mainly from the perspectives of philosophical and scientific methodologies.

From a theological perspective, it will be necessary to understand it from its very essence and citadel to understand the knowledge involved in faith. Here, a saying of Saint Paul can help us: "one belief with the heart" (Rom 10:10). In the Bible, the heart is the core of the human person, where all his or her different dimensions intersect: body and spirit, interiority and openness to the world and others, intellect, will and affectivity. If the heart can hold all these dimensions together, it is where we become open to truth and love, where we let them touch us and profoundly transform us.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the heart and conscience are two concepts that can be used interchangeably, so much so that whenever one is used in terms of knowledge, the other is invariably implied. Thus, conscience is understood as a man's most secret core and sanctuary. He is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths in loving communion and communication. There is also the depth of true love that is felt and expressed. And there, the love for truth and the desire for its external manifestation evolve.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, to know or have knowledge of something or somebody is to have profound contact with that which is known. It can be said that to know is to have intercourse (that is, a deep communication or interaction) with the known. This communication involves the totality of one's being, which stems from the heart. Thus, Jesus Christ, in replying to the Jews, who claimed to know God, said: "But I do know him, and if I were to say, I do not know him, I should be a liar, as

<sup>2</sup> K. OWOLABI, *The Nature and Problems of Epistemology: Issues and Problems in Philosophy*, A. K. OWOLABI, (ed.), Grovacs Network, Ibadan, 2002, 49

<sup>3</sup> S. STURGEON *et al*, *Epistemology, Philosophy: A Guide Through the Subject*, 9; cf. A. UDEFI, ed., *Philosophy and the Sciences: An Invitation to Interdisciplinary Studies*, Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd., Ibadan, 2010, 71

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. BURNYYEAT, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, 1990, 9

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. RUSSELL, *History of Western Philosophy*, Routledge, London, 1996, 163

<sup>6</sup> E. L. GETTIER, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis*, 1965, 23. 121-123, cited in A. UDEFI, ed.,

*Philosophy and the Sciences: An Invitation to Interdisciplinary Studies*, 72

<sup>7</sup> Cf. F. DRESTKE, "Conclusive Reasons," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1971, 49, cited in M. STEUP, E. SOSA, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Australia, 2005, 1

<sup>8</sup> FRANCIS I, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), n.26

<sup>9</sup> H. P. CALVIN, *Salvific Invitation and Loving Response: The Fundamental Christian Dialogue*, The Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, 1989, 141

you yourselves are. But I do know him, and I keep his word” (John 8:55). And again, it is said, “In this way, we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, I know him without keeping his commandments, is a liar, and truth has no place in him.” (1 John 2:3-4).

Thus, to know God, for instance, is to live in God. This involves the total transformation of the human into the divine, expressed in one’s way of living. It is living in Christ Jesus. It entails living by God’s will, aligning one’s will with the will of God and fulfilling his purpose in one’s life. Faith, as knowledge of the truth and love, lives out that truth and love that transcend every form of falsehood and hate. Faith itself becomes an expression of truth and love. Our faith, therefore, develops through the permanent process of our conversion into truth and love. And we communicate the truth and love since we have such knowledge through faith<sup>10</sup>

Fundamentally, the knowledge of God is innate. It is something inborn. By innate knowledge, here is meant due to our constitution as sentient, rational, and moral beings. It is opposed to knowledge founded on experience, to that obtained *ab extra* instruction, and to that acquired by research and reasoning.<sup>11</sup> That is not to say that through our experience of material creation, for instance, the universe and all that it contains, we cannot arrive at a contemplation of God, who is the creator. Even the scripture says, yes, naturally stupid are all unaware of God, and who, from good things seen, have not been able to discover Him-who-is, or, studying the works, have not recognized the artificer. Through the grandeur and beauty of the creatures, we may contemplate their author through analogy. (cf. Wisdom 13:1, 5).

It is important to conclude here, however, with the teaching of the Church. The Catholic doctrine holds that man can arrive at knowledge of God by the natural light of reason.<sup>12</sup> Knowledge of God by Faith, therefore, implies two possibilities; one is opened to us by revelation and grace, which is deeply rooted in theology; the other is immanent in reason—through rationality and the sciences.<sup>13</sup>

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF TRUTH

The concept of truth, like the concept of knowledge, has no doubt been construed differently and used in various contexts. Even many theorists have come up with different theories by which the concept of truth can be arrived at. There are many theories about truth and what makes a proposition or a belief

true or false. One of the oldest and perhaps most widely held is the correspondence theory of truth.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, we should ultimately see the truth in something, in a Being, in God, and many implications are open to us.<sup>15</sup> The words of Pope Francis are worth quoting here:

We are living in an age in which people are rather skeptical of truth. Benedict XVI has frequently spoken of relativism, that is, of the tendency to think that truth comes from consensus or from something we like. The question arises: Does “the” truth really exist? What is “the” truth? Can we know it? Can we find it? Here springs to my mind the question of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, when Jesus reveals to him the deep meaning of his mission: “What is truth?” (Jn 18:37, 38). Pilate cannot understand that “the” Truth is standing in front of him, he cannot see in Jesus the face of the truth that is the face of God. And yet Jesus is exactly this: the Truth that, in the fullness of time, “became flesh” (cf. Jn 1:1, 14) and came to dwell among us so that we might know it. The truth is not grasped as a thing, the truth is encountered. It is not a possession; it is an encounter with a Person.<sup>16</sup>

In the above quotation, Pope Francis gives a profound insight into the understanding of the concept of “the” truth. This is quite different from the conventional understanding of the standard terminology. It is a truth that is self-enfacing. It is the truth, not just as a proposition or possession, but the truth that is a Person, a Being, God himself. It is the truth that is

<sup>10</sup> T. DAJCZER, *The Gift of Faith*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 2005, 59

<sup>11</sup> C. HODGE, *Systematic Theology, vol. 1*, Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, USA, 2011, 191

<sup>12</sup> H. BOUILLARD, *The Logic of the Faith*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1967, 107

<sup>13</sup> H. BOUILLARD, *The Logic of the Faith*, 109

<sup>14</sup> N. LEMONS, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, 9

<sup>15</sup> G. OCHIAGHA, *The Truth: Its Habitat*, N-Trinity Press, Imo, Nigeria, 2016, 30

<sup>16</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Wednesday morning, 15 May 2013, at the General Audience in St Peter’s Square,” cited in G. OCHIAGHA, *The Truth: Its Habitat*, 30

transcendental and pre-exists even before creation. It is older than humans, and as such, we only come to encounter it. Moreover, Philosophy or speculative thought does not create or invent the truth; rather, it depends on the prior *givenness* of truth to religious consciousness. Hence, philosophy depends on religion for its content. The encompassing of religion by speculative thought is supposed to alter only the form but not the content of religions and theological truth.<sup>17</sup> That is why even a philosopher like Hegel would further claim that “religion and philosophy have the same content: “in both the object is the truth, in that supreme sense in which God is the truth.”<sup>18</sup> However, for a proper articulation of the understanding of truth, the truth shall be considered in binary forms, namely, the logical truth and the revealed or transcendental truth.

### THE LOGICAL TRUTH (PHILOSOPHICAL ENTERPRISE)

Logical truth is the truth that can be arrived at through the instrumentality of philosophical methodology. Thus, in the primary sense of the word, truth is a property of one’s knowledge. In secondary senses, truth is a property of being and, again, of one’s communicative expressions. Thus, we may speak of cognitional, metaphysical, and communicational truths. Nevertheless, metaphysical truth is akin to the revealed truth, the transcendental truth. As such, its truthfulness is not subject to empirical proof.<sup>19</sup>

In general, truth, in the primary sense, is the epistemic validity or epistemological objectivity of one’s knowledge, the property by which one’s knowledge, precisely as knowledge, is genuine, authentic, and successful. In this sense, the developmental or non-dialectical opposite of truth is cognitional non-truth, the simple absence of epistemic validity, and the hallmark of ignorance.<sup>20</sup>

There are as many specific accounts of cognitional truth as different specific accounts of human knowledge. These accounts, or simply put theories, try to explain the concept of truth; that is, what could be termed truth. They are simply attempts to define the concept of truth. The first two accounts of cognitional truth share the view that human knowing is only sensory and intellectual intuition. A knowledge claim is valid precisely insofar as it mirrors, reflects, and represents the contents of intuition. Truth is a matter of *unmediated*

*correspondence* between a knowledge claim and an intuited reality. The third and fourth accounts of cognitional truth assert in common that, in principle the critical element of human knowing is conceptual understanding and that a knowledge claim is true exactly insofar as it logically entails or is entailed by specific other knowledge claims. That is to say, truth is a matter of the logical coherence of a knowledge claim with a set of privileged knowledge claims. What is evoked here is the coherence of propositions with one another. Coherence is the relation among propositions, not between a proposition and something else (a state of affairs) which is not a proposition.<sup>21</sup>

According to a fifth account, professed by persons in the tradition of Peirce, James, and Dewey, human knowing has its basis and meaning in terms of useful thinking, and a knowledge claim is true just to the extent that it facilitates the attainment of some concrete goal. That is to say, truth is a matter of practical effectiveness of a knowledge claim about the solution of some problem or the performance of some task. Truth is simply what works. A true proposition works.<sup>22</sup> Human knowing culminates in judgmental affirmation on a sixth account, proposed by those in the Aquinas, Maréchal, and Lonergan traditions. First, the conscious subject arrives at some hypothetical knowledge claim. Next, she comes authentically to grasp that knowledge claim as fulfilling the criteria of rational affirmation that constitute in part the dynamic structure of her subjectivity. Finally, she points, asserts, affirms the knowledge claim, and in and through that affirmation, she achieves knowledge of the real. This view follows that truth is a matter of the mediated correspondence of a knowledge claim and a judgmentally affirmed reality—a correspondence mediated by the subject’s act of rational affirmation.<sup>23</sup>

In the opinion of some philosophers, knowledge is of two kinds, empirical and a priori. Empirical according to the conceptualization of Karl Popper, is knowledge of the truth of propositions that experience to some extent supports or corroborates, though not, if the propositions are general, strictly verifies, but that some conceivable experience would falsify. It is knowledge of truths vulnerable to conceivable observational tests. Such truths are contingent and might have been false. Truths of arithmetic are not such truths, nor those

<sup>17</sup> L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Meaning, Truth, and God*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982, 55

<sup>18</sup> HEGEL, *The Logic of Hegel*, translated from the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences by W. WALLACE, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, 2, cited by R. R. WILLIAMS, *Hegel and Schleiermacher, On Theological Truth*, in L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Meaning, Truth, and God*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982, 55

<sup>19</sup> M. VERTIN, “Truth” in J. A. KOMONCHAK, et al. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Theological Publication in India, Bangalore, 2011, 1062

<sup>20</sup> M. VERTIN, “Truth” in J. A. KOMONCHAK, et al. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1062

<sup>21</sup> J. HOSPERS, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, Great Britain, 1956, 116

<sup>22</sup> J. HOSPERS, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 117

<sup>23</sup> M. VERTIN, “Truth” in J. A. KOMONCHAK, et al. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1062-1063

of formal logic. When it comes to the truth of metaphysics—a truth beyond the physical, verifiability is not entertained.<sup>24</sup>

### **THE REVEALED TRUTH (TRANSCENDENTAL, ETERNAL, UNDYING)**

While “truth” in its primary sense denotes a property of one’s knowledge, and in a secondary sense it denotes a property of what one’s knowledge is of, namely, of what exists or occurs, reality, being, metaphysical or transcendental truth is the intrinsic “knowability” of being as such, just as transcendental unity is its intrinsic “undividedness” and transcendental goodness is its intrinsic desirability.<sup>25</sup>

Metaphysical propositions, if true, are not vulnerable to conceivable observational tests, for they claim to harmonize not simply with actual but with conceivable experience. Their testing is in the imagination, not in perception; by intellectual, not by physical, experimentation. They are not subject to philosophical theorization or scientific experimentation.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, in metaphysics, observation merely furnishes an illustration of meanings. It does not text truth. The meanings metaphysics deals with are those whose generality transcends the actual world to consider possible world states. Observation of the actual world alone cannot establish metaphysical principles. The test is the coherence of these principles among themselves.<sup>27</sup> Thus, we come to terms with the fact that proof is common to all fields of empirical and rational inquiry. Here, religion differs radically. The propositions entertained as true in religious creeds or articles of religious faith are entirely beyond proof.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, from understanding the metaphysical truth above, we can glimpse what revealed truth is. The revealed truth is about divine reality, the truth about the God who is truth himself. We also come to understand the nature or status of this truth. Because since all truth comes from God and God in His very nature is immutable, truth itself cannot change. God is an infinite existence. God’s very nature is to exist. Being infinite truth, what God has created are simply expressions, images, and reflections of the infinite truth.<sup>29</sup>

The revealed truth is what we receive as divine revelation. It is that self-communication of God to humanity. And the understanding of the revealed truth, which is the transcendental truth, is aptly captured by the following quotation:

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. C. HARTSHORNE, *Our Knowledge of God*, cited in L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Knowing Religiously*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984, 52

<sup>25</sup> M. VERTIN, “Truth” in J. A. KOMONCHAK, et al. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1063

<sup>26</sup> C. HARTSHORNE, *Our Knowledge of God*, cited in L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Knowing Religiously*, 52

<sup>27</sup> C. HARTSHORNE, *Our Knowledge of God*, cited in L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Knowing Religiously*, 53

The bible makes it clear that truth is to be considered from the perspective of God. This is therefore to say, as expected, the bible sees truth from a theological point of view. It is that which is consistent with the will, mind, glory, character, and being of God. In fact, truth is the self-revelation of God or the self-expression of God. Truth is theological before being ontological. Truth is also ontological because reality is what God declares it to be and has made it so. This means that God is the author, as he is the source, the arbiter, the determiner and the ultimate standard of all truth. Truth means nothing apart from God and so cannot be ultimately recognized, explained or understood unless it refers to God as the source.<sup>30</sup>

Undoubtedly, the truth of anything would always require recourse to the truth of another to establish. But it will be entirely out of place for us to go *ad infinitum*. This implies that ultimately, our quest for reality and truth must, at one point or another, appeal logically to an external self-existent creator of all else, which ultimately is the foundation of all truth and is truth himself. Thus, even on the moral plane, the truth of any discourse would simply appeal to God. The rejection of God as the standard for truth is itself a rejection of objectivity in morality, and what will be evoked will be subjectivism and relativism, which will lead to depravity and destruction. (cf. Rom. 1:28-29).<sup>31</sup>

### **FAITH AS THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH**

Moreover, “since all truth comes from God and since God in His very nature is immutable, truth itself cannot change. God is an infinite existence. God’s very nature is to exist. Being

<sup>28</sup> M. J. ADLER, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth- an Essay in the Philosophy of Religion*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1990, 17

<sup>29</sup> R. J. FOX, *The Catholic Faith*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, Indiana, 1984, 72

<sup>30</sup> G. OCHIAGHA, *The Truth: Its Habitat*, 31-32

<sup>31</sup> G. OCHIAGHA, *The Truth: Its Habitat*, 32-33

infinite truth, what God has created are simply expressions, images, and reflections of the infinite truth. Scientists discover the secrets of nature; they unfold the laws of nature which, often, have been hidden for millions of years to the intellect of man, but scientists do not create the truth, which they find hidden in nature.”<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the logic of truth is the same for all exclusionary claims to truth that something is correctly judged to be true and that all judgments to the contrary are incorrect. The proposition may be a theorem in mathematics, a scientific generalization, a conclusion of historical research, a philosophical principle, or an article of religious faith.<sup>33</sup> This is so because truth is not something that we originate. Instead, it is a reality that exists even in human consciousness. It transcends our human faculty, and we are only drawn to it. The ultimate truth, therefore, is a reality to which we are drawn by faith.

Hegel is quite close to Schleiermacher in claiming that religion apprehends the truth immediately in feeling, while philosophy is a reflective, speculative comprehension of that same truth. Hegel even concedes Schleiermacher’s point that feeling is the original, primary form of apprehension of ultimate truth, while doctrines are secondary and derivative: “Religion can exist without philosophy. But philosophy cannot exist without religion. For it encompasses it.”<sup>34</sup> As used here, the feeling is that inner voice that exposes man to the truth and imparts on him. It can be referred to as conscience, the inner voice of God.

In the light of the above, the issue of knowledge of truth becomes central to faith. We need knowledge and truth to stand firm in our faith. Man has sought out truth since the foundation of the world.<sup>35</sup> Faith without knowing the truth does not save or provide a sure footing. It remains a beautiful story, the projection of our deep yearning for happiness, something capable of satisfying us to the extent that we are willing to deceive ourselves. Either that is reduced to a lofty sentiment that brings consolation and cheer yet remains prey to the vagaries of our spirit and the changing seasons, incapable of sustaining a steady journey through life. Because of its intrinsic link with the truth, faith can offer a new light, superior to whatever calculations there are, for it sees further into the distance and considers the hand of God, who remains faithful to his covenant and promises.<sup>36</sup>

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF LOVE

Love today is a much over-used word. It has a thousand and one meanings. But without love, no one can live. When a man goes out from his loneliness to encounter a loving other, and when they find each other in the happiness of their love, he sees everything with different eyes: himself, the world, and his fellow man. Indeed, then he will even acquire some presentiment of the love of God. But on the other hand, it can be deadly, and life can be without meaning if, instead of loving acceptance, a man encounters nothing but cruelty.<sup>37</sup>

We must say quickly here that though love is a misinterpreted reality, its essence and meaning in the true sense of it cannot be undermined. Thus, in trying to understand the concept of love, it will only be apposite to resort to the very being who is love himself. This implies that God can never be removed from the picture in the discourse of love. For God is love. (cf. 1 Jn 4: 6). In line with this, True love for God brings forth an intense and strong love for others. As we grow in greater awareness of the indwelling essence in the deepest center of our being, at the same time, we become conscious of this divine, loving presence in, surrounding and penetrating all other things.<sup>38</sup> The entire scripture is about God, who is love and constantly communicates this love to his creation or creatures. The Old Testament represents a God who acts out of love. The New Testament is about God, who lives as love personified amongst his creatures, in the person of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

In light of the above, we can say that any use of a word or concept, despite its whimsical character, remains always faithful to reality. It is crucial, therefore, to be open to what is common to all the configurations of love and to keep in mind this convergence despite its unfortunate restrictive use, like the misuse of the word ‘charity’, restricted to the organization and care for the poor and the needy, or that of the word ‘friend’, to designate a mistress. On the other hand, despite the secular abuse of the word, we can still witness now rehabilitation, that is, a rebirth of its good use. Fundamental words do not allow themselves to be replaced, at least not

<sup>32</sup>R. J. FOX, *The Catholic Faith*, 72

<sup>33</sup>M. J. ADLER, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth- an Essay in the Philosophy of Religion*, 10

<sup>34</sup>HEGEL, *2nd Preface to the Encyclopedia*, cited in E. FACKENHEIM, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Thought*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967, 116, cited by R. R. WILLIAMS, *Hegel and Schleiermacher, On Theological Truth*, in L. S. ROUNER, ed., *Meaning, Truth, and God*,

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982, 55

<sup>35</sup>R. J. FOX, *The Catholic Faith*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, Indiana, 1984, 73

<sup>36</sup>FRANCIS I, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, nn.23-24

<sup>37</sup>J. HEINZMANN, *Faith is Friendship*, D. HEINZMANN, transl., Alba House, New York, 1983, 20-21

<sup>38</sup>G. A. MALONEY, *The Silence of Surrendering Love: Body, Soul, Spirit Integration*, Alba House, New York, 1986, 107

<sup>39</sup>Cf. J. HEINZMANN, *Faith is Friendship*, 21

arbitrarily, nor do they allow their content to be expressed by others, no matter how rational such a decision may be.<sup>40</sup>

### LOVE AS A THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE

No doubt, the necessity of the theological virtues cannot be ascertained without first establishing what persons are for. By knowing what persons are for, we can begin to discuss the essence of the virtues there are. Charity, the third theological virtue, is the virtue that provides us with the ultimate answer, that is, that persons are made by God to love Him and serve Him and to enjoy Him forever. Love or charity is the response of all the powers of persons in grace to God's infinite and essential goodness. Here, the concept of virtue, as the maximum to which man can aspire, is completed.<sup>41</sup>

According to Joseph Pieper, Christians approach God and his neighbour in the theological virtue of charity with an acceptance that surpasses all the strength of natural love.<sup>42</sup> Thus, charity primarily signifies sharing in the divine life. For Christians, it is the love of God poured forth in their hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5). Love is all about being a child of God and having the disposition to fulfill the divine life. It also calls one to be authentically human, choose, and live, given integral human fulfillment.<sup>43</sup>

Scripture contains commands to love God above all things and to love one's neighbour as oneself (cf. Luke 10: 27). It would seem, therefore, as if charity was a human act, yet charity has traditionally been referred to as, or called a virtue. One way of understanding it is that *Love God above all things* is not a command to perform some act; instead, it is a command to be perfect in the love of God by integrating one's whole life with charity.<sup>44</sup> For C. S. Lewis, we might think that God simply wanted obedience to a set of rules, whereas he wanted people of a particular sort<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, love is an underlying principle, a disposition towards fulfilment which informs everything one does. Christian love implies holiness. Furthermore, love is the central reality of the universe and the heart of all things. The essential nature of God is love. Love holds a significant place in the Holy Scriptures; it is the central message of the New Testament. It is the central reality of human life as well. Consequently, our primary task is to know this love, to open our beings to it, and to express it in our lives. This implies loving God above all things and loving

our neighbour as we love ourselves.<sup>46</sup> Though the attitude expected from men concerning God is caught instead by the word, several texts explicitly or implicitly also speak of a person's love for God. Indeed, elements in a person's response to God are not entirely exhausted by the concept of faith. If faith is a receiving from God, love, on the other hand, is the giving of something and an exchange. Whoever loves another wants to give him something and share all he can, and his suffering is that he cannot share what he wishes to.<sup>47</sup>

But it is evident that, since the love of God finds its preferred field of action in the love of neighbour (cf. Mt. 25:31-46), there is a tendency at times to identify the two: love of neighbour becomes the concrete mode of a person's love of God. However, such a thesis does not find support in Holy Scripture. The Bible clearly distinguishes the two commandments, and it does so for good reasons. We must be conscious that there are values in the love of God that are not contained in the love of neighbour. We pray to God and not to our neighbour. We expect the reign of God and not the reign of men. For "whoever considers love for God an obsolete mythological relic and wants to compensate for it by love for man and in addition to that void it of its meaning, may do so, but he should honestly not appeal for that to Jesus and the New Testament"<sup>48</sup> and not to the Old Testament either. The love of neighbour has its ultimate criterion and foundation in the love of God.

In the Old Testament, the love of God is attested everywhere. Though it is seldom mentioned *expressis verbis*, it is expressed clearly and indirectly in the numerous narratives of how he has acted towards men.<sup>49</sup> Hence, Deuteronomy 6:5 formulates the great commandment of love of God as a central theme of the covenant: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Also cf. Josh. 22:5). The wholehearted love of God is realized through a sincere service of Yahweh and the observance of his commandments.

That does not imply that Israel's love of God is a legal duty. Because man's love for God is far from being expressed in sheer legalism or external observance of the cult; on the contrary, it engages the whole of man, with all his powers; it must come from 'his whole heart' and must lead to a 'cleaving to' God that is living and dynamic.<sup>50</sup> Blessings

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. PIEPER, *The Fundamental Virtues*, 420, 447, cited in L. J. MUNOZ, *Virtues: An Inquiry into Moral Values for Our Times*, Oluseyi Press, Ibadan, 1996, 216

<sup>41</sup> L. J. MUNOZ, *Virtues: An Inquiry into Moral Values for Our Times*, 216

<sup>42</sup> J. PIEPER, *The Fundamental Virtues*, 13

<sup>43</sup> Cf. G. GRISEZ, and R. SHAW, *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral Principles*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, London, 2001, 289

<sup>44</sup> Cf. G. GRISEZ, and R. SHAW, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 291

<sup>45</sup> Cf. J. PIEPER, *The Fundamental Virtues*, 418

<sup>46</sup>Cf. K. H. PESCHKE, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II* vol. 2, Theological Publication, India, Bangalore, 1996, 88

<sup>47</sup>Cf. S. LYONNET, *La Carità Pienezza della Legge secondo san Paolo*, Ave, Roma, 1969, 25

<sup>48</sup>W. SCHRAGE, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Gottingen, 1989, 90

<sup>49</sup>V. WARNACH, "Love", in J. BAUER, ed., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1970, 518

<sup>50</sup> V. WARNACH, "Love", in J. BAUER, ed., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, 523

accompany the commandment of love for those who will keep it (Deut. 30:19f). The love of God for the human person is the love of a father for his child (Hos. 11:1-4; Jer. 3:19; 31:9,20-22). It is far greater than the love of a mother also (Is. 49:15, 66:13). Thus, God continually assures Israel of his love for her: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again, I will build you and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!" (Jer. 31:3f, cf. Is. 54:1-10; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2:16-20).

From every possible expression, the God of the New Testament is simply "the God of love" (2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Jn. 4:16) and the "God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:6). God's love for humans is primarily a father's love (Luke 15:11-32; 1 Jn. 3:1). And "unlike the rather rare usage of the image of God as father in the Old Testament, God's fatherhood is a concept of primary importance in the New Testament."<sup>51</sup> The relationship between God and human beings is that of a father-son or daughter relationship. God, in his fatherly love, cares for all men. His love finds its most profound and eloquent expression in the incarnation of his only Begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, "being mindful of his mercy" (Luke 1:54), God manifested his love in Christ (1 Jn. 4:9f).

God's love for mankind becomes more concrete in Christ's love for his disciples and in the sacrifice of his life for their salvation and that of all men. Such is the highest expression of true love. God in Christ has shown the perfect example of what love is. Our love for God is a response to the prior love of God. The divine love calls for reciprocity.

Moreover, love for God proves itself in total assent to the divine will and the ready performance of his commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3). The assent to the divine will also include, as its primary manifestation, the love of neighbour. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 Jn. 4:20f).

The above rightly captures the understanding of the theological virtue of love. It is that virtue by which we love God as the highest good for his own sake and all creation for God's sake. This shows that as a theological virtue, its primary object is God as the highest, most perfect, most comprehensive good. Its secondary object is all beings and creatures that God loves and wills. Men's love for God essentially belongs to benevolent love, whose characteristic is to will the good of another. For charity "means that we

delight in God, in his perfection and blessedness; that we are glad and 'dance with joy' at the thought that God is what he is, infinitely good, beautiful, mighty and blissful."<sup>52</sup> Love of God is delight in his unfathomable holiness and infinite goodness and joy in his eternal blessedness.<sup>53</sup>

Concerning its object, since the love of God is akin to the love of friendship, it tends towards union with God. Nevertheless, it transcends human friendship insofar as this union is not only a union of affection and mutual sharing of spiritual values but a total self-giving and abandonment to God. "To love God is to give oneself, body and soul, senses and faculties, wholly, irrevocably and forever so that one ceases to belong to oneself and becomes the absolute property of God."<sup>54</sup> Love draws one into a perfect and innermost communion and mystical union with God. This innermost communion and mystical union with God reflect and manifest in the love of neighbour.

The theological virtue of love as infused by God also makes us understand that our love for God must be sovereign. Only supreme love is worthy of God. Despite all odds, the existential situations of life, viz. sufferings, pains, negativities, joys and happiness, our love for God must be affectionately supreme. Love must also be practical and interior. Just as faith is a personal commitment to the ultimate truth, love is also a commitment to the God who loves himself. This commitment is not a mere intellectual assent but a concrete, practical and interior commitment to God, as expressed in daily life.<sup>55</sup>

## **THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS THE KNOWLEDGE OF LOVE**

Thus, we understand what Pope Francis meant when he said faith is the knowledge of truth and love. Faith transforms the whole person to the extent that he or she becomes open to love. Through this kind of blending between faith and love, we come to see the kind of knowledge that faith entails, its power to convince and its ability to illumine our steps. Faith knows because it is tied to love and brings enlightenment. Faith's understanding is born when we receive God's immense love, transforming us inwardly and enabling us to see reality with new eyes.<sup>56</sup>

Life is committed to love: "God is love. God's love was revealed in our midst: He sent his only Son to the world so we might have life through him. Love, then, consists in this: not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and has sent his son as an offering for our sins."<sup>57</sup> (cf. 1 John 4: 8-10). Faith is fundamental in the discourse of love because you

<sup>51</sup> A. HARNACK, *What IS Christianity?* Harper and Row, New York, 1957, 63

<sup>52</sup> L. COLIN, *Love the Lord Thy God*, Sands and Co., Covent Garden/Glasgow, 1956, 17

<sup>53</sup> Cf. K. H. PESCHKE, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II* vol. 2, 97

<sup>54</sup> L. COLIN, *Love the Lord Thy God*, 19

<sup>55</sup> Cf. T. PAZHAYAMPALLIL, *Pastoral Guide*, vol. 1, Kristi Jyoti Publications, Bangalore, India, 2012, 713-714

<sup>56</sup> FRANCIS I, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 26; cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.65, a.5

<sup>57</sup> J. HEINZMANN, *Faith is Friendship*, 20



actually cannot truly love people unless you love them by faith. To love people as brothers and sisters in Christ, you must love them by faith.<sup>58</sup>

If you do not have faith and do not know how to operate in it, you will likely be unable to love. Moreover, love is not an entity to be known. That faith is the knowledge of love does not imply that faith knows love. Instead, faith simply loves. One does not know love, but love. This is without any prejudice to our understanding of God as love.<sup>59</sup> Again, we must emphasise that to know something or somebody is to have a personal encounter with the known. To know is to have intercourse (that is, self-communication), personal conviction, encounter and interaction with the known. Faith knows because it loves. And love is the total commitment of life.

### CONCLUSION

The Christian faith is that profound conviction in the ultimate truth and total commitment to God, who is truth and love. To truly know God and to assent to the truths revealed by God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and proposed for our belief by the Church, one must come to the knowledge of the truth and love. God is love. He is the transcendental truth. His revealed truth is his self-communication in the world. The self-communication of God is God's mission in the world, which is the mission of our salvation. Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, makes us understand that he is the way, the truth and the life. Life is a commitment to love. Jesus Christ as God is the truth and love. Faith in God, therefore, is the knowledge of the truth and love.

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