



CAPP France Group

# Living and Leading in Truth

November 2025

## About this text

This text is the result of work carried out in 2024-2025 on the theme of "truth" by a sub-group of the French chapter (CAPP France) of the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation; this foundation<sup>1</sup> was created in 1993 by Pope Saint John Paul II to help promote the study and dissemination of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, as stated in particular by the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of Pope Saint John Paul II, itself published on the occasion of the centenary of the publication by Pope Leo XIII of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* which laid the foundations of the social doctrine of the Church.

## A clarification of terminology: "truth" and "Truth"

The text deliberately uses the terms "truth" (without a capital V) and "Truth" with a capital V in a differentiated manner, and they should be understood as having the following respective meanings.

- The term "truth" should be understood as having the common meaning of the word truth in the English language, without particular reference to the Christian faith; it is therefore intended to designate earthly, human, natural truths supposed to exist and which can be admitted by a large number of men independently of any religious or political reference.
- The term "Truth" refers to the truth or truths revealed by Christ (for example John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life"), professed and taught by the Christian religion.

In theory, from a strictly semantic and logical point of view, these two terms therefore refer to distinct concepts and orders; Christian doctrine also recognizes a "*just autonomy of earthly realities*."<sup>2</sup> ", which does not break the original link they have with their Creator.

But the group's reflections presented here forge a strong conviction that in reality these two concepts or orders are not (at all) separate or foreign.

More precisely ;

- **The Christian** who wants to follow Christ and thus attain the Truth must also live truthfully with himself and with others, and he cannot exempt himself from knowing, to the extent possible, and respecting the truths of nature, science, economics, and persons, for without this, his action in the world would be at worst harmful, at best irrelevant and ineffective, and it is not to this fruitless life that he is called.
- **The non-Christian** who lives and acts as an honest man with the desire to know and spread the truth, seeking to progress himself and to advance the world in which he lives, unknowingly fulfills a good part of God's plan for humanity, and is likely to draw closer to God and therefore to the Truth.

This fundamental coherence between truth (or the attitude of seeking and practicing truth) on the one hand and Truth on the other, which is a strong conviction of our group, does not in any way eliminate the existence – frequent, often painful, complicated to live with – of tensions, if not conflicts and contradictions between what seems to be or imposes itself as being at a given moment and in a given situation, the truth (or perhaps rather in fact the necessity of truth) and Truth; it is the challenge of the Christian to face these contradictions and to manage them as best he can, without ever forgetting where the Truth is.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.centesimusannus.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Encyclical *Gaudium et Spes* No. 36

## Synthesis

### Is our world trying to do without the need to refer to the truth?

Everyone's daily experience probably frequently leaves them with the impression that the current era has an increasingly distant, if not troubled or frankly problematic, relationship with the truth; the news is populated with "fake news," generative artificial intelligences manufacture speeches or images that are very difficult to distinguish from what was really said or really existed (and conformity to the truth is not a criterion of their performance), and many seem to consider that the number of "likes" or "followers" obtained on social networks legitimizes what is said as being, if not the truth, at least an acceptable and accepted "truth", or that the vehement promise of a person's sincerity is an acceptable justification for their actions and statements even if these were not in accordance with the truth or the rule.

The harshest geopolitical realities are reinterpreted or masked to serve one thesis or another; companies collapse, ruining their shareholders and putting their suppliers, customers and employees at great risk, or in some extreme cases causing the death of their users, for having concealed the reality of their economic situation or certain industrial problems for too long; and one cannot help but make a link between certain major political or social deteriorations of our national community (3) and the attitudes of concealing the truth around these problems, thus leaving unanswered situations that only worsen.

Even more striking, **relativism**, often erected as a positive and modern attitude, openly denies and calls into question a number of fundamental anthropological or historical truths as if their character of "truth" was only an opinion or a social construct accepted for too long, and that on the contrary the opposite opinion, supposed to have become majority or in any case loudly promoted and hammered as such, had every legitimacy to take -finally - the place of the previous truth without any criterion of veracity being called into question.

It is this strange feeling of a "post-truth" world which would pretend, either unwittingly and through its negligence, or deliberately, organizes and functions without needing to refer to the notion of truth, which has nevertheless been one of the major drivers of the evolution of humanity for the last 20 or 25 centuries, that seems to us to make it useful to **reflect on the notion of truth**, and in particular on the role it is called upon to play in the actions of a Christian with responsibilities in the economic world and who is concerned with the implementation of the social doctrine of the Church.

### The demand for truth

Contrary to this suggestion of a world that seems to be gradually exonerating itself from the truth, our work leads us instead to **promote with conviction a requirement of truth**, understood as the necessary attitude of always seeking, speaking (with the appropriate discernment) the truth, and always seeking to live and act according to the truth, a requirement which applies to every person, Christian or not, as well as to companies, nations, and to the institutions that govern them.

The requirement that is posed is that of the effort to seek, promote and conform one's life to the truth, much more than an unrealizable necessity to possess and even less to impose the truth.

It is indeed important to emphasize, with realism and humility, that this demand for truth necessarily encounters the difficulty of finding or recognizing the truth, when several visions of the same situation may exist and when our own may evolve according to the moments of our life.

Experience and history teach us that where this demand for truth is lacking, or worse, where it is knowingly masked or distorted, economic and political organizations, social relations and peoples' lives serious dysfunction, and this is what justifies this demand for truth without it being necessary at this stage to invoke any Christian reference.

This requirement is in no way a sanction, nor a constraint or a hindrance; on the contrary, it is a driving force that makes people and organizations grow, that makes them free and leads them towards efficiency and fulfillment and that allows life in society with just relations between people.

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3 As this document was authored in France, any "national" reference here should be understood as referring to France.



## For Christians, *Centesimus Annus* sets a clear demand for truth

Truth occupies a significant place in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, a reference for Christians, and in particular for those with responsibilities in the economic world who wish to work towards the implementation of the social doctrine of the Church, and this text specifically teaches us that;

1. **Seeking the truth**, especially through the intelligence given to us by the Creator, and living in truth (that is, in accordance with the transcendent dignity of the person) is essential to our human nature, and constitutes one of the fundamental rights of the human person; our capacity to live in truth is conditioned by our history and our environment, starting with that of the family.
2. Christians are commissioned (and empowered) to **instill Christian truth** (the "Truth") in the process of building the culture of nations to lead them towards good. To live up to this mission, we ourselves must constantly strive to seek the truth and share what we discover with our brothers and sisters.
3. The very function of *Rerum Novarum* has been to call for **respect for the truth of man in the economic and social field**, and it is in the Gospels that we can find the moral way to deal with the challenges posed to the world by these "new things".
4. Without **obedience to the truth**, there is no true freedom, no progress, no personal fulfillment.
5. Similarly, the **Refusal to submit to the truth** in a nation, like **relativism** which claims that truth is made by the opinion of the majority, leads that nation to totalitarianism and violence, and opposes the just consideration of the ecological issue; *Centesimus Annus* suggests moreover that it is the power of truth that brought down Marxism and totalitarian regimes.

*Centesimus Annus* thus confirms, in and through Christian thought, the demand for truth posed initially without invoking Christian reference but through human experience; this demand therefore imposes itself even more clearly on the Christian in general and on the Christian leader in particular.

## Living and Leading in Truth

Once this requirement of truth was established and thus doubly accepted, our reflection focused on identifying and proposing practical approaches, specifically adapted to the business world, to help the Christian leader live and lead in truth, that is to say, by conforming to the requirement to seek the truth, and to align his actions with what he has been able to discover of the truth.

And even if the Christian leader will be well aware that when he acts, in business for example, as an advocate and craftsman of (human) truth, he is carrying out God's plan in the service of the (divine) Truth to which he bears witness, he is not necessarily called to an explicit evangelization in business; this would be very likely to be irrelevant, poorly accepted or ineffective.

On the contrary, the Christian leader is called to live and act in truth, to be effective and loyal to the earthly missions which are his and to the building of the common good, to exercise them in conformity with the Truth (therefore Christian) which he himself recognizes, and thus to shine by his example and win support.

# I. The Demand for Truth

Truth is a requirement that applies to everyone: when it is lacking, economic organizations, social relations, political life and people experience serious dysfunctions.

## Introduction

Truth is a fundamental attitude that transcends cultures, religions, and systems of thought. It begins with respecting reality, which we are not free to bend to our wishes and desires.

Without truth, it is impossible to live in friendship and solidarity, to nurture love. But truth is not necessarily only mine; I must also receive it from others. Yet it is not always pleasant to speak; it is a stark reality, and it must be used with discernment and kindness. It is then essential to life, to progress, and to the growth of individuals, businesses, and society. Whatever our culture, religious or philosophical beliefs, it is necessary to give full rein to a truth that transcends us.

But truth is not only a matter of convictions, of knowledge, it is also the quality of a life that conforms to who I am, to the hope that dwells within me: if I do not "do" the truth in my life, I will not succeed in holding the truth in what I say, in what I believe.

## Our era seems to have a specific problem with the collective exercise of truth.

Paradoxically, we are experiencing a **crisis of truth**.

We have access to immense, almost unlimited, plural information, to points of view that reflect for the first time in history, the richness of nations and peoples, the rigor of complementary points of view of science and technology, the symphony of musical and plastic arts in their diversity.

And yet, fake news, conspiracy theories, and disinformation are spreading at an alarming rate, facilitated by social media and digital platforms. This fosters distrust of institutions, experts, and traditional sources of information. We are all increasingly skeptical, suspicious, and struggle to distinguish truth from falsehood.

This is partly a long-standing situation that reflects the persistence of our prejudices and our difficulty in questioning ourselves. But the very abundance of available knowledge and the speed of dissemination enabled by social media lead to a loss of control, a refusal, deliberate or not, to submit to the truth. In a world where information is plentiful but sometimes biased, it is easy to be seduced by narratives that reinforce our prejudices or personal interests. This tendency to prioritize convenience or intellectual comfort at the expense of truth is particularly worrying.

Many believe that truth will be "THE" central issue in the debates and difficulties of today's generation of young people (those around 20 years old), just as freedom (and the frantic search for it) was THE issue for the generation that was 20 years old in 1968; let us hope that this generation's quest for truth will not result in the same mistakes as those made in the name of freedom since the sixties.

## Why is the truth no longer appealing ?

To the complex question of why truth is no longer the reference it once was, one plausible explanation is that with the acceleration of action and the possibilities for action (particularly via digital technology), some people believe (sometimes explicitly stating it and claiming it as their competitive advantage or trademark) that truth is a constraint, **an obstacle to efficiency**, and that performance is better achieved if one does not adhere to the truth; this paradigm, which we totally refute here, is in a way at the basis of social networks, which would lose much of their substance and activity if only true things were discussed there.

Another explanation for the disregard of truth is that of **ideology**, which today seems, perhaps especially in France, to be an important driving force in the discourse and conduct of the affairs of the city; this ideology of course makes little of truth as well as reality, which could too often cast doubt on what is proposed by the ideology.

**Hubris**, which in a way leads to an ideology of self, and which may also be experiencing a certain development in our time given, for example, the speed and immense scale of certain successes, in terms of audience or money, driven by technology or the extreme financialization of our economy, is another possible explanation; if I am so filled with confidence in my talents and in my ability to obtain all successes, all recognitions, which can quickly be reinterpreted as "all rights", it is preferable and, in my eyes, legitimate, not to worry about the truth (which concerns others, but not me), including the truth about the damage or pain I may cause, or the bad consequences for the world of what I do. Incidentally, the source of hubris can also be found at the exact opposite of the "techno-capitalist" factors mentioned above, for example in the

progressive and libertarian bias of not accepting any constraint on my freedom, the famous "enjoy without constraint" of 1968.

Finally, we cannot completely rule out that the contemporary refusal to take truth into account can also be explained by a kind of pendulum swing, in reaction to a **past instrumentalization of truth** in more authoritarian moments in history, moments in which the various powers (political, technocratic, intellectual and religious, or even the Western world as a whole when it ambited to impose its ways of life on the rest of the world) have argued their mastery of the truth to impose on the population what they wished to impose on them.

### Yet truth is necessary everywhere: in personal and social life, in the progress of knowledge, in business life, in politics and in international relations.

Sincerity and honesty are fundamental values that allow us to build relationships of trust and mutual respect. Truth is the foundation of all human relationships, whether individual, familial, or affective. In a couple's life, truth is essential for maintaining open and honest communication ; lies and unspoken truths can quickly erode trust and lead to conflict. Building a legacy between generations that ensures both access to heritage and the freedom to imagine the future requires that truth create a healthy and secure environment where parents and children can flourish, thrive, and remain free.

The advancement of knowledge is only possible if we accept the inherently limited nature of what we know today: we do not possess the truth. We must accept the emergence of new ways of thinking, and we must subject our most deeply held convictions to the test of their limitations, even their lack of foundation. Since Galileo, we have known that, particularly in the scientific, technical, and industrial fields, truth is essential for progress and innovation. Scientific research relies on rigorous methods and verifiable evidence. Discoveries and technological advances can only occur within a framework of truth and transparency.

Lies and scientific falsifications can have serious consequences, particularly in the areas of public health, safety and the environment: the capabilities for action that technology offers us only serve the common good if we agree to subject them to a heightened sense of realism: this is what we have learned from both the experience of Covid and the overly confused entanglements of our collective discipline in matters of climate and biodiversity: truth is an imperative to ensure sustainable and responsible development.

Our collective life today is based on a complex organization that intertwines our activities, our forms of solidarity, and our collective imagination, allowing each individual to find their place and contribute to the solidarity and prosperity of all. However, the effectiveness of this complex organization depends on a precise discernment of the dysfunctions that are bound to arise, and on constant attention to the fairness that must govern the distribution of burdens and benefits for each person. Managing the inevitable contradictions of public opinion, to which we contribute, cannot be hoped for without a collective discipline founded on truth. The least that can be said is that our capacity to respect truth in collective life is far from perfect...

Thus, in the life of a company, a realistic perception of realities, however unsettling they may be, is absolutely essential. At a macro level, respecting the truth is indispensable for establishing strategy, controlling finances, and stabilizing governance. This is evident in the numerous cases where false or biased information leads to erroneous decisions that can ultimately lead to bankruptcy.

Listening to consumers is crucial to guaranteeing product quality and safety. Health fraud and unfair business practices can have serious consequences for the health and safety of consumers and for the reputation that is essential to the future of businesses. The globalization of the economy too often facilitates the disregard for these requirements of trust and transparency.

It is perhaps especially in matters of governance, in the management of human relationships, that truth is essential to gradually building the trust that alone allows for the creation of a healthy and productive work environment. It is not enough to simply not lie; one must also refrain from manipulation and accept that we have not always been right: otherwise, we open the door to conflict, decreased motivation, and a loss of trust within teams.

Transparency and honesty are also pillars of democracy and good governance: there is no hope of sustainably ensuring the freedoms we enjoy without public opinion, without civic life founded on truth. Political leaders have a responsibility to tell the truth to their citizens, even when it is difficult to hear, but this is not enough. The media must also strive to inform and construct a diverse commentary that is not based on the pursuit of ratings, and it must not seek to propagate an ideology ( e.g. , " wokism") that quickly becomes a provocation, preventing citizens from recognizing themselves in the image of collective life presented to them. The will to power, the desire to capture the public imagination, lies, and political manipulation can have disastrous consequences. They can lead to ill-informed decisions, a loss of trust in institutions, and

political crises. Truth is therefore essential to ensuring the stability and prosperity of nations.

### Without a shared truth, society is at risk

Experience and history show us that a society that no longer has a shared moral, philosophical or religious truth within itself runs two major risks;

- **the risk of violence** ; if there is no greater truth than the individual desire or conquering project of any particular group, the person or group will have a natural tendency to seek to accomplish their project by any means, including violence.
- the risk that **the money** takes the place of this shared truth that is missing.

It must be noted, moreover, that the contemporary era, which perhaps quite easily thinks that it can exempt itself from the necessity of society living together around certain common truths, is quite largely affected by these two risks, with on the one hand a violence that seems to be on the rise again after centuries of reduction, and an ever-increasing financialization.

### Truth cannot be reduced to sincerity.

While a person's sincerity is an essential quality in his or her relationships with others, "sincerity" should not be confused with "truth"; when someone is sincere, he or she express HIS or HER truth (of the moment) which is not necessarily THE truth; and the demand for truth does not consist of listening to oneself attentively in order to push or impose one's truth on others; the demand for truth consists of seeking the truth, integrating of course what our sensitivity and emotions tell us, but also, integrating with honesty and humility what the facts, others and their experience which may be more important than our own, the laws, the rules, science, history, etc. tell us.

We too often hear people justify a decision or action that didn't give due weight to the truth by their supposed (or at least perceived) sincerity at the time the decision or action was made, as if this sincerity, this authenticity, elevated to a cardinal virtue or the sole important guiding principle of life, were enough to legitimize everything; how would the world function if everyone's conduct had no other limit than their sincerity? Ultimately, this amounts to placing immediate desires and personal perceptions above all else.

In its own way, accounting also recognizes this difference in nature, humbly acknowledging that it is less demanding and more realistic to aim for "sincerity" rather than "truth," since the objective set for companies' financial statements is to be sincere but not necessarily true...

### Conclusion

There is no good life, no growth, no success, no fulfillment, no sustainably effective business, no just society without submission to the truth. Indeed, it would be futile to seek to promote justice, without which lasting peace is impossible, or to ensure the exercise of freedoms, without which we cannot build the future, if this justice and this freedom are not nourished by truth.

Truth is the foundation upon which our humanity rests. While no religious community or school of thought can consider itself the exclusive custodian of freedom, they must all be vigilant and ensure that fidelity to a spiritual and moral heritage of which they are the custodians leaves full room for a truth that we must not possess, but which must possess us.

## II. What *Centesimus Annus* tells us about the truth

### *Centesimus Annus*, a legitimate and indispensable reference for Christians

Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* was published in 1991 on the occasion of the centenary of the publication by Pope Leo XIII of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891, which laid the foundations of the social doctrine of the Church, in the context of the establishment of an industrial and capitalist world and the emergence of communism.

*Centesimus Annus* is in a certain way a reformulation of the social doctrine of the Church, adapted to the context of the end of the 20th century, a context in which the “new things” of 1891 were no longer new, and marked moreover by the end of the communist experiment which had settled in a part of the world to claim to resolve in its own way the questions arising from the rise of capitalism.

*Centesimus Annus* has, for Christians in general and in particular for those who act in the economic world and wish to live and act in it as Christians, an important reference value, almost a compass on social and economic issues.

For example, Cardinal Etchegaray <sup>4</sup>, when presenting the encyclical to the press in 1991, recalled that the social doctrine of the Church was not "optional" for Christians, "but on the contrary was an integral part of the Christian conception of life".

The Pope, for his part, stressed that while the Church did not have a model to propose per se, the social doctrine of the Church constituted an “indispensable intellectual orientation”, which recognizes the positive character of the market and of business, but at the same time underlines the need for their orientation towards the common good.

It was therefore particularly legitimate and important for our group to have sought to identify as precisely as possible what *Centesimus Annus* was telling us about the truth.

### The major role of truth in *Centesimus Annus*

The word “truth” appears 49 times in *Centesimus Annus*, present in 20 of the 50 pages, through 28 distinct occurrences (an occurrence being a paragraph in which the word “truth” appears one or more times); these 28 occurrences are reproduced in Appendix 1 (classified according to the themes identified below).

In a certain way, *Centesimus Annus* indicates that the search for, respect for, and obedience to the truth (in its sense of natural truth) are at the heart of human life.

Indeed, in *Centesimus Annus* there is a fairly clear affirmation of the existence of a natural truth of mankind, which applies to everyone even outside of Christian references, even if the establishment of Christian Truth in the life of the world is a goal to be pursued, a goal which is given as a mission to Christians.

Of course, for Christians, this natural truth overlaps with the Truth, the natural truth of man being that which God revealed to us in the gospels and through Christ, since God is the creator of man and the origin of life, therefore of the natural truth of mankind and of the world.

### 5 major teachings from *Centesimus Annus* about truth

It seemed useful to us to group the 28 occurrences of truth in *Centesimus Annus* around 5 themes, and in doing so, it seems to us, 5 major teachings proposed by *Centesimus Annus* about truth emerge.

1. **Seeking the truth** (especially thanks to our intelligence) and **live in truth** (that is, in accordance with the transcendent dignity of the person) is essential to our human nature, and constitutes one of the fundamental rights of the human person; our capacity to live in truth is conditioned by our history and our environment, beginning with the family.
2. Christians have the mission (and are made capable) **of instilling Christian Truth into the process of building the culture of nations** (that is, the collective truth they adopt) to lead them towards good.

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<sup>4</sup> President of the Pontifical Council “Justice and Peace” (in 1991).

More specifically, *Centesimus Annus* tells us:

- That the culture of nations is forged in the search for truth.
  - That we Christians have the mission to participate in this process of building this human truth by infusing it with the Christian Truth that has been revealed to us.
  - That God has given us not only the mission but also the ability, through our intelligence, to make this influx.
  - And that for this we must constantly strive to seek the truth (and the Truth), and to share what we discover with our brothers.
3. The very objective of *Rerum Novarum* is **to call for respect for the Truth of man in the economic and social sphere**, and it is in the Gospels that we can find the moral way to manage the challenges posed to the world by "new things".
  4. Without **obedience to the truth**, there is no true freedom, no progress, no personal development.
  5. Similarly, the refusal to submit to the truth in a nation, or the relativism which claims that truth is made by the opinion of the majority, **leads that nation to totalitarianism and violence**, and opposes the proper consideration of the ecological issue.

In addition to these 5 major teachings, we find in *Centesimus Annus* some additional propositions concerning the truth:

- the existence of a **duty of truth**, the counterpart to the duty of justice;
- the suggestion that it was the power of truth (and the testimonies made of it) that made it possible to **bring down Marxism and totalitarian regimes**.

#### The Absence of Truth as a Tool of Totalitarianism

"A people who can no longer distinguish truth from falsehood cannot distinguish good from evil. And such a people, deprived of the power to think and judge, are, unknowingly and unwillingly, completely subject to the rule of lies. With such a people, you can do whatever you want."

*Hannah Arendt (October 14, 1906 – December 4 1975)*

#### Essential teachings for a Christian reflection on truth

These lessons appear to us to be of major importance, both:

- as confirmation of the importance of taking the truth into account in the conduct of world affairs and of each individual life, and therefore, consequently, of the dangerousness of the tendency of men and especially of the current world to want to exempt themselves from the truth;
- as posing to us Christians special obligations regarding the search for and propagation of human truth and Christian Truth.

This rereading of *Centesimus Annus* to extract what the text tells us about the truth is therefore an important inspiration for our thinking, and we therefore offer it to our readers.

### III. Paths to living and leading in Truth

#### Introduction

In this third part, we will offer a number of reflections with a practical purpose, which can help everyone to live out in the best possible way the requirement that we believe is made for every man to seek the truth, to live according to this truth, and also to live out the additional requirement made for Christians exercising responsibilities in the city and in businesses to exercise them not only effectively for the good of all stakeholders, with loyalty to those who have entrusted them for this, but also in accordance with the social doctrine of the Church which has its sources in the Truth.

More than proposals or advice, these are observations that often bear witness to the difficulty of living with these demands, but which, hopefully, will encourage the reader to move forward and progress.

#### Note

In many cases, the reflections that follow, which concern the practical application of a desire to seek the truth and to live and lead according to the truth, apply as much to truth as to Truth.

For the sake of simplicity, but perhaps even more so to make the text suitable for readers to reflect on their conduct in the economic world, and so as not to apply only to Christians, the chapter is written using “truth”, but it is good to read it (or to say it to oneself) mentally replacing “truth” with “Truth”.

#### 1. Seek the truth and try to live in truth... without ever believing you truly possess it

As for Truth, for a Christian, it is supposed to be clearly defined as the path that Jesus Christ invites us to follow, and it is “codified” in the teachings of the Church and the doctrine of the Christian faith.

The same level of certainty is very far from existing when it comes to earthly or human truths.

In science itself, and this is even a driving force of the scientific approach and progress, what is true one day is no longer so a little later, and truth is ultimately only the best analysis or theory at a given moment, or what has not yet been proven to be false.

Even though we must not fall into the trap of relativism (according to which truth is constituted by the majority opinion of the moment), we must admit that in many cases (but not in all cases), human, social or economic truths are not always easy to grasp, and can even fluctuate according to people, places or times.

And perhaps our progressive and necessarily incomplete understanding of the truth also, or even primarily, occurs in a negative way, that is to say through the accumulation of learning about what is not the truth.

The call we are being given, it seems to us, is not a call to capture the truth, in order to (claim) to possess it and distribute it (even less impose it) around us, but **a call to be in the attitude of honestly seeking the truth, in all circumstances of life**, even the most uncomfortable, and to act according to what has appeared to us as going in the direction of the truth, and this of course having in mind that our earthly truths cannot go in a direction opposite to that which would be that of the Truth.

In particular, this approach of an honest but prudent and humble search for a truth impossible to fully grasp should encourage us to be wary of the risks of simplification or arrogance, without ever encouraging us to just take things as they are, without seeking to discern the truth.

And in this quest for truth, moments of doubt seem neither worrying nor inappropriate, and are perhaps even necessary; let us beware of those (including ourselves) who are totally filled with certainties and seem to ignore any moment of doubt.

An important point to clarify: while humility, caution, and even doubt are appropriate when assessing our success in grasping the truth, **this doubt should not extend to the question of the existence of truth itself**. It exists, even if it hides and it is difficult for me to reach it, but I must always continue to seek to reach it, and it is this tension towards the truth that makes man and society progress.

#### Jesus, the Way to Truth

“If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

(John 8.31-32)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(John 14.6)



## 2. Develop your inner life, practice discernment, pray, fast.

The Christian leader who wants to simultaneously fulfill his earthly missions (for example, economic performance), live in truth as in Truth, and respond to the call to work towards the effective deployment of the Church's social doctrine will necessarily find himself confronted with tensions and difficulties, because these goals will not always suggest the same actions and decisions to him; and since he does not possess (and he knows that he does not and will never possess) a complete, absolute truth that would unambiguously address all the situations he has to face, and that it would be enough to simply apply, he may find himself in doubt, not knowing what he should do.

It is the attention he will pay to his inner life, particularly through prayer, fasting, and the practice of discernment, that will help him find the answers regarding the direction to follow and the proper conduct of the things he is able to influence.

**Isn't the purpose of spiritual exercises to seek God's will in the governance of my life?**

## 3. Be prepared to pursue the truth outside of easy or pleasant areas.

We have all experienced that the path of action "in truth", that is to say in accordance with the truth that we have been able to identify after having carried out the necessary exercise of discernment, can often be uncomfortable, or even frankly the opposite of the one that would be simple or usual to follow.

While the fact that an option disturbs or costs us is certainly not a criterion for being part of the truth, it is also not a criterion for not being part of it, and we are certainly called upon **not to stop our search for truth and our attempt to live in truth at the limits of our comfort zone**; we must accept that the path of truth we seek to follow may require us to leave our comfort zone and take us to places that disturb us; it is up to us to make our choice, according to our possibilities.

This is especially true of our desire to live according to the Truth, which can clash (or will necessarily clash, one might say) with the truths that prevail in many areas of economic or political life, and to which we must therefore submit, or to which it seems inevitable to submit.

The resolution of this contradiction obviously does not have a magic and simple solution, and it is up to each individual to find their own way, and to remain as faithful as possible to the Truth; by doing so, they will bear witness to the Truth and their example may help others to seek and follow it.

## 4. True Love will help us to live in truth with others

Whether in a couple, in a family or in the management of people in a company, there are situations in which the requirement we give ourselves to seek the truth, and to conform our actions to it if we think we have identified it, can lead us to have to say things, or take actions that are painful for those around us (not to mention ourselves); think of the need to warn or even remove a colleague who is not up to the requirements of his position and is harming the success of the whole company (and possibly himself by undermining his chances of success and fulfillment), the stopping of a project that no longer seems likely to succeed, or having to sanction or admonish a child who is going in the wrong direction with serious risks for his future.

It would often be much simpler to sweep the dust under the rug, but that would be failing in the requirement we want to set for ourselves to seek the truth and act according to it; and in most cases, if not all situations, these risky compromises will prove to be losing and will only hasten those we think we are protecting further into trouble.

It is good in these moments to seek to connect the truth, and the courage it takes to speak it, with the even more important requirement of love; because we love or want to love those entrusted to us, we must say, with tact and discernment, what we think we should tell them, **because concealing certain truths from them would not help them or would harm others and would not be truly loving them.**

If love guides us in this process, and we take the time to let it inspire our actions and words, it can help us to act with determination but with words and attitudes that will make our action certainly not easy for us or for the other, but humane, just and perhaps acceptable.

## 5. Do not confuse transparency with truth

Our era, which, as we have already said, has certain difficulties with the very concept of truth, on the other hand increasingly puts forward a supposed requirement of total transparency on everything and in all circumstances, a requirement according to which everything should be disclosed to everyone, immediately and all times.

While transparency, when it means honesty and the absence of malicious concealment, remains a virtue, such a passion for transparency seems to us very dangerous in its potential consequences (not to mention the difficulty of its practical implementation) and does not seem to go in the direction we advocate of the personal attitude of seeking the truth and living in truth.

**Not every truth is good to tell, especially not to just anyone, not at any time;** it is up to each individual, and especially to those who exercise responsibilities, to discern what is good and useful to say, at what time and under what circumstances.

And in a way, subscribing to the cult of total transparency, which would consist of making everything available to everyone assuming that everyone will make good use of what they have thus learned to arrive at the right conclusions, would probably be in the end a cowardly way of shirking our individual responsibility of making good use of the information to which we have access in order to discern the truth, and to propose this truth to others.

This responsibility to generate, with one's intelligence and honesty in the search for truth, these "performative syntheses" is indeed one of the essential responsibilities of the business leader as well as the political leader, and indeed of the scientist.

## 6. Pursuing the truth is neither a punishment nor a hindrance, but a driving force

In an era sometimes excessively enamored of freedom, which has an excessive cult of self-determination and which would like a happy and harmonious life for people in society to be possible without them having to submit to (societal) rules, the call we make to conform to the requirement of truth may seem very out of step and very negative, appearing as a constraint that will hinder and stifle individual freedom and potential.

On the contrary, we believe that the practice of submitting oneself to the truth (seeking it, acting and living according to it) constitutes for each individual and for the organizations that submit to it **a powerful and indispensable lever of freedom, dynamism, progress, and growth.**

It is enough for each person to think of simple examples, for example that of grades in school or performance in sport: if the cyclist or marathon runner does not have the truth of his timing (or hides it from himself), he cannot progress and that is in fact how he would hinder his development.

The same is true of course in a company: if we hide from ourselves the elements of truth of the economic performance of the company or the technical performance of its products, it is the success and therefore the development and even the sustainability of the company that are in danger.

## 7. To educate about the truth, and to enable access to the truth

Recognizing the difference between true and false, being concerned with discerning the true and moving away from the false, and even simply admitting the idea that there are things that are true and others that are not, and that the former are preferable to the latter, is an attitude that may be spontaneous for a man who lives in a state of total naturalness (for him, taking the false for the true would put his life in danger), but which is no longer necessarily so in a society whose social and technical mechanisms (and tools) function equally well (the "well" here not carrying a value judgment and far from it) when acting per the truth or per falsehood.

It is therefore necessary to ensure that everyone receives **the essential education and knowledge that allow him to distinguish truth from falsehood** for himself, at least in the most common situations in life.

We also need **an education in truth, that is to say, in the existence of truth and the importance of seeking it**, and while the education of children obviously belongs to their parents and teachers, business leaders have a duty to radiate and establish a culture of truth in the areas of responsibility or in which they exert influence.

Leaders themselves must train to develop and maintain their ability to seek, discern, and communicate the truth.

The Christian leader has the additional duty to educate himself so that he can identify what the Truth has to say about the concrete world in which he acts, and so that his action can, without being explicit evangelization which would be inappropriate, lead to this Truth being recognized and influencing the human choices that are made around him.

## 8. Be wary of overly sophisticated tools

In an increasingly sophisticated world and business environment, which makes extensive use of complex digital tools, there is a risk of thinking that the truth will come out of these tools (and worse, can only necessarily come out of these tools), and therefore of relying exclusively on these tools to implement the requirement of truth (if we want to give it to ourselves) and choose the course of action to follow.

While these tools certainly have a use, it seems very dangerous and inappropriate to delegate to them completely the mission of telling us the truth, because firstly, especially in the age of artificial intelligence, the reliability of these tools is far from proven, and the criteria according to which they will forge their "truth" are far from being either clear or always satisfactory.

Furthermore, the complete delegation of our demand for truth to mechanical tools will distance our minds from the positive tension involved in seeking the truth and striving to conform our actions to it; there is an essential step back to



maintain, to allow room for the exercise of discernment, which in particular provides an opportunity to put into perspective the human truths that seem to emerge with the Truth.

A good example of the impossibility of delegating the demand for truth to tools is provided by social networks or digital technology in general; none of the attempts (laudable in their objective) to eliminate false information disseminated by social networks through algorithms has really succeeded, for reasons as much technical as structural (because it is necessary first to agree at the global level on what is true), and these moderation automatism have often achieved the opposite goal, that is to say, to reinforce relativism by giving, by weight, the appearance and the status of truth to "mainstream" propositions which often, for example in ethical questions, are completely contrary to fundamental anthropological truths; this phenomenon is a major, not to say lethal, limitation, perfectly known, which is the propensity for hallucination of artificial intelligence systems.

**The demand for truth cannot therefore be outsourced to "systems," and it is a demand that must be assumed by people, individually and collectively, with the intelligence and heart that have been given to them.**<sup>5</sup>

### 9. Seek personal alignment to live in truth

The desire to live in truth requires consistency between words and actions, in personal life as well as in managerial or public action.

If a leader wants to spread a culture of truth in the company or team he leads, he must embody it by living truthfully in his personal life.

**The Importance of Speaking the Truth**

"It is the one who walks blamelessly. He does what is right; his words are sincere and true. He speaks no evil against others, he does no wrong to anyone, he does no insult to his neighbor."  
(Psalms 15.2-3)

### 10. Instilling the Truth is an obligation of the Christian leader, distinct from proselytism or conversion.

A Christian leader, or a Christian in business, is not necessarily called upon to proselytize, to convert those around him to the Christian faith; this would often be inappropriate, or even outright forbidden by company rules, and it would legitimize other proselytizing which may not be welcome.

The mission given to him by *Centesimus Annus* is to instill Truth wherever he is, through his words as well as his example and actions, so that it is not absent from the human truths that are built around him.

Not responding to this call would mean being a "Sunday Christian," who would be a Christian when he is at home or in his parish, but would no longer be one on Monday when he crosses the threshold of his office.

**Ultimately, we are called more to establish the gospel in business than to proclaim it.**

Not engaging in clumsy proselytizing or evangelizing does not mean having to permanently hide one's convictions and what inspires one's actions and choices; there is an intelligent secularism to be found everywhere.

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<sup>5</sup> It is in a certain way to this more direct exercise of discernment, stripped of the excessively sophisticated tools that overwhelm us, that the Dominican brother Eloi Leclerc encourages us in his book *The Wisdom of the Poor*.



## Conclusion

Our era gives the impression of been keen to function more and more without referring the truth, and perhaps even ceasing to believe in the very notion of truth.

Yet, in a certain way, the search for and reference to truth has been the “eternal” rule of the evolution of humanity for long periods, even though the truth or truths to which it was appropriate to refer have been changing.

Perhaps this denial of the very notion of truth is caused for some by the Hubris which results from ever faster and sometimes spectacular technological and economic progress, leading them to believe that they can claim to be the creators of truth, at least their own, in the refusal of all transcendence, of the existence of a greater than me who obliges me and before whom I must bow.

Perhaps for others on the contrary, and especially those who hold power, the cause of this “disconnect” from the truth would be the difficulty in facing a disappointing reality that does not live up to the promises they made, and the difficulty, or even the perception of impossibility, of bending the current reality towards a better reality, which will probably always have to remain less beautiful than the promises.

The rejection of truth could also be a "rational" choice appearing as a source of efficiency and performance.

However, the honest man or woman of business, leader, political leader, expert, scientist, citizen, father, mother, child, neighbor knows that a healthy submission to the truth (to seek it, to speak it, to conform to it) is imposed upon us, and that masking it, ignoring it or not giving it its place leads societies, businesses and people towards serious difficulties and suffering.

**This is what leads us to affirm (or recall) the idea that there is a requirement of truth, a requirement that applies to everyone, regardless of any Christian reference.**

This demand for truth should not be understood as the impossible injunction to possess and impose a total universal truth, but as the attitude of always seeking to discern the truth, to make it known, and to conform one's own life and actions to it as much as possible, encouraging others to do the same through the example given.

For the Christian, the demand for truth is even stronger, because not only must he, like other men, seek to discern where the truth is and conform his actions and his life to this truth, but he must also allow himself to be imbued with the Truth, and ensure that in his search for truth on earth he leaves room for the Truth, which is to follow the path shown to us by Jesus Christ.

The acceptance (or rejection) of the existence of a truth ultimately leads us back to the question of transcendence and the acceptance of the existence of something greater than ourselves.

Anyone who admits that there is something greater than themselves cannot help but admit the notion of the existence of truth, and the necessity of seeking it and conforming to it, to the extent that they have been able to grasp it.

For the Christian, the one greater than himself is Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, and he is called to follow and imitate him.

## Appendix: Occurrences of the word “truth” in *Centesimus Annus*

*Note : the text below is a non-official English translation of the French version of the encyclical and may differ from the published English version of the encyclical*

### Lesson No. 1

Seeking truth and living in truth is essential to our human nature and constitutes one of the fundamental rights of the person; our ability to live in truth is conditioned by our environment, starting with the family.

#### Occurrence No. 23 (At 49)

*"Man is first and foremost a being who seeks the truth and strives to live according to that truth, to deepen it in a constant dialogue that involves past and future generations."*

#### Occurrence No. 21 (At 47)

*"Among the main ones, we must recall (...) The right to develop one's intelligence and freedom through the search for and knowledge of the truth."*

#### Occurrence No. 22 (At 49)

*"In a sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in accordance with the transcendent dignity of one's person."*

#### Occurrence No. 14 (At 38)

*"He is also conditioned by the social structure in which he lives, by the education he receives, and by his environment. These elements can facilitate or hinder his life, according to the truth."*

#### Occurrence No. 15 (At 39)

*"The first fundamental structure for a 'human ecology' is the family, within which man receives the first determining notions concerning truth and goodness, in which he learns what it means to love and to be loved, and consequently, what it concretely means to be a person."*

### Lesson #2:

Christians have the mission (and are empowered) to instill truth (and therefore Christian Truth) into the process of building the culture of nations and societies, leading them towards goodness.

#### Occurrence No. 1 (At 3)

*"our responsibility to show the way, to proclaim the truth"*

#### Occurrence No. 24 (At 50)

*"The nation's culture is characterized by an open search for truth that is renewed with each generation."*

#### Occurrence No. 25 (At 50)

*"evangelization becomes part of the culture of nations, strengthening their search for truth and helping them to accomplish their work of purification and deepening"*

#### Occurrence No. 27 (At 51)

*"The Church renders this service by preaching the truth about the creation of the world which God placed in the hands of men to make it fruitful and perfect it through their work, and by preaching the truth about the redemption by which the Son of God saved all men and, at the same time, united them to one another, making them responsible for one another ."*

**Occurrence No. 13 (At 37)**

*"Man receives from God his essential dignity and, with it, the capacity to transcend all social organization in the direction of truth and goodness "*

**Occurrence No. 20 (At 47)**

*"The Christian lives in freedom (cf. Jn 8:31-32) and puts himself at the service of freedom; he constantly proposes, according to the missionary nature of his vocation, the truth he has discovered. In dialogue with others, attentive to every element of the truth he discovers in the experience of life and the culture of individuals and nations, he will not renounce affirming all that his faith and a sound exercise of reason have made known to him."*

**Lesson No. 3:**

**Respect for the truth of man is at the heart of the social doctrine of the Church and therefore at the heart of the responsibility of the Christian leader**

**Occurrence No. 3 (At 4)**

*"Indeed, where do all the evils that Rerum Novarum seeks to combat come from if not from a freedom which, in the realm of economic and social activity, deviates from the truth of man?"*

**Occurrence No. 4 (At 4)**

*"As in that era, it must be repeated that there is no real solution to the 'social question ' outside of the Gospel and that, on the other hand, 'new things' can find in it their space of truth and the appropriate moral qualification ."*

**Occurrence No. 5 (At 17)**

*"The error, as has been said, lies in a conception of human freedom that exempts it from obedience to the truth and therefore also from the duty to respect the rights of other men."*

**Occurrence No. 28 (At 59)**

*"Furthermore, social doctrine has an important interdisciplinary dimension. In order to better embody the one truth concerning man in different and constantly changing social, economic and political contexts, this doctrine enters into dialogue with the various disciplines that deal with man, it assimilates their contributions and it helps them to orient themselves, in a broader perspective, towards the service of the person, known and loved in the fullness of his vocation."*

**Lesson #4:**

**Without obedience to the truth, there is no freedom, no progress, no personal fulfillment.**

**Occurrence No. 2 (At 4)**

*"The constitutive link of human freedom with truth, a link so strong that a freedom which refused to bind itself to truth would fall into arbitrariness and would end up submitting itself to the most degrading passions and destroying itself."*

**Occurrence No. 19 (At 47)**

*"But freedom is only fully realized through the acceptance of truth: in a world without truth, freedom loses its substance and man is subjected to the violence of passions and to apparent or hidden conditioning."*

**Occurrence No. 10 (At 29)**

*"No genuine progress is possible without respect for the elementary natural right to know the truth and to live according to the truth."*

**Occurrence No. 16 (At 41)**

*"Man cannot be free if he is preoccupied only or primarily with possessions and enjoyment, to the point of no longer being able to dominate his instincts and passions, nor to unify or master them through obedience to the truth. Obedience to the truth of God and of man is for him the primary condition of freedom and allows him to order his needs, his desires, and the ways of satisfying them according to a just hierarchy, so that the possession of things becomes for him a means of growth."*

## Lesson #5:

The refusal to submit to the truth (the duty of truth), or relativism (which claims that truth is constructed by the opinion of the majority), leads a nation towards totalitarianism and violence and hinders respect for ecological issues.

### Occurrence No. 12 (At 37)

*"In this, we notice above all the poverty or pettiness of man's gaze, more driven by the desire to possess things than to consider them in relation to the truth."*

### Occurrence No. 17 (At 44)

*"It must be added that totalitarianism arises from the denial of truth in the objective sense of the term: if there is no transcendent truth, through obedience to which man acquires his full identity, then under these conditions, there is no sure principle to guarantee just relations between men. Their class, group, or national interests inevitably set them against one another. If transcendent truth is not recognized, the force of power triumphs, and everyone tends to use to the fullest extent the means at their disposal to assert their interests or opinions, without regard for the rights of others."*

### Occurrence No. 9 (End of the 29th)

*"In totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, the principle of the preponderance of force over reason has been pushed to the extreme. Man has been forced to accept a conception of reality imposed by force and not acquired through the effort of his reason and the exercise of his freedom. This principle must be reversed, and the rights of human conscience must be fully recognized, as it is bound only to natural truth and revealed truth."*

### Occurrence No. 18 (At 46)

*"Those who are convinced they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are not trustworthy from a democratic point of view, because they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it differs according to various political balances. In this regard, it must be observed that, if there is no ultimate truth that guides and directs political action, ideas and convictions can easily be exploited for the benefit of those in power. A democracy without values easily transforms into an overt or insidious totalitarianism, as history shows."*

### Occurrence No. 10 (At 29)

*"No genuine progress is possible without respect for the basic natural right to know the truth and to live according to the truth."*

### Occurrence No. 26 (At 50)

*"However, when a culture closes itself off and seeks to perpetuate outdated ways of life, refusing all exchange and confrontation about the truth of humanity, it becomes sterile and heads towards decadence."*

### Occurrence No. 6 (End of 17)

*"However, hatred and injustice only seize entire nations and drive them to action when they are legitimized and organized by ideologies that are based more on them than on the truth of man."*

### Occurrence No. 8 (At 27)

*"After the collapse of the dictatorship, these [relationships] are very likely to explode violently, causing serious conflicts and mourning, if the moral tension and the strength to consciously bear witness to the truth that motivated past efforts are lacking."*

## The effectiveness of truth for the overthrow of Marxism

### Occurrence No. 7 (At 23)

*"Another fact deserves to be emphasized: almost everywhere, such a 'bloc,' such an empire, has been brought down through peaceful struggle, using only the weapons of truth and justice. Whereas, according to Marxism, social contradictions could only be resolved through violent confrontation by pushing them to their extreme, the struggles that led to the collapse of Marxism tenaciously persist in trying all avenues of negotiation, dialogue, and bearing witness to the truth, appealing to the conscience of the adversary and seeking to awaken in them a common sense of human dignity."*

*Et pourtant, il s'est trouvé dépassé par l'action non violente d'hommes qui, alors qu'ils avaient toujours refusé de céder au pouvoir de la force, ont su trouver dans chaque cas la manière efficace de rendre témoignage à la vérité. »*

## The duty of truth

### Occurrence No. 11 (At 34)

*"It is a strict duty of justice and truth to ensure that basic human needs do not remain unmet and that those who suffer from these deficiencies do not perish."*