



CONSECRATE THEM IN THE TRUTH

A Pastoral Exhortation Against Fake News

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

A key dimension of Jesus' mission was to preach the truth, and in His high priestly prayer, He prayed that His disciples might be consecrated in the truth. We, the Filipino nation, are part of the community of disciples for whom He prayed. At his trial, the question of truth figured prominently. "What is truth?" asked a bewildered Pilate, because he failed to recognize in Jesus, THE TRUTH!

So it is that the Christian cannot be part of falsehood, deceit and lies. A fact is anything that is or that happens. If one man kills another, it cannot but be a fact that the deed was done, and any "alternative fact" that would have it so that no killing was done is simply false, and, when meant to deceive, a lie!

The duty to speak the truth is so elemental a demand of morality and of good social order that it can hardly be reduced to more elementary precepts. It is almost as fundamental as the first principle of all morality: "*Do good; avoid evil.*" Human life would be impossible in a society where we constantly and habitually deceived each other.

Crucial decisions — personal and social — depend on the accurate grasp of facts. "Alternative facts" and "fake news" engender faulty decisions many times with disastrous long-term consequences to persons and to communities. Sadly, we see this happening today. There are persons who have given themselves to the service of reporting what never happened, concealing what really happened, and distorting what should be presented in a straightforward manner.

The active involvement of citizens in creating a nurturing society steeped in justice depends on the truth. That is the service to which media is called. That is why we have schools and colleges and universities. That is why teaching is a noble profession. That is why books and magazines, journals and articles are published.

But social media which, initially, promised to democratize expression and free the dissemination of truth from the clutches of moneyed entrepreneurs financing mainstream media has become the unfortunate site of "alternative facts" and "fake news". Not only does this offend against the orientation of the human intellect to the truth. It is, more fundamentally, a sin against charity because it hinders persons from making right and sound decisions and induces them, instead, to make faulty ones!



Our Catholic faith obliges us:

1. To refrain from patronizing, popularizing and supporting identified sources of “alternative facts” or “fake news”.
2. To rebut and refute falsehood whenever they are in possession of facts and of data.
3. To refuse to be themselves purveyors of fake news and to desist from disseminating this whether on social media or by word of mouth or through any other form of public expression.
4. To identify the sources of fake news so that our brothers and sisters may be duly alerted and may know which media and which sites to shun.

We your bishops join the Lord Jesus in His prayer that we all be consecrated in the truth, because the Word of the Lord is truth!

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, June 21, 2017

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
President, CBCP