

A letter against tyranny – Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm.

Jesus' disciples remain steadfast in discerning truth from falsehood

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Speaking truth to power, pushing for transparency, authenticity and accountability, is the sacrosanct duty of journalism and the press. Photo: Shutterstock.com

Sixth Sunday of Easter. Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23; John 14:23-29

In 1942, the Dutch Episcopal Conference asked Titus Brandsma, the ecclesiastical adviser to Catholic journalists, to personally circulate their letter addressed to editors of Catholic newspapers, banning the printing of Nazi propaganda. The letter was the Church's response to a law passed by German occupiers in the Netherlands, obliging media outlets to publish official Nazi propaganda. Opposition was considered treason, and "enemies of the state" would be imprisoned and interned in concentration camps and have their newspapers and publication houses closed.

After Titus visited a number of publishing houses, the Nazi were tipped off regarding his activity. He was arrested, unjustly tried and imprisoned in Scheveningen, Amersfoort and Cleves. In June, Titus was transferred to Dachau



Titus Brandsma was canonised last Sunday by Pope Francis.

concentration camp, where he endured aggressive and violent physical abuse, forced labour, humiliation and medical experimentation, until he was finally eliminated by a lethal injection administered by a nurse, to whom he donated his rosary while encouraging her to repeat constantly “pray for us sinners” and to pray for peace.

Titus was beatified in 1985, and canonised last Sunday by Pope Francis. The Cardinal Archbishop of Utrecht said Titus is not a saint because he resisted the Nazi, exposing, through the philosophical, theological and political sciences, their dangerous and inhumane ideology; neither because he was an activist defending the freedom of the press and of the Church. Rather his activism overflowed from his saintliness as a mystic immersed in God and hence in ultimate truth.

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Titus was indeed convinced that in our contemporary world the press is the new pulpit from which truth – dispersed, as if from a prism, in that which is true and authentic – is to be spread in freedom and justice against any form of propaganda, fake news, and intimidation by those in power.

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Speaking truth to power, pushing for transparency, authenticity and accountability, is the sacrosanct duty of journalism and the press. Responsibly spreading correct information to the public and being a safe space to voice constructive critical opinion on current affairs is crucial, considering the great responsibility these shoulder in the formation of public opinion. God forbid news outlets succumb to tyrannical tactics to spread malicious propaganda and agendas instead of resiliently persist in the service of truth.

From today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles we learn that, faced by the spreading of falsehood, as well as by harmful instructions imparted by "some who had come down from Judea" causing "no little dissension and debate" in the Christian community, "the apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole Church, decided to choose representatives" to be sent to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia with a letter to the local communities to instil peace of mind and to bring back harmony in the Christian community. Untruth upsets and disturbs. It is harbinger of confusion and fragmentation, capable of dismantling the moral fibre of both individuals and society. The Book of Revelation gives us the image of Jerusalem, the new city, descending from heaven, "gleaming with the splendour of God" as it is built on the truth of God.

Then in the Gospel, Jesus himself reminds his disciples that it is only by abiding in his word that one acquires true peace. Empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, such a disciple does not succumb to tyrannical fear, trouble or confusion, but remains steadfast in discerning truth from falsehood. Truth brings clarity of mind, enabling us to persevere in "doing what is right" in our path towards true and everlasting peace for the good of all.

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