

EDUCATION FOR MERCY – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PONTIFICAL DISCOURSES

Mercy is lifestyle, an essential and continuous
characteristic of the Christian vocation

Abstract

In today's world of distorted views of life, religious values and beliefs, powerlessness and despair, there is a growing need for the virtue of mercy which could grant hope, peace and justice to mankind. The aim of this paper is to identify a core terminology in a million-word specialized English corpus that was compiled for the purpose of this research, focusing on the concept of mercy and mercy-related terms. The corpus consists of the last three Holy Fathers' pontifical discourses freely available at the Holy See web site. The key-word lists generated by WordSmith tools for three subcorpora are contrasted to confirm preliminary assumption on their possible correspondence. The assumption is based on the fact that, regardless of different contexts and times the discourses were created, their authors share common religious legacy, beliefs, views and attitudes based on the Scriptures. The paper attempts to find the corpus-based evidences to an unbroken continuity of spiritual authorities in interpreting and pleading for mercy and justice in their pontifical discourses. This paper aims to contribute to the development of theological reflections based on the virtue of mercy, corpus linguistics, domain-specific terminology and clarity of religious concepts and ideas.

Key words: mercy, education, domain-specific terminology, pontifical discourses, corpus.

Introduction

As defined by J. P. Gee, "... discourse analysis is one way to engage in a very important human task. The task is this: to think more deeply about the meanings we give people's words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and the world a better, more humane place".¹

¹ J. P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*, Routledge, 2005.

Since specialized language is characterized by specific terminology, complex structures, recurrent expressions, nominalization, etc., a set of highly frequent words, which often act as headwords or component words of multi-word expressions, often suggests or highlights the main idea of a text or a small/huge text collection. The focus of education for mercy is to deal with tolerance and justice. However, mass media lack resources that are based on such principles necessary for healthy relationship among people. The need for mercy as expressed by Pope John Paul II² indicates to: “How greatly today’s *world needs God’s mercy!* In every continent, from the depth of human suffering, a *cry for mercy seems to rise up*. Where hatred and the thirst for revenge dominate, where war brings suffering and death to the innocent, there *the grace of mercy is needed* in order to settle human minds and hearts and *to bring about peace*. Wherever respect for life and human dignity are lacking, there is *need of God’s merciful love*, in whose light we see the inexpressible value of every human being. *Mercy is needed* in order to ensure that every injustice in the world will come to an end in the splendour of truth”. Being merciful to the other is so beneficial to the spiritual growth of any individual but it is not God-given benefit. On contrary, the growth in mercy is a life-long endeavour and goal of any true faithful. It is hard to reach spiritual maturity unless you are taught how to develop and nourish the virtue of mercy. Thus, the concept of mercy needs to be clarified.

1. Definition of the term mercy

Generally, the term mercy may denote both character and activity. In describing God or a person in a position of authority as merciful it means they show kindness and forgiveness to people.³ An act of mercy, based on compassion and forbearance is manifested through unmerited or undeserved forgiveness and humanity. It denotes “the disposition to be kind and forgiving. Founded on compassion, mercy differs from compassion or the feeling of sympathy in putting this feeling into practice with a readiness to assist. It is therefore the ready willingness to help anyone in need, especially in need of pardon or reconciliation.”⁴ Mercy is said to be a virtue influencing one’s will to have compassion for, and, if possible, to alleviate another’s misfortune. It is the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that although mercy is as it were the spontaneous product of charity, yet

² John Paul II, Pope’s Homily During Mass for Dedication of Divine Mercy Shrine Krakow-Lagiewniki: *Confession of Trust in the All-Powerful Love of God* (17 August 2002).

³ The Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, Harper Collins Publishers, 2001, Glasgow.

⁴ Catholic Dictionary, in: <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=34849> (accessed, 10 December 2017).

it is to be reckoned a special virtue adequately distinguishable from this latter. In fact the Scholastics in cataloguing it consider it to be referable to the quality of justice mainly because, like justice, it controls relations between distinct persons.⁵

The word “mercy” is expressed in Hebrew by two words: *rehem* and *hesed*. *Rehem* points to the mother’s lap holding a child and their connection based on a single bond of love. Thus, mercy denotes something intimate, true gentleness, kindness, patience, sacrifice. *Hesed* denotes undeserved sympathy, cordiality, benevolence. However, mercy⁶ is not an empty echo, instinctive goodness, sudden heartfelt or emotional impulses but rather an option for conscious and wilful goodness as an everlasting attitude.

Christian charity is neither a kind of human solidarity nor compassionate goodness. It is the realization of love of the Triune God in the history of salvation. “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). The mercy of God the Father is manifested in the Son, in Jesus Christ but also in Christians through the Holy Spirit.

God’s mercy has been revealed from the beginning as one of His attributes, as the revelation of God (Exo 34:6). God is self-revealing in mercy. However, the history of salvation is marked by sin. Israel felt God’s mercy as forgiveness. “Answer me, Yahweh, for your faithful love is generous; in your tenderness turn towards me” (Ps 69:17). “Your kindnesses to me are countless, Yahweh; true to your judgements, give me life” (Ps 119:156). If God reveals himself as a faithful and merciful, people should adequately respond. God’s mercy becomes a model and the cause of human mercy. Merciful God expects us to be merciful to brothers (Am 1:11), without constraints (Deut 24:6-22). This should be a characteristic of every believer: “to love mercy” (Mic 6:8).

In the New Testament, God’s mercy is manifested in Jesus Christ, who is “merciful” (Heb 2:17), the iconic presence of “The Father of mercies” (2Cor 1:3). Jesus’ life is the manifestation of our God’s mercy. He bends down over every human misery, physical and moral, those in need of tenderness and compassion, understanding and forgiveness. Jesus is the realization of prophetic proclamation: “Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.” (Mt 9:13).

His miracles were a manifestation of his love, compassion, mercy and closeness to the sick (Mr 1:41). St. Luke the evangelist offers unforgettable parables of the lost and found sheep, the lost and found drachma and the Prodigal son (Lk 15). They all emphasise the merciful love of the Father who is bending over spiritual and physical suffering of His chil-

⁵ Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, in: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10198d.htm> (accessed, 7 December 2017).

⁶ Cf. G. Augustin, *Kraft der Barmherzigkeit. Mensch sein aus den Quellen des Glaubens*, Matthias Grünewald Verlag, Ostfildern, 2016.

dren. The issue of mercy is well elaborated by Mandarić Valentina⁷ in her study on Mercy: The Way of the Church to the Human Being and Contemporary Outskirts. The study presented by Wojciech Zyzak⁸ deals with mercy as a theological term and its various dimensions.

1.1. The Holy fathers' reflections on the term 'mercy' and its definitions

On the concept of mercy and its mystery, Pope Francis points out that “the very word “mercy” is a summons to an open and compassionate heart. It comes from the Latin word *misericordia*, which evokes a heart –cor– sensitive to suffering, but especially to those who suffer a heart that overcomes indifference because it shares in the sufferings of others.” (3 November 2016). An overview of the definitions of the term mercy provided by the Pope: “It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it... the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity... the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us... the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life (...) the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness”⁹. “(...) divine mercy (*eleos*) as a synthesis of the work that Jesus came to accomplish in the world in the name of the Father (...) everything in Jesus speaks of mercy(...) indeed, he himself is mercy (...) mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth”¹⁰.

Referring to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Pope Benedict XVI highlights the meaning of “the word “mercy” which – in Greek *oiktirmon* and in Hebrew *rachamim*, maternal womb – expresses the compassion, kindness and tenderness of a mother... By walking together in humility along the path of justice, mercy and righteousness which the Lord has pointed out to us, Christians will not only dwell in the truth, but also be beacons of joy and hope to all those who are looking for a sure point of reference in our rapidly changing world... I would say precisely that charity is the fruit of truth – the tree is known by its fruit – and if there is no charity, then truth is not adopted or lived either; and where truth is, charity comes into being.”

On the subject of divine mercy, John Paul II points out: “mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God; It has the power to confer on justice a new content, which is expressed most simply and fully

⁷ Cf. V. Mandarić, *Milosrđe: put Crkve do čovjeka i suvremenih periferija*, Bogoslovska smotra, 86 (2016) 3, p. 705-730.

⁸ Cf. W. Zyzak, *Mercy as a Theological Term*, The Person and Challenges, 5 (2015) 1, p. 137-153.

⁹ Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, 2015, 2, in: cf. w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

¹⁰ Phrases extracted from the Pope Francis subcorpus.

in forgiveness; Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people; Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind (...). This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world (...). In the mercy of God the world will find peace (...) as it is one of the great intuitions and gifts that have been left to the People of God (...). Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbour (...). The hour has come when the message of Divine Mercy is able to fill hearts with hope and to become the spark of a new civilization: the civilization of love (...). Divine mercy is love more powerful than sin, stronger than death... the Lord is rich in mercy, and even: The Lord is mercy (...). The truth, revealed in Christ, about God the "Father of mercies," enables us to "see" Him as particularly close to man especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity (...). As we reflect on the call of Jesus to do penance we discover the new world of mercy, which is revealed in the Cross, "a radical revelation of mercy".¹¹

1.2. Mercy as a lifestyle

Mercy is a lifestyle, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. In his speech delivered on June 13, 2016, Pope Francis explains the difference between compassionate speech and action. He defines mercy as the culture and programme of life. Mercy denotes programme-related concept. He supports his claim with the fact that the very name of God is mercy and therefore the importance of compassionate action in everyday life should be based on it.

Contrary to the logic of profit and media, the logic of mercy includes compassion and a special concern for others. There is the growing importance of symbols of mercy today, for example, on the occasion of the closing of the Jubilee of Mercy in the Diocese of Feldkirch, Vorarlberg, some of today's symbols of mercy were exposed in the cathedral, such as headset, symbolizing "I listen to you", a rose which symbolizes "I pray for you" and bread being symbol for "I share with you." Perhaps, the new opportunity to remain the light of the world and the salt of the earth, today's Christians should find in listening to the Word of God and a specific person; praying to God for themselves, their loved ones and people around them and in the sharing of spiritual and material goods. The special Year of Mercy shows how much the mercy of God is at Pope Francis' heart. During the Jubilee of Mercy he held catechesis and delivered speeches on this topic, trying to bring the infinite mercy of God closer to man and to pro-

¹¹ Quoted phrases and lexical expressions are extracted from subcorpora.

mote the culture of Christian life in the tradition, sacrifice and compassion for the other, i.e. through concrete acts of mercy done for the other.

1.3. “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy”

This first sentence of the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* focuses on Jesus Christ being the mediator and the face of God’s mercy. “These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him.”

This truth about Christ as the mediator of mercy can be found in the speeches and writings of all three popes. The doctrine of mercy is grounded on it, claiming that Jesus Christ is the intersection of mercy. The truth about the love, being the very essence of God, is shown in Jesus Christ: “Jesus shows us in particular the truth about the love which is the very essence of God.”

When Pope Benedict speaks of mercy mediated by Jesus, he uses terms such as love, truth and freedom. Indeed, the theme of love permeates his entire theological reflection. His first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* is programmatic for many theologians. Referring to the principle of unity of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, Pope Benedict XVI, claims that God shows His love for us through the gift of His Son, enriching us with love and making us capable of love. “The love of God is the guarantee, a foundation of our overcoming, getting out of and surrendering of our “self” to God and our neighbour.” We can say that just as the concept of mercy is programmatic for Pope Francis, so the concept of love is for Pope Benedict. However, the concept of love for him is far more than a feeling. It is self-giving for which the best evidence is Jesus Himself accompanied by the infinite closeness of God. Pope Benedict supports his claim quoting “Jesus is the lodestar of human freedom: without him, freedom loses its focus, for without the knowledge of truth, freedom becomes debased, alienated and reduced to empty caprice. With him, freedom finds itself.”

Every person is interested in this truth which is proclaimed by the Church. It finds its centrality in the Eucharist which is the focal point of the Church mission, the proclamation that God is love! From its beginning, the Church calls for “Living in accordance with the Lord’s Day”, which the phrase of St. Ignatius of Antioch “*iuxta dominicam viventes*”. It means “living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence”.

When Pope Benedict refers to the merciful action of Christians, he uses terms such as spirituality, the culture of the Eucharist, the renewed mentality, the Christian faith. Pope Benedict puts the mystery of faith and the

Eucharist in relation with different cultures and urges that the Eucharist is transformed into spirituality which means “commitment to solidarity and social justice along with the respect for human dignity that comes from God’s love, and flows into it.”

2. John Paul II - the Pope of Mercy

Pope Saint John Paul II was passionate about of God’s Mercy and its great preacher. He approved the Divine Mercy Devotion in 1978, even when he was the Archbishop of Krakow. He also published the encyclical “Rich in Mercy” in 1981, where he claims: “The paschal Christ is the definitive incarnation of mercy, its living sign in salvation history and in eschatology.” He beatified Sister Faustina Kowalska, on the Octave of Easter in 1993 and canonized her on the Octave of Easter 2000. In his homily during the Canonization Mass he established the Feast of Divine Mercy, mandatory for the whole Church and entrusted the world to the Divine Mercy, in 2002, in Krakow.

2.1. Mercy - an important characteristic of the Christian vocation

Along with St. Faustina Kowalska, Pope John Paul II discovered the whole world the mystery of God’s mercy which is in the focus of his entire pontificate. He clarifies the concept of mercy in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* referring to Jesus model of mercy: “Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called “to practice mercy” towards others: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Mt 5:7). The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practice mercy.”

Pope also highlights that it is not one-time-task but rather a lifestyle based on the culture of mercy: “This authentically evangelical process is not just a spiritual transformation realized once and for all: it is a whole lifestyle, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. It consists in the constant discovery and persevering practice of love as a unifying and also elevating power despite all difficulties of a psychological or social nature: it is a question, in fact, of a merciful love which, by its essence, is a creative love.”

Furtherly, Pope explains the creativity of merciful love and Christian charity as a two-way participation in love. He invites us to imagine the crucified Christ as a perfect role model and an everlasting inspiration of mercy, Who always sees and recognizes our works of mercy made in His name. The act of merciful love is realized only if we are deeply convinced that it receiving through giving as quoted: “An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are

accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet true acts of mercy, nor has there yet been fully completed in us that conversion to which Christ has shown us the way by His words and example, even to the cross, nor are we yet sharing fully in the magnificent source of merciful love that has been revealed to us by Him”.

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II restlessly advocated for human dignity, the culture of life against the culture of death, peace in the world, a fair distribution of goods and justice among all nations which is documented by his encyclicals and testified by his travels all around the world. He also gives a very deep insight into the relationship between justice and mercy emphasising that justice requires refinement through love in all relationships. It especially refers to family relationships and friendships which include merciful love based on tenderness and sensitivity of heart: “Consequently, merciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; and it is indispensable in education and in pastoral work”¹². (*Dives in Misericordia*).

3. The theme of mercy in religious education

Since the Church is “the sacrament of mercy, the body of Christ, the sacrament of the continuing effective presence of Christ in the world”, its primary task is to proclaim Christ as the Saviour and the Redeemer of the world. The Church’s missionary zeal and commitment to the evangelization and catechetical instruction aim to the unity of every person in Christ, the only Redeemer of man. Regardless of the slight differences in terminology and the lengths of their pontificates, the three Popes have paved the way for the promotion of human dignity, Christian beliefs and practices and they affirm that the Church is the mediator of God’s mercy which should be announced to everyone. In this context, the pontificate of Pope Francis complements the pontificates of his predecessors.

Analysis of the pontifical discourses reveal that a great theologian, Pope Benedict focused on orthodoxy (right-teaching), the preservation of faith and clarification of the truth of the Church’s teaching. His holy predecessor Pope John Paul II, in the spirit of his time, advocated for the preservation of human life and its dignity, the culture of life, peace and justice among nations, the evangelization and the union of each man in Christ. Guided by the Church legacy and doctrine, Pope Francis, continues to profess, proclaim and practice mercy in order to remind the contemporary world of its power and significance.

¹² Cf. *Dives in Misericordia*, 14, in: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html.

He emphasizes the missionary paradigm of the Church (cf. EG 15), the Church's permanent missionary activity (cf. EG 25); This is the church that goes to the periphery (cf. EG 17, 20, 24, 30, 46), the periphery of human existence (cf. EG 20-23, 27-31, 78-86), because God's mercy is vitally important for each man. "Today's world is in need of God's mercy more necessary than ever, so the task of the Church to proclaim mercy is imperative."

Changes Pope Francis wants to introduce in the Church refer to its relationship with the world, i.e. today's world and culture become historical and salvific place of discovering the meaning and significance of the Gospel. Such understanding of the Church's mission results in: the primacy of the present over all other times, the priority given to orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy and the primacy of the Church as the Assembly of God's people over her hierarchy.

This is the ground for new approaches to faith formation. Such education is based on a deep knowledge of faith, adherence to Christ including the missionary zeal, the personal experience of mercy and the culture of mercy. Such faith formation cannot be associated with a self-centred pastoral care and a sterile form of catechesis. Moreover, the world should be permeated by the spirit of Christ through doing new works of mercy and repeating those already done. Without this, there will be no education in faith, i.e. mercy is the pillar of comprehensive faith formation.

4. Research

The research was conducted on a specialized corpus compiled of the last three Holy Fathers' pontifical discourses¹³ in the English language. All texts were converted from *html* and *pdf* formats into plain text files for the further processing by WordSmith Tools 5.0.¹⁴

4.1. Data set and tools

The corpus consists of 1 282 174 words, in total, and is divided into three subcorpora entitled according to the Holy Fathers' names.

- i. Pope Francis subcorpus consists of 264 speeches and messages created from March 20, 2013 to November 20, 2016, including Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus*ⁱ; the two Apostolic Exhortations: *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG)ⁱⁱ and *Amoris Laetitia*ⁱⁱⁱ and Apostolic letter *Misericordia et Misera*^{iv}.
- ii. Pope Benedict XVI subcorpus contains 267 speeches and messages created from April 25, to May 12, 2013. It also includes the three

¹³ Accessible at the official web site of the Holy See, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>.

¹⁴ M. Scott, WordSmith Tools 5.0. Lexical Analysis Software, 2010.

Encyclicals: *Deus Caritas Est*^v, *Caritas in Veritate*^{vi}, *Spe Salvi*^{vii}, and Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*^{viii}.

- iii. Pope John Paul II subcorpus is compiled of 221 speeches and messages written from May 7, 1980 to March 26, 2005. It includes Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* and the three Encyclicals: *Veritatis Splendor*^{ix}, *Dives in Misericordia*^x and *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*^{xi}.

The reference corpus is used to create lists of outstandingly frequent words (the key-words) which characterise three subcorpora. The frequency threshold was set to ≥ 4 .

Table 1. Subcorpora and the reference corpus statistics

Sub corpus	title	pages	tokens	para.	No. doc
	Pope Francis	718	428 135	4 713	264
	Pope Benedict XVI	729	426 490	4 692	267
	Pope J. Paul II	724	427 549	4 947	221
	Total	2 171	1 282 174	14 379	752

4.2. The keyword lists' creation and analysis

The subcorpora are processed by Wordsmith Tools in order to create the word lists prerequisite for generating the key-word lists as well as concordances to trace recurrent instances of a key-word in a text and information about its collocates. Identification of a key-word is based on the comparison of word frequency in the subcorpus with that in a larger reference corpus of general language i.e. the default British National Corpus reference list. The key-word list is displayed both in frequency and alphabetical order. Function words that have no lexical meaning were removed from automatically obtained keywords lists. The number of the key-words was limited to 100.

As shown in Table 2, the word *mercy* is highly ranked in Pope Francis subcorpus (1054 freq.), followed by significantly lower number of 588 occurrences in the Pope J. Paul II subcorpus and only 75 occurrences in the Pope Benedict XVI subcorpus. Apart from the word *mercy*, there are 15 keyword matches (60%) across three subcorpora such as: *God, Church, people, love, life, Jesus, Christ, world, Lord, human, faith, Spirit, peace, grace* and *justice*. These keywords share a common contextual background and they are profoundly interrelated.

Their complex relationships can be detected through the following structures:

God's (special) love, God's pardon, people of God, God of mercy and forgiveness, merciful and forgiving love of God, Spirit of God, God of peace, God of creation, God of life, God of redemption, God the Father

Table 2. Key word lists contrasted

Corpus	Pope Francis		Pope Benedict XVI		Pope John Paul II	
KWL	Key word	Freq.	Key word	Freq.	Key word	Freq.
1	GOD	2380	GOD	2303	GOD	2509
2	CHURCH	1701	CHURCH	1721	CHRIST	2267
3	PEOPLE	1456	LIFE	1494	CHURCH	2190
4	LOVE	1454	LOVE	1331	LIFE	1743
5	LIFE	1405	CHRIST	1292	LOVE	1558
6	JESUS	1247	WORLD	1181	PEOPLE	1224
7	MERCY	1054	FAITH	1163	JESUS	1219
8	CHRIST	925	PEOPLE	1099	WORLD	1170
9	WORLD	899	HUMAN	1052	HUMAN	1111
10	LORD	887	JESUS	773	LORD	801
11	HUMAN	745	LORD	750	FAITH	780
12	family	726	WAY	705	PEACE	730
13	FAITH	677	CHRISTIAN	640	MAN	719
14	<u>GOSPEL</u>	626	HOPE	626	SPIRIT	674
15	SPIRIT	583	TRUTH	609	CHRISTIAN	634
16	<u>HEART</u>	576	being	562	TRUTH	611
17	children	527	WORK	559	<u>GOSPEL</u>	610
18	today	514	joy	509	WAY	609
19	FATHER	510	PEACE	503	MERCY	588
20	brothers	505	MAN	495	FATHER	563
21	HOPE	490	SPIRIT	481	sin	455
22	PEACE	466	JUSTICE	316	<u>HEART</u>	450
23	GRACE	322	solidarity	160	GRACE	420
24	JUSTICE	234	GRACE	150	<u>HUMANITY</u>	302
25	<u>HUMANITY</u>	191	MERCY	75	JUSTICE	301

of mercies, God of merciful love, God's (beloved) children, God's grace, family of God, righteousness of God, world God created, world without God, truth of God, whole Church of God, multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings, faith in God, humble servant of God Most High, reconciliation of God with humanity, love of God-with-us, way(s) of God, merciful Father, all-powerful love of God, God of all consolation, Lord Jesus Christ, Christ- the God-Man, Lord God, true God, truth of God's word, Gospel of God's love, Gospel of God's grace, God's loving plan for

humanity, family of God's beloved children, God's universal love and saving grace, God's love for man, God's work, human world, God-the source of all joy, Christian life of God's people, loving kindness of God, Jesus Christ the Son of God and Saviour of the world, perfect love of God, God's justice, human justice, reconciling justice, merciful justice, Church as 'Peace of justice', zeal/cry/fight for justice, duty of serving justice and peace, interplay of justice and tenderness, works of charity throughout the world... love and mercy in the world, etc. The most frequent keyword God is interwoven with all other keywords indicating to God's omniscience, centrality and His being 'the Alpha and the Omega' (Rev 1:8)¹⁵.

a) Distinctive words identified in the Pope Francis subcorpus are: *family, children, brothers and today*. The word 'family' occurs as a headword or a component word in the following multiword expressions conveying both positive and negative meanings:

beauty/meaning of family life, anthropological basis of the family, Gospel of marriage and the family, dignity and mission of the family, Christian identity of the family, Holy Family of Nazareth, family spirituality, legal deconstruction of the family, blended or reconstituted family, deterioration of the family, etc. The keyword 'children' acts both as noun premodifier and the headword in the following expressions: children rights, children upbringing, children education, children procreation, children trafficking, children raising, children welfare, children protection, children trafficking, children sexual exploitation, abuse of children, children's cries of pain, phenomenon of 'street-children', unborn children, gift of children, prodigal children, etc.

The word '*brothers*' is a part of the most common greeting expression 'Dear brothers and sisters', used by Pope Francis. The word '*today*' is employed as an adverb or a noun to highlight the present period of time in the following structures:

today's (social and environmental) crisis, today's world, today's information explosion, martyrs of today, man and women of today, today's problems, today and always, today missionary activity, complexity of today's society, today's society of mass communications, today's ecumenical challenges, today's widespread fear, Church in today's changed setting, today's cultural reality, today's fast pace of life, today's problematic situation, the Church of today, today's sad context of conflicts and disasters, widespread individualism of today's culture, victims of today, "the 'today' is a flash of eternity. In the 'today', eternal life is in play (28 July 2013).

¹⁵ The New Jerusalem Bible, 1985.

Time is valuable for Pope Francis simply because of its two extremes: the beginning and the end. Since the past cannot be redeemed and the future is yet to come one should make the most of the part of time that actually exists, i.e. the present or today. It seems that, according to the Pope, each day should be lived for the glory of God in order to empower our own spiritual well-being and the well-being of others.

b) Distinctive words employed in the Pope Benedict subcorpus are: *being, work, joy and solidarity*. The word 'being' is mostly used as a component word of hyphenated compound:

well-being of others, social well-being, spiritual well-being, moral well-being, quest for well-being, emotional well-being, selfish well-being, being-with; as the gerund (active/passive): Christian way of being present, worthy of being lived, consciousness of being loved, forgiven; being concerned for each other, efforts being made to build peace, joy of being Christian, hope of being saved, being anchored to the Truth, being born anew, being witnesses of the truth, being responsible for others, children being forced into labour, being out of work, art of being authentically human, impression of being powerless in the face of current crises, awareness of being love by God, feeling of being of help to others, experience of being loved, beauty of being disciples of Christ, sense of being accepted unconditionally, being touched by Christ, being in touch with Christ, etc.; as a noun in the following expressions: respect for human being, threat to the human being, relational being, defenceless and innocent being, fulfilment of the human being, dignity of the human being, a being called to live in relationships, Christ's 'being for all', "having" does not count, it is "being" that counts! (15 February 2012);" where truth is, charity comes into being". (23 February 2012).

The word '*work*' is interwoven with other keywords on the list and occurs in the following structure:

work of charity, work of the Church, work of evangelization, work in the Lord's vineyard, work for the common good, work on behalf of society, Holy Spirit at work in others, the greatest work of charity-evangelization, responsibility to work for peace, work of redemption, God's work, work for the good of each person, church's work of communication, work of the Lord Jesus, apostolic work, charitable work, work for the spiritual and material rebirth, work of spreading the faith, pastoral work, volunteer work, great work of charity, work for justice, world of work, work and celebration, wondrous work of the Creator, tireless work for the purification of consciences, readiness to work in good faith, dignity of human work, Lord's saving work, work to promote common good, work of God' providence, work of building dialogue, work as a fundamental good, work of solidarity, God's mercy at work, work of education in faith, work of building ecumenical ties, work for

the freedom of faith, missionary work, love of work, obligation to work for justice, work of human hands, enslaved by work, work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love, work of assisting the needy, joy-filled discovery of love at work, life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, work in favour of the right to life, Gospel of work, work of justice, Christian charitable work, work to oppose violence, work of rebuilding Christian unity, work for the salvation of others, etc.

The word 'joy' acts as a noun in the structures such as:

joy of Easter, joy of an encounter with Christ, joy of being Christians, joy of believing, sentiments of deep joy and brotherly closeness, joy of "going" to meet humanity, joy of the Resurrection, joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation, joy of helping others, joy of sincere and pure love, joy of a job well done, joy of/in faith, message of joy and hope, joy of living, joy of seeing nature's beauty, Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, joy and peace, joy of being surrounded by God's love, secret of true joy in God, meaning and joy of life, great deficit of love, joy and hope, the joy of Jesus, joy of conversion, joy of salvation, joy of Eucharist adoration, God's joy, Christian joy and hope, divine gifts of joy and peace, culture of joy, God's blessings of joy and peace, Author of life, of joy, of love and of peace, joy of blessing, spiritual joy, joy of the Gospel, God-given joy, joy of listening, joy of giving, etc.

"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22); "Joy is the gift that sums up all the other gifts" (22 December 2008); "Joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is a fundamental hallmark of the Christian" (31 May 2012). "Seek joy in the Lord: for joy is the fruit of faith. Joy is the sign of God's presence and action within us. To have lasting joy we need to live in love and truth" (18 October 2012).

Concordance lines of the word 'solidarity' show its relationships with other keywords from the list which occur in lexical expressions such as: solidarity with the victims of natural disasters and poverty, personal relationships marked by truth and solidarity, works of solidarity and mercy, solidarity and peace, global culture of solidarity, solidarity between generations, horizon of solidarity and love, sustainable development in solidarity and the common good, solidarity and empathy, violation of solidarity, humanizing goal of solidarity, solidarity and responsibility for justice, immense need for solidarity, works of justice and solidarity at the service of humanity, freedom and solidarity, new culture of solidarity, highest ideals of justice, solidarity and peace, commitment to solidarity for the needy, solidarity of the whole Church, duty of solidarity and the commitment to justice, solidarity and Christian charity, reality of human solidarity, testimony of solidarity, paths of justice, reconciliation and solidarity, gratuitousness and solidarity, future of hope, solidarity and harmony, etc.

- c) The word 'sin' is the only distinctive word in the Pope John Paul II subcorpus. It occurs as a headword or a component word of the following expressions:

mystery of sin, mortal, venial sin, personal/social sin, sin against others' freedom, sin against the dignity and honour of one's neighbour, sin against the common good, sin against love of neighbour, sin against justice in interpersonal relationships, sin against the rights of the human person, sin which destroys charity, sin-a product of man's freedom, sin-an integral part of the truth about man, liberation from sin, power/evil of sin, responsibility for sin committed, the "first sin", essence and darkness of sin, sin of the world, snare of sin, nature of sin, struggle against sin and temptation, forgiveness and remission of the sin, human world-wounded by sin, correction of sin, conversion from sin, balance and harmony broken by sin, infectious source of sin, breaches caused by sin, grace lost by sin, roots of sin, upset and disturbed by sin; disappearance, loss, weakening of the sense of sin in contemporary society, commandment no to sin, ecclesial significance of sin and of conversion, healthy sense of sin, burden of sin, stain/shadow of sin, Christ's victory over sin and death, emptiness of sin and desperation, trial of sin, suffering of sin, slavery of sin, weight of human sin, victims of injustice and sin, realities of sin and grace, consciousness of sin, struggle between grace and sin, state of sin, gravity of sin, law of sin and death, strength to sin no more, prodigality and sin of the son, etc. The word 'sin' combined with word 'mercy' and 'love': mercy that wipes out sin, mercy stronger than sin and offense, love more powerful than sin, stronger than death.

Quotes referring to the word 'sin' extracted from the subcorpus: "*the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin*" (Pope Pius XII); "*the saving grace of Christ is much more powerful than sin and human weakness*", (Cf. Rom 5:20), 28 April 1983; "*Great is our sin, but even greater is your love!*" (Vespers hymn during the season of Lent, 10 April 1994). "*No human sin can erase the mercy of God*" (6 August 1993).

The word 'mercy' is closely related to the word 'love'. The power of mercy expressed by the word 'love': "Love is indeed "ecstasy", not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God"¹⁶.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 6, in: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.

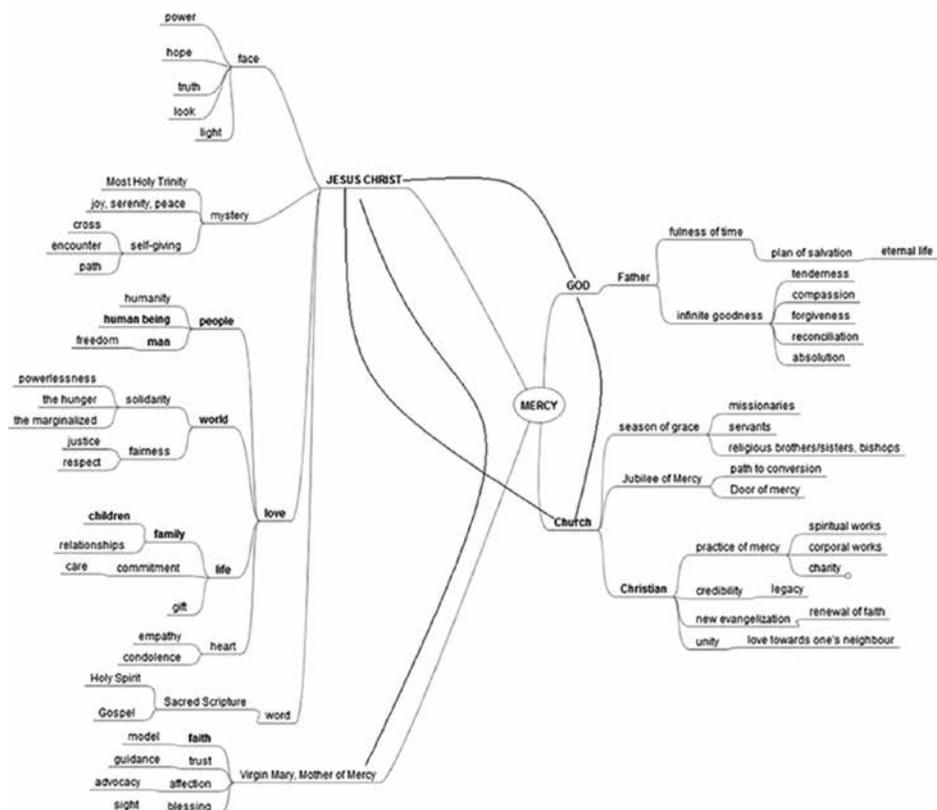


Figure1. A mind map showing relationships between key concepts

Conclusion

A million-word English corpus of the pontifical discourses of the last three Holy Fathers was processed in order to obtain the key-word lists for three subcorpora. The extracted key words were compared and analysed. A mind map showing relationships between key concepts was designed. Research results indicated to 60% keyword matches across three subcorpora which confirm preliminary assumption on their possible correspondence. Regardless of different contexts, times and lexical choices, the pontifical discourses can be characterised by simplicity, easiness, precision of terms, clarity of religious concepts, contextual redundancies used to ensure comprehension of a communicated complex message, context-dependent meaning, definitions, claims, arguments, citations, contextualization aimed to greater understanding and acceptance of the message. Sharing common religious legacy, beliefs, views and attitudes based on the Scriptures, the Holy Fathers advocate for the preservation

of faith; clarification of the truth of the Church's teaching; the culture of life, love, peace, justice and freedom among nations; the evangelization and the union of each man in Christ. Despite the apparent differences in style, the corpus-based evidences indicate to an unbroken continuity of spiritual authorities in interpreting and pleading for proclamation and witness to mercy, reminding the contemporary world of its power and significance. Education for the virtue of mercy promotes Christian culture and humanism.

The Holy Fathers' documents are freely available at the following Holy See web sites:

- i. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html
- ii. https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf
- iii. https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf
- iv. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html
- v. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html
- vi. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html
- vii. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html
- viii. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html
- ix. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html
- x. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html
- xi. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia-eucharistia_en.html