

**Paul's "Mercy": A "Pattern" of God's Inexhaustible Patience
for Future Believers (1 Timothy 1:12-17)**

Teresa Okure

Introduction

The First Letter to Timothy is considered an inauthentic letter of Paul. Yet 1 Tim 1:12-17 gives unique insight into God's mercy, as exemplified in Paul's life as attested to in his authentic letters and in the Acts of the Apostles.¹ Here as elsewhere, Paul does not simply theologise about God's mercy; he interprets this mercy, shown to him personally and received in faith, as a "pattern" put forth by Christ, to illustrate God's inexhaustible patience with sinners (1 Tim 1:12-17).² The motivating issue of the letter appears to be the need to curb the behaviour of erring teachers who spread wrong teaching in the Christian community of Ephesus due to their ignorance of both the Christian faith and the law (1 Tim 1:6-7); instead of teaching the doctrine of God's grace and mercy. In the letter Paul provides a pastoral strategy for Timothy, his co-worker for effectively addressing this situation.

The main concern of this study, set within the hermeneutical context of this year's CABAN convention theme, and more comprehensively within the context of the Special Jubilee of Divine Mercy, is to discover how Paul in this letter understands God's mercy shown to him. What function does his recalling of this mercy in relation to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" entrusted to him (1 Tim 1:11), play in this letter; the gist of which is to urge Timothy to prevent "certain people" from teaching wrong doctrine and spreading "myths, genealogies, debates that foster doubts" instead of promoting God's plan of salvation for all, founded on faith (1:2-4)? Does the nature of the letter, addressed primarily to Timothy an individual, add anything to its understanding of Paul's mercy? What is Timothy expected to learn from this mercy to inform and energise his personal life and ministry as servant of God and "minister of Jesus" (1 Tim 4:6) in the community?

Timothy's ethnic background is Jewish and Gentile; his Christian ministerial background that of being Paul's beloved "true child in the faith" and co-worker (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2). From the evidence of this letter and other letters,³ Timothy emerges as Paul's most constant companion in preaching God's gospel. Does this background contribute anything to how

¹ Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians are considered Paul's authentic letters (though some express doubt about the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians) and Philemon. For a handy summary of the discussion on Paul's authorship of the letters, see *The New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) Standard Edition. Henry Wansbrough, gen. ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; Kinshasa: Verbum Bible, 1985) 1849-1863, esp. 1859-1863; and Samuel Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Africa Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Hippobooks, Word alive, Nairobi, Kenya; African Christian Textbooks (ACTS), Bukuru, Nigeria; Step, Accra, Ghana: 2009), 1-3; reviewed by Teresa Okure *RBL* 07/2010.

² This study projects Paul as author of the letter; by this is to be understood that Paul is the speaker in this letter (regardless of whether he personally wrote the letter or another wrote and attributed it to him). The usage, therefore, does not engage the debate on Paul's authorship of the letter. What matters is the message which a faith-based reader is to draw from this canonical letter attributed to Paul as speaker (1 Tim 1:1-2); 2 Timothy (1:1-2); Titus (1:1-4); Colossians (1:1-2) and Ephesians (1:1) equally have Paul as author and speaker.

³ Paul often designates Timothy his co-worker as "brother" (2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:2), with him "servants of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1); co-preacher of God's gospel of "Yes" with Silvanus (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1).

Timothy is to understand and carry out his ministry, even as Paul's background and conversion experience helped him to understand God's mercy and informed his mission as apostle, preacher and teacher of the gospel? Why does Paul recall the mercy shown to him as the basis of his exhortation to Timothy on how to carry out his ministry in Ephesus (1:3)?

The study further discerns the message which can be drawn from the exegetical findings to impact the life and mission of the church in the celebration of God's jubilee of mercy, based on God's superabundant patience for all believers.⁴ Pope Francis described this Year of Mercy "as a special time for the Church; a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective".⁵ Do we today have erring teachers in our church communities who spread teachings that are in disaccord with God's jubilee of mercy and gospel entrusted to Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles, and concretely manifested in his life and mission? What can today's faith-based reader, especially pastors, learn from Paul's advice to Timothy about God's mercy unto salvation, firstly for their personal living and then for the method of exercising their pastoral ministry, using Paul's mercy as a pattern for all future believers?

These issues are studied exegetically in the context of 1 Timothy and with reference to 2 Timothy, Titus and other letters of Paul, where applicable. The contemporary hermeneutical dimension relates the exegetical findings to pastoral issues today. The method of study is narrative exegesis; the aim is to bring out the central message of the select passage, addressed to living faith-based contexts then and now. The major parts of the study include a brief overview of the geographical and religious backgrounds of 1 Timothy; an analysis of the select passage within the context of the letter and of other Pauline letters; and a contextual application to the today's church context.

1. Brief Backgrounds of 1 Timothy (and Its Unique Features)

The First Letter to Timothy appears in the NT biblical canon as the first letter to an individual; the others being 2 Timothy and the letters to Titus and Philemon. All four are Pauline pastoral letters addressed to individuals, though Philemon is generally not counted among the pastoral letters. Strikingly, the theme of mercy as God's pure grace dominates in all four letters. The letter to Titus is perhaps the most explicit: "When the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared, it was not because of any good deeds we ourselves might have done. It was purely from his own goodness and mercy that he saved us" (Titus 3:4-8).⁶ Equally Paul urges Timothy not to "be ashamed of testifying to Jesus" but to "take his share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his purpose and grace which he which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago" (2 Tim 1:8-10). The letter to Philemon is a gentle plea to Philemon to take back or show mercy and pardon to Onesimus, a runaway slave who has since become a believer, hence a double brother of Philemon ("both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Phlm 15-16).

Mercy as setting the tone of the letters to Timothy appears in the greeting: "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus the Lord" (1 Tim 1:2b; 2 Tim 1:2b). The inclusion

⁴ Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015) declared 8th December 2015 (Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception) to 20th November 2016 (Solemnity of Jesus Christ the Universal King) as the Special Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy; see nos. 3-5; also the President's elaboration of the convention theme in this volume as the motivation for this year's choice of theme for the CABAN convention.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 3 (Henceforth, *MV*).

⁶ The translation is that of the author to bring out the core message of the passage. All other citations are from the RSV, unless otherwise stated.

of mercy in the greeting formula is unique to these two letters. It is absent in other Pauline and NT letters generally with the exceptions of 2 John 3 (addressed to a church community, “elect lady and her children”) and Jude 2.⁷ “Grace” in the greeting speaks to God’s pure and unmerited gift of salvation. “Mercy” registers an attribute and the mystery of God that motivates this gift. It is “the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us . . . the bridge that connects God and man [sic], opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness”.⁸ “Peace” (*shalom*) is the result of this gift, bestowing on the receiver total wellbeing in mind, soul and body and governing his or her relationship with God, with others and with creation. Ultimately, “Christ is our peace” (Eph 2:14); he breaks down the walls of hostility between Jews and Gentiles and all other human barriers, “by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).

The main purpose of this letter from its internal evidence is hortatory. One might compare it to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament where the sage gives instructions to the young on how to lead a good and honest life. Here the primary aim is not instruction for personal living per se, but a guide to Timothy on how to exercise his ministry as “a good [or beautiful] minister of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 4:6) in the community, his youthfulness notwithstanding (1 Tim 4:11). He functions as a faithful overseer,⁹ to elicit gospel-based life from individuals and all categories of members in the community. His own personal behaviour is to serve in all respects as example for the community. Avoidance of wrong teaching by all is key to this gospel-based life.

Concretely, Paul left Timothy behind in Ephesus when he went to Macedonia,¹⁰ to serve as a watchdog to prevent certain persons from teaching wrong doctrine out of ignorance of both the law and faith in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:3-7). Paul first met Timothy at Lystra (Acts 16:1-3); since the brethren in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul decided to take him as a travelling companion in his first missionary journey that now focussed on Gentiles, that is, after the decision of the commonly tagged Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).¹¹ The letter captures theologically the essential spirit and character of Paul’s letters, with regard to “his gospel”, that salvation is a pure grace of God to be received by faith, not something an individual earns by personal effort, such as faithful observance of the law; particularly here by useless discussions about myths, genealogies and debates about the law.

Timothy, based on NT evidence, is a Jewish convert who first received his faith from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5). According to Acts, Timothy’s father was a Gentile presumably from Lystra where Paul first met and recruited him; his mother was a Jewish convert (Acts 16:1-5). In the post-exilic era, Jewish children received their nationality from their mothers, rather than their fathers. This development was a strategy to prevent Jewish

⁷ The usual elements in the greeting are “grace and peace” (cf. Rom 1:7b; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; Eph 1:2; Col 1:2b; 1 Thess 1:1b; 2 Thess 1:2; Titus 1:4b; 1 Pet 1:2b; 2 Pet 1:20); Jude 2 has “mercy and peace” but not grace. “Grace and peace” thus appear to have been the most common greeting formula among Christians. The liturgical greeting has “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit”.

⁸ Pope Francis, *MV* no. 2.

⁹ Timothy is an overseer in the true sense of the word. In the letter he is not seen either as a presiding elder (*episkopos*) or an elder (*presbyteros*), but as a minister (*diakonos*) of Christ. See further the controversial study by Raymond E Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (Mohawk: Paulist, 1984).

¹⁰ This could be a reference to Acts 20:1-2, when because of the riot in Ephesus stirred by Demetrius the blacksmith, Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia, to return later (Acts 20:17-38).

¹¹ On the significance of this phase of Paul’s mission, see Teresa Okure, “The Challenge of Lydia’s Leadership (Acts 16:11-15) for the Contemporary Church”, in *The Bible and Leadership in Africa*; 17th Congress of the Panafrican Association of Catholic Exegete (PACE), Bamenda, Cameroun, 8 – 15 September 2015; publication expected by September 1, 2017 (arrival date of the 2017 biennial Congress).

men from marrying gentile women if they wanted their children to be Jewish (cf. Ezra 9 –10). This explains the importance which Timothy's mother and grandmother played in bringing him up in the Christian faith. Timothy thus embodies the Jewish and gentile heritage which he brings to faith in Christ. Though born a believer (since he is said to have learnt his faith from his mother and his grandmother as his primary teachers), he would have understood in his person what it meant to be a bridge between believers in Ephesus who hailed from Jewish and/or gentile background.

Ephesus where Paul left Timothy to minister till his return (Tim 1:3; 14; 4:13) was dominantly a gentile territory, with strong devotion to the great "Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28). Paul's two years mission in Ephesus started with the disciples who received only John's baptism (Acts 19:1-7). Jewish exorcists, among them the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, tried to imitate Paul by calling on Jesus' name. Others who used spells or practised magic publicly recanted their trade. The Silversmith Demetrius stirred up a revolt against Paul because Paul's preaching won converts and threw their trade into jeopardy. The kind of religion practised in the area probably gave rise to syncretistic interpretation of the law by some Jewish converts who brought these syncretistic beliefs into the church.

The Gentiles of the community would naturally have been converts from the gentile religions mentioned in the letter (4:1-3; 6:4-6) and in Acts (19:18-41). This religion included the "worship of demons and elemental spirits" (Eph 2:1-3). Ephesians posits a contrast between the previous ignorant, hopeless, godless lives of these Gentiles before their conversion and their current state of conversion to God in Christ, rooted in God's pure and unmerited love (Eph 2:7-10). Once "not a people", they were now in Christ "God's people", fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household" (Eph 2:11-22). Thus graced by God, they were to stand firm and not be driven "to and fro by every wind of doctrine" devised by the cunning of humans skilled in practising deceit (Eph 4:14). This religious background would have contributed to syncretism in the community; it most likely formed the main cause of the wrong teaching that occasions the letter and that it addresses squarely. Knowledge of this situation would have been important to Timothy in his mission. Lucan Paul sadly warns the elders of Ephesus against false teachers that would emerge from their midst after his departure (Acts 20:11-38).

2. Analysis 2 Tim 1:12-17 in the Context of the Letter

Read against the above synthetic overview of its socio-religious background, 1 Timothy can be said to have three major concerns: the need for Timothy to instruct erring teachers in the faith by preventing them from doing damage to themselves and the community by spreading false teaching; the need for individuals and different groups in the community to resist this false teaching by a practical living of the faith; and the need for Timothy himself to hold on steadfastly to the faith he received, remain faithful to his charge and lead an honest, truthful and godly life as a living example to other believers in the community. Paul's mercy cited in the letter serves a paradigmatic function for Timothy in his ministry to the community.

The outline given here differs from what obtains in most commentaries and studies on the letter. A handy structure is that which sees the letter as organised around seven major headings each with subheadings: introduction (1:1-20); norms of behaviour in the community (2:1-3:6); advice to Timothy on a variety of subjects (4:1-6:2) including especially false teachers (4:1-5) and protection against false teaching (6:4:6-11); the greed of false teachers (6:3-10); a reminder to Timothy of his calling and faithfulness to the outlined duties of office (6:11-16), wealth and

recommended positive behaviour of the rich (6:17-19); and a concluding advice to Timothy to hold on to the faith entrusted to him and steer away from vain philosophical discussions and contradictions falsely called “knowledge” (6:20-21) and greeting.¹²

Timothy’s main charge is to prevent and urge certain persons “not to teach any different doctrine [than the one received], nor occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is faith” (1:3-4). These people “desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions” have “wandered away” from the truth of the gospel “into vain discussion” (1 Tim 1:6-7). The basic cause of the wrong teaching is ignorance of both the faith and the law on the part of the teachers. This situation is countered by the emphasis on sound teaching or doctrine and guarding against false teachers and their teaching (1:3-11, 18-20; 4:1-11; 6:6-10). Other measures include orderly and respectful prayers for everybody, including those in authority (1:1-15), sustained instruction of the people, including systematic and authoritative scripture reading (4:11-16); faithfulness to clearly defined lines of behaviour and interpersonal relationships within the community, namely, the qualifications and functions of the presiding elder (3:1-7), deacons (3:8-13), order of widows and those who can remarry (5:3-16), the elders (5:17-25), slaves (6:1-2) and the generality of members, including rich Christians (6:19-19).

Surprisingly, there is no mention of the category of youth, though Timothy himself is asked not to allow anybody to despise him for his youthfulness (4:12). Since Timothy is to oversee with integrity, courage and impartiality all these people in their different categories and functions, he is not counted as an “elder” (*presbyteros*) or “presiding elder” (*episkopos*). Like Paul, he is “a servant of Christ” (*diakonos Christou*). His role is to teach, admonish, and above all, be an example to the believers by his faith, love, impartiality, integrity and, faithfulness to the sound teaching which has been entrusted to him to pass on to others without derailing into the false teaching.

This problem of erring teachers, their ignorance of the faith and the damaging consequences to themselves and others is first introduced in 1:1:5-7 and taken up in 4:1-7 and 6:3-10. This literary structure interweaves this central problem with practical instructions to Timothy on how to guide the behaviours within the community and pay attention to his own behaviour so as not to be derailed by the false teaching and so that his life may be a living example to the people. At first sight, chapters 2 and 3 with attention on right behaviours within the community, appear like an intrusion into the problem of erring teachers or an insertion into the letter, especially given their negative view on women in the community.¹³ They come in block between 1:20 (the allusion to persons who throw their conscience to the winds) and 4:1 (those who desert the faith “by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared”). Rather than being a diversion from or intrusion into the central problem, these chapters (introduced by “in the first place” or “first of all”; 2:1) underscore the importance of practical daily living of the faith as antidote to engaging

¹² This outline basically follows that of Hans-Harmut Schroeder, “1 Timothy”, in *The International Bible commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, William Farmer, gen ed., Sean McEvenue, Armando J. Levoratti and David L. Dungan, associate eds.; and André LaCocque, map editor (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 1733-1746, esp., 1735-1736; see also the outline in NJB, 1959-1964.

¹³ A similar passage which scholars interpret as insertion in Paul’s letters is 1 Cor 14:34-36.

in myths, genealogies and useless debates. The view of women in particular is to be read within the patriarchal and socio-cultural culture of the time.¹⁴

In discussing how to address the central problem of ignorance, Paul first cites his own example of ignorance of the faith (and of the real purpose of the law) before he became a believer. Paul's treatment of the law in the letters to the Galatians and the Romans clearly indicates that after his conversion, he gained totally new insights into the true meaning of the law; for instance, he learnt to see the law as a tutor or guardian bringing us to Christ as heirs (Gal 3:23-4:1-7). And more drastically, based on his personal experience, he sees Christ as "the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified" (Rom 10:4). As I observed in a previous study, Paul discovered the relative nature of the law not theoretically but in his life; all the things he previously counted as so much gain he regarded as rubbish compared to the supreme joy of knowing Christ (Phil 3: 4-11).¹⁵ Christ is the end of the law because "However many the promises God made, the "Yes" to them all is in him" (2 Co 1:20).¹⁶

Paul begins the citation of his personal experience (the basis of his charge to Timothy; 1:12-17) by giving thanks to God (vv 12-13): that though he was at first, a blasphemer, a persecutor and contemptuous (of the cause of the gospel, understood) he nonetheless found mercy. God showed him mercy, *because he acted in ignorance* (that is, by a non-culpable lack of knowledge); he was lacking in faith (or was without faith, *apistia*). Despite this, "he was found" (that is, "God found him") worthy (or reliable, *piston*) to participate in the ministry. Did his ignorance excuse him (cf. Rom 2:15-16)? Is this a possible reason why he found mercy?

The underlying idea of the terms used here is that Paul acted ignorantly because he did not know Jesus and God's plan for salvation in him. Had he known, he would not have persecuted the believers or asked on the way to Damascus "Who are you sir?" (Acts 9:5).¹⁷ God's mercy came to him unexpectedly based purely on God's unmerited goodness and love. Paul recalls this experience severally in his authentic letters.¹⁸ He sees himself "as one untimely born" (1 Cor 15:8) unworthy to be called apostle because he persecuted God's church, but was saved by grace (1 Cor 15:8-11). The terms used to describe his pre-conversion life (a life lacking in faith) seem to rule out wilful culpability on his part: he simply did not know or was acting out of ignorance. Equally, his finding mercy and being found worthy to participate in the ministry register no personal effort or merit on his part.

Though before his conversion Paul acted out of ignorance of faith in Christ Jesus, he did so with full awareness and zealous commitment to the dictates of the law (as he states in Phil 3:3-16). His first encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus gave him insight into the intrinsic

¹⁴ On this issue, reference to the negative portrayal of rich women in the letter, see Elsa Tamez, "1Timothy", in *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte, gen ed., J Severino Croatto, Nicole Wilkinson Durand, Teresa Okure, Archie Chi Chung Lee, associate eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 508-515; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 310), argues that the picture of the community painted in the letter is to be read within its own particular context.

¹⁵ Teresa Okure, "'Christ, the end of the Law' (Rom 10:4): An Index to Paul's Conversion Experience", in *Paul Embodiment of the Old and New Testaments*; Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN); vol. 2. Luke Ijezie, Teresa Okure and Camillus Umoh, eds. (Port Harcourt: CABAN Publications, 2013), 26-48.

¹⁶ Author's translation; to underscore meaning.

¹⁷ The Greek word *kyrie* could mean sir or lord. Since Paul did not know who was speaking to him, it is likely he would have meant "sir"; unless it can be argued that the impact of the experience led him to intend the more reverential meaning (lord) than "sir". Paul's first proclaimed that Jesus "is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20); for Luke-Acts accounts of his conversion see Acts 9; 22; 26.

¹⁸ See I Cor 18:8-11; Gal 1:1-16; 2 Cor 4:1-6; Phil 3:4-11; Rom 1:1-7) and the letters with disputed authorship: Col 1:23b-29; Eph 3:1-11.

relationship between Jesus and all believers: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). This birthing grace of Jesus identifying himself with believers was to form the basis and leitmotif of his understanding that believers are the body of Christ (Cor 12:3-33) and “one” in him irrespective of anthropological or social affiliations (Gal 3:25-29). Because Paul was acting out of ignorance, Jesus gave him as pure grace this knowledge of faith that energised, empowered and motivated him to proclaim the mystery of God’s gospel offered freely to all without exception, and to do so with the same energy and zeal with which he previously spent in persecuting the church out of ignorance.

Paul understands God’s gratuitous outreach to him in his state of ignorance as solid practical demonstration of the super-abounding or overflowing (*hyperpleonasin*) and fullest nature of God’s grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. We meet the same effort to express the inexpressible in Eph 2:7-10, which speaks of “the immeasurable [extraordinary] riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7). The language strives to express grace that is full measure, pressed down, shaken together and flowing over. Paul could only respond to this free gift by believing, that is, accepting it in faith (since it makes no sense humanly speaking), and surrendering his entire being to that love which is in Christ Jesus. Faith is principally acceptance of God’s merciful, incomprehensible and totally free offer of love manifested in Christ Jesus. This mercy rooted in love is universal and timeless (“a pattern for all future believers”). It rules out the belief that salvation is dependent on personal effort which attracts merit and reward or on some esoteric knowledge.

Verse 15 may be considered the heart of the passage; it registers the unique and incomprehensible purpose of God’s mercy manifested in Jesus and his mission: “The word (thing, saying or proclamation, *logos*) is true (*pistos*, worthy of trust, solidly reliable) and equally worthy of “all glorious full acceptance”, namely, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”, of which Paul, though the least of the apostles, is yet “the greatest of all”. This truth of this good news offered freely to all, does not depend on Paul or any human being. Nonetheless it manifests itself very clearly and/or unmistakably in Paul, in a manner which rules out all possible doubt or questioning. Paul did nothing to merit it; on the contrary, his persecution of the church would have excluded him. This truth of God’s mercy permeates the New Testament and serves as “the core of our gospel and faith”.¹⁹ The name Jesus means “Saviour” (Matt 2:21). His mission was to impart that knowledge of the “one true God” which is “eternal life” (John 17:3) thereby to liberate those who lived in the darkness of ignorance of the true God (Luke 1:79). He did this by proclaiming the good news and being himself “God’s good news” (Rom 1:1, 3, 16); even as Timothy is to be both at his own level.

Verse 16 explains why Paul found mercy: so that concretely in him in the first place, in the totality of his life before and after his conversion, might be made manifest or clearly shown, the superabundant, inexhaustible patience, endurance of Jesus Christ for those who would later trust in him or have faith in him (not in the law, understood) for eternal life. This is a key motif in Paul’s authentic letters. The law is what individuals keep winning merit or fail to keep at their own cost; grace and mercy on the contrary are given by God, gratuitously or free of charge and

¹⁹ Pope Francis *MV*, no. 9 (commenting on the Parable of the prodigal son); see in particular Luke 15:2; 19:10; Titus 3:8 and parallels; also the two essays by Teresa Okure, “Gospel and Faith in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15)”, in *The Bible on Faith and Evangelisation*. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) vol. 6; Anthony Ewherido, Bernard Ukwegbu, Mary Jerome Obiorah and Joseph Haruna Mamman, eds. (Port Harcourt: CABAN Publications, 2015), 169-195; and “Mercy and the New Testament”, *Concilium* no. 4/2017 expected before the end of 2017.

without discrimination. Any teaching which opposes that, or any teacher who teaches the contrary, stands to be corrected.

3. The Pattern nature of Paul's mercy

To this end Paul's mercy serves as "a pattern" (*hypotypōsis*) for all future believers. The mercy he found or that was shown to him personally did not end there. He was to use this mercy to proclaim the true nature of God's mercy for all sinners and unbelievers and all who still act out of ignorance. Paul's awareness of the mercy shown to him was integral to his call to ministry. He attests, for instance, that the ignorance of the Gentiles both accuses and excuses them (Rom 2:15-16).

Paul's experience of mercy is **a pattern**, a blueprint or archetype (*hypotypōsin*) rather than a model. A model is something that is external, that one looks at and copies. The pattern is different. To use sewing as an example, one cuts a dress from a pattern by placing the pattern on the material or vice versa and cuts the piece exactly from it. If the piece is not exact, the material when it is sewn will not match the desired measurements. Paul, a tentmaker, probably knew how to use a pattern in his trade. This may explain why he uses the word *hypotypōsin* to describe the nature of the mercy shown him. God's mercy for him is the exact same measure of God's mercy shown to all ignorant people of all times. "God has no favourites" (Rom 2:11 cf. Acts 10:34). The only meaningful response to this mercy is faith or believing shown in the readiness to pass from being in the law to being in Christ. Being in the law attracts its own lifestyle even as being in Christ attracts its own lifestyle (Phil 3:3-16); it is rooted in faith and precludes wandering away into myths and false doctrines.

4. Call to Reproduce the Pattern of God's Mercy in one's Life

Paul realised that God used him as a pattern of mercy for others in Christ Jesus. That awareness placed on him a corresponding duty or grace: to commit himself to studying and understudying Christ so as to reproduce in his own life the pattern of Christ's own life (cf. Phil 3:3-21). This was the best way he could persuade and maybe convince others to believe in the surpassing mercy, love, patience and knowledge of God's mercy shown to all in Christ Jesus. Paul urged Timothy severally to remember his own calling and to live out this grace in faith by impeccable life and by taking care that he himself does not succumb to false teaching (6:11-15, 29).

Paul's paradigmatic autobiographical piece concludes with doxology, praise and thanksgiving to the one true God, for God's plan of salvation for all (v 17). Why is God referred to in terms not common in Paul's authentic letters? The designation of God as "the eternal king, the undying, invisible and only God" may have connection with the wrong teaching prevalent in Ephesus. We notice the same doxological conclusion at the end of the section where Paul reminds Timothy of his own calling (6:15-16). It would seem that this and the other doxologies (praise and thanksgiving to God in this and other letters of Paul) are not merely Hellenistic Jewish practice. Rather they are a constant reminder that the only correct response humans can give to God for his mercy is gratitude and thanksgiving from the heart, a gratitude that manifests itself in one's lifestyle. Mary of Nazareth did the same in her Magnificat. She thanked God for his unheard of and unique grace and subsequently lived her entire life according to God's will from Jesus' incarnation, hidden and public life to the paschal mystery. Zachariah too sang God's praises after the gratuitous birth of his and Elizabeth's son, John ("God is gracious").

5. Paul's Mercy vis-à-vis True and False Teachers

The false teachers first mentioned at the beginning are treated again in 4:1-16. They are juxtaposed with the **true teachers** (6:3-10). Paul reminds Timothy that these false teachers, too, are acting in ignorance; they neither “understand what they are saying or the things about which they speak”. Timothy is to correct them. Jesus on the cross cried “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Did they not know? Assumption of ignorance on the part of the offender appears to be a key for wholehearted forgiveness. Among their concrete errors is forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim 4:3). The same error is addressed more extensively in Col 2:8, 16-19. The errors to guard against in Colossae include allowing oneself to be deceived by “philosophy and empty deceit”, subjecting oneself to be judged “on questions of food and drink or with regard to festivals or a new moon or a Sabbath” or to be disqualified by those who insist on “self abasement and worship of angels and taking a stand on visions” instead of holding on to Christ who is “the substance” (Col 3:17).

Some scholars see in these false teachings the beginnings of Gnosticism (or proto-Gnosticism). The allusions to false knowledge or to “that knowledge which is not ‘knowledge’ at all” (6:21) justifies this. The inclusion of mercy in the greeting was highlighted earlier in the study. The wrong teaching may not be unconnected with the omission of mercy as key dimension of the gospel of salvation and a core component of God's gospel of grace entrusted to Paul. This gospel is to be received through faith in Christ Jesus; it cannot be replaced by knowledge as what bestows salvation, as the Gnostics later taught. The emphasis on faith, “the training in faith” (1:4), aims at counteracting the preoccupation with knowledge based on myth and speculations. By pursuing such knowledge “some have missed the mark and wandered away from the faith” (6:21). Timothy on his part is to “fight the good fight of the faith” (6:12).

The false teachers are misled among other things by money and the desire to get rich; those who believe that “religion is a way of making profit” (6:5). Indeed love of money and fame leads people to “wander away from the faith and have given themselves any number of fatal wounds” (6:9-10). Money and wealth seem to feature here alongside the law because both are concerned with what human beings can do or gain. God's mercy on the contrary attracts no such considerations as merit or desert or wealth. Here again Paul is a pattern. He reminds the Corinthians: or asks them to “remember the circumstances of [their] calling”. God chose the poor to shame the rich, the weak to shame the strong, the foolish to shame the wise” (1 Cor 1:26-31). God equally works through Paul despite his weakness as a rhetorical preacher (1 Cor 2:1-5).

6. Paul's “Mercy” as “a Pattern” in Contemporary Context

The study has surfaced ignorance as the fundamental problem in the church in Ephesus which Paul seeks to address. Timothy is to hold firm to and nourish the faith he received from his youth by praying, living a life of integrity and public reading of scripture (4:13). He is to teach the same faith as a trust faithfully and courageously without fear or favour. He is to appoint to the different offices in the community only trustworthy and tested people who demonstrate their faith by their way of life in the family and the community.

Today, ignorance of gospel can be said to be the single most important factor in the problems of the church and society globally. Many false teachers walk tall and strong in the church, not only unopposed and uncorrected; but applauded by some presiding elders who should call them to order; perhaps because such authorities themselves know no better. Today false teaching (to

take Nigeria, for example), takes the form of preaching and enforcing payment of tithes as the way to win God's favour; wrong use of scripture for material gains, turning the Eucharistic celebration into a privileged moment for extorting money from the people (asking them to "donate to God" to show appreciation or win God's favour), replacing the church's sacred liturgical traditions with loud choruses that have little or no solid theological content, (allegedly in order to give the people what they want), emphasis on miracles and testimonies rather than on faith; excluding suffering from the life of the Christian in favour of the prosperity gospel; and preoccupation with building prestigious structures at the expense of building God's people.²⁰

The First Letter of Timothy offers a big challenge to teachers and pastors, especially biblical scholars (students of God's word). They have received the special grace, and privilege to study God's word in depth. Biblical scholars and theologians need to honestly ask whether their research is guided by the desire to faithfully proclaim the gospel and hold on to the faith handed down by the early church, or whether they are guided by other motives, the desire to obtain research grants and satisfy such sponsors. How would Paul rate them among the multitude of today's teachers and TV evangelists of today? To what extent do they commit ourselves to living the gospel and correcting error and falsehood, not because they are superior to others, but because God's mercy in Christ and their insight into that mercy demand that they correct their brothers and sisters who have left the path of gospel mercy and faith to preach the gospel of prosperity, self-sufficiency, project the image of a God who repays only those who pay him handsomely; and other practices not rooted in Christ, God's gospel and mercy?

Every thesis at the Catholic Pontifical Institute of West Africa (CIWA) at all three cycles identifies ignorance as the cause of the many pastoral and other problems facing God's people, and recommends sound catechesis as the way to build authentic Christians and faith-based Christian communities. The truth is that most Christians today have no in-depth knowledge of the gospel and the teachings of the church. This ignorance is not limited to Nigeria, Africa or the developing world. It is perhaps worse in the older churches, because it is assumed that the people know the solid content of the gospel. Yet the promotion of such modern anti-gospel practices as abortion, same sex marriage/union, distorted sex education, false notion of human rights, desecration of nature against which Pope Francis has raised a prophetic plea,²¹ the aggressive promotion of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), human trafficking, radical nationalism, all endorsed by many Christians, testifies to the degree to which Christians globally have diverted from God's gospel and the sound teachings of the church. They have installed science, technology, self, money as the new gods, using them to judge God's gospel, and find it wanting, instead of the reverse.

The Second Vatican Council called for renewal and update in the church as the task of the new millennium. Successive Popes have done the same, including Pope Francis with his unrelenting zeal in teaching and living the gospel. Pope Benedict XVI called for re-evangelisation of

²⁰ For a fuller description of the problem in the Nigerian situation and the solutions proffered for them, see *Material Wealth and Divine Blessings in the Bible*. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), vol. 5 (Port Harcourt: CABAN Publications, 2013) especially the "Communiqué" and Teresa Okure, "Abuses of the Bible by Some Catholic Pastors Who Terrorize and Traumatize the Lay Faithful by Their False Interpretation of the Bible", commissioned paper given at the meeting of Catholic Bishops Conference and Major Superiors of Nigeria (CBCN and CMSN), Diocesan Conference Center, Bishop's Court, Effurun, Warri, Delta State, 11-13 September 2014.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* On the Earth Our Common Home (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015) arguably the most popular papal encyclical in recent times, welcomed by Christians, peoples of faiths and non believers alike.

Europe. The Second African Synod equally stressed the need for the primary evangelisation of the baptised. Popes Benedict XVI and Francis following the Second Vatican Council also emphasised the need for theologians to help the church mature in its understanding of Scripture.²²

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to correct his fellow Christians who had developed a flair for wrong teaching. Jesus leaves his followers especially church leaders, biblical scholars and theologians universally to do the same. This requires that they systematically and faithfully update themselves with faith-based reading of Scripture and the immensely rich heritage of the church. Then like Timothy and Paul they will be better servants of Christ, boldly proclaiming God's mercy manifested in Paul. The solution to the problems of false teachers, wrong teaching and the many other ills that plague our church and world today lies in a conscious and radical return to the gospel of Jesus and the gospel that is Jesus, God's gift and power to save all humanity (Rom 1:16). May "grace" (1 Tim 6:21) be with Christians as they boldly and wholeheartedly assume this charge with the same zeal, humility, integrity and faithfulness as Paul did and urged Timothy to do.

²² Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 12, 15; Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 31; Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 40.