Medieval Europe and Works of Mercy

Francis Thonippara

St Charles Lwanga Major Seminary, Windhoek, Namibia

Abstract

This work explores the centrality of mercy in the Christian faith, particularly its practical expression through works of charity. It argues that these acts, motivated by God's mercy, were understood by medieval Christians as crucial to imitating Christ and achieving salvation. The paper examines biblical foundations for mercy in the New Testament, emphasising the Good Samaritan and the Last Judgement parable, highlighting obligations to help those in need. It also explores the early Church's commitment to social justice and cares for the marginalised, exemplified by the role of deacons. Furthermore, the text cites the teachings of Church Fathers like St. Basil and St. Ambrose, who emphasised radical social responsibility as integral to Christian life. Finally, it touches upon the emphasis on mercy in the papacy of Pope Francis, highlighting his declaration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy and his call to address the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Overall, the work argues that mercy is not just a theological concept but a call to action, urging Christians to respond actively to the needs of others in society.

Keywords: Christian Mercy, Social Responsibility, Biblical Foundations

Introduction

The unique identity of the Christian religion is acts of charity, and the works of mercy are concrete expressions of the actions of charity. The Christian works of mercy are the spontaneous communal responses of the Christian religion's members to society's current needs. The

central theme of the teachings of Christ is the acts of mercy. Following the instructions of St Thomas Aquinas and other leading theologians, Christians of medieval times understood practising compassion as the most excellent way to imitate God and Christ (Keenan, 2017, p. 33-43). The communal dimension of the works of charity in the Christian religion is essential. As saved by divine Mercy, Christians firmly believe that the best way to be faithful Christians or disciples of Christ is to undertake acts of charity. Charity was a fundamental component of medieval Christian doctrine, essential to correctly understanding medieval piety. The centrality of charity to Christian salvation made its correct enactment a chief preoccupation of medieval Christian living. As expressed through works of mercy, charity played a central role in the medieval Church's catechetical pedagogy.

New Testament Models

Before we move on to the New Testament, I just mention two instances of Psalms where a clear picture of the mercy of God is manifested. God is merciful, but He also judges. "He loves justice and right" (Psalms, 33.5). That is why David states, "Of kindness and judgment I will sing; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise" (Psalms,101: 1). In the New Testament, we understand God as merciful through the words of Jesus: "Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs" (Mt. 5:7). There are mainly two New Testament passages which are the basis for the Christian teaching on mercy, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 25-37) and the last judgment (Matthew. 25: 31-46). The parable of the Good Samaritan is an answer to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?'. Jesus gives a clear answer to the question by saying that the neighbour is the one who shows mercy. The strong message of this parable, which transcends all religious boundaries, has a privileged position in the teachings of Christ and a unique mark in the lives of millions of Christians. This privileging of the Good Samaritan parable is once a privileging of mercy, established in the Last Judgement of the King in Matthew Chapter 25 (Keenan, 2017, p. 35). The Gospel of Matthew. 25: 31-46 gives the Christian world an explicit pedagogy in radical Christian living; all are created in the image of God, and all are children of God, universal brotherhood and sisterhood. The early Church was well aware of the Church's core mission and the central theme of the teaching of Christ. The Church, which was not institutionalised, which was charismatic and was sensitive to the teachings of Christ, paid due attention to the marginalised, to the people in the peripheries, and deacons were consistently associated with providing spiritual and

physical support to others (Acts. 6: 1-7). The deacons' office also stressed the Church's social dimension without neglecting the proclamation of the Word of God. A revival of the office of women deacons (Romans. 16: 1) in the Catholic Church is a topic worth discussing. Again, in Acts 4, 32-36, we read, "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul… No needy person was among them, for as many owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." The great revolution of equality which the Christian religion brought out in the world is beautifully described by an author thus: "The intervention of a preacher such as Ambrose, toward the end of the fourth century, showed that the poor could no longer be spoken of only as 'others' - as beggars to whom Christians should reach out across the chasm that divided the rich and the poor. They are also 'brothers,' Christian community members who could also claim justice and protection" (Brown, 2012, p.79). St Augustine repeatedly referred to the Christological foundation of the love of neighbour, as is evident from his writings, where he cites Matthew. 25, the Last Judgement, more than 275 times.

Fathers of the Church

The teachings of the Fathers of the Church are blessed with abundant references to the acts of mercy as the cornerstone of living. I quote two Fathers, representing East and West respectively, to show the radicality of their teaching in the social commitment of the Christians. St Basil (329-379), the Great Father of Eastern Monasticism and a great exponent of social justice has this to say: "The bread which you hold back belongs to the hungry; the coat, which you guard in your locked storage - chests, belongs to the naked; the footwear mouldering in your closet belongs to those without shoes. The silver you keep hidden in a safe place belongs to the needy. Thus, however many are those whom you could have provided for, so many are those whom you wrong." Again, St Ambrose (339-397), the Archbishop of Milan, says: "The Church possesses gold, not to hoard, but to scatter abroad and come to the aid of the unfortunate. If you have two shirts in your closet, one belongs to you and the other to the man with no shirt."

Modern Christian Understanding of Mercy

Cardinal Walter Kasper beautifully explains the Christian understanding of mercy in the twenty-first century in his book. The book's title is *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Kasper, 2014). "If mercy is the outwardly effective, fundamental

attribute of God, it is, as it were, the portent that stands at the head of all salvation history… God's mercy is the primordial presupposition and ground of creation and salvation history" (Kasper, 3014, p. 97). We have saints who were inspired and challenged by the words of Jesus: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25, 40). We have examples such as Deacon Lawrence, Martin of Tours, Nicolas of Myra, Elizabeth of Thuringia, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Damian de Veuster, Mother Teresa of Kolkata, etc., who became the merciful face of Jesus Christ all through the Christian centuries.

Post-Modern World

A recent lead article in the *New Indian Express* titled *Human Compassion, Not Religion, The Answer to Global Scourges* (Surendran, 2023) sheds light on acts of mercy that have nothing to do with religion. It is a spontaneous expression of humans, and according to the author, religion has no role in the works of mercy of the human race. It is an article written in the context of the Hamas-Israeli conflict, where the fight is in the name of religion. The author, very much influenced by the philosophy of Enlightenment, which gives top value to reason and denies any transcendent religion, naturally comes to the conclusion that religion has no place. The author concludes by saying "All the more reason why reason and compassion ought to prevail beyond hunger, poverty and war." This statement is a challenge for the followers of various religious traditions who lose the core values of their religion.

Medieval Europe

The twelfth century was a turning point in the conception and practice of charity in medieval Europe. Medieval Christians began to reflect on the fundamental Christian commitment to the needs of the less privileged in society with a spiritual imperative. The spiritual dimension was that the wealthy lay people could attain salvation through pious giving, and the poor acquired a sanctified position in society and a spiritual currency in the form of prayers offered by their benefactors. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries also witnessed debates surrounding the ideal Christian lifestyle. Ascetics like St Bernard of Clairvaux argued for the contemplative cloistered life as a model of the ideal of Christian living, stressing more self-sanctification and salvation. On the other hand, Pope Innocent III, St Francis of Assisi, St Thomas Aquinas, and others argued that an active life of charity towards neighbours and fellow human beings would be most pleasing to God. Cluny monks'

enthusiastic and dedicated services to the poor paved the way for a better understanding of Christian charity. A proverbial expression was: 'Cluny monks never forget the poor and the dead.'

Another unique noticeable feature of medieval Europe was the emergence of the mendicant orders, which challenged the existing Church after possessions and positions. The founding of the mendicant orders, like Franciscans and Dominicans, in the early thirteenth century significantly influenced the ideas about Christian charity. St Francis of Assisi and his followers offered a new understanding of poverty and charity in medieval Europe. St Francis of Assisi connected the spiritual concept of charity as the love of God and neighbour with the idea that this love could be manifested in the physical world through the works of mercy. Franciscan and Dominican friars also contributed to the medieval corpus of writings on the deadly sin of wrath, which might have influenced the contemporary understanding of charity and the works of mercy. According to medieval confessors' manuals, the only remedies for anger were charity, forgiveness and humility.

The doctrine of charity served as the foundation of religious education for the clergy and laity in medieval Christian Europe. This doctrine of charity went beyond more than almsgiving. It provided a conceptual framework that structured social relationships according to Christ's precept to love God and neighbour. For medieval Christians, living in a state of charity meant undergoing a process of social integration based on the sacramental program of the Church (Brown, 2014).

The High Middle Ages (1073-1294) saw the flowering of Christian culture. If it is wrong to paint a glorified picture of the Middle Ages as the ideal Christian epoch, it is not correct to exaggerate the defects in the overall picture. As far as the High Middle Ages are concerned, the lights are more numerous than the shadows, and the clouds appear denser because the lights are so bright. In no other period of history did the Christian spirit exert such a powerful and far-reaching influence; it permeated the life of the times, public and private, political and social, intellectual and aesthetic and awakened latent energy and creative activity. The Christian concept of order and man's relations with God governed the relations of individuals one to another and society. The belief that all shared in the graces of Redemption brought a sense of solidarity into the people's lives. With few exceptions, the people found absolute joy in their faith and willingly submitted to the authority of the Church in matters of faith and morals.

In its all-embracing sense, a charity inspired all the great undertakings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. "Institutions were to be found in every city and in almost every town and hamlet for the shelter and care of every type of human need: hospitals, homes for the poor, foundling asylums, orphanages, hospices for pilgrims and lazarettos, some of which are still being supported from endowments settled upon them by charitable benefactors centuries ago. The care of the poor and the sick was considered a pastoral responsibility which could best be met by members of a religious order or in some instances of a pious confraternity" (Bihlmeyer-Tuechle, 1967, pp. 340-341).

The Practice of Mercy in Medieval Europe (Melville, 2020)

The activities of craft guilds and pious confraternities reflect the religiosity of medieval Europe, and in their group activities, the communal aspect of medieval religion was realised. Besides the economic, social, and political assignments of these guilds, their charitable dimension gave the Christian faith a new face of mercy. Forming confraternities of like-minded people promoted religious and philanthropic activities beyond what the parish could offer. Although the guilds and confraternities were essentially lay-driven, they depended upon the clergy. They extended full support to the parish priest for the conduct of religious services in many other ways. The primary concern of the members of the guilds and confraternities was to provide charitable assistance to members in need. The confraternities were more religious and responded to the particular needs of groups within a parish or locality rather than being based on a craft or trade. Their purpose was more directly the religious growth of their members, and they reached out to others through prayer and works of charity. The guilds and confraternities enjoyed exceptional popularity in medieval Christian Europe and were living testimonies of lay Christian witnessing (Tanner, 2011).

Several smaller congregations were formed in the twelfth century for the care of the sick (Hospital Orders), and several pious associations of laymen were established for the same purpose. The **Antonines** or *Hospitallers of St Anthony,* a community of lay brothers, was founded in 1095. In 1297, they constituted Canons Regular and spread throughout Europe. The Hospital Order of the Holy Spirit founded about 1180 in France, made a more significant contribution to the care of the sick and soon spread to other places. Its rule made the service of the poor and the infirm its first duty. In 1204, Pope Innocent III gave this community charge of the famous hospital of S.Maria in Sassia in

Rome, called Santo Spirito in Sassia. The Trinitarians were founded in 1198 by St John of Matha (+1213) and St Felix of Valois (+1212) to redeem Christian captives and enslaved people from the Muslims in the Holy Land and for the care of the sick. The Trinitarians adopted the Augustinian Rule and a white habit with a red and blue cross on the scapular. Around 1226, a priest by the name Rudolf founded Worms in Germany with papal support, a community of repentant prostitutes and eventually took the name Order of St Mary Magdalene, which was inspired by the Bible words Luke 7, 47 (Melville, 2020, p.187).

In the early Middle Ages, the canons and monks had received the poor and the sick, pilgrims and travellers into their houses and cared for them. In these, the poor and the sick were to be seen and served Christ himself, according to the prescriptions of rule and constitution. Alongside the *opus Dei* in worship, work, and self-sanctification – the *vita contemplative* – the service of guests and infirm had, it is true, only a secondary significance and was scarcely anywhere regarded as a central preoccupation of religious communities.

A change occurred in the age of the Gregorian reform when there began more active participation by the laity in the public life of the Church. Prominent among the motives of the *vita apostolica* was the example of Christ as healer and helper: the *pauperes Christi* wanted to become poor to assist others in their necessities. At the same time, the crusades produced homelessness, sickness, physical disability, and poverty wherever they played a role, at home and abroad. In the hitherto familiar form, *Caritas* was in no position to provide generous assistance in such a massive need, so new forms had to be found to deal effectively with it.

One such form was the renewed hospital service in the West and East under the auspices of chapters and monasteries in cities and along pilgrimage routes. The source of this renewal in the West was, among other factors, the Augustinian Rule followed by the Canons Regular, including the Cathedral Chapters.

In the cities, hospital confraternities of men and women are usually connected with a chapter or monastery. From the twelfth century, hospitals directed by confraternities were encountered in all countries of the West. They were even established wherever cities appeared in the colonial and missionary areas. Founders of hospitals came from all classes of Christian society. Bishops and secular lords were all involved in the establishment of the hospitals. In addition, clerical or

lay confraternities were formed to administer existing hospitals, and new orders sometimes developed from them.

Order of Lazarus had its origin from a leprosary at Jerusalem in1120. This Order followed the Augustinian Rule and became a military order only in the thirteenth century, and from that time, the main focus was on military service. However, hospital service was not wholly forgotten. In 1266, Pope Clement IV granted it a monopoly of the care of the lepers, which, however, could not be maintained given the widespread nature of this disease.

The Teutonic Order maintained the care of the infirm. At the close of the eleventh century, the Hospital Order of Saint Anthony appeared in the Midi at the Church of La Motte-des-Bois at Saint Didier. They took the Augustinian Rule and adopted the organisation of the Augustinian canons regularly. The infirm were attended to, and their almsgiving was famous.

Order of the Brothers of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem rendered outstanding service in serving the sick (Jedin, 1982).

The Humiliati in Lombardy, Milan, was originally a pious fraternity of weavers who had united for economic and religious purposes during the social struggles of the first half of the twelfth century. Unfortunately, some fell into heretical teachings, and those who remained Catholic received approval as a religious order from Pope Innocent III in 1201.

The Bridge-Building Brotherhood was a group of members of a lay fraternity organised in various places of southern France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries to construct and maintain bridges and for travellers' lodging. They had papal protection.

Orders of Knighthood

The age of the Crusades produced an entirely new type of religious life, combining the practices of monastic life with the chivalry of knighthood. The Orders of Knighthood assumed the task of guiding pilgrims in Palestine, protecting them from attack and nursing them in case they fell ill. They also protected the Holy Places from desecration by the Saracens. The government of the military orders was strongly centralised, and the Grand Master was at the head.

Knights of St John, or Hospitallers, was a hospital in Jerusalem dedicated to St John the Baptist built by merchants of Amalfi in about 1050 for Palestine pilgrims. The Knights of Templars, the oldest Order

of knighthood, was organised at Jerusalem in 1119, and the members took the usual religious vows of poverty, obedience and chastity and added a fourth vow to protect pilgrims visiting Holy Places. Teutonic Knights were organised at Acre during the Third Crusade. In 1189 or 1190, a hospital was founded at Acre and committed to the care of knights. By 1198, the knights in charge of the hospital had formed a religious community based on the model of the existing orders of knighthood (Bihlmeyer-Tuechle, 1967).

Guilds and Confraternities

In the broadest sense, guilds are voluntary and permanent associations to promote common interests. Guilds attempted to encourage their members' social, religious, and professional interests. It enriched the social life of the brothers by sponsoring yearly banquets, aiding those members struck by a sudden disaster, helping disabled, sick, or aged masters, supporting widows, educating orphaned sons, and giving dowries to bereaved daughters. The guilds' efforts to aid the religious life of its members were no less broad. It invariably honoured a patron saint and solemnly kept his feast day; regularly contributed candles and oil to the churches; usually, the guild maintained an altar or chapel within the cathedral. It often helped build the cathedral or contributed to its establishment with stained glass windows. It sponsored solemn funerals and Masses for the souls of deceased members and often supported works of public charity, such as distributing food and clothing to the poor or the building and endowment of hospitals.

In a professional sense, the guild sought to uphold high standards for the particular art with which it was associated, to maintain peace among the brothers, to protect them from what it felt was unfair competition, whether from within or without the guild, and to arrange for the proper training of new members. The guild had developed an efficient corporate organisation by the thirteenth century to achieve its social, religious, and professional purposes. As a corporate person, it held property in its name and could sue and be sued in court (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967).

Guilds and other associations were increasingly involved in the patronage and performance of religious music. In addition, the mendicant orders' emphasis on spiritual instruction fostered confraternities of laypeople who sang vernacular songs.

Confraternity means brotherhood, an association of men united for some purpose or in some common profession: a guild, especially a brotherhood devoted to some particular service, religious or charitable. Confraternity is a sodality established as a moral person and aims to promote public worship. A confraternity has a distinct habit or insignia. The element that distinguishes a confraternity from all other sodalities is its specific purpose of promoting public worship.

A network of confraternities was in place by 1350, which offered membership in religious clubs devoted to a particular saint, associated with a specific craft, or oriented towards a special devotion (flagellation, the Passion, Corpus Christi) (Rubin & Simon, 2009). Moreover, promoting confraternities by the preachers and organisations of devout lay people led to further reinforcement of social solidarity within the ruling and working classes.

The confraternity of St John, the Baptist of Geneva, took the lead in running hospitals. The Oratory of Divine Love is another agency that actively showed Christian charity to medieval Europe. Finally, the Confraternity of St Jerome of Charity cared for the prisoners, the poor and the delinquents.

The Christian spirit of love for one's neighbour was particularly active in the fifteenth century in works of benevolence, and there is scarcely another age so fruitful in them.

"A great part of the people's religious life in the late Middle Ages was intimately bound up with confraternities. As piety tended to become individual and subjective, the confraternities gradually declined. At one time, they were numerous. Some confraternities were purely religious. Others combined religious with social or charitable purposes. This was usually the case with confraternities composed of craftsmen or guildsmen" (Bihlmeyer-Tuechle, 1967).

New Face of Christian Mercy

The Jews in Medieval Europe were looked at with suspicion, especially for their money transactions. The late twelfth century and the thirteenth century were an epoch of relative consolidation and prosperity for the Jewish colonies in Italy, France and England. The practice of usury was widespread among the Jews, and the treatment of the Jews was rendered harsher on account of their method of usury, which was prohibited to Christians of the later Middle Ages by canon law supported by the most robust sanctions. Usury was forbidden to clerics by the Council of

Nicaea I (325) and St Leo I (440-461). Despite the strict synodal rules, repeated again and again, usury was practised by Christians as well. In this context, the medieval Christian conscience acted positively to meet the financial needs of the people, to afford relief to the needy, whose necessities forced them to borrow; a measure of genuine philanthropy was conceived in the last century of the Middle Ages and known by different names, *monte di pieta* (mounts of Mercy)*, montes pietatis*, or charitable accumulations, etc. Other names given to them were *montes Christi*, *monte della Carita*, *mare di pieta.* The names vary depending on their purpose: for funds to provide for burial, *montes mortuorum;* contributions and funds to which mothers contributed at the birth of children, called *montes dotis* (Schaff). They were benevolent loaning funds. The idea found widespread acceptance in Italy, where the first institutions were founded at Perugia in 1462 and Orvieto in 1463. Between 1462 and 1470, an estimated forty more were developed.

This initiative was from the Franciscans who pooled money and made it available at comparatively low rates of interest to people in need whom unlawful money lenders easily victimised. Conservative moralists resisted this *monte di pietas* but ultimately approved by the Church (Knowles & Obolensky, 1979).

Monte di pieta, or bank or mount of Mercy, is a public pawnbroker's office for lending money at reasonable rates. The Mount of Mercy is an institutional pawnbroker run as a charity in Europe from Renaissance times till today. It used funds from charitable donors as capital and made loans available to the poor so that they could avoid going to exploitative lenders. Borrowers offered valuables as collateral, making the Mount of Mercy more like a pawn shop than a bank.

The concept of the Mount of Mercy was first developed as an early form of organised charity, intended as a reform against money lending and the associated sins of usury. It was an attempt to afford relief to the needy, whose necessities forced them to borrow a benevolent loaning fund. The idea found widespread acceptance in Italy (Schaff). City councils aided such funds with contributions. At Gubbio, a law taxed all inheritances one per cent in favour of the local fund, and neglect to pay was punished with an additional one per cent tax.

It was primarily promoted by Franciscans such as Barnabas of Terni, Bernardine of Feltre, and Michele Carcano. The Popes showed a warm interest in the new benevolence by granting indulgences to contributors. From 1463 to 1515, we have records of sixteen papal authorisations.

The public office was organised and operated by the Church. The administration of these relief bureaus was in the hands of directors, a diverse body of clergy and laypeople, and often appointed by the municipal council. They offered financial loans at a moderate interest to those in need (Schaff). Many oppositions from the traditional Catholics quoted Deuteronomy 24, 12 ff, ordering that a man who borrows a coat should be restored before sundown. However, it was replied that the object of loaning to the poor was not to enrich the fund or individual but to do the borrower good. The Fifth Lateran Council commended it (Schaff).

Over succeeding centuries, such organisations spread throughout the Continent of Western Europe, a credit to the preaching of Franciscans and their condemnation of usury, with later support by Dominican preachers and humanist intellectuals of the fifteenth century.

In England, the first institution was started in 1361 by the bishop of London, who left 1000 marks of silver for establishing a bank that should lend money on pawned objects without interest, providing that the institution's expenses be defrayed from its foundation capital.

Malta's *Monte di Pieta* was set up in 1598. In Belgium, in Brussels, the *Monte di Pieta* was founded in 1618, and is still an active institution.

The *Monte di Pieta* was developed on the principle of charity. It was designed to aid less fortunate people by providing an alternative to the socially unaccepted Jewish money-lending system. However, Jewish banks continue to exist with the *Monte de Pieta*, each catering to a distinctive clientele.

Further Developments

Benevolence and philanthropy, the essence of the Christian religion, flourished in the later Middle Ages. Institutions were established to care for the needy and sick, colleges and bursaries were endowed and protection was given to the dependent against the greed of unscrupulous money-lenders. Disease was fearfully prevalent in medieval Europe, including Black Death, Great Famine and Great Pestilence (Schaff).

In England, the care of the poor was regarded as one of the Church's primary functions. Archbishop Stratford, in 1342, ordered that a portion of the tithe should be invariably set apart for their needs. The neglect of the poor was alleged as one of the crying omissions of the clergy.

Doles for the poor, a common form of charity in England, were often provided for on a large scale. There were houses where doles of bread and beer were given to all wayfarers, homes where the sick were treated, clothed, and fed, particularly the lepers. The cook Ketel, a Brother of the Common Life, said it would be better to sell all the books of the house at Deventer and give more to the poor (Schaff).

In the fifteenth century, one could witness the growth of municipal hospitals, a product of the civic spirit developed in North Europe. Cities like Cologne, Luebeck, and Augsburg had several hospitals. The founders of many of these hospitals had high spiritual motivations and were put in a condition to be admitted to pray for them. In addition, some founders stipulated that the very poorest and sickest were to be taken care of whether they belonged to Cologne or were strangers. As a result, Rome had more than one hospital endowment.

Conclusion

We find a new phase in the history of the Catholic Church with the Pontificate of Pope Francis (2013-), who declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy on March 13, 2015, and urged that "Mercy: 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. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness."[1] Mercy is the keynote of Pope Francis' pastoral, theological, and ecclesial approach. Mercy is an expression of solidarity to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality and the negation of rights. One is merciful, which means providing opportunities where they are not. Mercy means recognising others as God's creatures, as expressions of God's goodness.

Society did not wait for the present age to apply the principle of Christian charity. The development of organisations and bureaus in the fifteenth century was not carried as far as it is today, and for the excellent reason that the same demand for it did not exist. The cities were small, and it was possible to carry out the practice of individual relief with little fear of deception. Medieval European Christians, despite all the worldliness of the Renaissance culture, had space for charity and the acts of mercy

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[1]The Bull of Indiction, declaring the Year of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, meaning 'the Face of Mercy', number 2, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015; refer also Jeevadhara, A Journal for Socio-Religious Research, Vol.XLV, No,270, November 2015, Kottayam, 'The Face of Mercy' and the Face of the Poor, Reflections on the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, John Nellikunnel, pp. 7-21.

of the medieval Christians stand as a challenge even today to the true followers of Christ.

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