

1. Orientation in a changing and confused world

Stop judging

**WORKING DOCUMENT
FOR DISCUSSION**

Version
25/02/2024

Target groups & goals

This text aims to support digital missionaries so they can guide both themselves and others and provide more in-depth responses to questions and concerns from their followers on social media regarding the topic of ‘Do not judge’ Therefore, it is primarily directed towards individuals who carry out their evangelizing mission in digital media.

With these contents, it will be easier for them to substantiate their posts and communication pieces, navigate when they themselves are attacked, and avoid the risk of their followers engaging in dynamics of disqualification, defamation, or slander.

Thus, this document does not intend to be an exhaustive or academic treatise on Jesus’ commandment (“Do not judge”), but rather an inspiration, a practical and well-founded aid for everyday mission.

Overview

The daily habit of issuing disqualifying and negative judgments about others is unlike good Christians. It can be said that it simply is unbecoming for good people because it harms and does not build society.

On the contrary, it is desirable that each of us formulates our opinions and expresses them with humility and respect towards those who think differently from us. Constructive criticism, giving feedback, genuinely, fraternal correction, and prophetic denunciation are marked by respect and do contribute value and improve social coexistence.

Jesus of Nazareth clearly said: *“Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned”* (Lk 6:36-38). Canon law makes it very clear that slander and defamation are offenses in the Church. And Pope Francis has emphasized the enormous harm done by backbiting, gossip, and frivolous criticism, even worse if the intention is to directly harm someone.

However, the recent listening conducted in the Digital Synod shows that a significant percentage of people are distancing themselves from the Church because of the condemning judgments issued about them or close individuals, both by their representatives and by the faithful themselves.

The problem has dramatically worsened when these judgments are issued through social media, seriously affecting coexistence beyond religious beliefs. Serious and often irreparable harm is caused to individuals and organizations.

We start from the fact that it is inherent to human beings to have an opinion, that freedom of expression must be preserved, and to denounce injustice. Catholic digital missionaries have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to explain the problem to their followers, who represent society, so they can correct behaviors, illustrating and illustrating a valid path for the rest of the

Church.

The first step is to thoroughly understand the issue, its relevance, and **how to act, avoiding two erroneous extremes:**

- One assumes **the right to judge and exclude all those who supposedly do not practice** the doctrine (and thereby alienate many people from the Church).
- The other trying **not to judge and not to exclude**, and so thinking that **everything is possible**, and it doesn't matter (that is, that **doctrine is not relevant** or should be adapted to each person's circumstances).

Neither of these extremes is virtuous. No one knows the hearts of others, and we are all limited and sinners. At the same time, we are all called and challenged by the Good News of Jesus.

Sometimes **strong opinions** are expressed **regarding specific individuals**, with the intention of defending the truth in some of its aspects, perceiving it to be at risk. It is possible and desirable to expose the truth of doctrine, and everything can be expressed if done with charity and respect. Love for the Christian truth (the Truth being **the person of Christ**) always **entails charity** towards others as the highest criterion of action. And the humility to know that there are **different sensitivities and emphases** in presenting the truth of Christ, which none of us is capable of exhausting completely.

Although this study starts from Jesus' statement, **the need to combat destructive and disqualifying judgments** and criticisms **goes beyond Christianity**; it is largely consistent with other mainstream beliefs and ideologies, from virtually all cultural backgrounds, aspiring to a more peaceful world.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This document is the first in a series of contents aimed at contributing to addressing the major challenges of transformation faced by the Catholic Church, which emerged from the digital listening to the People of God during the Synod (2022). These are important topics that challenge both the Church as a whole and each Christian individually.

Many of these topics, such as “Not judging and forgiving”, go far beyond Christianity and the Catholic Church. They are key issues for the current world, regardless of belief, ideology, or geography. They are challenges for a better, more peaceful, and harmonious world and for better coexistence.

The topics were gathered from 110,000 responses to specific questions, using the collaborative intelligence platform Delibera, on the topics proposed by the Synod Secretariat, and 300,000 suggestions to one of its open questions: “Express three things you would ask of the Church to be closer to you”.

After a thorough analysis of the responses, the following infographic was created with a team of experts, which, in the form of a mosaic, synthesizes 16 major changes required for the renewal of the Church. These changes coincide 95% with those that emerged from the general Synod (Document for the Continental Stage - DEC). Changes in line with the transformation being driven by Pope Francis. Changes that would also, as yeast in the dough, help to a better and peaceful social coexistence.

16 challenges for the Catholic Church

Results of the Digital Synod

The Church is all of us
Join the change

imision.org

1.

**Guidance in a
changing and
confusing world**



2.

**Authenticity in
Christian behavior**



Christ as the
reference

Less judgment,
more forgiveness

Love and live
according to the
example set by Jesus

Respect towards the
different ways of
following Jesus

Address
controversial
issues (LGTBI,
immigrants...)

Clarity regarding
unjustifiable acts
(abuse, corruption...)

Serving the poor
and those in need

Caring for the
planet, treating
it as God's creation

Simple, humble,
and committed to
serving others

Open to listen to and
dialogue with society

More places to
encounter God

More and better
faith education

New profile and role
of clergy, laity and
women

Seeks out youth
and those who have
become distanced

Experiential and
illuminating masses

Search for God
in others and
yourself

3.

**Exemplary and brave
Church and
representatives**



4.

**More ways
to reach God**



SOURCE: Analyse of 300.000 change suggestions gathered through social media in the 5 continents



The purpose of these documents on the topics shown in the mosaic is to support digital missionaries – those who are currently reaching more people – to contribute to the renewal of the Church and to promote, as much as possible, a more harmonious global social coexistence.

The aim is to help them guide and provide well-founded responses to the concerns of their followers, who, due to their breadth and diversity, largely represent society, including those distant from Christianity...

These documents are developed through dialogue among the missionaries, their followers, and a committee of experts from various disciplines, languages, and geographical areas, using an effective Collaborative Intelligence [CI] methodology to gather, synthesize, and harmonize the views of the various types and areas of participants.

Based on these documents, content will be created in short, suitable, and carefully crafted formats for social media, thus providing the People of God with a visually appealing, simple, clear, and attractive but well-founded elaboration on the topics it raised for the Church to be more consistent with the Gospel, of which the People are not only a part but also must be protagonists.

The topic “Not judging” was selected first because 27% of the participants referred to it when indicating reasons for distancing themselves from the Church. Both experts and iMissionaries themselves consider this topic funda-

2. DESCRIPTION, SCOPE, AND RATIONALE OF THE TOPIC

2. Description, scope, and rationale of the topic

2A. Judgments addressed in this document

a. We refer to condemning judgments in a broad sense (from frivolous gossip, destructive criticisms, derogatory remarks, to insults and denigrating words, defamation, slander, and acts with the intention of harming or destroying) that people often express in their daily lives, violating the dignity of others, in the realms of their family, professional, and social lives. These judgments can be expressed directly and in person, or through media and social networks. They refer to acquaintances or strangers, family members, friends, politicians, artists, athletes, organizations, and institutions of all kinds, etc.

b. We will also focus on judgments issued, in one way or another, in the context of the Church – by any of its representatives or any of the faithful – regarding individuals and ecclesial entities. Many of the reasons alleged in the synodal listening phase for distancing oneself from the Church referred to the experience of feeling not so much welcomed and called to embark on a journey of faith, but rather rejected, condemned, unwelcome. Ultimately, feeling judged as individuals, or their friends or groups with whom they empathized or feel aligned.

- There will be **special focus** on judgments about individuals in **fragile or irregular family situations** (divorced and separated with new partners). Also frequent are those judgements about individuals with homosexual, transgender, etc., orientation or partners.
- The same occurs when someone speaks against individuals **considered less worthy due to economic, ethnic, or other social issues**.
- Not forgetting that many times the problem lies in **not defending the unjustly attacked person**, as Jesus always did.
- In all these cases, people's desire to return to the community was taken away when they encountered a closed door to what they somehow desired: to approach God, participate in the life of the Church, and be able to live in communion with the community.

c. This document **does not delve** into the analysis of **orchestrated and well-organized campaigns** by lobbies or opinion groups that carry out a struggle between blocks within and outside the Church. These campaigns, although painful and harmful, will be addressed in another document. We refer, therefore, to the strict scope of personal opinions and actions, often made without considering their impact, although they are actually harmful and degrading to the targeted objective and, by extension, also to the person who makes them.

d. Nor will we delve into how these condemning judgments damage **intimate coexistence**, especially when they become habitual, **whether in the couple**, between **parents and children**, or in the close family environment, which should be one of unconditional acceptance and daily forgiveness.

2.B. Need to act against these judgments

Although the harmful consequences of these judgments – detailed more extensively in section 4 of the document – already justify action on their own, there are two major additional facts that have led us to begin with this key topic within the mosaic of Church renewal:

1. The proliferation of social media has multiplied these judgments and their damages because they go viral and amplify, making their effects greater and often practically irreversible. The ease with which insults and derogatory remarks are made through these means, both within and outside the Church, creates an aggressive and tense atmosphere in society at large, directly harming individuals, sometimes very seriously. And this phenomenon is on the rise.

2. The judgments issued **against Catholic influencers** themselves, in the form of derogatory remarks, insults, and personal attacks, which are causing them sometimes very serious harm, limiting, or even **eliminating their work**. This is serious damage because digital mission is very necessary for the Church, as recognized in the Synod Assembly in October 2023. If they

are not protected, the Church risks losing a good portion of these new digital apostles.

2.C. The role of the Church in this situation

a. In coherence with Christ's mandate, the Church bears **Good News**, which is **the love of God** for the world. The primary role of missionaries is, therefore, to **share this Good News**, which challenges and **calls for conversion every one of us**.

b. This is the teaching dimension that the Church has in its evangelization, expressing its stance on moral issues. In other words, **the Church must judge everything, including itself, according to the Gospel**. It is the **prophetic dimension** to which it cannot renounce, and it somehow challenges all consciences.

c. The judgment of the Church is primarily **the judgment of Christ**, which is a judgment **centred on love for the Father** and for one's neighbour. Key elements include **recognizing the dignity of every person**, loving others in the manner of Jesus, exercising authority as service, and performing **works of mercy**. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, etc. (Mt 25). The ecclesial "judgment" should have the function of **awakening mercy**, helping to "have among ourselves the same attitude that Christ Jesus had" (Philippians 2:5), acting as 'other Christs'.

d. The judgment of the Church in the image of Christ is well reflected in the passage of the adulterous woman: "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more" (John 8:10-11). Christ's final word, not the first, is 'sin'. Therefore, **the function of Christians is to live the Gospel** and invite others to live it. This also implies that their **primary task is not to attack those who do not fulfill the precepts**, but to fulfill them and **defend the attacked individuals**: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone".

e. When the motivation to express oneself firmly in the media and on social

networks is **the intention to defend the truth**, it is important to note:

- **In society**, there are **many ways of understanding truth** (scientific, ideological, sporting, aesthetic...), and the Christian mission consists of **offering the Gospel with simplicity and clarity**.

- **For Christians**, the revealed Truth **is not an idea or statement** but a Person, **Christ**, the Love of God made man.

- And **none of us**, individually or collectively, **exhausts all dimensions of that Truth**, which is infinite. We neither fully understand it nor live it in all dimensions of our life. "The Word always surpasses us" (EG 146).

- Additionally, **there is an order or "hierarchy"** in the truths of Catholic doctrine, due to their **diverse connection with the foundation of the Christian faith**.

- This applies to both the dogmas of faith and to the entirety of the Church's teachings, and **even to moral instruction**.

- This was taught by **Saint Thomas Aquinas**. What matters above all is "*faith working through love*" (Galatians 5:6). **Works of love for one's neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation** of the inner grace of the Spirit: "*The primacy of the new law lies in the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested in faith working through love*" (EG 36,37).

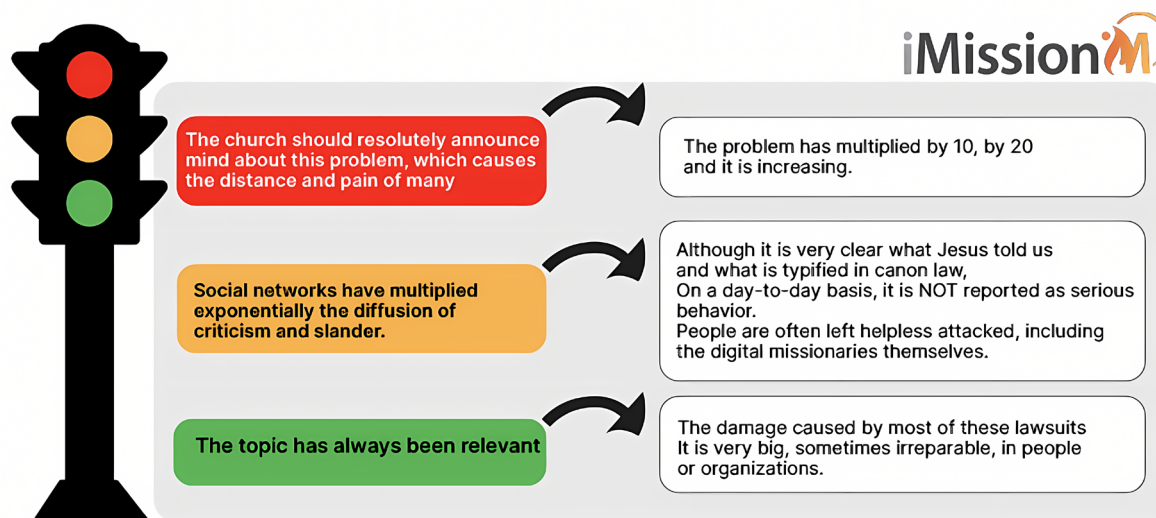
- Therefore, **we must be humble in pointing out to others what appear to us as errors**, and always the highest criterion for expressing oneself in defense of truth must be Charity.

- a. Based on all the above, the members of the Church must assume that we can and **should proclaim the revealed truth**, but that does **not imply condemning judgments** that do or can cause harm to others.

- b. "It is petty to dwell only on whether a person's actions conform to a general law or norm because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete existence of a human being" (Amoris Laetitia, 304).

c. The word of Christ **sets every person on a path of transformation; it does not compromise with evil.** In other words, when the Church “says *what the Gospel says*,” it **concerns all of us.**

d. The **truth of the Gospel** can be offered **without making people feel degraded, excluded, or rejected,** but rather **welcomed and invited** to progressively live according to the way of Jesus.



Furthermore:

- We are called to be bearers of the Good News par excellence. It is not consistent to constantly highlight the faults of others.
- Others will only recognize us as disciples of Jesus if we treat each other with love. Always. Even in **managing our differences.**

3. THE HUMAN DIMENSION: DISCERNMENT IS INHERENT TO HUMAN BEINGS

3. The human dimension: discernment is inherent to human beings

Discernment is a **crucial human capacity**. We **cannot avoid** having **evaluative opinions** about everything that is part of our lives.

Therefore, **one can and should have an opinion**; one can disagree with others and express it. We can **even feel aversion towards someone** and **distance ourselves** from certain individuals.

But **dissenting does not imply judging**, condemning, or hating, which is wishing harm upon another. If **hatred arises**, it can easily lead to words that harm or actions **that destroy**.

When speaking of “judging” someone, **both slander and defamation should be avoided**, as both are harmful:

Slander is a **false accusation** made maliciously **to cause harm**.

Defamation is **discrediting someone**, orally or in writing, **by publishing something against their good name**, reputation, and honour, even if no falsehoods are stated and it's not done with malicious intent.

When forming a personal judgment about someone:

One **cannot be frivolous** (superficial attitude of doing something **without being aware** of the **harm**, or without verifying the facts). **Frivolity** is the **trigger for many damages** inflicted on others, much more serious than one can imagine.

And in any case, **humility**: knowing that we **never have all the data to form a judgment**. Our knowledge of facts and people's motives is very limited.

There are **significant chances of being mistaken in judgment**, and moreover, we harm ourselves because we easily become slaves to our prejudices.

Each of us sees something that others do not see, as illustrated in the following table.



- Riskier still is to **move from judgment to sentencing, defining the degree of guilt** of a person **who often isn't even known**. And then it's easy to pronounce a sentence, which excludes the person and imposes a punishment or penalty: disqualification, exclusion, contempt.
- When this happens on social media, the attacked person may choose **to keep silent**, avoiding **giving more visibility** to the attackers; normally it depends on the seriousness of the attack content and the potential harm to followers.
- Often those who suffer the fiercest attacks are precisely the digital missionaries themselves. Because they are extraordinarily exposed (see annex for more detail).

- **Every public figure** exposes themselves to **judgments and disqualifications**, to having **haters**. In the case of **Christ's disciples**, he himself warned that **this would happen**: *"A servant is not greater than his master"* Mt 10:24, and the reality is that he was judged as *"a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of sinners"* Mt 11:19, *"acting with the power of Beelzebub"* Mt 12:24, and *"if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you"* Jn 15:18, *"in the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"* Jn 16:36.
- Being so exposed to the public environment **requires maturity, self-esteem, a lot of prayer, and humility**.
- Sometimes, however, it is necessary to defend oneself.
- But in **any case**, one **does not defend oneself by attacking**, which would make us enter the same dynamics and behaviour that **we reject**, but by **dismantling the arguments** that **support the unjust accusations** one by one. And if possible, dismantling them with **"healthy irony"**.
- Something we should try to avoid is interrupting communication with the other. "Ex-communication," which is nothing other than the canonical sentence of communication, of excluding the other from the community, is something that should not be in our repertoire of habitual behaviours. It is not for us, Christians, and ordinary members of the Church, to decree or apply it. And yet it is done a lot with irresponsible frivolity.

4. RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS TODAY

4. Relevant implications today

Condemnatory judgments issued or shared can **destroy individuals, families, reputations**, etc., causing much sterile and unjust suffering.

The ease and frivolity with which people forward or repeat personal disqualifications (whether slander or defamation) can lead to irreversible damage to the reputation, family, social, and professional relationships of the accused. They **harm the person who issues them because it feeds their personal inconsistency**, dilutes the essential **exercise of responsibility**, and creates a destructive inner climate towards others, directly and negatively affecting the one who fosters it. All of this contributes to the generation of an atmosphere of aggressiveness even in environments called Catholic. This is **completely contrary to the spirit of the Gospel**. And when expressed on social media, their ability to cause harm is **greatly increased**.

4.A. “Consequences matrix” of judgments

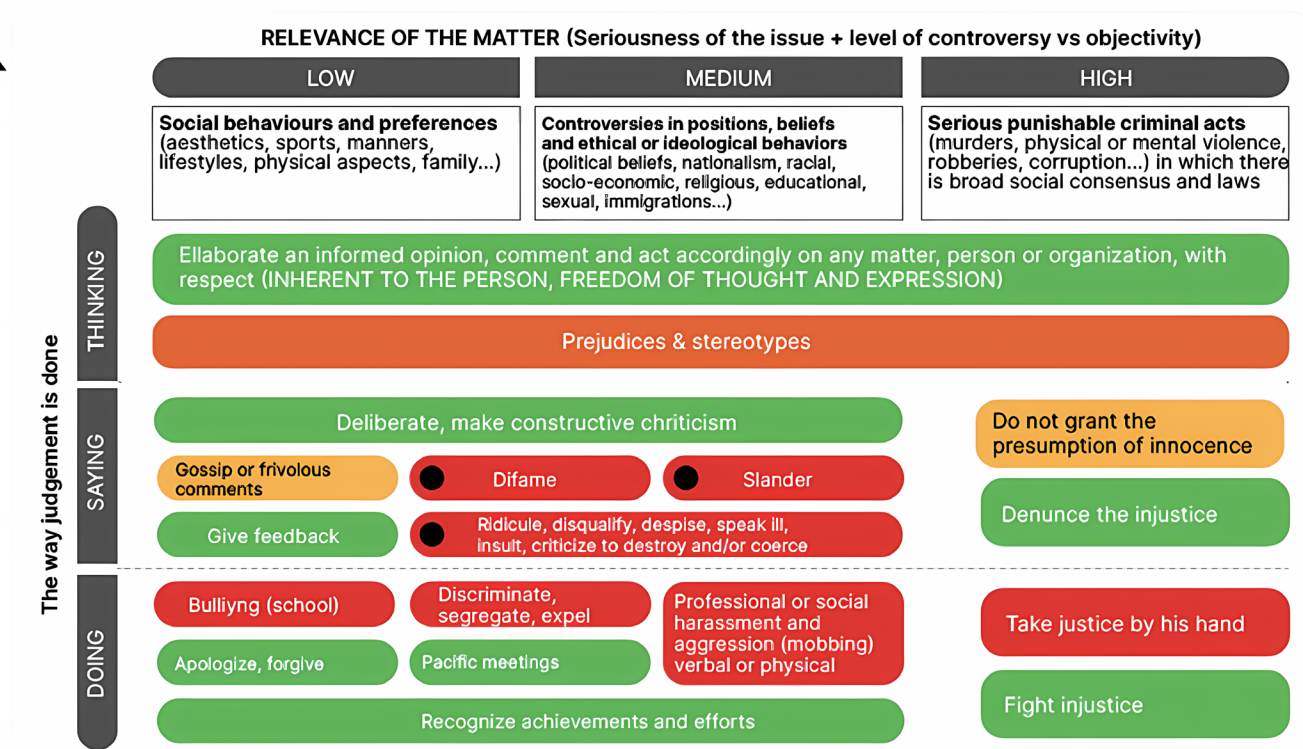
Hereby is our “*Matrix of the consequences of the judgements*”, To analyse, understanding in greater detail the judgements and their effects.



- Very serious damage
- Serious damage
- Medium damage
- Positive effect

● It can be a crime in the Church and carry canonical penalties

CONSEQUENCES MATRIX WHEN PEOPLE JUDGE THE OTHERS



The **horizontal axis** of the matrix indicates the **objective severity** of the facts or behaviours upon which **judgments are made**. From **trivial differences** in aesthetic or sports preferences to **criminal actions pursued by most legislations**.

The **vertical axis** indicates the **forms of expression of these judgments**: from individual thought through public expression in words to the actions generated by those judgments.

The **typology and importance** of the consequences are **expressed in colors**:

a) In green, the **positive effects** of the **human capacity to think and express opinions**. Necessary and the responsibility of all. The entire green background of the matrix implies a **huge constructive field** in individual thought, free and respectful expression of opinions, and peaceful and creative actions, consistent with our opinions.

In this situation, what can be asked of individuals and the media is to think before expressing opinions and to respect those with different opinions.

b) **In yellow**, judgments about **minor matters for peaceful coexistence**, which are expressed with **unconsciousness and frivolity**. Here, harm to third parties exists, although not serious. The problem is that sometimes they escalate to aggression. A spark is lit, and a fire is provoked. These are seemingly trivial issues such as denigrating followers of different sports clubs, or viciously criticizing a specific aesthetic in dress, or the places chosen for eating or vacationing...

Also, in yellow is the easy blaming of people accused of a crime, without giving room for the **presumption of innocence**.

In this case, what we can ask of people is to inform themselves, think more, and judge much less. And when it comes to people accused of crimes, maintain the presumption of innocence and a tone of respect, while also demanding action from the justice system.

c) **In orange, prejudices, and stereotypes**, originated in thought but fuelled by **judgments expressed by others. Thought sets our inner climate**, and cultivating prejudices and stereotypes **impoverishes us**, making it difficult to **understand the nuances** of human reality, which is **always more complex** than **simplifications**.

Thought and speech are deeply linked. Hence the seriousness of stereotypes, as they easily manifest in words and lead to disqualifications, defamation, etc. In this case, what we can ask of individuals and the media is to avoid labelling

people, not to echo prejudices, and not to spread unfounded rumours (the so-called “fake news”).

d) **In red**, the words and actions that cause **very serious harm** to many people or that generate division and violence, affecting coexistence and tearing apart the social fabric. This includes all the damage resulting from criticizing, disqualifying a person or organization for any kind of disagreement: sports, political, or ethical choices (economic, social, sexual, familial), etc. In this section lies the reality of bullying or harassment (school or professional) against individuals who have difficulty reacting or defending themselves.

These are the cases where the greatest problem lies. Due to their prevalence—almost everyone can be a victim, but also a generator of these judgments—they have an escalating effect. And in the Church, both slander and defamation are considered crimes and can incur canonical penalties. Here, what we can ask of individuals and the media is to be humble, admitting that they do not know everything about others, and they themselves make mistakes and misjudgements.

4.B. Importance of the channel and the number and typology of people involved

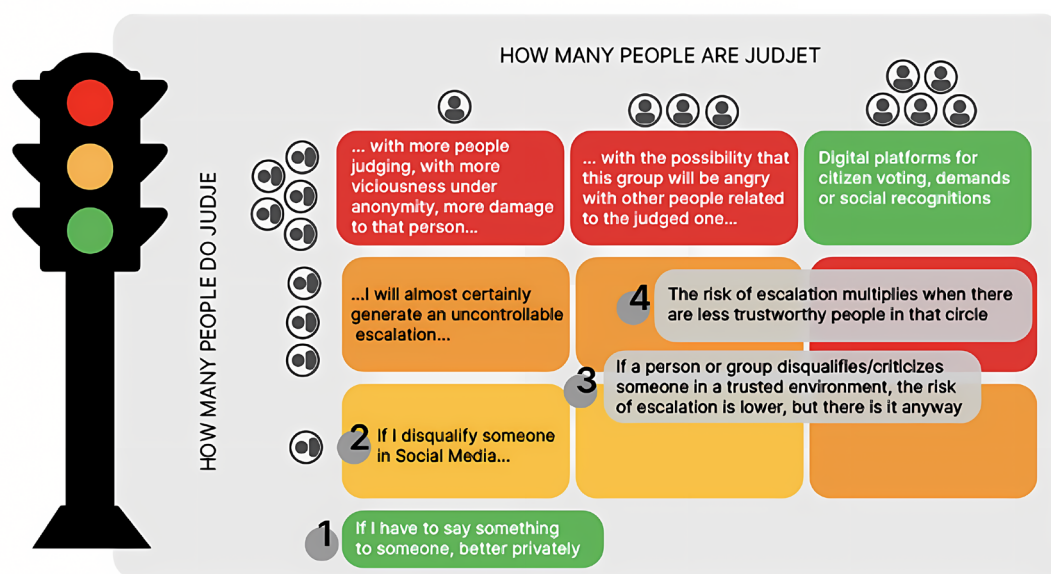
It is not the same if we criticize someone in a confidence environment, or when we do it on social media or in another public forum. The damage is not the same when you are attacked by a single person as when you are attacked by many.

In general, the more people join the judgment, the greater the consequence, whether in the form of harm or benefit (when the judgment is timely and well-executed). Vertical axis of the chart. It is also a fact that the more people are judged, the greater the harm. Horizontal axis of the chart. From here, it is advisable to keep in mind, without pretending to be exhaustive, that:

1. If I must tell someone something, it's better to do it privately, face-to-face instead of in writing, if possible, so they can explain themselves. In fact, telling each other things, with politeness and a constructive spirit, is necessary for understanding each other.
2. If one judges someone on social media, it easily escalates and multiplies. More people join in, with more cruelty under the cloak of anonymity and distance, feeding off each other, and paving the way to judge others like the initially judged. We must be very careful with the escalation that can arise from our words. That's why judgments issued on social media are more serious.
3. When one judges someone or many in a trusted environment, there is always some risk of escalation.
4. This risk increases the more strangers hear it. For example, we must be careful with what is said at a table during a meal, at a party; if there are strangers present, trying to make ourselves interesting. Moreover, they may take it to social media.
5. On the contrary, there are digital platforms for citizen voting, for social claims or recognitions, which are very civilized and respectful channels for expressing opinions. Just like comments on blogs or digital newspapers, when expressed with civility.

In no case does this imply that, with people of utmost trust and in private forums, we cannot express ourselves freely, because the risk of escalation is infinitely lower. But let us remember that judgment and harsh criticism can hurt people, no matter how well-known and beloved they may be, even if they are not the subject of the criticism. Simply put, it hurts to hear others speak in such a manner.

The table presented below summarizes the **dimensions to take into account** when understanding the consequences of the trials. The effect changes greatly depending on **who you say it to, by what means, and how the judgment can escalate**

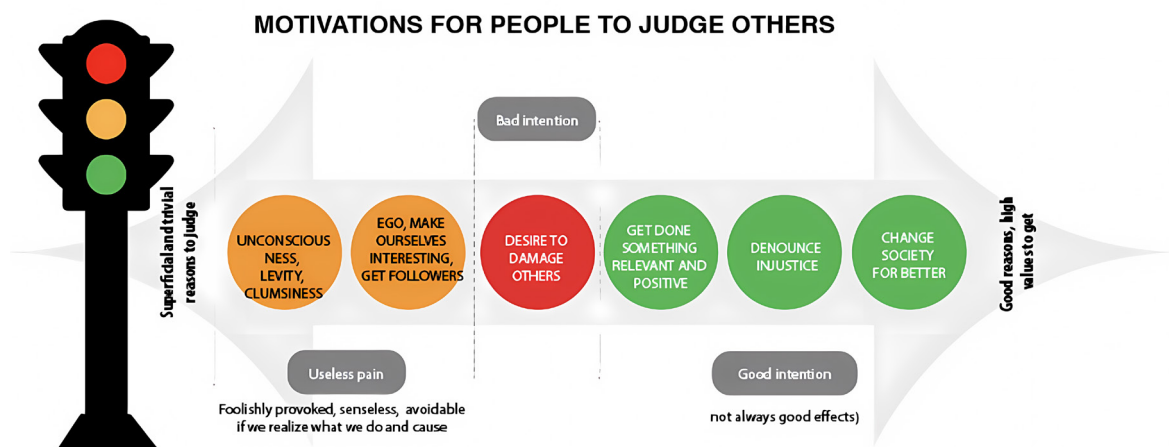


The effect changes depending on who you say it to, by what means, and how the judgment can escalate.

4.C. Motivations for judging

To fully understand these judgments, it is interesting to reflect on the **main reasons that lead us to issue them**. It can be enough to be aware of **how little we earn** in expressing them and how deep the damage they cause.

The following diagram summarizes the **motivations behind these judgments** in a form of scale. At one extreme, the **banal or selfish ones** that make more evident the possibility of causing stupid pain, **avoidable pain**, which has no justification and does not bear fruit in anything. And at the other extreme, those that are issued with the **best intention, to try to change and improve**



5. WHAT JESUS SAID, THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE CHURCH

5. What Jesus said, the New Testament, the Church

5. A. The Gospel and other NT texts

Jesus said « Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven; Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. » (Lk 6, 36-38)

« Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye ». (Mt 7, 1-5).

En estos dos textos Jesús nos invita a ser semejantes al Padre en nuestro modo de apreciar o valorar a las personas. Sin ingenuidades, pero sin dureza. No siendo más benevolentes con nosotros mismos que con los demás, sino benevolentes con todos, pues todos fallamos.

In these two texts, Jesus invites us to be like the Father in our way of appreciating or valuing people. Without naivety, but without harshness. Not being more benevolent with ourselves than with others, but benevolent with all, since we all fall short.

Also St. Paul the Apostle expresses in his Letter to Romans:

« Therefore, you are without excuse, a every one of you who passes judgment. For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things. » (Rm 2,1).

And the letter of James is a genuine treatise on how and why to master language and avoid slander.:

(...) The tongue is also a fire. It exists among our members as a world of malice, defiling the whole body and setting the entire course of our lives on fire, itself set on fire by Gehenna. (...) It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God. (...). Do not speak evil of one another, brothers. Whoever speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. » (Jm 3, 5-10 – 4,11).

5. B. Social context of the commandment “Stop judging”

- In the society of Jesus’ time, the entire populace lived under the criteria of the Law and countless precepts. The fulfilment or non-fulfilment of those precepts determined the social consideration and esteem toward individuals.
- Judging someone as “**sinful**” or **impure** implied that they **did not have God’s favour** and deserved to be **ostracized from society**.
- **The judgment** of the “**pure**” (those who adhered to the Law) **excluded those considered sinners** or impure without hearing their reasons, **condemning them without giving them a chance**. It was labelling them and locking them into a negative category without the possibility of escape.
- **Jesus himself was judged** and condemned without foundation. The Christian community that writes the Gospels had a **keen awareness of this**.
- And he was condemned, in part, **because he completely changed the way of approaching people considered “sinful”**. He **approaches them**, welcomes them, invites them to integrate. He highlights how the Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good” (Mt. 5:45) and asks his followers to act likewise.
- At the same time, he **does not hide the criteria** that **will be used** when God himself – the only one who can judge – **will judge people** at the end of life: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you

from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink...” (Mt 25:31-46)

5. C. Distinctions between prophetic voice, fraternal correction, and condemnatory judgments

- - Ceasing to judge **does not mean** ceasing to be **critical of evil**, nor is it being indifferent to it, failing to denounce it (prophetic voice) or failing to point it out with charity to the brother (fraternal correction) or ignoring the victims.
- - Jesus himself was **very severe** - with **prophetic words** - toward the scribes and leaders of God’s people, who **placed heavy burdens** on the shoulders of others (“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...” Mt 23:23-39) and toward the merchants of the Temple (Jn 2:13-22).
- - When Jesus says, “stop judging,” he **does not refer to the prophetic word**, which he himself applies at times, but to the **condemnatory expression** about **one’s neighbor** that **disqualifies and excludes** them, that causes harm. He refers to the judgment of one who puts themselves in God’s place, **distorts reality**, and often bases it on prejudice.
- Externally, **condemnatory judgment** and **prophetic speech** may **appear similar**. But they are different in their motivation and their objective.
- - **Motivation:** Not everyone who criticizes is a prophet. Prophets speak because they have first listened to God. They are based on mystical experience. Their starting point is listening and silence; they have allowed themselves to be questioned by God. They may speak harsh words, but their life is prophetic (consistent with what

they proclaim). The ultimate motivation is the love of God. They do not speak from ideologies, personal interests, resentments, envy, or a desire to harm. Likewise, they speak from humility, not from the arrogance of one who claims the vision of the just.

- - **Objective:** Those who prophesy desire to inspire reflection, provoke change. To enable the person to open to the truth of God. Without naivety, they are guided by hope, the desire for salvation for all people.
- Harsh words, in the case of condemnatory judgment, **enclose the person** in a **negative situation**. In the case of **prophecy**, they are a **loving call to conversion**. They must always be justified by the need to awaken the conscience of the one to whom they are addressed and never express contempt or a desire to humiliate the other.
- In the question of **whether** it is possible for us to **condemn the act and accept the sinners**:
 - It is undeniable that **actions shape the person**, and the **person is reflected in their actions**.
 - Therefore, it is very **difficult to separate** the action from the one who performs it, and even more difficult is to reject the wrongdoing and show compassion for the person who has committed it.
 - But **any person** can **reflect** on their actions and try **to change their behaviour**, repent, and improve.
 - And the **purpose of forgiveness** is precisely **to free the person from the burden of their bad actions** and thus help them to start being better.
 - This begins to happen when **the person stops engaging in wrongful actions**, when they open to a different way of living, repent, or ask for forgiveness. Then they distance themselves from their actions and their inherent goodness emerges.
 - People **can change if they are willing to do so**. At that moment, it is necessary to be willing to welcome them.
 - “Moreover, although there are situations that are not morally acceptable from an objective point of view, pastoral charity requires us not to

simply label other people as ‘sinners’ whose guilt or responsibility may be mitigated by various factors that influence subjective imputability” (Pope Francis, response to the Dubia, October 2, 2023).

- - **It is not necessary to demand repentance** beforehand to start talking with people who may have committed wrongs; repentance and **forgiveness can be the result of that dialogue.**
- **Fraternal correction**, on the other hand, implies that **within the community and first individually, one person expresses to another the need for a change** or points out an error. If necessary, it will then be done between two or more people. The attitude that Pope Francis asks for in this action is one of “*gentleness, prudence, humility, and attention towards the one who has committed a fault, avoiding that words can hurt and kill the brother. (...) When I speak badly, when I make an unfair criticism (...) with my tongue, this is killing the other’s reputation. Words can also kill.*” (Angelus, September 8, 2014).
- A discrediting judgment made in public and even less on social media can never be called “fraternal correction.”

5. D. Theological aspects

- Every time we judge, we tend to **project an image of a ‘god in our own likeness,’** not the image of God of Jesus. We are projecting our religious reality more than our belief, which makes us move between norms and laws, supposedly giving us security that we do not question.
- Spiritual people **do not judge by denigrating** but by **bearing witness**. We must **love more, and judge less**. In this world that favors the tendency to polarization, the possibility of **gestures of love, affection, kindness, and mercy** towards people of any condition are already acts of correction that avoid the merciless judgment that achieves nothing.
- **Judgment without charity is bad;** a judgment that only seeks to impose a way of seeing is bad; a judgment that reproaches something about a person without knowing them is bad; judgment expressed as gossip is bad; a judgment that does not observe, that does not maintain objectivity, is bad.

- To not judge, it is best to **experience an encounter with Christ**.
- **Mysticism** is that encounter with the **resurrected Christ** that **transforms life** and makes us look at everything differently.
- And we will experience that not judging is accepting disagreement as part of who we are; not judging is waiting, **giving another chance**, before responding or acting.
- Not judging is putting oneself in the other's place and thinking how I judge (or excuse) myself in a similar situation, **accepting the limitations** of others... It is being more humbly self-critical and also with love.
- Judging with **clear eyes** as a possibility of conversion is good because it is an opportunity for an encounter.
- Hence, it is necessary to do **theology "with open eyes"** to illuminate the reality of our time. In the mysticism of open eyes, we discover that not judging helps us advance in the process of **forgiveness and reconciliation** for the harm caused by judging lightly.
- Two examples of "theology with open eyes" were the German theologian **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, and the Carmelite priest **Saint Titus Brandsma**, who **judged Nazism** and the moral responsibility of those who created, supported, and expanded it, and both paid for that denunciation with their lives.
- Their judgment **was not about the people themselves**, but about **acts that were demonic** because of their **consequences**. In this case, **judgment is valid** because it **teaches a correct direction**, helps others to build a righteous conscience, even those who acted wrongly if they had wanted to listen.
- Bonhoeffer's judgment, although it might not seem so due to his extremely direct way of writing, was filled with love, affection, kindness, and mercy towards those he was helping to think and make decisions.
- As Christians, the responsibility of faith is to remember the **Christian hope**, which does not submit to a world subject to frequently **inhuman powers** and the excessive 'ego-ism' that leads us to **exert the abuse over others**, causing all other kinds of abuses: the **abuse of power**.

5. E. Pastoral aspects

- It's important to believe in **the potential for change** that every human being possesses. It must be acknowledged that at times this change **may seem difficult or even impossible**. But before reaching that conclusion, a **scrupulous**

path of deep knowledge of the life and soul of the individual is necessary. And this **is never within reach** of an external or **circumstantial commentator**.

- The **harm** that humans inadvertently cause each other often **arises from frivolity**, ignorance (knowledge bias), and **fear**. We must try to **overcome this ignorance** and help overcome this fear, although there are cases where ignorance is insurmountable or wilful, so a **change in the person would not then be expected**.

- **Condemnatory judgment divides**, separates, excludes because it refers to the Law: Do you comply? **You're in**. Don't you comply? **You're out**.

- The logic of **merciful love is different**. It does not lead to exclusion, but to the personal invitation to leave behind what destroys us and separates us from God and each other. But the person must take the **voluntary step of following this invitation**.

- A key issue here is **accepting** that human beings can **generate dynamics of freedom**. The more one knows oneself, the better one understands why one acts and can choose based on criteria of reality.

- The Christian view of human freedom acknowledges the paradox **of being able to choose evil over good**. But **freedom will always be limited** because self-awareness is never absolute, and actions are the result of many internal and external factors. We can do good or do harm. Part of our **imperfection** lies in **being able to do evil**, with greater or lesser awareness of it. This does not absolve personal responsibility for the harm done.

- **Frivolity is issuing** or repeating **condemnatory judgments about people** without foundation or **considering the harm** that may be caused, evading one's own responsibility. It is a problem both within and outside of social media.

- **Frivolity** often produces harm, an "unnecessary," sterile, **avoidable pain** that we inflict on each other when we could choose not to.

- Therefore, in everyday life and in our human relationships, we **cannot be frivolous** or condone evil. We must always recognize it, point it out, and avoid it.

- However, the person who commits evil is a subject with a history, circumstances. **They can and should be asked to take responsibility** for their words and actions. But **mercy urges** us to **invite them to conversion**, to appeal to their possibility of change, without this implying a reduction of their responsibility for the consequences of their actions. (We are not referring here to

large-scale genocides, or the evil done by the great powers of this world, often hidden and anonymous; this topic must also be addressed separately).

- The sense of mercy is to **trust in the possibility of change in a person**, especially when they can recognize the harm they have done. Mercy towards someone who has done something wrong is the response that, as we said, does not invalidate the call for accountability, but it does put in parentheses the establishment, decreeing, or demanding of these responsibilities by us. This is a task for legitimate judges. In our daily lives, we should never appoint ourselves as judges of others.

- -Mercy implies **accepting the freedom** of individuals, calling them to do good, and in any case, rolling up our sleeves, along with all those who want to, to repair the damage caused by the misuse of freedom by some.

- **-Without naivety:** the Christian attitude does not require denying conflict or assuming that the “right solution” is always known.

5. F. Magisterium

Pope Francis, Angelus 16-02-2014:

« When we say that a person has the tongue of a snake, what does that mean? That their words kill! Not only is it wrong to take the life of another, but it is also wrong to bestow the poison of anger upon him, strike him with slander, and speak ill of him.

This brings us to gossip: gossip can also kill, because it kills the reputation of the person! It is so terrible to gossip! At first it may seem like a nice thing, even amusing, like enjoying a candy. But in the end, it fills the heart with bitterness, and even poisons us».

Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 296-297:

« There is a need “to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations” and “to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition”. It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” mercy. No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel. »

5. G. Catechism of the Catholic Church N. 1861

“However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.”

5. H. Code of Canon Law (Canon 220)

“No one is permitted to harm illegitimately the good reputation which a person possesses nor to injure the right of any person to protect his or her own privacy”.

“The illegitimate injury to good reputation must therefore be considered not only a very serious unlawful conduct against a natural right of the individual but also against a fundamental right of the faithful. It can be asserted, unequivocally and unambiguously, that every Christian faithful has the right to have their honour and good reputation protected within the Church.”. (Comment from Francisco J. Campos Martínez).

6. LINES OF ACTION AND POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES

6. Lines of action and possible objectives

6. A. The Church must be a sign of unity and fraternity

- a. The Church has the **obligation** to **offer its opinion**, shedding the light of the Gospel on **all aspects of human life**. Its task is to **proclaim the Good News** of Christ, calling us all to conversion.
- b. Therefore, with its profound understanding of the human heart, **it has always regarded defamation and slander as serious offenses against charity**, thus even considering **canonical penalties** for these offenses, which are so far removed from the authentic experience of the Gospel and cause so much harm on various levels.
- c. This entails **urging ministers** and representatives to carefully **guard their judgments**. Love for Christ involves **always expressing the truth** with **charity** and in appropriate settings.
- d. It also means **protecting individuals** who are under attack, with a **special sensitivity** towards **digital missionaries** who are highly exposed on social media.
- e. Provide **clear guidance** on **controversial issues**.
- f. Maintain a **prophetic attitude**, always with charity towards individuals.
- g. Educate the faithful (and people of good will) to **reflect before passing judgment** on someone.
- h. In a polarized and divided society, it is the **Church's vocation to be a sign of unity**, not uniformity.
- i. It is normal for there to be **diversity among Catholics** regarding which issues are prioritized in following Jesus. **Dissent** may exist **regarding the emphasis placed on various aspects** of Truth, **yet communion can still be maintained**. We must teach to listen, understand, and deliberate.
- j. But maintaining **unity on essential matters**, **good humour**, and **respect** for individuals.

6. B. The faithful

- a. As important as not defaming or slandering is **to express opinions with respect** and contribute to the construction of a more harmonious and supportive society.
- b. **Abandon frivolity** and **take responsibility** for your words in all areas.
- c. Actively **promote respect** and constructive criticism.
- d. Seriously consider, **before expressing** them, the **negative criticisms** we make about people and institutions.
- e. **Avoid frivolously discrediting** or insulting people, especially if done through social media.
- f. **This does not mean that we cannot disagree and express our opinion** on important issues for social coexistence such as political and religious stances (right vs left, immigration, sexuality...). In fact, we should! But **always trying to understand** the context, respecting each person, even if **they have different points of view**.
- g. Our obligation to **denounce injustice** is also not eliminated, although always with caution and the **presumption of innocence**.
- h. Let's **not say anything** about someone that we **wouldn't say in front of that person**.
- i. It's **better to ask** than to **assert**.
- j. **Publicly defend** those who are being unjustly attacked, especially **on social media**.

6. C. The Digital Missionaries

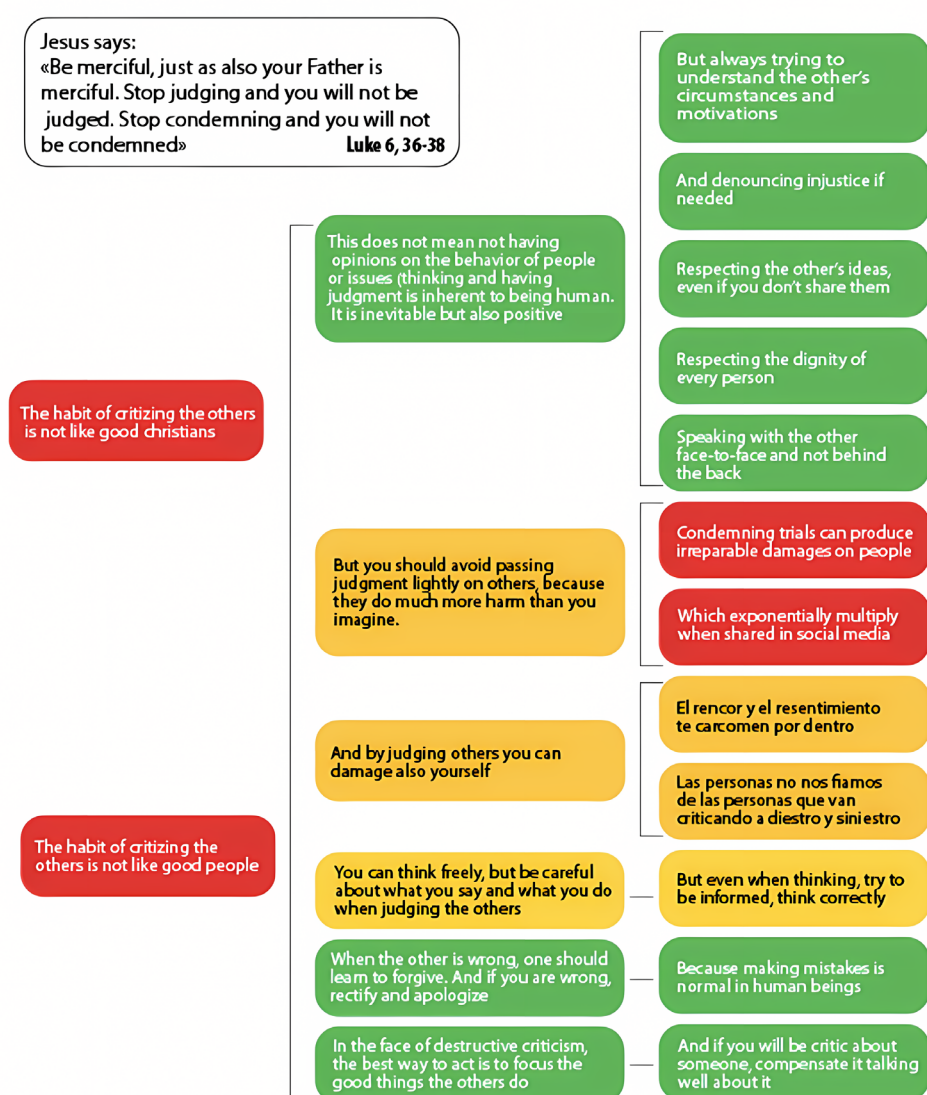
- a. **Be exemplary** in respecting people.
- b. Show **unity and harmony** with **other digital missionaries**, with all their different ecclesial sensitivities and types of apostolates.
- c. Train your followers in this way of managing differences and disagreements.
- d. **Dedicate time and posts** so that followers become **aware of the seriousness** of the **frivolous judgements** and suggest changes in their behaviours, prioritizing the issue in their content.
- e. **Protect yourself from attacks**, know how to prevent them and manage them (see Annex)

7. MAP OF MESSAGES AND GENERAL INFOGRAPHIC

7. Map of messages and general infographic

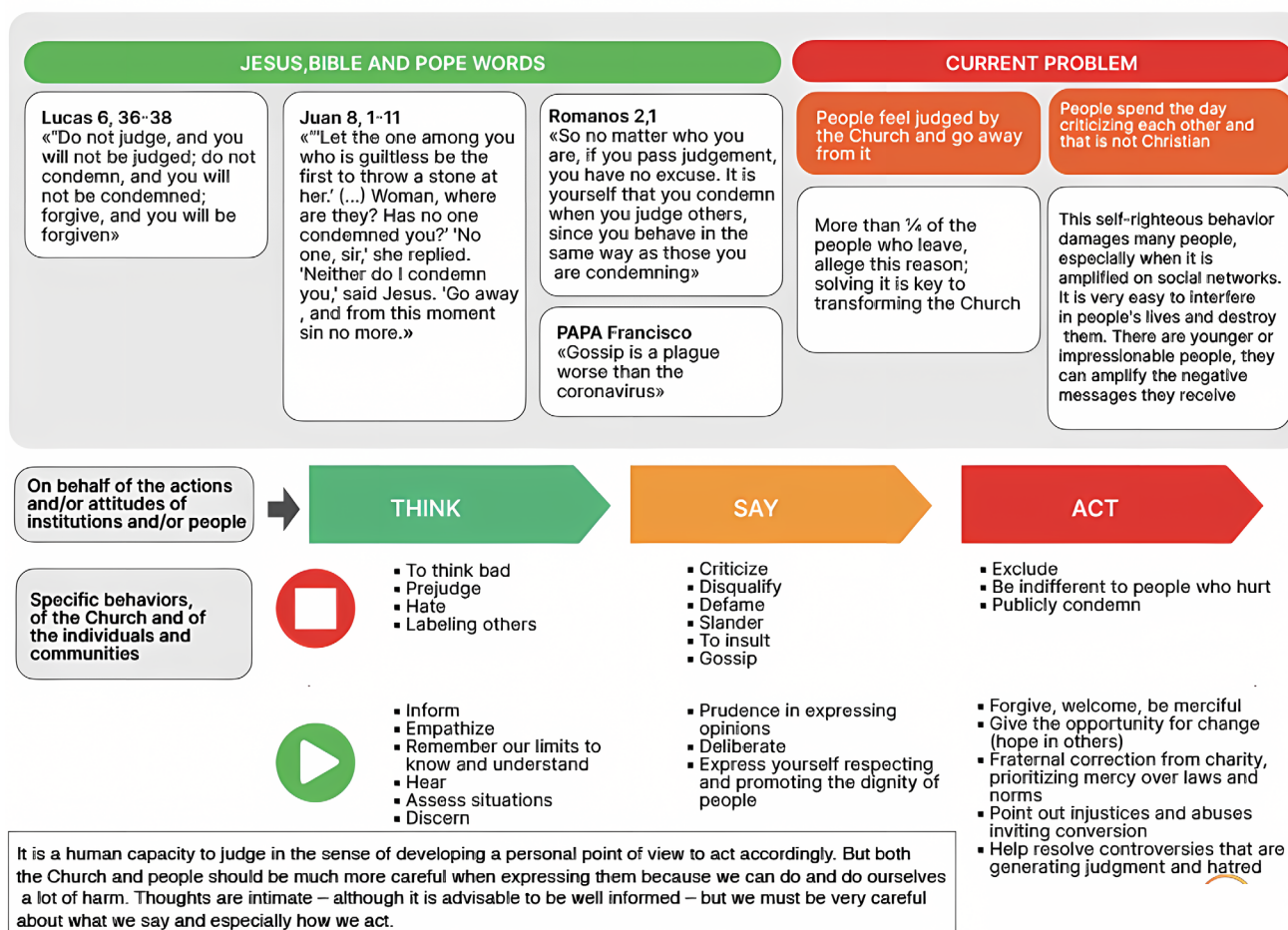
The following table presents a preliminary and indicative list of suggested messages to be communicated by digital missionaries, to live and transmit knowledge, principles and values with specific behaviours that they would later develop, explaining in detail, in interaction with their followers.

MAP OF THE MESSAGES TO COMMUNICATE



Social behaviours and preferences
(aesthetics, sports, manners, lifestyles, physical aspects, family...)

Finally, as a summary of the arguments discussed in this document, a preliminary general infographic.



8. NEXT STEPS

8. Next steps

- a) Review the document with more experts and people from the Church, from society, from different ages, professions, geographies, sensitivities and beliefs and ideologies.
- b) Present the document to more Catholic digital missionaries and collect their input.
- c) Generate a two-session training so that digital missionaries can delve deeper into this topic and reflect on how to communicate/dialogue it with their followers.
- d) Create the base audio-visual elements for RRSS.
- e) Start communicating on social media.
- f) Review the contents with the reactions of God's people.
- g) Re-adjust document and audio-visual content.
- h) Broader communication in a larger event.

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Annex 1: Facing Attacks Against Digital Missionaries

Framework of understanding and action proposed by iMission based on a dialogue with Father James Martin SJ.

Context:

- Any person exposed to public visibility (sports, entertainment, politics, science, religion...) will suffer virulent attacks and criticisms; this is a reality that must be accepted.
- In social media, where everything is recorded, it is very easy to take a phrase and take it out of context. And it is also very easy to dwell on a mistake made, because it is human to err. If everything we say were recorded, no one would be spared.
- In the case of digital missionaries, let us remember that Jesus himself promised his disciples that if they followed him, they would be rejected and attacked, even by those closest to them. It should not surprise us.
- But fierce criticism has intensified in our society, which is becoming increasingly polarized. Extremisms have simplified the view of reality, and people see the world in black and white, without nuances.
- Analysis and reasoning are scarce, and emotion is the preferred criterion.
- Social media platforms are fertile ground for this radicalization, due to:
 - Algorithms enhancing the confinement in bubbles of mental convergence.
 - The speed to react and share (easy viralisation of content), in relation to the rest of the media ecosystem.
 - The thirst for visibility and likes by many.
- Anyone who, in this context, seeks to provide nuances, reasoning, analysis, will face serious difficulties.

The Church, also in risk of polarization

Pope Francis is leading the Church in continuity with the line of the Second Vatican Council: **maturity of the laity, co-responsibility in the mission**, discernment, and co-responsible freedom (synodality), an open, close, and dialoguing Church with society.

There are tensions in many sectors of the Church regarding the ways in which this model is concretized. There is fear that the sacred and supernatural dimension of Christ's message may blur. Others fear that the push for greater co-responsibility may lead to democratic forms alien to obedience to the Holy Spirit, or the deterioration of the hierarchical structure of the Church.

There have always been within the Church **different ways of understanding** how to be faithful to the message of the Gospel and obedient to the Holy Spirit.

To **these natural differences** are added a **wide variety of charisms, diverse sensibilities, and emphasis on some aspects of following Christ**: some are more inclined to care for liturgical life; others, contemplation, and silence; others, education, or service to the disadvantaged; many movements deepen and promote issues related to family and life, others care for the sick, some focus on science, communication, sacred art...

Sometimes, faithful or representatives of some charisms **may intensify their tones of expression**, and in a polarized environment, **they can easily fall into negative judgments about people with other sensitivities**.

It is necessary to **insist that no individual or ecclesial group exhausts the richness of Christ's message** and life, and **mutual criticism** for this reason **sterilizes the Church's testimony of unity**. Only **together and in unity** in the fundamental aspects, in unity with the Pope, can we **reflect the face of Christ**.

On the other hand, within the cultural environment of our society, there are powerful lobbies that act co-ordinately on social media to publicly attack the Pope, amplified by the media at their disposal.

Additionally, there are individuals who, often anonymously, act with impunity on social media.

Most of those attacked do not respond and continue their work.

Negative consequences of the attacks:

- o The personal suffering of each missionary, which many are willing to face, but it drains their energy and discourages some from continuing.
- o The doubts sown among those close to the missionary.
- o The confusion of the simple-minded and of people who would embark on the mission but are bewildered by conflicting models within Catholicism.
- o The “normalization” of attacking others in the name of faith, which “creates a culture” contrary to the Gospel.

iMission's approach:

- o iMission lives in unity with Pope Francis, with the Second Vatican Council, with respect for nuances and ways of following Christ, always in fidelity to the deposit of faith.
- o Embracing the complexity of the world without simplifications, harmonizing faith and reason.
- o Focused on people and their well-being.
- o Listening, dialoguing, and welcoming people in their diversities, with openness and mercy.
- o Supporting together those who are unjustly attacked in this way.

Attacks: prevent, manage and counter

Preventing

- Prioritizing messages, images, and content of the highest evangelizing value.
- Choosing the pace of messages that may provoke attacks wisely.
- Selecting the tone and communication style, which is not that of intimacy

but of the masses. (Jesus spoke differently to people, according to their openness to the message and their love for Him. He spoke to the crowds in parables to arouse their interest and desire to approach and understand more. He revealed His intimacy only to those who welcomed His message).

Managing

- When insulted, do not let those words enter your heart. They are not the word of God; they should not enter your soul.
- Do not expect approval from everyone. You will never have it.
- Think carefully about whom you respond to. Do not waste energy on responding to people who only want to fight. Shake the dust off your shoes.
- Always respond with charity and move forward with the peace of knowing you are doing what is right.
- Using technical means, such as muting or blocking bots and haters.
- Through prayer, silence, and trust in Christ, who first endured that same misunderstanding.
- With as much emotional resilience as possible, knowing that many of these attacks are currently inevitable and unfounded.
- With support from close people, expressing and releasing the pain felt, relying on those who love us most.
- It may happen that people's anguish, their loneliness, make them only able to address you with an insult. Insults and aggressions, labels, could be turned into an opportunity to start a dialogue.

Countering

- Through prayer and deepening the relationship with God, not only individually but also communally.
- Through campaigns such as "Do not judge and forgive" for respect on social media or one about the joy of living the Gospel and following Jesus.
- Exercising practical and daily pedagogy of dialogue with people who think differently.

Annex 2: Concordances with other beliefs and ideologies (preliminary, to be studied)

There are **numerous ethical codes** proposed by **those beliefs and ideologies that seek to improve human coexistence**. Many of them agree on preventing hasty judgments, violent words, and insulting others.

We must say that these codes are often **more applauded than lived in practice**. But it is important to detect **to what extent there is agreement** on this issue of “**Not judging**.”

In **Christian churches and communities** (Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed - Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Methodist, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, etc.), **there is a warning against negative judgment towards others**, mainly based on the text of Matthew 7:1 and the Letter of James. The reference to the Gospel is **common to all of them**.

In the **Jewish tradition**, there is a teaching to **avoid hasty judgment and “las-hon hara” (speaking ill of others)**. The Talmud, a collection of rabbinic teachings and comments, emphasizes the importance of understanding before passing judgment. A fundamental principle is “dan l’kaf z’chut,” which means “giving the benefit of the doubt.” Jews are encouraged to interpret the actions of others in the most favourable way possible. Hasidism (a movement within Judaism) emphasizes the importance of understanding and compassion towards others. The principle of “Ayin Tova” or “good eye” encourages seeing others with a benevolent and positive outlook.

Islam has **various traditions**, but in them, the teaching of not judging and forgiving is also fundamental, **found in various surahs of the Quran** and in the teachings of the Prophet.

The Quran warns against hasty and uninformed judgment in several verses. One of them is verse 49:6, which says: “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.” Islam promotes the idea that judgment should be based on clear evidence and not on assumptions or prejudices.

The teachings of the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam invite to **foster justice, compassion, and benevolence** in human relations within Muslim communities.

Regarding non-religious philosophical systems, there is also significant convergence on this issue.

Confucianism, an ethical and social philosophy that originated in China with the teachings of Confucius, addresses the importance of not judging others hastily. It emphasizes the virtue of humanity (Ren), which involves compassion and benevolence towards others. Instead of judging, people are encouraged to practice empathy and understand the circumstances and motivations of others. It highlights the need for self-reflection and personal improvement. Before pointing out the faults of others, individuals are encouraged to examine their own actions and improve their own character.

Taoism, a philosophy, and spiritual tradition originating in China, is based on the teachings of the Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching) attributed to Laozi. It promotes the idea of living in harmony with the Tao (the natural order). Instead of judging and labelling things as good or bad, Taoism advocates acceptance and understanding of duality in life, with simplicity and without judgment, suggesting that the wise person does not rush to judge situations or impose their own interpretations. “He who judges does not understand, and he who understands does not judge” (Dao De Jing, Chapter 57). This highlights the connection between deep understanding and the absence of hasty judgment.

Buddhism is a philosophy and set of spiritual practices that seeks to liberate humans from their passions and desires, leading to full awareness. Through various essential principles, it cultivates serenity and leads to avoiding prejudice. One of these principles is learning not to judge, avoiding categorizing our experiences and the actions of others as good or bad, remaining free from expectations based on previous experiences and desires.

As for non-believers, there are also in Western societies, in a diffuse and vague way, traces of currents of thought subsequent to the Enlightenment and scientism, which **defend the dignity of individuals** and would **discourage issuing unfounded condemnatory judgments** about others. These traces are, in some way, present in the **common knowledge of many non-believers**, sceptics, atheists, or agnostics.



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