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THE SHAPING OF MORAL THEOLOGY: *VERITATIS SPLENDOR* AND THE  
DEBATE ON THE NATURE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

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**Abstract:** Moral theology explores the sources of the moral teaching in several religions. It is the branch of theology that analyzes the scriptural, rational, and ministerial bases of moral teaching on various issues in Christian living. Moral theology in the Catholic Church has been undergoing rapid development since the Second Vatican Council. This essay presents the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* as providing an important perspective on fundamental issues in moral theology. In *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II gave the response of the church magisterium to the issues raised for decades in moral theology. This essay also evaluates the Catholic moral theologians' responses to the encyclical. The theologians are categorized into two groups: the theologians who support the encyclical and the ones who view the encyclical in a critical way as misrepresenting their ideas. The essay recommends the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* for renewing interest in fundamental issues in moral theology.

**Key Words:** *Veritatis Splendor*, encyclical, Pope John Paul II, Second Vatican Council, theologians, moral, theology, Roman Catholic Church, natural law, scripture, autonomy, reason

The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* deals with central issues in Catholic fundamental moral theology. Fundamental moral theology provides the basis for moral evaluation in other areas of moral theology such as medical ethics, social ethics, sexual ethics, and liberation ethics, among others. By critically responding to issues in Catholic moral theology since the Second Vatican Council, the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* provides an overview of various topics developed by Catholic moral theologians. The responses to the encyclical led to further elaboration of the theological perspectives espoused by various theologians. The encyclical provides an analytical and critical presentation of various issues in the development of Catholic moral theology.

The Second Vatican Council called for the renewal of moral theology. The issues addressed in the encyclical include, among others, the biblical foundation of Christian morality, the criticism of autonomous ethics, relativism, teleology, and proportionalism. The encyclical advocates an ethics of faith in opposition to the contemporary emphasis on moral autonomy. Some theologians have emphasized the autonomous nature of Christian morality. The encyclical responds to those theologians who, according to Pope John Paul II, have given a prominent place to reason in moral theology at the expense of faith and revelation. Some theologians also responded to the criticism leveled by the encyclical by insisting that no theologian has advocated the separation of faith or revelation from reason. In light of the diverse views in moral theology today, I do a critical reading of the encyclical and also explore the responses from various theologians to the encyclical.

This essay begins by presenting a general overview of the encyclical which is further followed by a critical analysis of the various issues mentioned or condemned by the encyclical. The evaluation of the responses of various theologians will help in the understanding of the theological environment in which the encyclical was received. Theological responses critical of the encyclical include those by European and American theologians such as Louis Janssens, Richard McCormick, Charles Curran, William Spohn, and Bénézet Bujo who is an African theologian. However, some theologians and philosophers like Livio Melina, Germain Grisez, and John Finnis, will be seen as responding in support of the encyclical. These theologians and philosophers who support the encyclical view the condemnation of relativism and other theological trends they view as contrary to the revealed morality in the gospel as long overdue. On the other hand, those theologians critical of the encyclical, view it as somehow misunderstanding their work or as taking the side of one theological system, namely the proponents of faith ethics. Further, I argue that critically analyzing what the various theologians have to say on *Veritatis Splendor* helps in understanding the encyclical as well as the broader theological context addressed by the encyclical.

## *Veritatis Splendor* as a Response to the Renewal of Moral Theology

The *Veritatis Splendor* by the late Pope John Paul II deals with general moral theological issues. A good understanding of this encyclical requires an understanding of the theological contexts into which it evolved and into which it was received. This makes it possible to locate and understand the moral theological issues dealt with in the encyclical.

*Veritatis Splendor* addresses the issues called for in the renewal of moral theology in the Second Vatican Council.<sup>1</sup> The renewal of moral theology is characterized by the use of Sacred Scripture, the understanding of the nature of Christian ethics as Christocentric, the relevance of history in moral theology, the integral nature of human activity, and the natural moral law, among other characteristics. The theological debates that have taken place after Vatican II have reflected how the renewal of moral theology has been taking place in the Roman Catholic Church. An example of these debates is the autonomous ethics debate in a faith context, and also the debate on the proportionalist and teleological nature of human action.

*Veritatis Splendor* can therefore be said to have come about as a church response or reaction to developments in moral theology. Joseph Selling points out that:

In the summer of 1987, John Paul II came to the decision that there was a need to address not simply the current debates that were taking place within the public forum and the church community itself, but the very foundations of morality as a theological discipline. He announced that he would write an encyclical on the topic because he felt that those foundations were being undermined by certain contemporary theories. It took six years, and if rumors could be believed several drafts, for this encyclical to be published. In it one finds not only the reflective words of the bishop of Rome but evidently as well the counter-(r) evolutionary speculations of theorists representing the more traditional school of Christian ethics.<sup>2</sup>

The encyclical appears to have been a response to the needs in contemporary theology, as perceived by Pope John Paul II. Besides the issues about which the encyclical is critical, the general idea of reminding theologians to avoid the various extremes that have or can come up in their work is a laudable concern. However, the reality of theological diversity in the Church or even outside the Church is a fact that no one can deny. How to embrace diversity and make good use of it in Christian ethics is a task all theologians should embrace wholeheartedly.<sup>3</sup>

Studying the theology of Bénézet Bujo, one cannot also avoid critically studying what *Veritatis Splendor* has to say about the state of moral theology after Vatican II. Bujo deals with issues related with the renewal of moral theology. An example of the issues characterizing the renewal of moral theology, and realized in the theology of Bujo, include the use of sacred scripture, a historically conscious method, and the natural moral law tradition. Bujo locates African Christian theology in the context of the renewal of moral theology after Vatican II. Therefore, African moral theology also falls under the trends in theology addressed by *Veritatis Splendor*.

### General Concerns in the Encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*<sup>4</sup>

It is necessary to start here by making an analysis and assessment of the main points considered in the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. I begin by making a critical exposition of the main points in the encyclical, and only later in the next section refer to the theological responses to the encyclical. The task at hand here involves analyzing the theological issues raised, criticized or condemned by the encyclical. A consideration of the sources of *Veritatis Splendor* will also be presented.

The encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* was signed by Pope John Paul II on August 6, 1993 and released the following October 5.<sup>5</sup> The encyclical is addressed to all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church and concerns certain fundamental questions of the church's moral teaching (VS, Introduction). Then the encyclical makes a statement on truth when it states that "The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of creation and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26)" (VS, Introduction). Through its repeated reference to the truth, the encyclical shows its concern for truth in moral theology although it does not define what it means by 'truth.' *Veritatis Splendor* was brought about (or occasioned) by what it says is a concern for fundamental truths:

Today, however, it seems *necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching*, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied... It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions (VS, 4).

The preceding statement sums up what prompted the writing and issuing of the encyclical. However, the encyclical acknowledges a human capacity for knowledge but at the same time shows how this capacity is

limited. Hence, the Pope states that “Man’s capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened” (VS, 1). If the capacity for truth in human beings is weakened, then there is need for a higher power to meet this deficiency. This seems to prepare the reader of the encyclical to consider the commandments and the moral law, and ultimately, the need for grace and the role of the teaching authority of the Church’s magisterium.

The encyclical was intended to correct errors in contemporary moral theology, and thereby make known the official teaching of the church on various issues. The Pope states:

The specific purpose of the present encyclical is this: to set forth, with regard to the problems being discussed, the principles of a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition, and at the same time to shed light on the presuppositions and consequences of the dissent which that teaching has met (VS, 11).

The insistence on the importance of making use of Sacred Scripture and Tradition in moral theology is a positive point in the encyclical. Renewal in moral theology was characterized by the use of Sacred Scripture. The natural moral law tradition (although not mentioned in *Optatam Totius* 16) together with the Sacred Scriptures were important elements of the renewal of moral theology in the Roman Catholic Church.

Further, the encyclical makes an exploration of what has been going on in moral theology, and through this it makes a critical analysis on some of the controverted issues in moral theology. Acknowledging the call by Vatican II for renewal, the encyclical states:

The Council also encouraged theologians, while respecting the methods and requirements of theological science, to look for a more appropriate way of communicating doctrine to the people of their time (VS, 29).

The Pope indicates that not all developments in moral theology after the Council have been positive. The encyclical denounces most of what has been developing in moral theology as not in line with sound doctrine. Hence, the encyclical states:

Also, an opinion is frequently heard which questions the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality, as if membership in the Church and her internal unity were to be decided on the basis of faith alone, while in the sphere of morality a pluralism of opinions and of kinds of behavior could be tolerated...(VS, 4).

The relationship between faith and morality is an issue that has generated different theological perspectives. Some theologians have come to hold that Christian ethics is totally unique because of faith in Christ, while others have maintained that Christian ethics is specifically human and therefore can be realized in a genuinely human ethics.

Among the theological issues considered in *Veritatis Splendor* include the use of Sacred Scripture, the role of the magisterium of the Church in moral theology, freedom and its relation to the truth, conscience, the relationship between faith and reason in morality, and the natural law. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze these theological issues dealt with in the encyclical in a more specific way.

### The use of Sacred Scripture

Vatican II recommended that morality should be nurtured by Sacred Scripture and tradition.<sup>6</sup> The encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, is commendable in its use of Scripture, and also its realization of the Christocentric nature of Christian morality.<sup>7</sup> It begins with the question of the young man in the gospel who asked Jesus: "Teacher, what good must I do..." (Mt. 19: 16; VS, 7). The Pope takes this passage to show how faith in Christ affects the answer to the question about morality: "It is an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man, for it is about the moral good which must be done, and about eternal life" (VS, 8). The encyclical uses scripture to show the connection between grace and law in Christian moral life. The passage from Matthew is analyzed and directly applied to modern moral questions. The text is used as an example of Gospel morality, and to show the immutability of the teaching of Jesus on moral issues:

If we therefore wish to go to the heart of the Gospels' moral teaching and grasp its profound and unchanging content, we must carefully inquire into the meaning of the question asked by the rich young man in the Gospel and, even more, the meaning of Jesus' reply, allowing ourselves to be guided by him (VS, 8).

However, the Sacred Scripture as presented in the encyclical is an important source of moral theology. Moral theology appeals to scripture and tradition. No Catholic theologian has denied the use of Scripture in Christian morality, but what theologians question is the method or the way to use Scripture in moral reasoning. *Veritatis Splendor*, in its use of Scripture, shows how indispensable the word of God is to moral reasoning.

The important thing to note is the encyclical's emphasis on the Word of God in the Bible, for it shows the character of moral theology after the Vatican Council II. This is true when the encyclical states: "Indeed, Sacred Scripture remains the living and fruitful source of the Church's moral

doctrine...” (VS, 28). But it is also important to point out that no Catholic moral theologian can deny the relevance of Scripture in moral theology and yet remain a Catholic Christian moral theologian.

## **The Teaching Role of the Magisterium**

The encyclical defends the role of the church’s magisterium as one of authentically interpreting the Word of God and proclaiming moral principles (VS, 27).<sup>8</sup> The encyclical calls for the response of obedience to the magisterium of the church by theologians and other Roman Catholic Christians. Konrad Hilpert makes clear this call for obedience in the encyclical when he states:

The basic stance, which is prior to the fulfillment of the individual commandments, is obedience. There is hardly a document of the universal Church since Vatican II in which such clearly stressed obedience is demanded. In all, the concept appears almost thirty times and is thus demonstrated to be, besides “law,” one of the most frequently used theological keywords of the encyclical.<sup>9</sup>

The encyclical emphasizes the teaching role of the church magisterium. According to the encyclical, the magisterium provides authentic and absolute interpretations of the Word of God.<sup>10</sup> Because of this teaching authority in the Church, there is a call to obey moral principles as taught by the bishops and the Pope. However, the encyclical does not provide the method it applies in the realization of the moral norms from Sacred Scripture or tradition. The encyclical also does not show the interaction between the magisterium of the Church and moral theologians in the development of the moral teaching.<sup>11</sup>

The encyclical is intended to make known the teaching of the church on certain moral issues and as a result calls for assent from theologians to the church’s moral teaching. Hence, the encyclical condemns some theological positions such as relativism, the denial of intrinsic evil, and proportionalism as contrary to the moral teachings of the church.

## **Freedom**

The encyclical expresses concern about moral theories that over-exalt human freedom. The encyclical states:

Certain currents of modern thought have gone so far as to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values (VS, 32).

The above concern in the encyclical on human freedom is valid. The encyclical does not deny human freedom but it shows that human freedom is coupled with responsible moral action. There is an awareness in the encyclical, that from a Christian perspective, God makes human freedom itself possible. The encyclical is critical of the tendency to view human freedom as absolute (this is a modern tendency), and thus denying the human dependency on God as the creator. However, to deny human freedom as a reality in human existence would also be a denial of the gift of God to humanity. Human freedom, made possible by God, should never be seen as standing in opposition to God. From the book of Genesis, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27).<sup>12</sup> For this reason, we can say that humans have a power of self-determination. When this power of self-determination is taken away, it is referred to as coercion or control by an external force, and thereby moral responsibility is excluded. A major issue arising from *Veritatis Splendor* is: how do freedom of conscience and external authority interact in human conduct? It is good to emphasize that to be a moral agent, a human being must have the freedom of choice.

The encyclical moves on to show the intimate connection between freedom and truth. The encyclical is opposed to what it calls some tendencies of separating freedom and truth. "Despite their variety, these tendencies are at one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth" (VS, 34). The Pope does not tell us who is separating freedom from truth, but emphasizes the adherence to the truth.<sup>13</sup> *Veritatis Splendor* expresses the magisterium's concern, notably the implication of over-emphasizing individual freedom in moral theology at the expense of the social or communal life in Christian living. Basically, human freedom should always be geared toward the pursuit of truth.

Further, the encyclical connects truth to the moral law. The encyclical also expresses disappointment with some theologians for separating freedom from the law. The pope has stated:

The alleged conflict between freedom and law is forcefully brought up once again today with regard to the natural law, and particularly with regard to nature. Debates about nature and freedom have always marked the history of moral reflection; they grew especially heated at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation...The penchant for empirical observation, the procedures of scientific objectification, technological progress and certain forms of liberalism have led to these two terms being set in opposition, as if a dialectic, if not absolute conflict, between freedom and nature were characteristic of the structure of human history... In this context even moral facts, despite



their specificity, are frequently treated as if they were statistically verifiable data, patterns of behavior which can be subject to observation or explained exclusively in categories of psychosocial processes (VS, 46).

Freedom has always to do with self-determination of an individual person, that is, the ability to pursue the good. This self-determination includes realization of the right or the true moral norms. On the other hand, the separation of freedom from truth spells disaster in morality. The separation of truth and freedom in morality would mean a contradiction because freedom implies a capacity for knowing what is right and what is wrong. Freedom is coupled with responsibility. To act responsibly, a human person is entitled to seek knowledge. Freedom and knowledge are inseparable in responsible moral action. "The Pope is concerned that freedom uncoupled from truth will lead to a 'moral autonomy' (VS #35). Such a moral autonomy, it is feared would not only have an 'absolute sovereignty' but would also deny the existence of a Divine Revelation that contains 'a specific and determined moral content' which is 'universally valid and permanent'" (VS, 37).<sup>14</sup> Moral autonomy is concerned with the fact that an individual human being has the capacity of moral determination. Autonomous ethics, as understood in this work, advocates the possibility of realization of morality by human beings through reason.<sup>15</sup> Moral norms are important, but without the moral agent who acts from the heart, they remain in a book in a distant library or archive. Basically, human beings' capacity for knowledge and freedom of choice is the foundation of moral action.

Nonetheless, *Veritatis Splendor* holds that human beings are free, but it connects this freedom with the commandments: "The man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God's commands" (VS, 35).<sup>16</sup> The Pope questions the absolutization of human freedom, but on the other hand, it is questionable whether there would be individual moral responsibility without the individual having the capacity for self-determination. The pope says, "These doctrines would grant to individuals or social groups the right to determine what is good or evil" (VS, 35). The question that would remain is who decides for whom what is right or wrong. It is true to say that even the commandments of God or Sacred Scripture do not address all moral dilemmas people find themselves in, not to mention circumstances and all the concrete factors that go into any decision making. Human freedom is a determinant factor in morality.

## Conscience

In human action is expressed the human capacity for self-determination. Freedom of conscience makes responsible human action possible.<sup>17</sup> The reality of conscience and freedom are understandable only

when viewed as constitutive of human moral reasoning and action. On human conscience, the encyclical expresses the following concern: “The individual conscience is accorded the status of a supreme tribunal of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions about good and evil” (VS, 32), and “Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature” (VS, 32). And then, an individualist ethics would “...end up, if not with an outright denial of universal human values, at least with a relativistic conception of morality” (VS, 33). The encyclical does not deny the reality of freedom of conscience: what it emphasizes is that Christian morality has a communal or social dimension, and that Christian morality is realized through divine revelation. An individual conscience can be erroneous, and therefore, individual human beings have a responsibility to the formation of their consciences by seeking to overcome ignorance by knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

For the encyclical, formation of conscience is realized through listening to the word of God and the teaching tradition of the Church’s magisterium. Basically, the formation of conscience is an individual and communal responsibility. Traditionally in the Roman Catholic Church, the formation of conscience has always been given a central place in the lives of the Christian faithful. Formation of conscience does not mean coercion but some sort of moral education or spiritual formation. Formation of conscience is a task that shows an individual person’s responsibility to conduct the affairs of one’s life.

The encyclical’s warning against relativism and individualism is a valid concern. The communal or social nature of human beings is indispensable. Individuality and community are correlative terms. You cannot have one without the other. An ethic that emphasizes individuality and ignores the community dimension of morality is defective. The same can be said of a communal ethic that ignores the individual aspect of morality. Morality is made possible by the personal dimension of human beings which in turn is realized in the social perspective. Without doubt, there is the subjective and the objective pole in morality. An individual Christian is always a member of a community of faith.

## **The relationship between Faith and Reason in Morality**

The encyclical supports the faith-ethics position and is opposed to an autonomous ethics. The Pope emphasizes the role of faith in ethical matters and shows that reason alone is prone to error (VS, 36). *Veritatis Splendor* acknowledges the desire to foster dialogue in modern culture, where human rational nature is emphasized to show the communicable nature of Christian moral norms.

However, *Veritatis Splendor* clarifies that Christian morality is not solely based on human reason, but that it has its source in divine revelation (VS, 36). In the theological work of the advocates of an autonomous ethics, faith and reason go hand in hand in Christian moral reasoning. But some advocates of an autonomous ethics have also emphasized reason in such a way that they have left faith in the periphery of Christian morals.

In an explicit way, the encyclical condemns the advocates of an “...erroneous concept of autonomy” (VS, 37).<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, the encyclical shows that “... a rightful autonomy is due to every man, as well as to the human community...” (VS, 38).<sup>20</sup> The encyclical uses Vatican II to show that what it presents is a proper understanding of autonomy: “...the council warns against a false concept of the autonomy of earthly realities, one which would maintain that created things are not dependent on God and that man can use them without reference to their creator” (VS, 39).<sup>21</sup> Further, Pope John Paul II argues that “...obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a heteronomy, as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom” (VS, 41). The encyclical holds that “if a heteronomy of morality were to mean a denial of man’s self-determination or imposition of norms unrelated to his good, this would be in contradiction to the Revelation of the Covenant and of the redemptive Incarnation” (VS, 41). In the preceding, the encyclical seems to be basing itself on a transcendental or an existential premise where God is viewed as embodying the true realization of human existence as subject. In self-determination, human beings exercise the capacity given by God at creation, and therefore human freedom should be understood as made possible by God. However, the advocates of an autonomous ethics also share with the encyclical the understanding that the capacity of human self-determination makes morality possible. Nonetheless, it should be clarified that the encyclical is critical of the proponents of an autonomous ethics for presenting Christian morality as based on human freedom and not adequately showing the role played by divine revelation.

Connected with the debate about autonomous and faith ethics are the proponents of the distinction between an ethical order and an order of salvation.<sup>22</sup> According to the encyclical, there is no separation between an ethical order and an order of salvation. The Pope’s view is that Christian moral life should be identified with the journey of salvation. Evidently, the encyclical condemns the advocates of separation between an ethical order and order of salvation. It raises questions on the separation of the ethical order from the order of salvation. The Pope holds that the separation of an ethical order and an order of salvation is erroneous and contrary to Catholic doctrine. This separation is viewed by the Pope as a denial that there exists “in Divine Revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent” (VS, 37). The separation of an

ethical order from the order of salvation, further limits the word of God to proposing an exhortation, a generic paranesis, while “the autonomous reason alone would then have the task of completing with normative directives which are truly ‘objective,’ that is, adapted to the concrete historical situation” (VS, 37).<sup>23</sup> The separation of an ethical order and an order of salvation, according to the encyclical, is a misunderstanding of morality as understood in the Roman Catholic Tradition.

## Natural Moral Law

The interpretation of the natural moral law has shaped much of moral theology after Vatican II. The condemnation of moral autonomy and some contemporary moral theological developments, in *Veritatis Splendor*, is based on an interpretation of the natural law.<sup>24</sup> The Pope writes: “...the natural law is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation” (VS, 40). However, there are numerous interpretations on the meaning of the natural moral law.<sup>25</sup> The use of the natural moral law in the encyclical connects it to the moral theological debate on the renewal of moral theology coming after the Second Vatican Council. In regard to renewal moral theologians, the encyclical states:

As a result, some ethicists, professionally engaged in the study of human realities and behavior, can be tempted to take as the standard for their discipline and even for its operative norms the results of statistical study of concrete human behavior patterns and the opinions about morality encountered in the majority of people (VS, 46).

Moral theology cannot ignore developments in other fields of human and social sciences. However, as the encyclical cautions (VS, 46), Christian morality should not be limited to ‘statistical study of concrete human behavior,’ but it should also focus on ultimate human self-realization. However, the encyclical does not explicitly rule out the necessity of research in moral theology. Besides Sacred Scripture and tradition, moral theology makes use of the findings of social and human sciences. Moral theology after Vatican II has realized that it has a wider audience, and therefore it needs methods that present Christian morality as applicable to all human beings. Natural moral law has contributed in a tremendous way by presenting Christian morality, not as a sectarian ethic, but one that is human and Christian at the same time. All people share reason, and therefore, moral theologians appealing to reason demonstrate the communicable nature of Christian morality, and reason also safeguard it from sectarianism. The natural moral law tradition is one of the major

ways that Christian morality has been presented as reasonable and as having something to offer to all people. A shared humanity is a basis for shared values and goals.

### **The relation between Morality and Law in *Veritatis Splendor***

The encyclical presents Christian morality as to be understood in the context of obedience to the law or the commandments. To show the connection between morality and law, the Pope appeals to the text in the gospel of Matthew (19: 16-26). This text is used by the encyclical to show that for one to be saved, observance of the commandments is vital. Further, the encyclical uses the same gospel passage to show the intricate relationship between morality and law. The encyclical, therefore, understands morality in terms of obedience to the law.<sup>26</sup>

Further, the encyclical can be understood in a way that equates Christian morality with obedience to the commandments of God. According to the encyclical, God's will is knowable through the commandments. "The commandments thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbor; at the same time they are the proof of that love. They are the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom..."(VS, 13). According to the encyclical, God has already given what human beings need to know about morality through his commandments. Thus, the Pope writes: "Man's genuine moral autonomy in no way means the rejection but rather the acceptance of the moral law, of God's command: "The Lord God gave this command to the man...(Gen. 2: 16)"(VS, 41). How about human decision-making?

Considering the encyclical's emphasis on the commandments and the moral law, one cannot avoid to be concerned whether the encyclical is recommending a return to the moral theology before the renewal. Before the renewal, manuals of moral theology had a legalistic view of morality. A typical example of moral theology's emphasis on law, before the renewal, would be Bernard Häring's "Law of Christ," but this is markedly different from his "Free and Faithful in Christ" which was written after Vatican II.<sup>27</sup> There is a notable difference between the manuals before and those after Vatican II. Before the renewal, most of the manuals of moral theology laid emphasis on the moral law and not the human person who performed a particular act. A moral act was determined to be good or bad depending on whether a moral law had been fulfilled or broken. Manuals had as their primary focus the formation of future priests who would hear confessions. They were meant to help confessors understand the weight of the sins, which were confessed in kind and number, in order to give the right penance. Is the encyclical recommending a return to manualist moral theology in its emphasis of the law? Realistically, the time of the manuals is past and pluralism in theology is a reality that has taken root in

contemporary theology. There is no one way or method in the study of moral theology.

Consequently, the commandments are just one aspect of the Christian life. In a more concrete way, Christianity is not a religion of just meeting some requirements. Jesus invited his followers to go beyond the commandments. Christianity should not just emphasize the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law. The encyclical emphasizes the commandments: "Jesus refers to the two commandments of love of God and love of neighbor (cf. LK. 10:25-27), and reminds him that only by observing them will he have eternal life: "Do this, and you will live" (LK. 10: 28)"(VS, 14). Undeniably, the motivation in Christian living is the love of God and neighbor. But to reduce morality to the observance of the law (commandments) leads to a minimalist ethics<sup>28</sup> of requirements. Therefore, understanding the relationship between God and humanity as love shows the depths and boundlessness of Christian living. Commandments may not have answers to some situations Christians might find themselves in, but love always acts as a guide to proper decisions and actions.

In the on-going analysis of the encyclical, it is notable that *Veritatis Splendor* raises some important theological issues. The Pope emphasizes the role of Sacred Scripture as the source of moral theology. Although it is not my concern here, the near-equation of revelation and Scripture's teaching is problematic. There are very concrete commands in Scripture to conquer the Promised Land and drive out and kill its inhabitants (cf. Deuteronomy 20 and Numbers 31). These were very influential in the early and late medieval Christian practice as evidenced in the Crusades.<sup>29</sup> Considering all the tension in the Bible can we say there is a revealed morality? Nevertheless, the encyclical is not the final word but it should be seen as a call to engage further in the moral theological debate in the contemporary world. In the encyclical, it is undeniable that many contemporary moral theological positions that have been developing since the renewal are condemned or questioned. Several theologians have also responded to the issues dealt with in the encyclical.

## Theological Responses to *Veritatis Splendor*

Having analyzed the various issues addressed in the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, I proceed here to analyze various theological responses to the encyclical. The respondents to the encyclical either support or oppose it. After presenting Bujo's response to the encyclical, I present the arguments of the theologians who support the encyclical and later the theologians who are opposed to the encyclical.

## Bénézet Bujo's Critical Analysis of *Veritatis Splendor*

Bujo, like Louis Janssens<sup>30</sup> and others, has analyzed the encyclical from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas' teaching on the natural law.<sup>31</sup> The pope also uses Aquinas in the encyclical (VS).<sup>32</sup> In its use of Aquinas, the encyclical differs from other theological interpretations or readings of Aquinas. As in Janssens and McCormick, Bujo also uses Aquinas's theology to show how *Veritatis Splendor* differs from the position of Aquinas. The responses to the encyclical by Janssens and McCormick will be treated in the next section.

Bujo's theology is among the theological positions questioned by the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. Bujo develops a view of moral autonomy in an African perspective. His theology is concerned with a concrete consideration of moral issues. He is critical of theological perspectives that tend to generalize moral issues without due consideration of particular circumstances as well as cultural and historical background. Even without mention, Bujo's theology comes into direct confrontation with *Veritatis Splendor* where truth, freedom, and moral norms appear to be predetermined issues by the moral magisterium of the Church. Bujo's perspective is clear when he writes the following:

Some critics of the autonomous moral theology have suggested the need for an ethics of faith. As the entire discussion in the 1970s showed, the accusation made by these critics missed the point, since the proponents of an autonomous moral theology did not in the least deny the *proprium christianum* in moral theology; their concern was only to avoid a fundamentalistic perspective, a "fallacy of faith" in moral theology. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* likewise gives the impression of having misunderstood the fundamental thesis of the autonomous moral theology which it criticizes.<sup>33</sup>

Bujo advocates an autonomous ethics in the context of faith. He views the autonomous ethics debate as making a positive contribution to the realization of moral theology. He views the autonomous ethics debate as a development in the teaching on the natural moral law. He holds that the adherents of the autonomous ethics debate in no way support the separation of faith and reason in moral discernment. Therefore, he views the encyclical as exaggerating the moral autonomy position when the encyclical says that they (autonomous ethicists) remove faith in morality or separate freedom from truth. He states:

As for its critique of autonomy, one sometimes has the impression that the encyclical exaggerates its points and thereby misses the mark. Few moral theologians would agree that there are tendencies which "despite their variety are at one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth" (VS 34).<sup>34</sup>

Further, Bujo also questions whether “there are actually any Catholic moral theologians who deny the fact that the natural moral law has God as its author, and that man, by the use of reason, participates in the eternal law, which it is not for him to establish” (VS 36).<sup>35</sup> Hence the general conclusion or feeling of many moral theologians, according to Bujo is as follows:

The proponents of autonomous moral theology see in this critique more than a simple misunderstanding but rather an unjust criticism when the encyclical says: “Hence obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a heteronomy as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom” (VS 41).<sup>36</sup>

Fundamentally, according to Bujo, the advocates of autonomous ethics were strongly influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas’ view that “the human person is *capax Dei*.” Basing himself on Aquinas’ understanding of the nature of the human person, Bujo holds that “This ‘capacity for God’ enables the human person to transcend himself and discover the ultimate ground of his being transcendently in God.”<sup>37</sup> *Capax Dei* makes it possible for human beings to be involved in a “dynamic process in which he expresses his orientation to God.”<sup>38</sup> In being morally responsible, human beings realize their true nature created by God. This perspective is based on the understanding of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God. Bujo’s view on human morality has its source in the Bible, where the image of God is realized to be present in all human beings. Bujo sums this up when he writes that “one can become like God only by acting freely, autonomously, and creatively; this does not in any way abolish the theonomy.”<sup>39</sup> Human reason has a mandate to explore the truths in the world, including ethical truths. Bujo understands moral autonomy in the context of the realization of the splendor of creation in human beings. Notable in the theory of moral autonomy is the recognition of the human power of self-determination and creativity. God, who is the creator of human beings and all that exists, makes human freedom possible. Hence, moral autonomy cannot denounce the involvement of God in human ethics.

However, Bujo does not disagree with the encyclical’s teaching on morality but he suggests that there is need for some qualification or further elaboration. He states: “When the encyclical speaks of the ‘universality’ of moral norms (VS 51ff.), moral theologians will not disagree, provided that this is meant in the sense of general principles - since it is always true that ‘One must do good and avoid evil,’ ‘You shall be just,’ and so on.”<sup>40</sup> It could be said that the encyclical wants to provide a simple answer to some theological developments that have taken so much



time to take the shape they have today. There is no simple answer. Theologians have used the theology of Thomas Aquinas, which has come to have several nuances over time, as well as other theological traditions.

On the debate on moral norms, Bujo says the following on Thomas Aquinas: "The moral theologian will, however, join Thomas Aquinas at this point in adding that the validity of these general principles does not always find the same expression in *praxis*. The more concretely one must act, the more difficult it becomes to translate general principles into action. This is clear from STh I-II q. 94 a.4, where Thomas distinguishes between 'speculative reason' and 'practical reason.'"<sup>41</sup> Aquinas acknowledged that the natural law is realized in concrete and particular instances. Bujo writes: "Thus Thomas's position is that, while the natural law is one and the same for all persons when considered 'in general terms,' there are certain individual points, 'presenting as it were consequences drawn from the fundamental principles' (STh I-II q. 94 a. 4), which are not the same in all contexts."<sup>42</sup> From Aquinas' perspective, Bujo is critical of *Veritatis Splendor* when it insists "on the immutability of the natural law."<sup>43</sup> Bujo's theology and analysis of *Veritatis Splendor* is based on the natural law tradition in the Roman Catholic Church. This is evident, for example, when Bujo makes reference to Fuchs in the following statement: "The individual norms concerning prohibitions, as well as the theory of the *intrinsic malum* as such - even though this is traditional, and is taught in the Church - are justified only by the natural law, which means by human reflection. But human reflection cannot absolutely exclude erroneous thinking."<sup>44</sup> Using natural moral law reasoning, according to Bujo, should be contextualized in a concrete historical and cultural setting.

Evidently, the encyclical is aware of varying cultural contexts but insists that truth goes beyond cultural limitations (VS 53). Bujo points out that "*Veritatis splendor* employs a western doctrine of natural law; but the precepts deduced from this doctrine are based on human reason, which does not necessarily exclude errors."<sup>45</sup> But the western natural law doctrine is not the only method that can be used in moral theology. Bujo has suggested an intercultural approach to moral issues. Through an intercultural approach (or method), various theological traditions can dialogue, and thereby enrich each other. This leads to a more historical understanding of the natural law.

From the above, *Veritatis Splendor* appears to be confined to moral theology in the West. All other theologies are not given due consideration. There is an assumption that moral norms are the same all over the world. This is true when one looks at *Veritatis Splendor* on issues such as truth, freedom, and the commandments, among others. These demonstrate the encyclical's nostalgia for a return to scholastic theology, where truth was certain and the only thing the theologian was expected to do was to devise how to defend the truth. In an attempt to unify theological developments,

diversity is easily done away with in the theological categories that the encyclical stipulates.

As an alternative, Bujo has suggested “Only the inter-cultural approach allows us to see the problem of ethical pluralism in its true dimensions. This perspective makes it even clearer that both the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* and autonomous moral theology remain confined within their own world, that of European-American culture: it is in this world that their dispute is carried on.”<sup>46</sup> *Veritatis Splendor* fails to realize, according to Bujo, that “it is not a dispute about pluralism within one and the same system, but rather about accepting that differing modes of thought endeavor to interpret one and the same fundamental principle of the gospel and to put it into practice.”<sup>47</sup> The encyclical fails “since it asserts a priori a claim to universality *in moralibus*.”<sup>48</sup> The gospel of Jesus Christ has been used variously by different Christian denominations and also theologians to reach to different but related theological and ethical conclusions (some of which have been horrendous).

In Bujo’s analysis of *Veritatis Splendor*, the pope’s words might have taken on greater significance if he had urged moral theologians not to assert the absolute validity of their own views but to listen to the voices of other cultures too. This would have taken up a discussion that, for example, Latin American liberation theology has sought with regard to autonomous moral theology. In an attempt to emphasize the universality of the magisterium of the church, the encyclical forgets that universality has to be understood in particular cultural and historical settings. An African Christian or theologian can be justified in feeling that the encyclical does not address African issues. This feeling is categorically stated by Bujo when he writes: “Although it addresses the bishops of the whole world (see VS 5), it operates within the categories of Western philosophy and ethics and addresses problems that are an urgent concern for the Western world.”<sup>49</sup> The encyclical in its use of the natural moral law reasoning should go beyond the western philosophy, and in this way be inclusive of other traditions. Pluralism is an enriching element in theological study.

However, Bujo also points out the positive contribution of the encyclical in its use of Sacred Scripture. He does not go in depth in analyzing how Scripture is used in the encyclical. He states: “By starting with the example of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16), the encyclical operates on two levels of ethical argumentation. On the one hand, it refers to the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19: 17-19); on the other hand, it emphasizes the words of Jesus which urge the rich young man to go beyond the observance of the commandments (see VS 6-27).”<sup>50</sup> This would be seen to come into conflict with other theologians who argue that *Veritatis Splendor* does not use the passage from Matthew in an accurate way.<sup>51</sup>

In a precise way, Bujo has critically analyzed *Veritatis Splendor* from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas's natural law teaching. He suggests that the natural moral law reasoning should incorporate an inter-cultural method as a way to embrace pluralism and the use of Sacred Scripture. According to Bujo, an inter-cultural method in moral theology realizes that moral reasoning takes place in concrete historical and cultural context. Besides Bujo's response to *Veritatis Splendor*, there are other important theological responses to the encyclical.

### Other Theological Responses to *Veritatis Splendor*

Theological responses to *Veritatis Splendor* have either been given in support of or as critique of the encyclical. Some theological issues in the encyclical, and to which theologians variously respond include: authority of the magisterium of the Church, freedom, truth, conscience, moral autonomy, the use of Sacred Scripture, intrinsic evil, proportionalism, relativism, revealed morality, and the relation between morality and law.

Some theologians supported the encyclical and saw it as a document long overdue coming from the Pope. Their opinion was that some theological works, over the years, are contrary to what is Christian and, therefore, warrant a condemnation. Other theologians saw the encyclical as one-sided in its critique of the theological developments associated with them. These theologians somehow felt the encyclical was condemning theological positions associated with them. The theologians critical of *Veritatis Splendor* are viewed here as making a response to the encyclical, and also as clarifying theological positions associated with their work.

The two parts division below corresponds with the theologians who support the encyclical's condemnations of various positions in contemporary moral theology and further the theologians who have expressed concern about the encyclical's condemnations. In my research it emerged that there are more theologians who are critical to *Veritatis Splendor's* condemnations than those in support of the encyclical. For this reason, the section on the theologians critical to the encyclical is more extensive than the one on those who support it. Livio Melina, Germain Grisez, and John Finnis are the theologians who support the encyclical. Among the theologians critical of the encyclical include: Richard McCormick, Louis Janssens, Charles Curran, and William C. Spohn. McCormick is critical of the way the encyclical condemns proportionalism. Janssens presents teleology as having its foundation in Thomas Aquinas, and for this reason views the encyclical's criticism of teleological thinking as a criticism of the same natural law method used in the encyclical and other church teachings on morality. On the other hand, Curran is critical of the presentation of Christian morality in a legalistic way in *Veritatis*

*Splendor*. And Spohn is critical of the way Sacred Scripture is used in the encyclical.

### Theologians in Support of *Veritatis Splendor*

*Veritatis Splendor* can be praised as a coming to awareness by the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church on the issues being debated in contemporary moral theology. Whether the encyclical is critical of the majority of the theological debates is not the main point, but one can say that there is an awareness of many controverted issues that remain open to further theological inquiry. The encyclical represents the Church authority's participation and expression of caution in the debates, and presents what is the Church's official position on various issues concerning fundamental moral theology.

The theologians in support of the encyclical considered here include the Italian theologian, Livio Melina, Germain Grisez, and John Finnis. These theologians support the Pope on issues concerning (i) the relation of freedom and truth, (ii) conscience, (iii) the role of revelation and faith in Christian morality, and (iv) intrinsically evil acts.

#### Livio Melina

Melina points out the contribution of *Veritatis Splendor* in moral theology. He views the encyclical as calling theologians to participate fully in the renewal of moral theology called for by Vatican Council II in *Optatam totius* (no. 16).<sup>52</sup> He views the encyclical as providing guidance to theologians, and thereby stimulating renewal in light of Vatican Council II. He has written: "The encyclical also offers positive directions for carrying on the work of renewing moral theology by exploring new paths that can overcome the limits found in the more recent tradition and in its insufficient revision."<sup>53</sup>

Melina notes that the encyclical is concerned with the "breaking of the bond between freedom and truth and of that between faith and morals" (no. 4).<sup>54</sup> He locates this in the crisis of postmodernity where he says there is no link between "reason and universal and permanent truth, [postmodernity] abandons freedom to subjectivist arbitrariness."<sup>55</sup> He takes the argument further to maintain that "the rupture between faith and morality gives legitimacy to a pluralism of (contradictory) ethical views."<sup>56</sup> Of great significance for Melina is that *Veritatis Splendor* gives us "precious indications for deepening moral theology and giving it its theological and philosophical foundations."<sup>57</sup>

#### Germain Grisez

According to Grisez, the purpose of the encyclical is to correct errors in moral theologians and in the Christian faithful, and to show that truth should be safeguarded in moral teaching. He states:

The encyclical does not deal with specific kinds of acts, such as contraception or abortion, homosexual behavior or adultery. Rather, it examines and finds wanting dissenting views that attempt to find a way around some or all of the precepts which exclude those or other acts as always wrong.<sup>58</sup>

Grisez points out that the Pope, in his criticism of dissent, categorically holds that “faith includes specific moral requirements.”<sup>59</sup> He clearly holds that the natural law in no way contradicts God’s revelation but that the two go together. Grisez states: “The encyclical points out that God has communicated the same moral requirements both as a natural law, by giving human persons understanding of what is right and wrong, and as revealed truth.”<sup>60</sup> He lauds the Pope’s charge that a mistaken view treats conscience “as a creative decision rather than as a judgment following from moral truth.”<sup>61</sup>

Grisez views the encyclical as a masterpiece by the Pope showing the true and right way in Roman Catholic moral theology. The Pope’s intention, according to Grisez, is to correct the dissenters who “circumvent traditional teaching by flatly denying that the precepts forbidding certain kinds of acts as intrinsically evil really are exceptionless.”<sup>62</sup> Grisez holds the main teaching of the encyclical is the intrinsic evil of some acts forbidden in the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. He differs with the proportionalists or consequentialists when he says they hold that morality is determined by considering “the actual circumstances, the greater or the lesser good or lesser evil which it might bring about.”<sup>63</sup> However, Grisez points out that the Pope teaches, “that the exceptionlessness of the relevant norms is a revealed truth - that is, a truth demanding from every Catholic the assent of faith.”<sup>64</sup> Grisez concludes that dissenting theologians should either “admit that they are mistaken, to admit that they do not believe God’s word, or to claim that the Pope is grossly misinterpreting the Bible.”<sup>65</sup>

## John Finnis

Another theologian who supports *Veritatis Splendor* wholeheartedly is John Finnis. For Finnis the focus of the encyclical is on action and specifically on intrinsically evil acts. On the theologians who are condemned in the encyclical, Finnis says “they overlook the relevant exceptionless norm which the Church’s tradition, authoritatively interpreting revelation, has constantly and most firmly taught as truth to be held by every Catholic: it is always wrong to choose to kill the innocent,

whatever the circumstances.”<sup>66</sup> He views proportionalists’ teaching as unreasonable. He writes: “Proportionalism’s appeal to ‘proportionate reasons’ identifiable neither by reason nor by Catholic faith points everyone to decisions of ‘conscience’ grounded in whatever one *feels* appropriate, all things considered.”<sup>67</sup> He finds the encyclical as coming at an opportune time reminding theologians and Catholic faithful of the truth. He states: “The encyclical’s reaffirmation that there are intrinsically evil acts, exceptionless specific moral norms and inviolable human rights is philosophically defensible and manifestly necessary to preserve the moral substance of Christian faith.”<sup>68</sup>

For Melina, Grisez, and Finnis, *Veritatis Splendor* is “kind of a voice crying out in the wilderness” for theologians to return to the right path. These three theologians focus on acts rather than the person performing those acts. Their work seems to be a throwback to the manuals of moral theology where lists of sins and corresponding penances that a confessor was to administer in the sacrament of reconciliation were clearly stipulated. From the work of Melina, Grisez, and Finnis, the encyclical is a call to reform theology, and most of all to repair the damage that has been done over the years by showing the errors of contemporary moral theology. The call to theological objectivity in the encyclical can be seen as an awareness that despite all the theological diversity in the world today, there are still some areas of agreement. However, in the following section some of the theologians meant to be corrected by the encyclical will be seen to defend the validity of the positions they have taken, and show that the encyclical somehow exaggerates or misunderstands their theological positions.

### Theologians Critical of *Veritatis Splendor*

The theologians dealt with in this part of the essay should not be viewed as totally opposed to the encyclical, but as trying to nuance the various theological positions associated with them and condemned in the encyclical. Suffice it to say that theologians critical of the encyclical also have some positive evaluation of the same encyclical.

In its editorial, *Commonweal* summarizes the issues *Veritatis Splendor* condemns as follows:

The errors include: making freedom an absolute; according conscience the status of a supreme tribunal; granting reason complete sovereignty; making a sharp distinction between the ethical order and the order of salvation; pitting law against freedom; dividing the unity of the person; denying the universality and immutability of natural law; elevating a “fundamental option for the good” above concrete moral choices; denying a distinction between mortal and venial sins.<sup>69</sup>

From the statement above, the encyclical was intended to show that human beings need revealed morality in order to realize their ultimate end. Human beings are the recipients of God's revelation. When the encyclical refers to revealed morality, there should be more clarification that the revealed morality is realized through the rational nature in human beings. For this reason, the encyclical has also to affirm the undeniable requirement of human reason, not to mention conscience in morality. Christian morality presupposes reception by a rational human nature. To suggest a dichotomy between the revealed morality and a genuine human morality is untenable. God is believed as the creator of human beings as well as the source of revelation. No Catholic theologian has openly supported the extreme forms of dualities condemned by the encyclical, such as the separation of freedom from truth or even relativism.

Many theologians view in *Veritatis Splendor* a shift in the theology of John Paul II. Selling notes that John Paul II was a 'personalist' (phenomenologist), and that *Veritatis Splendor* is different from his earlier works especially on social ethics. For this reason the authorship of *Veritatis Splendor* is seen to point to multiple authors. Some theologians, like Selling, have suggested that the nature of the encyclical implies someone familiar with terms like autonomous ethics, theonomy, paranesis, ontic evil or physicalism and biologism.<sup>70</sup> This is seen to clearly point to someone or some people versed with trends or tendencies or currents of thought in theologies coming up in the West for decades in the past. Hence, Selling points out that the encyclical makes a "reinterpretation of the theory of the sources of morality: object, intention and circumstances."<sup>71</sup>

However, the theologians critical of the encyclical also see some positive points in the document. Lisa Sowle Cahill supports the positive aspects in the encyclical. She begins by saying that a "Lasting contribution of *Splendor Veritatis* [sic] is its affirmation of objectivity in moral thinking, against relativism and the absolutization of personal choice. The encyclical places ...moral theology in a faith context, both to maintain the connection between the moral life and religious commitment, and to assert the authority of the magisterium over theological interpretation."<sup>72</sup> This is also true of Richard McCormick who commends the encyclical on some issues while he also disagrees with others.<sup>73</sup>

Contemporary moral theology is characterized by diversity of opinions and methods. The encyclical points out the dangers of the various theological positions. However, some theologians studied here will be seen, to indicate that the encyclical somehow exaggerates some theological positions to the extreme. For instance, there is a general claim that there are no moral theologians who advocates relativism in moral issues. It is with an acknowledgement of diversity in contemporary moral theology that I limit myself here to the critical evaluation of the encyclical

by four theologians: Louis Janssens, Richard McCormick, Charles Curran, and William Spohn.

### Louis Janssens: Teleology

Besides McCormick's critical analysis of the issues in the encyclical, Louis Janssens adds another view in his analysis of the encyclical from the perspective of the work of Thomas Aquinas. According to Janssens, there is no way the magisterium can use the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas and not be subject to teleology and proportionalism. Writing on teleology and proportionalism in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas, Janssens states:

In its approach to the moral analysis of human action, the encyclical frequently refers to texts of St. Thomas. Thomas takes as his point of departure the inner act of the will, the principle of each moral act, and he emphasizes the priority of the end, the specific object of the will.<sup>74</sup>

One can say from the above passage that teleology and proportionalism are present in the work of Aquinas. Therefore, when the encyclical refers to Aquinas it seems to appeal, in a way, to proportionalism and teleological thinking in morality. Nevertheless, the encyclical condemns proportionalism and teleological thinking.

The theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is concerned with humanity coming forth from God and returning back to God (*exitus et reditus*). In this return, the consideration of the end and means to that end is unavoidable. In connection to the final end and proportionality, Janssens states:

According to St. Thomas, moral theology must first deal with the final end of human life and only after this can it deal with those things by which persons achieve this end, for it is from the end that one determines those things that are oriented toward that end (S.T., I-II, q. 1, *Introductio*). Clearly, this is a teleological perspective.<sup>75</sup>

The rightness and the wrongness of an act is determined by its contribution or hindering the realization of the final end. Janssens states:

The object of an action is a real good (*vere bonum*) when it stands in the right relationship (*proportio, ordinatio, commensuratio*) with the demands of love; it is only an apparent good (*bonum apparens*) if it stands in contradiction (*repugnantia, contrarietas, exclusio*) with love.<sup>76</sup>

From Aquinas, Janssens holds that:

Human persons not only apprehend the reality of the end, they also have a comprehensive



understanding of the end and the relationship between the end and that which needs to be done in order to achieve it (*cognoscitur ratio finis et proportio eius quod ordinatur in finem ad ipsum...proportio actus ad finem*). What is more, in contemplating an end, a person may consider not only the end itself but also that which must be done in order to achieve that end, and only then decide whether one wants to perform the action (S.T., I-II, q. 6, a. 2).<sup>77</sup>

In the work of Aquinas, the relation between the end and the means can be understood in the context of teleology and proportionality. The means should always be proportionate to the end. Therefore, for the Church to recommend the theology of Aquinas as a standard appears to be an acceptance of the teleological and proportionate nature of human morality (although this is what the encyclical is teaching against). Hence, Janssens states:

Thomas, therefore, arrives at the moral judgment of particular actions teleologically. From this it follows that whatever is done in order to achieve a goal (*ea quae sunt ad finem*) must be proportionate to that goal and thus must not be in contradiction to the moral value that is present in the goal itself.<sup>78</sup>

The rightness and the wrongness of an act is determined by its contribution or hindering of the realization of the final end, and also by the means chosen. "The object of an action must be described in such a way that it can be determined whether it is in accord with reason and is therefore *conveniens* or *inconveniens*."<sup>79</sup> For example, on whether stealing is to be viewed as intrinsically evil, one has to consider the object. Janssens notes that "On the basis of a goal-directed right to private property, Thomas concludes that in a situation of extreme need (*urgens, extrema necessitas*) one may take that which one needs from another's property when there is no other means to guarantee that which is needed to sustain one's life."<sup>80</sup>

Janssens makes an important contribution by showing how *Veritatis Splendor* makes use of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. As previously emphasized, Roman Catholic moral theological tradition was/is influenced in a tremendous way by the theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. However, there are many interpretations of the work of Aquinas. Hence, Janssens makes a good contribution in his analysis of how the encyclical uses Aquinas' work. This is also true of Richard McCormick's analysis of the encyclical.

## Richard McCormick: Proportionalism and Intrinsic Evil

McCormick notes that the encyclical is written in a very technical language. For this reason, the readers of the encyclical need some training to understand what has been going on in moral theology. The encyclical is addressed to the Roman Catholic bishops in the world. Some commentators on the encyclical have wondered whether all bishops whom the encyclical addresses can grasp the issues dealt with in the encyclical, for example, the distinction between the ethical order and order of salvation.

The commendable point, according to McCormick, is the encyclical's Christocentric presentation in chapter one. Of importance also to moral theologians is "the ringing rejection of the false dichotomies identified by John Paul II: between autonomy and theonomy, freedom and law, conscience and truth, etc. These extreme positions dead-end in relativism, subjectivism and individualism, and all of us repudiate such pathologies. But many theologians will protest that their work has nothing to do with these deviations."<sup>81</sup>

McCormick sees a problem in Chapter Two of *Veritatis Splendor*. He writes: "In its key second chapter, *Veritatis Splendor* is dense and technical. The Pope has joined an in-house conversation among moral theologians. To deal with the encyclical adequately, one has to plow into some heavy theological literature and language."<sup>82</sup> Among the repudiated issues in the encyclical are: proportionalism, teleology, relativism, and the controversy of intrinsic evil. McCormick finds the encyclical lacking because it judges some acts just by their objects without considering the circumstances and the intention of the moral agent. He states: "Equivalently, the Pope is saying that certain actions are morally wrong from the object (*ex objecto*) independently of circumstances."<sup>83</sup> He further clarifies that "The key problem is: What objects should be characterized as morally wrong and on what criteria? Of course, hidden in this question is the further one: What is to count as pertaining to the object? That is often decided by an independent ethical judgment about what one thinks is morally right or wrong in certain areas."<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, the encyclical is concerned with moral theology in the Roman Catholic Church. It is meant to give direction to bishops who as teachers in the Church ought to give guidelines to theologians and Christian faithful. To exercise his teaching role in the Church, the Pope highlights the importance of sound teaching based on Sacred Scripture as well the Sacred Tradition in the Church. However, he also condemns some recent theological concepts such as proportionalism, relativism, and the separation of truth from freedom, as not faithful to the Sacred Scripture and Tradition. On the condemnation of proportionalism in the encyclical,

McCormick holds that the encyclical does not accurately describe what proportionalism is all about. What the so-called proportionalists have in common “is the insistence that causing certain disvalues (nonmoral, premoral evils) in our conduct does not by that very fact make the action morally wrong, as certain traditional formulations supposed. The action becomes morally wrong when, all things considered, there is not a proportionate reason in the act justifying the disvalue.”<sup>85</sup>

As a theologian, McCormick feels that while the encyclical has some positive points, it also has somehow misunderstood some theological positions on issues such as proportionalism and intrinsic evil. McCormick notes:

Later, in No. 81, we read: “If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it.” In brief, the encyclical repeatedly states of proportionalism that it attempts to justify morally wrong actions by a good intention. This, I regret to say, is a misrepresentation.<sup>86</sup>

Further, referring to the encyclical, McCormick presents the problem by those who are for and against proportionalism as follows:

In the past, some have objected that certain actions are (and have been taught by the magisterium to be) morally wrong *ex objecto* (from the object). But the proportionalist, it is asserted, does not and cannot say this since he or she insists on looking at all dimensions of the act before saying it is morally wrong. The acts in question are contraception, masturbation, etc.<sup>87</sup>

According to McCormick, an action cannot be judged morally wrong simply by looking at the material happening, or at its object in a very narrow and restricted sense. The object, the circumstances, and the intention of the acting person should be considered in evaluating whether an action is moral or immoral. McCormick gives an example:

...a theft is not simply “taking another’s property,” but doing so “against the reasonable will of the owner.” This latter addition has two characteristics in the tradition. 1) It is considered as essential to the object. 2) It excludes any possible exceptions. Why? Because if a person is in extreme difficulty and needs food, the owner is not reasonably unwilling that his food be taken.<sup>88</sup>

The encyclical does not distinguish between proportionalism and the intrinsic evil controversy. Referring to the Pope's words in the encyclical, McCormick states:

He cites as an objection to proportionalist tendencies the notion that some acts are intrinsically evil from their object. I believe all proportionalists would admit this *if the object is broadly understood as including all the morally relevant circumstances*.<sup>89</sup>

McCormick clarifies the position taken by the proportionalists concerning how to consider the morality of an act. He states:

...we must look at all dimensions (morally relevant circumstances) before we know what the action is and whether it should be said to be "contrary to the commands of the divine and natural law."<sup>90</sup>

Finally, McCormick's response can be said to provide an important analysis of the issues dealt with in the encyclical. His critical evaluation of the encyclical is summed up here by his view of the encyclical's condemnation of proportionalism as based on a misunderstanding of what proportionalism is all about. However, McCormick's response to the encyclical is an important contribution in understanding the encyclical as well as some of the issues in contemporary moral theology such as proportionalism. Janssens' contribution, in his analysis of the encyclical from a teleological perspective, is related to McCormick's critical analysis of the encyclical from the perspective of proportionalism.

### Charles Curran: Moral Law

Curran views the encyclical as intending to show the role of the magisterium of the church in moral teaching. He points out that in the encyclical moral theologians "...are called to be an example of loyal assent, both internal and external, to the magisterium's teaching (n.106-117)."<sup>91</sup> However, he is opposed to the encyclical's presentation of Christian morality as realized through obedience to the commandments of God. He is critical of the encyclical's emphasis on morality as law. He states:

The first objection comes from the moral model which the pope proposes in *Veritatis Splendor*. Here John Paul II understands morality primarily on the basis of a legal model. Such an approach, which characterized the manuals of moral theology in vogue until very recent times, sees morality primarily in terms of obedience to the law or the commandments of God.<sup>92</sup>

Presenting moral issues in a legal framework goes against the understanding of morality from a Christocentric perspective, where morality should be seen as a response to the God who calls people in love to follow him. From a Thomistic perspective, Curran expresses concern over a legalistic understanding of morality. He writes:

Thomas Aquinas did not follow a legal model, but rather a teleological model, based on what is the ultimate end of human beings. For Aquinas, the ultimate end of human beings is happiness, and actions are good if they bring one to that end and evil if they prevent one's arriving at that end.<sup>93</sup>

The preceding statement by Curran compares to the position taken by Louis Janssens on the use of the work of Thomas Aquinas by the encyclical. However, Curran questions the encyclical's legal model. According to Curran, "*Veritatis Splendor* thus gives the impression that it is describing the model for moral theology in general."<sup>94</sup>

Basically, Christian morality goes beyond observing the commandments. The legal model, according to Curran, is contrary to the Catholic tradition. He writes:

The Catholic tradition as illustrated in Thomas Aquinas has always insisted on an intrinsic morality. For Aquinas something is commanded because it is good. For Aquinas the ultimate end of human beings is happiness. Morality involves what is good for me as a person and ultimately makes me flourish. There is no opposition between freedom and moral obligation, because the moral obligation is based on what is good for the individual.<sup>95</sup>

However, the preceding statement by Curran seems to need further clarification. He limits morality to the good of the individual, whereas morality has a communal or a social dimension. Nevertheless, he makes an important contribution by pointing out that morality is not founded on 'commands' but on the personal capacity to realize what is right or wrong.

Ultimately, the legal model of moral reasoning in the encyclical can be seen to further support the Church's firmness in defending universal and unchanging moral norms (VS, 96). The legal model is evident when the encyclical emphasizes the commandments, instead of intrinsic morality. "The major thrust of the encyclical insists on universal, immutable moral commandments which prohibit always and without exception intrinsically evil acts."<sup>96</sup> Curran notes that the Pope never cites the fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," because of the many variations surrounding this commandment. For example, the manuals only forbid "direct killing of the innocent on one's own authority," and

allowed indirect killing; killing in self-defense or in war, and capital punishment.<sup>97</sup>

Evidently, the encyclical is critical of contemporary moral theology. “*Veritatis Splendor* strongly disagrees with and condemns many of the developments in Catholic moral theology since Vatican II and stands opposed to the revisionist moral theology in

general.”<sup>98</sup> Curran further views the encyclical as a part of a theological system that wants to replace other theological systems. According to Curran, however, *Veritatis Splendor* should not occupy any privileged position but it should present its case in a convincing way and be open to criticism and disagreements as any other theological system. He states:

The pope explicitly denies any intention “to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one” (n.29). However, in reality John Paul II strongly reasserts the nineteenth and twentieth century Neo-Scholasticism of the manuals of moral theology within his more personalistic framework.<sup>99</sup>

From Curran’s perspective, one can say that reducing Christian morality to the observance of commandments or moral law has the danger of making it a minimalist ethics. To be a Christian means to be a new creation or a new being in Christ. It is an integral way of life. The commandments or even the moral norms are relevant to Christian life, but they are not the only aspect of Christianity. We should never forget that a Christian person encounters new situations every day. Some situations are not dealt with in the moral law or the commandments, and therefore, require a response coming from the ‘new being in Christ.’ The gospels or the Bible provide basic principles that need to be applied to Christian living. Experience in the world provides an important tool in interpretation and decision-making in everyday life.

From the responses of McCormick, Janssens, and Curran, one can say that the issues dealt with in the encyclical are controversial, but are at the same time, indispensable in contemporary moral theology. However, the three theologians dealt here, have been seen to question the position of the encyclical on issues in contemporary moral theology. On the other hand, some issues raised in the encyclical are helpful to contemporary moral theology. Further, William Spohn critically sheds some light through his analysis on the encyclical’s use of Sacred Scripture.

### William C. Spohn: The Use of Sacred Scripture

Just as contemporary moral theologians have used Scripture in their work, so also the encyclical begins with an extensive use of the gospel

story among other scriptural references. Spohn commends *Veritatis Splendor* for its use of Sacred Scripture. He acknowledges the undoubtable place of Sacred Scripture in moral theology. He states:

Examining the contours of moral theology's method will complement the historical map. Most writers in Christian ethics today would agree that there are four sources for moral reflection: Scripture, tradition, moral philosophy, and the empirical data relevant to the issue under consideration. Each of them makes an indispensable contribution.<sup>100</sup>

Spohn does not question the encyclical's use of Sacred Scripture in general but whether it makes the right interpretation of the scriptural passages it references. The encyclical uses several texts from the Bible. These texts are applied in the encyclical to show that the points made are based on the Bible. The word of God is an authoritative way of showing the relevance of moral teaching and its agreement with the bigger picture of God's revelation. However, the question of method in the use of scripture is an important one that always requires consideration in any theological study.

Spohn is concerned with the theological method used in *Veritatis Splendor*. Unfortunately, the encyclical does not explain the method it applies in its use of Sacred Scripture. Spohn raises concern over the methodology and the context of the encyclical in its use of Sacred Scripture. On the use of Sacred Scripture in moral theology, he writes:

The major obstacle to appealing to Scripture for moral argument is its apparent irrelevance to today's burning question. Can this collection of ancient texts from diverse cultures offer moral guidance on nuclear weapons, economic justice, or the new status of women? Clearly Scripture would have little to offer on these current issues if one restricts moral guidance to particular concrete moral rules of behavior. However, when ethics is expanded beyond rules and principles to encompass one's fundamental vision of what is worthwhile in life, the shape of one's character, the moral qualities of virtue and vice, and the humane quality of social practices and institutions, then Scripture can play a more extensive role in moral guidance. Biblical events like Exodus become paradigms for action; psalms are seen to shape the deeper emotions of the heart; and narratives reveal

the character of God and intimate a faithful response.<sup>101</sup>

Nevertheless, it is a controversial issue to use Sacred Scripture as a direct and literal source of moral norms. Scripture requires critical reading and interpretation in order to avoid a naïve fundamentalism. In a critical way, Spohn raises concern on whether the encyclical reads Matthew 19 in its context. He writes:

The chapter focuses on what four different classes of persons must do to enter the Reign of God: the married, those who do not marry, children, and the rich. In context, therefore, the rich young man is not “Everyman,” but a representative of the rich and their particular impediments to discipleship.<sup>102</sup>

The law and the commandments have a new meaning when viewed from the perspective of faith in God. The grace of God is necessary to lead to a moral life, and commandments are one way to respond to the God who calls people to union of love with him.

Sacred Scripture has a universal nature in the sense that it has something to offer to all people in the world, but it should always be immanent to context and always open to interpretation. Interpretation involves the reading of a text. However, one can question Spohn’s view that *Veritatis Splendor* misinterprets Sacred Scripture because, in my view, a text can have as many interpretations as there are readers. Alternatively, there is no one method of scriptural interpretation. Although, it is not my concern here, contemporary literary styles range from deconstruction, structural analysis, to the reader-response method. Historical criticism as a method, though not the only method, helps scholars to locate texts in their historical contexts. Sacred Scripture is always open to interpretation, but it is imperative to realize that a particular context always influences the reading of a text.

Notable is the fact that Spohn acknowledges that tradition also shapes the way Scripture is used, especially in ethics. He states:

Tradition and ethics will shape the selection of Scripture in any theological argument; it is virtually impossible to proceed *sola scriptura*. Biblical material is likely to be interpreted through commitments rooted in the author’s tradition in order to yield applications consistent with the tradition. Or ethics may be the controlling factor: the model of ethics which is assumed in the application phase will enlist particular doctrinal and ecclesiological themes of the tradition to select and interpret Scripture.<sup>103</sup>



According to Spohn, it is people who make an interpretation of a text, and therefore every passage derives its meaning from broader convictions and assumptions. He holds that central theological themes and methodological commitments make it possible to understand the selected texts. Further, he argues that a biblical text is used in certain way because of a people's basic notions of God, humanity and the world, Christological commitments, the relation of sin and grace (or grace and nature), and models of Christian community.<sup>104</sup> *Veritatis Splendor* also does not escape the influence of tradition in Roman Catholic moral theology. Ultimately, Sacred Scripture and tradition are inseparable in the moral teaching of the Church.

Nevertheless, one cannot avoid questioning the criterion used in the selection of the Scriptural texts in *Veritatis Splendor*. Spohn is particularly concerned whether the historical context is considered in the encyclical. "The process of selection inevitably raises the correlative question: What canonical texts, genres, or historical periods are left out?"<sup>105</sup> He notes that in the first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*, the Gospels of Matthew and John predominate. "What is missing from this set? OT narratives, wisdom literature and prophetic material are mostly absent, The Gospels of Mark and Luke, which present different images of Jesus and of morality, are peripheral at best."<sup>106</sup>

Besides questioning the method in *Veritatis Splendor's* use of scripture, Spohn also questions the theological method used. Spohn wants to know the theological process followed in the encyclical to reach the conclusions presented in the document. Further, he states:

Turning to the encyclical, we can inquire how it makes these methodological options concerning biblical material and coordinates them with the other sources of moral theology. Since the argument focuses on a particular disputed question, the empirical situation influences the choice of biblical material. The encyclical makes empirical claims about certain attitudes in the Church and secular society concerning truth, freedom, conscience, moral norms etc; however, no data are offered to substantiate or analyze these assertions.<sup>107</sup>

From Spohn, we can conclude that Sacred Scripture is an indispensable source and resource for moral theology. Sacred Scripture and tradition go hand in hand in any study of moral theology. This is coupled with the use of reason in moral issues as evidenced in the natural law tradition. However, just as faith and reason go hand in hand in Christian moral reasoning, so also we cannot separate Sacred Scripture

from human reason in the moral discernment process. Nevertheless, the use of Scripture needs to be qualified because naïve fundamentalism cannot be reconciled with any sound theological investigation. One cannot, as such, take moral norms directly from the Sacred Scripture because there is always need for reasonable interpretation.

## Conclusion

*Veritatis Splendor* is an important response of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church to the developments in moral theology after Vatican II. The encyclical condemns various trends in moral theology associated with several theologians. However, the encyclical raises some positive concerns in contemporary moral theology such as the problem of relativism, the use of Sacred Scripture in moral theology, the relation between morality and law, freedom and truth, among others.

This work presents a critical analysis of the various responses to the encyclical from moral theologians. Bujo suggests that the encyclical would be more powerful if it employed an intercultural method rather than limiting itself to the western natural moral law tradition. Some theologians, like Grisez, Finnis, and Melina, support the encyclical wholeheartedly as a voice of clarity in an otherwise confused world of contemporary moral theology. Spohn, on his part, is viewed as questioning the interpretation of Sacred Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*. Other theologians like McCormick, Janssens, and Curran, are featured as questioning the way the encyclical has dealt with issues in moral theology. These theologians question the encyclical's understanding and condemnation of proportionalism, teleological thinking, and the understanding of moral law. In their response to the encyclical, Bujo, McCormick, Janssens, and Curran, take recourse to the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Pope in *Veritatis Splendor* also refers to St. Thomas Aquinas to show that the encyclical is faithful to the tradition.

However, the encyclical should not be viewed as a final word in contemporary moral theology. Neither is the encyclical viewed here as a solution to all the problems in contemporary moral theology. Diversity in contemporary moral theology should be viewed as a positive aspect, an acknowledgement that all people, no matter what their cultural and historical background maybe, have something to contribute to the development of moral theology. Diversity should be seen as a realization of the true nature of being 'catholic' or universal. Though the church is one, she has many members who have different cultural and historical backgrounds.

Although the encyclical addresses moral issues after Vatican II, there are issues that the encyclical leaves unanswered. The first issue I think the encyclical does not address is cultural pluralism in the Roman Catholic Church. The encyclical emphasizes the Word of God as the source of moral

norms, however, interpretation of Sacred Scripture takes place in a historical and a cultural setting. The encyclical seems to advocate that the moral teaching of the Church magisterium has a universal nature. However in the world today, diversity is an undeniable reality, and evidence drawn from concrete experience is helpful in the realization of moral norms. Any people's culture and history shapes their interpretation of the gospels and Christian living. In the Synod of Africa, Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of the inculturation of the gospel in the evangelization of Africa.<sup>108</sup>

The second issue the encyclical does not address, but I think it should have, is the role of moral theologians in the official teaching of the moral magisterium of the Church. The call for obedience to the teaching of the magisterium is not enough but there is need of more dialogue on moral issues. This dialogue would be beneficial as a learning and listening process in the formulation of the teaching of the magisterium. This dialogue should include theologians and other members of the Church, and thereby enable the magisterium reconcile different theological positions. Again, the universality of the Roman Catholic Church suggests that there is a way to realize unity in diversity. The universality of the Church should enable the magisterium to accommodate diversity in moral thought. But diversity should not necessarily imply disunity but a higher level of unity, one in many and many in one.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius*, No. 16. See also Marciano Vidal, "Die 'Encyclical Veritatis Splendor' und der Weltkatechismus: Die Restauration des Neuthomismus in der katholischen Morallehre," in *Moraltheologie im Abseits? Antwort auf die Enzyklika Veritatis splendor*, ed. Dietmar Mieth, (Freiburg: Herder, 1994): 244-270.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph A. Selling, "The Context and the Arguments," in *The Splendor of Accuracy: An Examination of the Assertions Made by Veritatis Splendor*, eds. J. A. Selling & Jan Jans, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994): 22.

<sup>3</sup> There is no single way to categorize contemporary moral theology. Many theologians have shown that diversity is the true nature of moral theology today. For example, Bresnahan describes the contemporary situation in ethics as follows: "This experience of our freedom as power which produces moral dilemma has precipitated a crisis in contemporary ethics. Ethical reflection is supposed to help us understand and solve moral dilemmas. Yet today ethics, including natural-law thinking in ethics, does not seem able to produce readily understandable, or at least widely acceptable, solutions to the dilemmas we face". James Bresnahan, "An Ethics of Faith," in *An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology: A World of Grace*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995): 171

<sup>4</sup> The edition used here of the *Veritatis Splendor* is the one by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, August 6, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Some Early Reactions to *Veritatis Splendor*", *Theological Studies*, 55 (1994): 481. McCormick refers to VS as published in the *Origins*, 23 (1993): 297-334.

<sup>6</sup> *Optatam Totius*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> In VS 5, the encyclical refers to *Dei Verbum*, 10, where the Second Vatican Council recommends that moral teaching should be based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition.

<sup>8</sup> *Dei Verbum* 10 points out that the magisterium of the Church has a duty to "reverently preserve and faithfully expound" the word of God.

<sup>9</sup> Konrad Hilpert, "Glanz der Wahrheit: Licht und Schatten: Eine Analyse der neuen Moralenzyklika," in *Herder Korrespondenz: Monatshefte für Gesellschaft und Religion*, (Heft 12 47. Jahrgang, December 1993): 628. As stated in German: "Die Basishaltung, die der Erfüllung der einzelnen Gebote vorangestellt wird, ist der Gehorsam. Es dürfte kaum ein gesamt kirchliches Dokument seit dem II. Vatikanum geben, in dem so betont Gehorsam eingefordert wird; insgesamt kommt der Begriff fast dreißigmal vor und erweist sich damit neben 'Gesetz' als eines der am häufigsten gebrauchten theologischen Stichwörter der Enzyklika"

<sup>10</sup> It is worth mentioning here Bernard Hoose's view that magisterial authority in the Church varies depending on its link between revelation, fidelity to the lived faith of the Church (tradition), and the teachings in question (pp. 113-114). ["Authority in the Church," *Theological Studies*, 63, (2002): 107-122].

<sup>11</sup> One can question whether the magisterium of the Church is subject to a normal human learning and listening process. To understand the meaning of the magisterial tradition in the Church, from which *Veritatis Splendor* has its source, Richard McCormick's views are helpful. McCormick describes how the contemporary understanding of the magisterium came about. He notes that since the 1830s the magisterium has been presented in a very juridical way, and this understanding reached its climax in the encyclical *Humani Generis* under Pius XII. He states: "The focus that went into its (magisterium) making...produced a notion of magisterium with the following three characteristics [emphasis mine]: (1) an undue distinction between the teaching and learning function in the Church, with a consequent unique emphasis on the right to teach - and relatively little on the duty to learn and the sources of learning in the Church; (2) an undue identification of the teaching function with a single group in the Church, the hierarchy; (3) an undue isolation of a single aspect of teaching, the judgmental, the decisive, the 'final word'". R. McCormick, *The Critical Calling: Reflections on Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 19. See also the letter of sixty theologians of Quebec, "Lettre ouverte aux évêques du Québec," *L'Eglise canadienne*, 27 (January 1994): 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to GS, 24, VS 13 presents the commandment of love of neighbor as the "precise expression of the singular dignity of the human person."

<sup>13</sup> VS 34 calls for people to seek the truth and adhere to it. Reference here is made to *Second Vatican Council*, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2, which declares in part: "The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to

religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.”

<sup>14</sup> Karl P. Donfried, “The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*”, *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals*, eds. Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998): 48.

<sup>15</sup> Sandu Frunză, “Increasing competence - an ethical duty of civil servants”, *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, Special Issue (Dec 2012)*: 32-41.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted here that the encyclical refers to Thomas Aquinas on the new law as the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1).

<sup>17</sup> GS 17 states: “Since human freedom has been weakened by sin it is only by the help of God’s grace that man can give his actions their full and proper relationship to God. Before the judgment seat of God an account of his own life will be rendered to each one according as he has done either good or evil.”

<sup>18</sup> On the human responsibility to seek the truth always, VS refers to Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Alfons Auer sparked the debate on moral autonomy in the Roman Catholic Church through his book, *Autonome Moral und christlicher Glaube*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> The Pope also acknowledges that the rational nature of human beings makes it possible to have understandable and communicable moral norms (VS, 36). Reference is made here to GS 40 and 43. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 71, a. 6.

<sup>21</sup> See GS 36.

<sup>22</sup> See Josef Fuchs, “Moral Truths - Truths of Salvation?”, in *Christian Ethics in a Secular Arena*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1984): 48-67.

<sup>23</sup> Note the encyclical does not make any reference in footnote or otherwise, either from Vatican II or other papal encyclicals, when it condemns the separation of an ethical order from an order of salvation.

<sup>24</sup> The encyclical understands the natural law as it is presented by Thomas Aquinas. In VS 12, the pope refers to *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2. The encyclical also makes reference to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, GS 41.

<sup>25</sup> For an evaluation of *Veritatis Splendor* and the natural law see: Nicholas Lash, “Crisis and Tradition in *Veritatis Splendor*”, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 7 (1994): 22-28. Lash positively evaluates the encyclical’s use of natural law as follows: “Weaving in Aquinas’ classic definition of ‘natural law’ as nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided, and presenting the commandments as not a ‘minimum limit’ but rather as ‘the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom,’ the Pope integrates precepts and counsels into a single story of the human journey, enabled, drawn and coaxed by God, through holiness towards eternal life” (p. 23). See also the article by Janet E. Smith, “Natural Law and Personalism in *Veritatis Splendor*”, *Readings in Moral Theology No. 10: John Paul II and Theology*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S. J., (New York: Paulist, 1998): 67-84.

<sup>26</sup> See Timothy O’Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). O’Connell states: “The law of the Spirit, the law of the Christian’s new being, is an inner law. It is not a law imposed by God on unwilling humankind. Rather, it is, if we may put it this way, the result of intimate communication

between the heart of a loving God and the heart of the believing human person” (p.146).

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol. 1, (New York: Seabury, 1978-1981). Also by Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 3 vols., trans. Edwin G. Kasper, (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1961-66).

<sup>28</sup> Sandu Frunză, *Ethical Communication and Social Responsibility*, (Saarbruchen, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000). Lefebure writes: “The manifold ways that interpretations of revelation have supported violence demand a critical appropriation of the Scriptures and the Christian tradition itself” (p. 2).

<sup>30</sup> See Louis Janssens, “Teleology and Proportionality: Thoughts about the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *The Splendor of Accuracy: An Examination of the Assertions made by Veritatis Splendor*, eds. Joseph A. Selling and Jan Jans, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): 99-113

<sup>31</sup> On Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on natural law, see *Summa Theologiae* ST I-II, Q. 90 to Q. 94.

<sup>32</sup> See VS 36, where the encyclical refers to St. Thomas Aquinas, ST I-II, q. 71, a. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 2001), 80.

<sup>34</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>37</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Bujo, 82

<sup>41</sup> Bujo, 82

<sup>42</sup> Bujo, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Bujo, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Bujo, 83. When Bujo holds that intrinsic evil as taught by the church is known only through the natural law, he makes reference to J. Fuchs, “*Die sittliche Handlung: das intrinsece malum*,” in *Moraltheologie im Abseits?: Antwort auf die Enzyklika “Veritatis Splendor,”* ed. Dietmar Mieth, (Freiburg [im Breisgau]: Herder, 1994): 177-93. See also John Haldane, “From Law to Virtue and Back Again: On *Veritatis Splendor*,” *The Bible in Ethics*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995): 27-40. Commenting on *Veritatis Splendor*, Haldane states: “The main concern throughout is to show that a proper understanding of human agency implies that certain kinds of actions are intrinsically bad (*intrinsic malum*) and not such as can be justified by a pre-established fundamental option, good motives (*causis bonis*) or by a specific intention to produce beneficial outcomes” (p. 34).

<sup>45</sup> Bujo, 83.

<sup>46</sup> Bujo, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Bujo, 83.

<sup>48</sup> Bujo, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Bujo, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Bujo, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Demmer, Klaus M.S.C., *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, edited by James Keenan, S.J., translated by Robert Dell’Oro, and foreword by

Thomas Kopfensteiner, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000). Demmer states: "Scripture cannot be conceived as a handbook of moral theology, nor does it present any ethical system that could provide a ready-made answer for every area of life" (p. 27). The use of Sacred Scripture in moral theology, especially after Vatican II, is a major concern of renewal moral theologians.

<sup>52</sup> Livio Melina, *Sharing in Christ's Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of Veritatis Splendor*, trans. William E. May, (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Livio Melina, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Livio Melina, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Livio Melina, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Livio Melina, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Livio Melina, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Germain Grisez, "Revelation versus Dissent," in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, ed. John Wilkins (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994): 2.

<sup>59</sup> Germain Grisez, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Germain Grisez, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Germain Grisez, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Germain Grisez, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Germain Grisez, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Germain Grisez, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Germain Grisez, 7.

<sup>66</sup> John Finnis, "Beyond the Encyclical," *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, 70. It is worth mentioning here the contradiction in the Sacred Scripture on the requirement not to kill the innocent. While Exodus 20: 13 says, "You shall not murder," 1 Samuel 15: 3 states, "Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." Cf. Deuteronomy 20.

<sup>67</sup> Finnis, 71. See also Charles R. Pinches, *Theology and Action: After Theory in Christian Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 59-86.

<sup>68</sup> Finnis, 74.

<sup>69</sup> Editorial, *Commonweal*, (23 October 1993: 3): 4.

<sup>70</sup> Selling, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Selling, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Commonweal*, (22 October 1993: 3): 15.

<sup>73</sup> Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Veritatis Splendor and Moral Theology," in *America*, (October 30, 1993, Vol. 169 No. 13): 9.

<sup>74</sup> Janssens, 102.

<sup>75</sup> Janssens, 103-104.

<sup>76</sup> Janssens, 103-104.

<sup>77</sup> Janssens, 102-103.

<sup>78</sup> Janssens, 106.

<sup>79</sup> Janssens, 105.

<sup>80</sup> Janssens, 108-109.

<sup>81</sup> Janssens, 108-109.

<sup>82</sup> Janssens, 108-109.

<sup>83</sup> Janssens, 108-109.

<sup>84</sup> Janssens, 108-109.

<sup>85</sup> Janssens, 108-109. See also Edward Vacek, S.J., "Proportionalism: One View of the Debate," in *Theological Studies*, 46 (1985): 287-314. And also Bernard Hoose, *Proportionalism: The American Debate and its European Roots*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1987), 69-95.

<sup>86</sup> McCormick, "Veritatis Splendor and Moral Theology," 10.

<sup>87</sup> McCormick, 10.

<sup>88</sup> McCormick, 10.

<sup>89</sup> McCormick, 10.

<sup>90</sup> McCormick, 10. For a philosophical exposition on the background arguments in *Veritatis Splendor* see also Alasdair MacIntyre, "How can we learn what *Veritatis Splendor* has to teach?," in *The Thomist*, 58 (1994): 171-195. MacIntyre argues that the encyclical uses a Thomistic understanding of the natural law, especially in its teaching on intrinsic evil (p. 176).

<sup>91</sup> Charles Curran, "Veritatis Splendor: A Revisionist Perspective", in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, eds. Michael E. Allsop & John J. O'Keefe, (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995): 226-7.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Curran, 230.

<sup>93</sup> Charles Curran, 231.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Curran, 231.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Curran, 231.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Curran, 232. See also Karl P. Donfried, "The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John's Moral Encyclicals*, eds. Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998). Commenting on the use of Matthew 19: 16-22 in VS, Donfried asks whether Jesus had in mind the universal and unchanging norms (VS #96) when he referred to the commandments. He states; "The broad generalizations in this section of *Veritatis Splendor* go far beyond what is said in the Matthean pericope or what can responsibly be attributed to Paul" (p. 56).

<sup>97</sup> Curran, 232.

<sup>98</sup> Curran, 233. See also Helen Oppenheimer, "Some Anglican Comments on *Veritatis Splendor*", in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 7 (1994): 35-37.

<sup>99</sup> Curran, 226. See also Richard P. McBrien, "Teaching the Truth", in *Christian Century*, (Oct. 20, 1993): 1004-1005.

<sup>100</sup> William C. Spohn, "Morality on the Way of Discipleship: The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*", in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, eds. Michael E. Allsopp & John J. O'Keefe, (Sheed & Ward, 1995): 86. See also Servais Pinckaers, O.P., "The Use of Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology: The Catechism and *Veritatis Splendor*," in *The Thomist*, 59 (1995): 1-19.

<sup>101</sup> Spohn, 87.

<sup>102</sup> Spohn, 91. See also Gareth Moore, "Some Remarks on the Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*", in *The Splendor of Accuracy: An Examination of the Assertions Made by Veritatis Splendor*, eds. Joseph A. Selling & Jan Jans, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): 71-98. Moore differs with the encyclical on the use of Sacred Scripture. He says that the encyclical uses the passage from Matthew to show the importance of the commandments in moral life. He is of the opinion that in the text from the gospel of Matthew Jesus was concerned with riches: "The message of this narrative is not how hard it is for those who do not keep the commandments to enter the kingdom, but how hard for those with riches" (p. 77). The words of Jesus and St. Paul (Rom. 3: 28, 4:13-16)



point “to the necessity of something apart from obedience to law, to the inadequacy of thinking of a person’s relationship to God in terms of law and commandment” (p. 80).

<sup>103</sup> Spohn, 89. See also the statement by Collins when he refers to the use of Sacred Scripture in moral theology before Vatican II. He states: “To the extent that it was used at all, the Bible was generally introduced into moral theology in one of two ways. Sometimes appeal was made to a scriptural passage, taken out of its biblical context, in order to provide a biblical warrant for or a scriptural confirmation in support of a moral judgment which had been essentially elaborated by means of a merely rational process. Sometimes the Scriptures were used as a principle of organization in the exposition of moral theology” (p. 1-2).

<sup>104</sup> Spohn, 87

<sup>105</sup> Spohn, 87

<sup>106</sup> Spohn, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Spohn, 88.

<sup>108</sup> John Paul II, *The Church in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, (Nairobi: Paulines, 1995), 41-56.

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