

STUDY MATERIALS: The Moral Magisterium of John Paul II

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Introduction

The videos you have watched, are watching, will watch provide a summary and outline of the Moral Magisterium of Pope John Paul II. In essence, this conforms with what conventional Catholic moral theology calls "Fundamental Moral Theology."

Fundamental or general moral theology is the first course in Moral Theology since it considers the basic principles and presuppositions of the subject, but in this effort we employ the teachings and writings of John Paul II as our tests and constant reference.

The chief works for this course are:

John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (8/6/93) nn. 1-120.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) Part III, ##1699-2051.

Two recent 'Introductions' cover the same material more expansively while not limiting themselves so exclusively to the writings of Pope John Paul II:

- W. E. May, *Introduction to Moral Theology* (revised ed.) (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994) 288 pp.
- S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (French ed. 1993) (Wash, D.C: Catholic Univ. of America Pr., 1995) 489 pp.

Finally many basic terms of reference are well explained in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967) 15 volumes. For ready reference these are cited as *NCE* 9:1109-1117; that would refer to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia (NCE)* volume 9, pages 1109-1117. Lastly, the teaching documents of Vatican Council II will be referred to often; thus, one of the available collections of those documents (Abbott or Flannery) will be necessary as will a copy of the Bible.

Each of the lessons that follow will refer to other titles, particularly the documents and teachings of Pope John Paul II with some bibliography to expand your knowledge beyond the specific demands of this course.

1a. Subject: Place, Content, Method

Moral Theology is part of Sacred Theology and cannot be understood apart from it. Some popularly see casuistic and canonical emphases as the classic expression of Catholic Moral Theology, but the history of the subject demonstrates that the Church survived 15 centuries without Moral Theology being a separate discipline at all. (For a history of Moral Theology cf. *NCE* 9:1117-1123). Less scholarly, but perhaps more popular, distortions sometimes categorize Catholic moral teaching as a series of bans, prohibitions, largely external negative directives that appear external to the human agent. Because such distortions and slogans are so extensive, it is quite necessary to define properly the correct scope and nature of Moral Theology.

Consider the terms: Moral and Theology. The material object (the subject matter) is 'morality' -- that is, human conduct or human behavior. There are many natural or human sciences that study rational ethics. There is a long history and no shortage of ethical theories emanating from different and differing schools of philosophy (cf. G. Dalcourt, "Ethics, History of," *NCE* 5:573-578) all of which focus on the study of human conduct, arguing for or against ethical standards of human conduct.

Obviously, many human and social sciences also focus their study and concentration on human conduct and human behavior; e.g., economics, psychology, anthropology, medicine, sociology, etc. Many of these sciences and studies provide the basis for standards in these areas. Almost every profession has elaborated some code of ethics, some accepted and recognizable standards of behavior within that profession or area.

Thus, the *material* object (human conduct; human acts) is a subject matter that is neither unique nor exclusive to Moral Theology; all of the above natural, human or social sciences also study human conduct.

It is, rather, the *formal* object (point of view from which we consider the matter) of Moral Theology that distinguishes it from the natural or human sciences above. The *matter* for study remains the same (human conduct), but the point of view from which we study it (theology) is quite different. This point might seem simple and little more than a necessary division of labor and a conventional definition of terms; it is, however, crucial. Many disputes in Catholic Moral Theology (especially printed growth industries called 'dissent') are really not disputes in theology but rather a forgetfulness about the true nature of Sacred Theology.

Thus, we must recall throughout that the '*theos*' in theology refers to God. This is why the *sacred* sources come first in theology -- precisely because they are *sacred*: i.e. Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and Magisterium of the Church. The *material* object of our study remains the same (human conduct; human acts); but the point of view from which we study this matter is the point of view of the Sacred Sources.

As theology, Moral Theology has the same medium of knowledge (Divine Revelation) and the same first *principles* (articles of the faith) as does all Sacred Doctrine (*sacra doctrina*) along with noted Doctors (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Alphonsus) and reason inspired by faith. But it is important to notice and to insist that the 'sacred sources' come first and have first place. An ancient maxim from the Middle Ages held that 'theology' teaches God (*Deum docet*), is taught by God (*a Deo docetur*), and leads to God (*ad Deum ducit*). This is correct and should not be confused with any science that teaches man, is taught by man, and leads to man, or, teaches reason, is taught by reason, and leads to the reasonable only.

No one should ignore nor neglect the place and importance of rational ('reasonable') ethics; but that true science should not be confused with Sacred Theology either.

A dry but competent definition of 'Moral Theology' can be found in J.M. Ramirez, "Moral Theology" *NCE* 9:1109-1117. That article correctly defines the nature and object of Moral Theology as well as the relation of Moral Theology to the other parts of theology.

Since our course title is that of the Moral Magisterium of John Paul II, we can focus on the definition of 'Moral Theology' provided by Pope John Paul II in his moral masterpiece, *Veritatis Splendor* (8/6/93) (hereafter cited as *VS*):

" . . . in the specific form of the theological science called '*Moral Theology*', a science which accepts and examines Divine Revelation while at the same time responding to the demands of human reason. Moral Theology is a reflection concerned with 'morality', with the good and the evil of human acts and of the person who performs them; in this sense it is accessible to all people. But is it also 'theology', in as much as it acknowledges that the origin and end of moral action are found in the One who 'alone is good' and who, by giving himself to man in Christ, offers him the happiness of divine life." (*VS*, n 29)

This encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, is the foundational text of this course. Thus, a copy of it is required reading in its entirety and it can only be read intelligently with a copy of the Bible and the Documents of Vatican II alongside.

Theology -- knowledge derived from faith and scientifically elaborated by reason -- admits of at least two functions: one *cognitive* -- things to be *known* pertaining to faith; and, one *directive* -- things to be *done* pertaining to morals. Believing rightly and acting rightly came, in time, to be called Dogmatic and Moral Theology. But they are always integrally connected since ORTHOPRAXY (correct practice) always rests on ORTHODOXY (correct doctrine) -- the *truth* of salvation and the way of salvation are one: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn.14:6).

As above and throughout, the privileged place and interrelation of the Sacred Sources of Sacred Theology deserve careful review and study. When presented with a wealth of questions and opinions, we will take as our methodological rule a norm proposed by the International Theological Commission (10/11/72):

"The unity of Christian morality is based on unchanging principles contained in the *Scriptures*, clarified by *Tradition*, presented to each generation by the *Magisterium*."

In Sacred Theology (including, of course, Moral Theology), we look first to the *sacred sources*. Why? Because Sacred Scripture is *revealed* by God, Sacred Tradition is *guided* by the Holy Spirit and the Church (Magisterium) is endowed by Jesus Christ with a charism to *teach* in his name. There is more than human wisdom here. When we say 'yes' to these sacred sources, we give the assent of soul to what is revealed by God, guided by the Holy Spirit and taught in and with the authority of Jesus.

The place and import of these three sacred sources, their relation and interrelation, is compactly and authoritatively explained in the dogmatic constitution, *Dei Verbum* (nn.7-10) of Vatican Council II. This is the basis and foundation of all revealed religion, and our Catholic Faith is, of course, a religion of Revelation -- full Revelation: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church (Magisterium), whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. "This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed" (*DV*, n.10).

Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church are so linked and joined together "that one cannot stand without the others" -- each and together, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, contribute effectively to the salvation of souls. (*DV*, n.10)

The very beginning of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) has a compact but nuanced presentation of God's Revelation and the Transmission of that Divine Revelation (cf. CCC ##50-141). An explicit mention of morality and the Magisterium is found in CCC ##2030-2040. For a more extended and reliable exposition of these sources of revelation confer parts 3,4, & 5 of A. Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991) pp. 99-260. Another document of the pontificate of John Paul II that brings great precision and sound direction to these starting points in Catholic Theology is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Instruction On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" (*Donum Veritatis* (5/24/90), nn.1-42).

1b. Scriptural Sources

The text for our course on the Moral Magisterium of John Paul II is his encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (8/6/93). The precise purpose of this encyclical is stated clearly near its beginning: "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, n.5).

True to its stated purpose, *Veritatis Splendor* is itself a perfect example of what Moral Theology is and how to do it. Both the content and the method are obvious from the beginning. Consider Chapter I of VS, nn. 6-27. The Pope begins with a reflective meditation on the dialogue with the rich young man in Matt. 19:16-21.

Not only is this his personal style, almost his signature opening for many major teaching documents of his pontificate, but it is the proper starting point for Sacred Theology, i.e., Divine Revelation. And so, for example, the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (1980) reflects deeply on the Prodigal Son (L.15:14-32); *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) reflects deeply on the Cain and Abel account in Genesis 4:2-16.

But beginning with Divine Revelation is not just a personal style nor a given literary approach, it is rather the proper and correct methodology for 'doing' Sacred Theology.

Read Chapter I of VS, nn.6-27. Notice, not simply the dialogue with the rich young man of Matt. 19 in nn. 6-8, but the commandments (nn.9-13); the two great commandments (n.14); the Sermon on the Mount and Beatitudes (nn.15-18); the following of Christ (nn.19-21); the Grace doctrine (nn.22-24); faithful practice that permits no opposition between love and law and no separation of faith and life (nn.25-27).

This Chapter (VS, nn.6-27) must be read with a copy of the Bible alongside and with all citations studied. It may seem odd to some, but it is no less than amazing how many Christian authors have written over the decades that they find no specific Christian ethic and no specific moral content even in the New Testament. Some claim to find no more than general even vague attitudes and perhaps some dispositions, but they claim to find no moral content in the New Testament.

This is not a tired argument that some in the past may have misused or even abused a so-called "proof-text" approach in an overly simple way, but a misuse by some is no reason to accept the impossible claim that the New Testament is bereft of moral content.

Questions of exegesis and hermeneutics (interpretation) remain, but those questions are to be answered in a way that improves our understanding of biblical content, not to evacuate the content of the New Testament.

If the truth be told, an entire course could be constructed on biblical morality, especially locating *principles* in Sacred Scripture. Some textbooks in Moral Theology present convenient and very concise summaries of biblical principles: cf. e.g., K.

Peschke, *Christian Ethics* vol. 1 (2nd. ed. 1989) for Old Testament, pp. 13-28; New Testament, pp. 29-49; B. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, (NY: Alba House, 1996) pp. 3-38. A technical but rewarding study is that of H. Schurmann, "The Actual Impact of the Moral Norms of the New Testament," in *Readings in Moral Theology #4* (1984) pp. 78-104.

At and immediately after Vatican Council II, there was great enthusiasm for 'biblical categories', but this trend in Moral Theology soon took a wrong turn. Some authors simply ignore the teachings of Scripture entirely; others, claiming to follow the findings of 'historical criticism', judge that all moral teaching in the Bible was completely determined by historical and cultural factors, and so is not normative for today. This turn was a serious wrong move.

The direction set by Vatican II for moral studies was quite clear: "Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world." (*Optatam Totius*, n.16) What did not happen in some schools of theology clearly did happen in *Veritatis Splendor*, n.29.

In *VS*, for example, consider the treatment of the Decalogue (10 Commandments) (*VS*, nn.9-13) and the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:11-12;17-48), the compendium of New Testament moral teaching or what St. Augustine calls the *magna charta* of Gospel morality (*VS*, n.15). There is no opposition here, only complementarity. As the Pope teaches: ". . . On the other hand, *there is no separation or opposition* between the Beatitudes and the Commandments: both refer to the good, to eternal life. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the proclamation of the Beatitudes, but also refers to the Commandments (Mt.5:20-48) . At the same time the Sermon demonstrates the openness of the commandments and their orientation toward the horizon of the perfection proper to the Beatitudes. These latter are above all *promises*, from which there also indirectly flow *normative indications* for the moral life." (*VS*, n.16) Clearly, the directions for conduct in the Gospels (largely parables) differ in mode from the ethical precepts found in the Epistles. They differ in mode of expression: Gospel parables are more like general principles whereas the ethical precepts in the Epistles are and can be quite specific; but they do not differ in content. Given the wide and rich range of differing expressions in Holy Scripture, it is no less than amazing that there are no moral contradictions in the New Testament but a coherent and organic morality.

It is essentially a *religious* message. As obvious as that sounds, sometimes we have to state the obvious. "Jesus brought a religious message and it was from that message that His moral demands originated. Any attempt to interpret His preaching in any other way (as a criticism, perhaps, of the civilization of the day or as a program of social revolution) is wrong from the outset. Nowhere in the New Testament is it possible to break the unity between religion and morality" (R. Schnackenburg, *Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (1965) p.13). For the same emphatic insistence, confer *Veritatis Splendor*, nn.4; 26-27; 88.

Consider the rich and varied use of Sacred Scripture in the moral part of the *Catechism* (1992): (1) as the most quoted source of the *Catechism* (cf. Index pp.689-720; and (2) the specific introduction to the moral specifics of the *Catechism* -- "The Decalogue in Sacred Scripture" (##2056-2063); "in the Church's Tradition" (##2064-68) its unity and interrelations (##2069-74).

Clearly then, our first methodological principle is verified that we look first for moral principles located in Sacred Scripture, clarified by Sacred Tradition and taught in any given age by the Magisterium of the Church. VS explicitly employs this method as we should also.

2a. Freedom and Truth

"When God in the beginning created man, he made him subject to his own free choice. If you choose you can keep the commandments. It is loyalty to do his will. . . . Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given to him. . . . No man does he command to sin, to none does he give strength for lies." *Sirach* 15:14;15;17;20

"The lives of all of us are to be revealed before the tribunal of Christ so that each one may receive his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body." *II Cor.* 5:10

A first question might be -- why morality? The answer is given in the purpose of life: we are made for and called to blessedness (cf. VS, nn.9,10;12; CCC ##1718-1729). Next, adults will not reach happiness unless they do something about it. And what they *ought* to do depends on what they *can* do, and what they *can* do is largely a question of philosophical psychology. Specifically human activity involves at least two dimensions: what we are driven to do by the thrust of human nature and what we choose to do within the bounds of this necessity.

It is not possible to speak realistically about human responsibility unless we take for granted the existence of free will. For this reason, Catholic moral teaching must reject all forms of theological, philosophical or psychological determinism that deny the existence of free will.

This is the teaching of both Vatican Councils: Vatican I (*DS* 3035) and Vatican II:

"It is in accord with their dignity as persons -- that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility -- that all men should at once be impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth." *Dignitatis humanae*, n.2 "It is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free. This truth cannot be

disregarded in order to place the blame for individuals' sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people. Above all this would be to deny the person's dignity and freedom, which are manifested -- even though in a negative and disastrous way -- also in this responsibility for sin committed. Hence there is nothing so personal and untransferable in each individual as merit for virtue and responsibility for sin." John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (12/2/84) n.16.

To speak of human responsibility (for good or evil), we must first define and understand the meaning of a 'human act'. A HUMAN ACT has a technical definition in Moral Theology that is completely in accord with common sense. A HUMAN ACT is one that proceeds from the will with a knowledge of the end (cf. CCC #1732; ultimately, Aquinas, *ST* 1-2 q.6, a.2; Aristotle, *Ethics*, 111,24)

There are, in this classic definition, two basic components: (1) volition, i.e. of the will (as in 'proceeds from the will'); and (2) knowledge, i.e. of the intellect (as in 'with a knowledge of the end'). Clearly, if one does not will something, the act or result is not his responsibility (this should not be confused with a simple negative, as in, "I will not pay my taxes" which is of course an act of the will). Also, one must have adequate knowledge of what he is doing to predicate human responsibility (if one has no idea what he is doing, we do not attribute responsibility to unknowing conduct).

In moral textbooks, the *voluntary* is synonymous with the *human act*: a *voluntary* act is simply a willed act in which the agent knows what he is about to do and wills to do it. A *human act*, or *voluntary* act, is the product of one's own will and guided by one's reason; it is the actual exercise of personal ownership over our own conduct. Though an act is done and finished, it is still referable to its master as his act. The basic explanation why it was done rather than not done, is that the agent *willed* to do it and it remains forever related to him.

This relation we express by the words *responsibility* or *imputability* (ownership of the act, if you will; cf. CCC ##1734, 1735). They express the same relationship between *agent* and *act* but from different directions: the *agent* is called *responsible* (answerable; accountable; CCC #1734); the *act* is called *imputable* (chargeable; attributable; CCC #1735)

While these notions are connected, it's important not to confuse them, much less exchange them. We hold that ethical predication rests primarily on action (conduct), and that goodness or badness is attributed to the agent because of that action or conduct. Some modern revisionists reverse and confuse this: they predicate goodness or badness of the agent and from that then describe actions (often now in terms of rightness / wrongness; e.g., J. Fuchs; B. Schuller; K. Demmer; R. McCormick; J. Keenan). The conventional arrangement is clearer -- which is not to say it is without challenges. Clearer, because we hold to a *norm* which some now call a 'value principle'; we hold to a *law* which some now call a 'deontological principle'; and we hold to an *end* what some now call a 'teleological principle.'

Traditional Catholic moral teaching tends to consider these (NORM, LAW, END) *objectively*, and then proceed to consider subjective motives and intentions (this is clearly the core teaching of VS, nn.73-84); whereas revisionists tend to begin with *subjective* motivations and intentions and work back to describe actions and conduct. Some never find nor link up with any objective ground for morality. There are challenges and questions with any approach, but there are methodological and terminological differences that have great consequences. *Veritatis Splendor* (nn.73-84) takes great pains to repudiate what is not compatible with Catholic moral doctrine.

Conventional textbooks of Moral Theology go into some considerable detail -- details of precise definition and distinction which are beyond our present purpose, but are not a waste of time. Consider: "Freedom and Responsibility" in CCC ##1731-1742; also the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*: 'Free Will,' v.6:pp.89-93; 'Will,' 14:909-913; 'Human Act,' 7:202-209; 'Responsibility,'12:393-399; 'Voluntariety,' 14:747-750; 'Deliberation & Morality,' 4:733-734; 'Moral Consent,' 4:211-212.

Similarly, the conventional textbooks consider what they call obstacles to freedom (impediments to liberty) -- the *Catechism* mentions some of the classic impediments: ignorance, force, fear, and habit (CCC #1735). In an individual act or choice, these factors can affect the 'cognitive' or 'volitional' components (i.e., what proceeds from the *will* with knowledge of the end) and thus, in a given case, can diminish or even nullify human responsibility or imputability (CCC#1740).

The purpose of this course is not to exhaust all possibilities and all possible pathologies. If everyone is really sick -- that is the province of medicine, not morality. We will simply presume that there are some normal people, who under normal circumstances are normally responsible for their acts (for good or ill). After all, the shoe of responsibility fits both feet -- if we are truly incapable of wrong-doing we are also incapable of right-doing. Such radical incapacity allows no morality, just 'case studies', perhaps a chapter in a sociological book on victimology. True Christian doctrine does not hold such an impoverished view of those made in the image and likeness of God. Indeed, it rejects it!

2b. Freedom and Law

Apart from the definitions and distinctions about freedom and responsibility (II:3 above), the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, presents a cogent analysis and prescription for a correct understanding of human freedom. Human freedom is a great and precious commodity, but if freedom is not grounded in the *truth* and geared toward the *good* -- it can be an unguided missile. When freedom is not connected and linked to the truth, then a false freedom becomes the fertile ground for false autonomy, a false autonomy

that not only is incompatible with but contradicts the *truth* about the *good*. (This section of VS, nn.35-53, deserves very careful reading and study. Not only does it present a correct notion of natural moral law, but repudiates numerous false moral theories, especially moral relativism, the acid rain so destructive of personal and public standards.)

In the Book of Genesis we read that man was free to eat of every tree in the garden, ". . . but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die" (Gn.2:17) (VS, n.35). The Pope teaches that with this imagery, Revelation teaches us that the power to *decide* what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone.

Certainly, the human person is free; but this freedom is not unlimited. "God, who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his own love proposes this good to man in the commandments." (VS, n.35) Thus, God's law does not reduce or lessen human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom. This point is the direct opposite of modern, secular individualism. Radical autonomous individualism always fosters a conflict between human freedom and God's law. Secular autonomy demands that human freedom create "values" -- values that claim a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself is seen as the creation of freedom. This 'freedom' would be morally autonomous, an absolute sovereignty -- again the direct opposite of Genesis above.

The claims for human autonomy have had a dreadful influence in Catholic Moral Theology and our country too. It is a fundamental and prophetic theme of Pope John Paul II to insist on the link between freedom and truth [Cf. John Paul II at Logan Circle, Phila. PA, (10/3/79) "Christ himself linked freedom with knowledge of the truth. 'You will know the truth and the truth will make you free' (n.8:32) . . . freedom can never be constructed without relation to the truth;" again, at Columbia, SC (9/11/87) . . . America you cannot insist on the right to choose without insisting on the duty to choose well, to choose the truth.]

Some disregard the dependence of human reason on Divine Wisdom, and the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for Divine Revelation as an effective means of knowing moral truths, even those of the natural order. They posit a complete sovereignty of human reason in the domain of moral norms (VS, n.36). Even before John Paul II, the Council warned against the false concept of unlimited human autonomy: "Without its Creator the creature simply disappears . . . If God is ignored the creature itself is impoverished" (GS, n.36) . (The same lethal mistake of twisted morals will be analyzed as rooted in "a perverse idea of freedom" and the "eclipse of the sense of God and of man" in *Evangelium Vitae*, 3/25/95, nn.18-28.)

One simply cannot underestimate the danger of separating freedom from the truth. In its most exaggerated pose, a single sentence from a Supreme Court decision (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 6/29/92) states the case for absolute autonomy:

"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of life."

That statement is not only philosophically absurd but morally dangerous. It presumes that there is no truth; indeed, it presumes that truth is somehow the enemy of freedom, which is completely backwards.

"Patterned on God's freedom, man's freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through this obedience does it abide in the truth and conform to human dignity." (VS,n.42)

It may be helpful here to review some understanding of Christian Personalism because it is a central theme of the pontifical magisterium of John Paul II and also to the moral teaching of VS. (A convenient readable summary can be found in C. Burke's, "Personalism, Individualism and Communio" *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.ed.#17/1288) (April 28,1993) pp.7-8.)

The Church as '*communio*', a communion of the People of God, was an important theme of Vatican Council II; it also sparked a trend of 'personalist thinking.' Thus, the teaching of the Council was not just community-centered but also person-centered and this is a well known component of the teaching of John Paul II.

A first reaction might be: Do these two really go together? community-centered and person-centered? Is there not some basic opposition here? How do they harmonize?

The 'personalist' view of man places great emphasis on the dignity of each as a son or child of God -- as one called to fulfillment especially through the free commitment to worthwhile goals and values (CCC, III, I, a.3). That Christian Personalism is strongly conscious of personal freedom -- our own and that of others. Thus, it is also strongly conscious of personal responsibility. This Christian Personalism is deeply convinced of personal dignity and personal rights and alert to their violation in self or in others. Being conscious of rights it is also conscious of duties for they are correlatives -- there is no genuine philosophy of rights without some kind of philosophy of duties.

This Christian Personalism sees no degradation in the fulfillment of duty: one is not less human when obedient to the truth, or to legitimate authority or to reality. Rather, the peculiar expression of man's dignity is his ability to discern and respond to values. An early K. Wojtyla could write: "The person realizes himself most adequately in the fulfillment of his obligations" (*The Acting Person*, p.179; repeated in his book *Love and Responsibility*; again, as Pope, in his "Letter To Families", 2/2/94, n.11; and in VS, nn.40,41).

Conscious of both personal dignity and rights (your own and others) Christian Personalism stresses duties toward others because it is the fulfillment of these duties that is the means of personal growth and self-fulfillment.

This 'gift of self' is the essence of Christian Personalism and a key text of Vatican Council II: "It is only in the sincere gift of self that man can find himself" (GS, n.24). This text, GS, n.24, is quoted more often by John Paul II than any other text of Vatican II (cf. VS, nn.86,87). The 'gift of self' is documented by the Council text by reference to Lk.17:33. Thus, this is not merely the insight of a Polish philosopher, nor just a Council text, it is a Gospel principle for clearly the complete 'gift of self' is an accurate description of the life of Jesus Christ.

This Christian Personalism can find worthwhile values everywhere and in everyone -- personalism and community end up on the same line if you find yourself in giving yourself. Not only does this harmonize with community but is the actual condition for a healthy community.

Clearly, this is light-years removed from the secular notion of modern autonomous individualism -- so prevalent in secular education since John Dewey and so prominent in secular legal jurisprudence since Oliver Wendell Holmes. The modern secular outlook sees individualism as the enemy of community, as I suppose it must be in those terms. But absolute individual autonomy is the enemy of many things: law, medicine and theology; it completely undermines personal and societal standards. Thus, because VS does not separate freedom from the truth, it presents moral principles (both personal and social) that are consistent.

Much of this lesson sounds like a basic review of fundamental points in a philosophy of realism (and it is) because apart from or against these truths no coherent moral principles are possible. To reject the truth about freedom is to embrace moral relativism.

2c. The "Fonts of Morality"

In the prior lessons, we considered the "*human act*", i.e. those actions which proceed from the will with a knowledge of the end. In that effort, to some extent, we considered what a man *CAN* do; here, our concern is what one *ought* to do. If indeed, one cannot do something, there is no point in arguing that he ought to do that.

Here we concentrate on a fundamental and crucial criterion of morality. When we say that murder is evil (wrong), or, truth telling is good (right) -- on what basis do we make such statements? The concern here is not the individual case -- when John Q. robbed the bank, did he know what he was doing? what was his intention? The precise focus here is why do we call 'stealing' a *wrong* kind of act? On what basis -- what elements, what factors, what sources, indeed the classic term is *fontes moralitatis*, what determinants are relevant for predicating good or evil of human acts?

Again, as above, we do not and will not collapse morality into the physical (as if one could intuit morality from a photograph of a physical act; you can't); but, we do not prescind from the physical either. Thus, any *stealing* must involve a taking; any *murder* must involve a killing; any *perjury* must involve real speech; indeed, morality always involves the 'real' -- true chastity has to do with real flesh; true justice has to do with real property and ownership. Morality always has to do with the real.

Thus, when we say that *stealing* (taking against the reasonable will of the owner) is generically a 'wrong' kind of act in the moral order, on what basis do we make such a statement?

In traditional Catholic morality, three factors are relevant in predicating 'good' or 'evil' of human acts. The *Catechism* (1992) presents the three (CCC ##1749-1775) as:

1. the moral *object* chosen (#1751) (the *finis operis*);
2. relevant moral *circumstances* (#1754);
3. the personal *end or intention* (##1752-3) (the *finis operantis*).

This is the classic and received teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q.18, aa.2-4. This requires very careful reading and correct understanding. The student should read these few articles in the *Summa* but if the style and method of that great work is unfamiliar it might be best to read the Farrell-Healy *My Way of Life* (1951) II, a, c.III, pp. 175-186 as a preparation and introduction. It is my experience that the conventional textbooks in Ethics are clearer in explaining these 'sources' than most moralists. Thus, R. McInerney, *Aquinas on Human Action* (1992) pp.3-157; T. Mullady, "The Moral Act" *Ethics and Medics* 19:9 (Sept. 1994) pp. 1-2; J. Smith, *Humanae Vitae* (1991) pp. 215-220. The presentation and definitions of these 'sources' in the *Catechism* (##1750-1756) are accurate but the *Catechism* is highly concise and gives no examples.

The corresponding section of *Veritatis Splendor* nn.71-83 is, without question, the most technical part of the Encyclical and demands a very careful reading. It is not the purpose of Catholic doctrine to define philosophy as such; but, the teaching of *VS*, nn.71-83 comes as close to defining the analysis of the moral act by St. Thomas Aquinas (*ST*, I-II, q.18, aa. 2-4) as possible. It does not say this is the only way to analyze the moral act, but it does teach that no other way accords so well with Catholic teaching.

According to received Thomistic teaching -- actions are specified by their *objects*. For this reason, in this context, we look first to the *moral object* of the action, i.e. what kind of an act it is in its moral estimation. Thus, 'stealing' (morally defined as: a taking against the reasonable will of the owner) as a 'kind' of act is a wrong kind of act. Why? What is it about 'stealing' that makes it wrong? Because the kind of act it is (taking against the reasonable will of the owner) has a bearing or relation to some norm or rule of morals

(the 'norm' here, of course, is the 7th commandment and justice; it is true that we have not yet examined the 'norm' of morality (i.e. external norm being law; internal norm being conscience). Nevertheless, you know that when I say John Q. stole my car, I am not describing John Q. taking a shower -- that is a different kind of act. When I say John Q. is taking a shower, you know I am not describing the theft of my car.

'Taking' a shower is no kind of theft at all. Thus, actions are specified by their objects, and in their moral estimation, actions are specified by their *moral object* --that first determinant that has a real bearing (real relationship) on a rule or norm of morals.

The *moral object* answers the question "*what?*" in the question "What is going on here morally?" The *moral object* determines *what* kind of an act it is.

Thus, the *Catechism* teaches: "The *object* chosen is a good toward which the will deliberately directs itself. It is the matter of a human act. The object chosen morally specifies the act of the will, insofar as reason recognizes and judges it to be or not to be in conformity with the true good." (CCC #1751).

Veritatis Splendor teaches the same: "The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the '*object*' rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by St. Thomas (*ST*, I-II, q.18, a.6)

. . . The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behavior. To the extent that it is in conformity with the order of reason, it is the cause of the goodness of the will; it perfects us morally, and disposes us to recognize our ultimate end in the perfect good, primordial love. By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order. . . . Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person. . . . The reason why a good intention is not itself sufficient, but a correct choice of action is also needed, is that the human act depends on its object, whether that object is *capable or not of being ordered* to God, to the One who 'alone is good,' and thus brings about the perfection of the person." (*VS*, 78)

Next, no one can place some act in general; in real life some *act* is done in some concrete *circumstances* for some *reason*. Thus, the conventional analysis considers *circumstances*, including consequences, which are secondary elements of a moral act. As the *Catechism* teaches, relevant moral circumstances can increase or diminish the moral species (good or evil) of an act -- e.g. the theft of \$5,000 differs from the theft of 5 cents; obviously one is grave theft the other is light matter, but they are both thefts.

That is, the kind of act it is (its moral species) remains the same (taking against the reasonable will of the owner) but it can be gravely so or lightly so (cf. CCC #1754). Circumstances can *quantify* (greater or lesser) the moral species of an act but cannot change the kind of act it is generically. A tricky pyramid scheme can just as effectively separate someone from \$100 as ripping \$100 out of their pocket, but it still remains the kind of act it is -- theft.

Circumstances, then, are not the primary determinant of moral insight; by definition, 'circumstances' (*circum stantes*) stand around or surround the kind of moral object it is -- they answer questions like: how?, when?, where?, by what means?

Finally and importantly, there is the element of personal intention that answers the question *why?* Why did this person place this *act* in these *circumstances*? This is variously called the personal 'end', 'intention,' or 'purpose' -- technically, the *finis operantis* (cf. CCC ##1752-3). The 'intention', of course, resides in the acting subject. It is the voluntary source of the action and an element essential to its moral evaluation.

As above, one does *something* in some concrete *circumstances* for some *purpose* (personal intention). This intention may be for the best of reasons or the worst of reasons -- but a good intention does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered (e.g., perjury; murder; adultery) good or just. Some personal intentions may make things understandable but they are not for that reason alone ('good intention') justifiable. A (good) end does not justify the (wrong) means (Rms.3:8) (CCC #1753).

In this Thomistic and Catholic analysis of the morality of acts, it is the fullness of these causes together that determines the goodness of an act. There is an axiom: *Bonum ex integra causa* = goodness comes from the integrity of the causes; *malum ex quocumque defectu* = evil comes from any defect. Thus, it is not enough to place a good act for bad reasons, nor a bad act for good reasons; rather, an act must be good of its kind, in good or neutral circumstances and for a good purpose of intention.

We should admit that this understanding requires more rather than less: it is more challenging. There are, of course, other ethical theories, some with a single moral criterion: the Ethical Formalism of Immanuel Kant (*NCE* 5:570) holds that the agent's disposition (upright intention) determines the morality of his actions; the Utilitarianism of J.S. Mill (*NCE* 14:503-504) holds that the consequences (circumstances) will determine the morality of acts.

The Thomistic theory involves a full criterion rather than a single one, as the *Catechism* states: "A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together" (#1755). It is this integrity, this fullness that locates the cardinal moral principle of Catholic moral teaching that the "End does not justify the Means"! This is, indeed, a biblical principle (Rms.3:8) and a truly important one if one is to avoid mere subjectivism in morals.

Located here is the notion of intrinsic (objective) morality, as the *Catechism* clearly states: "There are some concrete acts -- such as fornication -- that it is always wrong to choose, because choosing them entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil." (CCC #1755)

And more emphatically, "It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) which supply their context. There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always

gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may never do evil so that good may result from it." (CCC #1756) For other specifics confer VS, 47, 80; and for the same teaching cf. VS, 78.

2d. The False Theory of Proportionalism

For the two decades prior to *Veritatis Splendor* (8/6/93), there were in Catholic moral circles heated debates and controversies concerning morals and especially moral theories. One of these revisionist theories was, at first, called "Consequentialism" and later called "Proportionalism." Since the Encyclical (VS) takes up these theories in some detail (VS, 74-75), and since the terminology may not be familiar to the average reader, it is, I think useful to examine the theory of Proportionalism to see what it is and what is done with it. One would hope that with the publication of VS -- and its repudiation of Proportionalism -- that this deviant theory would be quietly buried; but that, I fear, is not yet the case.

Noted advocates of Proportionalism include such authors as: P. Knauer; J. Fuchs; B. Schuller; L. Janssens; F. Bockle; R.A. McCormick, along with B. Hoose and J.F. Keenan. An early and accurate critique of Proportionalism, in readable English, can be found in W.E. May, "The Moral Meaning of Human Acts" *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* v.79 (Oct. 1979) pp. 10-21.

What is it Proportionalists claim? First, they distinguish between what they call *formal* norms and *material* norms. A *formal* moral norm would be that "Adultery is wrong!" This, they say, is a truly exceptionless norm; it is, after all, Divine Positive Revelation (i.e. found in Sacred Scripture: Ex.20:14; Dt.5:18; Matt.19:18; Rms.13:9). This they say no one questions because no one can. If one concedes that 'adultery' is sexual relations with the wrong person, this is tantamount to saying "wrong is wrong" which is a tautology no one can refute.

The challenge, they claim, is not then with *formal* norms that are truly exceptionless and universal, but rather with what they describe as *material* norms, often described as concrete material norms. If in the formal equation above, a morally evaluative word ('wrong') is on both sides of the equation, the challenge, they claim, is how to construct a *concrete material* norm without smuggling in a morally evaluative word on both sides of the logical equation.

This, they say, can only be done in general so that you have a good rule, a useful rule, a virtually exceptionless rule but not an absolute, not an exceptionless norm.

Thought project. Consider the following concrete *material* norm:

"Sexual intercourse with the spouse of another IS wrong!"

Clearly, there is one evaluative word ('wrong') stated explicitly in that proposition. However, no value words (no value-judgments) are smuggled into the descriptive front part of that proposition. 'Sexual intercourse' describes a kind of human activity; the 'spouse of another' states an empirical fact (legal and sacramental).

Now, Proportionalists will say that this concrete *material* norm (sexual intercourse with the spouse of another is wrong) is a very good norm, a practical absolute, a virtually exceptionless norm; but this concrete *material* norm is not universally true, nor truly exceptionless. They will concede that it is always true in a non-moral sense -- it is always some kind of evil: a physical evil; an ontic evil; a pre-moral disvalue; but it is not always and in every case a *moral evil*!

Proportionalists argue this could be a morally good choice (and therefore a good act) if:

- a) some *greater good* is achievable by this act (i.e. brings about greater good consequences); or,
- b) some truly *proportionate reason* is present to justify this choice (after weighing various positive and negative values).

Thus, in the concrete, one must always leave open the possibility that in some given set of circumstances, what would normally be a *moral evil* is not truly so, rather (sexual intercourse with the spouse of another) this is only a 'physical' or 'ontic' evil when it brings about greater goods or is justified by a proportionate reason for doing so.

This, of course, repudiates the notion that there are any kinds of acts, described in non-moral terms, that are intrinsically evil (thus, it repudiates the teaching of CCC #1756; VS, 47, 80 and 78; Vat.II, GS, n.27). It repudiates as well that there are or can be in the practical order 'negative moral absolutes'! In the Proportionalist view, an act is only morally evil when one directly intends moral evil. This, they maintain, avoids the condemnation of Rms. 3:8 (the end does not justify the means) because they do not make moral evil the direct object of their will act but only a 'physical' or 'ontic', and that, only with alleged reluctance, when a 'great good' can be attained ("Consequentialism") or a 'proportionate reason' is present ("Proportionalism").

Some of the terminology is similar to expressions found in traditional Catholic Moral Theology; but this tiny change in principle engineers a gigantic change in moral practice. Indeed, it is a different morality for these reasons:

1. It is a *Subjective* morality. After all, who does the counting, weighing, measuring of good and bad consequences; who calculates the proportionalities of grave reasons and their seriousness but the deciding subject. There is no link here with objective morality, it is all a matter of the subject's calculations.

2. It is a *Relativistic* morality. It is, by definition, a calculation of consequences; a calculus of values and disvalues, a comparison of moral pluses and minuses relative to other values and disvalues.
3. Its advocates are simply wrong in their claims about *St. Thomas Aquinas*. Their claim is that Aquinas nowhere states a moral absolute in exceptionless terms. This is simply wrong; confer *ST*, II-II, q.64, a.6: "*Et ideo nullo modo licet occidere innocentem*;" "It is never licit to kill an innocent"! Aquinas's theory is a teleology of virtue not a calculation of consequences.
4. It is an *extrinsic* theory. One notes in the above that there is nothing intrinsic to the act that determines its morality; rather, the moral fulcrum on which the theory turns is something extrinsic: external consequences (results) or proportionate reasons determine the morality of acts.

Again, what seems to be a small change -- even tinkering with terminology -- turns out to be a revolution: one puts aside a strong and cogent link with objective morality and replaces it with a truly subjective morality. No small change that!

Now, read carefully *VS*, 74-75:

". . . This *teleologism*, as a method for discovering the moral norm, can thus be called -- according to terminology and approaches imported from different currents of thought -- '*consequentialism*' or '*proportionalism*'. The former claims to draw the criteria of the rightness of a given way of acting solely from a calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice. The latter, by weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses rather on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the 'greater good' or 'lesser evil' actually possible in a particular situation. . . . Even when grave matter is concerned, these precepts should be considered as operative norms which are always relative and open to exceptions." (*VS*, 75)

". . . Such theories however are not faithful to the Church's teaching, when they believe they can justify, as morally good, deliberate choices of kinds of behavior contrary to the commandments of the divine and natural law. These theories cannot claim to be grounded in the Catholic moral tradition." (*VS*, 76)

Since Consequentialism and Proportionalism are not faithful to Church teaching, now read *VS*, 77-83 for a correct explanation of Church teaching. (A review by R. McInerney of B. Mullady's *The Meaning of the Term Moral in St. Thomas Aquinas* in the *Newsletter of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars* v.13:2 (March 1990) pp.6;19 is very helpful in this regard. For an analysis and critique of the philosophical confusion that underlies Catholic proportionalism, cf. [B. Mullady. "Both a Servant and Free" in Newsletter FCS v.17, #1 \(Dec. 1993\) pp. 20-24.](#))

3a. Conscience: Nature and Function

The nature and function of *conscience* in Moral Theology is most important, therefore a correct understanding of its nature and function is equally important. The formal treatment of 'conscience' in *Veritatis Splendor* is found in nn.54-64 (also 32 and 34) and also in the *Catechism* ##1776-1801. Some presentations are also found in the documents of Vat.II; cf. *GS*, 16;17;41; *DH*, 1;2;14.

In general, the term 'conscience' can signify knowledge of oneself (a joint knowledge: *con-scientia* in Latin). In English, we distinguish between a psychological meaning of conscience (often 'consciousness') and the *moral* meaning of conscience (a judgment or decision). The psychological is often *reflective* -- looking back, remembering, recollecting; the moral is *directive* -- looking forward, directive of prospective activity. It is this latter understanding that most concerns Moral Theology.

Some popular usage of the term 'conscience' often describes a personal 'feeling', an 'insight', perhaps an 'intuition' -- as in, "I feel that's right;" or, "I sense that's wrong," rather than a reasoned judgment or decision about right and wrong. Those who 'regulate' their life by a 'feeling' or 'intuition' follow a very uncertain guide. Some metaphors about conscience appear, such as the 'voice of conscience' or a 'voice within', which are fine provided we realize that metaphors have limits as these expressions surely do.

What we are concerned with is a *practical* decision -- very practical! Just as we make 'practical' decisions in all other areas of real life (health care; business), so we make practical decisions about how we will live.

Acts of the practical intellect are twofold: we can judge acts already performed (as in an examination of conscience) which is called *consequent* conscience. Or, the judgment can be about the moral quality of an act to be done or to be omitted -- this is called *antecedent* conscience. It is this judgment of *antecedent* conscience that most concerns Moral Theology. The judgment we make *before* we act: that this act is good and should be done by me, or, this act is evil and should be avoided by me.

Since it is a judgment, indeed, a practical decision of the practical intellect, it in no way differs from any other practical decision, i.e. it can be a correct decision or an erroneous one.

Now, conscience is not quite the same as knowledge itself but rather what we do with the moral knowledge we have. Conscience is not merely I.Q. In fact, wherever you get you moral knowledge -- from God's Revelation; family training; Church teaching; wisdom gleaned from the lives of the saints or your own life experience, it is the

application of your acquired knowledge that is directive of your prospective activity. That *antecedent* judgment that something is good or evil and will be done or avoided by me always involves two components: one OBJECTIVE, another SUBJECTIVE.

Perhaps, an outline chart will help:

CONSCIENCE	
OBJECT	SUBJECT
Correct	Certain
Erroneous	Doubtful

Objectively, when one judges as right what truly, objectively is right, one has made a *correct* decision of conscience. Similarly, when one judges as evil what truly is evil, again, another *correct* judgment of conscience. However, when one judges as good what is really evil, or, judges as evil what is truly good, one has made an *erroneous* judgment of conscience. Practical judgments are not infallible. Truth is infallible, but our judgments about the truth can be correct or mistaken. Conscience, after all does not invent truth, nor does it construct truth; rather, conscience can only discern, discover and detect the truth.

Subjectively, when we make a judgment on the truth about the good, we may be subjectively *certain* about that judgment or perhaps *doubtful*. The certainty about this moral judgment is what the textbooks call 'moral certitude' -- that is, the kind of practical certitude prudent people use and rely on in the practical affairs of life and living (i.e. the absence of positive doubts).

Thus, the two conventional maxims of traditional morality:

1. one can ALWAYS act on a *certain* conscience;
2. one should NEVER act on a *doubtful* conscience.

What do you do with a doubt? The same thing one does in other practical areas of life: you get more information; you ask people who have lived well enough and long enough to know what they are talking about. Clearly, if the doubt involves a small matter, we have to make a little effort to resolve it; if it is a big matter or important value, we have to make a big effort to resolve the doubt and achieve the practical certitude we need to act on a certain conscience. These distinctions are reflected in the *Catechism* ##1786-1751.

For some, this is all that needs to be said: "Follow your conscience, and say no more." However, since conscience does not invent truth, there is and remains the obligation for the serious Christian to *form* and inform a correct conscience in the first place (CCC ##1783-1785).

Up to this point, at least on the components or mechanics of conscience -- objectively correct or erroneous; subjectively certain or doubtful -- all religions agree. It is here in the *formation* of conscience that different and differing convictions can come into play. The goal, of course, is the pursuit of truth, indeed the 'splendor of truth' in a true (correct) conscience. There is such a thing as a correct conscience, even a correct Catholic conscience.

Thus, as a Catholic in pursuit of the truth I look first for principles located in Sacred Scripture, clarified by Sacred Tradition and taught in any age by the teaching Church. As the *Catechism* states: "In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer . . . before the Lord's Cross, . . . assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit; . . . aided by witness and advice of others, guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church." (#1785). This is the teaching of Vat.II: "In forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church" (*DH*, n14). Significantly, the Council cites the classic theological expression on conscience formation, the Address of Pope Pius XII (23 Mar. 1952).

Some care should be exercised with the popular expressions "good conscience" or "sincere conscience." In the faithful pursuit of truth, let us presume that all seekers are sincere. Lacking sincerity would be a case of bad faith. But even when we are most sincere, we are not exempt from error or mistaken judgment. Thus, just as I can be sincerely correct, so I can be sincerely erroneous. Sincerity will not undo reality. If I mistakenly drink a can of Drano -- sincerely thinking it a soft drink -- unless there is nearly immediate emergency intervention, I will die of poison. It's true I made a sincere mistake, but sincerity will not undo reality. Thus, the pursuit of a true and correctly formed conscience takes precedence over all other moral effort. The truth matters; it matters eternally.

3b. Conscience and Truth

Consistent with and in continuity with the whole of *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul considers "Conscience and Truth" (*VS*, 54-64) at some length as he did with "Freedom and Truth" (*VS*, 35-53). The relationship between human freedom and the truth about the good is lived most deeply in the heart of the person, in his "moral conscience" (*VS*, 54).

The way in which one conceives the relationship between freedom and truth, freedom and law, is intimately connected with the proper understanding of conscience. As above, some try to oppose freedom and law, with freedom so exalted that a so-called "creative

conscience" conquers all (VS, 54). Some others tend to reduce conscience to the application of 'general' moral norms but not to concrete particular ones. This 'creative' and 'responsible' voice (sometimes called 'free and faithful') attends not to the precise observance of universal norms but to "the creative and responsible acceptance of personal tasks entrusted to him by God" (VS, 55).

These judgments are indeed 'autonomous', and for some, the sign of moral maturity, some go so far as to say maturity is inhibited by the excessively categorical position adopted by the Church's Magisterium.

For some (often the Proportionalists above) there is even a double status of moral truth (VS, 56). A separation, even opposition, is alleged between the teaching of a precept valid in general, and a particular norm of the individual conscience which of course makes the final decision about good and evil. Some may call this "pastoral," some may call it a "creative hermeneutic," but the result that the deciding subject determines the truth about the good (VS, 56).

VS, 57-59 takes the teachings on conscience in Scripture and through Tradition to elaborate the distinctions above (III:7) and the *Catechism* §§1776-1802. The dignity of moral conscience derives from the truth about the good:

"The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts" (VS, 60).

"The truth about the moral good, as that truth is declared in the law of reason, is practically and concretely recognized by the judgment of conscience. . . . Consequently, . . . the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of 'judgment' which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary decisions. The maturity and responsibility of these judgments . . . are not measured by the liberation of conscience from objective truth, in favor of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions" (VS, 61).

"In any event, it is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives. . . . It is never acceptable to confuse a 'subjective' error about the moral good with the 'objective' truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience. It is possible that the evil done as the result of invincible ignorance or a non-culpable error of judgment may not be imputable to the agent; but even in this case it does not cease to be an evil, a disorder in relation to the truth about the good" (VS, 63).

Just as freedom must be rooted in the truth and geared toward the good; so the same linkage is essential for a correct conscience and a correctly formed conscience -- it must

conform to and reflect the truth about the good. The unrelenting theme of *Veritatis Splendor* is, of course, the truth.

Over 100 years ago, John Henry Cardinal Newman in his famous Letter to the Duke of Norfolk (Dec. 27, 1874) makes the point that I consider prescient since in the last century he repudiated a favorite distortion of conscience now reigning in this century.

(This Letter of Newman is cited in *VS*, n.34, footnote #59, and while not cited in *VS* 58, it makes the same point, as does the *Catechism* #1778, footnote #50). Newman's thought deserves careful study:

"The view of conscience, I know, is very different from that ordinarily taken of it . . . It is founded on the doctrine that conscience is the voice of God, whereas it is fashionable on all hands now to consider it one way or another a creation of man" (p.247).

"The rule or measure of duty is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience, nor fitness, order, and the *pulchrum*. Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, Who, both in nature and grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives" (p.248).

"When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the Creator, nor the duty to Him, in thought and deed, of the creature; but the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting, according to their judgment or their humor, without any thought of God at all. They do not even pretend to go by any moral rule, but they demand, what they think is an Englishman's prerogative, for each to be his own master in all things, and to profess what he pleases, asking no one's leave, and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer, unutterably impertinent, who dares to say a word against his going to perdition, if he likes it in his own way."

"Conscience has its rights because it has duties; but in this age, with a large portion of the public, it is the very right and freedom of conscience, to ignore a Lawgiver and Judge, to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a license to take up any or no religion, to take up this or that and let it go again, to go to church, to go to chapel, to boast of being above all religions and to be an impartial critic of each of them. Conscience is a stern monitor, but in this century it has been superseded by a counterfeit, which the eighteen centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self will" (p.250).

J.H.Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1876) in a Letter to the Duke of Norfolk on the occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Exposition 1874; esp.#5 "Conscience" pp.246-261.

Highly recommended reading: J.Cardinal Ratzinger, "Conscience and Truth" (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1991) 38 pp.

3c. Virtue and Truth

On first reading, *Veritatis Splendor* does not seem to stress very much the place of virtue. That is not really true as one can read in VS nn.102-108 and 118-120. But also the place and importance of the truth about virtue is prominent in Chapter I of VS in its biblical introduction nn.16-27 about the place of the Beatitudes:

"In their originality and profundity they are a sort of self-portrait of Christ, and for this very reason are invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ" (VS, 16).

Commenting on Matt.19, VS says: "Jesus' conversation with the young man helps us to grasp the *conditions for the moral growth* of man, who has been called to perfection . . . Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called" (VS, 17). Come follow me (VS, 19-21) -- following Him, discipleship, is not an outward imitation only, but becoming conformed to him (VS, 21). Quoting St. Augustine, the Pope outlines the central place of virtue and the growth in virtue: "Does love bring about the keeping of the commandments, or does the keeping of the commandments bring about love?" St. Augustine answers: "But who can doubt that love comes first? For the one who does not love has no reason for keeping the commandments" (VS, 22). Again, Augustine states the dialectic of law and grace: "The law was given that grace might be sought; and grace was given, that the law might be fulfilled" (VS, 23).

It is perhaps customary to think of Moral Theology in the framework of the commandments. Indeed, most catechisms over the past 400 years present moral teaching just that way. Academic manuals of Moral Theology, following the Jesuit model or plan of studies (*ratio studiorum*), do just that. There is admittedly great clarity in the framework of the commandments.

However, this is not the only way to approach moral teaching. Indeed, the Dominican tradition, following the outline of St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae*, presents moral teaching in the framework of the virtues.

These two schools of theology do not disagree; there is no contradiction between the commandments and the virtues, rather they are complementary. They are different in their approaches, in their methodological starting points. There is great clarity and convenience in the framework of the commandments; but, the framework of the virtues offers pastoral and spiritual advantages that can sometimes get lost, or left out, in the framework of the commandments. In the video I asked whether there was a difference between two simple questions: 'Is it a sin?' versus 'What is the right thing to do?'

If virtue or the virtues are relegated to another discipline, e.g. ascetical or spiritual theology, then your Moral Theology is lacking an essential component. 'Virtue' is not an

extra, an advanced placement course -- virtue is the key to Thomistic ethics and an essential component of Catholic Moral Theology, cf., e.g. "The Virtues" in CCC ##1803-1845.

The outline of the *Summa theologiae* is instructive, but its method may be an obstacle for those not familiar with it. St. Thomas begins every article with a question; then a series of objections arguing the opposite; then a *Sed contra* 'on the other hand' citing some authority divine or traditional; next, the *Responsio* his reply; finally, responses to all the objections raised in the beginning.

This method is unvarying throughout the *Summa* and might seem cumbersome to those unfamiliar with it. As a helpful approach, and not a substitute, I recommend that students read over the condensed version, Farrell-Healy, *My Way of Life* (1952), which is a summary in normal American English. Again, this is not a substitute, but rather an introduction, getting a 'lay of the land' so that the actual study of the *Summa* becomes more fruitful. Thus, in Farrell-Healy, virtues in general, Part IIa, chapters 6-8, pp. pp.223-224, and the whole of II-II in Part IIb, pp.312-439. After the students have read the condensed summary of the virtue or virtues in this pocket edition, then they should study the actual treatment in the *Summa* itself.

The entire *Secunda-secundae*, the second part of Part Two of the *Summa*, is about virtues -- all virtues. Unvaryingly, St. Thomas (1) defines a virtue; (2) notes part or ways to put that virtue into *positive* practice; and (3) considers *vices* opposed to that virtue. Thus, instead of asking only what is wrong and why, this framework of the virtues presents positive ways to put virtue into positive practice. This, I believe, presents a fuller and richer Christian life. It is possible to avoid grave or gross evil and end up standing still morally; i.e. no positive progress, no growth in Christian life and practice. It is only by the positive practice of virtue that we change and grow in the spiritual and moral life.

Again, as above, I suggest no contradiction between the Jesuit and Dominican schools of theology; indeed they can be complementary. In fact, one of the advantages of the new *Catechism* (1992) is in its treatment of the specifics of morality. Indeed, Section two of Part III 'Life in Christ' of the *Catechism* is the framework of the Ten Commandments (##2052-2557) but one should note that before the treatment of any commandment the pertinent virtue is first stated and introduced. In effect, the moral part of the *Catechism* combines these two schools.

There is no shortage of printed materials that treat morality in the framework of virtues: C.S. Lewis's apologetic classic, *Mere Christianity*, Part III 'Christian Behavior'; J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (1965); P. Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*(1992); S.Pinckaers, 'Rediscovering Virtue' *The Thomist* 60:3 (1996) 361-78.

The important place of virtue is not neglected in *Veritatis Splendor*. It is conventional to say that we only grow in virtue (character) when we do the right thing for the right reason. Acts done without reason or purpose are mere happenstance, they do not enhance or build virtue. As already noted in VS, 63, the Pope teaches that evil done as

the result of invincible ignorance or non-culpable error may not be imputable but it does not cease to be evil. The Pope continues: "a good act which is not recognized as such does not contribute to the moral growth of the person who performs it; it does not perfect him and it does not help to dispose him for the supreme good" (VS, 63). In short, this is not virtue; it does not contribute to the moral or spiritual growth of the person.

Further, it is not just knowledge of God's law that makes people good: ". . . knowledge of God's law is certainly necessary, but it is not sufficient: what is essential is a sort of '*connaturalitas*' between man and the good (ST, II-II, q, 45, a.2). Such a connaturalitas is rooted in and develops through the virtuous attitudes of the individual himself: prudence and the other cardinal virtues, and even before these the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. This is the meaning of Jesus' saying: "He who does the truth comes to the light (Jn.3:21)" (VS, 64).

That Gospel text Jn.3:21 is crucial -- 'He who does the truth comes to the light'. Moral growth is not just book knowledge, footnotes and learned citations; but by living the *truth* one comes to the light. This can explain why sometimes unsophisticated people -- in worldly estimation -- can have much to teach us about the moral and spiritual life. The reason is -- they live the truth! It is no accident that all serious spiritual directors and writers suggest that we read the lives of the saints -- they lived the truth, and, there is great light in that.

Thus, it is wise to learn of all the theological (faith, hope and charity) and moral (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) virtues (Cf. CCC and NCE). That effort is not really ascetics, nor spirituality, it is part of Moral Theology -- what Chapter I of VS calls imitating the self-portrait of Christ, the invitation to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ (VS, 16); the conditions for the moral growth of man (VS, 17); indeed, following Christ is the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality (VS, 19); following Christ means "becoming conformed to him" (VS, 21) and that is the work and life of virtue.

4a. Moral Magisterium

Our text and basic guide has been the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) together with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). These are two major and important components of the moral magisterium of Pope John Paul II. Subsequently, we will examine the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (3/25/95) on the life-death ethic and the life issues in general and in some detail.

However, it is not simply these two major encyclicals and the universal *Catechism* that give shape and content to the moral magisterium of John Paul II.

A rich and very extensive series of post-Synodal documents -- called Apostolic Exhortations -- are, in part or in whole, major contributions to Catholic life and practice.

Thus, the papal exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (10/16/79) is on catechetics; the Pope's personal and comprehensive *vade mecum* on marriage and family life, *Familiaris Consortio* (11/22/81); the sacrament of Penance, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (12/2/84); and a complete exhortation on the three states-in-life in the Church: *Christifideles Laici* (12/30/88) on the laity; *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (3/25/92) on the priesthood; and *Vita Consecrata* (3/25/96) on religious life.

Three social encyclicals contribute to the Church's moral-doctrinal patrimony: *Laborem Exercens* (9/15/81), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (12/30/87) and the magisterial summary of 100 years of Catholic social teaching in *Centesimus Annus* (5/1/91). It is significant that such titles as "The Person and Society" (CCC ##1877-1896), "Participation in Social Life" (##1897-1923) and "Social Justice" (##1928-1948) are included in the fundamental section of the moral part (III) of the *Catechism*. Thus, these are not extras, add-ons or advanced placement considerations; they are, rather, part of the fundamental Moral Theology of the Catholic Church.

Three Apostolic Letters of great importance because they deal with critical issues touching the fault lines of contemporary moral confusion and societal stress: *Salvifici Doloris* (2/11/84) on the Christian understanding of suffering which if understood correctly could help arrest the advance of assisted suicide and euthanasia. *Mulieris Dignitatem* (8/15/88) a key document that details the dignity and vocation of women, along with the Pope's highly personal *Letter to Families* (2/2/94) that summarizes central themes of his whole priestly and papal apostolate.

The Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (8/15/90) not only recapitulates the relevant universal law of the Church but offers as well ways and means to provide a juridic link with Catholic higher education.

During the same pontificate, the sixteen year effort at the re-codification of the universal law of the Western Church was promulgated by John Paul II in the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983). Also, for the first time, a complete codification of the canon laws of the Eastern Church was promulgated, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990). This double legal renewal fulfilled a request and requirement of the Fathers of Vatican Council II.

Although John Paul II gives generous credit to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the Holy Father views the *Catechism* as indispensable "in order that all the richness of the teaching of the Church following the Second Vatican Council could be preserved in a new synthesis and be given a new direction" (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994, p.164). While not

explicitly called for by the Council, the *Catechism* is the Catechism of Vatican Council II and completes the teaching and implementation of the Council.

Under the same Pope's approval and direction, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has promulgated instructions, declarations and letters in detail on the most contemporary problems: the *Declaration on Euthanasia* (5/5/80); the *Instruction on Infant Baptism* (10/20/80); and the Letter on *The Minister of the Eucharist* (8/6/83).

A two-part teaching was promulgated in 1984 beginning with a concise critique of *Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* (*Liberatis Nuntius*, 8/6/84) along with the fuller Catholic perspective in the instruction *On Christian Freedom and Liberation* (*Libertatis Conscientia*, 3/22/86).

The CDF *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (10/1/86) remains to this day the most concise and complete treatment of that question and its implications in Catholic history.

The CDF instruction, *Donum Vitae* (2/22/87), on bioethics and bioethical issues, presents clearly the moral status of the human embryo and all the needed distinctions and moral guidance necessary for resolving pressing and future questions.

In 1989, the same CDF issued a letter *On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation* that is both a useful warning and needed guide for neither fusing nor confusing Christian and non-Christian prayers and prayer forms.

Lastly, a CDF letter gave a definitive response to the question of *Reception of Communion: Divorced and Re-Married Catholics* (9/14/94), while a formal reply of the same Congregation stated that the teaching of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was infallible (10/28/95).

Surely, at least two other encyclicals provide teaching and guidance that directly affects Catholic life and moral practice: *Redemptoris Missio* (12/7/90) on the missionary nature and activity of the Church, and, *Ut Unum Sint* (5/25/95) on ecumenism.

These many mentions stand more as a bibliography of scope and outline of the moral magisterium of John Paul II, no pretense is offered here of explaining the content of all of them.

One reason for reviewing these documents (their contents and sources) is to appreciate their profound conformity with the Second Vatican Council. There are some tendentious faddists who, either ignorant of, or antagonistic to, the Council's true teaching, popularize the deceit that the Pope (John Paul II) and the current Prefect of the CDF (Cardinal Ratzinger) are trying, somehow, to reverse the Council. Some even accuse the Pope of trying today to restore 'minority' positions set aside at the Council and replace the 'majority' position actually taught by the Council. Nothing could be further from the truth. John Paul II, I would argue, is the most faithful expositor, even champion, of the true teaching of Vatican Council II.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (11/10/94), John Paul II teaches that the best preparation for the new millennium can "only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teaching of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church" (n.20).

Indeed, as a first phase of individual and ecclesial preparation for the new millennium, John Paul suggests a serious examination of conscience. A conscientious exam that considers the actual reception of the Council: To what extent has the Word of God become the 'soul of theology' and Christian living as *Dei Verbum* taught? Is the Sacred Liturgy the 'origin and summit' of Church life as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* taught? Is the ecclesiology of 'communio' lived as *Lumen Gentium* taught? Are careful discernment and courageous witness to the truth lived as *Gaudium et Spes* taught? (*TMA*, n.36)

Again, all these mentions are more bibliographical than descriptive, but they do outline, in part, the scope of the moral magisterium of John Paul II which we continue to examine in part.

4b. Sin and Reconciliation

The topics of sin and reconciliation are treated in *Veritatis Splendor*, nn.65-8;69-70; and the *Catechism* ##1846-1876. However, throughout the treatment of both, constant reference is made to the apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (12/2/84). To examine such questions as contrasting Social sin with Personal sin, the nature of Mortal and Venial sin and the so-called "Fundamental Option," it is really necessary to study *RP* nn.16 and 17 in some detail.

As is his consistent method, John Paul II reflects first on Holy Scripture to examine sin -- its nature, divisions and consequences: the Prodigal Son (Lk.15:11-32) *RP*, 5-6; Garden of Eden (Gn.3:12ff; 4:1-16) *RP*, 10; the Tower of Babel (Gn.11:1-9) *RP*, 13-14: "these consequences of sin are the reason for division and rupture, not only within each person but also within the various circles of a person's life: in relation to the family, to the professional and social environment, as can be often seen from experience; it is confirmed by the passage in the Bible about the City of Babel and its Tower" (*RP*, 13).

Sin is fundamentally an offense against God (*VS*, 70; *CCC* #1850; as the Council also taught: *SC*, 109; *LG*, 11; *Ordo Paenitentiae* (1973) Intro., n.5). Sin is both a *turning away from God (aversio a Deo)* and a *turning towards* some created good (*conversio ad creaturam*) (St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, III, q.86, a.4, ad 1; I-II, q.71, a.6; *CCC* #1850 and 1855 ["*avertit a Deo . . . praefertens inferius.*"]) This classic

definition is accepted, repeated and explained in some detail by John Paul II in *RP*, n.17.

But, prior to that correct explanation, the Pope takes some effort to clarify a contemporary distortion that is more popularized than analyzed.

Thus, the Pope teaches clearly: "Sin, in the proper sense, is always a *personal act*" (*RP*, 16). And "It is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free. This truth cannot be disregarded, in order to place the blame for individual's sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people. Above all, this would be to deny the person's dignity and freedom, which are manifested -- even though in a negative and disastrous way -- also in this responsibility for sin committed. Hence, there is nothing so personal and untransferable in each individual as merit for virtue or responsibility for sin." (*RP*, 16)

What then was meant by those who prior to the Synod (1983) spoke so often about "Social Sin"?

First, the Pope outlines acceptable usages of this term "social sin". A serious acceptance of "Human Solidarity" recognizes in a mysterious but real way that individual's sin in some way affects others (consider the doctrine of the Mystical Body); the same solidarity is explicit on the religious level in the Communion of Saints (a law of ascent along with a law of descent) wherein one can speak of a "communion of sin" (*RP*, 16). In these senses, every sin can be considered a 'social' sin.

Further, a direct attack against one's neighbor (made in the image and likeness of God) is, for that reason, an offense against God. These can be called 'social' sins. Likewise every sin against justice in interpersonal relationships, i.e. against the rights of the human person -- beginning with the right to life; every sin against the dignity and honor of one's neighbor or against the common good can be called 'social' sins. The same can apply to sins of commission or omission on the part of political, economic or union leaders "who do not work diligently and wisely for the improvement and transformation of society" and "workers who through absenteeism or non-cooperation fail to ensure that their industries can continue to advance" the well-being of workers, their families and the whole of society. (*RP*, 16)

A third meaning of 'social' sin refers to human communities, especially the 'class struggle'; indeed, deliberate confrontation between blocs of nations, one nation and another, different groups within the same nation. "In both cases one may ask whether moral responsibility for these evils, and therefore sin, can be attributed to any person in particular. Now it has to be admitted that the realities and situations such as those described, when they become generalized and reach vast proportions as social phenomena, almost always become anonymous, just as their causes are complex and not always identifiable. Hence if one speaks of *social sin* here, the expression obviously has an analogical meaning" (*RP*, 16). Yet, even here, we must not underestimate the responsibility of the individuals involved.

Having said this, "there is one meaning sometimes given to *social sin* that is not legitimate or acceptable, even though it is very common in certain quarters today. This usage contrasts *social sin* and *personal sin*, . . . "in a way that waters down and almost abolishes *personal sin*" (*RP*, 16). In this practically every sin is a 'social' sin and the blame for it is placed not on the conscience of the individual but rather on vague entities or anonymous collectivities such as "the situation, the system, society, structures" (*RP*, 16).

When the Church speaks of "situations of sin" or condemns certain social sins -- such cases of 'social' sin are the "result of the accumulation and concentration of many *personal sins*."

"It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; or of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world, and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of a higher order" (*RP*, 16; Take note, for those who claim to be: "Personally opposed, but . . . ").

"The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals. A situation -- or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself -- is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad" (*RP*, 16).

As above (II:3), one can only predicate moral good or evil of a human act -- which proceeds from the will with a knowledge of the end. In common speech, we might talk of a 'bad car', a 'bad book,' or a 'bad 5-iron' but those are not *moral* statements. Similarly, some speak that way of the 4 'Ss': sinful situation, sinful system, sinful society and sinful structures. But, the Pope correctly reminds us that a 'situation' is not in itself the subject of moral acts.

"At the heart of every *situation of sin* are always to be found sinful people. So true is this that even when such a situation can be changed in its structural and institutional aspects by the force of law, or -- as unfortunately more often happens -- by the law of force, the change in fact proves to be incomplete, of short duration, and ultimately vain and ineffective -- not to say counterproductive -- if the people directly or indirectly responsible for that situation are not converted" (*RP*, 16).

If individuals don't change, things don't change. In positive terms, you can't have a good society unless you have good people. As C.S.Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity* long ago (1943) good thinking and good plans are mere moonshine "unless we realize that the courage and unselfishness of individuals is ever going to make any system work properly" (in "The Three Parts of Morality" in *Mere Christianity*, 1943, p.58).

Unless there is a real change of mind and heart, there is no real change, some just play (unchanged) an old game under new rules. No conversion = no change; thus, those

who overwork 'social' sin at the expense of or even the elimination of 'personal' sin pursue a path that defeats what they advocate.

4c. Reconciliation and Sin

As in the prior lesson (IV:11), both *Veritatis Splendor*, n.70 and the *Catechism* ##1857-59 (1874) provide definitions of mortal and venial sin. However, both VS and CCC quote explicitly and at some length from the exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, n.17. In this, a correct understanding of 'serious matter' is crucial for the proper definition of sin, and, to refute revisionist theories of the so-called 'fundamental option' which Pope John Paul teaches is "contrary to the teaching of Scripture itself" and contradicts "the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul" (VS, 67). Prior errors (cf. II:5 and II:6) are repeated and exaggerated here and vice versa.

The question of *serious matter* is examined at some length by John Paul II in *RP*, n.17. Even the greatest theologians -- St. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk.21, c.27:5; and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Quodlibet*, VIII, q.9, a.15 -- acknowledge the delicacy and difficulty of careless definition in this regard, and they were reluctant to do so without the positive teaching of the Church to guide them.

The Pope teaches clearly, relying as ever on Holy Scripture (I Jn.5:16): "Here we have the core of the Church's traditional teaching, which was reiterated frequently and vigorously during the recent Synod (1983). The Synod in fact not only reaffirmed the teaching of the Council of Trent concerning the existence and nature of *mortal* and *venial* sins (DS.1573;1575;1577), but it also recalled that *mortal sin* is sin whose object is grave matter and which is committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. It must be added -- as was likewise done at the Synod -- that some sins are *intrinsically* grave and mortal by reason of their matter. That is, there exist acts which, *per se* and in themselves, independently of circumstances are always seriously wrong by reason of their object. These acts, if carried out with sufficient awareness and freedom, are always gravely sinful" (footnote #96 cites Trent, DS.1544 which cites I Cor.6:9ff (*RP*, n.17)).

This doctrine is based on the Ten Commandments, on the preaching of the Old Testament assimilated into the *kerygma* of the Apostles, belonging to the earliest teaching of the Church and constantly reaffirmed by her to this day -- thus, principles located in Sacred Scripture, clarified by Sacred Tradition and taught in any given age by the teaching Church: sacred sources all! (Recall I;1.)

Then, invoking the classic definition of sin -- *aversio a Deo, conversio ad creaturam* -- the Pope summarizes: "With the whole tradition of the Church, we call *mortal sin* the act by which man freely and consciously rejects God, his law, the covenant of love God offers, preferring to turn in on himself or to some created and finite reality, something contrary to the divine will (*conversio ad creaturam*). This can occur in a direct and formal way, in the sins of idolatry, apostasy and atheism; or in an equivalent way, as in every act of disobedience to God's commandments in grave matter" (*RP*, 17) (cf. *VS*, n.70 and *CCC* ##1857-59, 1874).

It is here, both at the Synod (1983) and before that in theological speculation, that some have proposed a threefold distinction of sin to replace the twofold (mortal-venial) distinction of received Tradition (advocates of this new shift would include: J. Fuchs; J. Keenan; T. Kopfensteiner; T. O'Connell; B. Haring et al.).

Surely not the most scholarly but perhaps the most popular version in American circles was published by L. Orsy, "The Sins of the Little One" *America* 129 (12/8/73) pp.438-441. His redefinitions were the following:

MORTAL sin:"It is a free and permanent option by man to remain alone and to exclude God from his life" (v.129, p.438);SERIOUS sin:"many acts that betray evil trends in the heart but do not necessarily bring about a radical break with God" (129:440);VENIAL sin"it is a refusal to grow," . . . "a kind of tardiness in our pilgrimage to God," (129:440).

One should note in this:

1. what some describe as 'mortal sin' is a fair description of 'impenitence,' which if it occurs at the end of life is called 'final impenitence' (*NCE* 7:396; also cn.1007);
2. what is newly called 'serious' sin is an acceptable description of *venial* sin -- acts or trends that bring no radical break with God;
3. although vague and open-ended, the 'venial' sin description can stand, if it says anything at all.

But, note well, there is here a change in 'words' without a corresponding change in 'realities.' If 'serious' sin is now *venial* and 'mortal' sin is described as *impenitence*, then *mortal* sin as we conventionally and correctly understand it mysteriously disappears from this 'new' analysis.

This re-definition of 'mortal' sin is basically and only *intentional*. The classic definition -- simultaneously turning from and turning to -- is simply cut in half. Presumably, one could turn TO a creature or finite reality as his end, and not simultaneously turn FROM God, since the agent could claim that no matter what his activity, he or she is fundamentally opting toward God.

The conventional teaching involves, of course, three factors: (1) serious matter; (2) sufficient knowledge; and (3) sufficient consent (CCC #1857; VS, 70; RP, 17). What happens in this re-definition is that 'matter' has no operative function; in fact, matter does not matter. But, 'serious matter' in the conventional analysis is our only link with objective morality; surely, knowledge and consent are, by definition, subjective categories, but if 'serious matter' is replaced by 'fundamental option,' 'core option,' 'core freedom,' 'fundamental life choice' etc. then all the analytical factors are subjective ones.

This shift ('re-definition') is properly described as "formal" (or intentional) because its advocates no longer speak of 'serious matter' (nor of light matter) but of total commitment or lack thereof, of love-response or lack thereof. One is no longer guilty of a grave MIS-deed but rather of a grave MIS-intention. Such sin is *grave* not because some 'serious' law of God is broken but because one has failed to elicit an adequate response of love. Sin, therefore, is not so much WHAT one does as WHY one does it -- the essence changing from a wrong *action* to a wrong *intention* or wrong *motive*. As Pope Pius XII taught (2/22/44) when one says 'yes' to the forbidden fruit, simultaneously he says 'no' to the God who forbade it. The intending of the *object* of evil is not separable from intending the violation of Divine Will and Law.

Some describe the so-called 'Fundamental Option' as engaging one at the core of his/her personality (the so-called "real me"). They argue we are not capable of expressing the totality of the whole person in a single act, and further, that this allegedly deep level of personal engagement is basically: UNthematic, UNreflective, UNarticulated and INaccessible since it is so deep in the 'core' of one's personality (e.g. J. Fuchs). But, this non explanation has the great advantage of not explaining that which is most in need of explanation here. (In attacking *Veritatis Splendor*, J. Fuchs presents a concise summary of his own confusion in "Good Acts and Good Persons" *Tablet* v.247, #7996 (Nov.6, 1993) pp.1444-5.)

On the contrary, *Veritatis Splendor* teaches: "Consequently, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, there are certain specific kinds of behavior that are always wrong to choose, because choosing them involves a disorder of the will, a moral evil." (VS, 78). The reference to the *Catechism* is #1761: "There are concrete acts that it is always wrong to choose, because their choice entails a disorder of the will, i.e. a moral evil. One may never do evil so that good may result from it."

5a. Gospel of Life

Up to this point, we have focused on the components of "fundamental Moral Theology" in the Moral Magisterium of John Paul II. Our text has been the encyclical, *Veritatis*

Splendor (6/8/93) with its connections and parallels in the *Catechism*, Part III, section 1, ##1699-2051. That part of the *Catechism* covering fundamental Moral Theology.

The focus here is not general (or fundamental) morality, but specifically the life-death ethic which, in part, is addressed in the *Catechism* (e.g. abortion in ##2270-2274; euthanasia in ##2276-2279); but our text is now the encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (3/25/95).

This encyclical is a full one of some 4 major parts, 105 numbered paragraphs, 142 footnotes and about 189 pages in English translation (the official Latin text is in AAS 87, 1995, 401-522). It is essential to read the full text of *EV* and best to do that with a copy of the Bible alongside. Most of these final four lessons will simply provide text and documentation for what was mentioned quickly in the tapes -- the argument and reasoning of the encyclical itself does not require extra explanation. Unlike *VS*, nn.71-83 which is highly technical Moral Theology, *EV* itself is more explanatory and consistent as it reads.

The Introduction (*EV*, 1-6) presents the rationale and need for this encyclical. It is now 30 years after Vatican Council II which condemned: ". . . any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; . . ." (*GS*, n.27). Unfortunately, this sad state is not decreasing but expanding with new scientific and technical prospects, and with it "a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold" (*EV*, 4) -- a "Culture of Death" -- with a "more sinister character" because broad sectors of public opinion try to justify "certain crimes against life" in the name of "rights" claiming not only exemption from punishment but even "authorization by the State" (*EV*, 4). Thus, choices once unanimously considered criminal are becoming socially acceptable.

Thus, another category of persons "is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life" (*EV*, 5). The purpose of this encyclical is to be "a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability" and also an appeal to every person, in the name of God, to "respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!" This is the only direction for justice, development, true freedom and peace. It is part then of the fundamental social teaching of the Church (*EV*, 5).

Chapter I of *EV* (nn.7-28) examines present-day threats to human life. The method of procedure here is the preferred one of John Paul II to begin with a reflection on Holy Scripture -- here the Cain and Abel narrative in Gen.4:2-16 (which should be read by each student). The reliance on Sacred sources is particularly evident in *EV* since every sub-section is introduced with a citation of Holy Scripture.

Consider *EV*, n.8, wherein "Cain, instead of showing remorse and apologizing, arrogantly eludes the question: 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' (Gn.4:9). Cain tries to cover up his crime with a lie." (*EV*, 8). The Pope teaches this is still the case where all sorts of ideologies try to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes against human beings.

Later, the Pope will refer to "innocuous medical terms" (*EV*, 11) and to "ambiguous terminology" (*EV*, 58) which try to distract attention and hide the true nature of the moral crime against life. Every gross violation of the 5th commandment normally involves a distortion of the 8th commandment. My own maxim is: All social engineering is preceded by verbal engineering! This is not an accident, it is an effective and lethal tactic.

Even pre-*Roe v Wade* (1/22/73), efforts were afoot to promote a 'new ethic' and the means to accomplish it. A famous editorial "A New Ethic for Medicine and Society" in *California Medicine* v.113, #3 (Sept.1970) pp.67-8 outlines precisely the problem and how to overcome it:

"The traditional Western ethic has always placed great emphasis on the intrinsic worth and equal value of every human life regardless of its stage or development. This ethic has had the blessing of the Judeo-Christian heritage and has been the basis for most of our laws and much of our social policy. . . It will become necessary and acceptable to place relative rather than absolute values on such things as human lives . . . This is quite distinctly at variance with the Judeo-Christian ethic . . . Since the old ethic (Judeo-Christian) has not yet been fully displaced it has been necessary to separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, which continues to be socially abhorrent. The result has been a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra-uterine until death." (*CM* 113:3, 1970, 67-8)

The key tactic is clearly stated, i.e. whatever you call abortion or euthanasia or any other anti-life campaign -- do not call it 'killing'! To succeed, you must call it something else; thus, terminate a pregnancy; remove product of conceptus; and all the choice anti-choice rhetoric. These are not carelessly chosen terms, but deliberately chosen (cf. the examples in *EV*, 58). Recall the warning of the Prophet Isaiah: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness . . . " (Ish.5:20)

It is with words that begins "the eclipse of the value of life" (*EV*, 10). It is a culture of skepticism in ethics, isolation in difficulties -- a culture that denies solidarity, a war against the weak generates a "Culture of Death" (*EV*, 11, 12). The threats against life take on vast proportions -- far beyond the single Cains who kill the single Abels -- because they are scientifically and systematically programmed threats: "an objective conspiracy against life" (*EV*, 17).

The same perverse notion of absolute autonomy, absolute individual freedom (so thoroughly repudiated in *VS*, nn.35-53) is the lethal root of the Culture of Death (*EV*, 18-28). The sovereign self sees others as "enemies" (*EV*, 20) and "rivals" (*EV*, 98) against whom one must defend and protect himself. There is no human solidarity in the Culture of Death, but rather an amazing contradiction: precisely at the time we make the most solemn proclamation of human rights *in print*, the same rights are selectively repudiated *in practice* (*EV*, 18).

The roots of this contradiction are obvious and operative: "extreme subjectivity" (*EV*, 19); "absolute autonomy" (*EV*, 20) with its sinister relativism; but above all, the "Eclipse of the sense of God and man" (*EV*, 21) so characteristic of modern secularism.

Vatican II taught clearly and emphatically: "Without the Creator the creature would disappear . . . when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible" (*GS*, n.36). One no longer considers life a *gift* from God (no longer 'sacred') but a mere thing (*EV*, 22).

This practical materialism prepares for the most profound shift in values and meaning and worth. It changes "The criterion of personal dignity -- which demands respect, generosity and service -- replaced by a criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they 'are', but for what they 'have, do and produce'" (*EV*, 23). If man is made in the Image and Likeness of God, it is inevitable, when the God profile is lowered and lessened, man's worth and value is lowered and lessened with that loss.

This wrong turn, this radical shift in values, this moving away from the primacy of being over having, the primacy of persons over things was a warning of the Council (*GS*, 35) and a consistent warning of John Paul II throughout his pontificate beginning with his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (3/4/79), insisting that the advancement of persons is not just the multiplication of things rather genuine human development must insist on the priority of Ethics over Technology, the primacy of Persons over Things and the superiority of Spirit over Matter (*RH*, n.16). Building a Culture of Life is not possible if we build on the wrong criterion.

5b. Gospel of Life: Origin and Destiny

Chapter II of *Evangelium Vitae*, nn.29-51, is the Christian message concerning life. The Gospel of Life is not merely a reflection nor merely a commandment, but the concrete proclamation of the very *person* of Jesus Christ: the way, truth and life (Jn.14:6) the resurrection and life (Jn.11:25) Who came that "they might have life and have it abundantly" (Jn.10:10). It is through the Person of Jesus that we can *know* and *do* the truth about life (Jn.3:21) (*EV*, 29).

Here begins the repeated thematic: "life is always a good". This anti-gnostic truth is the teaching of the Old Testament (*EV*, 31) and the New (*EV*, 32). "Life is always a good" (*EV*, 34): the summit of God's creation "a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things" (Gn.2:15): a special bond with the Creator, made in His image -- uniquely

endowed with reason and free will (*EV*, 34, 35), capable of and open to eternal life (*EV*, 37):

"Here the Christian truth about life becomes most sublime. The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him." (*EV*, 38)

"Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills" (*EV*, 39). This is why human life is *SACRED* -- because of its origin (God) and because of its destiny (God); the bible gives unanimous witness that the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and his creative activity: "For God made man in his own image" (Gn.1:26).

The "sacredness" of life gives rise to its inviolability (*EV*, 40) and this is the tap root principle for the life-death ethic (cf. *Catechism* #2258 and CDF, *Donum Vitae*, 2/22/87, Introduction, n.5).

'Teachings of the Magisterium', note carefully the 3 paragraphs and all footnotes ##16-22. The expression "Life is Sacred" is common in Catholic and religious circles, but its roots and rationale are often not well understood, it is more often presumed and left unexplained. That neglect is a serious mistake. *EV* takes some pains to explain it as we should make great effort to absorb it.

The dignity of the unborn and the elderly is then examined in the Bible in *EV* both the Old Testament (n.44) and the New (n.45).

"Although there are no direct and explicit calls to protect human life at its very beginning, . . ." (*EV*, 44) the possibility of harming, attacking or denying life is completely foreign to the People of God. Many sources are cited to support that conclusion: Ps.127; Gn.15:5; Jer.1:5; Job 10:8-12; 2 Mac.7:22-23 along with other Psalms:22:10-11; 71:6; 139:13-14. Curiously, the encyclical does not cite the only *indirect* case re abortion in the Bible Ex.21:22: "When men have a fight and hurt a pregnant woman, so that she suffers a miscarriage, but no further injury, the guilty one shall be fined . . . But if injury ensues, you shall give life for life" (21:22-23). True, it is not a case of direct abortion, but it is also true that this Torah case makes no distinction about so-called formed and unformed human life.

EV n.45 recalls the Visitation passage of St. Elizabeth and a beautiful citation from St. Ambrose. One might note with care the original Greek of Lk.1:44:" . . . the infant in my womb leaped for joy." The Greek reads: *to brephos* (the baby) *en tē koilia* which St. Jerome rendered in the Vulgate: "*exaltavit in gaudio infans in utero meo.*"

EV n.46 notes that it would be anachronistic to expect biblical revelation to speak of euthanasia in the present-day terms we so often employ. But, there can be no doubt about the dignity, respect and reverence of old age in the Bible which sees it as a

blessing just as life is a blessing. Old age and illness are not seen as a burden to be avoided and discarded but as more deserving of respect and reverent support.

The Doctrine of the Cross will provide the complete revelation of the whole Gospel of Life (*EV*, 50). Especially in the Culture of Death, we should turn to the Cross not from it, because what seems a defeat, a criminal prosecution, a loss is not. "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39) -- that moment of greatest weakness revealed who he is: on the Cross his glory is made manifest. It is, again, not just a reflection or commandment we examine here but a Person, Jesus Christ, who reveals the Christian message concerning life.

6a. Gospel of Life: Abortion

Chapter III of *Evangelium Vitae* nn.52-77 concerns the specifics of 'Thou Shalt Not Kill'. Two of these specifics coordinate well with the *Catechism*: abortion (CCC ##2270-2275) and euthanasia (2276-9), but the *Catechism* is highly concise. Both of these subjects have been the object of authentic Declarations by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and those doctrinal Declarations are theologically more extensive than the *Catechism* and more extensive than the encyclical *EV*. Thus, as we consider first the topic of abortion, it will be a great advantage to read and study the CDF *Declaration on Abortion* (11/18/74) nn.1-27. It is my experience that even pro-life Catholics who are well-informed seem not to know about nor be familiar with this *Declaration on Abortion* of 1974. This is a sad omission because that *Declaration* is neither liberal nor conservative but rather the doctrine of our faith.

EV, 53 repeats and summarizes that human life is sacred and inviolable (CDF, *Donum Vitae*, Intro., 5 and CCC #2258). *EV*, 54 in specifying the negative content of the commandment: 'thou shalt not kill' states an extreme limit which can never be exceeded. After citing Holy Scripture which makes no explicit mention of direct abortion, it does quote the *Didache* at length because it is the first explicit Christian mention: "You shall not commit murder. . . . You shall not kill an unborn child or murder a newborn infant" *Didache* 2:2 and again in chapter 5: "The way of death is this . . . they kill their children and by abortion cause God's creatures to perish" (5:3).

Since the focus of Chapter III of *EV* will be the direct killing of the innocent, some things are not formally included here: legitimate self-defense (*EV*, 55) and the death penalty (*EV*, 56). However, the latter, *EV*'s treatment of the death penalty, required that the *Catechism* in its definitive Latin edition (1997) be amended and corrected, cf. CCC #2267 in *Origins* 27:15 (9/25/97) p.261 for a corrected translation.

Having put aside examples of killing non-innocents (*EV*, 55, 56), the Pope then teaches a formal moral truth located in Sacred Scripture, clarified by Sacred Tradition and constantly proposed by the Magisterium of the Church:

"Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, *I Confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.*" (*EV*, 57; emphasis in the original). Further, "This doctrine, based on the unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (Rm.2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium." (*EV*, 57)

In the tapes (recorded in June 1997), I made the remark that this statement of doctrine is taught as infallibly true. Now, subsequent to John Paul II's, *motu proprio, Ad Tuendam Fidem* (5/18/98; cf. *Origins* 28:8, 7/16/98, pp.113;115-116) that is a correct remark -- it is infallibly true: that it is always gravely immoral to directly take the life of a moral innocent. This is a negative moral absolute that does not admit of exception: "there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is master of the world or the 'poorest of the poor' on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal" (*VS*, 96) in *EV*, 57.

The moral gravity of direct abortion is apparent in all its truth "if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved" (*EV*, 58) -- no one more innocent can be imagined; and in no moral sense is the unborn an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor (cf. John Paul's, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994, pp.205-206). It is unusual for pontifical documents to use the word 'murder' but *EV* does that (cf. Latin: *hic agi de homicidio* in *AAS* 87, 1995, p.467).

EV 60 addresses the question of the beginning of human life. While "the Magisterium has not expressly committed itself, the Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity as body and spirit: 'The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception . . . '(*DV*, I, 1)" (*EV*, 60).

Clearly, as the 1974 *Declaration on Abortion* taught: "from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being" (*Declaration*, 11/18/74, n.12). Thus, it is a life distinct in itself and distinguishable from others -- an individual person with characteristic aspects already determined. Very great clarity is required on this point: for philosophical clarity read G. Grisez, *Living A Christian Life* vol. 2 (1993) pp.488-498; for biological clarity read M. Johnson in *Theological Studies* 56:4 (Dec. 1995) pp.743-763; in summary confer: B. Ashley, A. Moraczweski, chpt. 3 in *Fetal Tissue Issue* (Pope John Center, 1994) pp.33-59.

EV 61 and 62 recapitulate in detail the teaching of Scripture and Tradition, the papal Magisterium and the universal law of the Church to support the summation of Pope Paul

VI that the teaching of the Church against direct abortion is "unchanged and unchangeable" (*EV*, 62). With the same formality and solemnity cited in *EV*, 57, the Pope invokes the authority of the Petrine office, as the Head of the College of Bishops together with the College of Bishops -- *I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder. EV, 62.* This too is infallible teaching.

It is unusual for a such a solemn formulation to delve into canonical discipline, but *EV*, 62 does that -- citing canon 1398 of the *Code of Canon Law* the abortion canon with its penalty of *latae sententiae* excommunication and also those close cooperators, without whose help this crime could not be accomplished (cn.1329,#2) who incur the same penalty. (Curiously but consistently, the *Catechism* #2272 does the same which, I think, is unusual for a Catechism but this, again, only underlines the importance of this crime against life, which, of late, civil and criminal codes no longer punish but authorize -- a sinister element of the Culture of Death the encyclical noted at the beginning, *EV*, 4).

Throughout this 3rd chapter, I have always used the term 'direct abortion' as distinct from 'indirect.' "Direct" in Moral Theology means *directly intended* as in directly procured abortion. Morally "indirect" abortions are legitimate applications of the principle of Double Effect and can be performed in a Catholic hospital. Thus, the removal of a cancerous uterus from a woman two months pregnant is an 'indirect' abortion, as are some of the classic cases of ectopic pregnancies. A moral guideline for this can be found in the NCCB's *Ethical and Religious Directives* (1994):

"Operations, treatments, and medications that have as their direct purpose the cure of a proportionately serious pathological condition of a pregnant woman are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the unborn child is viable, even if they will result in the death of the unborn child." (Directive #47)

The same can be found in the Vatican *Charter for Health Care Workers* (1995) n.142. Further and fuller explanations of when and how this double-effect reasoning applies and does not can be found in standard medical ethics textbooks; e.g., T.J. O'Donnell, *Medicine and Christian Morality* (3rd, ed. 1996) pp.176-195. (The same reasoning will apply to morally 'direct' or 'indirect' sterilizations, basically what is truly therapeutic and/or non-therapeutic.)

6b. Gospel of Life: Euthanasia

Chapter III of *EV* treats Euthanasia in nn.64-67. As with the prior lesson, there is a prior Declaration of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith that must be studied

because it is quoted throughout -- CDF, *Declaration on Euthanasia* (5/5/80) nn.I-IV. The companion piece in the *Catechism* ##2276-2279 also quotes the CDF Declaration of 1980 but oddly does not cite it in footnotes.

EV, 64 outlines how the Culture of Death prepares for and promotes Euthanasia -- the shift (*EV*, 23) from a criterion of personal dignity (requiring respect, generosity and service) to the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness. This is complicated by the temptation to take 'control' of death before its time, recalling the misguided autonomy rejected in the beginning of the encyclical since many moderns seem to think they *own* their life the way they own a BIC pen. Here too, life is a gift we have from God on trust, for a while, then we go back to God. God has absolute dominion over life; we have, at best, useful dominion, a responsible stewardship -- we are not the landlords of our own existence.

Euthanasia is defined in *EV*, 65 as an ACTION or OMISSION which of ITSELF or by INTENTION causes death (CCC#2277; *Ethical and Religious Directives* 60, 61; *Charter for Health Care Workers*, n.147). Thus, the terms of reference can be found in the intention of the will and in the methods used.

This is to be distinguished from aggressive or extraordinary treatment which it is legitimate to refuse.

Since the distinction between ORDINARY and EXTRAORDINARY is crucial here, we should attempt to define it. Ordinary and Extraordinary means are calculated in relations to the patient's real conditions and actual circumstances. Thus, all medicines, treatments and operations that: (1) offer a reasonable hope of benefit to the patient; (2) without a serious danger of death; and, (3) without excessive pain, hardship, burden, expense are 'Ordinary' means for that patient.

Morally, all are bound to use ORDINARY MEANS to preserve their life, health and bodily integrity (Ordinary = Obligatory); usually, one is not bound to use EXTRAORDINARY MEANS but is free to do so, if one chooses (Extraordinary = Optional).

There are certain basics that are always presupposed in a correct understanding of 'ordinary means:' basic hygiene and supportive measures -- food, water, bed-rest, room temperature and personal hygiene. Some call these 'minimal means!' The basis for this distinction is the difference between a *negative* prohibition that is absolute (not directly kill the innocent) and the *positive* duty to take care of health and life within reasonable and proportionate limits. Even the notion of 'minimal means' allows that their mechanical delivery, in unusual circumstances, might, by exception, qualify as 'extraordinary' but that can only be determined on a case by case basis. For good guidance consult the NCCB's "Nutrition and Hydration: Moral and Pastoral Reflections" *Origins* 21:44 (April 9, 1992) pp.705-712; also, *Charter for Health Care Workers* (1995) n.120.

It is, perhaps, in the area of omissions that the most confusion arises. Some even advocate the terminology "active" and "passive" euthanasia as if the former is prohibited

and the latter is acceptable. This is highly misleading. One can kill by omission; not every omission to be sure -- but the term "passive euthanasia" is inherently ambiguous until and unless one determines in a given case *what* is being 'passively' omitted, withdrawn or withheld.

The omission of Ordinary Means is euthanasia (*ERD #56*); whereas the omission of Extraordinary Means is *not* euthanasia and should not be so called (*ERD #57*).

Similarly, one should not equate cure with care. Cure is not always available; care is always appropriate and required. Quoting the *Declaration* of 1980, *EV* 65 is explicit -- when inevitable death is morally imminent one can in conscience: "refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted" (*EV*, 65). Some authors, even textbooks, omit the second half of that quote which is dangerous and misleading. "Methods of palliative care" are here recommended (*EV*, 65; also 88) as does the *Catechism*: "Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged" (*CCC #2279*).

As above, one can read with profit the specifics and examples in the *Charter for Health Care Workers* (1995) III 'Death' nn.114-138.

As twice before in *EV* (n.57 re direct killing of the innocent; n.62 re direct abortion) the Pope again proclaims a formal infallible truth. In harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors (largely 20th Century due to the formulation of this question; cf. footnote #81 of *EV*) in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church: "*I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person*" (*EV*, 65). The doctrine is based on natural law, divine positive law, sacred Tradition and the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church. "Depending on circumstances, this practice involves the malice proper to suicide or murder" (*EV*, 65)(Latin: "*homicidium*" in *AAS* 87, 1995, p.477).

Further, suicide and assisted suicide are similarly condemned in *EV* 66. It is perhaps, assisted suicide that presents the next lethal and legal step into the Culture of Death -- oddly a pattern more developed in the so-called First World than in the Third World. In essence, this is not a poor people's campaign, but the poor may be the first 'beneficiaries' of this unwanted 'favor' under the guise of reimbursement schemes, that is, the denial of reimbursement for ordinary care and treatments.

Quite properly, *EV* 66 calls euthanasia what it is -- a "false mercy". It will march under the banner of 'compassion'; but it is, of course, not compassion at all. "Compassion" (*cum passio*) means sharing another's pain or burden: "it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear" (*EV*, 66). Murder is no less murder simply because the recipient requested it.

EV 67 cites John Paul's Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris* (2/11/84) which treats of the Christian understanding of suffering. That apostolic letter should be read in its entirety; failure to do so leaves Catholics ill equipped to resist the euthanasia movement.

A final section of Chapter III of *EV* nn.68-74 treats at length of the relationship between civil and moral law. While it is true that the CDF Instruction *Donum Vitae* (2/22/87) did approach this subject in n.III, the treatment in *DV* is minuscule compared to the much fuller exposition in *EV* nn.68-74. It should be read and studied with the greatest care.