

November 1994

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Recommended Citation

Healy, Jack (1994) "Veritatis Splendor and the Human Person," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 61: No. 4, Article 6.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol61/iss4/6>

Veritatis Splendor and the Human Person

by

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On August 6, 1993 Pope John Paul II affixed his signature to *Veritatis Splendor*, the tenth encyclical of his pontificate.¹ Released on October 5, the encyclical, according to a piece appearing the next day in the *New York Times*, "was intended to encourage reflection and discussion of basic principles of morality, not to cut off debate."² If this was the Pope's intention, it was to some extent soon realized in the various print media.³ We would like in this essay to see, on the one hand, how with regard to basic moral principles, *Veritatis Splendor* defines the framework for discussion and, on the other, why according to the encyclical the human person is at stake. We will proceed first by summarizing the encyclical and then relating to it the Pope's seminal philosophical work, *The Acting Person*.

In the introduction to his encyclical the Pope minces no words when he speaks of "a genuine crisis" in morality. He defines the crisis as man "in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself." The cause, says the Pope, lies in the doubts and distortions which assail Catholic moral doctrine owing to certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions "which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth."⁴

Having laid out in the Introduction the scope of the crisis, the Pope divides his encyclical into three chapters with the first chapter a meditation, the second a theological *discursus* and the third an exhortation.

In chapter one John Paul selects for meditation Mt. 19:16, the story of the rich young man who inquires of Jesus, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus' answer, of course, is to cite the Ten Commandments and then to summon the young man to discipleship. The Pope says that "The young man senses that there is a connection between moral good and the fulfillment of his own destiny."⁸ Moreover, says John Paul, "To ask about good, in fact, ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness."⁹

While the young man as a believing Jew has the benefit of the Ten Commandments to guide him toward the ultimate Good, his question is really that of every man. With regard to the good, so the Pope tells us, God's answer is inscribed in man's very being. That is, in creating man in wisdom and love, God

constituted him to achieve his final end by endowing him with the light of reason to discriminate the good to be done from the evil to be avoided. This constitutional endowment directing man to what fulfills his nature is called "natural law".(12)

In a religious meditation the insertion of a philosophical concept like natural law may seem peculiar especially since it does not appear again until the second chapter of the encyclical. But there is a logical progression in the Pope's thinking. Following mention of natural law, he immediately reflects on God's choice of Israel and the commandments of Sinai. By linking natural law and the Decalogue, the Holy Father is indicating that the answer to the question about the good is accessible to all men and women, whether they are believers or not. That is, if man scrutinizes the law of his own nature he can see how the commandments of Sinai are in accord with it.

But having fulfilled these commandments, the young man evidently approaches Jesus for something more. The young man desires perfection, an undertaking which according to Jesus requires following him through renunciation of oneself and one's possessions. This invitation to perfection, says John Paul, is an appeal to freedom, the same appeal operating in the commandments the fulfilment of which has brought the young man to this stage of maturity. Keeping in mind the Pope's earlier reference in the introduction to "an illusory freedom apart from truth itself," we can understand the point he is driving home now, namely, that "human freedom and God's law are not in opposition; on the contrary, they appeal one to the other."(17)

In concluding his meditation, the Pope says that Christ's conversation with the young man continues, as it were, even in our own day. For, in the Church, Christ is still present interpreting through the Apostles and their successors God's moral prescriptions. They are found in the "Living Tradition" of the Church which enjoys the Holy Spirit's assistance, in the witness of the Church Fathers, in the lives of the saints, in the liturgy and, of course, in the Magisterium. On this note, John Paul closes his meditation.

The second chapter, the theological *discursus*, is by far the lengthiest of the three chapters. Alluding to the fidelity with which the Church has preserved God's word with regard to belief and moral action, the Holy Father seeks now to draw "attention to those elements of the Church's moral teaching which today appear particularly exposed to error, ambiguity or neglect."(30)

The first element of concern to John Paul is that of *human freedom* since certain currents of modern thought, with evident impact on moral theology, absolutize human freedom so as to make it the source of values. Sharing in this absolutism is conscience, the moral judgment of which is affirmed as true simply because it originates in conscience. With this presumption of truth, conscience hands down categorical and infallible decisions; it brooks no challenge from other claims of truth. Moreover, "sincerity, authenticity and 'being at peace with oneself'"(32) are presented as sufficient criteria for an individual to assess the proper working of conscience. Corollary to this radically subjectivistic conception of moral judgment is the tendency to accord conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria for good and evil. The result is the

emergence of an individualistic ethic which leads ultimately to the denial, not only of a universal truth about the good which reason can know, but also of the notion of human nature in which all men share. In the final analysis these thought currents, as the Holy Father reiterates, undermine or deny the dependence of freedom on truth.

In the interest of asserting man's moral autonomy, contemporary thinking also sets up an antithesis between freedom and law. John Paul, however, by referring to the Genesis account wherein God forbids man to eat from the tree of good and evil, contrasts God's law with the aberrant thinking that regards human freedom as "creative of values" and even of truth itself. According to the Pontiff, such thinking ignores God's eternal law, which established the natural law and the dependency of both human reason and the moral order on God. John Paul asserts that "Man's *genuine moral autonomy* in no way means the rejection but rather the acceptance of the moral law . . . [B]y submitting to the law, freedom submits to the truth of creation."(41)

John Paul develops this theme by appealing to St. Thomas Aquinas' theory of "natural law". Man's natural reason participates in God's eternal reason. Whereas the latter arranges, governs and guides creation to its due end or good, the former shares in that activity especially evident in man's free actions. John Paul puts it this way,

[God] cares for man not "from without," through the laws of physical nature, but "from within," through reason, which, by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law, is consequently able to show man the direction to take in his free actions.(43)

In short, man can recognize good and evil and freely choose in his actions the good which fulfills and perfects his nature.

The alleged conflict between freedom and law directly impacts the Church's teaching on natural law. In an age inclined toward the empirical, scientific, technological and liberal, the Pope sees the resulting mind-set as one which easily treats moral facts as statistically verifiable and explicable in terms of psychosocial processes. Statistics, therefore, become standards and norms, while material and biological nature is set in opposition to human freedom.

In supposing this opposition between nature and freedom some theologians make the criticism that the Church's conception of natural law converts biological laws into moral laws. This confusion of biology with morality, so the criticism maintains, informs much of Church teaching in the area of sexuality, specifically in reference to contraception, direct sterilization, autoeroticism, pre-marital sex, homosexual acts and artificial insemination. The Magisterium fails to give due regard to man as a rational and free being who "*must freely determine the meaning of his behavior*"(47) and not be morally bound by biological laws.

John Paul counters the criticism by exposing its implicit claim that man's freedom is absolute with regard to both human nature and the body. More specifically, he rejects the view that human nature and the body, while materially necessary, are merely presuppositions for the exercise of freedom and extrinsic to the person. Consequently,

Their functions would not be able to constitute reference points for moral decisions, because the finalities of these inclinations would be merely "physical" goods, called by some "pre-moral".(48)

The Holy Father claims that a doctrine which dissociates the moral act from the bodily dimensions of its exercise is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and Tradition.(48)

Setting freedom in opposition to nature has further negative ramifications for natural law. Chief of these is to pit the freedom of the individual against the nature which he or she has in common with others. What is lost sight of in this opposition is the universality and immutability of natural law. That is, since natural law recognizes an eternal law governing creation and operating as reason in man, natural law is inscribed universally and immutably in human nature. Of this law, reason can discern its dictates, traditionally called "precepts". The Pope cites some examples which traditional morality classifies as "positive" precepts or "formal norms". They do not specify the content of such an act as, for example, cultivating life or seeking truth but merely indicate goods and values which man should realize by his actions.

The other classification of precepts which will be the Pope's main concern embraces "negative" precepts or "material norms". Like the "Thou shalt not's" of the Ten Commandments, they specify actions forbidden to man. In keeping with the moral tradition of the Church, John Paul reiterates that these negative precepts "oblige each and every individual, always and in every circumstance." They prohibit given actions "*semper et pro semper*, without exception . . . [Thus] It is prohibited — to everyone and in every case — to violate these precepts."(52) Later in the document the Pope will insist on this point again.

Contrasting positive and negative precepts, the Holy Father attempts to dispel the impression that because the latter oblige always and without exception, the former are less important. Not at all. Rather, the reality is this: the positive precepts summed up in love of God and love of neighbor have no higher limit beyond which man can go to fulfill them; but they do have a lower limit, expressed negatively, beneath which they are broken.

Freedom, we may recall, was but one of the elements which earlier John Paul mentioned as being absolutized. Conscience was the other. In a lengthy section he deliberates on conscience, since "The way in which one conceives the relationship between freedom and law is thus intimately bound with one's understanding of the moral conscience."(54)

Consistent with his statements about positive and negative precepts, the Pope assails the opinion of some theologians who deny the binding character of these precepts or norms. This faulty opinion cuts personal decision loose from the norm so that the latter is reduced to being merely a useful tool for assessing the situation or offering a perspective. No longer, then, does it fall to conscience to *judge* actions but rather to *decide* them "autonomously". Conscience decides when a concrete action can preempt observance of the (negative) precept. In this view, therefore we see the results of freedom untrammelled by law: conscience makes the final decision about what is good and what is evil.

As a corrective to this false opinion, the Pope quotes from the letter of Paul to the Romans wherein Paul says of the Gentiles that they "do by nature what the law requires . . . They show that what the law requires is written in their hearts (2:14-15)." That law in their hearts is, of course, natural law with which conscience confronts them. According to the Holy Father "Conscience thus formulates *moral obligation* in

the light of the natural law.”(59) Having an “imperative character”, conscience, according to the Pontiff, summons man to obey the objective norm and to judge whether or not his actions correspond to that norm. In no way does conscience originate norms or decide the truth of moral good or evil. In emphasizing that the proper exercise of conscience is one of judgment, John Paul directly contradicts those who mistake its exercise as one of *decision*.

Having treated at length the ramifications of absolutizing human freedom and conscience, the Pope redirects his thought to a theory current among some authors. Referred to as the “fundamental option”, the theory proposes a distinction in man between his “fundamental freedom” and that freedom informing his particular choices. The former lies in the deepest recesses of man’s interiority, while the latter, partial and refractory, lies on the surface of his consciousness.

The Holy Father concedes that Christian moral teaching and the Bible know of such a fundamental freedom. But they do not recognize what, in the current theory, is tantamount to a division or separation in human freedom itself. For the theory allows that at the conscious level specific acts may contravene moral norms without changing a person’s fundamental option toward God. Besides contradicting the substantial integrity of the moral agent, the theory, according to the Pope, espouses the logic that despite his gravely evil acts a person can, in virtue of this option, remain morally good and in the state of grace. Implicit in this theory thus formulated is a denial of the Catholic doctrine of mortal sin. John Paul condemns the theory as contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

As he nears the end of this theological part of the encyclical, the Holy Father lays out its most dense and technical section. He treats of the “moral act” itself in conjunction with specific ethical approaches which to his mind undermine the “sound teaching” of the Church. It may be that in citing twice the question posed to Jesus by the rich young man that the Pope sees this section as culminating his earlier meditation. For the young man asked, “What good must I do . . . ?” and it is that good and its performance which the Holy Father addresses now.

Before he tackles the topic, John Paul makes a preliminary and general statement about the moral enterprise, a statement which will be at the heart of our concluding reflections later on. He says,

Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his *profound spiritual traits*.(71)

Thus, although focusing in this section on the morality of acts, the Holy Father makes the point that in their performance the real issue is the person himself.

The Pope cautions that human activity cannot be judged morally good simply because it attains its goal or because the proclivity of the person’s will — the Pope calls it “intention” — is good. No, the object of the action must be a good, the choice of which is both true to reason and befitting man’s ultimate end, that is, eternal fulfillment in God. Hence, by nature the moral life is, in the technical term of the Pope, “*teleological*,” that is, it requires man to deliberate and order his acts to his ultimate end [*telos*].

In view of the ethical theorists he will refute, the Pope constructs his argument by

asserting that human acts must be in themselves capable of being ordered to man's end. Hence, John Paul asks a specific question, "What is it that ensures this *ordering of human acts to God?*"(74) Is it the good intention with which man does them? Is it the circumstances surrounding them and the consequences which flow from them? Is it the object itself of the act? (This last question will require of the Holy Father further clarification).

The Pope has set the stage to confront "certain *ethical theories*, called '*teleological*'"(74) which owing to different currents of thought also carry the names "consequentialism" and "proportionalism." Although concerned with the specific question raised above, namely, the ordering of human acts to achieve the good, these theories are fundamentally utilitarian and pragmatic. They seek to weigh a person's act in terms of the values he intends over against the goods or non-goods he stands to realize by his act. In the terminology of these theories, these latter goods or non-goods are called variously "pre-moral" or "ontic" or "non-moral" goods or evils.

To everyone but the specialist, the concept of pre-moral or ontic good/evil is unfamiliar. Having earlier in the encyclical used the terminology (see above), the Pope merely cites examples now of its content from the physical order: health (or its privation), material goods, physical integrity, life, etc. In his characterization, the Pope sees the current theories as employing a type of pragmatic calculation whereby the norm for morally judging an act is solely a function of the value intended by the subject over against the resulting pre-moral good and evil of his act. In a rather dense sentence, John Paul draws the conclusion,

In this way, an act which, by contradicting [even] a universal negative norm, directly violated goods considered as "pre-moral" could be qualified as morally acceptable if the intention of the subject is focused, in accordance with a "responsible" assessment of the goods involved in the concrete action, on the moral value judged to be decisive in the situation.(75)

In other words, the Pope sees consequentialist theory as ultimately making the moral intention of the subject the criterion for judging the goodness or badness of an act. Thus, absent in the calculus of consequentialism is both due regard for the so-called object of the act and adherence to negative precepts binding *semper et pro semper*.

This disregard of the object of the act and of universally binding norms prompts the Pope to treat these issues more extensively. As he said earlier, the moral determination of an act derives not simply from the goals attained or the intention with which they are pursued. Rather, intrinsic to the moral enterprise is, as he alerts us now, the proper exercise of human freedom. After all, "The morality of acts is defined by the relationship of man's freedom with the authentic good."(72) And such freedom entails the will in its deliberate operation. If, as the Pope told us earlier, the body in its functions has "ends" or "finalities"(48), so too does the will. In this case, however, the end of the will is termed the "object."

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. (78)

The Holy Father asserts that certain objects, that is, specific kinds of behavior when chosen, thwart man's freedom and involve a disorder of his will. Meeting head-on the current teleological and consequentialist theories, the Pontiff,

therefore, finds the locus for assessing the morality of an act not only in a good intention or the goods attained but in the object "which determines the act of willing."(78) To make the point clearer, he cites the familiar Robin Hood case wherein St. Thomas concludes that a good intention to feed the poor cannot justify robbery.

John Paul opened this long theological chapter by stating his intention to address in the Church's moral teaching elements "particularly exposed to error, ambiguity or neglect." That he would close the chapter with a coda, as it were, on objects of human acting which are by nature "incapable of being ordered to God"(80) indicates the importance of the matter. Of all the elements exposed to error, this element of Church teaching needs, perhaps, the strongest defense against the current theories. Thus, the Pope lays out the nature of these objects.

They are acts which "radically contradict the good of the person." Termed "intrinsically evil", "they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances" (ibidem). The Pope cites directly from Vatican II instances of such acts which according to their species offend against life [homicide, genocide, abortion, etc.], against the integrity of the human person [mutilation, physical/mental torture, etc.], against human dignity [subhuman living condition, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, etc.], against human work [treatment of laborers as things of profit, etc.].

Irrespective of a good intention or surrounding circumstances, such acts remain irremediably evil because of their end or object. Their prohibition finds articulation in negative precepts. Finally, says the Holy Father, "Without the *rational determination of the morality of human acting* as stated above, it would be impossible to affirm the existence of an 'objective moral order'."(82)

Having stated his case in theological fashion, the Pope then undertakes in the encyclical's third chapter a more pastoral and, towards the end, exhortatory approach relative to the issue of morals. He begins, however, by reiterating what all along has been his concern: "the question of the *relationship between freedom and truth*."(84)

Axiomatic for the Christian faith is the belief that man attains his true good [end] only if his freedom submits to the truth. Unfortunately, according to the Pontiff,

The saving power of the truth is contested, and freedom alone, uprooted from any objectivity, is left to decide by itself what is good and what is evil (ibidem).

Denying this absoluteness of freedom, the Holy Father underscores its fragility and its need to be cultivated responsibly. For, in his freedom, man is called to "inalienable self-possession and openness to all that exists, in passing beyond self to knowledge and love of the other."(86)

John Paul claims that within the Church the radical separation of freedom and truth is a phenomenon consequent upon "*another more serious and destructive dichotomy, that which separates faith from morality*."(88) Calling this latter separation "one of the most acute pastoral concerns of the Church" (ibidem), the

Pope alerts Christians to the fact that more than intellectual propositions, faith is "a lived knowledge of Christ . . . a truth to be lived out." (ibidem) There is in faith a moral content in virtue of which faith becomes confession and witness before the world.

The Holy Father cites Christian martyrdom as an example of this witness which makes evident the inseparability of faith and morals. Martyrs bear witness, on the one hand, to the inviolability of the moral order and human dignity and, on the other, to the holiness of God's law and the Church.

Faced with the charge that the Church shows "intolerable intransigence" with its material norms and prohibition of intrinsically evil acts ["always and in every circumstance . . . without exception"], John Paul claims that such norms make for a level playing field, as it were, removing moral elitism so that "there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone." (96) Whether master of the world or one of the world's lowliest, everyone is absolutely equal before the demands of morality. Such norms, therefore, guarantee the ethical foundation of social coexistence. Should political and social life lose a sure moral referent, the end result is *ethical relativism*. Quoting from an earlier social encyclical⁴, the Pope points out the practical and ominous ramifications of this relativism for the Western democracies,

if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism. (101)

In a more exhortatory tone, the Pope proposes for his fellow bishops a "new evangelization" which involves the proclamation of morality. His appeal betrays a certain urgency owing to what he recognizes as "dechristianization" and a decline of the moral sense.

Before concluding his encyclical with a prayer to Mary whom the Holy Father invokes as "Mother of Mercy," he alludes one last time to the question which the rich young man asked Jesus. John Paul says that through the bishops and pastors, the Church answers that question today.

Having outlined the framework in which *Veritatis Splendor* proposes discussing basic moral principles, we would like now to see why according to its purview the *person* is at stake.

It is no surprise that, in the encyclical, the human person stays always within range of John Paul's reflections. His whole cast of thought is set within that philosophy called "personalism."⁵ Indeed, John Paul's *opus magnum* published several years after he taught ethics as a young bishop carries the title *The Acting Person*.⁶ No work as far as its philosophical principles is more evident in *Veritatis Splendor* than *The Acting Person*. Its basic themes, — freedom, conscience, self fulfilment, truth, law, man's spiritual and bodily nature, — their conceptual treatment and the insights derived therefrom inform the encyclical throughout. Even the oft used word "person" is in the encyclical at times qualified as "the acting person" (e.g., 52 & 78).

We may recall that in the encyclical John Paul broaches morality first as a question relative to persons. For he situates it within the personal conversation

Jesus and the young man had concerning the good and human fulfillment. Thus, in the inquiring young man, we see the question of morality personalized.

This personalization of the question, however, stands in sharp contrast to its treatment in the theological section of the encyclical. Here, in the interest of conceptual precision, the Pope handles morality and its related themes in an abstract manner similar to that of his *opus magnum*. Nevertheless, like *The Acting Person*, the main concern of the encyclical is, indeed, the *person acting* within the moral enterprise.

That enterprise is not something apart from and extrinsic to the person himself. Rather *is* the person actualizing himself in his free acts. In addressing human acts, John Paul, as quoted earlier, said that they do not merely effect a change outside of man. No, "they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his *profound spiritual traits*." Hence, the moral enterprise is inseparable from the person in his acts of self-determination. Given this inseparability, it follows that a "crisis" in morality puts the person at risk.

How does John Paul understand the person? What precisely stands to be lost in this "crisis" wherein human freedom absolutizes itself, severing "its essential and constitutive relationship to the truth"?

As evident in *The Acting Person* the then Cardinal Karol Wojtyla drew his understanding of the person from traditional scholasticism and from phenomenology, that is, from St. Thomas and Max Scheler respectively.⁷ Whereas St. Thomas, borrowing from Boethius, saw the person as a self-contained instantiation of rational nature, Scheler regarded the person as a dynamic subject of acts. Effecting his own synthesis, Wojtyla views the person in terms of what he calls "efficacy" and "transcendence."

Both are experiences which man has relative to the structures of his nature when he acts. Efficacy reveals the person to be the agent of his own becoming, "the conscious cause of his own causation." He realizes his actions as his own property and within the domain of his responsibility.⁸ Transcendence, as the word conveys, reveals the person going beyond "his structural boundaries through the capacity to exercise freedom."⁹ As a distinct ego, he is more than his nature and its activations. In short, efficacy and transcendence make evident that, more than the subject of a rational nature, the person is one who determines and possesses himself.

He is at once the one *who governs* and the one *who is governed by himself*, the one *who possesses* and the one *who is his own possession*. He is also *the one responsible* as well as the one *for whom* and *to whom* he is responsible.¹⁰

Since this self-governance and self-possession occur through man's own action, there is necessarily between the person and his action a dynamic intimacy. At the heart of this intimacy stands man's free will. Concerning this free will, Wojtyla says that while it refers the ego to outside intentional objects, its paramount feature is "its reference to the ego." For it is the will that "dynamizes" the person both to act self-determinatively and to bear responsibility "for the moral worth of the ego who is the agent performing the action."¹¹

Clearly in Wojtyla's analysis, the will and its freedom are, as it were, the engine

driving the person in the efficacy and transcendence of his action. Little wonder then that in the encyclical, freedom commands the Pope's attention and leads him to formulate today's moral crisis in terms of "an illusory freedom." But, the crisis is also, according to the formulation, a freedom "apart from truth itself."

What is under siege today is the constitutive relationship which freedom has to truth. In *The Acting Person* the author points out that inherent in the will's own dynamism is "the reference to 'truth'." It is the "inner principle of volition" and informs every decision and choice. Actualized through the knowledge man has of the objects set before him to choose, this reference to truth, however, does not derive from that knowledge as from an external source. Although knowledge is the necessary condition of decision and choice, "in the inner dynamism of will we discover a relation to truth that goes deeper and is different from the relation to the objects of volition."¹²

This relation or reference to truth involves, on the one hand, the person poised to act self-determinatively and, on the other, so-called "axiological truth" which is the value or good awaiting realization in the person through his intentional choices. In light of the dynamic intimacy of person and act and the will's primary reference to the ego, the "reference to truth" is nothing other than the good or value of the person, to use a colloquial phrase, "put on the line" in what Wojtyla calls "the moment of truth." In that moment the person determines himself as good or evil through the intentional objects of his will.¹³ While the will dynamizes the person, that which dynamizes the will, therefore, is its inherent reference to and dependence on moral truth or value. Paradoxically, this dependence on moral truth accounts, on the one hand, for the independence of the will to choose from the manifold objects presented to it and, on the other, for the freedom of the person to transcend them.¹⁴

When, therefore, in *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope speaks of "an illusory freedom apart from truth itself," he means the deception of denying to freedom its dependence on truth. Hence the freedom which man absolutizes is that of his independence and transcendence relative to intentional objects. But he disregards the will's dependence on objective truth, that is, its intrinsic reference to it. In being "creative of values" which his conscience ascribes to his choices, he denies that objective norms and precepts are "essential and constitutive" of the will's relation to truth. Moreover, with regard to his decisions, he accords natural law, Scripture and Church tradition mere extrinsic significance. In the face of this subjectivism, freedom and conscience emerge as the only absolutes. Consequently, there can be no others in the realm of norms or of values or of acts forbidden *semper et pro semper*. The person is unbridled freedom!

In the pastoral section of *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope sums up the plight of today's person: "The saving power of truth is contested, and freedom alone, uprooted from any objectivity, is left to decide by itself what is good and what is evil."⁽⁸⁴⁾ With this the case, the moral enterprise comes to ruin and with it, of course, the person. In the ominous words of the encyclical,

We not infrequently witness the fearful plunging of the human person into situations of gradual self-destruction. . . All around us we encounter contempt for human life after conception and before birth; the ongoing violation of basic rights of the person; the unjust destruction of goods minimally necessary for human life.⁽⁸⁴⁾

The person cannot flourish outside an objective order of truth where moral law and moral absolutes set the terms of his self-governance and self-possession. However transcendent and efficacious the person, he cannot fulfill and perfect himself if he acts contrary to what St. Thomas calls somewhere, "the truth of real things." To realize himself, therefore, the person must, according to a favorite phrase of Karol Wojtyla, "surrender to truth."¹⁵

Contrary to the irenic presentation of *The New York Times*, the encyclical of John Paul is doing more than invite reflection and discussion of basic moral principles. It is battling to save the moral enterprise because the human person is at stake.

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10. *Ibid.*, p.173.

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13. Guggenheim, Antoine, "Liberté et vérité selon K. Wojtyla," *Nouvelle Revue Theologique*, mars-avril, tome 115/n.2, 1993, pp.194-210; *ibid.*, mai-juin, tome 115/n.3, 1993, pp.400-411, especially pp.400-402, 405-407.

14. Wojtyla, p.138.

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