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The relevance of Christ or the *sequela Christi*?

Lorenzo Albacete

The ultimate roots of the moral life are found in the context of a relationship of communion with the Person of Jesus Christ.

According to John Paul II, "following Christ is . . . the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality" (VS, n. 19). The theological concept of the *sequela Christi* is thus the interpretative key to the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. This doctrine is at the heart of the entire first chapter of the encyclical, and this chapter is, I believe, the interpretative key to the entire encyclical. It is thus very important to grasp how John Paul II understands the *sequela Christi* and its relation to ethics and the Christian moral life.

In this context, there is an error in the English translation of the encyclical that threatens to undermine the theology of the first chapter. It occurs in n. 25. The Latin text says this: *Simultas temporum Christi cum homines cuiusvis aetatis fit in ipsius corpore, quod est Ecclesia*. Consider the official Spanish translation of this phrase: *La contemporaneidad de Cristo respecto al hombre de cada época se realiza en el cuerpo vivo de la Iglesia*; or the French: *La présence du Christ aux hommes de tout le temps se réalise dans son corp qui est l'Eglise*; or the German: *Das gleichzeitige Gegenwärtigsein Christi mit dem Menschen jeder Zeit verwirklicht sich im lebendigen Leib der Kirche*. Now consider the English translation: *Christ's relevance for people of all times is shown forth in his body, which is the Church*.

"Relevance"? "Shown forth"? This is not only a sloppy translation; it actually misses the point of the argument which, to repeat, is absolutely crucial to a full understanding of

Veritatis Splendor. And it not only misses the point, it invites us to think in categories that are *precisely at the heart of the errors* to which the encyclical is alerting the Church.¹

The first chapter is a commentary on the meeting between Jesus and the rich young man of Matthew 19:16. What is the nature of John Paul II's commentary? It is certainly not an exegetical analysis that one would expect from a biblical scholar. That is not the pope's field of scholarly competence, nor is a papal encyclical a place for this kind of analysis. Is the commentary then a "meditation," a spiritual reflection? It depends. If by meditation is meant a reflection for purposes of inspiration, devotion or piety, then the first chapter has been misunderstood. The first chapter offers us a theological interpretation of Scripture; more precisely, an *anthropological interpretation*.

Fascinated as ever by the drama of human personal life, John Paul II seeks in the experience of the young man's encounter with Jesus the disclosure of the truth about the human person, in this case, the human person whose moral action constitutes a quest for fulfillment and happiness. Concerning the young man's question about the good he must do in order to obtain eternal life, John Paul II comments: "For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about the full meaning of life" (n. 7). The words of Jesus, his reply to the question, will disclose the meaning of human life, the truth concerning personhood.

Those who are familiar with John Paul II's study of love, sexuality, and the body in the "Wednesday Catechesis" series will recognize this theological approach. In that work, he

¹In addition, it is a pastorally dangerous statement to make since very often the teachings of the Church will, and must, make no sense to one judging them according to the dominant cultural standards of "relevance." Quite often when the Church is being most visibly faithful to her mission, she must necessarily appear as irrelevant, especially in matters of morality, where relevance is often measured by usefulness. Indeed, it can be said that *the equation of relevance with usefulness is precisely the error which Veritatis Splendor is warning us about* when it opposes the detachment of freedom from truth. In the dominant culture of modernity, the Church will always be the Samaritan, as Paul VI said at the last session of the Second Vatican Council. She will be that Stranger of which Eliot wrote in *Choruses from The Rock, No. 1*: "And the Church does not seem to be wanted / In country or in suburb; and in the town / Only for important weddings . . . / The Rock. The Watcher. The Stranger. / He who sees what has happened / And who sees what is to happen. / The Witness. The Critic. The Stranger."

develops a theological anthropology based on the reply of Jesus to the questions concerning divorce, marriage in heaven, and celibacy for the kingdom. Of particular interest is the pope's analysis of the anthropological roots of the teaching of Jesus concerning "adultery in the heart," where John Paul II seeks to understand the anthropological presuppositions behind the words of Jesus about how one can and should act.²

According to the pope, Jesus does not merely extend or interiorize the range of the moral law against adultery; rather he discloses the *anthropological state* in which man finds himself as a consequence of the Fall. Therefore, "adultery in the heart" designates a particular anthropological configuration of mind, body and spirit (the "system of forces," he calls it) that lies behind the sinful act.³

John Paul II's philosophical anthropology has given him, I believe, a uniquely rich way of interpreting Scripture

²*Veritatis Splendor* reminds us of this argument in the third chapter: ". . . what are 'the concrete possibilities of man'? And of *which* man are we speaking? Of man *dominated* by lust or of man *redeemed* by Christ? This is what is at stake: the *reality* of Christ's Redemption . . . He has given us the possibility of realizing *the entire* truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the *domination* of concupiscence" (n. 103).

³Lust, he writes, represents "an intentional 'reduction'" which is primarily of an "axiological nature" (cf. "Mutual Attraction Differs From Lust," Audience of 17 September 1980). This, of course, is occurring within the consciousness of the acting person such that he becomes—his identity is that of—the *man of lust*. For John Paul II, human consciousness is not intentional, whereas cognition is. What is happening here is that the power of sin is bringing about this intentional reduction preventing man from escaping the tyranny of his intentionality and grasping the truth. As he writes: ". . . an adequate interpretation of the words of Matthew 5:27-28 requires us—by means of the intentionality itself of knowledge—to discern something more, that is, the intentionality of the very existence of man in relation to the other man; in our case, of the man in relation to the woman, and the woman in relation to the man." It is, he writes, not a matter of a psychological intentionality, but the "intentionality of man's very existence" (Audience of 24 September 1980). Now, "cognitive intentionality itself does not yet mean enslavement of the heart. Only when the intentional reduction . . . sweeps the will along into its narrow horizon," only then is lust "dominant over the subjectivity of the person," and only then is it at the basis of how one determines oneself as a person. The words of Jesus, therefore, go beyond a psychological deepening of the range of the commandment against adultery; they reveal (in the fullest sense of the term) the mystery of sin which has made man a captive of his own subjectivity. They are, therefore, a declaration of the need for a redemption beyond the subject's possibilities, as well as the announcement of that Redemption through Christ himself who alone is able to "fulfill the law."

which sheds light on the deepest reasons for the moral teachings of the Church because it has allowed him to go beyond the crippling debates about the specificity of Christian morality based on the relation between nature and the supernatural end. Bracketing that problem, he seeks to understand what happens when the concrete, existing human person encounters the revealed Word of God. Since the Word of God is personal, the encounter is best understood as an interpersonal encounter with its corresponding categories. In terms of ethics, the question is: how can an encounter with another person be at the root of those acts through which man determines himself as person? And, in particular for a *theological* ethics, what happens when that Person is Jesus Christ? *Theological moral discourse occurs, therefore, within the "existential space" of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, which explains the structure of Veritatis Splendor.* It is in terms of such an encounter that John Paul II applies to moral theology the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* n. 22, so crucial to his theological anthropology, found at the very beginning of *Veritatis Splendor*.⁴ That is why the first chapter cannot be considered simply a "spiritual reflection" for inspiration, but rather is the basis for the rational reflection in the crucial second chapter. And that is why it is so important to understand how a real personal encounter with Jesus Christ is possible after his death, as well as when, how, and where it does take place.

Indeed, some critics of *Veritatis Splendor* have appreciated this better than some supporters. Lisa Sowle Cahill writes that one of the purposes of the encyclical is "to place moral theology in a faith context, both to maintain the connection between the moral life and religious commitment, and to assert the authority of the magisterium over theological interpretation." The problem with this, she says, is that it is done "in a confessional and fideist mode which pulls the rug out from under the Church's and moral theologians' credibility as advocates of the human and the common goods . . . Moral theology

⁴"Consequently, the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself, as the Second Vatican Council recalls: 'In fact, it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of man. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of the future man, namely of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father's love'" (n. 2, and the very first footnote in the encyclical).

and moral reasoning thus become the presentation and justification of Catholic doctrine . . . The fideist and authoritarian conclusion of this encyclical will increase the marginalization of Catholics . . ."⁵ On the other hand, Stanley Hauerwas also recognizes the importance of this aspect of the encyclical and writes approvingly: "Happily the pope writes as a theologian profoundly displaying the difference Christ should make not only for how Christians live but also for how moral theologians think." Noting that Karl Barth also uses Matthew 19:16 as the central focus of his discussion of Christian ethics, Hauerwas sees it as "a wonderful indication that Catholics and Protestants are rediscovering that 'ethics' for Christians cannot be separated from the one who has called us into existence."⁶

The separation of moral discourse from the context of an interpersonal encounter with Christ detaches the "natural" from the Source of its very moral possibilities. One of the great contributions of this encyclical lies in the way it breaks through the straitjacket into which moral theology had been put by fears of fideism and rationalism. This achievement eliminates all possibility of moralism and legalism.

Moralism is the reduction of the Christian faith to ethics, to the quest for perfection, either individual or social. Legalism is the separation between the moral law and the truth about the human person. Certainly the Church's teaching on the natural law is precisely the opposite of legalism. But emphasizing the correspondence between ethical behavior and the fulfillment of the good of the person without identifying that good as divine life in Christ suggests that the achievement of such good is the necessary consequence of the right behavior.

This encyclical, with its strong defense of the natural law, escapes the impression of moralism by situating the entire reflection and discussion concerning the natural law in the context of an encounter with Jesus Christ. In theological terms, moralism is Pelagianism, salvation through good works. Pelagianism is overcome by a proper theology of grace, and *Veritatis Splendor* repeatedly stresses the necessity of grace in the moral life. However, grace is not presented as something "added to" and "external" to the natural law itself. Grace is the possibility of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Grace sit-

⁵*Commonweal* (22 October 1993): 15-16.

⁶*Ibid.*, 16-17.

uates the human person in an existential context such that life in fidelity to personhood is revealed to be the ethical fruit of that personal encounter.

Life according to that encounter, life within it, is called the *sequela Christi*, the following of Jesus Christ. This "following," the encyclical reminds us, is not an external imitation of the behavior of Jesus Christ; rather it is being in the presence of Christ at all moments. But this "being in the presence of Christ" must be understood as having an anthropological significance. It is not a matter of pious inspiration.

Therefore the pope writes: "Following Christ is thus the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality . . . This is not a matter only of disposing oneself to hear a teaching and obediently accepting a commandment. More radically, it involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father" (n. 19). And: "'Following Christ' is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means becoming conformed to him who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:5-8) . . . This is the effect of grace, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us" (n. 21).

The Christian moral life, therefore, the moral life to which all men and women are called, is not a matter of living according to the natural law and then somehow going beyond it by imitating Jesus in total selfless service and even martyrdom. The "fulfillment of the Law" of which the Sermon on the Mount speaks is not, as we saw, a matter of going beyond its scope of application. It is a matter of the capacity to realize what the Law itself intends. It is a matter of an ethos flowing out of a personal configuration which is not intentionally reduced by lust, that is, by the desire to possess, to dominate by the interior intentional reduction of persons to objects of one's desires. It is a matter of the capacity to live according to that personal configuration of mind, body, and spirit that conforms to the creative plan of God in Christ. By placing the entire discussion on the natural law in the context of the encounter between the young man and Jesus, *Veritatis Splendor* teaches that the ultimate roots of the moral life are found in the context of a relationship of communion with the Person of Jesus Christ *because it is Jesus Christ alone who has fulfilled the Law*.

Indeed, moral analysis itself is an operation the person performs while engaged in this encounter, in the very pres-

ence of Christ. It is an operation greater than the intellectual analysis of an individual mind. It is a thinking-with that occurs when being-with. Thinking in accordance with the natural law is thinking within creative Wisdom, but creative Wisdom is a very concrete Person. It is Jesus of Nazareth. Thinking in accordance with the natural law is thinking with Jesus Christ; it is "co-judging" reality with Christ. It is, therefore, being taken up into his concrete personal presence. The moral struggle is not a contest between abstract values and goods, but between concrete presences:⁷ the presence of Jesus Christ, the presence of the *communio*, and the presence of the object of temptation in consciousness.

John Paul II writes that, in order to discover the answer to the moral question "What must I do . . . ?", everyone must be able to have this personal conversation with Jesus Christ, not just to read about it or to be told about it. Everyone must be able to enter into his concrete presence. "People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their question about what is good and what is evil." The pope goes on to cite his own words from *Redemptor Hominis* n. 10: "The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly . . . must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self; he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself" (n. 8).

Outside of the presence of this encounter morality degenerates into legalism and moralism. The young man had fulfilled all the commandments, and yet he is aware of lacking something. This is an astounding thing. Here is someone whose behavior is always in accordance with the Law, but who has not in fact "fulfilled" it! John Paul II writes that "before the person of Jesus he realizes that he is still lacking something" (cf. n. 16). *Before the person of Jesus*, that is, within the context of this encounter, his fidelity to the law is exposed to have been legalism:

⁷Cf. Kenneth L. Schmitz's discussion of "Concrete Presence," *Communio* 14 (Fall 1987): 300-15. Concrete presence is a reality encountered in Christian prayer, made possible by the Incarnation, by God's bodily presence. As such, it is always an ecclesial reality. Christian mysticism is always the mysticism of the Church.

“Conscious of the young man’s yearning for something greater, which would transcend a legalistic interpretation of the commandments,” Jesus invites the young man to walk along with him, to follow him, to remain always in his presence.

Why legalism? It is legalism because no matter how “natural” the natural law is, the fact is that no man or woman can truly fulfill it without grace. A man or a woman may live perfectly (as hard as it is to imagine even that) according to the natural law and yet not “ful-fill” it as the gospel understands the fulfillment of the Law. One may live by it as some kind of external guide, but not “fill it to the fullest.” Only Jesus Christ fulfills the Law. “Jesus himself is the living ‘fulfillment’ of the Law inasmuch as he fulfills its authentic meaning by the total gift of himself: *he himself becomes a living and personal Law*, who invites people to follow him; through the Spirit, he gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions” (cf. n. 15). Therefore, whoever wishes to fulfill the moral law must in some way fulfill it with him, being in union with him. This is what “following” him means. The moral life is a life of witnessing to the fulfillment of the Law by Jesus Christ, witnessing to his love. This, John Paul II explains, makes faith and morality inseparable. “Through the moral life, faith becomes ‘confession,’ not only before God but also before men: it becomes witness” (cf. n. 89). (That is why *Veritatis Splendor* also discusses martyrdom as essential to the Christian moral life.)

Therefore, the encounter with Jesus Christ at the foundation of the moral life is, according to the encyclical, not a pious remembrance of him and his teachings, not the outcome of some mental acrobatics whereby I feel myself to be in his presence “as if I had been there.” It certainly is not a matter of the *relevance* of his teachings! It is instead a real meeting in space and time, a mutual sharing of a moment in space and time. How is this possible? This, I propose to you, is the key question in moral theology.

Jesus of Nazareth lived almost two thousand years ago. If I am literally to have a meeting with him, then either I have to travel back in time, or he has to travel forward to me. The former is impossible; the latter is a consequence of what we call the Resurrection. But if a consequence, it is certainly not a matter of traveling through time; nor is it a matter of never again dying and so being able to be there for all generations who come and go.

It is a matter of just Who Jesus Christ is. I is not only because Jesus conquered death that I can have this encounter with him. It is because of Who he is that I can actually share his life, his destiny, his personal history. The key question in moral theology, therefore, depends on Christology. The moral theology of *Veritatis Splendor* presupposes a Christology, and disagreement with the encyclical's conclusions may quite likely originate from different Christologies; the controversies and the disputes in Christian moral theology today, even within the Catholic Church, often reflect different Christologies. In fact, it can be said that the pope's greatest concern about the moral theologies he rejects is the Christologies they betoken.

Now, according to *Veritatis Splendor* n. 25 adequately translated, the "simultaneity of time" (*simultas temporum*) between Jesus Christ and the man of each age—making possible the personal encounter at the foundation of the moral life—is realized in the Church as his Body, that is, the Church as this "incarnational" realization of the concrete presence of Jesus Christ. This is stated at the very beginning of the encyclical: "In order to make this 'encounter' with Christ possible, God willed his Church." And quoting *Redemptor Hominis* n. 13, John Paul II continues by stating that, "Indeed the Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life" (n. 7).

We are thus at the crucial point in the argument of *Veritatis Splendor*, and indeed in the development of a moral theology adequate for the 'new evangelization.'⁸ For this we need an ecclesiology of *communio* rooted in an adequate Christology and in a theology of justification through the paschal mystery. (Marc Ouellet has outlined the foundations of Chris-

⁸Francisco Javier Martínez has perfectly described the moral discourse which the 'new evangelization' requires in "Christian Faith and the Search for Happiness," *Communio* 21 (Spring 1994): 69-104. He writes: "In reality, much of today's preaching on Christian morality is actually Kant's in disguise. The Person of Jesus Christ thus becomes the symbol of certain values that, once discovered, could be carried out by man alone. . . . To be a Christian today is to accept out of context a series of ideas (not easily comprehensible) about values, postulates, 'traditions,' and customs. Christianity has ceased to be an experience, a historical fact, and has become a utopia, an ideology or mere rhetoric." The reason for this, he argues forcefully, is that the Church is no longer perceived as "the human space of the presence of the Risen Christ."

tian ethics from this perspective by discussing the "Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics" of Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁹)

As a result of the hypostatic union, Jesus Christ is "the concrete categorical imperative." He is the concrete and *single* locus of the encounter in perfect harmony between uncreated and created freedom, and, as such, the one who perfectly fulfills the Law of the covenant. "He is more than the 'mediator' who comes between the two parties, he is their personified encounter, and therefore he is 'One'."¹⁰ Because of his unique identity as the One in whom and for whom all was created, human freedom *from the beginning* was meant to be the created human freedom of the incarnate Son. The rebellion of human freedom therefore has enormous christological and trinitarian implications. The relation between the Father and the Son revealed at the Cross is the response of the Trinity to the sin of man. The salvific mission of Jesus is inseparable from that trinitarian relationship, since in him Mission, Person, and Relation are identical.

The key concept here is that of the *Stellvertretung*, or vicarious substitution. The *Stellvertretung* is not something that the eternal Son "does" when Incarnate; rather, the taking of our place is inseparable from the Incarnation itself. It is the form of the Incarnation in a fallen world. (Thus the relation between the Head and the Body which Aquinas uses to discuss the *pro nobis* [in terms of the *gratia capitis*] is a consequence of what "occurs," so to speak, within the Trinity itself.) *Redemption and the realization of human freedom will always be a matter of a substitution, an exchange.* It will always have that form, that *gestalt*. This is, above all, the form disclosed and realized through the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the privileged way of Redemption becoming concrete presence.¹¹

As a result of the vicarious substitution on the Cross, a new relationship is established between Jesus and each

⁹Cf. "The foundations of Christian ethics according to Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 378-401.

¹⁰Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics," in *Principles of Christian Morality* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 77-104.

¹¹A splendid theology of the Eucharist in terms of disclosure of presence is given by Robert Sokolowski in *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington: C.U.A. Press, 1994).

person.¹² It is this new relationship of "belonging" to Jesus Christ that proclaims the success of the substitution. This new relationship, of course, has as its basis the relationship established by the creation of human nature in Christ from the beginning. This new relationship is a new creation (the sinner will really die with Christ) that restores that link to the liberty of the incarnate Son which was the origin of Adam's liberty. That is why the "natural" is restored in Christ. Now, however, *this liberty is exercised as loving obedience of the one who belongs to Jesus Christ*. It is a liberty which in the fallen world appears as non-liberty, a liberty expressed as suffering, as the suffering of an expiatory love. It is exercised as *sacrifice*.

The disclosure and realization of this sacrifice is the Church created eucharistically. This is the meaning of *Veritatis Splendor* n. 25. It is a far cry from the Church as showing forth the relevance of Jesus Christ!

Through the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross as a vicarious substitution creates the personal possibility for a share in his salvific mission made possible by the Holy Spirit. It thus sets liberty free. It makes possible the moral life according to the good of the person. It is the Eucharist of the Church (the Body of Christ) that thus makes it possible for everyone to have an encounter with Christ like that of the young man remembered in *Veritatis Splendor*. Outside of this there is no real encounter; it all remains abstraction, theory, calculation, proportionalism—indeed a matter of "relevance" according to the standards of the dominant culture within which man remains imprisoned by the Power behind it.

As a result of the sharing of Mission, the Christian can "follow" Jesus Christ; the *sequela Christi* becomes a possibility and a reality. Through it the Christian can participate personally (he becomes an actor in the *Theo-drama*) in the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ. He is co-crucified with him, co-risen; he judges reality with him, forgives sins with him, baptizes with

¹²"In traditional Christianity, to be a Christian was to consent in communion with the Church to a new relationship with God, established by divine initiative (to be children of God in his Son). From this relationship sprouted new relationships with everything: with oneself, with other Christians, with the institutions of the Church, with all mankind, with history (past and future), even with material things" (cf. Martínez, "Christian Faith and the Search for Happiness"). It is this concrete experience of a definitive new relationship that is so weak today.

him, is persecuted with him, suffers with him, and shares his glory. Indeed, as a result of this ecclesial eucharistic realization of the *sequela Christi*, the Christian is inserted in the very trinitarian life and participates in the divine operations in Christ by being co-predestined with him, by co-possessing with him the Holy Spirit, by being brothers as children of the same Father ("co-generated" with Christ). Above all, the Christian becomes a *generator of communio*.

As Balthasar writes, Jesus Christ is our "personal and concrete norm, who, in virtue of his suffering for us and his eucharistic surrender of his life for us (which imparts it to us—*per ipsum et in ipso*), empowers us inwardly to do the Father's will together with him (*cum ipso*)."¹³ Without this empowerment the moral life is simply impossible. That is why *Veritatis Splendor* is so strong in emphasizing the primacy of grace.

Veritatis Splendor n. 25 is thus a statement of profound anthropological significance. John Paul II's understanding of its teaching is, of course, independent of Balthasar's. Yet both see the redemption of human action in the world as having its origin in the sharing of the mission of Christ made possible by the Eucharist. In John Paul II's case, this is usually expressed as a share in the *threefold office of Christ*: prophetic, royal and priestly. Each office designates a "dimension" or "meaning" of the personal human act of dominion over the world, the ethical act. The prophetic office grounds the act in Truth; the royal office in the Good; and the priestly office gives to the act its cultic, liturgical, sacrificial form. There is an echo of this theology in the third chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*.¹⁴ This sharing in the threefold office is close to what Balthasar calls the *Teilnahme*, the

¹³Balthasar, "Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics."

¹⁴N. 87 mentions the share in the *munus regale* of Christ by the Church and each of her members. The three offices are mentioned in n. 107: "The life of holiness thus brings to full expression and effectiveness the threefold and unitary *munus propheticum, sacerdotale et regale* which every Christian receives as a gift by being born again in Baptism. His moral life has the value of a 'spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist; by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds." Finally, the magisterium's responsibility for the moral teachings of the Church is seen in terms of the threefold office of Christ in n. 114.

partaking of, participation in, cooperation with, sympathy for (in terms of value), and complicity with (in terms of acting-with) the name or identity of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of acquiring the *Gestalt* of Christ (*Gleichgestaltung*). This human personal mode of existence is most fully realized in Mary, with whom *Veritatis Splendor* concludes. Mary is the full manifestation of the moral life as the *sequela Christi*.

Moral theology thus depends on Christology, the theology of the paschal mystery, and ecclesiology. Without a Christology that makes Jesus Christ much more than "relevant," without a theology of the paschal mystery that shows how the vicarious substitution is actualized and disclosed through time, and without the corresponding ecclesiology, moral theology will not escape moralism and legalism.

And this is where the problem lies today. When the "mystery" that is one according to Scripture was splintered into three autonomous areas, when the plan of Creation and Redemption was broken up into doctrine, ethics, and spirituality, the door was opened for all the problems we experience today. Doctrine degenerated into fideism or rationalism, spirituality degenerated into individualist psychology, and ethics became the casuistry out of which proportionalism and consequentialism emerge. *Veritatis Splendor* offers the way out. It is the encyclical against moralism and legalism—as long as *Veritatis Splendor* n. 25 is properly understood, and translated. □