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Non-Catholic Reactions to *Veritatis Splendor*

Abstract

A growing ecumenical awareness among Christian theologians and ethicists has found in John Paul II's moral encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* a fresh impetus for a development of common studies of moral issues. Not few mainly Protestant ethicists expressed their comments on the way the Pope discusses and defines fundamental problems of Christian moral teaching. Some of those comments were apparently positive, at times even enthusiastic (e.g. R. Benne, S. Hauerwas, O. O'Donovan, J.B. Elshtain), while others displayed a mixed reaction to the papal teaching (e.g. L.S. Mudge, G. Meilaender, M. Banner). There were also some authors who approached *Veritatis Splendor* critically, some even rejected it altogether (e.g. N.P. Harvey, R. Preston, H. Oppenheimer).

Keywords: *Veritatis splendor*, moral theology/Christian ethics, ecumenical dialogue, Christian moral life.

Niekatolickie reakcje na *Veritatis Splendor*

Streszczenie

Wraz z coraz głębszym zrozumieniem prawdy o tym, że „kto podziela jedną wiarę w Chrystusa, winien dzielić także jedno życie w Chrystusie” (ARCIC II, *Life in Christ*), tematyka moralna znajduje dla siebie coraz więcej miejsca w dialogu ekumenicznym. Zarazem chrześcijanie różnych tradycji mają coraz większą świadomość konieczności dawania wspólnego świadectwa wobec świata, także co do życia moralnego uczniów Chrystusa. Szczególnym źródłem dla ekumenicznych debat nad fundamentalnymi problemami chrześcijańskiego nauczania moralnego stała się encyklika Jana Pawła II *Veritatis splendor*. Liczne grono etyków i teologów, głównie protestanckich (lutezańskich, anglikańskich, metodystycznych i innych), dało wyraz swoim przekonaniom, odnosząc się do podstawowych bądź bardziej szczegółowych zagadnień, przedstawionych w tym dokumencie. Wiele spośród tych opinii ma charakter pozytywny, niekiedy nawet entuzjastyczny (np. S. Hauerwas, O. O'Donovan, J.B. Elhstain, R. Benne), podczas gdy inne jawią się jako dwuznaczne – wskazują na aspekty godne pochwały, ale i ze swego punktu widzenia formułują oceny krytyczne (np. L.S. Mudge, G. Meilaender, M. Banner). Są i tacy, któr-

zy papieską wizję chrześcijańskiego życia moralnego wręcz odrzucają, często jednak nie podając poważnych racji (np. N.P. Harvey, R. Preston, H. Oppenheimer). Te zróżnicowane komentarze potwierdzają jednocześnie, że także dla niekatolików *Veritatis splendor* stała się szczególnie godnym uwagi dokumentem nauczania katolickiego, obok którego nie można przejść obojętnie.

Słowa kluczowe: *Veritatis splendor*, teologia moralna/etyka chrześcijańska, dialog ekumeniczny, chrześcijańskie życie moralne.

Morality has not been a favourite subject for those involved in ecumenical dialogues. Ever since formal debates started in the post-Vatican II years their areas of interest have been predominantly dogmatic, pastoral or historical issues. In fact just two examples could be adduced as comprehensive and bold attempts to bring moral issues up for discussion from different Christian perspectives and thus to know more clearly where the paths diverge and in what all interested parties share the same moral vision¹. Fifty years on the Second Vatican Council's call to unconditionally engage in the endeavour of the "restoration of unity among all the followers of Christ"² remains an urgent task. John Paul II's encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor*³, being a major papal pronouncement on fundamental questions of the Church's moral teaching, has provoked a considerable wave of discussions regarding Christian understanding of moral life. Though often critical, non-Catholic comments and reactions to the Pope's teaching should be seen as a contribution to a deeper perception of Christian morality and to a common Christian witness the Church continues to bear in the world.

1. Toward a genuine Christian dialogue on moral problems

Any serious endeavour to search for common ground between different Christian traditions must take into account an integral character of the Christian message. It includes both the fundamental doctrinal aspect as well as arising from it and rooted in it the moral ideal of Christian life. To meet the requirement for the integrity of teaching, morality is to be regarded as an essential part of the Chris-

¹ Cf. ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION (ARCIC) II, *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church. An Agreed Statement*, London: CHP/CTS 1994; JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *The Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues: Potential Sources of Common Witness and of Divisions*, "The Ecumenical Review" 48 (1996) no. 2, 143–154. For comments on both documents see S. NOWOSAD, *Moralność w dialogu ekumenicznym*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 47 (2000) no. 3, 50–74; S. NOWOSAD, *Teologia moralna w kontekście ekumenicznym*, in: *Polska teologia moralna. Czterdzieści lat po Soborze Watykańskim II*, eds. J. NAGÓRNY, J. GOCKO, Lublin 2006, 142–145; S. NOWOSAD, *Moral Theology Ecumenically Oriented*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 61 (2014) no. 3, 99–104.

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 1.

³ The Vatican: LEV 1993.

tian truth without which no serious ecumenical dialogue can reach its final end. Though briefly, Vatican II did point to the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of Christian life that need to be included in the debates Christ's disciples take up and continue in their search for a real and lasting unity. This made John Paul II emphasize that in the vast "area of ethics and morality" there is "much room for dialogue concerning the moral principles of the Gospel and their implications"⁴. Both the complicated historical course of events of Christianity in its various trends and man's limited *post-lapsium* capability of comprehension have led to different, sometimes mutually exclusive ways of understanding the moral message of the Gospel.

Another reason for a necessary ecumenical dialogue on ethical questions is the "need for the church to give a common moral witness and because of the appearance of new, potentially church-dividing or communion-hindering ethical disputes between and within the churches"⁵. It was clearly pronounced in the Catholic-Reformed ecumenical document that made their own a call for common confession in order to speak jointly to the world into which Christ has brought His message of salvation. All the Lord's followers should take and use every opportunity to "render decisive witness" particularly with regard to pressing contemporary issues like justice, peace and the integrity of God's creation. Otherwise, failing to do this, they would undermine their evangelical credibility and the integrity of their teaching would be endangered⁶.

The Church believes that due to the real presence of the Word of God the boundaries of the active presence of the Holy Spirit do not coincide with the boundaries of the visible Church. Consequently the Church also exists in some form beyond her own boundaries⁷. This allows to express and stress a similar conviction concerning the Christian moral vision, which is to be found also in some form beyond its Catholic concept. A sincere dialogue and exchange of theological opinions on Christian moral life can lead to a mutual enrichment and deeper comprehension of the "life in Christ" being a universal vocation for all Christ's faithful. What *Ut Unum Sint* articulated in the context of ecclesiology, can be applied to Christian moral vision. All Christians are to be "ready to admit that beyond the boundaries of their own communities there is no moral theological vacuum"⁸.

⁴ Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, The Vatican: LEV 1995, 68.

⁵ M. ROOT, *Ethics in Ecumenical Dialogues: A Survey and Analysis*, „Journal of Ecumenical Studies” 45 (2010) no. 3, 357.

⁶ Cf. REFORMED/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE, *Towards the Common Understanding of the Church (1984–1990)*, 157–160 (www.vatican.va).

⁷ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Urząd duchowy a jedność Kościoła*, in: J. RATZINGER, *Głosiciele słowa i służby waszej radości* [J. RATZINGER, *Opera omnia*, vol. 12], Lublin: Wyd. KUL 2012, 65–66.

⁸ S. NOWOSAD, *Moral Theology Ecumenically Oriented*, 99. „It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*exi-*

A closer analysis of the Christianity's picture almost 20 centuries after Christ prayed so "they all be one" proves ever more clearly that an ecumenical engagement on the part of all Christ's disciples is a necessary and urgent duty. It was already in the first months of his pontificate that John Paul II expressed his conviction about a necessity of "true ecumenical activity" and an expectation of a "dialogue, and a shared investigation of the truth in the full evangelical and Christian sense"⁹. It is not only about two great schisms of the 11th and 16th c. but in fact the whole range of issues that Christians continue to perceive and proclaim differently in the area of both doctrine and morality. The more unlikely the possibility of finding a common explanation of the Divine message presents itself, the more pressing the dedication for unity is to be. In order to be faithful to the integrity of Christian revelation one must believe that ethics is inextricably united with faith. John Paul II puts a strong emphasis on the indispensable and crucial union between the truths of faith and the norms guiding moral life of those who believe: "[...] an opinion is frequently heard which questions the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality, as if membership in the Church and her internal unity were to be decided on the basis of faith alone, while in the sphere of morality a pluralism of opinions and of kinds of behaviour could be tolerated, these being left to the judgment of the individual subjective conscience or to the diversity of social and cultural contexts"¹⁰.

2. Ecumenical responses to *Veritatis Splendor*

An authentic Christian engagement in the ecumenical endeavour must cover not only what the tradition has come to call the truths of the faith (*credenda*) but also moral consequences of believing in God who is both Creator and Saviour of man (*agenda*). The moral encyclical of John Paul II is a significant example of a necessary reaffirmation of the moral teaching the Catholic Church continues to offer both to her members and to the whole humankind. An increasingly matured ecumenical sensitivity among Christians of various traditions has spurred some theologians and ethicists to react to the Pope's teaching. It is a real proof that not only Catholic moral theologians but also others, being ecumenically concerned,

mia), which in the Catholic Church are part of the fulness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in the other Christian Communities". JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 13.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, The Vatican: LEV 1979, 6.

¹⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, 4.

“seek both the greater visible unity of the church and also the critical discussion and mutual learning that such unity should bring”¹¹.

2.1. Positive comments

The volume *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics* is a rare example of a serious ecumenical dialogue on the Christian moral vision in which several non-Catholic ethicists both appreciate and challenge John Paul II’s teaching as expressed in his two moral encyclicals¹². It is a valuable collection of mainly Lutheran contributions in which Protestant ethicists discover, discuss and confront selected issues of the Pope’s moral vision. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (and to a lesser degree *Evangelium Vitae*) has thus become a significant and fruitful point of reference for Protestants who had the courage and ability to purposefully engage this teaching.

It has been obvious for many readers of Karol Wojtyła and John Paul II that it is freedom that is at the centre of his concerns and intellectual and theological investigations. It is put very clearly in *Veritatis Splendor* where the Pope on one hand notices how human freedom has been exalted and made an absolute, the source of values, and on the other hand that same freedom has been questioned and finally denied when the human being is reduced to the conclusions of the so-called behavioural sciences, legitimate in themselves but not sufficient to describe the human person in his fullness¹³. Jean Bethke Elshtain highlights John Paul’s understanding of human freedom going back to as far as his early plays and writings. Freedom for him has been the most unique feature of every “acting person” who – in the light of Christ’s words about truth making one free (cf. Jn

¹¹ M. ROOT, *Foreword*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II’s Moral Encyclicals*, eds. R. HÜTTER, T. DIETER, Grand Rapids – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1998, VII.

¹² Though rare this volume is by no means the only one. See also e.g. *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. M. CROMARTIE, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997 or O. ABEL [ET AL.], *Paroles de Pape, Paroles Protestantes*, Paris: Les Bergers et Les Mages 1995. Another good example of ecumenical discussions on Christian morals – though prior to *Veritatis Splendor* – is O. BAYER [ET AL.], *Zwei Kirchen – eine Moral?*, Regensburg: F. Pustet 1986. Some other examples of scholarly ecumenical publications on ethics see R. HÜTTER, *The Project*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 1–2 footnote 2–3. An extensive overview of commentaries on *Veritatis Splendor* above all by Catholic authors that appeared soon after its publication see A. RODRIGUEZ LUÑO, “*Veritatis splendor*” un anno dopo. *Appunti per un bilancio (I)*, “Acta Philosophica” 4 (1995) f. 2, 223–260 and “*Veritatis splendor*” un anno dopo. *Appunti per un bilancio (II)*, “Acta Philosophica” 5 (1996) f. 1, 47–75. Some brief comments by some Catholic and Protestant authors may be found in: J.F. KEENAN, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences*, London – New York: Continuum 2010, 127–139.

¹³ „Certain currents of modern thought have gone so far as to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values”. *Veritatis Splendor*, 32. „Side by side with this exaltation of freedom, yet oddly in contrast with it, modern culture radically questions the very existence of this freedom”. *Ibidem*, 33.

8:32) – must come to know that freedom is fundamentally dependent upon truth. Still in his early play “Jeremiah” of 1940 Wojtyła articulated “a central premise of *Veritatis Splendor*: ‘In truth are freedom and excellence – /in untruth go you to slavery. /O Jerusalem! – Jerusalem!’”¹⁴. Elshtain notices how deeply the Pope rooted his teaching on human freedom when he many times stresses the implications of the first three chapters of Genesis for understanding the creation of male and female in the image of God so they live in *communio*. All these aspects are indispensable for John Paul’s personalistic theological anthropology, which would let him unfold his teaching on love, sexuality, marriage and the family. Though wounded by original sin, every person is capable of the disinterested gift of the self for which Christ set the pattern offering Himself to the Father for all. With an authentic admiration prof. Elshtain writes that the Pope was “broken-hearted about human sinfulness” but too believed that the human person, open to grace, is still “capable of communion” and so able to confirm the other as a person. Referring to her own book on St. Augustine she describes John Paul II as the “man who desired ‘not only a devout reader, but also an open-minded critic’ [who] gets too few of each, or both, in our harsh and cynical time”¹⁵. In many ways Elshtain perceives John Paul’s message as relevant not only for Catholics and not even Christians but for all who live “in our harsh time”. It is obvious that Elshtain’s “major claim is that, consistent with his theological personalism, the pope embraces the absolute ontological equality, an equality on the level of being, of rights and dignity between man and woman”¹⁶.

Law, and particularly God’s law is an issue of paramount importance in Reformation theology. It is Reinhard Hütter who discusses this concept as it was developed in John Paul’s moral encyclical from the Reformation perspective and in the light of Luther’s writings¹⁷. He does see a useful contribution in the encyclical to possible ecumenical debates about the law of God and its role in human life. The Lutheran ethicist would agree with many of the Pope’s points, particularly about the inherent link between one’s moral life and one’s salvation

¹⁴ J.B. ELSHTAIN, *A Pope for All Seasons? The Many-Sidedness of John Paul II*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 20. Elshtain (d. 2013) was an acknowledged American ethicist of Lutheran background, who in her last years taught at the University of Chicago.

¹⁵ *A Pope for All Seasons?*, 37; cf. J.B. ELSHTAIN, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1996, 128. „To say that John Paul’s way of understanding the self in relation to other and the mind in relation to reality is opaque to us in late modernity is to understate. We no longer appreciate the meaning of putting ourselves at the disposal of another: the donative gift of self looks like self-abnegation if not masochism. Mary’s radical ‘yes’ to God is an image that no longer computes”. J.B. ELSHTAIN, *A Pope for All Seasons?*, 36.

¹⁶ R. HÜTTER, *The Project*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 4.

¹⁷ R. HÜTTER, *God’s Law in Veritatis Splendor: Sic et Non*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 84–114. Born in 1958 in Germany, Hütter is a former Lutheran theologian and philosopher, now teaching at Duke Divinity School in Durham, USA. In 2004 he became a Roman Catholic.

which lies at the centre of the papal message. Hütter puts an emphasis on the way the encyclical presents “an impressive and coherent vision of human life, integrating the fulfillment of the moral good, that is, the creaturely destination towards the good, with the comprehensive fulfillment of the human destination toward communion with God”¹⁸. In this moral teaching of John Paul II it is all about the sound relationship between God’s eternal law and man’s freedom in which Hütter frequently notices an ongoing discourse ever since at least St. Thomas Aquinas. Various traditions of interpreting Aquinas’ theology in this respect are clearly shown with reference to numerous leading theologians and philosophers contributing to this debate¹⁹. It seems that at times the encyclical is one-sidedly focused on the subject of law, especially in the relation to the new law as expounded by Aquinas. From the characteristically Reformation perspective Hütter discerns that *Veritatis Splendor* insufficiently explores the fundamental notion of human freedom, which being *post lapsum*²⁰, is in need of liberation by Christ. It is in many points that Hütter refers to Luther whose ideas he, understandably, perceives as strongly helpful to illuminate some aspects he finds not developed enough by the Pope. An example of this can be found in relation to the understanding of the concept of man’s being sinful and on his way to perfection where “an overall harmonious and continuous relationship between creation and salvation [...] is obscured by the fact that a serious theological acknowledgment of human sin is missing as a constitutive element of the encyclical’s anthropology”. This makes some claims of the encyclical “problematic” because it does not presuppose clearly enough “with Aquinas – the new law” already being effective in the person or – with Luther – that this person already is ‘in faith’²¹. But Hütter also emphasizes that in other elements Luther would fully accept John Paul’s thesis that “human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfilment precisely in the acceptance of that law [i.e. the commandments]”²². More basic concerns can be identified in which *Veritatis Splendor* should be seen as a potentially fruitful contribution to Reformation ethics. One of them is how the encyclical, focusing on the centrality of God’s law in Christian life, can be for Lutherans “a welcome catalyst for rethinking God’s commandments and, thereby, being reclaimed by them. Despite the whole range of problematic

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 87.

¹⁹ See for example footnotes 13 and 14 on p. 90.

²⁰ „Man comes to realize that his freedom is in some mysterious way inclined to betray this openness to the True and the Good, and that all too often he actually prefers to choose finite, limited and ephemeral goods. What is more, within his errors and negative decisions, man glimpses the source of a deep rebellion, which leads him to reject the Truth and the Good in order to set himself up as an absolute principle unto himself: ‘You will be like God’ (Gen 3:5)”. *Veritatis Splendor*, 86.

²¹ R. HÜTTER, *God’s Law in Veritatis Splendor*, 102–103.

²² *Veritatis Splendor*, 35.

issues, the encyclical reminds us to understand in a renewed way God's closeness in the goodness of his will, whether communicated *via* the natural or the revealed law". Hütter too sees a similarity between the Pope's exposition of the intrinsically evil acts doctrine and the Lutheran idea of the "habitual, intentional, publicly insisted-upon and nonrepented breaking of the Decalogue's commandments". When reacting in a positive way to John Paul's insistence on God's good will shown in the commandments Lutherans could even "slowly relearn the practical knowledge of the 'natural law' or – to say it with Luther – to receive an ongoing training in God's good 'orders of creation'"²³.

Nature, and consequently human nature and natural law are crucial concepts in *Veritatis Splendor*. It is to these notions that Risto Saarinen turns his attention, delineating both agreements and disagreements with the Pope's teaching²⁴. While some Protestant opinions seem critical as regards the papal view of nature and thus human nature, Saarinen points out to a few topics that at least Lutherans could agree with, for instance the rejection of a false dualism between body and soul which implies a stress on the unity of the human person, also the conviction that a moral act cannot be separated from man's bodiliness. As has been stressed by another Lutheran ethicist, this John Paul II's "high regard for the significance of the bodily dimension of acts could well have appealed to Luther, for whom bodily existence is at once the ground and the testing ground for good works"²⁵. Saarinen marks, too, a growing Protestant consensus (at least among Scandinavian Lutherans and Anglicans) about the meaning of natural law as based on man's nature and so being a rational order and not a biological one²⁶. However, the Finnish theologian discusses in a more detailed way some parts of *Veritatis Splendor* where he discerns some Averroist tones. This he finds in the encyclical's treatment of human dignity, which seems to him as sharing in common nature rather than being based upon the person as an individual. Saarinen even asks a (evidently absurd) question whether *Veritatis Splendor* approaches the "monis-

²³ Cf. R. HÜTTER, *God's Law in Veritatis Splendor*, 111–113, including particularly footnote 47. A similar discussion and comparison with Luther's theological views with regard to intrinsically evil acts and works of faith see B. WANNENWETSCH, *Intrinsically Evil Acts; or, Why Abortion and Euthanasia Cannot Be Justified*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 213–215.

²⁴ Cf. R. SAARINEN, *Protestant Undertones, Averroist Overtones? The Concept of Nature in Veritatis Splendor*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 115–136. Saarinen (b. 1959) is a Finnish Lutheran philosopher and theologian living and teaching in Helsinki, engaged in the Lutheran-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue.

²⁵ B. WANNENWETSCH, *Intrinsically Evil Acts*, 211. „In free submissive love our bodily outward-directed existence is conformed to the 'new creation' that we have by God's grace become. So for Luther, too, the unity of the person is central, and any judgment on works flows out from it". *Ibidem*. Bernd Wannewetsch is a German Lutheran ethicist recently teaching at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, a former president of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics.

²⁶ Cf. *Protestant Undertones, Averroist Overtones?*, 122–127.

tic Averroistic views that deny the uniqueness of individual souls”²⁷. His charge is that the encyclical follows in this respect M. Rhonheimer’s view of nature as well as the role of the human body, which in Averroism is treated as the “principle of individuation”. Saarinen notes that the Pope refers to the human body (in unity with the soul) as the bearer of personality though not stating explicitly the body to be constitutive for human personality. This however can be found in Rhonheimer for whom the “body is ‘constitutive’ for personality; [and] thus the Averroist view of the body as the only principle of human individuation which is implicit in *Veritatis Splendor* 48–49 becomes explicit in Rhonheimer’s study”²⁸.

Another topic that Protestant ethicists would naturally be tempted to examine and discuss is the concept of freedom and truth, which is a major line in John Paul II’s encyclical. Lois Malcolm in her essay finds in *Veritatis Splendor* not primarily an effort to reinforce papal and ecclesial authority (as not few moralists and theologians stressed) but a more fundamental modern cultural trend of detaching human freedom from its essential relationship to truth that the Pope endeavours to face. Malcom thus classes John Paul II with “a range of theologians, philosophers, social scientists, and moral theorists who question whether a moral discourse restricted to the decisions and choices of autonomous moral agents is rich enough to provide moral resources for the pressing problems of our time [...] in the face not only of cultural pluralism but the rise of technological power”²⁹. The American theologian’s concern is mainly with the Pope’s concept of freedom rooted in the encounter with Christ, which she perceives as the crucial idea worth discussing also among non-Catholic Christians. It is only in the light of this understanding of human freedom, enlightened by the evangelical narrative of the meeting of Jesus with the rich young man, that the personalist and deeply Christian conception of freedom finds its root pattern and thus leads to the idea of true theonomy. It is in fact called in the encyclical “participated theonomy since man’s free obedience to God’s law effectively implies that human reason and human will participate in God’s wisdom and providence”³⁰. The concept of “participated theonomy”, against both a false autonomy and a false heteronomy, assumes that man’s freedom does not create its own values and norms but rather

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 129. “The perspective from which this conflict becomes visible is that of *Averroism* or *monopsychism*, that is, the view according to which human souls are finally clones that instantiate the one and the same archetype when they inhabit different individual bodies. According to *Veritatis Splendor*, individual human beings receive their personal dignity not because of any individual or unique characteristics but because they share in a common nature”. *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 135–136. Saarinen refers here to: M. RHONHEIMER, *Natur als Grundlage der Moral. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit autonomer und teleologischer Ethik*, Innsbruck: Tyrolia 1987.

²⁹ L. MALCOLM, *Freedom and Truth in Veritatis Splendor and the Meaning of Theonomy*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 160. The whole text cf. p. 159–184. Lois Malcolm has been teaching theology at the Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota for over two decades.

³⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, 41.

receives them as originated from God's wisdom and love. Though she also finds in *Veritatis Splendor* another understanding of freedom as based in natural law, its personalist conception and depiction should be regarded as the central one because it unambiguously shows the uniqueness of the human persons and their orientation toward communion with God and consequently with others. Malcolm finally comes to a conclusion that the personalist view of human freedom is rooted in the crucified Christ who is – following the text of the encyclical – the “living personal summation of perfect freedom in total obedience to the will of God. His crucified flesh fully reveals the unbreakable bond between freedom and truth, just as his Resurrection from the dead is the supreme exaltation of the fruitfulness and saving power of a freedom lived out in truth”³¹. Such argumentation allows a comprehensive as well as deeply Christological understanding of Christian moral life that Lutherans would welcome. In her conviction the “foundation for the Christian morality in the personalist view is neither an abstract and impersonal good nor an absolute conception of power, but Jesus' self-giving for his fellow human beings [...]. As Christ's identity – Christ's exercise of freedom and power – is constituted by self-giving, so the way of discipleship is constituted by obedience to the radical and unconditioned command of the gospel”³². Thus come to the surface so dear to Lutherans notions of discipleship and obedience, which have found their exemplary fulfilment in recent Protestant history in the life of D. Bonhoeffer³³.

The Methodist ethicist Stanley Hauerwas was enthusiastic in his reaction to *Veritatis Splendor*, which he found uniquely rich and full of insights for anyone wishing to understand better and more theologically moral life of the Christian. He sees in the encyclical “a unique and remarkable document” which is “a great gift not only to Roman Catholics but I hope to all Christians struggling to discern how we are to live in this strange time between times. That John Paul has written so eloquently on the nature of the Christian moral life is a great testimony to the Catholic ability to withstand the ethos of freedom and accordingly is a service to all Christians”³⁴. In Hauerwas's view it is important to note that the Pope not just describes moral life Christians are called to live but refers to how moral theologians think and to what this may lead. Writing profoundly theologically John Paul II reminds all Christians, Catholics and

³¹ *Veritatis Splendor*, 87.

³² L. MALCOLM, *Freedom and Truth in Veritatis Splendor and the Meaning of Theonomy*, 178.

³³ Cf. S. NOWOSAD, *Świętość w perspektywie ekumenicznej*, „Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN” 6–7 (2011–2012), 112–118.

³⁴ S. HAUERWAS, [untitled], „Commonweal” 120 (1993) no. 18 (22.10.1993), 16. That text was republished as *The Pope Puts Theology Back into Moral Theology* in “Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 16–18. Hauerwas (b. 1940) is a prominent American theologian and ethicist, influential and widely read, who has taught for many years at Duke University.

Protestants alike, that their moral life “cannot be separated from the one who has called us into existence” because “ethical order” cannot be divorced from the “order of salvation”. This topic is impressively presented in the discussion of martyrdom in the last chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*. Though being himself critical about the concept of natural law as a pattern for moral life, Hauerwas admits he finds in the encyclical a lot he is ready to share. A similar case is with the theory of intrinsically evil acts which for him appears unconvincing. However in his view here this discussion is put by the Pope rightly when he argues that “such actions cannot be made part of the well-lived life”³⁵. The Methodist theologian finds not one thing in *Veritatis Splendor* that may remind Protestants of J. Calvin’s or K. Barth’s teachings and writings.

In his another comment Hauerwas stresses a theological, or rather biblical and ecclesial method employed throughout the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*: “begin with Scripture, show how rational argument contributes to faith seeking understanding, and return to a church life and practice informed by Scripture”. This finally becomes in fact Christocentric because it is “Jesus, not ‘natural law’ [that is] the paradigm throughout” and “one must always return to the figure of Jesus”³⁶. With utmost attention the Methodist theologian follows John Paul’s argumentation, which he finds, constantly focused on truth, as the only context for human freedom to mature and direct man to Christ, the same way the young rich man was drawn to Him. In his comment Hauerwas can be rightly described as a personalist who together with the Pope comes to find in the Crucified Christ “the authentic meaning of freedom [who] lives it fully in the total gift of himself and calls his disciples to share in his freedom”. In this sense freedom is “ultimately directed towards communion”³⁷. Interestingly, Hauerwas makes references to Vaclav Havel and his deeply moral perception of politics and public activity. The Methodist ethicist finds Havel’s discernment to have much in common with the papal vision of moral life, though in Havel it is not, at least expressly, biblical or theologically warranted³⁸. Hauerwas’s reception of the papal document is a proof

³⁵ S. HAUERWAS, [untitled], 17–18.

³⁶ D. BURRELL, S. HAUERWAS [untitled part of *The Splendor of Truth: A Symposium*], „First Things” 1994 no. 39 (January), 21 and 22. This comment was written by S. Hauerwas together with David Burrell (b. 1933), a Catholic philosopher and theologian who taught for many years at the University of Notre Dame.

³⁷ *Veritatis Splendor*, 85–86.

³⁸ „So however it may be articulated, ‘by acknowledging and teaching the existence of intrinsic evil in given human acts, the Church remains faithful to the integral truth about man; she respects and promotes man in his dignity and vocation’. Such a summary statement recalls us to the context of Vaclav Havel: there are certain actions that no human being is entitled to perpetrate, whatever ideological justifications may be forthcoming. This is not only because of the harm such acts do to others but, equally important, the harm such acts do to the perpetrator”. D. BURRELL, S. HAUERWAS [untitled], 23.

of an authentic and unprejudiced reaction to a serious exposition of Christian doctrine that can and should be of interest and profit also for those who do not share the same ecclesial affiliation.

It is not in one case that *Veritatis Splendor* has compelled its Protestant readers to think again and more seriously about their own ways of viewing Christian moral life. This could be another fruit of an encounter with a serious and grounded deeply in Christian theological and moral tradition text that cannot be passed by unaffected. According to Robert Benne the “Pope’s clarity and weight” as well as “solidity, richness and thickness of the moral tradition” expressed in *Veritatis Splendor* makes him acknowledge the “present state of Lutheran ethics sadly confused and confusing³⁹”. This shows again that the substance of the encyclical is intensely rooted in the rich Catholic tradition of moral theology that can become a common field of research and a mutually enriching exchange of gifts. It, too, proves that the existence of teaching authority, as has always been the case with the Catholic Church, can be an authentic service to the unity of all Christ’s disciples⁴⁰. The insights that are contained in the Pope’s moral encyclical letter allow to clarify other issues that not only Catholics need to see clearly, like the calling and the service that moral theologians (or Christian ethicists – as Protestants would more frequently say) should offer to the Church and even to “human society and culture” and so “develop a deeper understanding of the reasons underlying its [the Magisterium’s] teachings and to expound the validity and obligatory nature of the precepts it proposes, demonstrating their connection with one another and their relation with man’s ultimate end⁴¹”. Benne seems to miss such a much needed and significant churchy role for moral theologians within his own Lutheran tradition. He sees in the Pope’s argument, in this case concerning the role of bishops as pastors, an inspiration for Protestants to take “faith and its moral tradition seriously”. Even if in more specific problems he will disagree with John Paul II, Benne is ready to stress that the “weight, clarity and grandeur of his proposal make me long for a church that has an authoritative and true word to speak to Christians and to the world⁴²”.

John Paul II’s moral endeavour, as all his teaching, carries a clear theological and Christological character being always Christ-centred. It became obvious ever since his first encyclical with his emphasis on Christ as the only one who is capable of responding to man’s questions. It comes up again in L. Gregory Jones’s

³⁹ R. BENNE, *Reflections on the Splendor of Truth*, „Pro Ecclesia” 3 (1994) no. 3, 272.

⁴⁰ „The absence of theologically-based moral theory is an effect of the loss of teaching authority in the Protestant churches. [...] authority has been split off from ordination, particularly at the regional and national expressions of the church’s life”. *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 110.

⁴² *Reflections on the Splendor of Truth*, 274.

stress on the rich young man's question about his salvation with which the Pope starts his encyclical⁴³. The theological issue of salvation is to shed light on man's all moral questions and thus enable him to have God always at the centre of his life. In connection with this observation Jones highlights the universality of moral questions of all men because "questions how I ought to live, and more particularly what I must do to be saved are being raised not only by Christians but by others as well"⁴⁴. The Methodist theologian refers several times to *Veritatis Splendor* as a "theological inquiry" in which he sees its central feature. He finds this as the Pope's particular concern in the context of contemporary culture, which has been deprived of any theological character resulting in a "theological bankruptcy". Hence he argues that the encyclical is to be understood as an "invitation to join in the rigorous, yet life-giving, demands of a comprehensive theological inquiry ordered by, and directed towards, the truth as that is discerned in fidelity to the God of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit". This theological inquiry would gradually reclaim a "theological *imagination*"⁴⁵. Such a deeply theological perception of John Paul II's moral teaching, unsurprisingly, allows Jones to ask for more which is an argumentation for a more eschatologically rather than teleologically understood moral theology.

For the Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan the Pope's exposition of Christian morality is a significant pastoral and evangelical attempt to respond to modern man's existential questions⁴⁶. What is clearly stressed in the papal letter is that moral life cannot be separated from following Christ, from the Holy Spirit's grace and must be rooted in the ecclesial community of faith. It is in this that the generations to come will continue to see the particular splendour of *Veritatis Splendor*. This makes the Church's moral teaching an authentically evangelical proclamation. John Paul II is right in his criticism of opinions, which question "the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality" being influenced by "currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth"⁴⁷. It is expressly underlined by the leading Anglican moral theologian that the "Pope has undertaken a review of trends in

⁴³ Cf. L.G. JONES, [untitled part of *The Splendor of Truth: A Symposium*], „First Things” 1994 no. 39 (January), 19–20. Jones (b. 1960) is a Methodist theologian, currently vice-president at Duke University.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 19.

⁴⁵ „[...] we need not only the encyclical's invitation to theological inquiry but also, and perhaps more determinatively, a reclamation of biblical and theological *imagination*”. *Ibidem*, 20.

⁴⁶ Cf. O. O'DONOVAN, *A Summons to Reality*, „The Tablet” 247 (1993), no. 247 (27.11.1993), 1550–1552. Oliver O'Donovan (b. 1945), an Anglican clergyman, was for over two decades Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Christ Church, University of Oxford and later taught Christian ethics at New College, University of Edinburgh. Retired in 2013, he continues to be regarded as the leading Anglican moral theologian.

⁴⁷ *Veritatis Splendor*, 4.

formal ethical theory – an unexpected but by no means unpersuasive strategy. His thesis is the necessity of truth as the condition of freedom. Objectivity humbles tyrants. Totalitarianism is the child of moral skepticism, having cast itself loose from the critical authority that can challenge social structures”⁴⁸. It is obvious John Paul’s target is not primarily some selected specific questions (which are discussed in the second part of the encyclical) but a critical look at the foundations of culture and its basic intellectual trends. O’Donovan joins the Pope in his critical account of the theories which fail to offer a “developed account of the field of moral action, that is to say, of the created world with all its infinite variety of created goods and ends, into which any act that we design has to be projected, within which any act has to be justified”⁴⁹. Though with respect to some elements of the Pope’s argumentation O’Donovan is not sure whether the position taken is the best possible way to deal with the analysed problems. He finally expresses his laudable conviction about not only the encyclical’s exposition of a general philosophical situation relevant for all Christians, but also about a possible valuable service and role of a Petrine office in the universal Church for which *Veritatis Splendor* appears to be a convincing example⁵⁰.

2.2. Mixed reactions

When asking about an impact of *Veritatis Splendor* on ecumenical dialogue, Lewis S. Mudge has turned to a broader cultural perspective. He thinks the papal document endeavours to highlight fundamental values that can “illuminate the challenges now faced by humankind – issues of the dignity of the human being in civil society and therefore of justice, peace, the integrity of creation”⁵¹. In this sense the Presbyterian theologian, not disguising his “antipathy to the

⁴⁸ O. O’DONOVAN, *A Summons to Reality*, 1550.

⁴⁹ „The world appears as an empty stage for human merit to parade on, formless, undetermined, infinitely plastic, like the universe before God’s first creative word. Action, in consequence, is shaped to the service of the agent-mind or agent-will, rather than to the service of the world. It loses its world-determined meaning as action – so that in some theories it comes to look like an expressive gesture revealing the secrets of the heart, in others like an instrumental technique manipulating the world to some end, and in still others virtually irrelevant to moral evaluation. The underlying connexion is the paradoxically ‘unworldly’ character (in this specialist sense) of twentieth-century ethics: that is, its tendency to refuse the world that is given it in favour of some other world which it invents”. *Ibidem*, p. 1551. Cf. S. NOWOSAD, *Veritatis Splendor w ‘The Tablet’*, „Studia Theologica Varsaviensia” 32 (1994) no. 1, 104–105.

⁵⁰ Cf. O. O’DONOVAN, *A Summons to Reality*, 1552. Interestingly enough, in his commendable opinion O’Donovan gets criticized for not being critical enough by some who have found themselves criticized in the Pope’s letter. See R. MCCORMICK, *Some Early Reactions to Veritatis Splendor*, “Theological Studies” 55 (1994) no. 3, 492.

⁵¹ L.S. MUDGE, *Veritatis Splendor and Today’s Ecumenical Conversation*, „The Ecumenical Review” 48 (1996) no. 2, 158. Mudge (d. 2009) was a Presbyterian theologian and ecumenist who in his years before retirement taught in San Francisco Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

encyclical's often authoritarian tone", is certain the document needs a thorough attention and reading. At the core of the Pope's argument is a common modern separation between freedom and truth, which results in perceiving personal and social life merely as an assertion of preference or power. Mudge recalls A. MacIntyre's belief that "the issue today comes down to a choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle: between deconstructive anarchy and the classical moral tradition underlying Catholic thought"⁵². Mudge highlights a few positive aspects of the encyclical as he perceives it, namely its completeness and carefulness in argumentation and setting forth the fundamental questions of the Catholic moral teaching, its improvement on some traditional conceptions like natural law, as well as the Pope's precise analysis of the concepts and theories he criticizes (like proportionalism, consequentialism etc.). At the same time he is not sure whether John Paul's language and argumentation can contribute to the "conversation of humankind" aiming at achieving some agreement on common issues of the tradition like moral order of human society or basic values for public life⁵³. The Presbyterian scholar is ready to admit that Catholic moral teaching – not only in this encyclical – is often principled and in-depth while some Protestant statements on ethics seem "spasmodic and even opportunistic". Thus another useful ecumenical fruit of John Paul's encyclical could and should be – on the part of Protestant and Orthodox ethicists – an acceptance "as a challenge the effort to put the moral content of their traditions into coherent restatements which could stand alongside what the pope has given us in *Veritatis Splendor*"⁵⁴. Though often critical, Mudge sincerely finds in John Paul II's moral encyclical a valuable challenge to non-Catholic Christian traditions that cannot be simply dismissed.

It is clear that any attempts to discuss concrete issues, including the moral ones, have certain starting points and assumptions proper to one's theological and ecclesial tradition. Thus Protestant theologians would use their own pattern of thought and the Reformation premises when attempting to comment on Catholic ethics. Gilbert Meilaender⁵⁵ would appreciate John Paul II's stress on the central

⁵² *Ibidem*, 159. Cf. A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London – New York: Bloomsbury 2013, 127ff.

⁵³ „[...] without such [religious] traditions in the picture we have what Richard Neuhaus has called 'the naked public square', a spiritually impoverished, normless public space overwhelmed by fragmenting and sometimes demonic forces which threaten to make it unlivable for human beings". L.S. MUDGE, *Veritatis Splendor and Today's Ecumenical Conversation*, 161.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 162.

⁵⁵ Gilbert Meilaender (b. 1946) is a well known and influential American Lutheran theologian and ethicist, teaching for many years at the Valparaiso University, interested mainly in bioethics. Both here and elsewhere he is deeply dependent on Karl Barth's reformed theological perspective: "From a Barthian perspective any acknowledgement of a continuing validity in natural reason to come to an understanding of the natural law is dangerously misguided". D.A. JONES, *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, in: *The Legacy of John Paul II*, eds. M. A. HAYES, G. O'COLLINS, London – New York: Burns & Oates 2008, 97.

role of grace and of faith in the Christian life (which is in some way matching the Reformation *sola fide* and *sola gratia* principles). However, referring to Karl Barth's explanation of the young man's encounter with Jesus (Mt 19:16-22), Meilaender points to – in his view – a lack of grace in the Pope's text. The Lutheran ethicist admits that it is with “the Reformation disputes in mind” and its principle of *sola gratia* that “one may legitimately wonder whether it would not be better, even from John Paul's perspective, to say that keeping the commandments is a *description* of being on the way toward fellowship with God, not a *condition* of it. The language of ‘conditions’ in these contexts risks undercutting the centrality of grace in the journey toward God”⁵⁶. Again, after discussing another part of *Veritatis Splendor* about faith and fundamental option, he would – still from a Protestant perspective – insist on diminishing of the significance of faith as *fiducia* in that document. This finally leads Meilaender to express his conviction that if “*Veritatis Splendor* grasps – albeit a bit haltingly in places – the importance of *sola gratia*, it fails to enunciate clearly the *sola fide*”. However, he is also quick enough to admit that Protestants should “be thankful for *Veritatis Splendor*” and its thoroughly theological character and language that can help them think their own “doctrine through to the end”⁵⁷. In his another comment Meilaender returned to *Veritatis Splendor* 20 years after its publication. His central issue then was the relation of agent and act at which he looks in light of H. Thielecke's *Theological Ethics*⁵⁸. He refers mostly to the concept of fundamental option whose certain explanation has been rejected by the Pope while from the Lutheran perspective it comes close to the concept of man as *simul iustus et peccator*. In his lengthy argumentation Meilaender comes to a conclusion that the “connection between person and work must be tighter than Thielecke sometimes seems to have in mind, even if perhaps not quite so tight as it sometimes is in *Veritatis Splendor*”⁵⁹.

Not few Protestant reactions to John Paul II's moral teaching as found in *Veritatis Splendor* have not been supplemented by similar Orthodox opinions. A.M. Stavropoulos's brief remarks cannot be taken as a real discussion with the Pope's teaching⁶⁰. His text does show, however, that from the Orthodox perspec-

⁵⁶ G. MEILAENDER, *Grace, Justification through Faith, and Sin*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 64.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 82–83.

⁵⁸ G. MEILAENDER, *Works and Righteousness: What We Do both Expresses and Determines Who We Are*, „First Things” (2013) no. 237 (November), 41–46.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 44.

⁶⁰ A.M. STAVROPOULOS, *Veritatis Splendor: An Orthodox Reaction*, „The Ecumenical Review” 48 (1996) no. 2, 155–157. Alexandre Stavropoulos has been for many years professor of pastoral studies and theology at the University of Athens. At a moral theology session at the Catholic University of Lublin in December 2013 a young Orthodox doctoral student from the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw expressed his total rejection of John Paul II's moral encyclical as a mistaken concept. Not a philosophical and rational argumentation is needed, in his view, rather

tive rational argumentation should be followed by “pastoral approach” to moral issues. The Greek theologian seems to welcome *Veritatis Splendor* as a “presentation of basic Christian truths [...] addressed to an age which has largely abandoned gospel ideals”, all the more so because it offers an “opportunity for detailed study of biblical texts and of the opinions quoted from the great fathers of the church”⁶¹. However, Stavropoulos does not conceal his expectations that the exhortations of this range, being a “message for the whole world”, should be in some way preliminarily consulted with the representatives of other Christian traditions before they are published in order to avoid an impression of disagreements among Christians. In this sense he seems to believe the encyclical contains an implicit criticism of non-Catholic positions with regard to the discussed problems. Nevertheless, his own reading of *Veritatis Splendor* leads him to offer – “in a spirit of truth and love” (Eph 4:15) – a brief outline of an Orthodox perspective of Christian moral life that would be, characteristically, rooted in the Patristic literature⁶². Again, one should not dismiss this inspirational effect of John Paul II’s (not only) moral teaching.

Michael Banner, one of the leading Anglican ethicists, reminds that important Protestant theologians like D. Bonhoeffer and K. Barth have both reflected on the Gospel on the young man asking the Master about good that is to be done in order to have eternal life⁶³. While he finds a lot to praise in the beginning and in the conclusion of John Paul II’s moral encyclical, he is clearly dissatisfied with the central section. It seems to him highly too philosophical and rational, not in line with the biblical introduction. Banner, who is himself deeply embedded in Barth’s theology with his radical *sola Scriptura* principle, deplores the unbiblical and unevangelical character of that part of the Pope’s argument. He thinks *Veritatis Splendor* should have taken a different path instead of trying to defend “a set of curiously modern philosophical commitments”. He would rather welcome a “narrative of God’s creation, reconciliation and redemption of the world which is known in Jesus Christ”. Only on this path, Banner argues, the Church would rediscover the “newness of the faith and its power to judge a prevalent and all-intrusive culture”⁶⁴.

a spiritual and prayerful perception of God’s revelation and the light from the Holy Spirit that would help the faithful obey and follow God’s calling.

⁶¹ A.M. STAVROPOULOS, *Veritatis Splendor: An Orthodox Reaction*, 156–157.

⁶² „These last remarks are an attempt to outline an Orthodox approach to moral issues and a way of thinking that reflects the thoughts of the fathers on morality. [...] to offer some comments from an Orthodox point of view on a first reading of *Veritatis Splendor*, which sheds light, the light of Christ, on some decisive points concerning family and sexual morality. My concern has been to read and react to it in a spirit of truth and love (Eph. 4:15)”. *Ibidem*, 157.

⁶³ Cf. M. BANNER, *Veritatis Splendor*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 8–10. Banner (b. 1961) has been Dean and fellow of the Trinity College in the University of Cambridge since 2006.

⁶⁴ M. BANNER, *Veritatis Splendor*, 10. Banner refers here to *Veritatis Splendor*, 88.

Not once a prophetic character of *Veritatis Splendor* is being highlighted by some of its commentators. One of them is Nigel Biggar, now Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Christ Church in the University of Oxford. He calls John Paul II's encyclical "a piece of prophecy" and appreciates his sharp criticism of some tenets of post-modern contemporary culture, for which "morality is simply a matter of individual feeling or preference. He contends instead that it is ultimately a matter of truth"⁶⁵. He follows the Pope's line of reasoning of such issues as moral law, conscience, consequentialism or fundamental option finding a lot he can agree upon, including the "validity of absolute prohibitions" about which he finds *Veritatis Splendor* "cogent". Nevertheless, Biggar makes his objections to some particular issues he finds unconvincing, like the negative moral assessment of sexual acts that do not intend procreation. His argumentation is in accordance with the Anglican position expressed quasi officially in some earlier statements⁶⁶. Unsurprisingly for a Protestant theologian, he does not conceal his disapproval of the encyclical's treatment of the role of moral theologians in which "criticism of current doctrine would appear to have no place among the moralist's proper functions"⁶⁷.

It is a basic theological message that man's final end is to shape all his life. God, being that ultimate end for all, is also "alone all-good, alone makes good". Hence, when man turns from his final end, it can be publicly visible through his behaviour, "certain negative acts – mortal sins" which reject good and choose evil. Thereby John Milbank shows how the Pope "locates the ethical primarily in the human act"⁶⁸. He believes that it is an authentic teaching when John Paul defends universal negative precepts and helps to recover "a genuine Thomist perspective on natural law" and to reject the transcendentalist "modern perversions of this tradition"⁶⁹. Milbank is at the same time unwilling to accept for example those parts of the encyclical which tend to supplement reason with the authority of the Church while he admits that "clearly the encyclical does not intend this: the magisterium is a prod to conscience, external law an aid to self-governing

⁶⁵ N. BIGGAR, *Veritatis Splendor*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 11. Biggar (b. 1955) is a well-known Anglican moral theologian who took up Oxford's Regius Chair of Moral and Pastoral Theology in 2007 (after O'Donovan), before he taught moral theology first in Leeds, then at Trinity College Dublin.

⁶⁶ See for example ARCIC II, *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, London: Church House Publishing/Catholic Truth Society 1994, 78–82.

⁶⁷ N. BIGGAR, *Veritatis Splendor*, 13.

⁶⁸ J. MILBANK, *Magisterial... and Shoddy?*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 29. Milbank (b. 1952) is an acknowledged Anglican theologian and philosopher, the founder and leader of the movement Radical Orthodoxy, teaching at the University of Nottingham.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 30.

freedom”⁷⁰. Even if some fragments of the text and modes of argumentation that offer an account of man’s sexual sphere and treat the human body “in primarily functional terms” and thus are too phenomenological for Milbank, the Anglican theologian acknowledges the positive and desired role for the magisterium to “speak profound truth in a genuinely public voice”⁷¹.

2.3. Negative opinions

Unsurprisingly, not one Protestant author would be critical about the authority of Magisterium Ecclesiae as expounded in the papal teaching. It is widely discussed in the context of conscience and law in Theodor Dieter’s treatment of conscience in *Veritatis Splendor*⁷². As is stressed by Dieter, both Catholics and Lutherans agree on the authority and dignity of conscience that speaks in the name of the truth about the good, though their perception of the reality conscience depends on will differ. Both here and elsewhere the German theologian highlights a lack of a precise mediation between the objectivity of moral law and subjectivity of (personal) morality; when discussing the concept of erring conscience he finds no explanation how and in what sense such conscience is binding; in his conviction the encyclical fails to distinguish between different meanings of law which leads to an ambiguous perception of the expression “morally good”⁷³. Dieter, while describing in eight theses the conception of the Magisterium as presented throughout the encyclical⁷⁴, takes a critical look at the understanding itself of the idea as well as at the high claim the Pope attributes to its authority. It is, evidently, in many ways dependent upon the Lutheran theological assumptions with above all their *sola Scriptura* principle and the common sinfulness of

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 31. „Yet it [the magisterium] is incredible [...] in its overstated claims to exclusive power to interpret, to inevitable rightness, to absolute consistency and consequent requirement of obedience”. *Ibidem*, 34.

⁷¹ „[...] the papacy needs a looser and more mystical (more eucharistic) account of the Spirit’s guarantee of continuing truth in the body of the Church [...] in order to guide the faithful”. *Ibidem*.

⁷² Cf. *Conscience and Magisterium in Veritatis Splendor*, in: *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics*, 137–158. He refers mainly to two parts of the encyclical where conscience is discussed – no. 31–32 and 54–64. Dieter (b. 1951) is a Lutheran theologian, since 1997 director of the influential Lutheran Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. He was deeply involved in the drafting of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification of 1999. In 2012 he was invited to the Castel Gandolfo gathering of Pope Benedict’s former disciples to present the key points of Lutheran theology.

⁷³ „There is a fundamental difference, however, in the meaning of ‘law’ when Paul says that ‘law brings only consciousness of sin’ (Rom 3:20b) or ‘Christ bought us freedom from the curse of the law’ (Gal 3:13) and when Thomas Aquinas states that ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ’ (Rom 8:2) can be understood as the Holy Spirit dwelling in the soul or as faith working through love (cf. #45). These (necessarily) different meanings of ‘law’ entail different concepts of conscience because it is constitutive for conscience to be related to law (or the word of God)”. T. DIETER, *Conscience and Magisterium in Veritatis Splendor*, 150. On the phrase “morally good” cf. 152–154.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 139–141.

all. Thus, Dieter states that the “magisterium consists of human beings, none of whom is free from sin and error, but they refer in such a strong way to the assistance of the Holy Spirit that the voice of the magisterium is identified with the voice of Jesus Christ”⁷⁵.

There is a widely accepted assumption that in the Lutheran vision of Christian life law (order) and grace (the Gospel) are two separate realities opposed to each other, which makes it unlikely to agree that “an ordered moral demand can be, in and of itself, evangelical”⁷⁶. Order (moral order) has nothing to do with grace or the Gospel and it is in fact “necessary where grace is absent [...]. But when grace arrives on the scene, moral order has reached its limit and termination; the gospel initiates a relationship between God and human beings which is not only more than moral, but altogether other than moral”⁷⁷. As Yeago points out, such a Lutheran vision of Christian life would create an obvious opposition to what John Paul II describes in his encyclical as an “inseparable connection” between God’s grace and man’s freedom and life. Grace in fact “does not lessen but reinforces the moral demands of love: ‘This is my commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us’ (1 Jn 3:32). One can abide in love only by keeping the commandments”⁷⁸. In light of this teaching any serious ecumenical dialogue would seem impossible. Yeago’s conviction is that such an understanding of Luther’s theology among Lutherans is mistaken. He argues that what the Reformer really had in mind is not the separation but an integration of grace and moral order: “Far from being indifferent to good and evil, order and disorder, the bestowal of God’s grace through the gospel is for Luther the only true formation of the human heart, that which alone sets the heart truly in order”⁷⁹. This new way of the interpretation of Luther’s theological conviction as regards moral life paves the way for interesting and promising discussions between Lutherans and Pope John Paul II’s exposition of fundamental questions of Catholic moral teaching in *Veritatis Splendor*.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 154–155. Cf. a similar brief remark by Saarinen in his *Protestant Undertones? Averroist Overtones?*, 127.

⁷⁶ O. O’DONOVAN, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 1986, 153.

⁷⁷ D.S. YEAGO, *Martin Luther on Grace, Law, and Moral Life: Prolegomena to an Ecumenical Discussion of Veritatis Splendor*, „The Thomist” 62 (1998), 163–164. „[...] for most Lutheran theologians, grace is grace precisely because it in no way seeks to put the life of the sinner ‘in order’ – if it did so, it would be law, not grace. On the contrary, grace simply embraces the sinner in God’s unconditional favor, an acceptance and affirmation that are wholly indifferent to right and wrong, good and evil, order and disorder”. *Ibidem*. David Yeago is a Lutheran theologian recently teaching at the North American Lutheran Seminary in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

⁷⁸ *Veritatis Splendor*, 24.

⁷⁹ D. YEAGO, *Martin Luther on Grace, Law, and Moral Life*, 164.

Nicholas Peter Harvey points his brief comment just to one part of the Pope's encyclical whose focus is on freedom and law⁸⁰. His conviction is that the Pope's diagnosis of the contemporary culture and morality is "tragically misconceived". However, it seems that the author of this comment misapprehends the text of the papal document (at least parts of it) and relying on peculiar reading of Sacred Scripture argues that the Pope offers "a grossly anachronistic portrayal of Jesus as a proponent of exceptionless moral norms" and is "seeking to defend the fantasy of a univocal concept of exceptionless law"⁸¹.

Obviously any comment and opinion, in this case of *Veritatis Splendor*, originates from its author's fundamental position, assumptions and key values. It is clearly observable in a very negative estimation of the papal document by Harry M. Kuitert⁸². Strangely, for him John Paul II's basic failure lies in his "total remoteness from real life, in anthropology as well as morals". He states that ethics has in fact nothing to do with revelation nor nature but solely with "experience". Consequently, that experience enables to acknowledge not only the plurality of Western culture but also of non-Western world. Finally it is "up to us to find out [...] the ways in which we serve humanity and the ways in which we do not"⁸³. Thus Kuitert's vision of morality is entirely individualistic, subjective, and hence relative. It even seems to be deprived of its Christian character.

In Ronald Preston's commentary on *Veritatis Splendor*, an initial perception of John Paul II's encyclical is that it is an "attempt to recover from the disaster of *Humanae Vitae*" and in fact has a lot to do with an "internal power struggle involving the position of the Curia and [...] the negative attitude of the official Roman Catholic authority to other churches"⁸⁴. It is several times that the idea of the infallible magisterium is challenged in this comment. Preston undermines the encyclical's teaching on intrinsically evil acts as well as on issues like fundamental option or proportionalism. As a matter of fact all these he sees as the Pope's secondary targets while the central one is to discipline moral theologians. He hopes that those Roman Catholic theologians who disagree

⁸⁰ N.P. HARVEY, *Comment on Veritatis Splendor*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 14–15. Harvey is a theologian and writer, a former monk of Downside Abbey.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁸² See H.M. KUITERT, *Veritatis Splendor*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 19–21. Kuitert (b. 1924), has been a noted Dutch Reformed theologian who taught for many years at the Free University in Amsterdam. He is now regarded by some as an agnostic and no longer a Christian theologian.

⁸³ H.M. KUITERT, *Veritatis Splendor*, 20–21. He even states that for the Pope „human beings are [...] equated with men, women do not come into the picture”. Cf. *ibidem*.

⁸⁴ R. PRESTON, *Veritatis Splendor: A Comment*, „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 38. Preston (d. 2001) was an influential Anglican social theologian who taught for several decades at the University of Manchester.

with the Pope will not be silenced because “dissentients are far too numerous to be silenced”⁸⁵.

Another example of a brief and in a sense allergic reaction to John Paul II’s encyclical is *Some Anglican Comments on Veritatis Splendor* by Helen Oppenheimer⁸⁶. Her general disapproval of the Pope’s teaching makes her refer to the encyclical as “a new piece of obscurantism” whose English translation “hurts” and is “tactless” because it has learnt nothing from feminism. She points to Christian freedom as a main theme of the document but “because freedom given its head is dangerous” the Pope equates the freedom of love with the teaching of the Magisterium⁸⁷. Oppenheimer correlates – in a bizarre way – John Paul II’s teaching with that of St. Paul because it is “not quite trusting its own insights”⁸⁸.

* * *

While the clear purpose of Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* was “to reflect on the whole of the Church’s moral teaching, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied”⁸⁹, it has as well paved the way for serious discussions among moral theologians and ethicists coming from different Christian traditions. In this sense it has proved how important is a common endeavour in the field of morality regardless of the real differences among Christians of East and West. If the ecumenical imperative is to include moral implications of Christian faith, both the Encyclical and its aftermath, with so many examples referred to above, confirm the necessity of dialogue and common consideration.

According to not few of the commentators, and what L. Woodhead emphasises explicitly, the Pope’s moral encyclical seems to be a “divided document”. Some of its sections or argumentation are described as important, relevant to the contemporary cultural situation and illuminating – like the opening meditation on the rich young man’s encounter with Jesus or other sections where both Christological and eschatological dimensions of Christian moral life find their

⁸⁵ R. PRESTON, *Veritatis Splendor: A Comment*, 42. „[...] Moral theologians are required to give it [the magisterium] loyal assent, both internal and external (110). This is the core position of the Encyclical”. *Ibidem*, 41.

⁸⁶ See „Studies in Christian Ethics” 7 (1994) no. 2, 35–37. Oppenheimer (b. 1926) is an Anglican theologian and ethicist, well-known and active in the British public and Church life.

⁸⁷ „This Encyclical is not cold, nor legalistic; but, hardly surprisingly, paternalist”. *Ibidem*, 36.

⁸⁸ „The Encyclical is Pauline in its understanding of what Christian morality is about. It is also Pauline in not quite trusting its own insights. St. Paul saw that in Christ ‘there is neither male nor female’ (Gal 3:28) but could not treat women fully as equals”. *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 4.

expression. Other parts of the document are perceived as defective, even flawed for instance when they are seen as misreading Aquinas or Sacred Scripture, as well as in the papal criticism of some ideas and ethical theories⁹⁰. Nevertheless, what is particularly valuable is an endeavour on the part of some of the reviewers to uncover a basic unity of *Veritatis Splendor*. It is found in Oliver O'Donovan's brief analysis where the encyclical is portrayed as a sketch of "moral theology as a whole" and thus "a pastoral and evangelistic response to the existential question constantly thrown up by the human agent who needs to find a ground and end of action"⁹¹. Consequently, the Pope offers a description of Christian ethics where the three consecutive sections of the document refer to the three dimensions of Christian ethics being teleological, deontological and eschatological.

The Pope's emphasis on the ecclesial character of moral theology and the need for moral theologians to work with and under Magisterium Ecclesiae are found by many of those non-Catholic commentators as exclusively Catholic. This makes them distance themselves definitely from that aspect of the papal teaching. The central and longest section of the encyclical has been often described as a criticism of modernity and several moral theories that had found their place and acceptance even among Catholic theologians. While some of those non-Catholic ethicists agree with the papal assessment and appreciate his critique, others disapprove of one or more aspects of the vision. Surprisingly enough, there seems to be more of those who share the Pope's concern about the condition of contemporary Christian ethics than among Catholic moral theologians (in some circles), not referred to in this paper, who have laid out their very unfavourable reactions to the positions presented in *Veritatis Splendor*⁹².

While not a proper review of John Paul II's encyclical as such, Keith Ward offered his own brief but illuminating as well as valuable comment to the Pope's manner of arguing on essential moral issues. He calls *Veritatis Splendor* "a rigorous and finely argued document" that is an emphatic example of how Catholic ethics combines both reason and faith in its outlining moral norms. This bears a clear personalist and Christological mark because for Christians moral life is eventually „culminated in the person of Jesus" and his great commandment of love of God and neighbour⁹³. Though brief, Ward's remarks appear as a precious

⁹⁰ „[...] the most common strategy amongst commentators on *Veritatis Splendor* is to focus on one aspect of the document as the most real and to more or less discount the rest, even when the dividedness of the Encyclical is explicitly acknowledged". L. WOODHEAD, *Veritatis Splendor: Some Editorial Reflections*, „Studies in Christian Ethics" 7 (1994) no. 2, 5.

⁹¹ O. O'DONOVAN, *A Summons to Reality*, 1550.

⁹² Cf. S. NOWOSAD, *Veritatis splendor w „The Tablet"*, 101–107.

⁹³ „The papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, for example, is a rigorous and finely argued document on morality which makes clear that Christian moral decisions are made on grounds of reflection on natural human inclinations, in the light of belief in a creator God and the revelation of God's

contribution to an ecumenical reflection on what is fundamental in Christian faith and life.

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love in Jesus Christ. When reference is made to the Bible, it is taken as a record of developing moral insights that culminated in the person of Jesus, who gave as his main principle of interpretation, ‘Love God and your neighbour as yourself’. That principle needs to be carefully worked out, but it certainly excludes applying ancient biblical texts literally without reference to the Church’s long tradition of moral reflection”. K. WARD, *Faith, Hype and a Lack of Clarity*, „The Tablet” 260 (2006) no. 8623 (21.01.2006), 5. Keith Ward (b. 1938) is an Anglican clergyman and highly regarded British philosopher and theologian, who between 1991 and 2003 was Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford.

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