

expression of its inner identity; the family carries this mission out by being faithful to its own proper being as a community of life and love: The "apostolic mission of the family is rooted in baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan" (no. 52).

The Pope notes two characteristics of the prophetic apostolate of the family: First of all, it is exercised within the family itself by encouraging and helping family members to live fully their Christian vocation. Wisely, the Holy Father notes that "just as in the Church the work of evangelization can never be separated from the sufferings of the apostle, so in the Christian family parents must face with courage and great interior serenity the difficulties that their ministry of evangelization sometimes encounters in their own children" (no. 53). In addition, this prophetic and of defending and spreading the faith, a task that has its roots in baptism and confirmation, and makes Christian married couples and parents witnesses of Christ 'to the ends of the earth,' missionaries, in the true and proper sense, of love and life" (no. 54). One form of this missionary activity, John Paul II observes, "can be exercised even within the family. This happens when some member of the family does not have the faith or does not practice it with consistency. In such a case the other members must give him or her a living witness of their own faith in order to encourage and support him or her along the path toward full acceptance of Christ the Savior" (no. 54).

This, then, is the evangelizing role John Paul II assigns to the Christian family.

IV. Conclusion

There is an intimate bond between Catholic moral life, understood as a *sequela Christi*, a call to holiness, and a summons to be faithful to our baptismal commitment and the work of the "new evangelization." Laypeople in particular have the sacred mission of bringing the truth and good news of Jesus' saving death and resurrection to the secular world in which they live their lives. They are called to be "other Christs," to be his vicarious representatives in the world of everyday life. If they are true to their call they will indeed be a "light to the nations," people who bring others Jesus' own self-giving love.

Revisiting the Biblical Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of *Veritatis Splendor*

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I. Introduction

AS THE NEO-THOMISTIC revival lost momentum in the 1950s, a growing number of Catholic thinkers had been persuaded by those who emphasized a "return to the sources" that a more rigorous philosophical development of the Thomistic tradition, broadly speaking, should not be at the forefront of the Church's intellectual response to the challenges presented by modern thought. Instead, many were convinced that the mysteries of the faith would be most appealing when presented through a rich array of primarily biblical language and images. On the other hand, John XXIII and Paul VI insisted that the Second Vatican Council must uphold the doctrinal and moral tradition, expressed especially in the conceptual formulations of Thomism.¹

In moral theology there was growing dissatisfaction with the predominant emphasis on natural law and casuistry, and with the lack of integration with Scripture, the sacraments, and the spiritual life. Following the enthusiastic response to the more ample reference to Scripture in Bernard

¹ Here I cite footnote 100 of *Veritatis Splendor*, as it makes my point precisely: "The words spoken by John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council can also be applied to moral doctrine: 'This certain and unchanging teaching (i.e., Christian doctrine in its completeness), to which the faithful owe obedience, needs to be more deeply understood and set forth in a way adapted to the needs of our time. Indeed, this deposit of the faith, the truths contained in our time-honored teaching, is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else'." AAS 54 (1962), 792; cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 12, 1962, 2."

Haring's *The Law of Christ*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council issued their oft-cited call for a biblical renewal of moral theology.² In the post-conciliar era, various efforts have been made toward fulfilling this mandate; however, none of these have been successful in combining a credible and compelling biblical vision of the Christian life with a moral philosophy adequate to the Catholic tradition.

In this essay, I will focus primarily on offering an explanation of why this mandate has yet to be fulfilled, following the principle that a problem properly defined is half-solved. On this basis, I will argue that *Veritatis Splendor* not only encourages us to take up again the mandate of the Second Vatican Council for this biblical renewal of moral theology, but also gives several helpful indications of how this might be done. I will proceed in three steps. First, I will briefly sketch the decisive characteristics of the theological and philosophical context in which early efforts toward this renewal were attempted. Second, I will highlight some of the most influential developments in Catholic moral theology between the Council and the encyclical, offering a preliminary assessment of the extent to which these efforts can be considered an authentic biblical renewal of the discipline. Third, I will summarize how *Veritatis Splendor*, read in light of John Paul's basic theological approach, both encourages a recommitment to conciliar mandate and exemplifies how it might be fulfilled.

II. The Post-Conciliar Theological and Philosophical Context

Early efforts toward the biblical renewal of moral theology were heavily influenced by the theological and philosophical context in which they took place. Whereas various forms of what John McDermott has called "conceptual Thomism"³ had formed the backbone of Catholic theology

² The primary text is from the decree on the formation of priests: "Special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching." Note that this reference to the renewal of moral theology follows a more general discussion of a renewal of theology, in which Scripture is first treated as the animating principle of theology, followed by a study of the Fathers and the broader historical development, giving special attention to the Thomistic synthesis. See Austin Flannery, ed., "*Optatum totius*," in *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (North Port, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), Chap. 5, §16.

³ For the notion of "conceptual Thomism," and the following characterization of the shift from it to "transcendental Thomism," I am following the work of John M. McDermott, SJ, because it offers a particularly thoughtful analysis of post-conciliar intellectual climate, including the place of John Paul II's thought within it. This is an important area needing further research, and I plan to offer a more extended discussion in a forthcoming book that expands upon the present article. For a more adequate presentation of McDermott's work on this "shift," see

and philosophy since the Council of Trent, especially during the neo-Thomistic revival, the period following Vatican II was marked by a widespread shift to "transcendental Thomism." Among other characteristics, this "conceptual Thomism" had been distinguished by a confidence in the ability of Thomistic concepts and propositional formulations to attain to the truth of things.⁴

This first part will proceed in four major steps: (1) we will trace the shift from conceptual Thomism to transcendental Thomism;⁵ (2) we will summarize several of the ways that transcendental Thomism impacts moral theology; (3) we will briefly survey some ways in which the embrace of historical-critical methods of Scripture study impacts efforts

his "The Methodological Shift in Twentieth Century Thomism," *Seminarium* 31 (1991): 245-66, and the many references cited therein and below. More generally, the approach one takes to the renewal of moral theology is heavily dependent upon the narrative framework within which one interprets not only the history of moral theology, but also the history of the Thomistic intellectual tradition.

⁴ For example, some of the most important of these Aristotelian/Thomistic "concepts" pertaining to the articulation of Catholic doctrine include nature, person, substance, accident, form, matter, essence, and existence. For the sake of precision we should note that, strictly speaking, Thomism distinguishes between the internal "concept" as "the natural, formal and imaging sign" and the corresponding "term" (a written or spoken word), understood as the external, "artificial, instrumental and non-imaging sign of the concept." Thus, my examples are really "terms," which are understood to correspond to concepts in our minds. See William A. Wallace, *The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians* (New York: Alba House, 1977), 15-16. Most philosophical traditions hold for the existence of concepts, or mental entities as the internal signification of our words. But for a provocative rejection of the very existence of such mental entities, see Robert Sokolowski, "Exorcising Concepts," *Review of Metaphysics* 40 (1989): 451-63. This topic also requires a more extended discussion.

⁵ In what follows, I will offer descriptive, sometimes sympathetic and sometimes critical comments regarding transcendental Thomism. While open to draw useful insights from this school, my position is closer to Avery Dulles's "postcritical theology," to the example of John Paul II, to Aquinas himself, and perhaps to many associated with what McDermott calls conceptual Thomism. Dulles summarizes that "[transcendental Thomism] retains its Thomistic inspiration, it is unquestionably viable. But to the extent that it borrows from transcendental idealism, it remains contestable." See his *The Crisis of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 132 and also 124. It seems to me that, when one adopts a "modern/critical" bias toward revising traditional conceptual and propositional formulations of doctrinal and moral teachings as opposed to a post-critical respect for them as bearing tacit knowledge and mediating true judgments, one has conceded too much to a highly deficient modern epistemology. Further clarification and broader consensus on this point is crucial to the renewal of Catholic theology. For a study of the important but neglected dialogue between Jacques Maritain and J. Maréchal on this topic, see Ronald

toward a biblical renewal of moral theology; and (4) we will note how the centrality of the debate over sexual ethics diverts attention from a biblical renewal of moral theology.

Tracing the Shift from Conceptual to Transcendental Thomism

Transcendental Thomism shares common roots with mid-century *nouvelle théologie* in the work of the Jesuits Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal.⁶ These thinkers sought to show that Aquinas offered a better framework within which to appropriate certain insights of modern philosophy than the various post-Kantian alternatives.

This school of thought is built upon Rousselot's recovery and elucidation of Aquinas's distinction between *intellectus*, or understanding, and *ratio*, or reason.⁷ Following this distinction, the prime analog for *intellectus*, and knowledge in general, is the divine mind, or God's knowledge of all things through a simple act of understanding. The human intellect is understood primarily in light of its orientation and underlying dynamism toward fulfillment in the perfect knowledge of beatific vision; indeed, this dynamism was considered so fundamental that each earthly act of human knowing was understood to include an implicit knowledge of God. However, because of its limited character as *intellectus imperfectus*, human knowing involves both *intellectus* and *ratio*, with reason working to remedy our defects in understanding.⁸ This foundational element of transcendental Thomism is widely accepted today, even by scholars who stick

McCamy, *Out of a Kantian Chrysalis?: A Maritainian Critique of Fr. Maréchal* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998). For a recent rejection of any basis for transcendental Thomism in Aquinas, see John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

⁶ For this section, I have benefited from John A. Gallagher's *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 140–61.

⁷ See his *L'Intellectualisme de saint Thomas* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1909), ET: *The Intellectualism of St. Thomas*, trans. James E. O'Mahoney, OFM Cap (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935). Joseph Maréchal is the other major figure in the early development of transcendental Thomism. As evident in the previously cited work by McCamy, traditional Thomists saw these thinkers as Kantians and predicted their movement would lead to problematic theological consequences. For a careful analysis of this question, granting various modern insights while rejecting a strong transcendentalism and the resulting revisionism, see the works of John M. McDermott, SJ, starting with his *Love and Understanding: The Relation of Will and Intellect in Pierre Rousselot's Christological Vision* (Rome: Universitas Gregoriana Editrice, 1983). For our present purposes, McDermott's reading is helpful as it parallels John Paul II's theological approach.

⁸ Here I borrow from the more detailed discussion in my "Martin Rhonheimer's *Natural Law and Practical Reason*," *Sapientia* 56 (2001): 533–34.

more closely to Aquinas such as Servais Pinckaers. Indeed, Bernard Lonergan and others have argued forcefully that the conceptualists were closer to Scotus than Aquinas in their overemphasis on the concept and corresponding neglect of the act of understanding.⁹

Early advocates of this distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* not only pointed to its textual basis in the Angelic Doctor's teaching, but also argued that it merited greater contemporary development to purify Thomistic thought from the influences of enlightenment rationalism, with its exaggerated confidence in human reason. Similarly, they saw a greater appreciation for this distinction as providing a better account of human knowledge of the divine mysteries; these, they would argue, are initially grasped intuitively through *intellectus*, and then more discursively, though imperfectly, through a reasoning (*ratio*) that makes use of concepts and rational explication, leading to a deeper understanding. Moreover, this basic approach of affirming the mysterious depths of theological realities, claiming a real but limited grasp of them through a knowledge that is initially more intuitive, and then allowing for a deeper grasp of their intelligibility through reason and conceptual formulations, offered a promising framework for addressing the question of the development of doctrine.¹⁰

Perhaps more importantly, advocates saw in this epistemological distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* a path toward the reintegration of the Thomistic tradition with its biblical, patristic, and spiritual roots.¹¹

⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David Burrell (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967). Knasas, on the other hand, rejects this a priori emphasis on an intellectual dynamism and argues for a retrieval of the neo-Thomistic a posteriori emphasis on sensation as the basic access to reality. See his *Being*, 285–313. It is a positive sign for Thomistic thought that these central questions are getting the attention they deserve.

¹⁰ For example, whereas the magisterial declarations of Marian dogmas might be explained as deductions from previous doctrinal propositions according to the methodology of conceptual Thomism, this framework would treat them as a further unpacking of something implicit in the mystery of Christ.

¹¹ The recovery of this dimension of Thomistic thought facilitated the appropriation of various useful insights from modern philosophy. For example, it helped Catholic scholars to accommodate something of Heidegger's emphases on the importance of implicit knowledge over explicit, on the importance of an invoked, practical viewpoint over detachment and objectivity, on the social dimension of knowing over methodological individualism, and on the importance of holistic perspectives over a mere multiplication of distinctions. This parallels Avery Dulles's characteristics of a post-critical philosophy. See his *Craft of Theology*, 5–7. On the other hand, it is not clear to me how a more neo-Thomistic and philosophical retrieval of Aquinas, such as that proposed by Knasas, will address the need of Thomistic theologians to appeal to these more biblical, patristic, and postmodern sensibilities.

However, while recovering and emphasizing the underlying dynamic movement of the intellect toward the fullness of truth, and thereby relativizing somewhat the epistemological status of conceptual formulations, John M. McDermott shows that the best transcendental Thomists acknowledged the ability of concepts and propositional statements to attain to the truth of things in judgments.¹² Put another way, just as Aquinas maintained a careful balance between a dynamic existential order and an Aristotelian essential order, these thinkers hoped to maintain a similar balance in the contemporary context.

Indeed, we might read the documents of the Second Vatican Council as embodying a blending of this new emphasis with the earlier conceptual Thomism. For example, documents like *Lumen Gentium* utilize various biblical images to mediate the mysteries of the faith, while the documents as a whole explicitly maintain continuity with previous doctrinal formulations, although often in footnotes. Similarly, McDermott argues persuasively that, although there is no evidence that transcendental Thomism directly influenced Pope John Paul II, his basic theological approach could be understood as a commonsense blending of these two.¹³

On the other hand, the risks inherent in such partial movements from traditional varieties of conceptual Thomism were clearly recognized before the Council, and clearly proven thereafter. The most obvious example of pre-conciliar concern was the 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis* of Pius XII, which effectively halted the *nouvelle théologie* movement, citing concerns over a false irenicism toward modern thought and a tendency toward dogmatic relativism.¹⁴ In this period leading to the Council, the two thinkers who were to lead the transition to transcendental Thomism, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, escaped a similar critical scrutiny in light of the encyclical, even though they followed the fundamental shift initiated by Roussetot and Maréchal; this is perhaps

¹² See his "The Context of *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Prophecy and Diplomacy: The Moral Doctrine of Pope John Paul II*, ed. John J. Conley, SJ and Joseph W. Koterski, SJ (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 115–72.

¹³ See, for example, John M. McDermott, SJ, "The Theology of John Paul II: A Response" in *The Thought of John Paul II*, ed. John M. McDermott, SJ (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1993), 55–68, and "The Context of *Veritatis Splendor*," 166–72. I would suggest, however, that Karol Wojtyła was certainly exposed to the moderate accommodation of transcendental insights through the work of Henri de Lubac. Moreover, we might say that his accommodation of certain insights from modern philosophy, without losing the metaphysical grounding of truth claims, mirrors that of the best transcendentalists.

¹⁴ See Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future*, 149–51.

because their early works were so explicitly grounded in Thomistic thought.¹⁵ However, the fears of doctrinal anarchy were realized in the years following the Council, especially as Catholic thinkers engaged more seriously with modern philosophy.¹⁶

Rahner was the most influential of the leading transcendental Thomists, perhaps because of his focus upon particular theological questions, whereas Lonergan focused more upon methodological issues.¹⁷ Although a thorough discussion of this movement is far beyond the scope of this essay, I think it is fair to say that transcendental Thomism can develop in either orthodox or heterodox directions, the former generally characterizing the great thinkers like Lonergan and Rahner, given their deep familiarity with the tradition, and the latter more prevalent among disciples who lack such familiarity.¹⁸ Among the latter it becomes clear that the less one is able to affirm the truth-bearing capacity of traditional and authoritative doctrinal and moral formulations, the more problematic for Catholic theology.¹⁹

With a growing reliance on modern philosophy and a corresponding loss of confidence in traditional Thomistic metaphysics, this new era dominated by transcendental Thomism led to a critical re-evaluation,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153–54.

¹⁶ By modern philosophy, I mean all philosophy following Ockham's break with realism up to the advent of the contemporary, postmodern, era. For those who doubt whether a more traditional Thomistic epistemology is a serious contender in contemporary debate, see John O'Callahan's *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

¹⁷ For understanding these developed forms of transcendental Thomism, the classic work is Otto Muick, *The Transcendental Method*, trans. William D. Seidensticker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). For a recent introduction, see J. A. Di Noia, OP., "Karl Rahner" in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Concise introductory remarks pertaining to moral theology can be found in Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future*, 151–58 and 207–9.

¹⁸ This is not to say that the works of Lonergan and Rahner themselves should be exempt from critical scrutiny, especially as their thought contributes to the subsequent departure of their disciples from the Catholic moral tradition; but the present essay can only touch obliquely on such matters. Once again, the work of John McDermott provides an excellent starting point for those willing to consider developments of, and departures from, traditional Thomistic positions. See, for example, his "Dialectical Analogy: The Oscillating Center of Rahner's Thought," *Gregorianum* 75 (1994): 675–703; and his "Tensions in Lonergan's Theory of Conversion," *Gregorianum* 74 (1993): 101–40.

¹⁹ At a minimum, those who wish to appropriate selected insights associated with transcendental Thomism, in a way that does not lead to Kantian idealism, will need a post-critical stance of deep familiarity with, and sympathy for, the traditional doctrine and practices of the Church.

reformulation, and revision of both the doctrinal and moral teachings that had been expressed in these traditional concepts. Given the mid-century consensus that Western thought had embraced modern philosophy in a definitive way, thereby rejecting Thomistic realism and metaphysics, many concluded that Catholic theology needed to forgo traditional metaphysics and philosophical categories and be rethought in contemporary ones.

Although one can argue that efforts to communicate the faith through the categories of modern, and especially Kantian, philosophy have a certain merit in cultures where such language is widespread, such strategies have proven highly problematic.²⁰ Moreover, recent years have witnessed a shift from the modern to the postmodern era, indicating that the widespread embrace of modern presuppositions by Catholic thinkers needs a critical re-evaluation. Furthermore, within the more recent post-modern context, more Christian thinkers are recognizing the dangers of subjecting Christian theology to the epistemological criteria of modern philosophy.²¹ This may be leading to a more fruitful theological context that remains open to accommodating the legitimate insights of transcendental thought, modern philosophy, and postmodern philosophy while retaining the crucial elements of Thomistic realism and metaphysics, thereby upholding the doctrinal and moral tradition.²²

As practiced in the post-conciliar era, transcendental Thomism is inclined toward the ongoing reformulation of doctrines in the terminology of contemporary cultures, presupposing these cultures are something to which the faith needs to accommodate itself. This basic presupposition

²⁰ Bruce Marshall observes that when Christian doctrine has conflicted with the perspective of modern philosophy, the general approach of modern theology has been to reinterpret even the most central Christian claims to meet the epistemic standards of modernity. See his *Trinity and Truth, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

²¹ I deal at some length with the problematic relationship between modern philosophy and Christian theology in my "Towards a Postcritical Recovery of the New Testament Foundations of Christian Ethics: A Catholic, Evangelical and Thomistic Narrative," *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003): 261–86.

²² From our postmodern perspective, we can suggest several factors that indicate whether a scholar achieves the benefits promised by such developments of the Thomistic tradition, or whether they necessarily lead to the doctrinal anarchy of the post-conciliar era. For example, one must first have a deep familiarity with the tradition. Second, in marked contrast to the modern distrust of tradition, one must have a sympathy toward it, treasuring it as a vehicle through which God discloses to us knowledge of himself and the divine plan of salvation. Third, one must affirm the ability of past and present conceptual formulations to mediate true, albeit limited, judgments.

of much post-conciliar thought is now receiving the level of critical scrutiny that it deserves. As Tracy Rowland has argued forcefully, the treatment of culture in *Caudium et Spes* is ambiguous and, if interpreted through the metaphor of "opening the windows," instead of through the Christocentric theological anthropology of No. 22, is highly problematic.²³ Indeed, the first reading ignores all the significant pre-conciliar scholarship on culture, including that of Romano Guardini, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and others who insist that culture is inseparable from religious presuppositions (i.e., *cultus*). If the document is read in this first way, culture appears as an autonomous, theologically neutral reality, and something to which the Church must accommodate itself, assuming modern persons are fundamentally products of secular modern culture. However, leading contemporary thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre have offered powerful analyses of modern culture, emphasizing how it works against an understanding of human flourishing through growth in the Christian virtues. Moreover, other scholars like von Balthasar, and David Schindler following his lead, argue that the culture of modernity, because of its anti-theological bias, is unable to mediate the transcendentals of goodness, truth, and beauty, which disclose the supernatural destiny of human persons. In light of these growing critiques, the Church needs to be more critical in its accommodation to modernity.

The Impact of Transcendental Thomism on Moral Theology

Following upon the more general philosophical and methodological shifts indicated above, the widespread adoption of strong forms of transcendental Thomism had profound implications for moral theology. Because of its emphasis on the dynamism of the mind toward the fullness of truth in an intuitive vision of God, transcendental Thomism tends to relativize internal mental concepts, the external terms corresponding to them, the propositional statements through which doctrines are articulated, and the judgments corresponding to them.

Similarly, in light of the prevailing preference for a unified, intuitive perspective over divisions and concepts, this transcendentalism tends to dissolve various distinctions deemed essential in traditional moral theology and philosophy. These would include the distinctions between intellect and will, matter and form, subject and object, love of God and love of neighbor, and the natural and supernatural orders. I would agree that there are many reasons to prefer more unified perspectives, especially in

²³ See Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003).

