

## *Veritatis Splendor: Overview & Discussion Questions*

### **Introduction (Blessing and secs. 1-5)**

Jesus Christ, the true light that enlightens everyone  
The purpose of the present Encyclical

### **Chapter I. Christ and the answer to the question about morality (secs.6-27)**

[*The personalist center of morality*; an extended meditation on the account of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, followed by a brief reflection upon the Great Commission: how following Christ is at the center of Christian ethics and how the Ten Commandments fulfill their ultimate trajectory in the dispositions prized in the Beatitudes.]

"Someone came to him..." (Mt 19:16)  
 "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16)  
 "There is only one who is good" (Mt 19:17)  
 "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17)  
 "If you wish to be perfect" (Mt 19:21)  
 "Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21)  
 "With God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26)  
 "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20)

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What makes it important to John Paul II to place following Jesus as the key to Christian morality?
- Were you surprised by any of his reflections upon the story of the rich young ruler?
- Why does he argue that the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes are interrelated?
- How important is obedience to Christian discipleship?

### **Chapter II. The Church and the discernment of certain tendencies in present-day moral theology (secs.28-83)**

[*The theoretical realignment necessary for Catholic moral theology*; specifically, a new awareness that at the center of modern ethics is a high concern with human freedom, and yet without a sense of universal truth, the meaning of the conscience changes in very destructive ways.]

Teaching what befits sound doctrine (cf. Tit 2:1)  
 "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32)

#### I. Freedom and Law

[Freedom is found in accepting God's commands, and the role for human reason and creativity in ethical life and thought is founded upon this truth. Human dignity and dominion is from and under God the Creator. Natural law cannot be reduced to sociological statistics, nor does it bifurcate freedom and nature. Even given history and culture, some things about human nature do not change and are ultimately founded upon Christ himself.]

"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:17)  
 "God left man in the power of his own counsel" (Sir 15:14)  
 Blessed is the man who takes delight in the law of the Lord (cf. Ps 1:1-2)

"What the law requires is written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15)

"From the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8)

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What are some of the ethical positions that John Paul II is rejecting?
- Why does he argue that freedom is found in accepting and obeying God's commands?
- How does John Paul II seek to balance human freedom and reason with divine revelation?
- How would you evaluate the success of his scriptural exegesis?

#### II. Conscience and truth

[Judgments are not the same as decisions. Conscience is a herald of God's law and has an imperative quality that holds us each accountable, yet it can be mistaken or imperfect in its judgments. ]

Man's sanctuary

The judgment of conscience

Seeking what is true and good

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What is the difference between an ethical judgment and an ethical decision? Why does John Paul II value the first and distrust the second?
- How can conscience be both the voice of God and a faulty human instrument?

#### III. Fundamental choice and specific kinds of behavior

[The fundamental act of freedom cannot be separated from our concrete decisions, and the heart of the Gospel is the radical decision to follow Christ. The character of our actions do influence the state of ourselves.]

"Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal 5:13)

Mortal and venial sin

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What is true about the fundamental freedom choice? What is mistaken about it?
- Is the distinction between moral and venial sin a necessary one?

#### IV. The moral act

[Consequentialist theories of ethical action ignore that some species of actions are wrong under all circumstances. Our true telos is eternity with the Triune God, and the object of our deliberate actions must itself be good.]

Teleology and teleologism

The object of the deliberate act

"Intrinsic evil": it is not licit to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Rom 3:8)

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What makes one kind of teleology acceptable to the Gospel and another dangerous?
- Are certain acts intrinsically evil? Why and/or why not?

### **Chapter III. Moral good for the life of the Church and of the world (secs.84-117)**

[*The missiological focus of the Church is the freedom found in Christ; Martyrdom is a counter-example to consequentialism—doing the right thing may cost us our very lives; the repentant conscience has the goal of evangelization before it, and the teaching Magisterium has a responsibility to correct ethical teaching.*]

"For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1)

Walking in the light (cf. 1 Jn 1:7)

Martyrdom, the exaltation of the inviolable holiness of God's law

Universal and unchanging moral norms at the service of the person and of society

Morality and the renewal of social and political life

Grace and obedience to God's law

Morality and new evangelization

The service of moral theologians

Our own responsibilities as Pastors

### **Conclusion. Mary, Mother of Mercy (secs.118-120)**

#### *Discussion Questions*

- What makes martyrdom an important counter-example to situational or consequentialist ethics?
- How are universal ethics necessary to human flourishing?
- Does John Paul II's position undercut salvation by grace alone, as has sometimes been charged?
- How much of his argument is dependent upon his view of Church authority?