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## Discerning God's Will

The expression “discerning God’s will” has been quite a household word in spiritual and religious circles and, particularly so, since the Second Vatican Council. This is not because the Council issued any particular document about discernment. Its teaching, however, as deeply rooted in Revelation, Tradition and Scripture found particularly strong inspiration in Pope John XXIII’s charismatic call to the whole Church to “read the signs of the times.”<sup>2</sup> The Council Fathers, taking to heart these prophetic words of the Lord, worked hard to discern what the Spirit of God was calling the Church to. The Vatican Council Constitutions and Decrees, being the benchmark against which to judge the reform of Catholic pastoral practice, are still urgently calling the Christian Community to shake off much dust gathered over the years and to strenuously commit to live and witness the vitality, freshness and joy of the Gospel.

Vatican II very bravely and in a spirit of faith faced the challenges of a secularist society and of a fast-changing culture that has deeply affected and swayed the lifestyle of people. Fundamental Vatican II documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Nostra Aetate* have surely made us realize how seriously the Council took up John XXIII’s prophetic call to discern the will of God by responding to the urgent pastoral needs of the people living in modern times. This was the context that had revived the awareness and the concrete need of spiritual discernment in the Church. Faced with the new challenges of the twenty-first century, the Christian community cannot but

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<sup>2</sup> See Mt 16:3, “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”

commit itself seriously to spiritually discern what Christ is calling us to, the will of his Father in living the joy of love in these difficult times.

### ***Amoris Laetitia* and Discernment**

The following are only a few notes and reflections about the process of discerning God's will. They are hints about the main import and the art of spiritual discernment, emphasizing the conditions necessary for good discernment. I do not intend taking up any particular case for spiritual discernment. The principal framework in mind will be, however, Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and its particular context pertaining to Christian families. More specifically and concretely, I am drawn by the Pope's words of exhortation addressed to couples who, though living in contrast with the Church's teaching about married life as revealed to us by God, could still be truly and sincerely willing to discern the will of God about their present concrete situation and their free moral responsibilities. Pope Francis exhorts the faithful, particularly the families sincerely willing to be integrated fully with the Christian Community, to spiritually discern God's will and find out whether in their particular 'irregular' concrete situations, they may - trusting in God's infinite merciful love - live in God's friendship and love, the divine life of grace, and consequently be fully integrated with the Shepherd's fold, the Christian community, through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

### **Discernment: Its General Meaning and its Different Forms**

First of all, the etymological import of the word 'discernment' itself gives a good lead for its right understanding. Rooted in the Latin word *cernere*, meaning 'to see' and also related to the Greek word *dia-krinein*, (*dia*: 'through', *krinein*: 'sifting'), discernment indicates a process of separating and distinguishing one thing from another, to be able to see clearly the different reasons for or against the issue being discerned.<sup>3</sup>

There are various areas where discernment is applied to reach a good decision. In fact, today we come across different forms of discernment, namely, social,

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<sup>3</sup> "Cernere" (to see) bears similar meanings connotated with "perceiving," "being acquainted with," "understanding," "judging." It is also important to emphasize the particle "dis" in the word *dis-cernere*, since it clearly points out the importance of distinguishing rightly one reason or situation from another to reach a clear vision in a complex and obscure situation. The word "discernment" is also related to a word-series, which indicates also the different shades of meaning related to the word itself, namely, *crisis*, *criterion*, *critique*, and *discretion*.

moral, managerial, spiritual, Christian and others. The major distinguishing factors, besides their possible different methods, are the subject-matter, the motivations and the values inherent in the issues to be studied or discerned. These modes of discernment, although quite different in their objectives, may also in certain particular circumstances include and consider the spiritual element in their discernment.

Taking discernment in its general meaning, namely, as a tool in our daily life for reaching good decisions, we are expected first of all to pause and study well the different situations confronting us. We then weigh and evaluate objectively the different reasons in favour of or against each alternative. This rational process demands a good grasp of the whole situation and it surely depends on one's interior freedom, intelligence, and judicious mind for the objective evaluation of the reasons for and against the matter being discerned in view of the final decision to be taken.

### **Spiritual Discernment**

These are a few reflections on the meaning of spiritual discernment and about the main tenets regulating this discernment, when faced with questions or problems in our personal spiritual life, in the family, in one's work or profession, in our relationships, and in the social, political life. Discernment implies a process and the discerning persons are expected to be well-equipped with the way the discernment is carried out.<sup>4</sup>

In its strict meaning, the spiritual discernment refers to the discerning *experience of the promptings of the Holy Spirit* working within us and in our life-relationships. The spiritual factor is strictly and mainly connected with the purpose, the process, and the operation of the discernment.

Reflecting on the spiritual discernment, one is expected to keep in mind first and foremost that the faith issue is at its very centre. The spiritual discernment, grounded in faith experiences, is an expression of one's faith in a personal God who intimately loves us and cares for each one of us. Through various ways and means, God communicates himself to us, inspiring us, communicating himself to us and thus inviting us to listen to and accept his inner voice within us. As an expression of faith the spiritual discernment is a sincere searching for the word of God and of his loving will in our daily life, particularly when we are faced with personal or communitarian decisions for which we are responsible. In discernment we enter into a deep and very delicate experience, namely, the

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<sup>4</sup> Gilles Cusson, "Pour mieux situer le 'discernement spirituel,'" *Cahiers de Spiritualité Ignatienne* 67 (1993): 212-216.

spiritual communication between the Divine Spirit and ourselves, while the evil forces will still be exerting their subtle influences to lead us astray, take bad decisions, and thus distance us from God and from his loving goodness.

## Jesus and the Will of His Father

Jesus Christ - the Son of God - has set for us a sublime example of searching and fulfilling God's will throughout his life. This was the main and principal aim in all his life, the motivation and integrating factor of his personality and of his salvific mission. Though strongly resisted and criticized by the high religious authorities and in dire conflict with the resisting stance of the Scribes and Pharisees, Christ strongly and clearly affirms that his life is all centred in fulfilling the will of God the Father:

‘And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’ (Jn 8:29).

Since the Resurrection of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost, searching the will of God, discerning the direction of the Holy Spirit, had always been the driving force in the mission of the Apostles and of the disciples. In his Letter to the Romans St Paul explicitly exhorts the community to discern and read the will of God: “I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (Gk: *to aioni*: this age), but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God” (Rm 12:1-2).

In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul again insists on the need of discerning the will of God: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test (Gk: *dokimazete*) everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil” (I Thess 5:16-20).

In his First Letter St John writes to the first communities: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test (Gk: *dokimazete*) the spirits, to see whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this, you know the Spirit of God: every spirit, which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God” (I Jn 4:1-2).

Since the spiritual discernment to discover the concrete will of God for us is an experience of our faith in God, prayer has to be the concrete expression of this faith-experience. Communicating with the Lord, prayerfully searching in faith

what God wants us to do in a determined and concrete situation, is a necessary condition for spiritual discernment.

The Desert Fathers used to discern, among other issues, whether it was God's will to be ordained a priest or to accept a bishopric. Another matter for discernment concerned the rules concerning their bodily penances or about changing their locality in the desert. In their discernment about choosing a superior, one fundamental criterion was the candidate's very good experiential knowledge of the Word of God, the Scriptures. Since for them the core of their vow of obedience was their commitment to obeying and following the will of God, then, only one spiritually immersed in the Scriptures would be the best suitable monk, the best candidate to interpret for them the word of God and thus lead them to discern and obey God's will.

## The Field of Discernment

What are the matters which one can discern about? We do not discern about what God has clearly revealed to us as being his divine will for us, for instance, the Ten Commandments, the fundamental values of the Gospel, the Beatitudes, God's universal salvific will and his merciful love for all of us. Nor do we discern about matters clearly forbidden by God.<sup>5</sup> We discern when we are faced with possible, good situations or alternatives, which we do not know God's will about, though we know that what he wills for us will be the right one for us.<sup>6</sup> The subjects or matters for our discernment may be, for instance, vocational decisions, family life, parenthood, matters concerning work or profession, radical life-style, personal or communitarian stands to be taken in family life, in groups or communities, in political life, missionary voluntary work and others. We discern about good issues to find out which one would actually be more pleasing to God;

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Ivens, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), no. 170. St Ignatius clearly states: "It is necessary that all the matters about which we wish to make an election should in themselves be either indifferent or good, so that they function constructively within our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church, and are not bad or opposed to her." Coathalem further explains this point: "If there is a question of a naturally stable state, the choice of which has already been made, and made badly, there is only one resource. One should try to make the best of what one is not permitted to change; one should confide oneself to the mercy of God, and try to sanctify oneself in the situation rashly assumed." Hervé Coathalem, *Ignatian Insights, A Guide to the Complete Spiritual Exercises*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Taichung, Taiwan: Kuangchi Press, 1971), 186. Ignatius himself suggests this, given the particular situation and conditions of the Church's law during his times.

<sup>6</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 171-172; Coathalem, *Ignatian Insights*, 31.



this is the *magis* St Ignatius explicitly and strongly recommends in the *Principle and Foundation of The Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>7</sup>

## Criteria

- i) As a preparation for spiritual discernment, one is expected to renew one's fundamental option for God in Jesus Christ, expressed in deeply desiring to freely accept Christ as the Lord of his/her life with openness to being moved and led by His Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, the first criterion for spiritual discernment is the conviction expressed, as a deep desire and a strong will, to do the will of God, whatever this would be. We cannot begin the process of discerning, if we are still hesitant or dubious about our willingness to do God's will. This first criterion, deeply related and ingrained in the *Principle and Foundation of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>9</sup> is an explicit manifestation of our faith in God and in his love for us in Christ.

- ii) The second criterion is our openness to truth. Sincerity with ourselves and with those involved in the discernment is necessary and should accompany the whole process. This sincerity enforces our openness to truth.
- iii) It is extremely important to be thorough and clear about the issues to be discerned. Hence, all the necessary data have to be gathered, objectively and diligently studied. Without this full information about the alternatives themselves and about the persons involved, one can hardly start considering and weighing the reasons for and against the matter in question.
- iv) To be truly objective in considering, assessing and evaluating the necessary data one has to be interiorly free. The interior freedom is the most important criterion necessary for discernment. This is often hard to attain, for it implies an interior detachment from all disordered inclinations and attachments. Without a truly objective and sincere examination of our inner self, we fail

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<sup>7</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 23.

<sup>8</sup> St Ignatius in his Introduction to the *making of an election* sums up by saying: "Finally, nothing whatever ought to move one to choose such means or deprive myself of them except one alone, the service and praise of God Our Lord and the eternal salvation of my soul." *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 169.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23.

to detect whether there is a deep-seated hard-headedness or a subtle interior resistance to be truly open to listen to others. Moreover, sincerely striving to be interiorly free, one could also detect prejudices, suspicions, pique, envy, resentfulness. More importantly one has to examine oneself well to detect whether there are personal interests or comforts lurking within oneself and swaying one's decisions. Working hard to be interiorly free by striving to overcome these possible disordered attachments which blur one's judgement and derange one's reasoning is what Ignatius calls an attitude of "indifference."<sup>10</sup>

- v) This necessary interior freedom creates an attitude of openness and of readiness to listen to each other, without excluding anyone; moreover, it instils an interior conviction that the Lord may inspire us through any person taking part in the discernment. This active listening and free communication, deeply respecting each and every person, implies a spirit of faith in the workings of the Holy Spirit within the discerning persons. Moreover, it creates a human and serene atmosphere of mutual genuine trust in those discerning the will of the Lord.
- vi) The above criteria surely demand human efforts. However, being a faith-experience and at the same time an accompanying awareness of our human frailty, the whole process of spiritual discernment has to be animated by a continual life of prayer. This prayer-awareness creates an atmosphere of serenity, objectivity, and trust during the whole discerning process and, particularly so, when we are in the process of sifting, appraising, and evaluating the reasons in favour or against the issue being discerned.

### **The Process of Discernment**

- a) A spiritual discernment may be personal or communitarian depending on whether one individual person or a group would be making the discernment. In either case, the essential meaning of spiritual discernment and its main

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., no. 23. "Indifference" as Michael Ivens rightly remarks, "should also be thought of in a positive way, and, regarded positively, it is an affective space within which the movements of the Spirit can be sensed and things seen in relation to the signs of God's will, an affective silence making possible an unconditional listening. The indifference in the Exercises is a stance before God and what makes it possible - and also something quite other than either apathy or stoicism - is a positive desire for God and his will." Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Surrey: Gracewing and Inigo Enterprises, 1998), 31.

tenets are the same; the difference lies in the process and dynamics of the discernment.

- b) When a group is discerning, each and everyone should be and feel free to express his or her opinion. All should be encouraged to express their own views sincerely and charitably. If among the discerning group or community there happen to be persons shouldering important responsibilities, they have to be wary lest they exert any undue influence, particularly by any prevailing air of superiority. In fact, all are expected to use a modest unassuming style in expressing their views for or against the issue or point being discerned.
- c) In a communitarian discernment a facilitator, experienced in the discernment-process - not being however one of the discerning group - will help the participants share their views orderly and calmly without any unnecessary interruptions and in full freedom. During the sharing of the reasons put forward in favour or against, the participants may ask for clarifications. The reasons for and against, serenely addressed to enlighten the issue, are expected to be expressed in a spirit of a communitarian sharing or dialogue, far from tending towards any debating! It is very important to keep the meetings and the sharing group-centred to avoid or overcome the temptation to unduly over-emphasize one's own personal opinions or reasons put forward. This will promote and better ensure an atmosphere of objectivity in the dialogue, since the participants will focus more on listening more attentively and weighing judiciously the reasons or considerations put forward. This attentive listening to each other is a sure sign of accepting and respecting the others in their discerning and in expressing their views. This discerning dialogue is particularly strengthened by the participants' prayerful trust in the Lord leading them in their efforts to search and discern his divine will, while averting the promptings of the evil spirits.
- d) During a communitarian discernment, while listening attentively and dispassionately to the reasons for or against being forwarded by the participants, to help the participants evaluate more objectively their own reasons for or against, St Ignatius recommends having two distinct sessions during the communitarian dialogue: one session just for sharing the reasons in favour and the other simply for the reasons against the issue. This method would enhance detachment and objectivity in searching the truth, since each participant would be trying hard to search and find out all possible reasons both in favour and against.

- e) It is recommended to ask someone experienced in the discernment-process to help the discerning community, particularly if this were their first experience of spiritual communitarian discernment. However, it is very important that the facilitator simply accompany and help them follow the process and by no means influence the participants one way or the other. The facilitator has to keep in mind that the discerning dialogue among the participants is foreign to any contesting or competition. While in a debate there is a battle of minds carried out in a friendly spirit but ending with one side winning the day, by contrast in a discerning dialogue the process is completely different, as explained above.

As a concluding note, one may affirm that being truly free to discern God's will and to detach oneself offers a certain assurance that this communal discernment engenders a true interior peace in all, no matter what the final outcome would be. Moreover, whether the communitarian decision is taken by a consultative or a deliberative vote, it is highly important that each would be interiorly convinced that one has done one's utmost to discern the will of the Lord and each and every participant will be at peace within himself and ready to accept peacefully the decision taken at the end, which Ignatius would describe and express as "*todos contentos*."<sup>11</sup>

### Three Ways or Methods of Discerning

After specifying the fundamental nature of spiritual discernment, the possible issues to be discerned about and the necessary criteria, we now consider and reflect on what St Ignatius calls "Times" of discernment or three situations or ways of discerning God's will as explained in *The Spiritual Exercises*.

The "First Time" is "when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that without doubting or being able to doubt, such a dedicated soul follows what is shown, just as St Paul and St Matthew did when they followed Christ Our Lord."<sup>12</sup>

St Ignatius explains that in this case the person undergoing this spiritual experience is so strongly drawn to follow the inspiration that the person is certain that the call is from God without any doubting. As one of the commentators remarks, "this is the case of an overwhelming attraction, unquestionably

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<sup>11</sup> "All pleased."

<sup>12</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 175.

divine.”<sup>13</sup> However, it does not necessarily follow that it implies an extraordinary experience, with visions. St Ignatius simply says that the person is so sure that God has manifested his will that “such a dedicated soul follows what is shown.” If we take this “First Time” as a very dramatic experience, we would naturally tend to expect it to be rather rare. However, drawing on personal experiences one comes across persons being truly certain of God’s will even without undergoing any extraordinary experience, for instance, when one perseveres peacefully in an extremely difficult situation in life or bravely takes a very difficult step with respect to his or her vocation in life, stating simply: “I am certain, without any doubt that this is what God wants me to do!” Before excluding offhand this case as a discernment of the “First Time,” one could further test the case by the “Third Time of discernment” explained further on.<sup>14</sup>

### Discerning the Spirits

St Ignatius refers to this way of “discerning the spirits” as the “Second Time” which “is present when sufficient clarity and knowledge are received from the experience of consolations or desolations and of discerning the various spirits.”<sup>15</sup>

Interior spiritual peace, as the fruit of the Holy Spirit working within us, is a sure sign of a true authentic discernment. However, it is not easy to detect whether it is truly the peace instilled by the good Spirit. One may normally experience an interior contentment or satisfaction resulting from the good efforts made to assess the reasons pro and against the issues being researched and studied in view of reaching a decision. However, this experience possibly savouring of a certain interior serenity may not be the interior spiritual peace indicating the direction of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it may be quite difficult to make out whether the good Spirit is truly instilling his peace in our heart, when various other spirits could be evoking and exerting different drives and emotions within us.

Discerning the Spirits is fundamental in one’s “spiritual life,” since the Christian, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, is expected to be guided by the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus to his disciples in his last intimate sharing with them, as St John’s gospel testifies: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will

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<sup>13</sup> Coathalem, *Ignatian Insights*, 187.

<sup>14</sup> Jules J. Toner, *Discerning God’s Will* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991), 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 176.

be in you" (Jn 14:15-17). The "world" resists and consequently cannot receive the spirit of truth,<sup>16</sup> since it harbours other movements arising from other forces or 'spirits'. St Paul writing to the Corinthians mentions among other gifts and charisms "the ability to distinguish between spirits" (1 Cor 12:10). St John too, warns his community to be vigilant: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1).

The Second Vatican Council, exhorting priests to be able to discern "the signs of the times" along with the laity, maintains that, "while testing spirits to see if they be of God, priests should discover with the instinct of faith, acknowledge with joy, and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity."<sup>17</sup>

What are the "spirits" that have to be discerned? First of all, we do not have a direct intuition or understanding of the reality of the "spirit," since all our knowledge fundamentally depends on our senses. However, since early Christian times the word "spirit(s)" has been largely in use, bearing different meanings and functions. St Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians expresses prayerfully his desire that the Community at Thessalonica live in holiness in spirit, soul, and body and heartily exhorts them: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit (*pneuma*) and soul (*psike*) and body (*soma*) be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thess 5:23-24).

Although when we speak of our spiritual life we normally understand a life lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we do also experience other 'spirits' at work within us, preternatural and natural,<sup>18</sup> which may be described as forces, tendencies, movements, attractions or repulsions working within us and exerting their influences upon us. Discerning these experiences implies the careful sifting and distinguishing among these motions within us to examine and find out which directions they are or might be leading us to. While going through this exercise, we keep in mind all the time the main and fundamental purpose of our Christian living.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world'" (Jn 8:23).

<sup>17</sup> Vatican II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9, in Walter Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 553.

<sup>18</sup> "Preternatural" out of the ordinary course of nature.

<sup>19</sup> "What then is discernment? It is the distinguishing between these spiritual impulses, moods, and states, so that I can decide whether they are good or bad, so that I can say what their direction

We experience various motions or tendencies evoking within us attractions or repulsions. Unless we make efforts to be fully aware of these movements and tensions working within us, we may be easily led astray by fleeting impulses or emotions carrying ambivalent or deceitful suggestions. Consequently, it is vital to discern and decide rightly when we are gripped and affected by these motions. This is not an easy task and we have to keep praying for spiritual wisdom and for a true and a sincere self-knowledge.

At this stage, we have to examine well and reflect deeply on the interior movements experienced and described as “consolation” and “desolation.” In consolation a person experiences the presence of the Spirit drawing him/her nearer to God and instilling peace and spiritual joy, fruits of an increase in hope, faith, and love. On the other hand, when one experiences desolation one feels distant from God and may go through a period of dryness, sadness, together with craving for lowly things together with a sense of disbelief.<sup>20</sup>

Drawing on the spiritual experience of those who truly strive to follow the Lord, one may deduce that the workings and the influence of the Holy Spirit engender within them true happiness and spiritual joy. St Paul writing to the Galatians explicitly mentions the fruits of the Holy Spirit working within us as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). On the contrary, the evil forces strive to rob us of this spiritual peace and consolation. In fact, even “if the basic orientation of a person is towards God, the evil spirit could even feign donning the apparel of ‘the angel of light’<sup>21</sup> offering superficial pseudo-consolations to veer the person onto a false path which could eventually lead him or her away from God. Thus a ‘consolation’ which seems to be good in its initial stages is bad if it eventually leads one astray from God.”<sup>22</sup>

St Ignatius is very clear in his description of spiritual consolation: “By spiritual consolation I mean that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. Finally, under the word consolation I include every increase in hope,

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is. This direction, particularly in a prayerful context, such as making the Spiritual Exercises, will be for a generous Christian towards the more perfect, the more Christ-like.” Michael Kyne, “Discernment of Spirits and Christian Growth,” *The Way Supplement* 6 (1968): 22.

<sup>20</sup> John C. Futrell, “Rules for Discernment of Spirits I,” in Marian Cowan, John C. Futrell, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola: A Handbook for Directors* (New York: Le Jacq Publishing, 1982), 139-152.

<sup>21</sup> “And no wonder! For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14).

<sup>22</sup> Cowan, Futrell, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*, 153-161.

faith, and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts one towards heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, by bringing it tranquility and peace in its Creator and Lord."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, with respect to spiritual desolation, Ignatius writes: "By this kind of desolation I mean everything contrary to what is described concerning consolation, that is, obtuseness of soul, turmoil within it, an impulsive motion towards low and earthly things, or disquiet from various agitations and temptations. These move one towards lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love. One is completely listless, tepid, and unhappy and feels separated from our Creator and Lord. For, just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which arise from consolation are likewise, contrary to those which spring from desolation."<sup>24</sup>

St Ignatius, offering us very wise advice, suggests that when we are in desolation we are not to make any decision, unless the desolation results from our own resisting to God's grace. However, we have to withstand the desolation with prayer and penance. While experiencing the deep influences of good and evil, we have to keep in mind that the spiritual discernment of God's will is not to be simply reduced to the application of rules and methods. Discerning these strong tendencies, we have to keep in mind the importance of examining whether and how they could be unduly influencing our inner freedom. Deepening our personal contact with the Lord in prayer, we will surely be greatly helped to detect whether these strong tendencies would be intruding on or stifling this freedom.

Coathalem, in his solid study of the *Spiritual Exercises*, summing up his reflections on the vital role of the "Second Time" in discernment, points out that this is "the time when we experience consolations or desolations which manifest the trend of God's call and serve as guideposts for the 'election.' These experiences do not convey complete certitude of their own, but must be interpreted in the light of the rules for the discernment of spirits. Such light will show whether they bear the mark of the good or evil spirit, and whether they should be followed up with action, or be resisted and rejected. This 'Second Time' does not give us tranquil assurance, excluding all doubt, as the 'First Time' does. In a subject who is not prudent, illusions may arise from these experiences. If however, we have experience in the ways of the spiritual life and, if we are open and helped by a director, these graces can be very enlightening. St Ignatius personally had frequent recourse to this method, more often than to others, as his *Spiritual Journal* shows."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 316.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, no. 317.

<sup>25</sup> Coathalem, *Ignatian Insights*, 188. In an important letter to Fr Francis Borgia, Ignatius gives



The experience of consolation and desolation during discernment, though enlightening the trend of God's call, does not necessarily convey complete certitude on its own. It is the deep spiritual personal experience which one prayerfully goes through that ultimately indicates if and where the Spirit of God is leading the discerning person.

### **The Third Time: Reasoning - Judging - Deciding**

We now present what Ignatius calls the "Third Time," a quite common and, I would say, normal way of discerning, summarily described as the reasoning method of discernment. It is sometimes suggested or recommended as a further 'check-up' given that the "Second Time," being an "intimately spiritual" one, may demand the reassuring reasoning way of discernment.

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us quite an insight of his discerning God's will according to the "Second Time." Charles V had asked the cardinal's hat for Borgia and the Pope was quite willing to bestow it. St Ignatius wrote to Borgia about this important matter: "With regard to the cardinal's hat, I thought that I should give you some account of my own experience, to God's greater glory, and speak as I would to my own soul. It was as though I had been informed that the emperor had as a matter of fact nominated you and that the pope was willing to create you a cardinal. At once I felt impelled to do all I can to prevent it. And yet, not being certain of God's will, as I saw many reasons for both sides, I gave orders in the community that all the priests should say Mass and those not priests offer their prayers for three days for divine guidance, to God's greater glory. During this space of three days I reflected and talked with others about it, and experienced certain fears, or at least not that liberty of spirit to speak against and prevent the project, saying to myself, "How do I know what God our Lord wishes to effect?" Consequently, I did not feel entirely safe in speaking against it. At other times, in my customary prayers, I felt that these fears had taken themselves off. I repeated this prayer at intervals, now with the fears now without them, until finally, on the third day, I made my usual prayer with a determination so final, so peaceful and free, to do all I could with the pope and the cardinals to prevent it. I felt sure at the time, and still feel so, that, if I did not act thus, I should not be able to give a good account of myself to God our Lord - indeed, that I should give quite a bad one. Therefore, I have felt, and now feel, that it is God's will that I oppose this move. Even though others might think otherwise, and bestow this dignity on you, I do not see that there would be any contradiction, since the same Divine Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and others to the contrary for other reasons, and thus bring about the result desired by the emperor. May God our Lord always do what will be to his greater praise and glory. I believe it would be quite in order for you to answer the letter on this subject which Master Polanco is writing in my name, and declare the intention and purpose with which God our Lord has inspired you and may now inspire you. Your opinion would thus appear in writing and could then be produced whenever it may be called for, leaving the whole matter in the hands of God our Lord, so that his holy will may be done in all our affair." William J. Young, ed., *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), *Letter* 265, 259.

Ignatius writes: "The 'Third Time' is one of tranquillity."<sup>26</sup> First of all, Ignatius reminds the discerning person to keep first and foremost in mind the fundamental purpose of his or her life as a human being, namely, to praise God our Lord and to save one's soul. Hence, the discerning persons will keep this fundamental motivation as a guiding light. Being a discernment of tranquillity it is expected to be a time when we are not in depression, oppressed or moved by various spirits. It has to be a time when with the free and tranquil use of our natural powers - our reasoning and judging faculties and our free will - we can think calmly, reason out, judge, and freely reach the right decision about a specific matter.

The first stage in this discernment is to distinguish clearly between the different situations confronting us and which may be two or more alternatives. After collecting all the necessary data related to the matter to be discerned, the second stage will be to analyse, reflect upon and intelligently evaluate separately the possible alternatives in view of reaching and forming a judgement.<sup>27</sup> This is a naturally human process of judging a situation which everyone can go through, depending on one's intellectual ability and judicious perception. However, although discernment is not possible without reasoning and judging, it does not follow that an intelligent and judicious person is *ipso facto* well-equipped and ready for spiritual discernment. We have to keep bearing in mind that spiritual discernment is a faith-prayerful experience. In fact St Ignatius insists that going through this kind of discernment "I should beg God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in regard to the matter proposed, so that it will be more to his praise and glory. I should beg to accomplish this by reasoning well and faithfully with my intellect and by choosing in conformity with his most holy will and good pleasure."<sup>28</sup> It follows that the necessary prayerful attitude enlightens and directs the discerning person to consider and think over rationally the advantages or benefits one would gain by accepting the proposed matter to be decided upon and, on the other hand, to consider the disadvantages and dangers if one would refuse it. This would be the procedure with each alternative, looking into its benefits and its disadvantages.

The next step will be to weigh well the reasons for and against each alternative. Having examined and thoroughly reflected on the different reasons, one will then detect to which side "right reason" mostly inclines. Relying on the stronger and more reasonable movement and not on any sensual inclination one would then make up one's mind, that is, to judge and decide.

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<sup>26</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 177.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 180.

Since this is not merely a prudential assessment, Ignatius, keeping always in mind the end for which we were created, namely, “to praise God our Lord and save the soul,” writes: “Furthermore, I ought to find myself indifferent, that is, without any disordered affection, to such an extent that I am not more inclined or emotionally disposed towards taking the matter proposed rather than relinquishing it, nor more towards relinquishing it rather than taking it. Instead I should find myself in the middle, like the pointer of a balance, in order to be ready to follow that which I shall perceive to be more to the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.”<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, to guide someone during discernment one is expected to be familiar with the discernment-process, namely, to have made a “discernment grounded in experience, empathy and wisdom.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Conclusion: Prayer for Confirmation**

Once such a deliberation has been made, the person who has reached the decision-point should then turn with great diligence to prayerfully place himself or herself before God our Lord and offer him this “election,” so that his Divine Majesty may be pleased to accept and confirm it if it is to his greater service and praise.<sup>31</sup> This prayer for confirmation, which St Ignatius recommends at the end of a process of spiritual discernment, is another sign of trust in the accompanying divine light during the whole discernment process itself. Ignatius concludes: “When the decision has been made, the person who has made it ought with great diligence go to prayer before God our Lord and offer him that decision, that the Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive it and confirm it, if it is conducive to his greater service and praise,” leaving this further grace in the hands of the loving God.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., no. 179.

<sup>30</sup> Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 137.

<sup>31</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 179-183.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., no. 183.

# A Critical Perspective of Liturgical Translation in the Vernacular

## *Ressourcement: Returning to the Source*

Defined by poet Charles Péguy as “an overtaking of depth, an investigation into deeper sources, a return to the source in the literal sense,”<sup>2</sup> *ressourcement* was at the heart of the Second Vatican Council’s journey into liturgy. Freeing liturgical discourse from the stultifying implications of a “baroque theology”<sup>3</sup> where processes of metaphysical self-reference had “volatized [God] into simulacra,”<sup>4</sup> *ressourcement* promised a coherent foundation upon which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) could be built. In order to affect this shift away from purely formal representation, the Liturgical Movement in the twentieth century undertook a reevaluation of Catholic ritual and an exploration of the liturgy’s radically Christological identity.

*Ressourcement* methodology encouraged just such a creative return to early Christian texts, approached as a hermeneutical key to unlock “new rooms in the

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas J. Healy, Jr., “Evangelical *Ressourcement*,” *First Things* 213 (2011): 56.

<sup>3</sup> Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu coined the phrase in reference to the theology that had dominated Catholic ecclesiology since the Reformation. Theology was approached as a deductive logical exercise, with an emphasis on submission to authority and a Church ostensibly conceived of in juridico-canonical, hierarchical terms alone.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Stanford: University Press, 1988), 166-184.

treasure house of tradition.”<sup>5</sup> These would be integral to restoring the communal dynamics of ritual and subsequent attempts at rediscovering the liturgical expressions of pioneer Christian communities. It is no surprise that the use of vernacular languages was highlighted throughout the Council, emblematic of the drive for liturgical reform and a direct, uncomplicated intimacy with the liturgy.

This focus on a renewed approach to the liturgy was shared by two major perspectives within the predominant ‘Nouvelle Théologie’ of the period - “neo-Augustinians (Daniélou, de Lubac, Ratzinger, von Balthasar) and neo-Thomists (Chenu, Congar, Rahner, Lonergan, Schillebeeckx).”<sup>6</sup> The neo-Augustinian school’s deep-rooted concern for a fundamental disunity between the Church and the world (where any “openness to the world would be ‘naïve optimism’”)<sup>7</sup> contrasted with “a new ‘progressive’ group focused on a re-interpretation of classical Thomism, counselling openness to the world”<sup>8</sup> in order to engage with modern philosophical and social innovations, in much the same way “Thomas [Aquinas] had done with Aristotle in the thirteenth century.”<sup>9</sup>

Neo-Augustinians and Neo-Thomists came together in a mutual vision of the Church’s privileged participation by grace in the worship offered by the Son, explored (particularly since the Second Vatican Council) via a *complexus* of sensuous material “demonstrative of the present invisible sacred realities,”<sup>10</sup> and pointing to the liturgy as an earthly manifestation of a graced world through multimodal semiotic systems<sup>11</sup> conditioned by both culture and history.

What is most important in terms of the Council, and its impact on the liturgy, is that both these theological anthropologies, overcoming apparent dialectical opposition, were united to declare a single vision for the Church and a new model for understanding the unitive potential of liturgical utterances. This was concretized in *Gaudium et Spes* (and *Dignitatis Humanae*), promulgated on the

<sup>5</sup> Marcellino D’Ambrosio, “Ressourcement Theology, Aggiornamento, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition,” *Communio* 18 (1991): 530–55.

<sup>6</sup> Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ormund Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>9</sup> Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Cipriano Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), 74.

<sup>11</sup> Liturgical acts necessarily incorporate linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial systems within ritual.

last day of the last session of the Council, 7 December 1965. The documents highlight a newfound sense of Christian confidence in dialogue between the world and the Church, striving for a revitalising closeness to the ancient liturgical traditions of early Christianity.

This would be achieved by establishing *ressourcement* (the spirit of *Nouvelle Théologie*) in the Catholic consciousness, a point of continuity with the Church Fathers and a hermeneutic of renewal in theological study and liturgical practice. The new “*ressourced liturgy*” reset the cultural and ideological praxis of Catholicism in contemporary life and informed the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* in particular. Not only was the document’s focus on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the modern world ground-breaking, it was drafted organically within the ongoing Council (while Pope John XXIII, deathly ill, watched the proceedings on closed circuit television) and not as a result of any preparatory schemata.

Just as one of the last documents to be promulgated by the Council contained a strong message of *ressourcement*, so did one of the “first fruits which the Second Vatican Council [began] to offer to the world,”<sup>12</sup> in *De Sacra Liturgia, On General Principles for Reforming and Fostering the Liturgy*. This schema would develop into *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, described positively by Congar as “meeting the standards of *ressourcement*.”<sup>13</sup> It received “a favourable judgment that was, remarkably, virtually unanimous”<sup>14</sup> from the Council Fathers, announcing a new phase in the “spiritual and pastoral life of the Church.”<sup>15</sup>

The text of the schema’s article 36.2, substantially retained in the constitution’s final draft, already makes clear that “the use of the vernacular very often can be very helpful to the people in Holy Mass... [thus] a larger role is conceded to the vernacular”<sup>16</sup> as a principle of fundamental importance. Father Vagaggini, the liturgist appointed by Pope John XXIII to assist with the formulation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* along with catechist Josef Jungmann and philosopher Philippe Capelle, wrote, “It is noteworthy that this question [of the vernacular] was the most discussed in all the debate on the liturgy ... The Second Vatican

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<sup>12</sup> Cipriano Vagaggini, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 8 December 1963. See <https://vaticaniiat50.wordpress.com/2012/12/10/father-vagagginis-article-on-liturgy-document>.

<sup>13</sup> Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile I*, 2 volumes (Paris: Cerf, 2002), entry of August 5-6, 1962, “Le texte sur la liturgie est bon; il est beaucoup plus au niveau du *ressourcement* actuel.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *De Sacra Liturgia*, 36.2.

Council, officially introducing bilingualism into the life of the Latin liturgy, takes a memorable stride in history.”<sup>17</sup>

In response to these momentous changes, the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) was formed in 1963<sup>18</sup> during the ongoing Council, as a mixed commission with representative Catholic Bishops’ Conferences from all major English speaking countries. The purpose of the Commission was, and remains, the preparation of liturgical translations out of Latin in accordance with the teachings expressed by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: “Respecting [the] norms and also, where applicable, consulting the bishops of nearby territories of the same language, the [Bishops’ Conference] is empowered to decide whether and to what extent the vernacular is to be used.”<sup>19</sup> Structures for enabling these processes of translation soon emerged, and by 1983 these were reflected in Canon Law.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Comme le prévoit: Dynamic Equivalence***

The Bishops’ Conferences were able to implement the aspirations of the Council Fathers by working together in ICEL, cooperating on a shared translation of the liturgy as the expression of a single “literary and linguistic heritage”<sup>21</sup> while retaining sensitivity to the complexities of such a far-reaching project. Immediately following the Council, the Holy See pushed for provisions to be made for the creation of one translation in each vernacular, designed to reflect the ideology set out in the charter for translation known by its French title *Comme le prévoit*,<sup>22</sup> issued by the Consilium for Implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy<sup>23</sup> on 25 January 1969.

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<sup>17</sup> Cipriano Vagaggini, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 8 December 1963.

<sup>18</sup> The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments officially formed ICEL as a mixed commission in 2003, as per *Liturgiam authenticam*.

<sup>19</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> “It is the prerogative of the Apostolic See to regulate the sacred liturgy of the universal Church, to publish liturgical books and review their vernacular translations, and to be watchful that liturgical regulations are everywhere faithfully observed ... It pertains to Episcopal Conferences to prepare vernacular translations of liturgical books, with appropriate adaptations as allowed by the books themselves and, with the prior review of the Holy See, to publish these translations” (CCL 838).

<sup>21</sup> Tom Elich, *Liturgical Translation at a Crossroads*, <http://compassreview.org/summer02/6.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Tellingly, the document was written in French and subsequently issued in six major languages. A Latin version was never prepared.

<sup>23</sup> The Consilium was established in 1964, before being merged with the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in May 1969.

*Comme le prévoit* established the prevailing method of translation implemented by ICEL and equivalent commissions, declaring, “It is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time.”<sup>24</sup> In proposing this principle, *Comme le prévoit* defined the method of dynamic equivalence (although the term itself is conspicuously absent in the document) as applicable to all liturgical translations.

Both the first and second English editions of the Roman Missal followed this principle of dynamic equivalence, a methodology developed from the work of Eugene Nida in the fields of translation theory and linguistics. Nida’s application of the semantic domain concept in Biblical translation remains particularly relevant,<sup>25</sup> where a contextual semantic domain corresponds to what cognitive linguistics describes as a cognitive context, focused on the syntagmatic relationship between a specific lexical item and other lexical items used in the same cognitive framework.<sup>26</sup> This is distinct from lexical semantic domains where the focus rests on paradigmatic relationships between lexical items and other members of its same category.

Therefore biblical (and liturgical) translators working within dynamic equivalence as proposed by Nida derive a substantial portion of the meaning of particular words from the context in which those words are generally used, determining what meaning best resonates with a specific verse by critically observing various uses applied elsewhere in Scripture and related texts.<sup>27</sup> These concepts were endorsed by *Comme le prévoit* and brought to bear upon the earlier English editions of the missal, shaped with attentiveness to English language style, idiomatic usage and colloquialisms.

It is important to recognise the contribution of the “father of modern linguistics”<sup>28</sup> Noam Chomsky, whose work (in relation to Nida and Nida’s influence on *Comme le prévoit*) also merits a closer look. The theoretics of

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<sup>24</sup> *Comme le prévoit*, 1.6.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Stine, *Let the Words Be Written: The Lasting Influence of Eugene A. Nida* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> This is discussed in *Comme le prévoit* (CLP) Section 1, article 12.

<sup>27</sup> Nida’s (along with Johannes P. Louw) *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) applies this theory, and is considered a standard lexicon for New Testament word studies.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Tymoczko, Jim Henle and James M. Henle, *Sweet Reason: A Field Guide to Modern Logic* (New York: Springer, 2000), 101.



translation was significantly motivated in the 1960s by Chomsky's *Syntactic Structure* (1957) and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), alongside Nida's *Message and Mission* (1960) and *Toward a Science of Translation* (1964). Chomsky and Nida defend an integrated model of semantic-transformational translation<sup>29</sup> as an essential approach to translation theory.

It is interesting to observe that Nida's development of a science of translation in biblical studies was partly inspired by his distrust of the critical methodology that had been characteristic of the nineteenth century, "an emphasis on technical accuracy, an adherence to form, and a literal rendering of meaning."<sup>30</sup> This contrasts with the methods proposed by Chomsky and Nida - Chomsky attempts to demonstrate the existence of universal rules of grammar and universal lexical forms as the central object of the process of translation,<sup>31</sup> while Nida makes "metaphysical claims about an original divine message."<sup>32</sup> Language as understood by Chomsky and Nida in the 1960s is an ultimately "psychological phenomenon, organized in terms of mental properties"<sup>33</sup> with an implicit reliance on the intuitive discernment of others. What Chomsky brought to the field was an "elaborate model of formal linguistics"<sup>34</sup> capable of interpreting the rule-governed creativity of language as a system.<sup>35</sup>

The authors of *Comme le prévoit* follow this line of thinking when they propose that, "a liturgical text, inasmuch as it is a ritual sign, is a medium of spoken communication."<sup>36</sup> The sign is received by the senses and communicated as *mysterium* when formulated in a liturgical context. "By spoken words Christ

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<sup>29</sup> The transformational model affirms that every language has areas of equivalence to other languages, and the translator works upon these nuclear structures by transforming them into equivalent nuclear structures that can be synthesized within the translated text.

<sup>30</sup> Huaizhou Mao, Yingling Gu and Ming Liang, "Commentary on Nida vs. Chomsky's Translation Theories," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2/6 (June 2012): 1285-1290.

<sup>31</sup> Chomsky's general theory of universal grammar proposes a common and innate mental sub-structure that "generates" language. Chomsky considers these "deep structures" common to all languages.

<sup>32</sup> Mao, Gu and Liang, "Commentary on Nida vs Chomsky's Translation Theories."

<sup>33</sup> Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner, *Social Theory Today, Giddens, Structuralism, Poststructuralism and the Production of Culture* (Stanford: University Press, 1987), 197.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Current Issues in Linguistic Theory," in *The Structure of Language: Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, eds. Jerry A. Fodor and Jerrold J. Katz (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 50-118.

<sup>36</sup> *CLP*, 1.5.

himself speaks to his people and the people, through the Spirit in the Church, answer their Lord.”<sup>37</sup>

The text continues, “Thus, in the case of liturgical communication, it is necessary to take into account not only the message to be conveyed, but also the speaker, the audience, and the style. Translations, therefore, must be faithful to the art of communication in all its various aspects, but especially in regard to the message itself, in regard to the audience for which it is intended, and in regard to the manner of expression.”<sup>38</sup>

The process of liturgical translation championed by *Comme le prévoit* aims at discovering relationships between the global context of a text (historical, cultural, doctrinal and literary) and the reformulation of the text into a new embodiment in the receptor language, directly relevant to the needs of the receiving individual. An effective translation is thus capable of expressing content through the quality of equivalence, and is “able to produce in the audience of the receptor language the same effect as the source language has on its original audience. In short, it achieves the same purpose as the original text.”<sup>39</sup>

*Comme le prévoit* is explicit in stating the shortcomings of formulae (passed on from some other historical period or geographical location) when translated literally, because ecclesial prayer is by its very nature the prayer of an actual and living community with its own particular history. For this reason, liturgical translators must work carefully<sup>40</sup> to ensure that each translation suits the intimate prayer of the assembly in which each believer articulates his/her own spirituality. To reflect this, the document states that translations “from another language are clearly not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy. The creation of new texts will be necessary.”<sup>41</sup>

It was through the agency of Nida and Chomsky’s metaphysics of translation, and efforts at returning to the source of Christian liturgical life (as originally experienced in an immediately understood vernacular by a participatory community), that *Comme le prévoit* interpreted the Second Vatican Council’s desire to engage the world in heartfelt dialogue. “The accuracy and value of a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *CLP*, 1.7-8.

<sup>39</sup> Anscar J. Chupungco, “The Translation of Liturgical Texts,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Introduction to the Liturgy*, ed. Anscar Chupungco (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 389.

<sup>40</sup> *CLP*, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> *CLP*, 43.

translation can only be assessed in terms of the purpose of the communication”<sup>42</sup> which is to say the truthfulness of a translation is only reflected in the inward reception of the liturgical reality. *Comme le prévoit* sought to explore this relationship through a method of dynamic equivalence, emphasising fluent communication and immediate accessibility of meaning.

In the atmosphere of intellectual excitement at the end of the 1960s, *Comme le prévoit*'s pressing message was received with open arms. It upset existing standards of liturgical translation in favour of experimental processes, and instituted a liberating message of theoretical innovation. The document opened textual meaning to a method of re-reading that aimed at developing liturgical texts specific to individual cultural orientations. The translator's intervention, always evaluative and containing both conscious and unconscious choices,<sup>43</sup> was everywhere motivated by the call to discover “God's word in Man's language.”<sup>44</sup> However, *Comme le prévoit* would not be the foundational document for the twenty-first century translation of the Mass.

### ***Liturgiam Authenticam: A Formal Focus***

On the first Sunday of Advent 2011, the Church in all English speaking regions began using a new translation. Formed by ICEL working in union with the Vox Clara committee, this translation implemented the programme of change laid out in the instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001) as more closely grounded in the Latin text of the third *editio typica* of the missal. One year later, a preliminary study conducted by Georgetown University, USA, found that 70 percent of self-identified adult Catholics agreed with the statement, “Overall, I think the new translation of the Mass is a good thing.”<sup>45</sup>

Explaining this journey towards ever more comprehensive liturgical communication in the vernacular, Jeremy Driscoll, Benedictine monk and member of Vox Clara, concluded, “The decision at Vatican II to move from Latin to the vernacular was a great decision... But 40 years down the road, there (were) quite a lot of differences between the original Latin and the translations.”<sup>46</sup> ICEL

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<sup>42</sup> *CLP*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Munday, *Evaluation in Translation: Critical Points of Translator Decision Making* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 20.

<sup>44</sup> The title of Nida's 1952 introduction to the history and theory of Biblical translation.

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Bauman, “Catholics Strongly Support New Mass Translation After First Year,” *Catholic News Agency*, 30 November 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Haught, “New English Translation Alters Familiar Language of the Catholic Mass,” *The Oregonian*, 29 January 2011.

and Vox Clara sought to address these differences under the aegis of *Liturgiam Authenticam*.

Initial responses to *Liturgiam Authenticam* were varied and revealing. Some commentators expressed anxiety over a perceived political agenda behind the new Instruction's replacement of *Comme le prévoit*, while others celebrated its role in encouraging effective and formal translation as a core feature in the transmission of Catholic doctrine. Those who believed the former said it struck "at the heart of Vatican II ecclesiology by centralizing power in the Curia and by insisting that local cultures adopt an essentially Roman style of worship,"<sup>47</sup> while supporters received the document as "a direct, organic development of the vision of the Council Fathers."<sup>48</sup>

There can be no doubt that ecclesial paradigms of authority changed dramatically following the Second Vatican Council. The cultural reconfiguration undergone by society at large led to troubling questions over "who or what (was) to be used as the arbiter of correct belief, action, and control."<sup>49</sup> Claims of authority became increasingly rooted in personalist and pluralistic forms of expression, distanced from hierarchical structures of traditional teaching. Phyllis Tickle defines these new shapes of authority as driven by *orthonomy*, relational harmony and *orthoparadoxy*, dissolved dichotomies. The new authority becomes the perception of harmonious beauty, in itself a means of influence, where "the employment of aesthetic or harmonic purity [is] a tool for discerning the truth."<sup>50</sup>

This changing paradigm impacted ways of undertaking liturgical translation. The 1990s' disagreements over liturgical intent (between ICEL and the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments) are a case in point, while the most common arguments posited by critics of the current translation are primarily aesthetic, in reaction to a translation "which some have welcomed as 'poetic' and others criticize as 'clunky and archaic.'"<sup>51</sup> If Christians are to discern truth in the holiness of beauty, "sorting through their beliefs as they greet Christian theology and doctrine in the liturgy,"<sup>52</sup> the responsibility

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<sup>47</sup> John L. Allen, "New Document Replaces 35 Years of Liturgy Work - *Liturgiam Authenticam*, A Power Grab or Fulfillment of Vatican II Vision?," *National Catholic Reporter*, 25 May 2001.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence - How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Ada: Imprint Baker Books, 2008), 45.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Roland Flamini, "Mass Confusion: Catholics Adjusting to New Translation of the Liturgy," *The Washington Times* 29 (22 December 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Mary Gray-Reeves, Michael Perham, *The Hospitality of God: Emerging Worship for a Missional Church* (London: Seabury Books, 2011).

of translators is considerably magnified. The Church is on a journey to develop “a Christian theology in the light of [a theological aesthetics], that is to say: to complement the vision of the true and the good with that of the beautiful (*pulchrum*).”<sup>53</sup>

At the heart of disputes over an aesthetics of liturgical translation rests a deeper concern as to what constitutes authentic belief. The theoretical questions prompted by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and explored in *Comme le prévoit* ask whether a praxis of logocentric interpretation can indeed be fruitfully applied to the liturgy of the Roman Church. This was certainly part of Nida’s plan for dynamic equivalence in practice,<sup>54</sup> combined with a phonocentric imperative acknowledging “the power of speech, which animates the extraordinary power of the word.”<sup>55</sup>

Logocentrism becomes a double-edged sword, whereby texts and signifying systems generate “a desire for a direct, unmediated, given hold on meaning, being and knowledge”<sup>56</sup> that goes necessarily unfulfilled - speech is the original signifier of meaning, and the written word is confronted by the spoken word. It is this access to and control over conceptual, signifiatory identity that typifies the logocentric desire to know “the phenomenal world, and oneself as a conscious subject.”<sup>57</sup>

Escaping the essentially polarizing structure of logocentrism<sup>58</sup> is the key message of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, by an attempt at reorienting the translation of liturgical texts in order to evade the objectification and erasure of the subject and recover a “liturgical negotiation of identity”<sup>59</sup> in a journey of openness, crucial to the restoration of the subject. Only then can the liturgical text “join the eternal divine text of the Logos which is nonetheless a book perpetually uttered by the Father, uttered as writing, only to re-expire in the out-breathing of the Spirit.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Vol 1*, trans. Fessio and Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Simms, *Translating Sensitive Texts* (Amsterdam - Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Gross, “Derrida and the Limits of philosophy,” *Thesis Eleven* 14/1 (1986): 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Constructing a binary system where an *other* must exist against which the privileged term distinguishes itself to ensure its identity. For example, presence and the category of absence, non-being, non-existence.

<sup>59</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Cosummation of Philosophy* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 199.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

## Befriending the Texts

At their core, both *Comme le prévoit* and *Liturgiam Authenticam* encourage the liturgical translator to attempt a delicate process of interpreting the outcoming manifestation of divine reality in the liturgical celebration<sup>61</sup> and the believers' in-coming apprehension of something wholly *Other*. In doing so, the tension between subject (where the subject's founding gesture is of voluntary subjection) and object (most radically, "that which disturbs the smooth run of things"),<sup>62</sup> at the heart of the twenty-first century's anxieties of consumption, is subsumed into the theological assertion that "*nothing* is one's own, but rather everything, life and death alike, arrive not as possessions but gifts."<sup>63</sup>

What occurs when we "do" the liturgy is therefore a gifted rupture in being, through which the subject is realized and reconciled with the Logos, Truth. This event<sup>64</sup> opens a path towards the emergence, in Christ, of "the perfect achievement of our reconciliation,"<sup>65</sup> and by this dynamism (in which we are fully participatory and not the mere discoverers of ready-made objects) "the fullness of divine worship [is] given to us."<sup>66</sup> This is a central feature of the ressourcement approach to liturgical action, explored in both Instructions. It is the consummation of a movement of desire beyond desire, Saint Paul's imperative to know and love what cannot be known and we dare not love, against hope believing in hope.

The idea behind such an approach to the liturgy is metanoetic<sup>67</sup> and transformative, creative and re-creative. The performative encounter occurs within the opening created by the liturgical moment, where the text itself constitutes the "very border of the Holy of Holies, and then, having abandoned the utility of language, [the believer] tangentially 'senses' the Beloved"<sup>68</sup> and undergoes a transformation into a diastemic refiguring of the *mysterium* itself.

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<sup>61</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1326.

<sup>62</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>63</sup> Pickstock, *After Writing*, 111.

<sup>64</sup> Badiou's *événement*.

<sup>65</sup> Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Rome: Herder, 1966), n.1265 cf. also n.1241, 1248.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> A term coined by Hajime Tanabe in his *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (translated in 1987), to describe a situation where the awareness of Kantian radical evil as a result of a crisis of reason initiates further crisis, and the opportunity for salvific metanoia.

<sup>68</sup> Scot Douglass, *Theology of the Gap* (New York et al.: Peter Lang, 2005) 247.

Language becomes the vehicle of connection across this vacancy, between oneself, others, and God - the human activity of language expresses the desire to transcend the alienation of distance and the longing to know as well as be known. The human creature's attempts at effective communication are a method of negotiating the space between words and the reality behind them, bridging the distance between speaker and listener. Despite language, the deepest knowledge remains unknown and the liturgical utterance is painfully necessary because "the object of [God's] love is bound in language."<sup>69</sup>

The recovery of linguistic features inherent in the Latin text is principally what the new translation set out to achieve, on a mission to restore the relationship with transcendental beauty that was somehow hidden in a blurring of "our constitutive, positive, and analogical distance from God"<sup>70</sup> by the previous translations. For example, forms of repetition occur throughout the Extraordinary Form yet these were identified by early translators/reformers with decadent, late accretions rather than acknowledged as integral elements. Rather than effecting a fullness of liturgy, incorporating the re-beginnings "endlessly postponed"<sup>71</sup> in anticipation of eschatological consummation, the liturgy produced under *Comme le prévoit* focused on the image of a primitive meal that had supposedly been obscured in the Roman Rite's layered text.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is thus a palpable necessity to continue promoting processes of befriending between the orientations described in *Comme le prévoit* and *Liturgiam Authenticam*, rather than perpetuating false oppositions. It is clear that these texts have vital messages for one another, and for us. Indeed, each document complements (substantially "completing") the other, with their different focuses on the purpose of liturgical translation, but mutual commitment to the centrality of worship as a gifted moment of grace between the individual and the community, and community members with God.

These texts make it clear that liturgy's logic is not a linear progression of inexorable cause and effect, but rather, follows an apophatic trajectory with an inherently ambiguous destination. Paradoxically, the journey toward the liturgical destination of God's presence requires us to "seek a purity that is impossible (and yet is always already given) and we must struggle (through repetitious starts,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>70</sup> Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, 173.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

stops, backslidings and recommencements) towards a place where we've already arrived."<sup>72</sup> It is a redefining of this complex liturgical character, assumed by the celebrant and congregation, that *Liturgiam Authenticam* seeks to achieve while still working in the medium of the Paul VI Missal.

The freedoms of *Comme le prévoit* benefit from the corrective catholicity of the liturgy, and orthodoxy of doctrine, which are contained in *Liturgiam authenticam*. What is potentially most mystical in understanding *Comme le prévoit* is also most vulnerable, because of its emphasis on individual intelligibility. The individual is introduced within the corporate act of communal worship, creating possibilities of sacred friendship, patterned on the likeness of Christ himself.

For this reason, modifications to the third edition of the *General Instructions to the Missal* are part of an ongoing process of review, loyal to the Council's theological vision and not yet fully realised in the liturgy. This journey of liturgical renewal is in organic continuity with the Second Vatican Council's desire to bring the Mass into ever-greater contact with the people of God by means of translation in the vernacular. By centring all actions on Christ in the pursuit of relational harmony, the Mass is continually renewed, "(drawing) the faithful into the compelling love of Christ"<sup>73</sup> through whom "grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist: Nathan Mitchell* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2007), 133.

<sup>73</sup> SC 10.

<sup>74</sup> SC 10.



## Lessons from Aquinas in *Amoris Laetitia*

It may have escaped the notice of some readers of Pope Francis' Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* that the first quoted reference in Chapter One, after Genesis, Revelation and Matthew, is to Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), the Argentinian short-story writer, essayist, poet and translator, considered by critics as arguably "the most important figure in Spanish-language literature since Cervantes."<sup>2</sup> Francis calls him "the poet" and quotes from "Calle Desconocida," "The Unknown Path," a poem from Borges' first collection of poetry, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, published in 1923.

The beautiful image quoted by Francis, "every home is like a lampstand," comes at the end of a long sentence starting with Jesus' description of the two houses, one built on rock and the other on sand, which, in the Pope's words, "symbolises any number of family situations shaped by the exercise of their members' freedom." This is not the usual interpretation put on the Gospel simile (Mt 7:24-27), but Francis links it to the Exhortation's opening remark that "The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises," right from the appearance of Adam and Eve's family, "with all its burdens of violence and also its enduring strength" (§8).

Using the first six lines of Psalm 128 as a stepping stone, the Exhortation invites us to "cross the threshold of a tranquil home, with the family sitting around the festive table," with the father and mother at the centre, "a couple with their own personal story of love," and children at their side "like olive shoots" (§9).

This "idyllic picture" of a harmonious household contrasts sharply with "the presence of pain, evil and violence that break up families and their communion

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Friggieri is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Malta. His areas of specialization are Philosophy of Language, Action and Aesthetics. He is well-known for his cultural programmes on radio and television and is a regular contributor to social and political debate.

<sup>2</sup> Noah Wardrip Fruin, Nick Montfort eds. *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 29.

of life and love - a sombre dimension already present at the beginning, when through sin, the relationship of love and purity before man and woman turns into domination" (§19). "This thread of suffering and bloodshed," the author reminds us, runs through the pages of the Bible, starting with Cain's murder of his brother Abel and "the tragedies and violence marking the family of David," from which Jesus was descended, right down to the massacre of the Innocents by Herod and his henchmen after the birth of the Messiah, on account of which Jesus and his family "had to flee to a foreign land" (§§ 20-21). Herod may be seen as the prototype of a vast array of ruthless dictators who have marked the course of history. Francis mentions him again at the end of Chapter One as the despotic ruler whose "implacable violence" brought suffering "and even nightmares" to the Family of Nazareth (§30). Borges, incidentally, was a sworn enemy of dictatorial regimes and a fearless critic of all kinds of totalitarian systems, from Nazism and Communism to Fascism and Peronism. "Dictatorships," he once wrote, "breed oppression, servility, cruelty. More loathsome still is the fact that they breed idiocy, mere discipline usurping the place of clear thinking."<sup>3</sup> The impossibility, moreover, of separating original sin from grace in the history of the human race and the life of its members is one of the themes pursued by Borges in his short stories.

Among the factors causing pain and disruption in modern families, the Exhortation mentions unemployment, poverty, hunger (§25), social degradation resulting from brutal exploitation of the earth's resources (§26), the lack of dignified or affordable housing, inadequate health care, long working hours and badly paid jobs (§44), war, terrorism and organised crime (§45).

A long paragraph talks about migration and its negative effects on family life. It quotes at length from the Synod's final report (2015, 23), noting that "forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecutions, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families," often forcing those who migrate to leave family members behind (§46).

The Exhortation mentions drug abuse ("one of the scourges of our time"), alcoholism, gambling and other addictions as "causing immense suffering and the breakup of many families" (§51). It also refers to domestic violence and "the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected" as "craven acts of cowardice" on the part of men.

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<sup>3</sup> From a speech written by Borges for the Argentinian Society of Writers (SADE), in Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (New York: Viking, 2004), 295.

All this is a far cry from the kind of idyllic picture of the “tranquil festive table” described at the beginning of Chapter One. In the introduction to the Exhortation, Francis expresses his gratitude to the many contributions made by the Synod Fathers which helped him “to appreciate more fully the problems faced by families throughout the world” (§4) and to deal with them honestly, realistically and creatively. “The complexity of the issues that arose,” Francis observes, “revealed the need for continued open discussion of a number of doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and pastoral questions” (§2). Two attitudes needed to be avoided for greater clarity to be achieved in such matters: “an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding” on the one hand, and “an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations” on the other (§2). In the chapters following the introduction, Francis shows by example how one can avoid the second pitfall not by rejecting change but by grounding it in sound philosophical and theological reflection.

*Amoris Laetitia* uses a number of sources to deal with the questions it raises, including the Scriptures, the two Synod reports, especially the final report of the Second Synod (2015), as well as previous Papal documents and the author’s own catechetical instructions. But it also makes frequent use of Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* (henceforth ST), and it is with those passages in the Exhortation that refer to Aquinas that this essay is (mainly) concerned.

Just as Borges appears at the beginning of Chapter One of the Exhortation, the first reference to Aquinas (Chapter Four, §99) follows a quote from another Latin American writer, the Mexican poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature Octavio Paz (1914-1988). Francis is commenting on the word “aschemonei,” which picks out one of the qualities of love mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 13:4-7, a word that indicates that love is not rude, harsh or impolite, but gentle, thoughtful and pleasant. It is at this point that Francis quotes the Mexican poet’s definition of courtesy as “a school of sensitivity and disinterestedness” which requires a person “to develop his or her mind and feelings, learning how to listen, to speak and, at certain times, to keep quiet.”<sup>4</sup> Francis adds that this is not something a Christian may choose to reject, but “an essential requirement of love,” and he supports this claim by quoting Thomas to the effect that “every human being is bound to live agreeably with those around him.”<sup>5</sup> “Every day,” Francis continues, “entering into the life of another, even when that person already has a part to

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<sup>4</sup> Octavio Paz, *La llama doble* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1993), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (STh) II-II 114.2, ad 1.

play in our life, demands the sensitivity and restraint which can renew trust and respect. Indeed, the deeper love is, the more it calls for respect for the other's freedom and the ability to wait until the other opens the door to his or her heart" (§99).

Chapter Four, from which this passage is taken, reads like an exercise in virtue ethics, where the virtues listed by Paul constitute the main features or properties of love. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, virtues are acquired by habit and manifest themselves in action. This comes out clearly in the Exhortation's discussion of generosity as another defining feature of love, where generously serving others is considered far more noble than loving oneself (§101). In Aquinas' words, quoted in the text, "it is more proper to charity to desire to love than to desire to be loved,"<sup>6</sup> so much so that "mothers, who are those who love the most, seek to love more than to be loved."<sup>7</sup> Willing the good of other persons for their sake, rather than to fulfil our own needs, is what Aquinas means by generosity. And the rationale of generosity is love.<sup>8</sup>

Following Aristotle, Aquinas describes conjugal love as "the greatest form of friendship."<sup>9</sup> The Exhortation elaborates: "It is a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life" (§123).

As one would expect given the title of the Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* talks at some length about the joy and beauty of love. Here again Aquinas is quoted in the body of the text. For him the word "joy" refers to an expansion of the heart.<sup>10</sup> It increases our pleasure and helps us find fulfilment in any number of things, even at those times of life when physical pleasure has ebbed (§126). Loving another person, then, involves appreciating their inner beauty and sacredness - "their great worth"<sup>11</sup> - beyond their physical or psychological appeal, and without feeling the need to possess them (§126).

Where feelings and desires are concerned, readers of the Exhortation are reminded that for Aquinas "experiencing an emotion is not, in itself, morally good or bad."<sup>12</sup> The stirring of desire or repugnance is neither sinful nor blameworthy. What is morally good or bad is what we do on the basis of, or under the influence

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<sup>6</sup> *STb* II-II 27.1, ad 2.

<sup>7</sup> *STb* II-II 27.1.

<sup>8</sup> See John Finnis, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 311.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 123; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8, 12.

<sup>10</sup> *STb* I-II 31.3, ad 3.

<sup>11</sup> *STb* I-II 26.3.

<sup>12</sup> *STb* I-II 24.1.

of a given passion (§145). Marital life tries to ensure that one's entire emotional life benefits the family as a whole. A family is mature when the emotional life of its members does not stifle their freedom but allows it to grow,<sup>13</sup> "springs from it, enriches, perfects and harmonises it in the service of all" (§146).

Training the emotions and instincts, the Exhortation goes on to say, is necessary and sometimes requires setting limits. It mentions two points made by Aquinas: first, that "excess, lack of control or obsession with a single form of pleasure can end up weakening and tainting that very pleasure";<sup>14</sup> and secondly, that controlling one's emotions "does not mean renouncing moments of intense enjoyment,<sup>15</sup> but rather integrating them with other moments of generous commitment, patient hope, inevitable weariness and struggle to achieve an ideal" (§148).

Following the two central chapters on love (the fourth and the fifth), Chapter Six highlights some pastoral approaches that could lead to the formation of well-functioning families, followed by Chapter Seven which deals with the raising and education of children. While Chapters One and Two described some of the factors of a political, social or economic nature (war, poverty, unemployment, lack of decent housing, forced migration etc) that led to the disruption of families, as it were "from the outside," Chapter Eight deals in great detail with the internal causes responsible for the breakup of marriages and family life. Whereas in cases of the former type, the family members themselves can hardly be held responsible for the disruption, since they can do very little, or virtually nothing, to change the situation they find themselves in, in cases of the latter type some kind of moral assessment of the actions of the individual members of the family group may be appropriate. Once again, Thomas Aquinas plays an important role in providing useful guidelines for making such an assessment. (A caveat is necessary before we proceed. Cases of drug abuse, gambling, alcoholism and other addictions, as well as instances of domestic violence and the shameful treatment of women and children mentioned in Chapter Two, are obviously also subject to moral judgement.)

The importance of Chapter Eight is highlighted by Francis in the introduction, where he says that while married couples will be more concerned with Chapters Four and Five, and pastoral ministries with Chapter Six, "everyone should feel challenged by Chapter Eight," which starts by quoting the Synod Fathers as exhorting the Church to "accompany with attention those who show signs of

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<sup>13</sup> *STb* I-II 59.5.

<sup>14</sup> *STb* I-II 32.7.

<sup>15</sup> *STb* II-II 153.2, ad 2.

a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like a beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way, or who are in the middle of a storm.”<sup>16</sup>

In another simile Francis compares the task of the Church to “that of a field hospital” (§291). He insists that pastors need to enter into dialogue with those who live in situations which do not correspond to the Church’s teachings on marriage. Quoting from one of his own homilies, Francis says that he wants to reiterate something he “sought to make clear to the whole Church, lest we take the wrong path,” namely, that “there are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church’s history: casting off and reinstating,” adding that “the Church’s way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement.”<sup>17</sup> “Consequently,” the Pope continues, “there is a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations and to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition”<sup>18</sup> (§296).

Francis himself shows, by means of examples, how different such situations can be even in the case of divorce, and reminds pastors of the need of “adequately distinguishing” between them. Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, he insists that no “easy recipes” exist (§298).

For this reason, he adds, “neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases.” And since “the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases,”<sup>19</sup> “the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same” (§300). “A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding its values, or be in a concrete situation which does not allow him to act differently and decide otherwise.” Mitigating factors may exist “which limit the ability to make a decision.”<sup>20</sup> Francis quotes “Saint Thomas Aquinas himself” as having “recognised that someone may possess grace and charity, yet not be

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<sup>16</sup> The Synod of Bishops, *Relatio Synodi*: “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” 2014, 28, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20141018\\_relatio-synodi-familia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141018_relatio-synodi-familia_en.html).

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis’s Homily at Mass with the New Cardinals, 15 February 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 107 (2015): 257.

<sup>18</sup> The Synod of Bishops, *The Final Report*: “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World,” 2015, 51, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20151026\\_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

able to exercise any one of the virtues well.”<sup>21</sup> Even Saints, Thomas adds, may “experience difficulty” in practising what certain virtues require, “even though they have the habits of all the virtues”<sup>22</sup> (§301).

Francis follows this up by quoting at length from the Catechism of the Catholic Church which again mentions these “mitigating factors,” claiming that “imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors.”<sup>23</sup> For this reason, Francis continues, “a negative judgement about an objective situation does not imply a judgement about the imputability or culpability of the person involved.” And he quotes approvingly “what many Synod Fathers wanted to affirm,” namely, that “under certain circumstances people find it difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions is not the same in all cases ... Even the consequences of actions taken are not necessarily the same in all cases”<sup>24</sup> (§302).

In the next paragraph the Exhortation talks about conscience. Aquinas called the habitual knowledge of the primary moral principles *synderesis* and the act of applying moral principles to particular actions *conscientia*.<sup>25</sup> John Finnis explains: “One’s conscience [for Aquinas] is the judgement (*sententia*) one reaches in trying to *apply* practical principles ... to particular (types) of situations in which one is deliberating about, or at least contemplating, acting, or is reflecting on what one did.”<sup>26</sup> Conscience may be erroneous, whether through our own fault or through some cause for which we are not responsible.<sup>27</sup> An erroneous conscience is morally binding simply because to the person in error it seems to be stating the truth, and so (however monstrous my error) I cannot defect from my conscience without being guilty of a willingness to act “contrary to the truth.”<sup>28</sup> If our conscience tells us that we ought to perform a particular act, it is our moral duty to perform it.<sup>29</sup> “Every conscience,” Aquinas insists, “whether it is right or wrong, whether it concerns things evil in themselves or

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<sup>21</sup> *STb* I-II 65.3 ad 2; Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 2, art. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *STb* I-II 65.3 ad 2.

<sup>23</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1735, 2352.

<sup>24</sup> The Synod of Bishops, *The Final Report*, 85.

<sup>25</sup> *STb* I 79.12-13. See Frederick Copleston, *Aquinas* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 228, n.1.

<sup>26</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 123, n. 101.

<sup>27</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 228.

<sup>28</sup> *STb* I-II 19; Finnis, *Aquinas*, 123.

<sup>29</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 228.

things morally indifferent, obliges us to act in such a way that he who acts against his conscience sins.”<sup>30</sup> As Copleston makes clear, “this does not mean that there is no such thing as an objectively correct moral conscience, but ignorance and mistakes are possible in moral matters, and the nearer we come to particulars the greater is the field for error.”<sup>31</sup>

The Exhortation therefore states that “while every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience,” there may be cases where, while recognising “that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel,” one may also at the same time recognise “with sincerity and honesty” that “it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one’s limits” (§303).

Following these considerations, Francis asserts that “it is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being” (§304). The tone he uses at this point indicates how strongly Francis supports Thomas on this matter. “I earnestly ask,” he writes, “that we always recall a teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas and learn to incorporate it in our potential discernment.” And he goes on to quote a well-known passage from the *Summa Theologiae* which makes the point that “although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects,” and that “in matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles; and when there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all. The principle will be found to fail, according as we descend further into detail.”<sup>32</sup> Francis develops the argument further. “It is true,” he writes that:

General rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all practical situations. At the same time it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule. That would not only lead to an intolerable casuistry, but would endanger the very values which must be preserved with special care (§304).

In a footnote on the same page, Francis draws attention to the text in which, “referring to the general knowledge of the rule and the particular knowledge of

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetum*, III.27.2.

<sup>31</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 228.

<sup>32</sup> *STh* I-II 94.4.



practical discernment, Saint Thomas states that if only one of the two is present, it is preferable that it is the knowledge of the particular reality, which is closer to the act.”<sup>33</sup> “For this reason,” the Exhortation continues, “a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in ‘irregular’ situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives.” In the same spirit, the Pope expresses full agreement with the International Theological Commission’s remark that “natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions”<sup>34</sup> (§305).

What the Pope’s *Exhortation* shows, especially in Chapter Eight, is that there can be no proper moral assessment of human actions without an adequate understanding of human psychology. Francis finds in Thomas Aquinas the kind of philosophical/ psychological theory that can fill that role and satisfy that condition. For on Aquinas’ account, as one leading scholar has described it, a person:

Wills only what the intellect presents at that time as good under some description. Acts of will, then, are for something apprehended or cognised as good at a particular time and in particular circumstances, as distinct from something which is good considered unconditionally or abstractly. Besides happiness and the vision of God, all other things are such that they can in principle be considered good under some descriptions and not good under others, so that there is nothing about them which must constrain the will of any agent always to want them.<sup>35</sup>

This may give rise to situations where the intellect “influenced by the will, may be moved by opposed desires to represent the thing in question as both good (under one description) and not good (under a different description).”<sup>36</sup> Conversely, “the intellect need not present one simple, unified result to the will.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen, “the influence of the passions may also complicate the case.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, VI, 6.

<sup>34</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic. A New Look at Natural Law,” (2009), 59, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20090520\\_legge-naturale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html). The need to exercise humane reasonableness (*epieikeia*) as a corrective to the inadequacies of law is discussed by Aristotle in his examination of (particular) justice in *Nicomachean Ethics* V (1137a31-1138a3).

<sup>35</sup> Eleonore Stump, “Aquinas’s Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will,” *The Monist* 80/4 (2002): 580.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 582.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

*Amoris Laetitia* is full of references to Aquinas and is strongly influenced by his thought. The central philosophical argument that in morality there is a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of problems and situations derives directly from him. So does the view that when things go wrong, the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases, and that a negative judgement about an objective situation does not imply a judgement about the person involved; for as Aquinas shows, although one may be clear about general principles, the more one descends to matters of detail, the more frequently one encounters difficulties in determining what one should do. The Exhortation's reflections on conscience, the virtues, marital love, and the upbringing of children owe a lot to Aquinas' teachings, and it is for this reason that Francis invites his readers, especially those engaged in pastoral work, to be inspired by those teachings and to incorporate them in their approach. *Amoris Laetitia* can do this because, as John Finnis observes, "the natural soundness of Aquinas' theorizing, its explanatory power, and detachment from the conditions of his own time, and even his own life, contributes greatly to its lasting worth."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 14.

# Should there be a Place for Spirituality in Business? Reflections on Spirituality of a Business Leader

Nowadays, in the Western world, many people are realising that there is more to profits in the economy. In a post-Enron world,<sup>2</sup> people have become aware of the importance of ethics in business and the values that are being exercised in the day-to-day leadership. At the same time, spirituality in business and the workplace has increased. In the introduction to their book, *Managing as if faith mattered*, Alford and Naughton, pointed out that:

Ten years ago [in 1991], questions of faith and spirituality seemed, confined to the private realm, discussed publicly only in churches or during retreats. Now, conferences, seminars, and workshops reveal an awakening to the importance of the religious and spiritual dimensions in all realms of life.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, a proliferation of books on this subject; some of which I have read, have and are still being published at a steady pace. These include: *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*; *Jesus CEO*; *Working from the Heart*; *The Soul of Business*; *Spirit at Work*; *Leading with Soul*; *Redefining the Corporate Soul*;

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<sup>2</sup> A scandal, revealed in October 2001, eventually led to the largest bankruptcy reorganisation in American history at that time of the Enron Corporation, an American energy company.

<sup>3</sup> Helen J. Alford and Michael J. Naughton, *Managing as if Faith Mattered* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001), 2.

*Lead like Jesus, Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time; Jesus Entrepreneur; Jesus Life Coach; Leadership lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today's Leaders; The Leadership style of Jesus; Servant Leader; The Heart of a Leader: Insights on the Art of Influence; What Would the Buddha Do at Work?; The Corporate Mystic; Mother Teresa, CEO: Unexpected Principles for Practical Leadership; The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari: A Fable About Fulfilling Your Dreams & Reaching Your Destiny* and many others. Likewise, there are guides and websites on these books with practical guidelines, motivational videos, day-to-day exercises, sharing of lessons that life has taught, etc. However, more often than not, authors try to construct a business ethic or spirituality of business from scratch. Some authors simply “mix and match” useful ideas from different, and even conflicting traditions of thought. Moreover, some consider spirituality as a means of increasing integrity, job satisfaction and motivation.

## **The Role of Business Leaders**

For this article, the focus is on the entrepreneur, or better stated as the *business leader*, while also taking into consideration other players in the business institution. Business:

institutions are highly diverse, including cooperatives, multinational corporations, small entrepreneurial start-ups, employee-owned businesses, family businesses ... Some of these businesses are publicly traded stock companies, while most are privately held. Some have revenues larger than many countries, but most are small. Some are owned by thousands of investors, others are owned by a single person or family.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, in a business institution there are different types of roles. There are the employees, the supervisors, the managers, other professional people, and naturally there is the *business leader*.

The focus on the business leader is of utmost importance when one takes into consideration that we are living in a world where there are about 47,000 listed companies on stock-exchange,<sup>5</sup> consisting mostly of large companies, and an unquantified number of large non-listed companies, together with

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection* (Vatican / Minnesota: St. Paul - Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2014), 5. Except where indicated, the numbers quoted refer to paragraphs and not to pages.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, “Listed domestic companies, total,” <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/CM.MKT.LDOM.NO/countries/1W?display=graph>

approximately 125 million<sup>6</sup> registered micro, small and medium companies, as well as many other non-registered companies. One must not leave out self-employed businesses from this complex network albeit these are not considered to be companies. It is also important to take into consideration the influence that a leader's leadership style, skills, capabilities and values will have, both directly and indirectly on other employees and the market players.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as noted by the United States Catholic Bishops, "securing economic justice depends heavily on the *leadership* of men and women in business and on wise investment by private enterprises."<sup>8</sup>

A business leader should refrain from putting his interests first and be genuinely responsible for the community, society and the country; that is to act as required to safeguard the common good.<sup>9</sup> Even when talking to a person in a business institution, one must keep in mind that he is not just dealing with that individual but with a whole organization that has protocols and guidelines to handle things, policies and strategies that dictate how it functions within society.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, in business there are complex contexts that require good, cautious judgments "that are wise and rooted in reality and in truth."<sup>11</sup> Such judgments can be compared to a tree with roots. The roots are the theological grounding whilst the trunk represents the core principles and the branches

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<sup>6</sup> Khrystyna Kushnir, Melina Laura Mirmulstein and Rita Ramalho, "Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Around the World: How Many are There, and What Affects the Count?" <http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/9ae1dd80495860d6a482b519583b6d16/MSME-CI-AnalysisNote.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>, (2010).

<sup>7</sup> Empirical research has paid attention to the influence of religiosity, including Christianity, in several aspects of business. This includes making comparative studies between behaviour of Christians and other people, as well as the influence of Christian spirituality in managing and leading business. Yusuf Ahmed Nur and Dennis W. Organ, "Selected Organizational Outcome Correlates of Spirituality in the Workplace," *Psychological Reports* 98 (2006): 111-120.

<sup>8</sup> United States Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, *Economic Justice for All* (Washington: United States Catholic Bishops, 1986), 110. My emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Not every economist agrees with the term *common good*. It is also criticized, referring to it as the Tragedy of the Commons, amongst other things. However, there are particular economists, such as the 2009 Noble Prize only woman economist Elinor Ostrom, who proved that the commons do not have to end in tragedy. This article has a limitation as it did not delve into this issue.

<sup>10</sup> See Carmen Ansotegui, Fernando Gómez-Bezares and Raúl González Fabre, *Ética de las finanzas* (Bilboa: Desclée de Brouwer, 2014), 175.

<sup>11</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 27.

signify the secondary principles. Lastly, the leaves symbolise the situations encountered in business which require the application of good judgement. However, “the ability to make reasoned judgments...must be nurtured in the moral and spiritual culture from which business leaders come, namely their families, religion, educational institutions and the larger communities to which they belong. For the Christian business leader, at the heart of that culture is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as pointed out by Cardinal Bertone:

The business leader is not a speculator, but essentially an innovator. The speculator makes it his goal to maximize profit; for him, business is merely a means to an end, and that end is profit. For the speculator, building roads and establishing hospitals or schools is not the goal, but merely a means to the goal of maximum profit. It should be immediately clear that the speculator is not the model of business leader that the Church holds up as an agent and builder of the common good.<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, the business leader should be an “innovator,” an agent and also a builder of common good.

### Real Examples of Business Leaders

Having defined the role of the business leader, it is now worth taking a look at some instances in the business world where companies have applied some form of spiritual practice for various reasons, such as for guidance in decision-making or to prepare for tough situations. Some practical examples include: *Timberland Shoes* CEO who uses his prayer book and religious beliefs to guide him in business decisions and company policy making, apart from consulting his rabbi on regular bases. The CEO of *Bio Genex* uses the Hindu holy text to steer his business out of trouble. In the *American Stock Exchange* there is a Torah study group. The plane manufacturing giant; *Boeing* has Christian, Muslim and Jewish prayer groups whilst *Microsoft* has an on-line prayer service. Companies such as *Apple*, *Google*, *Yahoo*, *IBM*, *Cisco*, and *Prentice-Hall* have meditation classes, where some give hours on company time to pray, as it was found that such practices improve productivity and creativity. Others resort to meditation to come up with ideas, projects and company names. Another interesting fact is that executives of *Xerox* have gone on week-long retreats.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>13</sup> Tarcisio Bertone, “Address Secretary of State for the Opening of the Executive Summit on Ethics for the Business World,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/card-bertone/2011/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20110616\\_business-ethics\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/card-bertone/2011/documents/rc_seg-st_20110616_business-ethics_en.html).

The following are further real examples of good role models in the business world. One can easily encounter other examples:

James E. Burke was the CEO of pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson when the Tylenol poison crisis hit the firm in 1982. Seven people in Chicago died when they used Tylenol capsules that had been emptied and filled with cyanide. Burke is widely credited for immediately withdrawing the capsules (at a cost of 100 million dollars), and for being very honest with all the stakeholders and the media. He said that the J&J Credo states at its very beginning that: "our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, and patients and to mothers and all others who use our products," and admitted that these were the words which inspired him to do the immediate, expensive recall. Burke and J&J gained immense stature with the public because of the way they handled the crisis.

Burke later reflected upon his and the company's decisions: "All we did was what we thought any responsible company would have done in our position - and people reacted as if this were some radical new departure for American business. My God, what did people expect we'd do? The amount of mistrust and cynicism out there is really depressing."

During the 1980s CEO Burke resisted pressure from Wall Street for constant quarterly earning increments and instead made long-term investments that have paid off handsomely in new products and he also succeeded at taking J&J to China and Russia. After retiring from J&J, Burke became president of the Business Enterprise Trust, an organization of business leaders that identifies business firms which are especially responsible from year to year. The Trust selected at least five firms each year, held them up as models of virtuous behaviour in business and publicized their acts, both through written testimonies and videos for business school students. Burke says that he learned more that is helpful to him in business through his undergraduate liberal arts program at Jesuit College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., than he did at the Harvard Business School.<sup>14</sup>

Other examples are:

- Lour Giuliano, the former boss of ITT Industries, used to have a plaque in his office that read, "Bidden or not bidden, God is present."
- The relentlessly entrepreneurial Wayne Huizenga said that he prays for his employees almost every day.

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<sup>14</sup> Gerald F. Cavanagh and Mark R. Bandsuch, "Virtue as a Benchmark for Spirituality in Business," *Journal of Business Ethics* 38 (2002): 109-112, 115.

- The former CEO of Alaska Airlines encouraged his caterers to place cards with Bible verses on every meal tray.
- Tom Monaghan reserved an entire wing of the Domino's office complex in Anna Arbor, Michigan, for Catholic apostolates, including the Thomas More Society, the Spiritus Sanctus Academies, and Legatus.
- Mark Dillon, the president of Tampa Bay Steel Corporation, tries to solve difficult corporate problems - what should he do about a delinquent customer? Should he sack an underperforming employee? - by consulting the Bible.<sup>15</sup>
- Mark Weinberger, the CEO of Ernest and Young (EY), which is one of the four biggest audit firms in the world, pointed out in a speech, that EY was working hard to change their culture both because it is the right thing to do and because it is a smart business move to make. Like most major financial firms, EY has a turnover problem among mid-career working parents. It is also combatting an industry-wide culture of overwork and employs many millennials who are increasingly demanding flexibility. Furthermore, it is a business that depends upon the talent and dedication of its employees. Before Weinberger became CEO, he discussed the opportunity with his wife and four children. His family agreed that he could take the job only if he remained a highly-involved dad. Shortly after becoming CEO, he was in China giving his first big speech to the EY employees there, along with many business partners and government officials. He was nervous about the speech and wanted it to be memorable. A big dinner reception was to be held afterwards. However, Weinberger ended his speech with an apology. He stated that he would have to skip the reception to catch the next plane home so that he could take his daughter to her driver's test. He explained that he had promised his daughter to do so a year before and felt the need to stay true to his word in honour of his commitment to his family.<sup>16</sup>

## Fragmentation and Compartmentalization

Such observable good traits of leadership give hope. However, in today's reality and the daily life events one encounters, there can be cases where one finds himself obsessing over his own personal life and focusing solely on his own interests and concerns. The repercussion is that such a person leaves no

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<sup>15</sup> The examples quoted taken from John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See "Leading by Example: EY's CEO Mark Weinberger on Work and Family," <http://fathersworkandfamily.com/2014/07/09/leading-by-example-eyes-ceo-mark-weinberger-on-work-and-family/>.



room for others in his life.<sup>17</sup> There is also, “activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable,”<sup>18</sup> thus work becomes unrewarding and tiring. Meanwhile, there is also a call for individuals to take the initiative on a personal level to mind the gap that exists between faith and ethics, between spirituality and morality. This is the *divided life*. “This split between faith and daily business practice can lead to imbalances and misplaced devotion to worldly success.”<sup>19</sup> This is “the split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives.”<sup>20</sup>

One can mention various real life examples, including that of Joseph P. Nacchio, former chairman and CEO of Quest Communications, and L. Dennis Kozlowski, former CEO of Tyco International, both of whom claimed Roman Catholic affiliations but faced media scrutiny of their business ethics.<sup>21</sup> Kozlowski, along with other senior officers of Tyco, was charged with violations of federal securities laws by the Securities and Exchange Commission. He also dragged Seton Hall University into the controversy, which is his Alma Mater and to which he has been a generous benefactor.<sup>22</sup> Former CEO of Enron, Kenneth Lay, was forced to resign amid federal investigations for fraud.<sup>23</sup> These examples, amongst many others, are a reminder for business leaders “into believing, falsely, that their professional lives are incompatible with their spiritual lives.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, the business leaders “risk valuing status and fame over lasting accomplishment, and consequently risk losing their good judgment.”<sup>25</sup>

This gap is what Alford and Naughton called “fragmentation,”<sup>26</sup> whilst MacIntyre referred to it as “compartmentalization.”<sup>27</sup> Fragmentation “arises from a divided life or a split personality - that is, embracing a distinct set of

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<sup>17</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG], 24 November 2013, 2. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 82.

<sup>19</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, Executive Summary, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* [GS], 43.

<sup>21</sup> See “How Tyco’s CEO Enriched Himself,” *Wall Street Journal* 113 (7 August 2002): 1.

<sup>22</sup> See John Byrne, “Seton Hall of Shame?,” *Business Week Online*, 20 September 2002, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/stories/2002-09-19/seton-hall-of-shame>.

<sup>23</sup> See “High Profiles in Hot Water,” *Wall Street Journal* 113 (28 June, 2002): B1

<sup>24</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Alford and Naughton, *Managing as if Faith Mattered*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Alisdair MacIntyre, *A Culture of Choices and Compartmentalization*, <http://brandon.multics.org/library/Alasdair%20MacIntyre/macintyre2000choices.html>.

values at work and another set in non-work or private milieu.”<sup>28</sup> “Constantly changing masks creates a disjoint within the person”<sup>29</sup> and at the extreme, it may even cause one to lose his soul, through a disconnection from his inner self, as one switch off his conscience in some spheres of his life.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, compartmentalization refers to the manner by which individuals have managed to separate and live within distinct spheres. Naughton argues that “when work is separated from our faith, we are denying the image in which we were created, which is the beginning of denying our end in salvation.”<sup>31</sup> This leads to the distancing of oneself from his actions. Wolfe and Roels summarised this in the following statement:

Faith and work can be compatible, personally and spiritually rewarding, as well as be a means for responding to God’s gift of love and relationship. Yet the potential for serious disconnects between early personal spiritual formation and corporate leadership must be recognized. Sometimes the loosening of connections begins in business school where subtle messages about corporate mission and ethical responsibility undermine faith-based values and perspectives on business. The disconnect can become greater if powerful corporate cultures are not complemented by other sources of accountability and ongoing faith formation that assist individuals in living out their vocational identity.<sup>32</sup>

## Non-Theistic Accounts of Spirituality

With the presence of fragmentation and compartmentalization as challenges in today’s world and in the business scenario, there are different points of views that arise both from a theistic and a non-theistic form of spirituality. A particular non-theistic movement is the spiritual management development (SMD). In an article, Bell and Taylor tried to identify the theoretical foundations and practical features

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<sup>28</sup> Cristine Atienza; Maria A. Santiago, “Role of Business Leaders in the Integrality of the Working Individual,” *De La Salle University Business Notes and Briefings* 1/3 (2013): 1.

<sup>29</sup> Alford and Naughton, *Managing as if Faith Mattered*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> See Michael J. Naughton, “A Divided Life: One of the More Serious Errors for the Christian Professional,” in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times and Interpreting them in Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 1-16.

<sup>31</sup> Michael J. Naughton, “The Corporation as a Community of Work: Understanding the Firm Within the Catholic Social Tradition,” *Ave Maria Law Review* 4 (2006): 42.

<sup>32</sup> Regina Wentzel Wolfe and Shirley Roels, “Roman Catholic and Protestant Perspectives on Business as a Calling: Managerial Leadership in the Corporate Square,” in *Business as a Calling, Interdisciplinary Essays on the Meaning of Business from the Catholic Social Tradition*, eds. Michael Naughton and Stephanie Rumpza (St. Paul, Minnesota: Center for Catholic Studies, 2004), 25 (online edition: <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/documents/businessasacallingpdf/14WolfeRoels.pdf>).

of SMD following religious keywords that diffused in the management field. There is a discourse dominated by intrinsic motivation, commitment, empowerment, personal growth and self-actualization which leads to various programmes in a holistic approach, recognizing and cultivating spirituality. The SMD focuses on the meaning and significance of existence, making it implicitly religious whilst not necessarily drawing directly on religious belief.<sup>33</sup> SMD is a term used “to refer to the wide variety of seminars, workshops, and training courses that employ a discourse based on self-fulfilment, self-discovery and self-development in relation to managerial work.”<sup>34</sup> The goals of SMD are “personal growth and self-creation, rather than self-knowledge or knowledge about the organisation,”<sup>35</sup> “search for meaning and explore feelings of solidarity and re-identification with their work roles and work organisation.”<sup>36</sup> SMD employs different techniques which are dominated by New Age movement, focusing on the self as the key to personal and corporate salvation while putting forward the believe that spirituality can be practiced in the business world in a ‘pick and mix’ approach. Bell and Taylor suggest that SMD “provides a place of temporary retreat from the difficulties and uncertainties of work life where individuals can seek security and try to overcome the feelings of separateness and isolation they experience in the workplace.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore “the rejection of rational knowledge and denial of social structure leads towards a praxis that turns organizational issues into spiritual ones for which the individual is responsible.”<sup>38</sup> There is no reference to deity.

Moreover, in a paper, which reviewed a 140 papers on spirituality at work, to explore how spirituality improves employees’ performances and organizational effectiveness; Karakas pointed out that through the literature reviewed, it became apparent that there exist three different perspectives on how spirituality benefits employees and supports organizational performance. These are that: a) Spirituality enhances employees’ well-being and quality of life; b) Spirituality provides employees with a sense of purpose and meaning at work; c) Spirituality provides employees with a sense of interconnectedness and community.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> See Emma Bell and Scott Taylor, “‘From Outward Bound to Inward Bound:’ The Prophetic Voices and Discursive Practices of Spiritual Management Development,” *Human Relations* 57(2004): 439-466, 440-443.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>39</sup> See Fahri Karakas, “Spirituality and Performance in Organizations: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 94 (2010): 89-106.

author also pointed out that “to achieve successful integration of spirituality at work, major concerns and caveats of bringing spirituality at work should be adequately addressed.” These caveats include openness and freedom of expression and acknowledgement of employees as whole persons.<sup>40</sup> As Karakas concluded, “in the 21st century, organizations need to incorporate a set of humanistic and spiritual values into workplaces to enable human hearts, spirits and souls to grow and flourish.”<sup>41</sup> These studies show signs of positivity and hope for business activity, and provide a good ground for dialogue from a theistic spirituality point of view.

### **Meanings of Theistic Spirituality that can Help Business Professionals**

Max Weber’s work, *Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, is one of the first texts to make an explicit connection between business activity and spiritual practice with reference to deity. In fact, the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism is shown in his famous treatise, in which he explains where and how Protestantism has influenced the contemporary attitudes of work. Weber argued that the asceticism of Protestantism played a significant role in the development of capitalism. Many changes have occurred since 1930 when the treatise was written till today. In this regard, in today’s world, as Heather Höpfl points out:

Spirituality has become a matter of personal preference and choice, has become a self-indulgent concern with personal spiritual well-being. There is no allegiance to a community and no sense of collective responsibility. There is little or no understanding of the importance of discernment in moral matters, nor collective celebration which is not primarily self-referential.<sup>42</sup>

This statement points out the challenges whilst asserting that there exists a relationship and close connection between spirituality and morality in a theistic form.

To this, questions arise regarding the meaning and definition of spirituality and its connection to the business activity, which is in itself a moral activity. Spirituality is the source of moral life on which the actions we take are founded. Hence, morality and spirituality cannot be separated into two different areas. Spirituality affects and shapes the moral person, the person’s character, the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>42</sup> Heather Höpfl, “Catholicism: Incarnation and Remembrance of the Body,” in *Belief and Organization*, eds. Peter Case et al. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 109.

powers that modify the person and the moral deliberation. Virtue leads to action, providing a sensitivity and inclination to do the right thing.<sup>43</sup> Spirituality without morality is incorporeal and morality without spirituality is rootless. Thus, spirituality is a search for inner identity, connectedness and transcendence.

Having said this, William C. Spohn makes a difference between “lived spirituality” and “reflective spirituality.”

Lived spirituality, analogous to morality, refers to the practice of transformative, affective, practical, and holistic disciplines that seek to connect the person with reality’s deepest meanings. It is concerned not primarily with isolated experiences such as visions or insights, but with a way of life that consciously seeks to live in tune with ultimate or comprehensive realities.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, for Spohn:

Reflective spirituality, analogous to ethics, stands for the second-order interpretation and communication of this dimension of experience as experience. It employs theological, historical-contextual, artistic, anthropological, and hermeneutical methods to analyse the lived experience.<sup>45</sup>

This aids further reflection upon our theme since it provides insight on the different meanings and types of spirituality.

Reflection on all of this, derives the question, that Rossouw, asked over twenty years ago, when he wrote the article: “Business Ethics: Where Have All the Christians Gone?”<sup>46</sup> In the mentioned article, the author surmised the integration between spirituality and ethics and noticed that at that time few Christian proposals for business ethics were presented. He argued that postmodern culture offers theology an opportunity to get re-involved in the world of business, thus re-establishing a close connection between spirituality (in a theistic form) and business. In this regard, from a Catholic point of view and according to Höpfl, spirituality “is the way in which the individual and the community of the Church relate to the deity.”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, Höpfl compares the Easter rite with the individual and the organisation, the individual and the *shared* culture and the desire for shared commitments. He demonstrates that “it

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<sup>43</sup> See Richard M. Gula, *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> William C. Spohn, “Spirituality and Ethics: Exploring the Connections,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 112.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Gedeon J. Rossouw, “Business Ethics: Where Have All the Christians Gone?,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 13 (1994): 557-570.

<sup>47</sup> Höpfl, “Catholicism: Incarnation and Remembrance of the Body,” 110.

is a service without the more usual celebration of the Eucharist which binds a congregation to a common purpose,<sup>48</sup> where “the experience is individual but guided by a common intention: a higher order of authority.”<sup>49</sup>

However, both feet on the ground, as Pope Francis pointed out, “the return to the sacred and the quest for spirituality which mark our own time are ambiguous phenomena.”<sup>50</sup> At the same time, “whenever we say that something is ‘spirited,’ it usually refers to some interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity.”<sup>51</sup>

As Pope Francis brought to the fore, in some places and maybe also in businesses, “a spiritual ‘desertification’ has evidently come about, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots.”<sup>52</sup> It is a risk where Catholics, including business leaders, are “being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements, some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God,”<sup>53</sup> which is a “human reaction to a materialistic, consumerist and individualistic society.”<sup>54</sup>

As already outlined above, in the spiritual practices that are being carried out in some businesses, there is the “immanentism”<sup>55</sup> that expresses a “false autonomy which has no place for God,”<sup>56</sup> and which can take “the form of a spiritual consumerism tailored to one’s own unhealthy individualism,”<sup>57</sup> with the risk of ending up “by being taken in by solutions which neither make life truly human nor give glory to God,”<sup>58</sup> as individuals try to satisfy their thirst for transcendence and for God with “alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus who demands nothing of them with regard to others.”<sup>59</sup> This leads to “various forms of a ‘spirituality of well-being’ divorced from any community

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *EG* 89.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

life”<sup>60</sup> and a “spiritual worldliness”<sup>61</sup> with “an obsession with programmes of self-help and self-realization.”<sup>62</sup>

Such a gap, the divided life, compartmentalization and fragmentation happen to business leaders, as they do to other believers. Thus, the call made by the United States Catholic Bishops in 1986 which is still timely in today’s world although it goes back to more than 30 years ago:

We need a spirituality which calls forth and supports lay initiative and witness not just in our churches but also in business, in the labour movement, in the professions, in education, and in public life. Our faith is not just a weekend obligation, a mystery to be celebrated around the altar on Sunday. It is a pervasive reality to be practiced every day in homes, offices, factories, schools, and businesses across our land. We cannot separate what we believe from how we act in the marketplace and the broader community, for this is where we make our primary contribution to the pursuit of economic justice.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace document, *Vocation of the business leader*, outlines that:

Fortunately, new movements and programs have been developed in an effort to take moral and spiritual life more seriously in relation to business. Faith-and-work groups, spirituality of work programs, business ethics training and social responsibility projects, are all helping business leaders to manage their companies in the spirit of St. Paul’s exhortation: ‘But test everything; hold fast what is good’ (*1 Thes 5,21*). Many of these groups and movements are enabling business leaders to recognise their work as a vocation and the role their businesses play in contributing to the common good.<sup>64</sup>

Here, the document is referring to the Economy of Communion from the Focolare movement, UNIAPAC, Legatus, Woodstock Business Conference, *Compagnia delle Opere* from the Communion and Liberation movement, as well as other movements that take the relationship of faith and business seriously. Their aim, the teleological goal is the common good, where their love is expressed in contributing to the wellbeing of others in the community. This brings hope to the business leader.

At the same time, curiously enough, the word “spirituality” rarely appears in Catholic social teachings, while its assumptions are woven throughout. The

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> United States Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, 25.

<sup>64</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 25.

principles of the Catholic social teaching are rooted in the dignity of every human person and bring us together as a community, while creating relationships of love and respect. These principles are born of “the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society.”<sup>65</sup> “The spirituality assumed in Catholic social thought revolves around the understanding of God’s involvement in the world through humans as well as the human response to the divine initiative,”<sup>66</sup> where thus the connection between spirituality and morality is intertwined.

### **Vocation of a Business Leader from a Christian Perspective**

Having reviewed meanings of spirituality, a delving point on the business leader is important before arguing about how Christian spirituality can be of help to a business leader. In view of this, some questions arise: How is the business leader viewed from a Christian perspective? How are we going to dialogue with business leaders? What is the role of the ordinary pastoral ministry in all this? What is the role of the Church? Pope Francis pointed out that “ordinary pastoral ministry seeks to help believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God’s love ever more fully in their lives.”<sup>67</sup> It is an invitation to accompany other believers, including those who have the vocation of business leaders, who want to advance in spiritual life and thus “constantly be missionaries.”<sup>68</sup> Business leaders qualify as missionaries as well because “business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving

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<sup>65</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* *Libertatis conscientia*, 72. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19860322\\_freedom-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html).

<sup>66</sup> Michael H. Crosby, “Spirituality,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1994), 918.

<sup>67</sup> *EG* 15.

<sup>68</sup> See *ibid.*, no. 272: “When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries. The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs. A committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others.”



to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all;”<sup>69</sup> thus emphasising equal access to all.

In itself, business is a vocation as “when businesses and markets as a whole are functioning properly and are regulated in an effective manner by government, they make an *irreplaceable contribution* to the material and even *spiritual well-being of humankind*.”<sup>70</sup> Hence, taking all this into consideration, the spiritual accompaniment leads others, including business leaders, ever closer to God, in whom they attain true freedom.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, “the calling of the entrepreneur must be considered within the more comprehensive call to holiness.”<sup>72</sup> There is the example of Blessed Giuseppe Tovini, a businessman and banker from Brescia, who used to say “without faith, your children will never be rich; with faith they will never be poor.” This makes Tovini an excellent role-model in the business world amongst others, because he eloquently proves that not all business men and business endeavours are bad, as people seem to believe.

And what is the view of the Catholic Church on business? In relation to this, Pope Pius XII made a significant contribution to the formulation of the Catholic social tradition on the nature and purpose of the enterprise, by incorporating the spiritual and moral resources of the social tradition - that is, the social nature of property and its private ownership, the role of virtue, the idea of communities of people, and so forth.<sup>73</sup>

However, it was only in 1983, in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, that the word “entrepreneur” actually appeared for the first time in a papal social encyclical. To be an entrepreneur is a special gift, a gift from God. Here:

Pope John Paul II viewed enterprise as an activity of God the Creator whose image is impressed upon humanity. This image is clearly expressed in the abilities of men and women to combine *intellectus* (mind), *res* (material things) and *opera* (work) to produce goods and services that *enhance* and *fulfil* the human persons within community.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>70</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 2. My emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> See EG 170.

<sup>72</sup> William J. Toth, “The Entrepreneurial Calling: Perspectives from Rahner,” in *Business as a Calling*, 1. (online edition: <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/documents/businessasacallingpdf/04Toth.pdf>).

<sup>73</sup> See Jean-Yves Calvez and Michael J. Naughton, “Catholic Social Teaching and the Purpose of the Business Organization,” in *Rethinking the Purpose of Business*, eds. Stephen A. Cortright and Michael J. Naughton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>74</sup> Toth, “The Entrepreneurial Calling,” 2-3. My emphasis.

This enhancement and fulfilment of the human person is one of the aims that needs to be achieved for the common good. Pope John Paul II treated enterprise and the role of the entrepreneur as a right subsumed under the right to personal economic initiative and even considered this right to be co-equal to the right of religious liberty.

Furthermore, in talks to managers, entrepreneurs and professionals, Pope John Paul II has insisted that entrepreneurship is a form of social service, a service to all. In an address to the entrepreneurs of Milan, Pope John Paul II remarked: “the degree of well-being that society enjoys today would have been impossible without the dynamic figure of the entrepreneur, whose function consists in organizing human labour and the means of production in order to produce goods and services.”<sup>75</sup> The entrepreneur also balances and adjusts to market needs, worker expectations and the demands of correct business management.<sup>76</sup> Most importantly, an entrepreneur is a steward of the resources of a nation. “These resources are not to be possessed but to serve labour and ultimately, to be made available to all in society,”<sup>77</sup> thus men or women for others. The economic activity is also called upon to contribute to the work of salvation in Jesus Christ, as the economic work contributes to the building of the Kingdom.

This economic activity reflects the theological dimensions of the Trinity. Although Karl Rahner had not written on entrepreneurship *per se*, following his theological writings one can attain a Rahnerian theology of entrepreneurship. The first base-point lies “in the creative and providential mission of the Father.”<sup>78</sup> This love is concertized in the kenotic risk of the Son. The second theological base-point for the entrepreneur - one which underscores the depth of his or her risk - can be found in the “searching Christology” of Rahner, where Christ illuminates the depths of self-emptying love upon which all human risk is grounded. A final and most significant characteristic of the entrepreneurial vocation can be drawn from Rahner’s understanding of the Holy Spirit.<sup>79</sup>

For Rahner, the manifestation of creativity is just the first phase of the Holy Spirit’s activity. The circle of the Holy Spirit’s activity becomes complete when the “entrepreneur-creator” of the breakthrough acknowledges and surrenders personally to the uncreated Creator as the ultimate source all human creativity. In

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<sup>75</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Address to the Entrepreneurs of Milan” (22 May 1983), *L’Osservatore Romano* 15 (30 May 1983): 5.

<sup>76</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Toth, “The Entrepreneurial Calling,” 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 7.

<sup>79</sup> See *ibid.*, no. 10.

that process, not just the work of the entrepreneur but the entrepreneur is blessed. At that moment he or she becomes *kainon* - a new creation. At that moment the entrepreneur has accomplished the basic human task which, according to Rahner, is to surrender to transcendental order of truth and value whose ground is God.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, the three key works are “creative and providential mission,” “self-emptying love,” and “new creation.” Having established this, one may ask: What is the role of the Church in all this? “The place of the Church is to provide business leaders with fundamental and practical principles to consider in their decisions, but not to prescribe particular courses of action.”<sup>81</sup> In a message sent by Pope Francis to the Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum on the occasion of the Annual Meeting at Davos-Klosters (Switzerland), Pope Francis pointed out that:

The international business community can count on many men and women of great personal honesty and integrity, whose work is inspired and guided by high ideals of fairness, generosity and concern for the authentic development of the human family. I urge you to draw upon these great human and moral resources and to take up this challenge with determination and far-sightedness. Without ignoring, naturally, the specific scientific and professional requirements of every context, I ask you to ensure that humanity is served by wealth and not ruled by it.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, a Christian ethic and spirituality, essentially based upon fellowship with Jesus Christ, favour these ideals and concern for an authentic development of human family. “Without receptivity [and interiority] in their lives, business leaders can be tempted...to regard themselves as *determining* and *creating* their own principles, not as receiving them.”<sup>83</sup> “Christian business leaders are men and women of action who have demonstrated an authentic entrepreneurial spirit, one that recognises the God-given responsibility to accept the vocation of business generously and faithfully.”<sup>84</sup>

These leaders are motivated by much more than financial success, enlightened self-interest, or an abstract social contract as is often prescribed by economic literature and management textbooks. Faith enables Christian business leaders

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., no. 11.

<sup>81</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 74.

<sup>82</sup> Pope Francis, “Message to the Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum on the Occasion of the Annual Meeting at Davos-Klosters (Switzerland),” [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140117\\_messaggio-wef-davos.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140117_messaggio-wef-davos.html)

<sup>83</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 66.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 61.

to see a much larger world, a world in which God is at work, and where their individual interests and desires are not the sole driving force.

## Bridging the Gap

Following this review on different meanings of spirituality (theistic and non-theistic), the challenges in spirituality, business *per se*, the business leader and the role of the Church, a thought-provoking quote provided in the document *Vocation of a business leader* states that:

When business leaders integrate the gifts of the spiritual life, the virtues and ethical social principles into their life and work, they may overcome the divided life and receive the grace to foster the integral development of all business stakeholders. The Church calls upon business leaders to *receive* - humbly acknowledging what God has done for them - and to *give* - entering into communion with others to make the world a better place. *Practical wisdom* informs their approach to business and strengthens business leaders to respond to the world's challenges not with fear or cynicism, but with the virtues of faith, hope and love.<sup>85</sup>

This is a call to receive and give, through a journey of faith, hope and love. It is a call to overcome fragmentation and compartmentalization which challenge our spirituality. Furthermore, it is a call for the Church to accompany, where business is viewed in an integrated approach. Interestingly, Verstraeten tried to explain how “Christians are called to affirm a *difference* in business and that as such they become relevant as a source of moral innovation and transformation towards more humanity.”<sup>86</sup> This is different from a self-centred business leader. “The moral life of Christians cannot be practiced without discipleship.”<sup>87</sup> All this discourse about the “calling” of business:

Can give the impression that one can easily merge the rationality of business with the ethico-religious language of ‘vocation’ or ‘calling.’ This is quite problematic since the world of business and the sciences related to it (management theories, business ethics) are affected by the differentiation process of modernity.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>86</sup> Johan Verstraeten, “How Faith Makes a Difference: Business as a Calling or the Calling of Christians in Business?,” in *Business as a Calling* (online edition: <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/documents/businessasacallingpdf/02Verstraeten.pdf>) 1.

<sup>87</sup> Alain Thomasset, *Paul Ricoeur: Une poétique de la morale* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 208.

<sup>88</sup> Verstraeten, “How Faith Makes a Difference,” 2.

Furthermore, one must provide an answer to the following impeding question: How does one articulate the unifying spirit of an enterprise inspired by one's faith while at the same time respecting the diversity that its success ushers in?<sup>89</sup>

Christian life leads to a hermeneutic interruption of business since Christians are not only "citizens" of the world of business and its hermeneutic horizon, but they also have access to another horizon of interpretation which is quite different. The point is not, as McCann has suggested, that Christians have access to a hermeneutical horizon which is "older" than the horizon of modernity with its instrumental rationality<sup>90</sup>, but rather, that it is a *different* horizon. This is because:

Christians cultivate a hermeneutic relationship to an interpreting community and an ethos that is *different* than that of modernity and its forms of instrumental and managerial rationality, they are [*sic*] able to discover ethical and meta-ethical perspectives that can break through the dominance of this type of rationality and social organization which is coupled with it, as well as it enables them to break through the narrow angle of 'problem solving' (seeking solution on the basis of the analysis of problems instead of on the basis of innovative new perspectives).<sup>91</sup>

## New Perspectives - How Christian Spirituality Could be of Use

In this last part, new perspectives inspired by Catholic faith are outlined. These perspectives, as a way to unify the spirit of an enterprise, respect also the diversity that business is walking into. One can bring into focus perspectives such as servant leadership, centrality of human development, business as a community as well as the role of virtues, and values framework amongst others.

### Servant Leadership

One path is servant leadership, which is based on religious faith.<sup>92</sup> The adoption of a servant's attitude not only reflects and celebrates the lesson taught by Jesus when he washed the feet of his disciples; but also highlights the difference between leadership, and authoritarian exercise of power and management. Guitián, in his study, presents the ethical concept of service as a

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<sup>89</sup> See Kenneth E. Goodpaster and Laura L. Nash, *Policies and Persons* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 135-150.

<sup>90</sup> See Dennis P. McCann, "Umpire and Batsman: Is it Cricket to be both?," *Journal of Business Ethics* 5 (1986): 445-452.

<sup>91</sup> Verstraeten, "How Faith Makes a Difference," 4.

<sup>92</sup> See Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

way of specifying higher ethical principles in business practice. He argued that this ethical concept of service can act as a bridge for bringing love, benevolence, consideration and other related concepts into business practice. Furthermore, service provides ethical growth through virtue.<sup>93</sup> This “provides business leaders with a larger perspective and helps them to balance the demands of the business world with those of ethical social principles, illuminated for Christians by the Gospel.”<sup>94</sup> When Christian business leaders fail to live the Gospel in their organisations, their lives “conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, importance must be awarded to personal growth, working towards a state of a whole self, unfolding of individuality and the development of moral strength and consistency.<sup>96</sup> It is the holistic and integrated life, involving “integrating mind, body and spirit in all spheres of life, including work.”<sup>97</sup>

“When the gifts of the spiritual life are embraced and integrated into the active life, they provide the grace needed to overcome the divided life and to humanise us, especially in our work.”<sup>98</sup> Moreover:

The Church calls the Christian business leader to receive the sacraments, to accept the Scriptures, to honour the Sabbath, to pray, to participate in silence and in other disciplines of the spiritual life. These are not optional actions for a Christian, not mere private acts separated and disconnected from business.<sup>99</sup>

### **Authentic Human Development**

Another path is the authentic human development. An area which requires effective application of spirituality is the area of how employees are treated.

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<sup>93</sup> See Gregorio Guitián, “Service as a Bridge Between Ethical Principles and Business Practice: A Catholic Social Teaching Perspective,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 127 (2014): 59-72.

<sup>94</sup> Harrington et al, *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> *GS* 19.

<sup>96</sup> See Cécile Rozuel, “The Moral Threat of Compartmentalization: Self, Roles and Responsibility,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 102/4 (2011): 688. Cécile Rozuel, “The Moral Threat of Compartmentalization,” 658: “The moral responsibility requires us to move away from a role-based life game which leads us to compartmentalize and forget who we are and what we value at a significant cost. On the contrary, an understanding of the process of compartmentalization and a greater awareness of the complex yet holistic nature of the self-contribute to furthering moral integrity and responsibility.”

<sup>97</sup> Judi Neal David Miller and Tim Ewest, *The Integration Box (TIB): An Individual and Institutional Faith, Religion, and spirituality at Work Assessment Tool* [Online]. Princeton University. <http://www.princeton.edu/faithandwork/tib/research/vienna>, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 68.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

Employees are not mere human resources or human capital, but human beings with capacities, qualities, intelligence and freedom - human beings who are in search of satisfying genuine human needs, enhancing their spiritual well-being and their religious freedom. A business leader leads and focuses on employees and people, whereas a manager manages things. A leader is someone who influences people towards achieving an objective, an aim for the common good. For a Christian leader, who is also a witness of the social message of the Catholic Church,<sup>100</sup> the objective is the integral human development. In fact, for the Catholic Social Teaching (which is also considered as moral theology in practice) integral human development is the centre of social thought and action. It is a vocation at which all personal, social, and political activity must be directed.

The centrality of human development in business is outlined in the book; *Human Development in Business: Values and Humanistic Management in the Encyclical Caritas in Veritate*, edited by Domènec Melé and Claus Dierksmeier.<sup>101</sup> Psychologists like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, management thinkers like Elton Mayo and Mary Parker Follett have proposed a humanistic approach to leadership in companies. Benedict XVI also appealed in his 2009 encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, for the creation of “a new humanistic synthesis,”<sup>102</sup> that demands placing man at the centre of conducting business, or as Sandelands emphasised; “the Business of Business is the Human Person.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, this humanistic management - which is a descriptive perspective - must be understood as a way of how leadership ought to be conducted.

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<sup>100</sup> See *ibid.*, 60: “Today more than ever,” St. John Paul II wrote, “the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the *witness of actions* than as a result of its internal logic and consistency.” These witnesses of action, the great majority of whom are among the lay faithful, are not “solely passive beneficiaries but are the protagonists of the Church’s social doctrine at the vital moment of its implementation. They are also valuable collaborators of the pastors in its formulation, thanks to the experience they have acquired in the field and to their own specific skills.” *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 62: “Business leaders are supported and guided by the Church as well as by Christian business organisations to live out the Gospel in the world. Without these practitioners and the organisations that support them, the Catholic social tradition would become merely inanimate words rather than a lived reality. As St. James tells us, faith without works is dead (Jas 2:17).”

<sup>101</sup> *Human Development in Business: Values and Humanistic Management in the Encyclical ‘Caritas in Veritate’*, eds., Domènec Melé and C. Dierksmeier (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>102</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, [CV] 21.

<sup>103</sup> Lloyd Sandelands, “The Business of Business is the Human Person: Lessons from the Catholic Social Tradition,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 85/1 (2009): 93-101

In his study, Sandelands, also describes a person-centred ethic of business that is based upon eight social principles, which are; 1) the principle of the common good, 2) the universal destination of goods, 3) the principle of subsidiarity, 4) participation, 5) the principle of solidarity, 6) the fundamental values of social life, 7) the way of love, 8) business is a glory of God.<sup>104</sup> The latter principle came to me as a surprise considering the negative connotations that business carries along with those involved in it. However, it is also consolatory to read that “business glorifies God *as it helps man to his incarnation*; to his realization of God in becoming a person and to his embodiment of God in taking part in a union of male and female in one flesh.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, following Novak,<sup>106</sup> in business there are “three cardinal virtues in whose exercise man comes to be in God: creativity, building community, and practical realism.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, “entrepreneurs ... should be encouraged to recognise their work as a true vocation and to respond to God’s call in the spirit of true disciples. In doing so, they engage in the noble task of serving their brothers and sisters and of building up the Kingdom of God.”<sup>108</sup>

### Community of Persons

Moreover, a business leader serves to pursue the authentic development of every person and all of humanity, since a firm is a community of persons<sup>109</sup> - one which is “made up of relations or feelings with a sense of fellowship.”<sup>110</sup>

When we consider a business organisation as a community of persons, it becomes clear that the bonds which hold us in common are not merely legal contracts or mutual self-interests, but commitments to real goods, shared with others to serve the world.<sup>111</sup>

Work can and should be one such commitment, where people work with each other, and their work is characterised by the unification of people and the

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<sup>104</sup> See *ibid.*, 97-100.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. My emphasis.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

<sup>107</sup> Sandelands, “The Business of Business is the Human Person,” 99.

<sup>108</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 87.

<sup>109</sup> Domènec Melé, “The Firm as a ‘Community of Persons’: A Pillar of Humanistic Business Ethos,” *Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Business Ethics* 106/1 (2011): 89-101.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>111</sup> Harrington et al., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 58.



building of a community.<sup>112</sup> This understanding helps avoid the spiritual poverty that often arises in market economies due to the lack of human relationships within and around a business.<sup>113</sup>

Being a 'community of persons' emphasizes both individuals and the whole, and makes explicit the uniqueness, conscience, free will, dignity and openness to human flourishing. This requires appropriate communication about and participation in matters which affect people's life, and makes it essential to cooperate for the common good of the business firm and the society.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, as Pope Benedict XVI says in *Caritas in Veritate*: "Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family."<sup>115</sup> There is the growth of the community of persons and the kingdom of God through the leader's business activity. As noted by Naughton, significant obstacles could be encountered when attempting to create a community of work on such principles in large publicly traded companies. In spite of this however, there exist around 800 companies which follow, celebrate and engage in the practice of the "economy of communion." Furthermore, there are cooperatives such as Mondragon Cooperative, which was inspired and guided by the vision of Fr. Don José Maria Arrizmendiarieta, whose theology and philosophy of work was grounded in the Catholic social tradition.<sup>116</sup>

### Values Framework and Dimension of Work

Another path is the values framework. In their study, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone points out a value framework of workplace spirituality. The value framework includes benevolence, generativity, humanism, integrity, justice, mutuality, receptivity, respect, responsibility and trust.<sup>117</sup> These ten values are consistent with what Pfeffer asserts are the:

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<sup>112</sup> See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html), 20. Hereunder referred as LE.

<sup>113</sup> See *CV* 53.

<sup>114</sup> Melé, "The firm as a 'Community of Persons,'" 89.

<sup>115</sup> *CV* 7.

<sup>116</sup> See Naughton, "The Corporation as a Community of Work," 70-76.

<sup>117</sup> See Carole L. Jurkiewicz and Robert A. Giacalone, "A Values Framework for Measuring the Impact of Workplace Spirituality on Organizational Performance," *Journal of Business Ethics* 49 (2004): 129-142.

Four fundamental dimensions of what people seek in the workplace:

- 1) interesting work that permits them to learn, develop, and have a sense of competence and mastery;
- 2) meaningful work that provides some feeling of purpose
- 3) a sense of connection and positive social relations with their co-workers, and
- 4) the ability to live an integrated life, so that one's work role and other roles are not inherently in conflict and so that a person's work does not conflict with his or her essential nature and who the person is as a human being.<sup>118</sup>

The business leader can create a framework for the workplace, where these values are put into practice, while also having a Christian flavour. Furthermore, the critical challenge for entrepreneurs as well as scholars in entrepreneurship, is to begin to *integrate* the subjective and objective dimensions of work. If entrepreneurs were to create organizations without due regard to the objective dimensions of work, chaos would reign as a prelude to bankruptcy. But in a similar way, if they were to create organizations without recognizing the subjective dimension of work, chaos of a different nature would reign, namely, the moral and spiritual stagnation of persons. It is in light of this challenge of integration that the Catholic social tradition proposes the role of *virtue* as a critical framework to integrate the subjective and objective dimensions of entrepreneurial work.<sup>119</sup> It is also of utmost importance to have a holistic overview of the person, taking into consideration his dimensions, necessities, his history, his whereabouts and his development.

Pope John Paul II asked business leaders and employees to develop a spirituality of work, enabling them to see their role in God's creative and redemptive purpose and giving them the strength and virtue to live out His call.<sup>120</sup> Pope Francis explains however, that "without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out."<sup>121</sup> A spirituality of work is an attitude

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<sup>118</sup> Jeffrey Pfeffer, "Business and Spirit: Management Practices that Sustain Values," in *The Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*, eds. Robert A. Giacalone and Carole L. Jurkiewicz (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 32.

<sup>119</sup> Jeffrey R. Corwall and Michael J. Naughton, "Who is the Good Entrepreneur? An Exploration within the Catholic Social Tradition," *Journal of Business Ethics* 44 (2003): 61-75, 65.

<sup>120</sup> See *LE* 99.

<sup>121</sup> *EG* 62.

of the mind and a condition of the soul that constantly asks three simple yet profound human questions: Where do I come from?, Where am I going?, Who am I? These questions are far from trivial. Their concerns describe the structure of spirituality itself. "If I would understand the present, I must understand my origin and destiny; if I would understand who I am, I must explore where I came from and where I am going. If we avoid these questions, we avoid ourselves."<sup>122</sup> The business leader is to embrace and reflect on these questions, while also creating the favourable framework for employees to do the same.

### **Virtue as a Benchmark and Role of Virtues in Entrepreneurship**

Cavanagh and Bandsuch propose that spirituality's ability to stimulate and support good moral habits and personal virtue is the most determinative test of the best benchmark for the appropriateness of a spirituality in the workplace.<sup>123</sup> "As a norm or benchmark to assist business people in deciding which spiritualities are appropriate for the workplace," Cavanagh and Bandsuch propose that "managers support those spiritualities that promote good moral behaviour and good character, because such spiritualities will maximize the benefits of a spirituality in the workplace while minimizing the potential problems."<sup>124</sup>

Thus, managerial virtue unites technical expertise with moral and even spiritual leadership. In their study and in light of their discussion, Cornwall and Naughton concluded that proper ordering of the three distinct kinds of goods is necessary for the entrepreneur to define the activity as *virtuous* which serves as the basis of authentic success. These are: "(1) the good of being technically competent, (2) the good of the individual (subjective dimension of work) and (3) the good of community (social order of work)."<sup>125</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Following the review of some non-theistic spirituality forms, positive signs and hope in spirituality and the business activity become apparent, particularly where the business leader is concerned. There are good grounds of encounters with a theistic form of spirituality. In the last part of the paper, theistic perspectives of how Christian spirituality could help have been discussed. These

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<sup>122</sup> Alford and Naughton, *Managing as If Faith Mattered*, 211.

<sup>123</sup> Cavanagh and Bandsuch, "Virtue as a Benchmark for Spirituality in Business," 112.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>125</sup> Cornwall and Naughton, "Who is the Good Entrepreneur?," 71.

included: servant leadership, the authentic human development, the community of persons and the values framework. These perspectives were discussed in light of finding the right means to bridge the gap in the issues that business leaders encounter in today's world, especially with regards to leading a divided life. Business is a vocation, which glorifies God as it helps man to his incarnation. Thus, a spirituality that is appropriate enables the achievement of a teleological end, which is the common good. Furthermore, the spirituality of the business leader influences the values that he applies, through the values framework. These values will be practiced repeatedly, through servant leadership and will consequently become a *habitus*, a good moral habit; a virtue.

With this said, two questions are brought to light: what virtues are necessary in today's world for a business leader to acquire and practice a new, more humane economic and leadership vision? Does this encounter have to be from the perspective of justice or from the perspective of love? Currently, 'justice' is not so present in the economy. Normally, the term 'justice' is referred to more frequently where distribution is concerned. For a more universal theory, one has to be more rational and reasonable, and maybe less theological. Justice will appeal more than universal love feelings. For example, if someone is unjust to another, the latter would be outraged. If he loves God however, he would be more willing to forgive and move on. The moment that one uses the theological concept of love in this regard, is the moment that he starts to risk failure in making this category universal. Thus one must be cautious and aware of the limit. Justice could be more appealing, even though it emanates from Christian love. This virtue - Christian justice flowing from Christian love - will influence the character of the leader which in return influences the workplace in the authentic human development process. The leader also influences the community of persons in the spirituality of work.

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## Jesus Meets the Samaritan Woman: Discovering Christian Memory and Identity

Israel Rosenfield<sup>2</sup> writes that identity “is the brain’s abstraction of the totality of our ‘memories’ and ‘experiences’” and is therefore created and reconstructed in relation to others.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman provides a variety of individual and collective memories which are recalled through the experience of the encounter with Christ as new experiences and relationships are formed or proposed.<sup>4</sup>

Memory seems to lie at the interface of the material and the immaterial. It is known first and foremost through experience, but has an impact which is perceptible. It is influenced by, and influences human relationships and behaviour. These qualities are in common with Christian spirituality. In

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Grech Sammut is a medical doctor specialised in Family Medicine, with an interest in a holistic approach to health. She has concluded a Master’s degree in Spirituality (General) with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta in 2017. This article arises from the observations, results and research carried out for the dissertation: *Discovering Christian Identity and Memory Through the Meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)*, under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Paul Sciberras.

<sup>2</sup> Israel Rosenfield (1939-) is an author who writes extensively on neurosciences. He has a background in mathematics and medicine but is also recognised for his contributions in the arts sector.

<sup>3</sup> Israel Rosenfield, “Memory and Identity,” *New Literary History: Narratives of Literature, the Arts, and Memory*, 26/1 (1995): 197-203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057275>.

<sup>4</sup> Through her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman experiences an amicable way of relating with a man and a Jew. She also returns to relate with her townspeople. The disciples are challenged when seeing Jesus relate to her, and are then made witness to the Samaritans who come out of their city to meet Jesus. Jesus also introduces another way of relating when speaking of the sower and the reaper as will be discussed further on.

Christianity, memory has been subject to study and reflection since the first centuries of Christian faith.<sup>5</sup> Memory is important both as a capacity for the individual, as well as a collective faculty. In the text chosen (Jn 4:1-42) both types of memories are referred to: the Samaritan woman is brought to recall her marital history (Jn 4:16-18): reference to Jacob as the father common to both Jews and Samaritans (Jn 4:12) and the disputes between Samaritans and Jews (Jn 4:20) recall collective memories which still had an impact on the scene presented (Jn 4:9):<sup>6</sup> Jesus' presence heals both the Samaritan woman's individual memory and the rift between his disciples and the woman's fellow citizens, creating a new experience and a new 'memory' as the Samaritans ask him to stay on (Jn 4:40).

Within the Church the concept and function of memory have been debated and explored over the centuries. Augustine (354-430) and other Fathers of the Church spoke about the memory of the actions of God and Christ, and the memory of God's graces and mercy. Augustine was particularly influential in the study of memory in Christianity. He related the memory of the individual to the original source of the spirit, wherein the image of God lay. In keeping in touch with the memory of the true self, the person can then remain in touch with the light, keeping out of darkness.<sup>7</sup> Hugues de Rouen (d. 730) considered memory as a faculty which made it possible for the Christian to meditate on God's work in the history of salvation.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) downplayed the Augustinian view which related memory to the spirit and focused rather on the role memory of memory within the intellect. His contemporary Bonaventure (1221-1274) maintained the Augustinian view connecting memory to the spirit. For Bonaventure, when God became the object of the memory, the person could glorify and proclaim him as it became filled with God's presence and salvific actions.<sup>8</sup>

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) also related memory to the spirit. He spoke about the union which develops as the memory becomes purified from that which separates the soul from God. Through this poverty of spirit, and in being filled with hope, the soul detaches itself from earthly goods to attain glory, in

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<sup>5</sup> Aimé Solignac, "Mémoire - Au Moyen Age," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 10, eds. Mancel Viller et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), 1001.

<sup>6</sup> Incidences recorded in the Old Testament which are related to the locations near Jacob's well are described in further detail below.

<sup>7</sup> Graziano Giuseppe Pesenti, "Memoria," *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, vol. 2, ed. Ermanno Ancilli (Roma: Città Nuova, 1990), 1577. Solignac, "Mémoire," 999-1000.

<sup>8</sup> Solignac, "Mémoire," 1000.

union with God.<sup>9</sup> In the chosen text, an analogy to this is found in the Samaritan woman leaving her water jar behind as she goes back to the city (Jn 4:28) after Jesus revealed himself to her.

## Memory is Intimately Related to Time and Tradition

Memory relates the past to the present, and commits the present to the past.<sup>10</sup> The preservation and recollection of memories can also have an impact on the individual, in the re-reading of history, and in the making of the future.<sup>11</sup> Memories are influenced by, and influence society, behaviour, and relationships.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, memories expressed through tradition permit the transmission of faith and of the memory of salvation through Christian history, hence building the identity of the Christian.

In John 4:1-42 the scene surrounding Jacob's well forms a backdrop in which tradition and history outline the discourse of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Biblical scholars identify Sychar, the town mentioned in John 4, either with Shechem,<sup>13</sup> or Askar.<sup>14</sup> Both are close to Mt Gerizim, Mt Ebal and the Oak of Moreh,<sup>15</sup> sites related to God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants; sites which recall the "birth" of a nation and the institution of an identity related to land and law - the products of land providing material support and the law providing the social and moral structure for the new people. These mountains also recall the conflict between Jews and Samaritans and issues on worship<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1002; G. G. Pesenti, "Memoria," in *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, vol. 2, ed. Ermanno Ancilli (Roma: Città Nuova, 1990): 1577.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago/London: Chicago Press, 1983), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Pesenti, "Memoria," 1576; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Pesenti, "Memoria," 1577.

<sup>13</sup> Brown and Coloe hold that Sychar is a corruption of the name Shechem, a town mentioned in other parts of the Old Testament (Gen 12:6; Deut 11:29, 27:4-28:69; Jos 24:25-28) and situated within walking distance of Jacob's well. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Yale University Press, 1966), 169; Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 91 n. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Sychar is identified with Askar a modern-day village situated close to the site believed to be Jacob's well. See Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 91, n. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Shechem is mentioned in relation to the Oak of Moreh and Abram in Gen 12:6.

<sup>16</sup> After the Jews' return from the Babylonian exile, Samaritans had impeded Jews from rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, whilst in 128 BC the Jewish high priest John Hyrcanus, had burned the Samaritan temple at Gerizim. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 170; Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 87, n. 8; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, trans.

which are specifically brought up by the evangelist, in the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:20).

Whereas the backdrop mentioned above describes the beginning of a relationship of the people with God based on land and law, Jacob's well carries with it implications of another stage of Israel's relationship with God. In the Old Testament wells were linked to marriage covenants.<sup>17</sup> This reflects a theme which recurs in the Old Testament, that of God as the bridegroom/husband, and of Israel as the bride. This type of relationship implies a deeper and more mature form of interaction than the one mentioned above.<sup>18</sup> The theme of marriage also brings with it the idea of a union which can procreate and give new life.

The narrative elements highlighted above can be transposed for the Christian today to reflect on significant aspects in their identity. This scene provides an encounter with Christ situated in the past through the memories that the site provides. Likewise, for the Christian today, identity is inevitably linked to and rooted in the past. It is linked to the distant past - to the same covenants and history of salvation portrayed in this scene. It is also linked to the more recent past, which events and memories are challenging the Christian identity today.

## Memories of the Distant Past

Reading of the Sacred Scriptures allows the Christian to commemorate the distant past not only as a narrative of Salvation but especially as the Word of God through which the covenants and God's love for his people are being relived. In the preface to *Dei Verbum*, the Word of God is referred to as: "divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love."<sup>19</sup> In John 21 the Beloved Disciple - who had witnessed and acknowledged God's love for him - becomes himself a witness, and his writing "remains" (μένειν).<sup>20</sup> In and

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Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 425.

<sup>17</sup> Gen 24:11; 29:2; Exod 2:15-22. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 170.

<sup>18</sup> The progression in the relationship with God is also seen from chapter 3 to chapter 4 in John's gospel. From the subjunctive mood, whereby the action - to be "born anew" (Jn 3:3) - though expected is not considered an objective fact, the author changes to the indicative in chapter 4 - "If you knew the gift of God ... you would have asked him" (Jn 4:10) whereby Jesus states it as an existing fact.

<sup>19</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965, 1, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

<sup>20</sup> Jn 21:23-24.



through the writing of John and the other authors of the Sacred Scriptures, divine revelation is still handed on that the Christian may believe. The “living water” is still being passed on to the Christian today. And that “living water” can still transform the human chatter (λαλία) into an experience of the Logos (λόγος), similar to the way in which the Samaritan woman’s words were transformed as she shared the revelation of Christ.

The Christian, who listens to or reads the Word of God, can remember God’s plan of salvation as it is unfurled in the Old Testament. Through the New Testament Jesus’ life and actions are recalled: Jesus Christ being “both mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”<sup>21</sup> And Christians continue to listen to God’s word today “so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.”<sup>22</sup> Through hearing the Word, therefore, the Christian can re-live the experience of the Samaritan woman at the well as she was led from the life-giving source left by Jacob to the everlasting life offered by Jesus.

### Recent Past - Acknowledging Truth About the Self

The recent past is exemplified in this biblical pericope in what is recalled “at the surface” of Jacob’s well, namely the woman’s marital history (Jn 4:17,18) and the hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews (Jn 4:9). Jesus does not reprimand the woman, nor does he exhort that she sins no more as he does in other encounters in the same gospel (Jn 5:14; 8:11). He simply acknowledges the truth. And he does the same when she brings up the issue of worship between the Samaritans and the Jews (Jn 4:22). Acknowledging this truth seems to allow the woman to move on in her growing faith in Jesus, and in her personal life.

The shift of dialogue from the woman’s personal past to the issue of worship is interpreted by some biblical exegetes as an attempt by the woman to move the topic of conversation away from her unsavoury past.<sup>23</sup> Others see it as part of a process showing her growth in faith and understanding of Jesus’ identity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 2; Jn 4:26.

<sup>22</sup> *DV* 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hoskyn’s interpretation is mentioned by Schnackenburg as giving this view. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 434.

<sup>24</sup> In her thesis Mary Coloe argues that there is a play on the meaning of the term “baal” (Jn 4:16-18) which is used to denote both god and “husband” (Aramaic). The six husbands - five previous and the current one - are compared to the six jars mentioned in the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:6) and said to represent the lack of perfection in Samaritan worship of “inadequate gods.” So the shift in dialogue from that of husbands (baalim) to worship is seen as a positive shift in the dialogue reflecting the woman’s growing perception of Jesus’ identity. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 99.

Diarmuid Mc Gann explains this process from a Jungian perspective. His interpretation is that Jesus brings the woman to face her personal past, and then moves her on to discover the core of her being:

Jesus ... activates her memory in the dialogue, leading her out of forgetfulness of her elusive and painful past. He remembers with her so that by calling her from forgetfulness he can trigger in her the much deeper memory of who she is before God. He enables her to tie into something larger than either the forgetfulness of her personal past or the painful memory of her personal life. That is why the conversation can end up focused on the future.<sup>25</sup>

The Christian's ability to tie into this identity allows one to discover the truth about God and about oneself. When the Christian recovers his or her true image and likeness of God one draws sustenance from that which is no longer limited to earthly needs but gives "eternal life" (Jn 4:14). This recalls Augustine's view of the relationship of the Christian with the initial memory of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, which keeps them on the right path.<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, in his book *Memory and Identity*<sup>27</sup> writes that for the believer the origins of identity are found in the account of Creation in the book of Genesis (Gen 1:26-27) when God himself "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7).<sup>28</sup>

John Paul II speaks about the creation of the human person in this account as being different from that of the rest of creation. For the rest of creation God says: "Let there be ..." whereas in the creation of man God says: "Let us make man ..." (Gen 1:26). The creation of man involves a "Trinitarian consultation" he says.<sup>29</sup> For the believer, the roots of their identity lie in the relationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, a relationship which God desires to share. This desire to share is seen in John 4 in Jesus' offering of the gift and "living water" and the "harvest," for which "sower and reaper rejoice together."<sup>30</sup> Although Jesus is

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<sup>25</sup> Diarmuid Mc Gann, *Journeying Within Transcendence: The Gospel of John Through a Jungian Perspective* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 56.

<sup>26</sup> See Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. E. M. Blaiklock (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 237-266. See also Books 10 and 11 of *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*.

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 89-99.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Jn 4:38; See Psalm 126:6.

at the centre of the encounter in John 4, he extends the relationship to include the Holy Spirit and God the Father.<sup>31</sup>

The Christian too, through his encounter with Christ can come to know God in whose image and likeness we are created, and thus discover this deep-rooted identity. Paul Lamarche speaks of two truths which this theme can reveal about the person's Christian identity.<sup>32</sup> In recognising that one is created in the image and likeness of God the person comes to realise the qualities which give the Christian the identity of "a child of God": a direct link with God which affords immortality. As a consequence of this link there is a spiritual aspect in a person's identity which calls the Christian to transcend earthly matters and look towards the eschaton. In chapter 4 of John's gospel the invitation to discover one's spiritual identity is seen when Jesus shifts the conversation to living water and spiritual food.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the limitations which separate God and the human person are also revealed when humanity comes face to face with God and the reality of having originally been created in his image and likeness. In the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, the first revelation she receives after asking for the gift of living water is about herself (Jn 4:17). She comes to realise how her present situation lies so far from the truth.

Christ lies between these two truths. He unites them both, by throwing Light, showing the truth by being the Truth, and becoming the Way<sup>34</sup> for her (and the Christian) to discover the identity which gives eternal life (Jn 4:14).

The awareness brought about by acknowledging these two truths confronts the person with another truth - that of God's omnipotence - which continues to define the identity of the believer through his or her relationship with God. In her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman questions Jesus' identity twice: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (Jn 4:12) and "Can this be the Christ?" (Jn 4:29). In her search to satisfy her insatiable thirst (Jn 4:15), she was

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<sup>31</sup> Most exegetes agree that the gift of God refers to the Holy Spirit or to the Spirit of God which is given by Jesus. See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 431. In Jn 7:37-39 the evangelist directly relates the "rivers of living water" to the Spirit. In Jn 4 Jesus refers to God the Father when speaking about worship (Jn 4:23) and doing the will of the one who sent him (Jn 4:34).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Lamarche, "Image and Ressemblance," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 7, eds. Marcel Viller et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971), 1402-1403.

<sup>33</sup> Jn 4:14. 32.

<sup>34</sup> See Jn 8:12; 14:6.

challenged to let go of the image she had of father and messiah<sup>35</sup> to discover the true identity of God through her encounter with the living God.

In his *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger speaks of the apostasy of the Israelites in the desert when they erected a golden calf for worship while Moses was on Mt Sinai (Exod 32:1), and identifies two reasons for this being a departure from their God-given identity. The first reason was that the people could not cope with what they did not see and therefore created a cult to bring God to them when they desired it, rather than waited for God to become present. The second reason was that the cult, being “self-generated,” lacked the true spirit from which true worship could arise. Without the true spirit worship became “banal self-gratification” and “There is no experience of that liberation which always takes place when man encounters the living God.”<sup>36</sup> Christ makes himself present at Jacob’s well. That encounter liberates the Samaritan woman from the past and introduces her to an experience of true worship as she starts to relate with the true God.

As the Samaritan woman engages in dialogue a re-ordering of roles within the relationship is seen. She moves from calling Jesus a Jew to addressing him with a more respectful “Sir” (Jn 4:11),<sup>37</sup> recognising him as prophet and eventually considering the possibility of him being the Messiah. Whilst Jesus overcomes barriers by approaching the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:9, 11, 27), boundaries are redefined as Jesus is given a more respected space and the woman becomes more mindful and respectful of her reality.<sup>38</sup> The identity of the woman and of the Christian are defined when one meets God and relates humbly to him in his greatness and omnipotence.

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<sup>35</sup> In Jn 4:25 the evangelist explains the word “Messiah” (*māšīah*) by the Greek term “christos” (Χριστός). In verse 29 the Samaritan woman herself refers to Jesus as “Christ.”

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 22-23.

<sup>37</sup> In addressing Jesus “Sir” (Kyrie) the woman is giving Jesus more respect and consequently she is placing herself in a humbler space in relation to him. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 428; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 170.

<sup>38</sup> “As he [Jesus] speaks there is a gradual unveiling of who he is. As she speaks there is a gradual acceptance of who she is. This acceptance of who she is corresponds to an expansion of vision, and the interesting fact is that as she accepts herself more she comes to see him more and more in his own uniqueness.” Mc Gann, *Journeying Within Transcendence*, 55.

## Collective Memory and Tradition

In the previous sections the memory and identity of the individual were seen in the context of John 4. The discovery of the “original” identity through the encounter with Christ, together with the changes this can bring were also discussed. The process of moving from past painful memories into the future becomes more complex, however, when involving collective memories, especially those spanning generations. Hans Urs von Balthasar writes about the principle of tradition for Catholics which does not allow them to put aside or dissociate themselves from the past:

The same Church to which he submits himself has done, or allowed to be done, things that can no longer be justified today. One can put this down to the evolution of human awareness, and yet how many were the entanglements between the temporal and spiritual! The Christian himself is enmeshed in this same tradition, whether he likes it or not.<sup>39</sup>

The encounter with the Samaritan woman provides hope in this aspect. The issue of the place of worship, which carried with it many painful memories for both Jews and Samaritans is placed within a new perspective by Jesus (Jn 4:21-24). His presence takes it to another level - the spiritual level which encompasses all “true worshipers” (Jn4:23). He does not repudiate the past but introduces a deeper understanding of worship (Jn 4:23), which become possible with his incarnation when the spirit and truth of God are shown through his presence.<sup>40</sup> The presence of Christ transforms these memories even as they continue to form part of the identity of the persons involved. A “new” identity was gained through the encounter with and revelation of Christ. In the light of this biblical encounter, tradition and unsavoury memories in Church history can find new life when seen in the right spirit through an encounter with Christ who, whilst acknowledging the truth, shows mercy and not retribution.

Although at present the general society seems to be focusing more on the “sins” of the Church, the Christian identity is built on positive collective memories and rich traditions too. Hans Urs von Balthasar also writes: “he [the Christian] may be poor with his (spiritually) poor brothers, and yet he may not deny his own riches.”<sup>41</sup> In this biblical pericope traditions represented by Jacob’s well remain a meeting place where the present meets the past to give life to the future. However,

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<sup>39</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Who Is a Christian?* trans. Frank Davidson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 15-16.

<sup>40</sup> Jn 4:34; Matt 11:27; Lk 10:22.

<sup>41</sup> Von Balthasar, *Who Is a Christian?*, 21.

as already discussed, the preservation and recollection of memories as well as the re-reading of history can be subject to influence by society and experience.<sup>42</sup> The meeting with the Samaritan woman can provide a perspective on how to integrate memories and traditions genuinely. Jesus meets the Samaritan woman in her time and space, helps her recollect personal memories (Jn 4:16-19) and collective memories (Jn 4:12,20,22,25) while leading her to a new revelation based on the truth which is Christ himself (Jn 4:26).<sup>43</sup> The disposition to know the truth and the ability of the Samaritan woman to let go of old structures allow her to move on in her faith. In the development of their identity in faith Christians too are called to constantly search for the truth, discarding traditions which mislead from true faith. This requires a sifting of authentic and inauthentic traditions. Authentic traditions are based on the truth and are gained from the original source of the memory. In contrast, inauthentic traditions develop when based on memories which are distorted in perception or recollection.<sup>44</sup> For the Christian the memory of the original identity can be discovered in the encounter with God in whose image one was created and in moving on from knowledge and tradition to the revelation of being saved in and through Christ.

### From Knowledge and Tradition to Revelation

Knowledge and tradition are limited sources of the spiritual life if they are allowed to become stagnant like the water in Jacob's well.<sup>45</sup> The water which Jesus offers is one which quenches all thirst and gives everlasting life (Jn 4:13-14). However, when the Samaritan woman asks to be given this gift Jesus leads her through a process of revelation which involves her openness and ability to change. In the chapter preceding the encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus meets Nicodemus, a fellow Jew. Nicodemus is called to let go of his

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 91-91.

<sup>43</sup> Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus According to John* (New York: St Paul Publication, 1989), 69, speaks of the "truth" in John as referring to the revelation of the divine plan of salvation, through the revelation of Jesus' presence and identity as Son of God.

<sup>44</sup> Marygrace Peters, "Tradition," *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London: SCM Press, 2005), 622-623.

<sup>45</sup> When Jesus introduces "living water" the evangelist starts uses the term *phrear* (φρέαρ) for Jacob's well (Jn 4:11-12). This term is closer to "cistern" which implies water which is stagnant, in contrast to the living water offered by Jesus Christ, and fresh flowing water implied by the use of the term *pegè* (πηγή) to denote Jacob's well in the first part of this text. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 170.

Jewish understanding and be “born from above” (Jn 3:3). In both encounters, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are called to let go of old structures on which their source of life depended in order to discover deeper roots to their faith and spiritual identities. Though spirited in her dialogue the Samaritan woman demonstrates a poverty of spirit which is receptive to the gift which Jesus makes.<sup>46</sup> Nicodemus, on the other hand, finds it hard to submit to Jesus’ revelation and demands (Jn 3:2-7).<sup>47</sup> The increasing openness of the Samaritan woman culminates in Jesus’ revelation of his identity as Messiah (ἐγώ εἰμι) (Jn 4:26).

In his exegesis of this text, Brown notes the difference between the perception of the messiah for the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews expected an anointed king from the house of David who would restore to them the national identity related to earthly matters. The messiah for the Samaritans was more of a Moses-like prophet, who would lead his people to the promised land through adherence to the law of God.<sup>48</sup> One represented earthly power and self-sufficiency, the other a deeper relationship with a God who cares for, sustains and provides. As Brown comments, Jesus seems to ascribe to himself the definition of messiah more easily when given by a Samaritan woman.<sup>49</sup> This is relevant to this article as it reflects and further qualifies the identity of Christ on which is based that of the Christian.

Through her encounter, the Samaritan woman receives Jesus’ revelation as messiah or saviour in her life not on a physical or earthly plane but on a spiritual level.<sup>50</sup> This revelation leads to another revelation: that true worshippers “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23), “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (Jn 4:23, 21). Although the emphasis is on the spirit and worship is freed from its earthly forms, the role of Israel in the history of salvation is not denied by the evangelist. Rather it is presented as a stage in the process.<sup>51</sup> John 4:22 can be considered as a transition from the announcement of “the hour”

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<sup>46</sup> This disposition recalls the purification of memory described by St. John of the Cross which allows one to let go of that which hinders perfect union with God and be open to the revelation of God.

<sup>47</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 364.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 172-173.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> The gift of living water Jesus offers quenches the spiritual thirst and leads to eternal life (Jn 4:14).

<sup>51</sup> The evangelist does not refute the spiritual heritage of Judaism as he says “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22). R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1998), 142; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 172.

(Jn 4:21) to its actualization in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn 4:23) in whom the Spirit of God took earthly form.<sup>52</sup> In the next section it will be discussed how this revelation is linked to salvation and truth which, whilst coming through the spirit, involves and is manifested through Christ's presence.

### Jesus' Identity - Revelation and Truth

The phrase "I am" (ἐγὼ εἰμι) carries a solemn and sacred implication rooted in its use in the Old Testament. In this text it is found between the two scenes, like a hinge in a diptych. With the revelation of Christ as God/Messiah there is a shift in the scene. As the woman exits the scene the disciples take on the dialogue (Jn 4:31-38). Unlike the Samaritan woman who met him unexpectedly, these disciples know and believe in Jesus. They have already been called and are following him.<sup>53</sup> The topic of the dialogue also changes from thirst and water to nourishment or food, and harvest - from that which gives life to what nourishes and sustains it. This scene therefore allows for a deepening in the understanding of Jesus Christ's and the Christian identity.

The link with the past continues through the language used. The word "Messiah," derived from a Hebrew form *māšīah*, was used in the Old Testament to mean "anointed" or "anointed one"; the act of anointing indicating God who entrusted a mission to a specific person or people.<sup>54</sup> At the end of the first scene (Jn 4:26) Jesus accepts the title of Messiah from the Samaritan woman. In the second scene he elaborates on the mission implied by the title (Jn 4:34). Rudolf Schnackenburg describes the food or nourishment (βρῶσις) as a metaphor used by Jesus to denote his readiness to do God's will. He writes that here the nourishment is not a gift from God or a source of food which comes from the Father, but rather an inner impetus of being who he was meant to be - that which nourished his identity: "... to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4:34). Through his presence but also in his being, Jesus reveals and realizes God's plan of salvation.

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<sup>52</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 436.

<sup>53</sup> In Jn 4:2 the evangelist specifies that the disciples were baptising people. In this gospel, the term "disciples" (μαθηταί) is used to refer to the regular followers of Jesus. The term "apostle" was used in the post-resurrectional period. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 98.

<sup>54</sup> Wolter Rose, "Messiah (māšīah)," *Dictionary of the OT Pentateuch: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2003), 565.



Revelation of the person and identity of Jesus Christ is a central theme in the gospel of John.<sup>55</sup> It is also fundamental for the Christian because such identity depends on it. In verse 23 Jesus says that true worshipers must worship in spirit and truth. De la Potterie defines the word “truth” as used in John’s gospel as “the revelation of the divine plan of salvation.”<sup>56</sup> This truth is revealed in the person of Jesus Son of God who, in doing his Father’s will, realizes God’s plan of salvation. In the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus reveals himself as Saviour (Jn 4:14) but also as God (Jn 4:26). He reveals his identity and also his mission. And in accepting this revelation and truth the believer can become a true worshiper and grow in their relationship with God.

This biblical pericope affords a study on the process of growth that the relationship between God and the believer can undergo, with a consequent development in the identity of the latter. This changing identity indicates the dynamic quality of the process of faith which requires that the Christian believer is open to change and to challenges which they may encounter unexpectedly. Jesus’ disciples are faced with such a challenge when they return. They not only find Jesus going against the norms by talking to a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:27) but he also refuses their offer of food (Jn 4:31-33). The next section will look at the changes that Jesus proposes to his disciples and the change to their identity that this implies.

## From Discipleship to Apostleship

Through his discourse in the second scene Jesus continues to elaborate on the relationship that his disciples are to have with God the Father (Jn 4:36) and their role within the plan of salvation (Jn 4:38). He reminds them of their mission: “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour” (Jn 4:38).

The act of “being sent” (*ἀπέστειλα*) implies a development in the disciples’ identity. The disciples who were following Jesus are no longer simply with him in order to be instructed. They become involved in Christ’s mission (Jn 4:38). Their identity hence develops from one of discipleship to one which is apostolic (Jn 4:38).<sup>57</sup> They become actively involved in his mission of salvation.

<sup>55</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 507.

<sup>56</sup> De la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 69.

<sup>57</sup> “Disciple” being the “one who learns” whilst “apostolic” here refers to the followers of Christ who are sent by him just as he was sent by the Father (Jn 20:21). Thomas P. Rausch, “Discipleship,” *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London, 2005), 249; Gemma Simmonds, “Apostolic Spirituality,” *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London, SCM Press, 2005), 119.

This development in identity is obtained through Christ who lives out his own identity as the one sent by the Father and who then sends his followers (Jn 20:21). Through Jesus as the truth, the disciples are being invited to take their relationship with God to another level: a level which connects them with God the Father.<sup>58</sup> In this biblical scene one can see the different levels of identity: from the Samaritan woman who represents the believer's initial meeting with Christ becoming open to the gift of God, the revelation of her true self which is followed by Jesus' definition of the true worshiper and subsequently the description of the relationship with God the Father which was to become more direct in true worship. In the second scene this relationship becomes more intimate through sharing Jesus' "food" of doing God's will. Thus, "being sent" can become that which nourishes the identity of Christ's disciples too. This indicates an aspect inherent in the identity of the Christian - that belief in Christ cannot be held within oneself. In this respect, the reaction of the Samaritan woman to Jesus' revelation of his divinity and the disciples' reaction will be explored in the next section.

### **When Revelation Spreads -Formation of Communion**

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well begins between two individuals and concludes with Jesus' disciples and the Samaritan townspeople meeting at the well of their common ancestor. On receiving the revelation of Christ and acknowledging him as Messiah, the Samaritan woman "left her water jar and went into the city" (Jn 4:28). That which is material - clay jar and well-water - is replaced by the spiritual. The person herself becomes the "container" (temple) of the spiritual source of everlasting water, which flows over to reach others: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? They went out of the city and were coming to him" (Jn 4:29-30).

Christ's revelation and belief in him leads to a transformation in the Samaritan woman which changes her behaviour in relation to her townspeople. She returns to share the good news of Jesus' revelation. In her book, *Holiness*, Donna Orsuto speaks about how belief in Jesus Christ implies a conversion and that this new vision of oneself "affects our distinctive behaviour in the world."<sup>59</sup> This same behaviour spreads the good news (Jn 4:29) and can lead to more conversions (Jn 4:39). In this way true Christians become the "living stones" forming a temple where God has chosen to dwell (cf. Jn 4:40) and where "the true worshippers will

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<sup>58</sup> See Jn 13:20.

<sup>59</sup> Donna Orsuto, *Holiness* (London: Continuum, 2006), 37.

worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). This “temple” goes beyond physical structures or individual merit: it enhances them. It goes beyond space and time: it unites them. It goes beyond social, historical and biological structures: it nourishes them. Thus, in this way God can become “Incarnate”: that which was started by Jesus’ coming and walking in this world can be continued by his disciples, just as what started with Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman spread to include the other Samaritans and his disciples.

An interesting factor in this scene is that Jesus’ disciples and the Samaritans meet at Jacob’s well - their common father. Jacob’s well is referred to in the text as a source of nourishment and life for family, livestock and subsequent generations (Jn 4:12). John Paul II relates the concept of “father” (*pater*) to “fatherland” (*patria*) which, he says, “refers to the land, the territory, but more importantly, the concept of *patria* includes the values and the spiritual content that go to make up the culture of a given nation.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the animosity between Samaritans and Jews expressed in the beginning of the encounter (Jn 4:9), Jacob’s well offers a meeting point through a common father. The water which this well provides has limitations, however. “Jesus said to her ‘Everyone who drinks from this water will thirst again’” (Jn 4:13). Jesus propels the disciples and Samaritans onto their journey of faith. He introduces another source of water which gives everlasting life (Jn 4:14). He also qualifies another relationship with the “Father” - with God the Father - through the dialogue on worship in the first scene (Jn 4:23,24) and on the harvest in the second scene (Jn 4:34-38). The past, biological and historical is not to be dismissed but Jesus brings in the new, building on what is already present. This gives an image of a dynamic Church building on the past, uniting through flaws in the present and projecting into the future, with Jesus as the cornerstone uniting all who are called to believe in him.

This dynamic of God entering a life, transforming the person and catapulting the believer into a life-giving future can be glimpsed as far back as the personal history of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people.<sup>61</sup> Abraham’s faith in God and in his promises leads him to take on a new identity which surpasses his limitations and spreads to form a communion of God’s people. In John 4 the communion of people around Jesus remains diverse. Jesus does not appeal to the

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<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> When Abraham welcomed God’s presence in his life his identity became linked to the future: “All families will be blessed in you” (Gen 12:3; 18:18); “You will have a son” (Gen 18:10); “I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies” (Gen 22:17).

Samaritans to follow him - he stays with them. Likewise nowadays, Christians are a varied group of individuals who retain their particular character and their diverse cultural and social ways.<sup>62</sup> What unites them is the encounter with God through Christ: an encounter which takes one to the spiritual realm, where their identity as God's adopted children saved by Christ, becomes common to all. This diversity within communion will be discussed in the next section in relation to the text.

### Diversity in Communion

An intriguing theory mentioned by both Brown and Schnackenburg interprets John chapter 4 in the context of the conversion of Samaria as narrated in Acts chapter 8.<sup>63</sup> In this mission, Philip was "the sower" of Christian faith (Acts 8:5), whilst Peter and John had gone down to confer the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-16). Philip, who was a Hellenist, presumably opposed worship at the Jerusalem temple whilst some in the church of Jerusalem wanted the Samaritans to shift their loyalty to Jerusalem as part of their embracing the Christian faith. This background would explain the distinction made between the sower and the reaper in John 4:37, and would also include the issue of place of worship mentioned in John 4:19.<sup>64</sup>

In the light of this theory, the theme of sower and reaper may reflect the different identities/roles that Christians hold within the Church. This recalls St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (1 Cor 12:4-6) and "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). Brown also quotes 1 Corinthians 3:6 in relation to this text: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."<sup>65</sup> This perspective takes the sower and the reaper both as disciples and places them in relationship to God and to God's spirit; a relationship which gives life.

With the relationship of the sower and the reaper as described by Jesus in this text the identity of the Christian no longer stands alone, describing individuals, but differentiates to form disciples having different roles which complement

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<sup>62</sup> John Bowden, *Christianity: The Complete Guide* (London: Continuum, 2005), viii.

<sup>63</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, vol. 1, 453.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-XII, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

each other (Rom 12:4-7). This may be compared to the physical body which while starting as one cell divides into cells all containing the same DNA. These cells then differentiate to form organs, each having a unique identity. This same identity finds fulfilment in relation to the whole: the hands have a similar “identity” but differ in being right or left, are different from the foot whilst being complementary to it.

Taken from this perspective, Jesus transforms the idea of “individual jobs” presented by the proverb (Jn 4:37), and introduces a new order which whilst preserving the individual identity, goes beyond it to make one whole, united in and through God’s spirit. All parts, united in God, are then called to rejoice as one in celebrating the fruit of the harvest (Jn 4:36).

### **The Harvest - Sower and Reaper Rejoice Together**

In the second scene Jesus introduces a new perspective to the saying: “One sows and another reaps” (Jn 4:37). In the Old Testament this saying is used in a negative way often implying that life is unfair and that the sower may not live to enjoy the harvest (Deut 20:6, 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic 6:15). It is not clear whether the sower in the text refers to Jesus, God the Father or others who may have prepared the Samaritans before they met Jesus.<sup>66</sup> However, if it is taken to refer to or include God the Father, it portrays a relationship with God which is nourishing and joyful.<sup>67</sup> Jesus Christ transforms the relationship between sower and reaper to one which is giving and sharing: the reaper is sent to harvest what he did not sow (Jn 4:38) and sower and reaper rejoice together with the harvest (Jn 4:36).

The relationship between sower and reaper is transformed from one of inequity to one of giving or sharing and to one which is nourishing and joyful.<sup>68</sup> The theme of joyful living and celebration has been reiterated by Pope Francis.<sup>69</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium* he speaks of “going forth” which is a mission for the Christian.<sup>70</sup> It is this joyful living which arises from living in the spirit of God and from doing his will which evangelises and thus shares in the harvest. That

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.,183.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 1, 2, 24. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html); Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 126 (Vatican: Editrice Vaticana, 2016), 108.

<sup>70</sup> EG 20.

which is sown by God bears fruit which can be shared by all involved, giving rise to a true communion.

Finally, an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

Through the study of John 4:1-42 it was seen that Christian identity is not acquired in a one-time event (during baptism only) but involves a process in which memories are processed and experiences transformed to discover a deeper self in relation to God and to others.

The formation of Christian identity involves a personal encounter with God. Jesus is at the centre of this encounter. He meets the person in his space and is the one who initiates the exchange (dialogue). However, it requires an open disposition on the part of the individual and a readiness to engage in the “dialogue.” As the Christian identity develops one allows oneself to be transformed in one’s perception and behaviour - to move from that which is earthly to the “spirit and truth.” These characteristics can be seen in the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Christ.

The woman’s openness and desire to acquire what Jesus was offering - the gift of living water - brought her face to face with her truth as well as also with the revelation of who she was in front of God (in worship), even as Jesus reveals his identity to her and to the reader of the Gospel.

The relationship of memory with Christian identity was given particular importance in this article since the setting of the scene lends itself to remind the reader of the background which lay behind the two main “actors.” The covenants with God’s people lay the foundation of moral and legal behaviour and Jacob’s well was seen to remind one of another step in the developing relationship with God - one which involved a more mature interaction. These memories which still lie at the foundation of Christian identity were transformed in the presence of Jesus, who introduces a new relationship with God.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 24.

In the first scene Jesus speaks of the true worshipers who are no longer tied to land or law but whose identity is created (animated) in spirit and truth. In the second scene Jesus elaborates on his identity as the one who is sent and who finds nourishment in doing the will of God. The identity of the disciples also develops from one in which they receive the “living water” as the Samaritan woman did, to one in which they too are sent and asked to participate in the mission of salvation - to reap the harvest. The characteristic joy accompanying community as typical to Christian identity are also seen.

One hopes that through the study of this theologically dense text, the identity of the Christian, starting from one’s relationship to the roots and developed through an encounter with Christ, might be discovered in a way which sheds light on challenges being faced by Christians today.

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## *Amoris Laetitia* and *Veritatis Splendor* on the “Object of the Act”

On taking up a text, it is good to remind ourselves that our reading of this encyclical must be a real dialogue in which both reader and document have a part. A minimum of openness and good will is indispensable if we are to welcome and grasp any writer’s thought, discover his message, and draw profit from it. The suggestion of the apostle St. James is also relevant: “Be quick to listen and slow to speak.” In other words, we first have to read it attentively, a little as if we were listening to a friend. We need to take time out too, for reflection, to make sure we really hear what it is saying. Then we shall be able to make an informed judgment and perhaps later some pertinent comments.

Given the rich fruits of the two-year Synod process, this Exhortation will treat, in different ways, a wide variety of questions. This explains its inevitable length. Consequently, I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text. The greatest benefit, for families themselves and for those engaged in the family apostolate, will come if each part is read patiently and carefully, or if attention is paid to the parts dealing with their specific needs.

**I**ntroduce the article with these two quotes, both referring to documents of the Magisterium, to make a simple observation. While they were written twenty years apart, the two authors are making exactly the same point. In fact, one would be justified in thinking that they might be considering exactly the same document. Or at least, that if the texts they were referring to were different,

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they might still be raising similar, or related challenges to demand the same level of attentiveness and preparedness from the reader.

Yet it might come as a surprise that the two quotes refer to two Magisterial documents that some in the Roman Catholic Church today want to present as opposed to each another. If the second quote is from the introduction to the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (AL 7),<sup>2</sup> where Pope Francis himself is urging attentive pondering, the first text is authored by the Dominican Servais Pinckaers,<sup>3</sup> who as Craig Steven Titus notes, “was intimately involved in shaping the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (VS) and [the moral theology section of] the *Catechism*,”<sup>4</sup> and, of course, is referring to none other than the famous encyclical. The *Catechism* and VS,<sup>5</sup> both foremost doctrinal works of St. John Paul II’s papacy, were “drawn up at the same time” and in part, for the same purpose of the renewal of moral theology called for by the Second Vatican Council. Thus, it is necessary “to observe the correspondence” since, if the *Catechism* “is set in a broader perspective and has the more general purpose of providing an overall, well-ordered teaching on morality as related to the Creed, sacraments and prayer,” “the encyclical is more limited in its object, since its focus is limited to certain basic questions and theories which are open to criticism in view of Catholic tradition.”<sup>6</sup>

In fact, in the quote above, in his usual gracious style, Pinckaers is referring to the very-heated controversy in the wake of VS between self-styled “traditionalists”

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, March 19, 2016, [http://m.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](http://m.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Servais Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future: *Veritatis splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology: Studies by Ten Outstanding Scholars*, eds., J. A. DiNoia and R. Cessario (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publications, 1999), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Steven Titus, “Servais Pinckaers and the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 1/1 (2012): 57. Titus notes that at the time, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, O.P., a former student and longtime friend of Pope Benedict XVI, but also the one chosen by Pope Francis to lead the press conference that presented the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, was Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Fribourg, and therefore a colleague of Pinckaers’, but also the Secretary of the commission responsible for drafting the *Catechism*. “It cannot be doubted that the proximity of the two professors and the respect for Pinckaers’ works both inside the Church and at large (as is evident in his being invited to join the International Theological Commission in 1990 and his growing international influence) were instrumental in allying Pinckaers to these projects of the Magisterium.” (p. 58, n.74).

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, August 6, 1993, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html#-3K](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html#-3K).

<sup>6</sup> Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future,” 16-17.

and “revisionists.” In a long essay, where he gives a detailed explanation of the text and argues why *VS* is “an encyclical for the future,” he begs fellow moral theologians, not only “to perceive what is at stake in the questions [it] raises and the significance of the answers it proposes,” but more crucially, and in line with his lifelong work of recovering “Thomism” as a corrective to manualism, he exhorts them to recognize how *Veritatis Splendor* “is far more innovative than first appears.”<sup>7</sup>

In this light, it seems somewhat strange and paradoxical that today, *AL* is being criticized by self-styled “traditionalists” precisely for breaking away from the “traditional” teaching of none other than the “innovative” *VS*. So what is going on?

It is also well known that the most controversial aspect of *VS*, and the one over which much ink has been spilled, is its argument for the “intrinsic evil” of particular moral acts based on their “object.” Yet, as contemporary commentators like the Swiss philosopher and Opus Dei priest Martin Rhonheimer would argue, it is precisely *VS*’s understanding of the “object of the act” that is its most “innovative” aspect. Or, put more compellingly in the words of Pinckaers, that it is its understanding of the object of the act that “points out paths that will lead to a profound renewal in the way Catholic moral theology is taught.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, the now famous (or infamous) *dubia* or “questions for clarification” about the teaching of *AL* presented to Pope Francis by Cardinals Walter Brandmüller, Raymond Burke and the now late Carlo Caffarra and Joachim Meisner,<sup>9</sup> highlight precisely *VS*’s understanding of the “object of the act” as being (at least potentially) contradicted by *AL*.

Fifty years after the Council, two possibly conflicting Magisterial documents continue to raise controversy in the Church over exactly the same philosophical issue, the morality of human acts, and indeed, over the correct interpretation of the one they both claim as their primary source, the great Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>10</sup> This shows not just how deeply contentious the reform of

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> See, Edward Pentin, “Full Text and Explanatory Notes of Cardinals’ Questions on *Amoris Laetitia*,” *National Catholic Register*, November 14, 2016, <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia>.

<sup>10</sup> Various articles have sought to contradict Cardinal Schonborn’s claim that *AL* is “Thomistic.” See among others, Richard A. Spinello, “The Morality of *Amoris Laetitia* is not Thomistic,” *Crisis Magazine*, November 14, 2017, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2017/morality-amoris-laetitia-not-thomistic> and Dorothy Cummings McLean’s interview with Thomas Crean, “*Amoris Laetitia* is ‘ambiguous,’ ‘not a Thomistic document’: Filial Correction signatory,” *Lifesite News*,

moral theology continues to be, and in particular on how divisive “Thomism” continues to be, but - as the controversy over *AL* confirms - how it touches every aspect of the church’s ministry and indeed, the very self-identity of the church.

Hence, why in this article, I focus specifically on the meaning of the “object of the act” as implied in the document by Pope Francis that, just like *VS* twenty three years earlier, is being hailed (or condemned - depending on one’s point of view) as a “point of no return” for the Catholic Church. But, as I will proceed to argue, the meaning given to the “object of the act” is a reflection of something much deeper: the kind of framework of moral reasoning and, in turn of pastoral praxis, that is operative in the reader of the text. I will contend that *VS* is in fact pushing for a particular framework of moral reasoning for its post-Vatican II reform to moral theology. Following Pinckaers and Rhonheimer, I will argue that this is a properly “Thomist” framework. Thus, my more general question in this article is the following: is *AL*’s “Thomism,” as emphasized by Pope Francis and the Dominican Christoph Cardinal Schönborn,<sup>11</sup> in continuation with the “Thomist” teaching of *VS*? If so, then *AL* should be consistent not just with the “spirit” of *VS* in its application to a specific and highly complex pastoral situation, but also more narrowly, in its implied understanding of the “object of the act.”

Otherwise, one might want to consider the critics’ position, that *AL* breaks with the tradition of *VS* - even if the critics’ own reading of *VS* seems to understand it less as “an encyclical for the future” and more as a continuation with the (pre-conciliar?) past.<sup>12</sup> If so, what framework of moral reasoning is implied in the critics’ reading of *VS* (and, in turn, of *AL*) in particular on the issue of the “object of the act”? Understood from this wider perspective of “moral framework,” then we might also be able to see why the current Pontiff has consistently ignored the

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October 11, 2017, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/amoris-laetitia-is-ambiguous-not-a-thomistic-document-filial-correction-sig>.

<sup>11</sup> Cardinal Schönborn has defended *AL* calling it “an act of the magisterium that makes the teaching of the church present and relevant today.” He adds: “I believe that the exhortation has its roots in Ignatius and Thomas. We find here the exposition of a moral theology that draws inspiration from the great Ignatian tradition (the discernment of the conscience) and the great Dominican tradition (virtue ethics). We turn our back on the ethics of obligation, which have an extrinsicism that generates both laxity and rigorism. And we rejoin the great tradition of Catholic moral theology, which allows us to integrate the entire contribution of personalism.” (Interview with Antonio Spadaro, “Cardinal Schönborn on “The Joy of Love”: the full conversation,” *America: the Jesuit Review*, August 09, 2016, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/richness-love>).

<sup>12</sup> Pentin stresses that “The cardinals make a point in the *dubia* of repeating three times that *VS* is ‘based on sacred Scripture and on the Tradition of the Church,’” <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/four-cardinals-formally-ask-pope-for-clarity-on-amoris-laetitia>.

*dubia*, even while he insists on the healing of “moral frameworks” in the tradition of “the great Thomas.”<sup>13</sup>

Of course, it must also be acknowledged that, at face value, the task of this paper - to compare *AL* to *VS* - does not seem to be a very obvious or even fruitful one. Thus, my first undertaking will be to offer justification for the endeavour by highlighting the specific point of intersection between the two documents. This point of intersection is not just the one stressed by the *dubia* Cardinals, that is, the question of intrinsically evil acts, but the deeper question of how the church understands her mission of caring for souls. That understanding is precisely what points to the wider consideration of ‘moral frameworks’ in the ongoing reform of moral theology.

The second part of the article, however, will narrow down on the specific questions raised by the *dubia* Cardinals, in particular those on the understanding of the “object of the act” in *VS*. Here I will rely on the work of the Swiss philosopher Martin Rhonheimer, who builds on that of Servais Pinckaers, to tease out two contrary ways - even if both find their roots in Thomas - of understanding the “object of the act”: a pre-conciliar one that emerges from a manualistic interpretation of Thomas, and another that claims to retrieve Thomas’ own more complex framework of moral reasoning. More to the point, it will become apparent that if the former interpretation of the “object of the act” will tend to read *VS* and *AL* as mutually contradictory, the latter not only can, but must read *AL* as a sound and consistent attempt to apply the teaching of *VS* to one of the most difficult pastoral issues of the day: the divorced and remarried.

Thus, in the conclusion of the article I will then return to the original question of continuity and discontinuity in the ecclesial tradition of moral reasoning. Questions surrounding the meaning of the object of the act are not merely a matter of philosophical preference, but ultimately, as *AL* shows, of evangelical

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<sup>13</sup> In his private meeting with Jesuits in Colombia, Pope Francis said: “A second thing: some maintain that there is no Catholic morality underlying *Amoris Laetitia*, or at least, no sure morality. I want to repeat clearly that the morality of *Amoris Laetitia* is Thomist, the morality of the great Thomas. You can speak of it with a great theologian, one of the best today and one of the most mature, Cardinal Schönborn.” Antonio Spadaro, “Grace is not an Ideology: Pope Francis’ Private Conversation with some Colombian Jesuits,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* (English Edition), September 28, 2017, <https://laciviltacattolica.com/free-article/grace-is-not-an-ideology-a-private-conversation-with-some-colombian-jesuits/>

Some in the Catholic media considered this to be the Pope’s indirect response to the *dubia* Cardinals. See Joshua J. McElwee, “Francis responds to critics: Morality of *Amoris Laetitia* is Thomist,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 28, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-responds-critics-morality-amoris-laetitia-thomist>.

truth and therefore of the authenticity of the church herself as witnessed in her pastoral practice. But this attestation is true only insofar as we also understand what, in our contemporary cultural context, is at stake for the evangelizing mission of the church. The retrieval of a “Thomist” framework of moral reasoning initiated by Saint John Paul II and that continues with Pope Francis, is not only necessary in our times, but urgent, precisely to fulfill Vatican II’s demands for the renewal of moral theology.

### ***AL* and *VS*: What is the Connection?**

What is perhaps most interesting about the *dubia* and, in particular the questions they raise about the teaching in *VS*, is that *AL* never even refers to *VS* in its voluminous presentation on the challenges to the family. Some have argued that this is because *AL* is seeking to distance itself from a “natural law approach” that, the same commentators, associate both with *VS* more narrowly, but also with John Paul II’s moral teachings more generally.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, *AL* does quote substantially from another work of John Paul II’s that is intimately bound to his catechesis on the theology of the body and therefore cannot be said to dismiss “natural law”: the 1981 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Family *Familiaris Consortio* (*FC*).<sup>15</sup> *AL* insists on continuity with *FC*, even taking on its “law of gradualness” as core pastoral principle. But *FC* predates *VS* by more than ten years and reflects its own times: not just of cultural transition for the Christian family, but of theological and philosophical transition for the Church in her reform of moral theology. Would *FC* be read differently from the

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Sean Winters in his commentary on a conference on *AL* held at Boston College wrote: “One of the most striking features of the conference was what was not said. The phrase ‘natural law’ was uttered not once. I have noted previously that one of the remarkable things about *Amoris Laetitia* was the lack of references to natural law: It is mentioned once explicitly and alluded to in three other instances. This is a huge shift in Catholic theology. St. Pope John Paul II would include profound meditations on the Scriptures as part of his magisterial documents like *Familiaris Consortio*, but there remained a heavy reliance on natural law thinking once he turned to analysis of the situations confronted, especially family life. The pastoral ineffectiveness of natural law thinking is, I suspect, the reason its frames are being discarded.” See “*Amoris Laetitia* conference signals big changes, highlights problems left,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/amoris-laetitia-conference-signals-big-changes-highlights-problems-left>.

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, November 22, 1981, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html#\\_ftn180](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html#_ftn180).

point of view of *VS* that sought to treat “more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very foundations of moral theology” (*VS*, 5)?

Then again, one might want to ask, why should *AL* refer to *VS*? *VS* is famous for being concerned about determining the morality of acts, a precondition to discerning and judging one’s sinfulness. But *AL* is not questioning that the flock is burdened by sin; rather, it is exhorting pastors that the church’s foremost responsibility is to heal wounds, not to condemn the sinner. This is consistent with Pope Francis’ insistence that the Good News is of God’s mercy, and that evangelization - the foremost task of the church today - is an encounter with God’s mercy (*Evangelii Gaudium* [*EG*], 3).<sup>16</sup> In other words, *AL* presents itself as concerned with an “evangelical” consistency in our pastoral practice, a fundamental matter for the self-understanding of the church, since it implies that who the church is, and therefore what the church teaches, must be evident in how the church acts in her pastoral practice.

At the same time, *VS* was not only seeking to be a corrective to philosophical errors of the times, most notably proportionalism and consequentialism. In no uncertain terms, *VS* took “sin” seriously and, in so doing, it sought to be a return to the sources of moral theology. As the *dubia* Cardinals rightly note, *VS* “sets forth ... the principles of a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition” (*VS* 5). John Paul II did this with a clear intent to fulfill the demands of *Optatam totius* 16,<sup>17</sup> that is, to recover how the foundation of all Christian morality is the God-human relationship as revealed in Scripture, and that this confirms, on the basis of reason, our inherent desire for God that is knowable through what *Gaudium et Spes* 16 famously termed “conscience.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, *VS*’s most pressing concern was one of doctrine. But because it was aware

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<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>17</sup> “Let the other theological disciplines be renewed through a more living contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world.” Pope Paul VI, Decree On Priestly Training *Optatam Totius*, October 28, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_optatam-totius\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html)

<sup>18</sup> “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience.” Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World *Gaudium Et Spes*, December 7, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

that the way how priests minister reflects the theology they were taught, the encyclical's primary practical concern was not how pastors are serving their flock in the trenches, but how priests were being formed in seminaries and theology faculties.

Yet, while the two issues, of priestly formation and of pastoral work, are distinct, they are also deeply intertwined. Indeed, Pope Francis continually expresses his concern about how priests should be true pastors, but also that it is the responsibility of seminaries to form them as such. An "intellectual conversion" in seminary formation as demanded by *VS*, must be the foundation to an authentic "fatherly" attitude in priestly ministry; an attitude that, for Pope Francis, is undeniably one of witnessing the "mercy" of the Father that gives joy.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, there is a pivotal point where *VS* and *AL* intersect. If *VS* is concerned about moral truth, a truth that can ultimately be known and is for the sake of our relationship with God, *AL* is about assisting the flock to discover that truth to grow in their relationship with God. The "truth" is two-fold: God's infinite mercy, but also the recognition of our sinfulness that is a pre-condition to truly receive God's mercy and be reconciled with him. *VS* and *AL* intersect on the crucial matter of the illness in our relationship with God, a sin that needs to be properly diagnosed as well as skillfully treated to heal the sinner. In other words, *VS* and *AL* intersect on the heart of moral theology's reform named in *Lumen Gentium* as the church's "universal call to holiness."<sup>20</sup> After Vatican II, moral theology must be understood as formation aimed to holiness.

However, it is also for this same reason of the care of the souls that, as the *dubia* Cardinals note, *VS* is at pains to show that there are acts that are intrinsically evil by virtue of their object; that is, that there are moral actions that put us at the risk of spiritual perdition (mortal sin). But in doing so, *VS*

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, in his Address for the Meeting with Seminarians and Religious Novices (July 6, 2013) Pope Francis said: "A journey that matures, that develops towards pastoral fatherhood, towards pastoral motherhood, and when a priest is not a father to his community, when a sister is not a mother to all those with whom she works, he or she becomes sad. This is the problem. For this reason I say to you: the root of sadness in pastoral life is precisely in the absence of fatherhood or motherhood that comes from living this consecration unsatisfactorily which on the contrary must lead us to fertility. It is impossible to imagine a priest or a sister who are not fertile: this is not Catholic! This is not Catholic! This is the beauty of consecration: it is joy, joy." ([https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130706\\_incontro-seminaristi.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html))

<sup>20</sup> Pope Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution On The Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), Ch. 5.

also teaches what constitutes true discernment and judgment of conscience as we determine our sinfulness as malady in our relationship with God. This is the point that *AL* takes up and seeks to elaborate even more vigorously through its Ignatian influence: to stress not just proper diagnosis of sin through a process of discernment, but also to skillfully treat it through a process of accompaniment that seeks re-integration.<sup>21</sup> *AL*, just like *FC* before it, for all those in “irregular” situations seeks a true healing of the sinner’s personal relationship with God, but also in the family of God, that is the church.

This point of intersection between two Magisterial documents that, at face value, are radically different, is also significant for reasons that go beyond the immediate controversy in the church. This is because it is precisely in this rich interface between theory and practice, between theological and philosophical articulation and the actual experience of the People of God, that tradition flowers. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*: how we live and pray shapes how we reflect on God’s word, in the same way that theological reflection challenges our Christian living and deepens our worship. Likewise, since doctrine shapes praxis, the assumption is that *VS* must structure the theological and philosophical presuppositions that order the pastoral reflection of *AL* - even if this ‘framework’ might not be immediately evident. However, one might also ask the opposite: if praxis can sharpen our understanding of doctrine, should *AL* encourage a re-reading of *VS* in light of the “pastoral conversion” that *EG* (27-33) proposes?

In this space of creative encounter, one should also not lose sight of the dangers of misinterpretation. Because the documents are separated by time (and, one could also add, rapid cultural shifts); because the intended audiences are different; because the concerns and challenges to the Church they discuss are different, one should not be surprised that the language used is different. It should come as no surprise that the different rhetorical forms of John Paul II, the philosopher and teacher arguing for the “splendour of truth,” and of Francis, the pastor and pedagogue urging his flock to taste of the “joy of love” as the quintessence of the good Christian life, should also imply different forms of expression, even if not contradictory substance or “spirit.” The search for and articulation of truth requires dialectical sharpness and clear argumentation. But, as Pope Francis insists repeatedly, moral truth is not to be found in the realm of

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<sup>21</sup> Nadia Delicata, “Sin, Repentance and Conversion in *Amoris Laetitia*,” in *A Point of No Return? Amoris Laetitia on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* ed. Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, *INTAMS Studies on Marriage and the Family* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017), 74-86.



ideas, but in the messiness of a personal, relational reality.<sup>22</sup> The pastor exhorting his flock must necessarily inhabit the concrete world fraught with ambiguity.

However, as with all church doctrine, the Catholic must start with a hermeneutic of continuity, rather than of disruption or even of suspicion; with the trust in the Holy Spirit that when the Bishop of Rome speaks, and speaks for the synod of bishops, he is speaking with authority that always enlightens the church to receive the fullness of the Gospel as demanded by the times.<sup>23</sup> Our starting point as Catholics must be trust in the authority of Tradition guaranteed by the Spirit through apostolicity. As *VS* itself teaches:

While exchanges and conflicts of opinion may constitute normal expressions of public life in a representative democracy, moral teaching certainly cannot depend simply upon respect for a process: indeed, it is in no way established by following the rules and deliberative procedures typical of a democracy. Dissent, in the form of carefully orchestrated protests and polemics carried on in the media, is opposed to ecclesial communion and to a correct understanding of the hierarchical constitution of the People of God. Opposition to the teaching of the Church's Pastors cannot be seen as a legitimate expression either of Christian freedom or of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts. When this happens, the Church's Pastors have the duty to act in conformity with their apostolic mission, insisting that the right of the faithful to receive Catholic doctrine in its purity and integrity must always be respected. "Never forgetting that he too is a member of the People of God, the theologian must be respectful of them, and be committed to offering them a teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith" (113, quoting Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis*, May 24, 1990, 11).

A hermeneutic of suspicion, of "doubt" and fear that Popes will "contradict" each other rather than enlighten the flock with the truth of the Gospel, is in itself against the Catholic spirit. So, on this cluster of fundamental issues - our reality as sinners called by God and therefore the salvific mercy of God, but also the "manifest" gravity of sin in distinction to "actually being" in a state of mortal sin because of factors that reduce imputability - what do *VS* and *AL* teach?

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<sup>22</sup> "Realities are more important than ideas" is one of the "four specific principles which can guide the development of life in society and the building of a people" (221) that Pope Francis identifies in *EG* 231-233.

<sup>23</sup> Rodrigo Guerra López, "The Relevance of Some Reflections by Karol Wojtyła for Understanding *Amoris Laetitia*: Creative Fidelity." *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 22, 2016, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/relevance-some-reflections-karol-wojtyla-understan>.

## The Object of the Act and the “Thomism” of *VS*

The Letter that the four Cardinals addressed to Pope Francis in September 2016, that was then made public two months later, includes five *dubia*, three of which specifically compare and contrast passages in *AL* to *VS* highlighting three related themes:

- *AL* 304 is contrasted with *VS* 79 to raise questions regarding “the existence of absolute moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts and that are binding without exceptions”;
- *AL* 302 is contrasted with *VS* 81 on the understanding of the object of the act by asking whether the teaching that “circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act ‘subjectively’ good or defensible as a choice” is still valid;
- *AL* 303 is contrasted with *VS* 56 on the understanding of conscience to emphasize “that conscience can never be authorized to legitimate exceptions to absolute moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts by virtue of their object.”

While the first question asks about absolute moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts, the second specifies that these are to be judged as such by virtue of their “object,” a judgment that happens in conscience, which of itself, can never make exceptions to absolute moral norms that prohibit what is evil. The third question reveals something of the process of moral reasoning implied by the Cardinals: that conscience judges based on established moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts absolutely; acts that are known to be such by virtue of their “object.” Adultery is such an intrinsically evil act; thus, in conscience, one can never make a “legitimate exception” to it.<sup>24</sup> What is clear from this process

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<sup>24</sup> As the *dubia* Cardinals put it: “According to *Veritatis Splendor*, with intrinsically evil acts no discernment of circumstances or intentions is necessary. Uniting oneself to a woman who is married to another is and remains an act of adultery, that as such is never to be done, even if by doing so an agent could possibly extract precious secrets from a villain’s wife so as to save the kingdom (what sounds like an example from a James Bond movie has already been contemplated by St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 15, a. 1). John Paul II argues that the intention (say, “saving the kingdom”) does not change the species of the act (here: “committing adultery”), and that it is enough to know the species of the act (“adultery”) to know that one must not do it.” (<http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia>)

As will become clearer later, this point is countered by *AL* 305: “305. For this reason, a pastor

of reasoning is that, while there is a clear assumption that conscience's duty is to abide with norms, the norm itself is such because it hinges on what is being meant by the "object of the act" that gives an act its moral character.<sup>25</sup> So how does *VS* understand the meaning of "object of the act"?

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cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in 'irregular' situations, as if they were stones to throw at people's lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church's teachings, 'sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families.' Along these same lines, the International Theological Commission has noted that 'natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions.' Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin - which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such - a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end. Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. Let us remember that 'a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.' The practical pastoral care of ministers and of communities must not fail to embrace this reality."

This paragraph from *AL* suggests that while a person might be aware of a particular norm, because of their "conditioning", and therefore lack of rectitude of appetite, they might still have severe difficulties in truly grasping its meaning for their life. For that reason, "from the perspective of the acting person" the act literally takes a different meaning. It does not mean that the meaning given by the agent is necessarily the true one. This is not relativism. But it does mean that the more fundamental challenge of all accompaniment is formation of conscience through progressive discipline for greater rectitude of appetite. As the person becomes more virtuous (in particular more temperate and courageous, in order to be just and prudent), they will also be able to grasp and appropriate the natural law more truthfully.

<sup>25</sup> In his interview with Edward Pentin one year after the *dubia* were made public, Cardinal Burke replied thus to Pentin's question:

Pentin: "What tangible effect has this mix of interpretations had?"

Burke: "This hermeneutical confusion has already produced a sad result. In fact, the ambiguity regarding a concrete point of the pastoral care of the family has led some to propose a paradigm shift regarding the Church's entire moral practice, the foundations of which have been authoritatively taught by St. John Paul II in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*."

Indeed, a process has been put into motion that is subversive of essential parts of the Tradition. *Concerning Christian morality, some claim that absolute moral norms need to be relativized and that a subjective, self-referential conscience needs to be given a - ultimately equivocal - primacy in matters touching morals.* What is at stake, therefore, is in no way secondary to the *kerygma* or basic Gospel message. We are speaking about whether or not a person's encounter with Christ can, by the grace of God, give form to the path of the Christian life so that it may be in harmony with the Creator's wise design."

*VS* offers a lengthy section (71-83) that discusses the moral act, the object of the act and intrinsically evil acts, but the *dubia* Cardinals focus on merely two paragraphs (79 and 81) from this section. Lest these paragraphs are read out of context, it is important to briefly describe the entire section. Next, I will present key fragments from Pinckaers' and Rhonheimer's work that tease out differing interpretations from the tradition on the "human act" and the "object of the act," that, in turn, reflect two modes of moral reasoning. Lastly, I will suggest that the process of discernment, accompaniment and integration in *AL* assumes the need for an ongoing 'naming' of personal sinfulness. My contention will be that this relies on a "Thomist" understanding of the object of the act, even as retrieved by *VS*, but whose determination is not static, but rather dynamic, as the person who grows in virtue always seeks to approximate better the truth, even the truth about their past and present actions, in their growth to holiness.<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, this reading will contrast sharply with the more static and normative interpretation of the object of the act in *VS* assumed by the *dubia* Cardinals, as evident from the questions themselves.

*VS*'s first step is to introduce what constitutes a "moral act." This is crucial, since as *VS* implies, it is not any happening or activity that has a moral "object," but only properly "human" acts. Para. 71-72a will suffice to show how these "moral acts" have both a subjective and objective dimension; the former as an expression of human freedom, the latter as measured by the authentic human good known through the right exercise of reason (rather than by "norms" per se, even if norms should reflect such a "right" exercise of reason).

The relationship between man's freedom and God's law, which has its intimate and living centre in the moral conscience, is manifested and realized in human acts. It is precisely through his acts that man attains perfection as man, as one who is called to seek his Creator of his own accord and freely to arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.

Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate

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"Cardinal Burke Addresses the *Dubia* One Year After Their Publication," *National Catholic Register*, November 14, 2017, <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/cardinal-burke-addresses-the-dubia-one-year-after-their-publication>, my emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> See Marc Cardinal Ouellet, "Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating Weakness," *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 21, 2017, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/accompanying-discerning-integrating-weakness>.

choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his *profound spiritual traits* (71, emphasis in original).

This introductory paragraph is at pains to show that a moral act is such only as an expression of human freedom, a freedom ordered to God, the alpha and omega of our existence. When a person acts, the act reflects his or her own being and desire for becoming “by cleaving to” God. What we do consciously, and therefore with full knowledge and intent, reflects this existential drama. A “human” and therefore “moral” act is such because we consciously put our very self, desirous of God, into what we do and how we act. One should note, however, that the opposite of this dynamic is just as true. When, because of various factors, our freedom to act is diminished, our actions become somewhat less than human, and for that reason, we cannot be held to be fully responsible for them. Errors or gaps in our awareness, experience and understanding, condition and constrict our freedom, diminishing our intentionality, and therefore our very power to act. These factors have traditionally been reflected upon in the context of determining sinfulness for sacramental confession, since they reduce culpability even for actions whose “matter” is objectively grave.

The *morality of acts* is defined by the relationship of man’s freedom with the authentic good. This good is established, as the eternal law, by Divine Wisdom which orders every being towards its end: this eternal law is known both by man’s natural reason (hence it is “natural law”), and - in an integral and perfect way - by God’s supernatural Revelation (hence it is called “divine law”). Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are *in conformity with man’s true good* and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness (72a, emphasis in original).

Our desire for becoming, expressed through freely appropriated actions, is measured by the objective good, a standard of authentic flourishing according to our human nature. It is God the Creator who orders our *telos*, but human beings can know this ordering of becoming, and therefore what constitutes authentic human flourishing, through the right exercise of reason as participation in the eternal law. Natural law as the virtuous (prudential) exercise of practical reason, whose first principle is to seek good and avoid evil, can determine what is the good that we can accomplish in the here and now, but always in the light of the ultimate good. As that good is appropriated and freely chosen, it makes our action properly intentional and good (that is, reflecting the ultimate good in the particular moment). When human reason is too fragile to grasp divine reason, in particular when reason is blinded by sin, God not only reveals to us our ultimate good - most transparently in the Incarnation of his Son - but assists

our determination of how to manifest it in our daily life in the power of the Holy Spirit through infused virtues.

Moral acts are objectively good when the person grasps rightly how they contribute to their authentic flourishing and takes responsibility for their personal and communal becoming. When this goodness, knowable through the right exercise of reason is rejected, the person not only chooses what is objectively contrary to the good, but also harms himself or herself, since their personal flourishing is necessarily stultified or diminished. This is what the tradition will describe as human acts that are “intrinsically evil,” of an evil character.

The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality. Hence human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject’s intention is good. Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the voluntary ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. If the object of the concrete action is not in harmony with the true good of the person, the choice of that action makes our will and ourselves morally evil, thus putting us in conflict with our ultimate end, the supreme good, God himself (72b).

If a truly moral act is necessarily rational (conforming to the ultimate good) and voluntary (the act is intended *because* it conforms to the ultimate good), it follows that morality cannot be equated simply with “a means for attaining one or another of its goals” (an argument against consequentialism) “or simply because the subject’s intention is good.” “Intention” here needs to be understood not as the voluntariness that determines the morality of the particular human act, but as ulterior motivations, as is typically understood in proportionalism. *VS* specifies this reading of “intention” as ulterior motivation in its discussion on intrinsically evil acts:

Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature “incapable of being ordered” to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, *on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances* (80, italics is my emphasis).

Indeed, the next sentence in para. 72 confirms once more the crucial importance of intentionality in moral acts when it stresses that “activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the *voluntary* ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it

is acknowledged in its truth by reason.” One’s desire for authentic self-becoming is expressed *analogically* in every “moral” action; that is, in every action one undertakes in full awareness and responsibility. This reasonable intentionality expressed in concrete action is the “object of the concrete action” or the “object of the act.”

Paragraph 78a of *VS* specifies even more clearly what the encyclical means by “object of the act” and in doing so, refers directly to Thomas.

*The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the “object” rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas (Cf. Summa Theologiae, I-II, q.18, a. 6.). In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person. The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour. To the extent that it is in conformity with the order of reason, it is the cause of the goodness of the will; it perfects us morally, and disposes us to recognize our ultimate end in the perfect good, primordial love. By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person (emphasis in original).*

As we will see in Rhonheimer’s discussion of the morality of *VS*, this is the linchpin of the encyclical’s philosophy of human action: the person’s understanding and appropriation of their action determines its morality. Thus, the determination of the “object of the act” can only be done “in the perspective of the acting person” and, as the concluding paragraph of this section of *VS* attests, this teaching conforms to how the church understands who the human being is. The question of the “object of the act” is an anthropological question, a question of the “truth” we attest to about ourselves as human beings. If in the Church’s pastoral practice this truth is not acknowledged, or is not respected, the Church would be contradicting a fundamental tenet about her very existence as a community of men and women chosen by God.

As is evident, in the question of the morality of human acts, and in particular the question of whether there exist intrinsically evil acts, we find ourselves faced with *the question of man himself, of his truth* and of the moral consequences flowing from that truth. By acknowledging and teaching the existence of intrinsic evil in given human acts, the Church remains faithful to the integral truth about man; she thus respects and promotes man in his dignity and vocation (83).

The specification of the “object of the act” from “the perspective of the acting person” is the core philosophical teaching of *VS*. Pinckaers and Rhonheimer also

argue it is a core teaching in the philosophy of action of Thomas Aquinas. In a famous, 1986 essay titled “A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts,”<sup>27</sup> Pinckaers argues that it is “the first foundation regarding the moral quality of acts.” He considers it to be pivotal to ask: “Does this moral quality flow from the nature of actions in conjunction with a truly natural law, or does it depend essentially on an external law with its precepts and prohibitions? What we are concerned with here is the intrinsic or extrinsic character of morality, as well as the objectivity of moral judgments in general.”<sup>28</sup>

It is also no secret that Pinckaers’ core argument for the superiority of Thomas’ virtue ethics centers precisely on this issue of how morality is to be understood as “intrinsic” to the human person rather than as “extrinsic.”<sup>29</sup> However, Pinckaers also argues that through the philosophical errors of Nominalism, the church appropriated an increasingly “extrinsicist” morality that culminated with the low casuistry of the manuals. In this essay, Pinckaers traces how this extrinsicist understanding of morality also distorted Thomas’ understanding of the “object of the act,” reducing it to something that contradicts its spirit.

Pinckaers argues that in his “great classical analysis of moral action,” “St. Thomas makes of the end and the matter of the act the elements of the action. For him, the end is the principal (*principalissima*) element of the action, that which moves the agent to action and which directly involves the will. The second element is what is done, the matter of the action, which forms its substance.”<sup>30</sup> It follows that “the interior and external act, the intention directed to the end and the choice of the matter, are ordered to each other therefore as form and matter, we might say, as soul and body, to constitute the morality of the action.”<sup>31</sup>

This is the proper “object” of the moral act, since for Thomas, “the term “object” does not signify a material thing as contrasted with a person, but the reality placed before the reason or will as its matter, and this could easily be God or another person when one is talking about the object of love. Nor is the object opposed to the end, for he will say that the end is the proper object of the will

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<sup>27</sup> Servais Pinckaers, “A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts,” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology* eds. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 185-235.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Pinckaers’ celebrated *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) 327-378 makes this point strongly contrasting the understanding of freedom implied in obligational moral theories and in virtue moral theories. See also his shorter *Morality: The Catholic View* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Pinckaers, “A Historical Perspective,” 201.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205.



and designates the reality that the will seeks through desire and love. “*With St. Thomas, therefore there is no identification between the object and the matter of the act, as there is with modern moralists.*”<sup>32</sup>

Pinckaers’ historical reconstruction of the changing meaning of the “object of the act” from Thomas to the manualists, the latter being also appropriated by consequentialists and proportionalists,<sup>33</sup> shows how after the crisis of Nominalism, the meaning of “object of the act” becomes contrary to that intended by Aquinas. Modern moralists introduce a “separation between the *finis operis*, which designates the end inherent to the act and is identified practically with its object, and the *finis operantis*, or the end added by the one who acts.”<sup>34</sup> Pinckaers argues in no uncertain terms:

St. Thomas did not believe the distinction between *finis operis* and *finis operantis* necessary for the analysis of the composite parts of morality. ... The end being the proper object of the will, all finality, even external, is led to the voluntary finality and integrated with it when it is taken up by voluntary action.

But later on, a new concept of morality and of action will lead interpreters of St. Thomas to consider this separation essential to moral finality. It will enable them to discard with ease those texts of Thomas which prevent them from focusing the moral judgment on the object of the act (its matter) and reducing the end sought by the acting subject to the rank of a circumstance.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps the foremost of these texts that show how Thomas’ understanding of the object of the act was “from the perspective of the acting subject” and not merely the “matter” of the action, is the one from the *Summa Theologiae* that *VS* itself refers to in para. 78:

Certain actions are called human, inasmuch as they are voluntary, as stated above (I-II:1:1). Now, in a voluntary action, there is a twofold action, viz. the interior action of the will, and the external action: and each of these actions has its object. The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear. Therefore just as the external action takes its species from the object on which it bears; so the interior act of the will takes its species from the end, as from its own proper object.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 203, my emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> See Servais Pinckaers, “Revisionist Understandings of Actions in the Wake of Vatican II,” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 236-270.

<sup>34</sup> Pinckaers, “A Historical Perspective,” 209-210.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 210.

Now that which is on the part of the will is formal in regard to that which is on the part of the external action: because the will uses the limbs to act as instruments; nor have external actions any measure of morality, save in so far as they are voluntary. Consequently the species of a human act is considered formally with regard to the end, but materially with regard to the object of the external action. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* v, 2) that “he who steals that he may commit adultery, is strictly speaking, more adulterer than thief” (*ST*-II.18.6).

Thomas’ own example illustrates his point evocatively, precisely because it shows that a “reading” of the action from “outside” is necessary, but does not always suffice to determine with clarity the morality of a human act, and concomitantly, the spiritual state of the person. This, in fact, is the core argument that Rhonheimer develops in his essay on *VS* in his collection of essays on the object of the act, aptly titled *The Perspective of the Acting Person*.<sup>36</sup>

Rhonheimer notes that the philosophical “problematic” of the object of the act “consists in confusing the viewpoint of the ‘first person’ (the agent’s perspective) with the viewpoint of the ‘third person’ (the observer’s viewpoint). To a large extent, these two perspectives correspond to two quite different concepts of human action: the intentional and the causal-eventistic concept.”<sup>37</sup> Rhonheimer uses this distinction to emphasize how the consequentialist and proportionalist perspectives that *VS* criticizes are heirs of modern utilitarianism that, in their emphasis on the analysis of effects, take “the observer’s viewpoint.” In distinction, as we have seen in the analysis of *VS*, just like Thomas, the encyclical understands moral action from the agent’s perspective, stressing his or her intentionality. The difference in these two ways of conceiving of the object of the act becomes evident when we consider Rhonheimer’s own example: “to kill P’ is not simply ‘to cause P’s being dead,’ but rather it is *to choose, to intend, to want* P’s death (for the sake of *whatever* further end)”<sup>38</sup> (author’s emphasis). Likewise, following Thomas and *VS*, Rhonheimer argues that the goods that we seek, we seek them precisely because we desire them, we choose them, we intend them, since we perceive them as good for us.

There is, however, another distinction that is assumed in the two different understandings of human action that Rhonheimer considers: that between “moral *rightness*” and “moral *goodness*.” In this distinction as well, the former “concerns

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, “‘Intrinsically Evil Acts’ and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *The Perspective of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy* ed. William F. Murphy (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 37-67.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

the question about the properties which render an action “right” or “wrong”; the second is related to those properties of an action insofar as it springs from a *free will*.”<sup>39</sup> (author’s emphasis) Teleological ethicists (consequentialists and proportionalists) separate “moral rightness” from “moral goodness,” considering the former as a question of normative ethics, while the latter is judged on the basis of whether the person acts out of benevolence or not. Thus, in this schema, one can have an action that is “morally good” even if, normatively, it is deemed to be “wrong,” or vice versa. That is, this schema relies on the manualist distinction between the *finis operis* and *finis operantis*, even if it might disagree with the outcome of its “extrinsicist” moral analysis.

Rhonheimer argues that this distinction belies the confusion that emerges when considering moral action under two aspects, but failing to see their intrinsic unity. The first perspective reduces moral action to a merely “technical” consideration (has one done the *right* thing?), as Pinckaers also argues when he shows how the rise of casuistry and the moral manuals tended to rely on an understanding of morality as implying “technical ends.”<sup>40</sup> Still, as Thomas argues, true moral goodness must include not only a consideration of goodwill, but also a consideration of what is effectively being done to achieve it (the “matter” of the act). In other words, moral goodness must also consider what is *concretely* morally at stake in a particular situation. A “good moral” action must be “rightly” executed, which implies, not just a good intention, but the right (or fitting) choice of what exactly to do.

Hence, the distinction between “right-making properties” and “good-making properties” is in principle questionable. We always have to describe actions and behaviours as objects of *choices* and, therefore, as *intentional* actions. From such a perspective, however, the goodness of the will is regarded as depending on the goodness of freely chosen, *wanted* actions which also includes the agent’s willingly referring to the specific goal which constitutes the objective intentionality of this action. ... *That is why acts of choice are always describable as forms of rightness, that is of the rightness of desire or of the will*<sup>41</sup> (Italics, my emphasis).

This “rightness of desire or of the will,” that is, that one wills what is truly good in the particular situation, is not something that can be assessed using “*norms* (or rules): “‘norm-ethics’ are ‘objectivist’ in the sense that they *may not*, on the level of the concrete performance of actions, include in their reflection the acting subject and his willingly ‘taking a position’ with regard to “good” and “evil” *in*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>40</sup> Pinckaers, “A Historical Perspective,” 208.

<sup>41</sup> Rhonheimer, “Intrinsically Evil Acts,” 52.

choosing this or that particular action” (author’s emphasis).<sup>42</sup> As Rhonheimer puts it, like all modern moral philosophies that are heirs to Nominalism, even Kantian ethics “shares with utilitarianism and discourse-ethics the central characteristic of every norm-ethics, which is to judge actions from the point of view of an observer, from a standpoint *outside* that of the acting subject.”<sup>43</sup>

The classical virtue ethics approach, on the other hand, “holds that there are actions which are evil despite the best of intentions, or despite the foreseen and intended outcomes, precisely because the *choice* of this particular kind of action *through* which these laudible intentions are meant to be fulfilled must already be considered as morally evil.”<sup>44</sup> But this moral evil stems from something much deeper than mere intended consequences, because it stems from a “lack” in the acting person himself or herself. As Rhonheimer puts it,

Moral virtue is not only, as it is sometimes asserted, the will or the free determination to do “the right thing” each time. Were it like this, there would exist only one single moral virtue. Instead moral virtue is the habitual rightness of *appetite* (of sensual affections, passions, and of the will, the rational appetite) related to the various spheres of human praxis. An act which is *according* to virtue is an act which is suited to cause this habitual rightness of appetite which produces “the good person.”<sup>45</sup>

Or alternatively, the key feature that enables the person to determine what would be the best way to act in every situation is the “goodness or wickedness of appetite,” that not only facilitates the agent’s grasp of what is morally at stake in every situation together with the choice of the most fitting action, but is revealed in one’s interactions with others in their context or situation.

Thus, a morality that is “from the perspective of the acting person” is inherently a “personalist” morality, that first and foremost considers both “personal” and “communal” well being; and therefore, that is inherently “just” by manifesting the agent’s own virtue.

In reality, as acting subjects, we neither observe nor follow norms or rules, nor do we work out our decisions each time exclusively on the basis of foreseeable consequences for all those affected by our actions. Instead, human action, realizes itself in the context of definite “moral relationships,” the relationships between concrete persons (fellow-men, friends, married persons, parents and children,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Rhonheimer, “Intrinsically Evil Acts,” 53.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 54.

superiors and subordinates, employer and employee, creditor and debtor, physician and patient, partners in a contract, persons who live in a particular community, etc.). Here, it is always concerned with what we *owe* to others, with the question of right and of good will toward particular fellow-men, with the question of responsibilities toward concrete persons.<sup>46</sup>

Based on this analysis, it becomes obvious that not only is *VS* recovering a morality of virtue that begins with “the perspective of the acting person,” but that in doing so, it is also recovering an inherently “personalist” morality in distinction to the individualist moralities of the modern era, “where one’s own interests are limited by the interests of another.”<sup>47</sup> In doing so, *VS* also enhances a personalist anthropology where every person’s well being is reached not only in communion with others in society, and therefore according to nature, but ultimately and in the power of grace, in communion with God. A truly Christian theological anthropology necessitates this retrieval, because the alternative is the insipid and “idealist” (rather than “realist”) morality of the manuals that the Second Vatican Council sought to heal and correct.

Now we are in a position to contrast this “Thomist” understanding of the object of the act as promoted by *VS* in the encyclical’s quest to reform moral theology with the *dubia* about *AL* raised by the four Cardinals.

The *dubia* identify two quotes from *VS* that are central to their concerns about the object of the act:

The primary and decisive element for moral judgment is the object of the human act, which establishes whether it is *capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God*. This capability is grasped by reason in the very being of man, considered in his integral truth, and therefore in his natural inclinations, his motivations and his finalities, which always have a spiritual dimension as well. It is precisely these which are the contents of the natural law and hence that ordered complex of “personal goods” which serve the “good of the person”: the good which is the person himself and his perfection. These are the goods safeguarded by the commandments, which, according to Saint Thomas, contain the whole natural law (*VS* 79, emphasis in original).

“Circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act “subjectively” good or defensible as a choice” (*VS* 81).

Interestingly, the first paragraph could be read as if the measure for the morality of the act is not, strictly speaking understood to be “intrinsic” to the person who

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>47</sup> Rhonheimer, *Perspective of Morality*, 9.

grasps the moral meaning of action in his or her conscience, but in Pinckaers' words, more "extrinsically," that is, quite literally (rather than metaphorically) as "the *contents* of the natural law... safeguarded by the commandments." If that is the case, then one could also see, why the second quote is chosen, precisely to highlight that the "object of the act" must be distinguished from "circumstances or intentions." If the morality of an act is measured by external norms, then it has to follow that the operative moral framework is also normative, "causal-eventistic" and impersonal.

Let us not forget that this was one of the Cardinals' core criticisms of *AL* as suggested in the way they contrasted the *VS*'s text on the "object of the act" with *AL* 304:

It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being. I earnestly ask that we always recall a teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas and learn to incorporate it in our pastoral discernment: "Although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects... In matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles; and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all... The principle will be found to fail, according as we descend further into detail". *It is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations.* At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule. That would not only lead to an intolerable casuistry, but would endanger the very values which must be preserved with special care.

It becomes evident that *AL*'s argument here is precisely "from the perspective of the acting person." Indeed, following Thomas, *AL* argues that if one is to be truly just in his or her relationships to others (and therefore reason from a personalist, or virtue morality) it must be acknowledged that complex situations require discernment way beyond the mere application of norms. At the same time, it would also have to be acknowledged that the very moral grasp of the situation would differ according to the rectitude of appetite of the agent himself or herself. Thus, the reason why *AL*, in continuity with the teaching of *FC*, proposes a "law of gradualness," since the complexity of the situation together with the poverty of the agent, demands an ongoing discernment to not only grasp more clearly what is morally salient in the particular situation, but also to act with greater prudence in order to be more just towards all involved. Likewise, as the agent looks back on his or her past actions, they would also learn to reconsider the

moral meaning of their actions and, consequently to name and rename their sin. As they mature in virtue, their understanding of past sinfulness would also become more “integral” and “realistic” as the person is enabled to name their sin with greater clarity and candour.<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, *AL* 302, the other text noted by the *dubia* Cardinals, argues:

A negative judgment about an objective situation does not imply a judgment about the imputability or culpability of the person involved. On the basis of these convictions, I consider very fitting what many Synod Fathers wanted to affirm: “Under certain circumstances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person’s properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations. Even the consequences of actions taken are not necessarily the same in all cases.

It is clear that when *AL* mentions “circumstances,” these are not, in fact, extraneous to the moral action of the person himself. They are rather, the complex situation in which he or she is seeking to grasp what is truly most morally salient and therefore, to make the most fitting decision about how to act. Just as, for the one who understands the meaning of the holy object, stealing a chalice from a tabernacle is properly an act of sacrilege, so the judgment of how to act in a complex situation must consider more than the mere action for the proper evaluation of the morality of the act. In such situations, precisely because there are sufficiently complex that the mere application of a rule is unjust, then

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<sup>48</sup> In his article in *L’Osservatore Romano* cited earlier, Cardinal Ouellet makes this crucial point about the disciplinary practice of participating in holy communion for the divorced and remarried: “I would add, even if this is implicit in the text of *AL*, that the help of the sacraments in “certain cases” may have a provisional character depending on the maturity of the couple who are seeking reintegration in the Church. It may well be that such help might be granted for a period where individuals discern that this help is necessary for them in conscience. The same individuals may then give these up later in their journey, not out of rigorism but as a free choice, by virtue of the fact that, with competent and respectful help, *they have arrived at a better understanding that the help of the sacraments for their growth in grace does not resolve the contradiction between their public state of life and the sacramental meaning of Eucharistic communion.* In such a case they might refrain, not above all for fear of scandal (an ecclesiological motive) but out of respect for the divine companion whose ecclesial witness they do not wish to sully (a theological motive) by a sacramental communion that is subjectively compatible with their state of grace, but objectively incompatible with their state of life. Such a spiritual attitude, aware of the ecclesial meaning of sacramental communion, goes beyond the subjective desire for one’s own sacramental benefit and favours an objective service to offer to the divine witness expressed in the sacramental communion of Christ and the Church” (my emphasis in italics).

it follows that, even if persons do not act in an ideal manner, that is, in a manner that fully exemplifies the good, this is not solely because their conscience is ill-formed, but also because the situation itself limits what can be realistically, and therefore prudently, be done.

What is more important for our current discussion on the continuity or discontinuity between *VS* and *AL*, however, is that these texts actually reveal how *AL* embodies the moral reasoning exemplified in Thomas' virtue ethics, and in contrast to modern "normative" moralities, whether they are of the consequentialist or proportionalist streak as criticized by *VS*, or even of the deontological streak evident in pre-conciliar manualist moral theology as criticized by Pinckaers. The real question that one should perhaps ask is whether the *dubia* imply a framework of moral reasoning that is "from the perspective of the acting person," or whether it is in fact, more "normative." If the latter is the case, than ironically, it would be the Cardinals who have mistaken the essence of *VS*'s teaching and of the reform to moral theology that it sought to promulgate.

### **The Church's Pastoral Practice is a Matter of Evangelical Truth**

So far, I have tried to argue that contrary to the "doubts" raised by Cardinal Burke and his colleagues, I can see no doctrinal disruptions between *VS* and *AL*. In fact, quite the contrary: as I have tried to show, albeit too briefly, *AL* is grounded in the morality of "the great Thomas" as was *VS* before it. If anything, *AL* attempts to be thoroughly consistent with that Thomist ethic even in the messiness of very complex situations. It exhorts that all priests apply in their ministry of the healing of souls precisely that ancient discernment and spiritual accompaniment, beautifully summarized in the virtue ethic retrieved by *VS*, that does not immediately judge from an "observer's perspective", but truly honours the sinner's spiritual journey to grow in God. As Pope Francis puts it so eloquently to fellow pastors: "We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (*AL* 37).

Yet, one has to admit, that the controversies surrounding *AL* will not simply rest because of doctrinal consistency with the tradition (a matter, that should have been taken of course even by the harshest of critics). Rather, the truly controversial aspect is what Thomas' teaching should imply, not just for the discernment of sinfulness, but for the pastoral practice of the church in her ministry of healing. Even more specifically, what it should imply for the "disciplinary" practices of the church - that in situations of "irregularity" are always necessary to protect the faithful from scandal - but, at the same time, continue to encourage the manifestation of God's mercy in the healing ministry with sinners. As is well



known, in these past decades it has been especially difficult for the church to achieve this balance in particular in ministry with the divorced and remarried.

Much ink has been spilled (and vitriol exchanged online) on the question of whether the divorced and remarried should be allowed access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Interestingly, while *AL* in the now famous (or infamous) footnote 351 (but also footnote 336) does not exclude in principle the possibility, it also makes it clear that this decision of pastoral practice, including therefore, the decision of how to discipline, should rest squarely on the shoulders of individual bishops. As *AL* in its introduction makes clear:

Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. (3)

The Nominalist crisis brought in the church not just a more “normative” and casuistical morality. It also brought into the church an expectation of “uniformity” in every single aspect of ecclesial life, including the liturgical and the disciplinary. As is well known, when it comes to the discipline on the partaking of the Eucharist, two important canons rule this practice: canon 916 which rules the person himself or herself who in their conscience must judge whether they are worthy to receive the Body of Christ. But also canon 915 that rules the minister who is prohibited from administering the Eucharist to “those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin.”

*AL* is contentious - at least as detractors see it - because, like *FC* before it, it suggests the possibility of opening the door to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist for the divorced and remarried, and therefore, for those whom tradition teaches should be disciplined because they are “obstinately persevering in *manifest* grave sin” (canon 915, my emphasis). Cardinal Burke confirmed this when, a year after making public the five *dubia* (and still without a formal response from the Pope), in the interview with Edward Pentin of the *National Catholic Register* he lamented:

Over and above the moral debate, the sense of the ecclesial sacramental practice is increasingly eroding in the Church, especially when it comes to the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. The decisive criterion for admission to the sacraments has always been the coherence of a person’s way of life with the teachings of Jesus. If instead the decisive criterion were now to become the absence of a person’s

subjective culpability - as some interpreters of *Amoris Laetitia* have suggested - would this not change the very nature of the sacraments? In fact, the sacraments are not private encounters with God, nor are they means of social integration into a community. Rather, they are visible and effective signs of our incorporation into Christ and his Church, in and by which the Church publicly professes and actuates her faith. Thus, by turning a person's subjective diminished culpability or lack of culpability into the decisive criterion for the admission to the sacraments, one would endanger the very *regula fidei*, the rule of faith, which the sacraments proclaim and actuate not only by words, but also by visible gestures.

Yet, if one had to stretch the logic that participation in the sacraments is a "visible and effective sign of our incorporation into Christ and his Church," then it would follow that only the perfect are worthy of reception. However, even though the Christian must always strive towards the ideal of holiness, it is hubris to assume that we are not sinners and, pastoral ministry must begin precisely where the sinner is. In the evocative fourth chapter of *AL*- its very heart -Pope Francis makes it clear that "after the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is 'the greatest form of friendship'" (123).<sup>49</sup> Yet, he also adds, "in marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated" (126). Likewise, in both *EG* and *AL* Pope Francis stresses that the sacrament of "the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (*EG*, 47). Thus, the fundamental principle of pastoral ministry of *AL* is the same one taught in *EG*:

Without detracting from the evangelical ideal, [pastors] need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur. I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best. A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.

The emphasis is on a path of conversion, since the quintessential good news is the joy that God saves, even if we do not deserve salvation. And it is precisely this generous, freely given mercy of God that Pope Francis desires that the church emulates pastorally first and foremost, and therefore that the church witnesses as "good news" in all her ministry.

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<sup>49</sup> Quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 123.

In this light, even the risk of scandal as stressed by *FC 84* takes on a subordinate role. If the “traditional” disciplinary practice of the church was ultimately out of charity to prevent that “the faithful ... be led into error and confusion regarding the Church’s teaching about the indissolubility of marriage,” Pope Francis suggests that there could be an even greater “stumbling block” for the ecclesial community if she stubbornly refuses to “be merciful as the Father is merciful.” Yet, even in this case, Francis does not prescribe since there is no “one size fits all” solution. Rather, he exhorts that bishops exercise prudence for the well being of their flock.<sup>50</sup>

I think that Pope Francis is less categorical about disciplinary measures in the Church - and in so doing, he retrieves the ancient practice where every bishop was responsible for determining disciplinary measures in his diocese - for two important reasons. The first is that evangelization, and therefore the ecclesial embodiment of God’s mercy, must always be witnessed concretely in a particular cultural setting. Only the bishop truly knows his flock. Thus, only the bishop can determine the wisest path of conversion and integration of all people of God in his diocese.

The other important consideration follows, that is, of collegiality that is made manifest through ecclesial practices. Just as Pope Francis recently put the responsibility of translating liturgical texts squarely on the shoulders of individual Bishops’ Conferences,<sup>51</sup> so Pope Francis expects bishops to know what is truly morally at stake in their diocese and to act in a prudential manner for their communities.

Thus we see how, for Francis, the “personalist” ethic of Thomas must permeate - and *be seen to permeate* - every single level of pastoral reform in the church. As *EG* already suggested, “pastoral conversion” is necessary from the Roman Curia to the pastoral approach of individual priests in every corner of the world. But the heart of that pastoral conversion is a retrieval of a framework of moral reasoning, where the starting point is “the perspective of the acting person” who as he or she grows, is also perfected in their appetites to reveal through their actions the beauty of God’s law.

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<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this can be understood as similar to the Eastern Orthodox approach that while holding strictly to the law, they also confront difficult pastoral situations with “flexibility” or *oikonomia*. For a very enlightening discussion on these principles see Kevin Schembri, *‘Oikonomia’, Divorce and Remarriage in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, 2017), Ch. 2 “*Akribia* and *Oikonomia*,” 75-124.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter in the form of *Motu Proprio Magnum Principium* by which Can. 838 of The Code of Canon Law is Modified, September 9, 2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/09/09/170909a.html>.

While the philosophical reflection in *VS* on the object of the act might seem to be infinitely distant from the pastoral approach of Pope Francis, in fact, it is its beating heart: the fulcrum to pivot the church from an “extrinsicist” and “technical” moral imaginary to reclaiming the grandeur of the human person created *imago Dei* as endowed with reason, will and conscience to shape his or her own life in pursuit of their desire for God alone.

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Retrieving the Tradition:

Excerpts from Past Issues of *Melita Theologica*

## Peter Paul Saydon, “Recent Developments in Old Testament Literary Criticism,”

*Melita Theologica* 2/2 (1949-50): 79-96.

Daniel criticism during recent years has gradually become more conscious of the literary problems of this prophetic book, more progressive in its tendency and more uniform in its conclusions. An echo of the traditional opinion attributing the whole book to the prophet of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., still rings in Father A. Vitti’s paper *Il libro di Daniele nella recente critica*.<sup>1</sup> But since the beginning of this century opposition to strict Danielic authorship has been growing increasingly stronger. These points seem to have been definitely established; (i) the book contains at least a Danielic nucleus including the Visions chapters; (ii) the book received its actual form during the Greek domination, that is not later than the year 300 B.C., or perhaps, during the Maccabean age; (iii) in the hypothesis of a Greek origin interpolations from the Maccabean age are admitted.

The latest commentaries on the book of Daniel, though representing different points of view, embody the main results of recent criticism. J. Linder S.J. (*Commentarius in librum Daniel*, 1939, which is a revised and modernized edition of Knabenbauer’s commentary in the series *Cursus Scripturae Sacrae*) explains the origin and composition of Daniel in this way: 1. Daniel himself wrote the Visions chapters; 2. The stories chapters were written either by Daniel

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<sup>1</sup> (1) *Atti della Settimana Biblica*, 1931, 76-91.

himself or by a contemporary writer and later translated into Aramaic; 3. The book received its final form about the year 300 B.C. L. Dennefeld (*La Sainte Bible*, Tome VII, 1947) after referring to the opinions of recent critics concludes: "As regards the origin of the book of Daniel it is better that one contents oneself with general conclusions, namely, that it presents an apocalyptic character, that it received its definite form at the age of the Maccabees, but that its contents are derived from a tradition that goes back to the times of the exile" (p.638). Giov. Rinaldi (*La Sacra Bibbia, Daniele*, 1947) brings the final redaction of the book down to the year 300 B.C. without excluding, however, later retouches and amplifications made during the Maccabean age. Mention must also be made of the opinion of Dom A. Miller and A Metzinger who in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of Höpfl Introduction (0946) describe the book of Daniel as the work of unknown author writing not later than the year 300 B.C. and making use of older material.

Another important feature of modern Daniel studies is a fuller appreciation of the historical background of its prophecies. While the messianic character of the prophecies is strictly maintained, the historical outlook of the writer is fixed within the limits of the Maccabean age. Hence, the identification of the fourth kingdom with the Roman Empire is being gradually abandoned, the anointed prince in the prophecy of the Seventy weeks is Cyrus, not the Messiah, and the Anointed One in the same prophecy is the high priest Onias. Naturally, the conservative school has a more uncompromising attitude in its messianic interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel.

The brief survey of the results of literary criticism in its application to the Old Testament studies, far from falling into a stagnant, unscientific, uncritical conservatism, are slowly, but steadily, marching forward under the unerring guidance of the Church and keeping up with the progress of profane sciences. Though Catholic research has been less extensive and less varied than non-Catholic research, its results are unquestionably more sound and less conflicting. Looking back upon the last decade we notice that Pentateuchal criticism has now been placed on a sound and a broader basis. The problem is no longer: Whether Moses has written the Pentateuch and what really belongs to him and what to later editors. Criticism of the historical books has received a powerful impulse from the Encyclical *Divino afflante*, and further developments are expected. As regards the Psalms interpreters are evermore realizing the necessity of determining not only the historical but also the psychological and religious background for a full comprehension of the sense intended by the inspired poets. Isaias is still a thorn in the eyes of critics. While it is generally agreed that the second part of his book in its actual form can hardly be referred to him, no satisfactory theory has

an yet been proposed that would explain how the work of an unknown prophet came to be regarded as the work of the great prophet of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Daniel is no longer a mysterious prophet cut off from his contemporaries, predicting only a gloomy future to far distant generations and utterly unconcerned with his fellow-exiles. His book is a message to a living generation, and it is in this light that it must be read and interpreted.

Much has been done in the field of literary criticism, but more remains to be done. There still remain many problems the solution of which we, perhaps, shall never see in our lifetime. "But, to conclude with Pope Pius XII' warning, this state of things must in no wise daunt the Catholic interpreter; prompted by a practical and ardent love of his science, the sincerely devoted to Holy Mother Church, he must grapple perseveringly with the problems so far unsolved, not only to repel the attacks of opponents, but also in the effort to find an explanation which will be faithfully consonant with the teaching of the Church, particularly with the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, while being at the same time in due conformity with the certain conclusions of profane sciences".