

- 16 Quoted in I. Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music* (Oxford, 1984), p 326.
- 17 cf E. Walter White, *Tippett and his Operas* (London, 1979), p 116.
- 18 *Opera*, 1986, p 1199.
- 19 cf. *Opera*, 1986, p 495; *Opera*, 1986, p 1199; *Opera*, 1991, p 876.
- 20 M. Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle* (London, 1984), p 125.
- 21 P. Griffiths, *Peter Maxwell Davies* (London, 1982), p 48.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p 163.
- 23 *Opera*, 1985, p 380.
- 24 For further comments on Harvey's 'Inquest of Love', and on Tavener's 'Mary of Egypt' and Saxton's 'Caritas', see M. Fuller, 'Some Expressions of Spirituality in Contemporary Opera', *Modern Believing*, 1994, pp 6 ff.
- 25 J. Tavener, programme note in *1992 Aldeburgh Festival Programme Book*, p 96.
- 26 J. Tavener, 'The Sacred in Art', in *1992 Aldeburgh Festival Programme Book*, p 89.

Truth and Martyrdom: The Structure of Discipleship in *Veritatis Splendor*

John Berkman

Early in February, I was privileged to participate in a gathering of forty-five predominantly Catholic philosophers and theologians who met to discuss John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. Most of the discussion at the conference focused on the second of the encyclical's three chapters, which deals with "some trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations [that] are incompatible with revealed truth." (§29) Conspicuously absent was any attention to either the first or especially the third chapters of the encyclical. The first chapter investigates the nature of Christian discipleship through the lens of St Matthew's account of Jesus' meeting with the rich young man. (Matt 19) The third chapter treats

the issue of Christian martyrdom and other sources for Christian renewal. In the course of the discussion, the notion of discipleship was mentioned rarely, and the subject of martyrdom never came up. By concentrating almost exclusively on the second chapter, the conference failed to locate the encyclical's critique of particular "trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations" within the context provided by *Veritatis Splendor* itself, namely that of Christian discipleship. In doing so this group mirrored much of the general response to *Veritatis Splendor*, which has centred almost exclusively on the second chapter. It is my goal to shift this focus, and to highlight the primacy of discipleship for a right understanding of *Veritatis Splendor*.

Veritatis Splendor has a message about a notion central to our lives: freedom. The Pope argues that the common conception of freedom as merely the absence of constraints is misguided. Christian freedom must be connected with the pursuit of truth. Since it is the truth that sets us free, (§55) "genuine freedom involves seeking the truth and adhering to it once it is found." (§56) The Pope's argument resonates with one sung by Janis Joplin in *Me and Bobby McGee*, a song written by Kris Kristofferson. In this song, Kristofferson writes, "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." The notion of freedom that Kristofferson criticizes is a peculiarly modern one, which emphasizes "freedom from" (e.g. any particular demand or constraint), rather than "freedom for" (e.g. the pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful). In different yet complementary ways, Kristofferson and John Paul II emphasize the inadequacy of the "freedom from" conception of freedom.

This notion of freedom as "freedom from" is exemplified by those Americans who oppose government subsidized universal medical coverage, or gun control, because America ought to be a "free" country. For these people, it does not matter whether they or their neighbours *actually* own a gun, or can *actually* obtain basic medical care, but that everybody is free to seek medical care or purchase a gun without government constraints. The upshot of Kristofferson's observations in *Me and Bobby McGee* is that these advocates of "freedom" are deluded in thinking that their politics are essentially sound, even for the 40 million poor Americans who cannot afford medical coverage, and for the poor generally, since everyone has "freedom." But for many who actually live out this "freedom," it amounts to simply having nothing left to lose.

Kristofferson's depiction of modern freedom as that state in which you have "nothing left to lose" is strikingly similar to the notion of

freedom as “doing whatever one wants” criticized by *Veritatis Splendor*. Freedom is reduced to “doing whatever one wants” when freedom no longer has a goal or a *telos*, when there is no longer anything sacred, anything with intrinsic and inalienable worth and dignity that is worth disciplining ourselves in order to pursue. Such freedom is no longer ordered to the pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful. *Veritatis Splendor* insists upon a fuller notion of freedom that is only found within the bounds of truthfulness. Thus it highlights the words of Jesus: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (§34)

The reader will notice the negative note thus far, a discussion of what is not being affirmed in *Veritatis Splendor*. In adopting this approach I am following the example of many of the encyclical’s commentators. But a continued focus on *Veritatis Splendor*’s criticisms would obscure the heart of the encyclical, which is a constructive vision of the Christian life. This vision is introduced in the form of the question the rich young man asks Jesus in the nineteenth chapter of St Matthew’s gospel. He asks “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?” (§8) Jesus first responds by telling the young man to keep the commandments, a response sometimes interpreted to endorse a “minimalist” understanding of Christian morality. However, the young man does not leave the matter here, and as *Veritatis Splendor* stresses, neither should we. Like the young man, we must probe further. When the young man presses the issue, he is told by Jesus “if you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (§16) Here, we have arrived at the heart of the story, and the heart of *Veritatis Splendor*. While the commandments are conditions for full life in Christ, and indeed shape us and form us into such a life, they do not constitute the core of discipleship. (§17) The Christian life is not fundamentally about what rules and principles one must follow to be in the good graces of God and the Church. Rather, the Christian life is fundamentally about following Jesus when, and in whatever way Jesus calls us.

Too often, obeying rules degenerates into a “minimalist” Christian morality. This truncated vision of Christian life sees most of the ends, intentions and decisions in our lives as morally neutral, to be pursued as we please, as long as they are not in conflict with rules x, y, and z. This understanding of Christian life is not only *not* the good news of Jesus; it is not even a correct understanding of the Decalogue. The ten commandments are not a self-contained code of behavioural rules, but a people’s response in gratitude to God for delivering them out of

slavery and bondage:

The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for humans. It is a response of love, according to the statement made in Deuteronomy about the fundamental commandment: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Dt. 6:4–7). Thus the moral life, caught up in the gratuitousness of God's love, is called to reflect his glory: "For the one who loves God it is enough to be pleasing to the one whom he loves: for no greater reward should be sought than that love itself; charity in fact is of God in such a way that God himself is charity." (§10)

Obedience to the ten commandments is properly understood first and foremost as a desire to honour God, indeed to be like God. The commandments assist and enable disciples to live the life God envisions for them. The commandments themselves arise out of and are justified in terms of God's continuing relationship with the people of Israel, who are told "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." (§10) In the same way that the commandments are justified in terms of Israel's relationship with their God, so too for Christians moral rules can only be adequately understood and appropriated within a prior context of discipleship.

Although we may be tempted to believe, perhaps we have been taught, that Christian life consists primarily in the fulfilment of the rules of God and the Church, *Veritatis Splendor* insists that this view is deformed and will never make sense of the Christian gospel as truly *good news*. Christian practice must not be reduced to a moralistic minimum; for the Christian life consists in responding to the call of Jesus to the rich young man, the call of "Come, follow me" which is "the new law of the Church and of every Christian." (§114)

A wholehearted response to the call of Christ is the necessary first step in a faithful Christian journey. Thus, near the end of the encyclical, the Christian life is summarized as "abandoning oneself to [Jesus], in letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church." (§ 119) Only when the Christian's gaze is fixed upon Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are invoked to live out that journey, do the demands of Christian faith cease to be onerous, and instead become alluring. Thus, in trying to understand Christian morality, the

first questions are: Are we followers of Christ? Do our lives come from God, depend on God, and pursue a return to God? Is God our source and God our goal?

At present, too much debate about the Christian life focuses on specifying and nuancing particular prohibitions and duties (i.e. "follow the commandments") without locating this debate within the context of how to follow Christ faithfully. (i.e. "Come, follow me") It is only when the former is firmly located in the context of the latter that the gospel truly functions as good news for the Christian.

This returns us to our original reflections on the true meaning of freedom for Christians. Christians do not understand freedom as the absence of constraints, such that the demands of the gospel are seen as burdens upon our life, liberty and happiness. Negative freedom is not Christian freedom. Christian freedom *begins*, as St Augustine notes, in being "free from crimes . . . such as murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. . . . But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom." (§13) Following rules undoubtedly enables us to avoid certain evils, but perfect freedom lies in the active pursuit of our true good. Our true good lies in our pursuit of God along the path of true righteousness. Faithfulness to God is faithfulness to the truth, and that truth can never be alien to our freedom.

Having emphasized the priority of "discipleship" to "rules," let not a hint of antinomianism enter here. The path of perfection in the Christian's journey toward God cannot be navigated properly without a knowledge of the basic perils to be avoided. The commandments have not been abolished, and continue to function to shape our lives. Thus, *Veritatis Splendor* quotes Augustine again, that "to the extent to which we serve God we are free, while to the extent that we follow the law of sin, we are still slaves." (§17) Once we are captured by the gospel, impelled to live it out, its demands become freedom. For,

...those who are impelled by love and "walk by the spirit" (Gal 5:16) and who desire to serve others, find in God's Law the fundamental and necessary way in which to practice love as something freely chosen and freely lived out. Indeed, they feel an interior urge — a genuine "necessity" and no longer a form of coercion — not to stop at the minimum demands of the Law, but to live them in their "fullness." (§18)

The issue is not the necessity of the Law, but the adequacy of the Law. How, then, can a Christian in the modern world concretely follow Jesus? Are there not numerous contemporary problems which Jesus simply does not address directly by his life? Do we not need

universal rules to apply the Gospel to these situations? Of course, there is a place for moral rules, but if we wish to answer faithfully Jesus' call to "Come, follow me," we require guidance more fundamental than knowledge of rules, and a wisdom beyond rules outlined by moral theologians. This guidance and wisdom is to be found in Christians who have journeyed most faithfully, who have best embodied the faith in their lives, and it is they to whom Christians first turn for guidance. It is in God's faithful people, the body of Christ, that we see Christ in action. The many varieties of faithful response to Christ's call are best exemplified in the lives of the saints and the sacrifices of Christian martyrs. Christians must first and foremost be captured by the vision of the *imitatio Christi*, following the example of Jesus, and that of his faithful body as exemplified by the saints and martyrs.

In emphasizing the central and inviolable status of faithful witness, *Veritatis Splendor* echoes *De Ecclesia*:

Right down from the beginning, therefore, some Christians have been called to bear this highest witness of love in the sight of all and especially of persecutors; and some Christians will always be called to do this. Through martyrdom the disciple is made like his master in willing acceptance of death for the salvation of the world and resembles him by the shedding of his blood. For this reason, therefore, martyrdom is held by the church to be the highest gift and the supreme proof of love. (*De Ecclesia* §42)

Veritatis Splendor and *De Ecclesia* share the fundamental conviction that all Christians are called to perfection in charity, and that martyrdom — while a gift given to few — is the supreme proof of Christian charity. *Veritatis Splendor's* second (and longest) chapter (§28–83) is devoted to a discussion of "some trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations [that] are incompatible with revealed truth." (§29) One of the trends singled out for criticism is consequentialism, which denies the existence of particular kinds of acts which are intrinsically wrong and to be prohibited absolutely. (§75) While *Veritatis Splendor* opposes this trend for a number of reasons, the most important criticism is that the denial of the existence of intrinsically evil acts renders the wisdom in the lives of the saints and the deaths of martyrs profoundly suspect: (§92)

The unacceptability of . . . ethical theories, which deny the existence of negative moral norms regarding certain kinds of behaviour, norms which are valid without exception, is confirmed in a particularly eloquent way by Christian martyrdom. (§90)

As the above excerpt stresses, if there are no intrinsically wrong acts, if the rightness or wrongness of an act is determined, as consequentialism (in some forms) advances, through a weighing of pre-moral goods and evils, then the witness of the martyrs could be undermined by a revisionist history. A reevaluation of the pre-moral goods might lead to the conclusion that more good could have been gained if the martyr had sinned and saved his or her life. It is precisely the *inviolability* of the witness of the martyrs to which *Veritatis Splendor* appeals to make sense of and justify the absolute prohibition of certain acts as intrinsically evil.

Thus, *Veritatis Splendor* discusses the story of Susanna (Dan 13), the witness in the death of John the Baptist (Mk 6), the martyrdoms of the deacon Stephen and the apostle James (Acts 6–7; 12), and the countless others who accepted martyrdom rather than perform evil acts, such as idolatrously burning incense before the statue of the Emperor (Rev 13). (§91) To take just one contemporary example, consider the martyrdom of Oscar Romero. If we could conclude that a more muted criticism of the El Salvadoran military would have significantly lengthened his life, and that in so doing pre-moral goods could have been better maximized, would that make his martyrdom foolishness? Passing by the question of the very commensurability of consequences in such a scenario, suffering to honour God and God's way with the world will always be foolishness to the Greeks, to those without the wisdom of the saints.

It is possible, and in some contexts appropriate, to summarize the above response to consequentialism in the moral maxim "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." However, John Paul II's position is reflected most deeply and profoundly, not in any moral maxim, but in the lives and deaths of the martyrs. Faithful believers often faced martyrdom because they were unwilling to do certain acts, even at the cost of their lives — even at the cost of their children's lives. If we fail to acknowledge the absolute wrongfulness of certain acts, then it no longer makes sense to *unconditionally* revere the martyrs as guides for Christians.

Can we actually identify acts that are always wrong? According to *Veritatis Splendor*, contemporary idolatry often comes in economic and political forms. Thus it includes the following examples: "Enterprises which for any reason — selfish or ideological, commercial or totalitarian — lead to the enslavement of human beings, buying or selling them like merchandise" or "reducing persons by violence to use-value or a source of profit." (§100) These and all other acts which are contrary to the dignity of human beings are

intrinsically evil. If the reader finds the above examples overly abstract, obscure, or hard to follow, and thus doubts their intrinsically evil character, let a more specific example suffice: taking a water hose, putting it well down someone's throat, and turning on the water full blast until their guts are blown out. That's *always* wrong!

In addition to jeopardizing our reverence for the saints and martyrs, *Veritatis Splendor* discusses several other consequences of failing to acknowledge that particular kinds of acts are intrinsically wrong. One common and too frequent result is the surrender of human persons to economic and political *interests*. Thus,

if one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others . . . (§99)

Of course, these are generally the interests of government leaders or others in positions of power. All governments which deny the transcendent source of true good and the transcendent basis for the dignity of the human person tend towards totalitarianism. *Veritatis Splendor* identifies Marxism as a primary example of a philosophy which evolved into a form of totalitarianism. However, the same risk exists in governments which ally democracy and moral relativism. "As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism." (§101) Here *Veritatis Splendor* speaks prophetically, as the West has scarcely begun to recognize, much less respond to, its own tendencies towards democratic totalitarianism.

Finally, *Veritatis Splendor* warns Christians against the danger of opposing faith to reason. Christians must integrate reason and Christian faith. All moral truth is from God. God's demands and commands can never be alien to our nature or reason because the call of God is always for our true good. If we find the demands of the gospel alienating, if grace corrects our moral reasoning, it is surely not because grace is in opposition to our nature; rather, we merely failed as moral reasoners.

Unless we affirm the existence of intrinsically evil acts, we cannot unconditionally honour the great acts of the saints and heroic sacrifices of the martyrs. If none of the demands of Christian life are absolute, then we will be hard pressed to justify how it might be incumbent upon some Christians to undergo martyrdom. Furthermore, the consequentialist stance cannot unconditionally endorse God's ultimate self-communication with the world in the death and

resurrection of Our Lord, the pattern for all Christian martyrs. For in Jesus' dying we learn that we must hold fast to doing no evil, that we must suffer evil rather than do wrong. The willingness to do evil, to harm an innocent person, is exemplified by the utilitarian Caiphas, the one who condemns Jesus on the grounds that the benefit of the many is worth the suffering of one innocent. (Jn 18)

Although in refusing to do evil, Christians may be called to suffer greatly, Christians know that God vindicates this manner of life. In resurrecting Jesus, God has shown us definitively that it is in the unwillingness to do evil that true life is found, that God honours and raises those faithful to God's way of peace and nonviolent love. We can thank John Paul II for reminding us of this in *Veritatis Splendor*.

Reviews

THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY: REVITALIZING THE TRADITION by David N. Power. *Gill and Macmillan*, 1992. Pp.xiii + 349.

Father Dermot Power O.M.I., is Professor of Systematic Theology and Liturgy at the Catholic University of America. He has also served on the editorial board of *Concilium*. He has previously written on Ministry and on the eucharistic doctrine of the Council of Trent. This, his most recent work is situated in the context of a dialogue between Tradition and traditions. It is into an encounter with history that Father Power invites us, at the same time prompting us to uncover the intellectual and cultic genealogy of much of our eucharistic practice. To that end he presents a series of historical readings of particular periods in the Church's history, ranging from the pre-Nicene Church through Nicaea and the period after, to the high middle ages and St Thomas Aquinas.

Father Power demonstrates considerable facility with the latest liturgical and theological research. His assessments are judicious and his historical judgements well-informed. His treatment of the medieval patterns of piety and eucharistic devotion provides a useful and well-balanced survey of the time. In this context it is particularly useful to have a concise but rich presentation of the interlocking themes of