

The Luminous Excess of the Acting Person: Assessing the Impact of Pope John Paul II on American Catholic Moral Theology

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THERE IS NOTHING DEADER than a dead pope” or so say the cynics of Rome who have watched the parade of pontiffs who have passed through the walls of the Vatican over the course of years. Only time will tell just how lasting will be the imprint left by Pope John Paul II on the Church, but early indications some six years after his death are that the influence from his exceptionally long and prodigious pontificate continues to be felt by the Church’s members and in its institutional life. His global travels in 104 apostolic journeys (which took him to 129 different countries), his charismatic personality, and his multilingual eloquence impacted millions and redefined the image of the papacy for the modern world. The international interest in his recent beatification testifies not only to the witness provided by his own personal holiness but also to the ongoing global impact of the Polish pontiff.¹ Biographers tout the geopolitical impact of his papacy through his defense of human freedom and rights and his personal interventions around the globe which helped encourage democracy in much of

¹ Pope Benedict XVI beatified his predecessor on May 1, 2011. See Jesús Colina, “1M Pilgrims Make for Most Crowded Beatification Ever,” <http://www.zenit.org/article-32449?l=english>.

Latin America as well as playing an important role in the peaceful fall of communism in Europe and the former Soviet Union.² His pontificate did much to heal the wounds of Christian anti-Semitism and to foster closer relationships with Jews, members of other non-Christian religions, and with members of other Christian churches.³ His teaching on the struggle between a “culture of life” and a “culture of death” has not only shaped ethical teaching and discussion, but has become part of political discourse on life issues.⁴ His call for a “new evangelization” remains programmatic for the Church as it moves into the new millennium.⁵ His teaching in the area of mar-

² This is a frequent theme in the laudatory works on the late pope by George Weigel. See his *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999) and *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—the Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 2010). But this idea is supported by others as well. See Jo Renee Formicola, “The Political Legacy of Pope John Paul II,” *Journal of Church and State* 47 (Spring 2005): 235-42; and Chester Gillis, ed., *The Political Papacy: John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Their Influence* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006). Others highlight the late pope’s efforts to build a “culture of peace” through his diplomatic activism and interventions. See Bernard J. O’Connor, *Papal Diplomacy: John Paul II and the Culture of Peace* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s, 2005).

³ On the late Pope’s effort to promote Jewish Christian dialogue see the collection of essays in David Dalin and Matthew Levering, eds., *John Paul II and the Jewish People: A Jewish Christian Dialogue*, (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2008). On his efforts to create dialogue with Judaism and other non-Christian religions see Byron Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005). On the pope’s impact on relations between the Catholic Church and Evangelicals see Tim Perry, ed., *The Legacy of John Paul II: An Evangelical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007). For assessment of John Paul II’s ecumenical teaching from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives see Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen, eds., *Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul II’s Encyclical Ut Unum Sint*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁴ The term was an important theme in Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. It subsequently was adopted as a name by a Washington DC pro-life think tank (the Culture of Life Foundation). It entered more directly into American political discourse when used by George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election (in a debate with Vice President Al Gore on October 3rd) and then subsequently in his presidency to articulate his pro-life views. For differing assessments of the language of these opposing cultures of life and death see, Marc Oullet, “The Mystery of Easter and the Culture of Death,” in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, Readings in Moral Theology, no. 10 (New York: Paulist, 1998), 109-19; and Charles E. Curran, “*Evangelium Vitae* and Its Broader Context” in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, 120-33.

⁵ The idea has not only been frequently addressed by his successor but in June of 2010 Benedict XVI announced the creation of a Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization. On John Paul’s own understanding and implementation of the term in his outreach to youth see Mario D’Souza, “Action and the New Evangelization:

riage and family is the subject of ongoing study by a worldwide institute which bears his name.⁶ His catecheses known as the Theology of the Body continue to generate wide popular interest as well as increasing scholarly scrutiny.⁷

Yet not unlike the retreat which Karol Wojtyła preached for the household of Paul VI, John Paul II's pontificate could be described in the biblical language of a "sign of contradiction."⁸ The relationship of his papal teaching to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council has been the subject of intense debate. Some commentators see the late pope's work as a retreat from the reforms of the Council and retrenchment of older preconiliar ideas.⁹ Advocates of the late pope's teaching counter that his pontificate represents instead a critical discernment and purification of the Council's vision which had been clouded in the years immediately following it.¹⁰ In some ways these competing readings map onto larger fault lines of theological disagreement which existed both during the Council and in its aftermath. These lines were set ablaze by the explosive debate which ensued after Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* over the issue of contraception.¹¹ This fierce disagreement quickly spread simulta-

The Youthful Humanism of Pope John II," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2005): 199-215.

⁶ The John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family has sessions (or locations) in Rome (at the Lateran University), Washington, D.C.: Benin, Brazil, India, Mexico, Spain, and Australia.

⁷ This will be considered at greater length below.

⁸ In this work Wojtyła asks the very suggestive question whether the term "sign of contradiction" might be "a distinctive definition of Christ and the Church?" See Karol Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction*, trans. St. Paul Publications (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 7-8.

⁹ For a case in point in regard to John Paul II's teaching in *Veritatis splendor* see Mary Elsbernd, "The Reinterpretation of *Gaudium et spes* in *Veritatis Splendor*," *Horizons* 29/2 (2002): 225-39. On the perception of the late pope by progressives as a "restorationist" see Charles Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States: A History* (Washington: Georgetown, 2008), 98.

¹⁰ See, for example, Tracey Rowland, "Pope John Paul II: Authentic Interpreter of Vatican II," in *John Paul the Great: Maker of the Post Conciliar Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 27-48.

¹¹ On the historical genesis of this debate see and its immediate aftermath see, William H. Shannon, *The Lively Debate: Response to Humanae Vitae* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970); and John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. 409-500. On the impact of this debate on the Church in the face of the sexual revolution see John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 10-21.

neously to other questions of sexual ethics and to questions of fundamental moral theology.¹²

Moral theology in the United States emerged from the preconconciliar stasis of a field still largely dominated by Neo-Thomism and the manuals of moral theology to the center of the post-*Humanae vitae* storm.¹³ This shift into the limelight of public controversy paralleled the movement of Catholics in the United States from a somewhat enclosed subculture to positions of prominence in American culture and political life.¹⁴ Organized public protests to its teaching,¹⁵ an aggressive rethinking of received positions in the area of sexuality,¹⁶ and the emergence of new revisionist approaches to the discipline characterized American Catholic moral theology after the encyclical.¹⁷ Countering these developments was the work of a small but

¹² The trajectory of this debate is catalogued in the volumes of the Paulist Press Readings in Moral Theology series edited by Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, S.J. which capture many of the chief points of contention both regarding methodology and in regard to specific areas of teaching.

¹³ For a concise overview of the history of Catholic moral theology in the United States see John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1990), 184-202. Charles Curran also notes the impact of papal condemnations of Americanism and Modernism in the late 19th century on American Catholic moral theology. See *Catholic Moral Theology*, pp. 35-38. For an insightful analysis of changes wrought in the U.S. Church by the Second Vatican Council and their impact on the field of moral theology see David Cloutier and William C. Mattison III "Introduction" in *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2005), 1-23.

¹⁴ On the relation of this transition to debates in moral theology see David McCarthy, "Shifting Settings from Subculture to Pluralism: Catholic moral theology in Evangelical Key," *Communio* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 86

¹⁵ The most notable example was the "Washington Statement" released the day after the encyclical was promulgated. For the text see "Statement by Catholic Theologians Washington D.C., July 30, 1968" in *Readings in Moral Theology*, no. 8: *Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching*, eds. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1993), 135-37.

¹⁶ A rather notorious example is provided by the study commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society in America published in 1977. See Anthony Kosnick et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (New York: Paulist, 1977). In their effort to broaden the traditional criteria for evaluating sexual activity the authors could find little in the way of moral critique to direct toward any form of sexual activity with the possible exception of bestiality. This was the basis for James Burtchaell's tongue-in-cheek description of the work's "liberating norms... whereby the only discouraged form of sex is doing it with a Doberman." See *The Giving and Taking of Life: Essays Ethical* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 288.

¹⁷ Richard McCormick with his ground-breaking 1973 Pere Marquette Lecture and his years as the author of the "Notes on Moral Theology" section in the journal *Theological Studies* helped to articulate the approach to moral reasoning known as Proportionalism. See *Ambiguity in Moral Choice* (Milwaukee: Marquette University

influential group of philosopher theologians who used a revised natural law theory to defend received positions in the area of sexuality and ethical theory.¹⁸ This highly polarized climate was the place where John Paul II's teaching was heard and, in varying degrees, "received."¹⁹

Yet the effort to force John Paul II's teaching into the confines of the existing disagreements or into newer debates sparked by them in American Catholic moral theology has been in many ways unsuccessful. In part this was because neither the revisionist nor traditionalist "camps" could account for the anthropological depth or coherence of this teaching. Efforts by proponents or critics to invoke the late pope's thought often failed to do justice to the many facets of his presentation of the human person: Scripture, action theory, Christology, gift theory, and experience. His multifaceted presentation generates a kind of excess which overflows shallow categorizations or reductions of his thought to preexisting positions. It is precisely in this anthropological excess—which has the form of the human person addressed by Christ in the drama of salvation and offered fulfillment through the grace-enabled gift of self—that much of the continuing appeal of the late pope's thought to students and scholars lies. This study will argue that it is precisely this anthropological depth evidenced in differing areas of John Paul II's moral teaching that ac-

Press, 1973). Charles Curran's approach has been more eclectic, moving over the years from a self-described "relational responsibility" approach to moral judgment in his earlier works to an acceptance of the Wesleyan quadrilateral of authority which holds in tension Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. For the meaning and evolution of Curran's "relational responsibility" model of personalism see the overview provided by Timothy O'Connell, "The Moral Person: Moral Anthropology and the Virtues," in *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*, (Washington: Georgetown, 2002), 19-35, esp. 26-29. On the Wesleyan four sources as characteristic of contemporary Catholic moral theology see Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 48; *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States*, 208-209. For Curran's take on the impact of *Humanae vitae* on the development of revisionist thought and dissent see *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States*, 102-27.

¹⁸ In the United States the central figure in this group was Germain Grisez. His massive multi-volume work *The Way of the Lord Jesus* offered both a critique of revisionist thought and extended defenses of traditional positions. See especially the first volume of the work *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

¹⁹ For an overview of the ongoing clash between "revisionism" and the new natural law theory as formative for fundamental Catholic moral theology see Todd Salzman, *What Are They Saying about Catholic Ethical Method?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003). The book is a bit simplistic in that it tends to view all revisionist approaches through the lens of proportionalism and really does not treat other approaches which are sympathetic to traditional positions outside of the "basic human goods" approach of Grisez.

counts for both the propensity of critics and proponents alike to mischaracterize it and for its ongoing appeal to those less invested in reading it within the confines of other controversies.

This study will proceed by first acknowledging some of the methodological difficulties that attend any analysis of the late pope's work and its reception and also by considering some of the limitations of scope and subject matter particular to this essay. It will then examine two concrete examples in his moral teaching where John Paul II's thought has been mischaracterized to varying degrees in the effort to utilize it to address existing debates with the result that something of its anthropological depth has been missed. These two areas are the Theology of the Body catecheses and the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*. The essay will conclude by noting some of the further challenges and promise of this anthropological excess for the ongoing reception of the late pope's teaching.

APPLES AND ORANGES?

SOME LIMITATIONS OF METHOD AND SCOPE

To consider John Paul II in the context of other significant figures who have influenced the field of U.S. Catholic moral theology is to run headlong into dissimilarities and dissonance. One could even ask if his inclusion in such a group is justified given the qualitatively different nature of his influence. While others have shaped the field by virtue of the substance of their thought and the questions they have pursued, the late pope did so, at least in part, simply on the basis of his authority and office. And this is true in a number of distinct ways.

First, in a general sense, one can ask whether the late pontiff's work would have commanded all that much attention—at least outside of Polish-speaking circles—had he not been elevated to the Chair of Peter. Certainly, his philosophical work in *Love and Responsibility* captured the attention of Paul VI and won him a spot on the Papal Study Commission for the Study of Family, Population, and Birth Rate.²⁰ He played an important part in the drafting of *Gaudium et spes*, which impacted subsequent Catholic moral theology, but was by no means its sole architect.²¹ His visit to the United States as a

²⁰ Though as Weigel notes, he was prevented from attending the decisive June 1966 meeting of the Commission at which a majority of those present embraced the position which formed the basis of the "Majority Report" advocating change in the traditional teaching on contraception. See Weigel, *Witness*, 207.

²¹ On Wojtyła's impact on drafting the text and its reception by the Council see Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, trans. Paolo Guetti and Francesca Murphy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 193-99. Cf. Weigel, *Witness*, 166-69.

Cardinal in 1976 would probably have left little imprint in the US without his election to the papacy two years later. It was only with the surprise move of the 1978 conclave that the bulk of his work as a philosopher was rushed into translation in English and other languages and scholars turned their attention to this (in the West) relatively unknown Polish intellectual.²² So one might ask, have scholars paid attention to his thought because of its own intrinsic merit or because of its promulgation by the Church's universal pastor?

A second and related complicating feature of including John Paul II in such a list of influential figures is that, more than many of his predecessors, he used the authority of his office to directly impact and direct the field of moral theology in ways individual theologians could not. He wrote documents intended to both shape and critically evaluate the field in both its foundations and in regard to specific topics.²³ He also authored documents which reshaped received Catholic positions on moral issues.²⁴ He disciplined individual revisionist theologians.²⁵ And he sought to clarify the ecclesial relationship between individual theologians, the Universities where they taught, and the Church of which he was the spiritual head.²⁶ In other words, it is not just that others noticed his work because of the authority and position of its author, but he also used and traded on this very authority to impact the methodology used and positions taken within moral theology. In these ways the Chair of Peter which John Paul II

²² It is true that *Love and Responsibility* had been translated into French and Italian in the early 1960s which enabled it to be read by Paul VI. The English version did not appear until 1981 (trans. H. T. Willets [New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1981]). The English translation of his philosophical *magnum opus* *The Acting Person* (trans. Andrej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana* Series [Boston: D. Reidel Publishing 1979]) is notoriously poor for a variety of reasons. For an overview of these problems see Kenneth Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 58-60.

²³ This is obviously the case with *Veritatis splendor* which will be considered below.

²⁴ One significant example is *Evangelium vitae*'s prudential opposition to the use of the death penalty which led to the revision of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. On the anthropological basis of this teaching and its significance see Thomas R. Rourke, "The Death Penalty in Light of the Ontology of the Person: The Significance of *Evangelium vitae*," *Communio* 25 (1998): 397-413.

²⁵ On the case of Charles Curran see *Vatican Authority and American Catholic Dissent*, ed. William W. May (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

²⁶ These efforts would include the 1979 Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* on pontifical universities, the 1990 Apostolic Letter *Ex corde ecclesiae* on Catholic universities in general, the 1990 C.D.F. Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis*, and the 1998 Apostolic Letter Moto Proprio *Ad tuendam fidem* updating the 1983 Code of Canon Law regarding the Profession of Faith and juridical penalties for certain kinds of dissent.

occupied served him as a bully pulpit from which to attempt to mold and re-shape the field.

A third problematic feature of the inclusion of John Paul II in this consideration has to do with the genre and nature of papal teaching itself. While the work of individual theologians is just that, popes seldom write their own work in quite the same way. Many papal texts and addresses are written by other persons, vetted by still others, and finally approved by the pontiff. Even in the case of popes who write much of their own material as was the case with John Paul II, there is still a level of involvement on the part of others that exceeds the normal feedback sought by scholars before publishing their work. So it is in some respects comparing the work of an individual to that produced by a committee—a committee comprised of Vatican theologians and officials. It is not always clear where the work of the individual pope ends and that of others begins.²⁷

A fourth problem in analyzing the thought of John Paul II in particular stems from the prolific nature and wide-ranging scope of his teaching. Unlike other figures whose thought usually contains particular kinds of conceptual unity and lines of organic development, the very nature of the late pope's ministry to the universal Church required an equally universal scope in his teaching.²⁸ As a result, there is no question of offering anything like a thorough or systematic analysis of this teaching in a study of this length. What follows is necessarily partial but intentionally suggestive. The effort in this study is to locate diverse areas of the late pope's thought in terms of content and method which nevertheless highlight areas where this teaching has not been adequately understood because it often exceeds the categories in which it was received. It is precisely here—in the

²⁷ In some respects, the challenge for the commentator on papal texts is not unlike that facing the biblical scholar wrestling with issues of authorship—and at times it seems that sources consulted by exegetes are actually more forthcoming about these matters than are Vatican insiders.

²⁸ The problem becomes more complex in the case of popes such as John Paul II or Benedict XVI who had careers as private scholars prior to their elevation to the papacy. Commentators naturally tend to look for lines of continuity between the work of the individual thinker and universal teaching issues during his pontificate—in spite of the differences in genre and authorship. In the case of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II such a unifying theme or idea is supplied by his recurring focus on the person. Even at the beginning of his pontificate, commentators from around the globe pointed to the concept of person as the overarching focus of Wojtyła's philosophical project. See, for example, Abelardo Lobato, "La Persona en el Pensamiento de Karol Wojtyła," *Angelicum* 56 (1979), 207. Cf. John Hellman, "John Paul II and the Personalist Movement," *Cross Currents* 30 (1980-81): 409-19; Elzbieta Wolicka, "Participation in Community: Wojtyła's Social Anthropology" *Communio* 8 (1981): 108-18; and P. Gilbert, "Personne et Acte: À Propos d'un Ouvrage Récant," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 196 (1984): 731-37.

“excess” of ideas that elude efforts to categorize or pigeon-hole his thought—that some of the reasons for the late pontiff’s continuing appeal to scholars and students become apparent. While it may be the case that it was his office which initially drew many to consider his work, its authority alone does explain the fruitfulness of his ideas.

Regardless of how one views John Paul II’s relationship to the Council, it is apparent that he tried to respond to and exemplify in his own moral teaching many of the marks of renewal of which it spoke. Moral theology, the Council had taught, needed “livelier contact with the mystery of Christ” and to be “more thoroughly nourished by Scriptural teaching.”²⁹ Engagement of various kinds with Scripture (through meditation, exegesis, analysis, and even phenomenological reading) and preoccupation with the person and mystery of Christ permeate the late pope’s writings. This biblical and Christological focus converged in his understanding of the human person. The ideas of *Gaudium et spes* 22 and 24—that Christ reveals us to our selves and that human fulfillment is found in the sincere gift of self—form hermeneutical keys to the corpus of his thought. It is largely because of this Christological anthropology—the differences noted above in genre, authorship, and authority when compared to other influential figures notwithstanding—that John Paul II’s teaching continues to generate interest and to reward careful study.³⁰ As will be demonstrated below, the “excess” of John Paul II’s thought which so often eludes both proponents and critics has the form of the human person as a dynamic embodied subject invited by Christ to give him or herself in love.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY: MORE THAN SEX APPEAL

Certainly one area where interest in the late pope’s teaching has continued unabated after his death has been the catecheses given over the first years of his pontificate which have come to be known as the Theology of the Body (TOB). Popular presentations on this teaching have mushroomed and become a staple of many religious education programs and “theology on tap” style lectures. At the same time, both the catecheses themselves and their popularizations have garnered a growing amount of scholarly attention as scholars have

²⁹ Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum totius*, no 16. The citation is from Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, (Piscataway, NJ: New Century Publishers, 1966), 452.

³⁰ Even if John Paul II’s office was a significant part of the reason why others originally studied his thought, this teaching had a depth which encouraged further consideration.

sought to understand and critically evaluate their appeal.³¹ What sometimes goes unrecognized is the common ground that popular promoters and critics of the TOB find in reducing the subject matter of the catecheses largely to a discussion and defense of traditional Catholic teaching on sex.

The “brand name” of popularizations of the TOB in the United States belongs to Christopher West. He has become a kind of one man cottage industry of seminars, audio, video, and print products on the catecheses.³² In addition to these, West has produced numerous books on the subject.³³ In these works West sees the catecheses as offering a kind of “gospel of sex” to a contemporary culture sorely in need of such a message. He believes that the heart of this good news is John Paul II’s view of the centrality of marriage and sex within the Christian message. He claims: “Of all the ways that God chooses to reveal his life and love in the created world, John Paul II is saying

³¹ For a thoughtful examination of this popularity which locates the appeal of the catecheses in the cultural hunger for “authenticity,” see David Cloutier, “Heaven is a Place on Earth? Analyzing the Popularity of Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” in *Sexuality and the Catholic Church: Crisis and Renewal*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill, John Garvey, and T. Frank Kennedy, S.J., (New York: Herder and Herder, 2006), 18-31.

Fortunately, this deeper scholarly interest has also led to the production of a better and more critical English translation of the catecheses. The original English translations were produced by the staff of the English edition of the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano*. These were collected and published in four volumes in the United States by the Daughters of Saint Paul: *The Original Unity of Man and Woman* (1981), *Blessed Are the Pure of Heart* (1983), *The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy* (1986), and *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* (1984). In 1997 these volumes were gathered into a single work by the same publisher (*The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*) along with teaching that had served as its historical catalyst (*Humanae vitae*) or was its later fruit such as John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and vocation of women *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988) and the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (1995). But the catecheses in these texts still suffered from the inconsistent translation of having been produced by different members of a newspaper staff. In 2006 Michael Waldstein published a new critical translation of the text which not only consistently translated the official Italian text but also checked it against the original Polish and included new and previously unpublished material. See *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006).

³² For some sense of West’s array of presentations and products see his website, <http://www.christopherwest.com/>.

³³ These include: *Good News about Sex and Marriage* (Cincinnati: Servant, 2000); *The Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II’s ‘Gospel of the Body’*, (Boston: Pauline, 2003); *The Theology of the Body for Beginners* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2004); *The Love that Satisfies* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2007); *The Theology of the Body Explained: Revised Edition: A Commentary on John Paul II’s Man and Woman He Created Them* (Boston: Pauline, 2007); *Heaven’s Song: Sexual Love As It was Meant to Be* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2008).

marriage—enacted and consummated by sexual union—is most fundamental.”³⁴ Indeed, marriage and sex disclose the very structure of Christian revelation, they are the grammar through which God’s plan is made known to us.³⁵ Within this gospel of the body, the sexual drive, for West, takes on roles traditionally ascribed to grace: “God gave us sexual desire to be the power to love as He loves, so that we can participate in divine life and fulfill the very meaning and being of our existence.”³⁶

Reviews of West’s account of the TOB have been mixed—and for good reason. It is undoubtedly true that he has been successful in increasing the level of interest in the late pope’s catecheses and creating a more positive view of the Church’s teaching on sexuality among many Catholics both young and old. Much of his message has positioned John Paul II’s teaching as a positive and appealing presentation of the goodness and beauty of sex in a culture which has shown itself prone to fascination with the topic.³⁷ In particular, this work has helped many parish and diocesan religious education programs regain a voice in relating the faith to questions of sexuality after these programs had been debilitated first by internal Church disagreement in the polemics which followed *Humanae vitae* and then by the wave of sexual abuse scandals which subsequently rocked the Church.³⁸ However, scholars who have examined West’s account of the TOB have raised significant questions about it. They argue that it gives marriage and sex an undue preeminence in the Christian life;³⁹ that it romanticizes marital sex, making it bear a weight of meaning and experiential fulfillment that it cannot carry;⁴⁰ and that in varying

³⁴ West, *Good News*, 21.

³⁵ This is an idea that runs throughout his works—a kind of nuptial hermeneutic. West writes: “We cannot understand the inner ‘logic’ of the Christian mystery without understanding its primordial revelation in the nuptial meaning of our bodies and that biblical vocation to become ‘one flesh.’” *Theology of the Body Explained* (2003), 14. Cf. *Good News*, 19; *The Love that Satisfies*, 13; and *Heaven’s Song*, 28.

³⁶ West, *Good News*, p. 21. In a later work which builds on Benedict XVI’s teaching on love in his first encyclical, West compares *eros* to “the fuel of a rocket meant to launch us into the stars and beyond.” See *The Love that Satisfies*, 34.

³⁷ Cloutier points out that West’s own relationship to the culture is a complex one. He sees the culture as misguided in its sexual fixation but at the same time blindly groping toward a deeper reality. See, “Heaven is a Place,” 24–25.

³⁸ See Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 20.

³⁹ See William Mattison, III, “‘When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given to marriage’: Marriage and Sexuality, Eschatology, and the Nuptial Meaning of the Body, in Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” in *Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church*, 41–43. On this point, Mattison is generally careful to distinguish between West and John Paul II.

⁴⁰ In some cases this charge appears to be leveled against both West and John Paul II. Thus Mattison refers to a “myopic fixation on the extraordinary” in this regard. See

ways it seems to fail to come to grips with the reality of sin in present human existence.⁴¹ There is disagreement as to what degree these problems are unique to West or whether they have their roots in John Paul II and are simply amplified or exacerbated by him.⁴²

A full evaluation of West's works or their treatment by critics is beyond the scope of this study. In particular, the charge that both he and the late pope grant sexual intercourse a romanticized preeminence in the marriage relationship deserves serious examination beyond that which can be given here. However, the argument that John Paul II and West share a common starting point and purpose in regard to contemporary culture in regard to their examinations of the body deserves to be challenged. To argue that both are simply trying to harness contemporary culture's sexual fascination in their presentations is to read John Paul II through the lenses of West's popular-

"When they rise from the dead," 43-46. Cloutier, complains about the TOB's "extraordinarily romanticized view of self-giving." "Heaven is a Place," 19. In other cases the primary target is John Paul II himself as representative of a particular kind of personalism. Thus David Matzko McCarthy criticizes the view of sex as total self-giving because he believes that it "says too much to be right... sex has no room to be ordinary." Individual sexual acts thus carry the weight of "representing a lifetime of friendship between husband and wife." See *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM, 2001), pp. 43 and 47. Lisa Sowle Cahill too finds the language of "total self-giving" used by the pope as dependent upon "a very romanticized view of sex, and even marital love." See *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 203.

⁴¹ The point is deftly argued against West by Cathleen Kaveny, "What Women Want: Buffy, the Pope, and the New Feminists," *Commonweal* 130, no. 19 (2003): 21-22. Her criticisms are echoed and elaborated by Mattison, "When they rise from the dead," 46-49.

⁴² Among the most careful not to conflate the two is Mattison, "When they rise from the dead." However, in a more recent piece coauthored with David Cloutier, he apparently throws in the towel on this effort. Noting recent critiques of West engendered by some of his statements, they write: "While we generally agree with such critiques, we cannot but help recognize the dominance and even major ecclesial support West's work, in person and in books, has achieved... Thus, our treatment of West and TOB here is not meant to claim that West necessarily 'gets John Paul II right,' but rather that West's reading of the Pope is (a) not an unreasonable interpretation of the Pope's work (including possible weaknesses) and (b) especially likely to be a common means of 'receiving' TOB in the church, since few laypeople are likely to slug through 600 pages of talks." "Bodies Poured Out in Christ: Marriage Beyond the Theology of the Body," *Leaving and Coming Home: New Wineskins for Catholic Sexual Ethics*, David Cloutier, ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 207. This appears to cede to West the role of the official interpreter of the TOB at least for the Church in the U.S. David Matzko McCarthy's essay in the same volume ("Cohabitation and Marriage," 119-41) also focuses primarily on the work of West (and Michael Lawler) rather than John Paul II.

ized portrayal.⁴³ This conflation of West and the late pontiff has a number of significant problems. First, it assumes that both share a common stance in regard to the sexually saturated culture of the western world, particularly the United States. This overlooks the fact that John Paul II had a far more nuanced and critical stance toward that culture than does West. It is true that there is an element of simple critique in West's engagement of popular culture.⁴⁴ However, it does not approach the nuanced analysis of the struggle between "the civilization of love" versus its antithetical "anti-civilization" in the *Letter to Families* or that between "the culture of life" versus the "culture of death" in *Evangelium vitae*. This dialectical opposition between clashing cultures is integral to the late pope's understanding of marriage, sexuality, and family and hence frames the TOB catecheses.⁴⁵ Second and related to the preceding point, this conflation ignores the degree to which West's own reading of the pope is at times conditioned by the Freudian pan-sexualism of his own American culture.⁴⁶ Third and more basically, the claim of a common starting point between West and John Paul II tends to reduce the whole point and content of the catecheses to being "all about sex."

It is here, in this very reduction, that one finds common ground between West's popularizations and some of the TOB's sharpest revisionist critics. Others too have tended to equate key concepts from the TOB with shills for traditional positions on sex. "The nuptial meaning of the body," for Margaret Farley, is simply new language for excluding divorced and remarried Catholics from a sexual relationship in a second marriage.⁴⁷ Similarly, Lisa Sowle Cahill contends that the inter-subjectivity of sex captured in the notion of "language of the body" is ultimately stripped of its real meaning and implications by a prior commitment to the norm of *Humanae vitae*.⁴⁸ In-

⁴³ Mattison suggests that both are engaged in a common project of attempting to "despoil the Egyptians" in this regard. See "When they rise from the dead," 50-51.

⁴⁴ Cloutier, "Heaven is a Place," 24-25.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Martin Tripole, S.J., "John Paul II the Countercultural Pope," in *Creed and Culture: Jesuit Studies of Pope John Paul II* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2004), 35-55; and in the same volume John C. Haughey, S.J., "A Critical Reading of Pope John Paul II's Understanding of Culture," 75-92.

⁴⁶ This manifests itself in the propensity toward sexual reductionism in West's portrayal of the Christian message and particularly in his frequent identification of the power of *eros* and that of grace noted above. On the genesis of this Freudian pansexualism in American attitudes toward sex see the fascinating historical treatment provided by Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (New York: Oxford, 1986).

⁴⁷ See her work *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 309.

⁴⁸ See *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 202. Cahill contrasts the late pope's conclusions with the challenge to traditional norms posed by the work of André Guindon,

deed, for Luke Timothy Johnson the whole point of the TOB, in spite of the effort to use biblical texts and the language and phenomenological analysis of experience, is to offer a vain *apologia* for Pope Paul VI's failed 1968 encyclical:

John Paul II's conferences finally come down to a concentration on 'the transmission of life.' By the time he reaches his explicit discussion of *Humanae vitae*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that every earlier textual choice and phenomenological reflection has been geared to a defense of Paul VI's encyclical. However, there is virtually nothing in this defense that is strengthened by the conferences preceding it.⁴⁹

Michael Lawler and Todd Salzmänn similarly read the TOB as a defense of natural (i.e., procreative) complementarity with a view to the exclusion of contraception, reproductive technologies, and sex between partners of the same sex.⁵⁰ As such, the TOB is limited in that it is merely "a heterosexual theology of the body for reproduction" which does not take into account the experience of persons who do not fit this pattern.⁵¹ What is needed are multiple theologies of the body which can account for the situation of others—"single people, widows and widowers, celibates, and homosexuals."⁵²

Both West in his popularizing exposition of the TOB and scholars who are critical of it seem to agree on a number of things. First, they concur that the catecheses—both in their key concepts and their overall sweep—have sex as their primary point. Second, they also agree that in spite of their novel language and tone, that the catecheses of the TOB are largely a defense of traditional sexual norms. For West, this is a good thing. The catecheses represent the Church's per-

The Sexual Language: An Essay in Moral Theology (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1976).

⁴⁹ See "A Disembodied 'Theology of the Body': John Paul II on Love, Sex, and Pleasure," *Commonweal* 128, no. 2 (January 26, 2001): 11-17. The citation is from p. 14. In addition to this unsuccessful attempt to defend *Humanae vitae* Johnson believes that the TOB suffers from an uneven handling of Scripture, a focus on male agency, inattention to the actual experience of married people, particularly women, and a failure to treat sexual pleasure or pain.

⁵⁰ See *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 84-91. Against this view they argue that these traditionally prohibited forms of sexual expression can be justified in some cases. In the case of homosexual expression this requires "sexual orientation complementarity" between the two partners.

⁵¹ Salzman and Lawler, *The Sexual Person*, 91. Cf. Ronald Modras, "Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, 149-56.

⁵² Salzman and Lawler, *The Sexual Person*, 86. Cf. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2005), 168.

ennial wisdom offered in a positive and compelling form for contemporary culture. For revisionist critics this reveals their problematic and potentially deceptive nature. It is “the old wine of biologism, physicalism, and classicism of the manuals of moral theology in the new wineskin of Thomistic personalism and a theology of the body.”⁵³ What can be made of this rather surprising common ground on the part of those who are otherwise so at odds in their assessment of the TOB and its value?

It must be conceded that this unexpected agreement has support from some obvious features of the catecheses. Clearly issues of sexuality were a major concern of Karol Wojtyła’s in writing the reflections that he later gave as general audiences during the first years of his reign as Pope John Paul II. His philosophical work and pastoral work had convinced him of the need for a new exposition of the bases of Catholic teaching in sexuality.⁵⁴ This conviction was reinforced by his experience on the “Birth Control Commission” of Paul VI, the firestorm of disagreement which followed the encyclical, and the impact of the Sexual Revolution that he could see in his contact with the western world and to some degree in his own communist Poland.⁵⁵ The fact that the TOB closes with a series of audiences that reflect on the moral norm proposed by *Humanae vitae* adds credibility to the charge that this issue was the catalyst and *telos* of the TOB from its inception.⁵⁶

But a closer examination suggests that there is more to this issue than meets the eye. Certainly sex and ethical norms concerning it are concerns of the TOB—but they are not the only such concerns. Both in its particular components and as a whole, the TOB’s focus is the whole person of which sex is but one integral component.

In regard to particular features of the catecheses, it is worth noting that its key concepts mentioned above are by no means univocal in describing features of sexual activity or expression. Scholars have argued, for example, that the “spousal meaning of the body” has to

⁵³ Salzman and Lawler, 91.

⁵⁴ For a good overview of this philosophical effort as reflected in *Love and Responsibility*, see Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 83-116.

⁵⁵ On Wojtyła’s pastoral work with married couples and families in Poland see Weigel, *Witness*, 194-97.

⁵⁶ Though it should be noted that Waldstein’s consultation of the official Italian text and the original Polish manuscript make clear the *L’Osservatore Romano* translation used headings for individual catecheses and groups or cycles of them that did not reflect those in Wojtyła’s original text. Hence the material originally published in English under the title of *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* was actually the third part of a treatment of the sacrament of marriage dealing with conjugal ethics and spirituality (“He Gave them the Law of Life as Their Inheritance”). This suggests a different “goal” for the TOB than does Johnson’s reading.

do with far more than its capacity for sexual self-gift.⁵⁷ It has to do rather with the human capacity for self-donation and communion regardless of one's state in life—whether single, married, or celibate.⁵⁸ In this regard it can be understood as an integral component of the human capacity for friendship and love central to the moral teaching of Saint Thomas.⁵⁹ Likewise “the language of the body” has to do with the whole range of the body's capacity to communicate its sacramentality and gift character in non-verbal ways, particularly in the state of original innocence.⁶⁰ One can also use it to understand the body's inherent communicability in and through the experience of suffering.⁶¹ Sexual union which communicates a promise of fidelity and unconditional self-gift is simply a unique and privileged instance of this communicability.

Furthermore, the treatment of sex in the TOB is not merely focused on questions of sexual activity, it is also very much concerned with issues of sexual difference—the status of “masculinity and femininity.”⁶² Even some critics of the TOB pick up on this concern,

⁵⁷ Earlier English translations of the TOB usually rendered the Italian *significatio sponsale del corpo* as the “nuptial meaning of the body” though Waldstein points to 7 other variations in the *L'Osservatore romano* translation. Waldstein consistently translates the phrase as “the spousal meaning of the body” which he regards as a superior rendering of the Italian. See his “Introduction” in *Male and Female*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Waldstein notes that the term is the key concept in the catecheses, being used some 117 times, and that it has a wide range of meaning including the gift character of human existence, the call to communion, and the virginal gift of self in the eschatological state. See *Male and female*, 682-83. For a good synthetic overview of the concept and its range of meaning especially in the early cycle of the catechesis see Earl Muller, S.J., “The Nuptial Meaning of the Body” in *John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial*. Festschrift for Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., ed. John McDermott, S.J. and John Gavin, S.J. (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2008), 87-120 and in the same volume the equally substantive response by John McDermott, S.J., “Response to ‘The Nuptial Meaning of the Body,’” 121-53.

⁵⁹ For a good study of the anticipation of this concept of Pope John Paul II see Thomas Petri, O.P., “Locating a Spousal Meaning of the Body in the *Summa theologiae*: A Comparison of a Central Idea Articulated in the Theology of the Body by Pope John Paul II with the Mature Work of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” S.T.D. Dissertation (The Catholic University of America, 2010).

⁶⁰ Cf. Mary Healy in *Men and Women are from Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2005), 24-28.

⁶¹ See the insightful treatment of the body's capacity to communicate in and through suffering by Peter Harman, “Towards a Theology of Suffering: The Contribution of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II,” S.T.D. dissertation (The Catholic University of America, 2009), 303-415.

⁶² It is for this reason that an overview of the TOB is included by Christopher C. Roberts in a recent study of the phenomenon of sexual difference in the Christian tradition (undertaken in part because of debates over same-sex marriage). See *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 171-83. His concern is primarily a defense

though they tend to read John Paul II as advocating a narrow understanding of sex complementarity in which men and women are incomplete without the other⁶³ and in which women are simultaneously romantically exalted but seen as subordinate to men.⁶⁴ While the late pope does use the language of “complementarity,” he does so as a way to describe the way in which the “originality” of men and women as persons correspond to one another.⁶⁵ If the body reveals the person, then the bodily differences of men and women reveal unique and original ways of existing as a person within their shared humanity.⁶⁶ The categories in which sexual difference is described here and in John Paul II’s more weighty Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* are Trinitarian—personal difference disclosed thorough mutual relation within an underlying unity of nature.⁶⁷

Both this broader reading of the spousal meaning of the body and the concern with sexual difference helps to bring into focus the basic anthropological thrust of the TOB. While John Paul II used the language of “a theology of the body” he also characterized these audiences on numerous occasions as an effort to elaborate “an adequate

of the Augustinian account of sexual difference as articulated by Karl Barth. Roberts sees John Paul II as an ally of Barth’s account for the most part but criticizes him for his neglect of Christology and turn to Mariology for his derivation of distinct roles and qualities of women.

⁶³ This is the reading of Farley, *Just Love*, 141–42. Prudence Allen, R.S.M. describes this as “fractional sex complementarity” and does not see it as an accurate reading of John Paul II’s thought. See her study “Integral Sex Complementarity and the Theology of Communion,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 523–44.

⁶⁴ See Susan Ross, “‘Then Honor God in Your Body’ (1 Cor. 6:20): Feminist and Sacramental Theology on the Body,” *Horizons* 16, no. 1 (1989): 7–27. Cf. Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 204–205. An examination of this charge of romanticization (and simultaneous denigration) of women in the TOB is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the fact of this controversy does support that the basic claim that the catecheses are focused on more than questions of sexual activity.

⁶⁵ John Paul II states that: “the knowledge of man passes through masculinity and femininity, which are, as it were, two ‘incarnations’ of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world—two reciprocally completing ways of ‘being a body’ and at the same time of being human—as two complementary dimensions of self-knowledge and self-determination and, at the same time, two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.” *Male and Female*, 10:1, p. 166 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁶ The late pope says of man and woman: “Their unity denotes above all the identity of human nature; duality, on the other hand, shows what, on the basis of this identity, constitutes the masculinity and femininity of created man.” *Male and Female*, 9:1, p. 161 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁷ On the original reciprocity of male and female as existing persons see *Male and Female* 15:3–5, pp. 187–90 and *Mulieris dignitatem*, no. 10. For an analysis of the Trinitarian basis of this difference this see John S. Grabowski, “Mutual Submission and Trinitarian Self-Giving,” *Angelicum* 74 (1997), 501–8.

anthropology.”⁶⁸ In some ways one sees in these audiences many of the concerns of his work as a professional philosopher carried forward—the self-awareness and self-determination of the acting person experienced through the bodily dimension of personal existence of which sexual difference is typically a key component.⁶⁹ It is for this reason that the pope’s analysis of “original solitude” at the heart of human life and existence is a key to the whole of the TOB.⁷⁰ Already in the command given by God not to eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden, the transcendence of the human person is evident in the freedom to eat or not eat.⁷¹ This theological notion of transcendence has its roots in Wojtyła’s early study of the thought of John of the Cross.⁷² From the Doctor of Fontiveros, Wojtyła imbibed the idea that faith is not merely something that one has—it must be consciously lived through praxis by which one grows and bears fruit.⁷³ Such praxis at the root of the transcendence of the human person is expressed vertically in his or her relationship with God and horizontally in the relationship between the sexes.

In the TOB this focus on the self transcendence of the person is joined to phenomenological analysis of action and experience and used as a method to mine dimensions of biblical texts often un-

⁶⁸ See *Male and Female* 13:2; 14:3; 15:1; 23:3; 25:2; 26:2. Waldstein notes that the Italian *adeguato* does not carry the connotation of “barely good enough” that “adequate” can denote in English. Instead it should be understood as indicating something “commensurate with its object” (cf. *ibid* 55:2, p. 678).

⁶⁹ Though at times John Paul II seems to be so focused on the bodily nature of human existence that he himself loses sight of sexual difference as essential to actual persons and thus makes overtly self-contradictory statements such as: “Although in its normal constitution, the human body carries within itself the signs of sex and is by its nature male or female, *the fact that man is a ‘body’ belongs more deeply to the structure of the personal subject than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female.*” See *Man and Woman*, 8:1; p. 157 (emphasis in original)

⁷⁰ Commentators have pointed out the centrality of original solitude in the pope’s anthropology: “Original solitude is an essential experience of the human being, both male and female; it remains at the root of every other human experience and so accompanies man throughout his whole life’s journey.” Carl Anderson and Jose Granados, *Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II’s Theology of the Body* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 27. For a more extensive consideration see Mary Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage in Light of John Paul II’s Anthropology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), esp. 95–101.

⁷¹ Cf. *Male and Female*, 5:4, 7:3–4.

⁷² On Wojtyła’s “Carmelite Personalism” see Waldstein, “Introduction,” *Male and Female*, 23–34.

⁷³ On this see Alvaro Huerga, “Karol Wojtyła, comentador de San Juan de la Cruz,” *Angelicum* 56 (1979): 348–66. According to Huegera, John of the Cross took this distinction between “having faith” and “living faith” from his reading of a book by Luis de Granada.

touched by more standard exegesis—the solitude of the self-aware subject addressed by God, the longing for communion, the discovery of oneself in the encounter with an irreducible other, the freedom found in the gift of self in love.⁷⁴ This highly textured biblical analysis is then stretched across a theological tableaux—the triptych of human existence as created, fallen, and imbued with the grace of redemption.⁷⁵ The template of the drama of redemption adds to the existential urgency of the analysis. The catecheses reverberate with the existential weight of human freedom confronted with the call of God, the struggle of the human heart torn between the poles of love and inordinate desire, and the longing for the freedom of love given and received. The reader is invited to “identify in” and find his or her own experience illuminated by the biblical texts considered. The experience that they capture well is that of the Christian who seeks to turn his or her faith into the daily praxis of “life in the Spirit” lived within the limits of fallen, historical existence.⁷⁶ The TOB thus offers an experientially focused method of reading Scripture which envisions the human person as an icon illuminated by the mysteries of creation, the fall, redemption, and the eschaton.

That this iconic anthropology has application to issues beyond sexual activity and morality was noticed both by John Paul II himself and by scholars interested in his thought. In the concluding audience of the TOB he noted: “One must immediately observe, in fact, that the term ‘theology of the body’ goes far beyond the content of the

⁷⁴ While Johnson is critical of the pope’s disengaged and overly academic analysis, he admits that John Paul II is generally careful in his handling of biblical texts. See “A Disembodied Theology,” 13. For more thorough and generally positive assessment of the use of Scripture in TOB see Michel Ségin, “The biblical foundations of the thought of John Paul II on human sexuality,” *Communio*, 20 (1993): 266-89; and William Kurz, S.J., “The Scriptural Foundations of *Theology of the Body*,” in *John Paul II on the Body*, 27-46. Kurz points to the pope’s awareness of historical critical exegesis as well as patristic and medieval readings, but highlights his pastoral engagement with Scripture as God’s inspired word for Christians looking for its guidance. In his response to Kurz, Christopher Cullen, S.J. concurs in regard to the late pope’s sophistication as a biblical interpreter but argues that his method of “exemplary actualization” of some biblical texts (such as Ephesians 5) exceed what they actually say on current questions. See “A Response to William Kurz, S.J.” in *John Paul II on the Body*, pp. 47-64.

⁷⁵ Mary Healy suggest that this triptych can perhaps be understood as a “quadriptych” which splits redeemed existence between the experience of grace in the confines of present fallen history (“redeemed humanity”) and the eschatological completion of this (“glorified humanity”). See *Men and Women*, 9-12, 43-65. This fourfold division has the advantage of making clear that the full restoration of the paradise of humanity’s original state is eschatological—a point sometimes lost in the rhetoric of West’s popular portrayal.

⁷⁶ This is part of what I take Cullen to mean by John Paul II’s approach the Scriptures as embodying “exemplary actualization.”

reflections presented here. These reflections do not include many problems belonging, with regard to their object, to the theology of the body (e.g., the problem of suffering and death, so important in the biblical message).⁷⁷ Though he himself did not develop this anthropology in that direction, scholars have found aspects of the TOB to be relevant to his teaching in his 1984 Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* in articulating “a theology of the suffering body.”⁷⁸ Others have found these reflections to be relevant to articulating an account of the bodily presence and moral agency of the unborn, the comatose, the mentally handicapped, and other vulnerable persons.⁷⁹ Still others have explored the fruitfulness of the TOB for a range of issues—not just sex or suffering but vocation, revelation, technology, work, prayer, and eschatology.⁸⁰

This diverse range of issues and applications to which the TOB lends itself as well as its theological depth in treating the human person in the panorama of salvation history, belies its reduction to a catchy new way to present old Catholic views of sex. This simplistic reading is shared by both enthusiastic popularizers like West and revisionist critics of the catecheses. The TOB certainly does treat sex and in so doing attempts to defend traditional norms, but it does so in the context of developing a larger vision of the person called to make a gift of him or herself through the body—a gift lived in differing ways in the single, married, and celibate states.⁸¹ This gift character of the human vocation integral to creation is debilitated by sin but progressively recovered through the healing work of grace made possible by union with Christ. As such, it is better read as a presentation of the gospel in which sex plays a part, than “a gospel of sex.”

⁷⁷ *Male and Female* 133:1, 660.

⁷⁸ In addition to the study of Harman, “Towards a Theology of Suffering” noted above, see José Granados, “Toward a Theology of the Suffering Body,” *Communio* 33 (2006): 540–563.

⁷⁹ See the fine analysis provided by Jeffrey Tranzillo, “The Silent Language of a Profound Sharing of Affection: The Agency of the Vulnerable in Selected Writings of Pope John Paul II,” Ph.D. dissertation (The Catholic University of America, 2003).

⁸⁰ These issues among others are treated by Mary Timothy Prokes, F.S.E., *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). While not written as a commentary on John Paul II’s catecheses, Prokes’ work is clearly influenced and inspired by them.

⁸¹ *Humanae vitae* itself speaks of the need to develop a total vision of the person and his or her vocation (cf. no. 7). In this sense one can see the catecheses as a response to the encyclical and the controversy it generated.

VERITATIS SPLENDOR:**THE DRAMA OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST**

If reception of the TOB was skewed by its being commandeered by differing sides of the debate over the teaching of *Humanae vitae* and other traditional sexual norms as well as by the dearth of effective catechesis in its aftermath, then the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* was widely seen as the late pope taking sides in the methodological controversies which that very same debate had spawned. In this case it was John Paul II weighing in on and authoritatively taking sides in debates over absolute moral norms, conscience, fundamental option theory, proportionalism, and action theory. This reading was shared by revisionists who believed themselves targeted by the teaching and their traditionalist opponents who saw it as vindication for their own positions. The problem with this reading is that it fixates on the second chapter of the document and largely dismisses its first and third chapters to the status of mere window-dressing or parenthesis. A casualty of this narrow reading is the meditation on the encounter with Jesus and the rich young man of Matthew 19. In the first chapter of *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II makes the biblical motif of the call to discipleship the foundation of the rest of the document.

Revisionist treatments of the document, while applauding John Paul II's stand against the relativism and individualism of the wider culture, found both its center of gravity and its Achilles heel in its treatment of technical questions of moral theology. Thus Richard McCormick, S.J. focused on the analysis of the moral object as the key to the document. But the fact that the encyclical makes "repeated appeals to actions wrong *ex objecto* does not aid analysis, rather it hides it."⁸² Charles Curran objected to what he saw as the overwhelming focus on law within the document, especially laws which take the form of exceptionless moral norms.⁸³ As was the case for McCormick, the key issue is how the act is described. John Paul II's moral absolutes are merely formal norms: "all would agree that murder is wrong because murder is by definition unjustified killing."⁸⁴

A second common charge leveled against *Veritatis splendor* by revisionists was that it mischaracterized their positions. Curran makes this claim in regard to its presentations of autonomous ethics, its mention of accusations of physicalism in official Church teaching, its discussion of the relationship of conscience and truth, the evaluation

⁸² See "Some Early Reactions to *Veritatis Splendor*," in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, 5-34; the citation is from p. 28.

⁸³ See "*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, eds. Michael Allsopp and John O'Keefe (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 224-43.

⁸⁴ Curran, "*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective," 232.

of the theology of the fundamental option, and its action theory.⁸⁵ McCormick gives a wide survey of literature critical of the document which echoes the contention that the document mischaracterizes proportionalism in the positions which it opposes.⁸⁶ Others press the claim further. The document, they argue, without naming any specific authors describes positions which no one would accept and then rejects these positions—a classic case of erecting and toppling straw men.⁸⁷ In the words of James Gaffney, “proportionalism,’ as presented here by the pope, is quite simply a bugaboo.”⁸⁸

Still other revisionist critics of the encyclical see John Paul II’s primary point as the assertion of Church authority to quash dissent to traditional positions. In other words the real issue is ecclesiological—the nature of the Church and the function of authority within it. For McCormick, this ecclesiology is clearly restorationist, envisioning a view of the Church “as a pyramid where truth and authority flow uniquely from the pinnacle” as opposed to Vatican II’s “concentric model wherein the reflections of all must flow from the periphery to the center if the wisdom resident in the Church is to be reflected persuasively and prophetically to the world.”⁸⁹ Curran faults the document for its assumption that the “hierarchical magisterium just has the truth” rather than attending to the role of reason and human experience in arriving at truth.⁹⁰ Compounding this imbalanced ecclesiology are problems of the lack of consultation in its composition and questions about the authorship of its key second chapter.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Curran, “*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective,” 233-37.

⁸⁶ McCormick, “Some Early Reactions,” 12-25. McCormick’s analysis also includes some studies favorable to the document though his own sympathy for revisionist positions is evident throughout. For his analysis of the encyclical as “the final solution” to the “problem of proportionalism” see his “Killing the Patient” in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, ed. John Wilkins (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994), 14-20. For a somewhat less partisan overview of reactions to *Veritatis splendor* see James Keenan, S.J., *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum, 2010), 128-34.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Joseph Selling, “The Context and Arguments of *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *The Splendor of Accuracy: An Examination of the Assertions Made By Veritatis Splendor*, ed. Joseph Selling and Jan Jans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 22-70.

⁸⁸ See “The Pope on Proportionalism,” in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, 60-71; the citation is from p. 70. A similar argument is made by Louis Janssens in “Teleology and Proportionality: Thoughts about the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *Splendor of Accuracy*, 99-113.

⁸⁹ McCormick, “Some Early Reactions,” 29. Cf. Gabriel Daly, O.S.A., “Ecclesial Implications,” *Doctrine and Life* 43 (1993): 532-37.

⁹⁰ See “*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective,” 239.

⁹¹ McCormick complains that revisionist theologians were not consulted in the process of drafting the document and echoes the speculation of others (such as Ronald Modras and Joseph Selling) that the primary author of the document’s second chapter was not the late pope. He mentions Andrez Szostek (whose dissertation at the

These analyses of the primary point of the document map rather neatly onto the contentious debates over method in moral theology which emerged in the storm which followed *Humanae vitae*. This historical connection is cemented by the suggestion that John Paul II's real point in the document was in fact the debate over moral norms regarding sex in general and contraception in particular. Some scholars make this connection historically (i.e., that *Humanae vitae* was a catalyst for the growth of dissent at which *Veritatis splendor* was aimed).⁹² Others see it as a recurring "obsession" of Pope John Paul II which manifests itself in this document,⁹³ still others simply saw it as a subtext for the document as a whole.⁹⁴

Interestingly, some of the chief opponents of revisionist thought share a very similar reading of the primary concerns of the document. Thus Germain Grisez locates the heart of the document in its depiction of the idea of moral absolutes as a truth taught by revelation. This for Grisez is a stake aimed at the heart of dissenting positions that cannot be evaded. Attempts to reduce such moral norms to the status of generalities regarding love, guidelines for judgments of conscience, discreet acts incapable of reversing a fundamental option, or the idea that such norms indicate only "pre-moral" or "ontic" evil are weighed against revelation (in the form of particular biblical texts) and found wanting.⁹⁵ In the end such dissenting theologians have three choices: "to admit that they have been mistaken, to admit that they do not believe God's word, or to claim that the Pope is grossly misinterpreting the Bible."⁹⁶ While Grisez anchors his argument in appeals to specific biblical texts, the heart of the matter for him still centers on moral absolutes and Church teaching authority.

University of Lublin included then Cardinal Wojtyla on his board) and John Finnis as possibilities. See "Some Early Reactions," 9-10, 29.

⁹² See, for example, David Hollenbach, S.J., "Tradition, Historicity, and Truth in Theological Ethics," in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and James Childress (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1996), 62.

⁹³ This is the term used by Ronald Burke, "*Veritatis Splendor*: Papal Authority and the Sovereignty of Reason," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, 119-36; see esp. pp. 127-28.

⁹⁴ Thus the angry lament of Bernard Häring, "A Distrust that Wounds," in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, John Wilkins, ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994), 9-13. A more balanced analysis is provided by James Hannigan. Hannigan denies that sex is either the primary point or dominant subtext of the document, but notes that it does raise important questions for sexual ethics in its idea of moral perfection, engagement with revelation, treatment of intrinsically evil acts, and engagement with culture. See "*Veritatis Splendor* and Sexual Ethics," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, 208-23.

⁹⁵ See "Revelation versus Dissent" in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, 1-8.

⁹⁶ Grisez, "Revelation versus Dissent," 7-8.

John Finnis claims to offer an alternative to the common but reductionist reading of the encyclical that it is really about sex. Instead, he argues, its real point is faith.⁹⁷ But much like Grisez, much of his argument is devoted to offering an indictment of proportionalist reasoning. The invocation of proportionate reason to create exceptions to moral absolutes allows the genie out of the bottle such that no reason for a moral action can ever be disqualified as disproportionate. The immediate result is that the basis of moral judgment is shifted to “whatever one *feels* appropriate, all things considered.”⁹⁸ The more long term result is the broader cultural impact. The introduction of exceptions in regard to the teaching on contraception has resulted in widespread acceptance of abortion by Catholics in countries like the United States.⁹⁹ But these problems are merely symptomatic of a deeper crisis of morality and belief in post-Christian culture which appear in the Church as “reconceptions” of revelation and faith. Such “reconceptions” need to be banished by solemn judgments of the magisterium which highlights their incompatibility with Christian faith as *Veritatis splendor* shows the incompatibility of the denial of moral absolutes with Catholic teaching.¹⁰⁰ Finnis does therefore regard the encyclical in a larger cultural and epistemological context, but those things on which he focuses in the document are familiar: absolute moral norms, the pitfalls of proportionalism, and the need for authoritative teaching by the Church.

Absent in these analyses of the key ideas of *Veritatis splendor* is attention to John Paul II's significant engagement with Scripture. This feature of the document did not go wholly unnoticed by scholars. However, even when discussed, the encyclical's use of Scripture was frequently attached to one of the contested methodological foci identified above. In the case of Grisez, individual biblical texts are culled from the encyclical to refute revisionist attempts to defuse or evade the notion of moral absolutes.¹⁰¹ For Curran the invocation of Scripture, including the mediation on Jesus' encounter with the Rich Young Man of Matthew 19, serves to reinforce the legal model of morality which dominates the encyclical.¹⁰² William Spohn largely

⁹⁷ See “Beyond the Encyclical,” in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, 69-76.

⁹⁸ Finnis, “Beyond the Encyclical,” 71; emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Finnis, “Beyond the Encyclical.” It would therefore seem that Finnis sees sex as an important subtext of the document after all.

¹⁰⁰ Finnis, “Beyond the Encyclical,” 75-76.

¹⁰¹ Critics of Grisez complained that the piecemeal invocation of texts used in a “bitter and simplistic attack” on other theologians implied a simplistic notion of revelation akin to fundamentalism. See Seán Fagan, “The Encyclical in Focus,” *The Tablet* 247 (20 November, 1993): 1519.

¹⁰² He writes that, “the pope's purpose has shaped and limited the use of Scripture. The moral life is understood primarily in terms of commandments (to the exclusion

concurr: "The encyclical promises a Christonomous ethics of discipleship but it cannot deliver because it reduces morality to a matter of rules and principles."¹⁰³ Gareth Moore sees the document's use of Scripture as largely unsuccessful—an attempt to support its condemnation of modern moral theories which the Scriptures do not address.¹⁰⁴

These readings fail to do justice to the actual engagement with Scripture in the document, particularly in its presentation of discipleship in the first chapter. Many commentators found positive things to say about this section in spite of their views of the rest of the document or its overall purpose. Thus McCormick gushed, "All Catholic moral theologians should and will welcome this beautiful Christ-centered presentation unfolded in Chapter One...."¹⁰⁵ Grisez called it "an inspiring articulation of the Gospel's teaching about following Jesus."¹⁰⁶ Summarizing the general good feeling generated by chapter one, Oliver O'Donovan remarked that: "Everyone has had a nice word to say about this first section." However, as he noted: "Not everyone has appreciated its innovative strength as a programme for moral theology... in these pages which shape the moral discourse of the Church as an evangelical proclamation."¹⁰⁷ The typical readings of the document by both critics and proponents surveyed above support the truth of O'Donovan's observation. The first chapter was nice or even beautiful, but it had little to do with the rest of the letter. A more careful reading of the text reveals that it does make very strong claims about the nature of moral theology which are relevant to the rest of the document. It does this through the articulation of a dramatic biblical anthropology into which the reader is invited as a participant.

of and underplaying of other elements such as the change of heart, virtues, vision, attitudes, moral imagination, goals, etc.), and the role of Jesus and consequently of the Church is reduced to teaching commandments." See "*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective," 225; cf. 230-32. Interestingly, Grisez too focuses on the specific moral norms identified in Jesus' exchange with the Rich Young Man, finding a certain amount of common ground with Curran in his reading of the text. See "Revelation versus Dissent," 2.

¹⁰³ See "Morality on the Way to Discipleship: The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, 83-105. The citation is from p. 102.

¹⁰⁴ See "Some remarks on the Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Splendor of Accuracy*, 71-97.

¹⁰⁵ See "*Veritatis Splendor* and Moral Theology," *America* 169, no. 13 (October 30, 1993): 9.

¹⁰⁶ "Revelation versus Dissent," 3.

¹⁰⁷ "A Summons to Reality," in *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, 41-45. The citation is from p. 42.

John Paul II identifies the unnamed rich young man of Matthew 19:16 as a type of “every person, who consciously or not, *approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions him about morality*.”¹⁰⁸ He is thus identified with Adam—an association that recalls not just his point of departure in the catecheses on the body, but Wojtyła’s work as a playwright in works such as *The Jeweler’s Shop* and *The Radiation of Fatherhood*. He is “John Q. Everyman” who wrestles with the moral good and questions concerning the meaning of life. Readers are thus encouraged to identify with the young man and to hear Jesus’ words addressed to them in this dramatic encounter.¹⁰⁹ This reading of Scripture is not just one addressed to spectators at a theatrical performance but participants in an existential drama. The young man’s questions to Christ are those which well up from the depths of the readers own hearts, pulled from their lips because of “the attractiveness of the person of Jesus.”¹¹⁰ His answers ring true because he is the answer to the existential dilemmas which bedevil the human heart, as the “Alpha and the Omega of human history” particularly in his Incarnation and in the mystery of the Cross.¹¹¹

In John Paul II’s narration of this dramatic encounter on the stage of the Gospel, the reference to the commandments serve not to buttress a law-dominated morality, but to highlight the call to discipleship as a gift of grace. The commandments themselves are reflective of God’s gracious initiative, but “not even the most rigorous observance of the commandments, succeeds in ‘fulfilling’ the Law.”¹¹² Instead, human beings still find themselves in slavery to sin which makes God’s law appear alien and as a burden.¹¹³ The young man, like fallen Adam, is unable to take the next step—the perfection to which he is called requires “maturity in self-giving” which itself is a gift of grace.¹¹⁴ Discipleship requires an interior transformation realized through participation in the sacraments which provide the “source and power” of the gift of self in love in union with Christ’s own Eucharistic self-gift.¹¹⁵ Following Jesus is therefore not exterior

¹⁰⁸ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Veritatis splendor*, no. 7. The citation is from the Daughters of Saint Paul edition, Vatican translation (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1993), p. 17; emphasis in original. All subsequent references to this document are from this edition.

¹⁰⁹ This chapter of Matthew’s Gospel serves “as a useful guide for listening once more in a lively and direct way to [Jesus’]... moral teaching.” *Veritatis splendor*, no. 6, p. 16. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁰ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 8, p. 18.

¹¹¹ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 8, p. 18.

¹¹² *Veritatis splendor*, no. 11, p. 21.

¹¹³ Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, nos. 17–18.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, no. 17.

¹¹⁵ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 21, p. 35.

imitation based on norms, but interior transformation in conformity with Christ lived in the Holy Spirit who is himself the “new law” of Christian life.¹¹⁶ This transformation contains the happiness which the young man seeks.¹¹⁷

This call to transformation in discipleship is not addressed to an elite few, but to all. The universal call to holiness reaffirmed at Vatican II is articulated through the dramatic call to the perfection of discipleship given to the young man: “*The invitation*, ‘go sell your possessions and give money to the poor,’ and the promise ‘you will have treasure in heaven,’ are meant for everyone, because they bring out the full meaning of the commandment of love of neighbor, just as the invitation which follows, ‘Come follow me,’ is the new, specific form of the commandment of love of God.”¹¹⁸ To make this identification is already a significant departure from the standard Catholic reading of the text which saw in this interlocutor of Jesus a pious layman who kept the commandments now called to the perfection of the evangelical counsels.¹¹⁹ The Young Man challenged with this general invitation shows once again the transcendence of the human person called to the gift of self in love—vertically in love of God and horizontally in love of neighbor. Sadly, the young man turns away from this call even offered as a gift, demonstrating human freedom in its negative form.

This dramatic anthropology gleaned from the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man as everyman is not limited to the first chapter of *Veritatis splendor*. It echoes through the rest of the document. The inviolability of the commandments safeguarded in the defense of absolute moral norms reinforces the need for grace to embrace the call of discipleship offered as a gift.¹²⁰ Moral norms thus

¹¹⁶ See *Veritatis splendor*, no. 24, echoing the teaching of Saint Thomas in the *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 106, a. 1. On this theme of transformation in the document (issued on the Feast of the Transfiguration) see J.A. DiNoia, O.P., “The Moral Life as Transfigured Life,” in *Veritatis splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1999), 1-10.

¹¹⁷ On the eudaimonism of the document see Livio Melina, “The Desire for Happiness and the Commandments in the First Chapter of *Veritatis splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, 143-60.

¹¹⁸ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 18, p. 31. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁹ This reading is at least as old as Athanasius’ famous *Life of Anthony*. In this my reading differs from that of John O’Keefe who sees asceticism at the root of the encyclical’s notion of perfection. See “No Place for Failure? Augustinian Reflections on *Veritatis splendor*,” in *Veritatis splendor: American Responses*, 16-37.

¹²⁰ “*The gift does not lessen but reinforces the moral demands of love.*” *Veritatis splendor*, no. 24, p. 37. Emphasis in original. In no. 83 a similar point is made about the gift of the Holy Spirit enabling us to interiorize the law and to live it in true freedom. On the social import of moral absolutes in the document see Romanus Cessario,

protect but do not exhaust the corresponding gift of oneself in love in response to this gracious call, a truth eloquently proclaimed by the sacrificial self-gift of the martyrs.¹²¹ This response is undertaken in less dramatic form by the choice of particular goods pursued in concrete moral choices. The choice of such goods which specify the moral object of particular acts is therefore necessarily a “first person” endeavor on the part of the disciple.¹²² The transcendence of the person to freely respond to God’s invitation requires this. The authority of the Church to defend genuine moral goods and the norms which protect them is necessary to make it a place where this dramatic encounter between Christ and the human person can occur.¹²³ Thus understood, morality is not primarily obedience to rules but about a transformative encounter with Christ who reveals us to ourselves.

The connections identified here between the dramatic biblical anthropology of chapter one and the rest of the document do not represent an exhaustive list. However, they do help to challenge a reading of the document which minimizes the import of chapter one as mere biblical parenesis, while focusing on the “real issues” contained in chapter two. O’Donovan is correct in underscoring the potentially revolutionary character of chapter one for the Church’s moral teaching. For John Paul II moral theology both proceeds from and is ordered to an encounter between the human person and Christ. The Church and its teaching and sacramental life is the place where this transformative encounter takes place. These notes sounded most forcefully in the document’s first chapter are reprised in different ways and in different style and subject matter in those which follow.¹²⁴

O.P., “Moral Absolutes in the Civilization of Love,” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, 195-208.

¹²¹ On the witness of the martyrs and moral norms see *Veritatis splendor*, nos. 90-93. For a thoughtful, critical evaluation of the document’s invocation of martyrdom and particularly the story of Susanna, see Katherine TePas, “‘If You Wish to Be Perfect...’: Images of Perfection in *Veritatis splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, 48-59.

¹²² “In order to grasp the object of an act which specifies the act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person.” *Veritatis splendor*, no. 78, p. 99. Emphasis in original. For an incisive study of the importance of this contention see Martin Rhonheimer, “Intrinsically Evil Acts and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, 161-93.

¹²³ “In order to make this ‘encounter’ with Christ possible, God willed his Church.” *Veritatis splendor*, no. 8, p. 17. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁴ In addition to theories about different authors accounting for the differences in style and sources within the various chapters, it is worth considering whether some of these differences are the result of John Paul II’s distinctive phenomenological style of analysis. The phenomenological method employed in the encyclical circles the

As in the case of the TOB catecheses, the effort to fit John Paul II's teaching in *Veritatis splendor* into the lines of post-*Humanae vitae* debate leads to a reduction and loss of its anthropological depth. Lost is precisely that which makes it engaging for the reader willing and able to put in the effort to engage the document. The appeal to experience in the context of the biblical drama of salvation enables the reader to "identify in" and find him or herself as the one addressed and invited by Christ to transformation through the gift-call of discipleship. Deeper engagement with Scripture and "livelier contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation" are keys to the renewal of moral theology called for by the second Vatican Council.¹²⁵ These marks are prominently displayed in the dramatic biblical anthropology of the opening chapter of *Veritatis splendor*. An examination of the implications of taking the encounter with Christ as the starting point and goal of moral theology offers a rich vein for reconceptualizing the methodology of the discipline in conjunction with the field's deeper engagement with Scripture and virtue ethics.¹²⁶

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that the "reception" of Pope John Paul II's teaching within Catholic moral theology in the United States to this point has been incomplete at best and in some ways inaccurate. A significant reason for this limited reception is that both proponents and critics of his teaching have sought to plug some of his ideas into the contours of already existing debates within the field or the wider culture. This has clearly been the case with the popular promotion of and critical reaction to the TOB catecheses as well as with the typical readings of *Veritatis splendor* by major revisionist and traditionalist scholars. In both of these cases there has been a corresponding reduction or loss of the anthropological depth within the discussion of these teachings. It is as if proponents and critics have plucked the fruit of individual insights or ideas which support their own positions while ignoring the tree which supports and unifies them. That

reality of the moral life itself allowing it to disclose itself through the media of Scripture, philosophical themes of fundamental moral theology, and social engagement.

¹²⁵ See Vatican Council II, Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum totius*, no. 16.

¹²⁶ Some critics of the encyclical did indeed perceive this potentially transformative impact of the document on the field but warned of its dangers. Lisa Sowle Cahill, for example, described its "confessional and even fideist mode which pulls the rug out from under the church's and moral theologians' credibility as advocates of the human and the common goods." See "*Veritatis Splendor*," *Commonweal* 120, no. 14 (22 October, 1993): 15-16. While disagreeing with the negative consequences of her assessment, Lorenzo Albacete notes that in some respects she grasped the implications of the document better than some of its proponents. See "The relevance of Christ or the *sequela Christi*," *Communio* 21 (Summer 1994): 255.

“tree” is the human person, a dynamic acting subject, addressed by Christ in the existential drama of salvation, and called to fulfillment through the grace-powered action expressive of the gift of self. The individual insights or ideas gleaned from the late pope’s thought are intelligible and fruitful because of the anthropology which nourishes them.

It is this anthropological foundation too which accounts for much of the continuing appeal of John Paul II’s teaching years after his death. The appeal to experience in both the TOB and *Veritatis splendor* encourages the reader to “identify in” and to discover him or herself in the biblical text examined. Scripture becomes the place to encounter Christ and to allow him to engage the reader in a dialogue which leads to self-discovery. The process is simultaneously intellectually stimulating and ethically and spiritually challenging. Wojtyła’s “Carmelite personalism” learned from John of the Cross pulls the reader to search for ways to go beyond merely “having faith” to the praxis of “living faith” and bearing fruit in the Christian life. His anthropology is thus both dynamic and holistic, engaging the reader as a whole person. It is also relevant to a consideration of much more than individual norms concerning sexual behavior.

The analysis of the particular examples afforded by the reception of the TOB and *Veritatis splendor* does not constitute an exhaustive list of areas where the anthropological depth and consistency of John Paul II’s moral teaching has been missed. Another example which could be considered is the widely echoed claim of methodological inconsistency between the late pope’s teaching in regard to sexuality and that within his social teaching.¹²⁷ According to a common narrative, Vatican II represented a shift in Catholic teaching from a “classicist worldview” composed of absolute norms deduced from unchanging biological structures to an inductive, dynamic, and historically conscious method of moral-reasoning in which norms are understood more flexibly and contextually. Revisionist thought has embraced this historically conscious worldview and applied it across the board. Pope John Paul II embraced a historically conscious approach in his social and political teaching, but has maintained a classicist approach in his sexual teaching and life ethics.¹²⁸ This claim has al-

¹²⁷ This has been a consistent theme in the work of Charles Curran. For his reading of this methodological shift in the history of 20th century Catholic moral theology, see *Catholic Moral Theology*, 103-107. “Historical consciousness” understood in this way is also a methodological point of departure for Salzman & Lawler in *The Sexual Person*.

¹²⁸ On this charge of inconsistency in John Paul II see Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*. Some more recent studies question whether John Paul II’s later social teaching shows something of a retreat from a “historically conscious” ap-

ready been indirectly challenged by studies which have shown a consistent view of the human person underlying John Paul II's teaching in these various areas, but more work needs to be done on this subject.¹²⁹ One can also more directly challenge the premise of the argument by questioning the coherence of appeals to "historical consciousness" which do not acknowledge their own historical conditioning or refuse to ground an appeal to experience within a particular tradition.¹³⁰

Another area of ongoing scholarly work which holds promise for fostering a deeper reception of the anthropological depth of John Paul II's teaching is a growing interest in the sources of this teaching. Certainly his elevation to the papacy created a flurry of interest in phenomenology on the part of scholars who had never studied the method or who dismissed it as a strange species of "continental philosophy." Much of this interest centered around the classification of Wojtyla's "Lublin Thomism" or "Thomistic personalism" and whether it was more phenomenological or Thomistic. More recent scholarship has begun to attend to existential understanding of faith the Wojtyla gleaned from his study of John of the Cross and to the deeper dimensions of his appropriation of the thought of Saint Thomas.¹³¹ Such work serves to uncover the ontological depth in the late pope's

proach to more of a natural law methodology. See Ethna Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights* (Washington: Georgetown, 2010), 42.

¹²⁹ For an outstanding study which demonstrates the continuity of Wojtyla/John Paul II's anthropology from his philosophical work in *The Acting Person* to the biblical anthropology of the TOB to his social encyclicals see Gerard Beigel, *Faith and Social Justice in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997). Thomas Williams, L.C. in a recent study similarly demonstrates the continuity in Wojtyla's personalist analysis of human dignity in the sexual ethics of *Love and Responsibility* and John Paul II's papal defense of human rights. See *Who is My Neighbor? Personalism and the Foundations of Human Rights* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2005), 105-216.

¹³⁰ Brian Johnstone, C.Ss.R. points out that the concepts such as "historical consciousness" developed by Vico and "historicity" developed by Hegel were imported into discussions of shifts in theological worldviews by Bernard Lonergan. But these appeals rest on an attribution of a kind of ontological subjectivity to the world which it does not possess. Furthermore, proponents of "historical consciousness" seldom apply the limitations imposed by this approach to their own theories. Johnstone makes these observations in an unpublished paper on Salzman and Lawler's *The Sexual Person* presented at a faculty colloquium at the Catholic University of America on November 8, 2010.

¹³¹ In addition to Waldstein's consideration of Wojtyla's "Carmelite personalism" and Petri's study of the Thomistic foundations of the spousal meaning of the of the body noted above, see the collection of essays in Michael Dauphanis and Matthew Levering, eds., *John Paul II and St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press, 2006). On the history of personalism in general and Wojtyla's Thomistic appropriation of it, see Williams, *Who is My Neighbor?*, 105-24.

account of the transcendence of the human person in moral choice and action in the face of more superficial appeals to human “experience.”

Ultimately, only time will indicate the full measure of Pope John Paul II’s impact on the field of Catholic moral theology in the United States and throughout the world. This study has indicated some of the reasons as to why the reception of that teaching to this point has been incomplete. There is an anthropological depth and coherence in John Paul II’s thought that resists its reduction to either a simple answer to or a problem indicated by a preexisting debate. And it is this underlying vision of the person which continues to draw students and scholars to consider his thought as a method for engaging Scripture and experience in fashioning a compelling account of the moral life. This holistic anthropological vision points the way to the heart of the renewal of moral theology for which the Council called. It may well be this that proves to be Pope John Paul II’s most lasting contribution to the field.¹³² **M**

¹³² I am indebted to Joseph Capizzi, Lawrence Welch, Rae Grabowski, William Mattison, and David Cloutier for helpful comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.