FOREWORD

This essay on *Veritatis Splendor* has two parts: the first part is an outline (a set of notes) of the encyclical. This outline is biased towards specifying the various errors that the encyclical tries to address; included are the responses of the encyclical to the same errors. These notes are not to be taken as a substitute for the actual reading of and reflection on the encyclical itself.

The basic issue that *Veritatis Splendor* addresses, as I see it, is the relationship between freedom and truth — and by implication, the relation between freedom and the law. The fundamental mistake/error committed by those who found reason to call into question traditional moral doctrine, according to the encyclical, is the detachment of freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth.

The second part of this essay is an attempt to provide some ground for a philosophical discussion of the encyclical. It would be profitable to have a philosophical discussion of every issue and response that the encyclical raises, but time and space will not allow that here. But since the encyclical refers to the theory of the Natural Law in most of its responses to the various issues raised against traditional moral doctrine, I thought that a discussion of the Natural Law would be in order. The discussion of Natural Law draws heavily from notes handed out and taken in Fr. Norris Clarke, S.J.’s course on St. Thomas in Fordham University.
PART I. NOTES ON VERITATIS SPLENDOR

1. PURPOSE OF THE ENCYCLICAL

Today it is "necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching," especially since there is the spread of "doubts and objections of a human and psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church's moral teachings."

This is "no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine . . ." (4)

Hence, the encyclical wishes "to treat more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very foundations of moral theology," limiting itself to "certain fundamental questions regarding the Church's moral teaching, taking the form of a necessary discernment about issues debated by ethicists and moral theologians" (5).

The *Fundamental Error* is in detaching human "freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth" (4).

*Human Freedom* is one issue that is most frequently debated today. The Vatican II Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, linked freedom with human dignity. But "this perception, authentic as it is, has been expressed in a number of more or less adequate ways, some of which however diverge from the truth about man as a creature and the image of God, and thus need to be corrected and purified in the light of faith" (31).

2. ON FREEDOM AND TRUTH

The *Error* here is the *Absolutization of Freedom*. Certain currents of thought (especially those that have lost the sense of the transcendent) "exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes absolute, which would then be the source of values."

The *Implication for Truth* is that "the inescapable claims of truth disappear, yielding their place to a criterion of sincerity,

1. Number references in the text follow the encyclical's paragraph numbers.
authenticity and 'being at peace with oneself', so much so that some have come to adopt a radically subjectivistic conception of moral judgment" (32).

The Implication for the Notion of Conscience is that individual conscience is given the status of supreme tribunal of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions about good and evil. Thus

Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly (32).

The Implication for Human Nature is that this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature (32).

A second Error is that the very existence of freedom is questioned (Determinism). Arguing from the great variety of customs, there is, if not the denial of universal human values, a relativistic account of morality (Relativism) (33).

Both these errors are one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth.

In this Response to Errors the question of morality cannot escape the issue of freedom. Freedom is central: there can be no morality without freedom.

But there is a need to qualify the kind of freedom needed in morality:

Genuine Freedom is defined as "an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man 'in the power of his own counsel' (cf. Sir 15:14), so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God."

Genuine freedom is therefore grounded first and foremost in the search for Truth — God Himself. "Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known" (34).

The Church has always promoted this idea of genuine freedom
by emphasizing the role of human reason in discovering and applying the moral law. But it stresses the fact that “reason draws its own truth and authority from the eternal law, which is none other than divine wisdom itself” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I-II, q. 93) (40).

Freedom that is rooted in the Truth (Divine Wisdom) finds its expression in the Natural Law, which says that

The moral law has its origin in God and always finds its source in him: at the same time, by virtue of natural reason, which derives from divine wisdom, it is a properly human law. . . . The natural law “is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided.”

When the Church admits to the autonomy of human reason, it therefore means that “man possesses in himself his own law, received from the Creator.” This should be distinguished from the flawed thinking that autonomous reason creates values and moral norms. In the latter, there is a denial of participation in Divine Wisdom (40).

“Only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to do the Truth.” (Address to those taking part in the International Congress of Moral Theology [10 April 1986]) (84).

3. ON FREEDOM AND LAW

The dichotomy of freedom and truth implies another, dichotomy that is no less objectionable — freedom is alleged to be in conflict with the law.

The Error in some contemporary currents of thought is to take freedom and law to be in conflict: i.e., they grant to individuals and groups the right to determine what is good or evil.

An implication here is that freedom would thus “create values” and would enjoy a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom. Freedom would thus lay claim to a moral autonomy which would actually amount to an absolute sovereignty (35).

Some have disregarded the dependence of human reason on
Divine Wisdom and have actually posited a complete sovereignty of reason in the domain of moral norms regarding the right ordering of life in this world (37).

The Response to these Errors is to clarify that while the human being possesses a far-reaching freedom, this freedom is not unlimited: "it must halt before the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil', for it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law."

God's law, contrary to some contemporary thought, does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom (35).

In assigning complete sovereignty to reason in the domain of moral norms, God could no longer be considered the Author of the law, "except in the sense that human reason exercises its autonomy in setting down laws by virtue of a primordial and total mandate given to man by God." This is against the Natural Law (36).

Another result of making reason sovereign as posited by certain moral theologians is a dichotomy between the ethical order and the order of salvation.

The ethical order would be human in origin and of value for this world alone; the order of salvation would include only certain intentions and interior attitudes regarding God and neighbour. This dichotomy ends up denying the existence of a "specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent" in Divine Revelation (37).

In this context, it is necessary to clarify the fundamental notions of human freedom and of the moral law, as well as their profound and intimate relationship (37).

The Church's position has always been that human reason is not without relation to something beyond itself (Divine Wisdom). Genuine moral autonomy, therefore, does not reject but rather accepts the moral law, God's command. Hence, obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a heteronomy, as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom (41). Law is an expression of divine wisdom: by submitting to it, freedom submits to the truth of creation (41).
Natural Law. To further clarify the intimate relationship between freedom (moral autonomy) and the law, there is a need for a more thorough working out of the Natural Law. This endeavor will suggest that there is no incompatibility between obedience to the law and the autonomy of human reason and freedom:

In his journey towards God, the One who "alone is good", man must freely do good and avoid evil. But in order to accomplish this he must be able to distinguish good from evil. And this takes place above all thanks to the light of natural reason, the reflection in man of the splendour of God’s countenance. . . ."The light of natural reason whereby we discern good from evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light" (Sum. Theol., I-II, q. 91, a. 2) (42).

Eternal Law “is the divine law itself, the supreme rule of life — eternal, objective and universal law — by which God out of his wisdom and love arranges, directs and governs the whole world and the paths of the human community. God has enabled man to share in this divine law, and hence man is able under the gentle guidance of God’s providence increasingly to recognize the unchanging Truth” (Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae 3) (43).

St. Thomas identifies this eternal law with the type of divine wisdom as moving all things to their due end.

Natural Law. “But God provides for man differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons. He cares for man not “from without,” through the laws of physical nature, but “from within,” through reason, which, by its natural knowledge of God’s eternal law, is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions” (Sum. Theol., I-II, q. 90, a. 4).

The natural law, therefore, is the human expression of God’s eternal law (43).

Given that the natural law participates in the eternal law, the former — a prescription of human reason — cannot have the force of law unless it were the voice and the interpreter of some higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be subject.
It follows, as Leo XIII said, that the "natural law is itself the eternal law, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them towards their right action and end; it is none other than the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the universe" (Encyclical Letter Libertas Praestantissimum [20 June 1888]) (44).

God's plan, therefore, poses no threat to man's genuine freedom; on the contrary, the acceptance of God's plan is the only way to affirm that freedom (45).

4. FREEDOM AND THE NATURAL LAW

The response to the errors absolving freedom from any dependence on the law involved a clarification of the Natural Law. But there are those who would also refuse to see or consider the verity of the Natural Law. This refusal is grounded in an erroneous understanding of the Natural Law.

The Error is that the attraction to empirical observation, the procedures of scientific objectification, technological progress and certain forms of liberalism has led to freedom and the Natural Law being set in opposition, as if a dialectic, if not an absolute conflict. Moral facts, despite their specificity, are frequently treated as if they were statistically verifiable data, patterns of behaviour which can be subject to observation or explained exclusively in categories of psycho-social processes (46).

A second Error is when others, desiring to stress the importance of values and sensitive to the dignity of freedom, however, conceive of freedom as somehow in opposition to or in conflict with material and biological nature, over which it must progressively assert itself. "Nature" is reduced to raw material for human activity and for its power. According to this view, nature needs to be transformed, indeed overcome by freedom, inasmuch as it represents a limitation and denial of freedom. "Nature" would thus come to mean everything found in man and the world apart from freedom.

The implications for "human nature" is that it is reduced to and treated as a readily available biological or social material. As freedom is opposed to nature, so then, freedom becomes self-defining and creative of itself and of its values.
When all is said and done, man would not even have a nature; he would be his own personal life-project. *Man would be nothing more than his own freedom* (46).

A third *Error* is that given the alleged conflict between freedom and nature, the *universality* and *immutability* of the natural law is denied. The *concern for historicity and for culture*, in particular, on the basis of progress of humanity, has led to the questioning of the universal and immutable validity of the natural law. There is a denial of the existence of "objective norms of morality" (53).

*Response to Errors*

Given a reduction of "nature" to raw material over and against which freedom must assert itself, it is understandable that the objections of physicalism and naturalism have been levelled against the traditional conception of the natural law, now accused of presenting as moral laws what are themselves mere biological laws.

Thus the Magisterium’s sexual and conjugal ethics, it is maintained, are based on a naturalistic understanding of the sexual act... failing to take into consideration both man’s character as a rational and free being and the cultural conditioning of all moral norms.

Moreover, the workings of typically human behaviour, as well as the so-called "natural inclinations," would establish at the most — so they say — a general orientation towards correct behaviour, but they cannot determine the moral assessment of individual acts, so complex from the viewpoint of situations (47).

A review of the correct relationship between freedom and human nature is in order.

First, the *human body* becomes mere raw datum for a freedom that claims to be absolute. It is devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design.

In effect, both the body and human nature appear as presuppositions, "materially necessary for freedom to make its choice, yet extrinsic to the person, the subject and the human act. Their functions would not be able to constitute reference points for moral decisions, because the finalities of these inclinations would be merely 'physical' goods, called by some 'pre-moral'."
This position contradicts the Church’s teachings on the unity of the human person. “The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being whereby it exists as a whole — corpore et anima unus — as a person.” It is in the light of the unity of the person that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined (48).

Only from the perspective of the unity of the human person can the natural law be understood properly. Natural law refers to “man’s proper and primordial nature, the ‘nature of the human person’, which is the person himself in the unity of soul and body.” Thus “the origin and the foundation of the duty of absolute respect for human life are to be found in the dignity proper to the person and not simply in the natural inclination to preserve one’s own physical life. Human life, even though it is a fundamental good of man, thus acquires a moral significance in reference to the good of the person, who must always be affirmed for his own sake.”

Thus “natural inclinations take on moral relevance only insofar as they refer to the human person and his authentic fulfillment, a fulfillment which for that matter can take place always and only in human nature” (50).

Universality and Immutability. Given the relationship of the natural law to the person, the natural law involves universality. Since it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt in all beings endowed with reason and living in history.

Thus, inasmuch as the natural law expresses the dignity of the human person and lays the foundation for his fundamental rights and duties, it is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all mankind. Positive precepts, like serving and worshipping God, are universally binding; they are “unchanging.” Concretely, the precepts of the natural law, as universal and immutable, oblige everyone regardless of cost. Negatively, they may never be violated — by anyone and in any case.

True, what must be done in any given situation depends on the circumstances, not all of which can be foreseen. Still, there are kinds of behaviour which can never, in any situation, be a proper response — a response which is in conformity with the dignity of the person (52).
True, man always exists in a particular culture, but the same culture does not exhaust the meaning of man. Moreover, progress of culture shows there is something that transcends it — "human nature." "This nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures" (53).

Admittedly, there is the need to seek out the most adequate formulation for universal and permanent moral norms in the light of different cultural contexts. Nonetheless, "the norms expressing that truth remain valid in their substance, but must be specified and determined . . . in the light of historical circumstances by the Church’s Magisterium . . ." (53)

5. OTHER RELATED ISSUES

A. ON CONSCIENCE

One Error is to hold, as expressed in the opinion of some that conscience’s function is the simple application of general moral norms to individual cases in the life of the person. Conscience is the individual personal decision on how to act in particular cases. Actions of conscience are "decisions" not "judgments." And only by making these decisions "autonomously" would the human being be able to attain moral maturity.

Moral norms are regarded not so much as binding objective criteria for judgments of conscience as they are general perspectives that help human beings tentatively to put order into their personal and social life. The Church’s categorical position in many moral questions inhibit, it is claimed, the process of maturation and even causes unnecessary conflicts of conscience (55).

A second Error is to propose a double status of moral truth. As regards more concrete existential considerations (beyond the doctrinal and abstract level), circumstances could legitimately be the basis of certain exceptions to the general rule and "thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law."

A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases
between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil (58).

Response to These Errors

There is a need to present a “creative” understanding of conscience. In St. Paul conscience becomes a “witness” for man . . . of his faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law. Such a witness is known only to the person himself. Conscience, then, is an “interior dialogue of man with himself.” But it is also a “dialogue of man with God,” inasmuch as God is the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of man.

Thus “conscience bears witness to man’s own rectitude or iniquity to man himself but, together with this and indeed even beforehand, conscience is the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man’s soul, calling him . . . to obedience” (58).

In the context of the natural law, the judgment of conscience is a practical judgment, “a judgment which makes known what man must do or must not do, or which assesses an act already performed by him. It is a judgment which applies to a concrete situation, the rational conviction that one must love and do good and avoid evil. This first principle of practical reason is part of the natural law.”

Whereas the natural law discloses the objective and universal demands of the moral good, “conscience is the application of the law to a particular case; this application of the law thus becomes an inner dictate for the individual, a summon to do what is good in this particular situation. Conscience thus formulates moral obligation in the light of the natural law.”

In a judgment of conscience, applying the law to a particular case, “the universality of the law and its obligation are acknowledged, not suppressed. . . . The judgment of conscience states ‘in an ultimate way’ whether a certain particular kind of behaviour is in conformity with the law; it formulates the proximate norm of the morality of a voluntary act . . . .” (59).

Conscience, therefore, is only the proximate norm of personal morality. Its dignity and authority derive from the truth about
moral good and evil. This truth is indicated by the “divine law,” the universal and objective norm of morality. “The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good” (60).

Conscience, as the judgment of an act, is not exempt from the possibility of error. Conscience is not an infallible judge. However, error of conscience can be the result of an invincible ignorance (62).

The dignity of conscience derives always from the truth. If it is correct, conscience has gleaned the objective truth. If it is erroneous, conscience has mistakenly, subjectively, considered something to be true. It is objectionable to “confuse a ‘subjective’ error about a moral good with the ‘objective’ truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience.” In the latter, while the agent may not be culpable, the act does not thereby cease to be evil (63).

The Church, when she pronounces on moral questions, in no way undermines the freedom of conscience. “This is so not only because freedom of conscience is never freedom “from” the truth but always and only freedom “in” the truth, but also because the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it. . . . The Church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience” (64).

B. ON FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE

There is Error if one would say that fundamental choice (a decision about oneself and a setting of one’s own life for or against the Good, for or against the Truth, and ultimately for or against God) must be distinguished from deliberate choices of a concrete kind of behaviour. In other words there is a separation. “On the one hand, the order of good and evil, which is dependent on the will, and on the other hand, specific kinds of behaviour, which are judged to be morally right or wrong only on the basis of a technical calculation of the proportion between the ‘premoral’ or ‘physical’ goods and evils which actually result
from the action."

The conclusion is that "the properly moral assessment of the person is reserved to his fundamental option, prescinding in whole or in part from his choice of particular actions, of concrete kinds of behaviour" (65).

Response to the Error

Tendencies to separate fundamental option and particular actions go against Scripture "which sees the fundamental option as a genuine choice of freedom and links that choice profoundly to particular acts." "By his fundamental choice, man is capable of giving his life direction and of progressing, with the help of grace, towards his end, following God’s call. But this capacity is actually exercised in the particular choices of specific actions, through which man deliberately conforms himself to God’s will, wisdom and law."

Moreover, "to separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behaviour means to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul." This "does not do justice to the rational finality immanent in man’s acting and in each of his deliberate decisions" (67).

There is also an objectionable pastoral implication of the separation. "An individual could, by virtue of a fundamental option, remain faithful to God independently of whether or not certain of his choices and his acts are in conformity with specific moral norms or rules" (68). Another implication is the implied revision of the traditional distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. With this separation, opposition to God’s law causing loss of sanctifying grace could only be the result of an act which engages the person in his totality, in other words, an act of fundamental option (69).

Given these objectionable implications, "care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of ‘fundamental option’ . . . against God. . . . Mortal sin exists also when the person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something gravely disordered. In fact, such a choice already includes contempt for the divine law, a rejection of God’s love for humanity and the whole of creation: the person turns away from
God and loses charity."

The basic mistake in this is that "from a consideration of the psychological sphere one cannot proceed to create a theological category, which is what the 'fundamental option' is" (70).

C. ON THE MORAL ACT

The issue of the meaning of the moral act raises the question: On what does the moral assessment of man's free acts depend? That is, what is the source of morality itself?

**Errors**

First, certain ethical theories called "teleological" claim that human acts should conform with the ends pursued by the agent and with the values intended by him. Here the criteria for moral evaluation are "drawn from the weighing of the non-moral or pre-moral goods to be gained and the corresponding non-moral or pre-moral values to be respected" (74).

Second, right or wrong is judged against the capacity of an act to produce "a better state of affairs for all concerned. Right conduct would then be identified with 'maximizing' goods and 'minimizing' ends" (Utilitarianism) (74).

Third, Catholic moralists who distance themselves from pragmatism and utilitarianism (both judge human acts without regard for man's true ultimate end), rightly recognize the need to find ever more consistent rational arguments in order to justify the requirements and to provide a foundation for the norms of moral life (74).

But there exist certain false solutions in their efforts:

(a) Some "do not take into sufficient consideration the fact that the will is involved in the concrete choices which it makes: these choices are a condition of its moral goodness and its being ordered to the ultimate end of the person."

(b) "Others are inspired by a notion of freedom which prescinds from the actual conditions of its exercise, from its objective reference to the truth about the good, and from its determination through choices of concrete kinds of behaviour."

These are called — according to terminology imported from
different currents of thought — consequentialism (draws the criteria of the rightness of action solely from a calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice) or proportionalism (weighs the various values and goods being sought, focuses on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the "greater good" or "lesser evil" actually possible in a particular situation).

On the basis of their proposed criteria for moral evaluation, both proportionalism and consequentialism "maintain that it is never possible to formulate an absolute prohibition of particular kinds of behaviour which would be in conflict, in every circumstance and in every culture, with those values."

Given this position, the moral "goodness" of an act would be judged on the basis of the subject's intention in reference to moral goods, and its "rightness" on the basis of a consideration of its foreseeable effects or consequences and of their proportion. Consequently, concrete kinds of behaviour could be described as "right" or "wrong," without it being thereby possible to judge as morally "good" or "bad" the will of the person choosing them" (75).

Response to These Errors

In responding to these errors, certain preliminary points must be made.

First, properly so-called "human acts" manifest and realize the relationship between man's freedom and God's law; through them, man attains perfection. They are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They give moral definition to the very person who performs them (71).

Second, human acts are related to the Eternal Law. The good is established by Divine Wisdom which orders every being towards its end. That act is moral which is in conformity with man's true good (the good as established by Divine Wisdom). "The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality" (72).

Third, thus the moral life, expressed through moral acts, "has
an essential ‘teleological’ character, since it consists in the deliberate ordering of human acts to God, the supreme good and ultimate end (telos) of man.”

Fourth, it is important to realize that this ordering to one’s ultimate end is not something [purely] subjective, dependent solely upon one’s intention. “It presupposes that such acts are in themselves capable of being ordered to this end, insofar as they are in conformity with the authentic moral good of man, safeguarded by the commandments” (73).

The theories mentioned above can be very persuasive. But “they are not faithful to the Church’s teaching, when they believe they can justify, as morally good, deliberate choices of kinds of behaviour contrary to the commandments of the divine and natural law. These theories cannot claim to be grounded in the Catholic moral tradition” (76).

To offer rational criteria for a right moral decision, the theories above take account of the intention and consequences of human action. But these are not sufficient for judging the moral quality of a concrete choice.

The weighing of the goods and evils foreseeable as the consequence of an action is not an adequate method for determining whether the choice of that concrete kind of behaviour is “according to its species”, or “in itself”, morally good or bad, licit or illicit. The foreseeable consequences are part of those circumstances of the act, which, while capable of lessening the gravity of an evil act, nonetheless cannot alter its moral species (77).

The Church affirms, then, that “the morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the ‘object’ rationally chosen by the deliberate will.”

But what is the object of the act of willing? It is a freely chosen behaviour; it is in conformity with the order of reason; “it perfects us morally, and disposes us to recognize our ultimate end in the perfect good.”

By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision
which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.

Given this definition of the “object” of the moral act, the following points are affirmed:

(1) There are certain acts that are always wrong to choose, because choosing them involves a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil.

(2) No evil done with a good intention can be excused. The reason is that the human act depends on its object — whether that object is capable or not of being ordered to God, to the One who “alone is good,” and thus brings about the perfection of the person (78).

THEREFORE, we must reject the thesis (of teleological and proportionalist theories) “that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species — its ‘object’—the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behaviour or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned.” In moral evaluation, we must consider always whether the object of the human act “is capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God” (79).

THEREFORE, there are acts which are “intrinsically evil,” i.e., “they are such always and per se . . . on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.” Some examples: homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture . . . etc. (80)

A good intention or particular circumstances can diminish the evil of intrinsically evil acts; but they cannot remove it. “They remain ‘irremediably’ evil acts; per se and in themselves they are not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person.” “Consequently, circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act “subjectively” good or defensible as a choice” (81).

When may an intention be called “good”? When it aims for the true good of the person in view of his ultimate end. That intention is good that moves one to perform actions that are “capable of being ordered” to God and “worthy of the human
person.” The commandments (Church norms) therefore are really an expression of the good acts that define good intention (82).

(Part II, the philosophical discussion of Veritatis Splendor, will appear in the next issue.)