

The Splendor of Truth: John Paul and The German Synodal Way

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John Paul II promulgated the long-awaited encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* on August 6th, 1993. This encyclical teaches that Jesus is the Splendor of Truth (§83), and in the commandments of the old and new Covenants of Love, the Church has defined certain acts as intrinsically evil (§80). These commandments, made for the good of God's creation, will exist for the rest of time. Should we, like the rich young man, "wish to be perfect," we must set aside our worldly goods and take the hand of the good teacher. This paper will discuss the fundamental teachings of *Veritatis Splendor* and address its reception and criticisms. In the final portion, I will apply its moral teachings to the recent approval to bless same-sex unions due to the German Synodal Way.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II wrote *Veritatis Splendor* (henceforth "*VS*") over five years, causing many to await its publishing with great anticipation. John Paul acknowledged this anticipation in §5 during his opening remarks, explaining that his timing was due to carefully considering the publishing of the Catechism of the Catholic Church just a year before.¹ He hands the Church this "sure and authentic reference text," along with the encyclical, to fully equip it for future ages. It is then imperative to note that *VS* is solely addressed to the world's bishops, unlike many other encyclicals, which include an address to the entire Church faithful and even the world.² John Paul hands this letter and the Catechism to his bishops to say, "Here is your task, and here is the handbook."

A "genuine crisis" triggered the encyclical and conferral of the Catechism (*VS* §5): the perilous confusion and loss of what defines truth, freedom, and goodness. He explains that while the College of Bishops had been working over centuries to correctly reinforce the teachings on

¹ John Paul II. *Veritatis Splendor*. [Encyclical Letter]. The Holy See. August 6, 1993. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

² "[T]otius orbis itemque universis bonae voluntatis hominibus..." John XXIII. *Pacem in Terris*. [Encyclical Letter On Establishing Universal Peace In Truth, Justice, Charity, And Liberty]. The Holy See. April 11, 1963. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

morality in particular cases, such as “human sexuality, the family,... social, economic, and political life,” there is a present need to address the Church’s moral teaching as a whole (§4). The crisis is within the Church itself, provoked even in seminaries and faculties of theology. It is the risk of “distortion and denial” of the Catholic Church’s moral teachings, even the most fundamental ones (§4). The encyclical’s purpose is to affirm the principles of the Church “based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition.” It also addresses the “presuppositions and consequences of the dissent which that teaching has met” (§5).

Before the crisis is directly dealt with, John Paul must set foundations in place. The first chapter centers on the story of the rich young man who approaches Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 19: “Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?’” (Matthew 19:16) John Paul states that this question echoes within the hearts of all mankind. It is a question in search of goodness itself, of satisfying an “echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man’s life” (§7). The question is asked not to check off a list of tasks to receive a prize, but it is presented from the depth of the human soul, asking what the true meaning of life is. If we want to understand what the purpose of our life is, what goodness is, and what our end is, we must reach out to Jesus, who, “as a patient and sensitive teacher, answers the young man by taking him, as it were, by the hand, and leading him step by step to the full truth” (§8).

This scriptural illustration leads to the first fundamental teaching within the first chapter: The Catholic Church teaches that the meaning of life is to live for the glory of God by our actions (§10), specifically those that respect the commandments. Jesus responds to the rich young man’s question by stating that he must follow the Commandments. He replies, “Which ones?” Jesus describes the particular commandments, which “safeguard the good of the person,

the image of God, by protecting his goods” (§13). These are the old covenant laws. Jesus ends His list by inserting a new covenant law, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:18-19). By combining old and new covenant laws, Jesus shows us the inseparable link between them and foreshadows His future act of humanity’s restoration on the Cross. This is the second fundamental teaching within this first chapter: “The commandments,” John Paul writes, “thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbor; at the same time they are proof of that love. They are the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point” (Ibid). The old and new covenants reveal laws to be followed, but they are laws made out of love by God for us to love Him in return (§15).

When the young man replies that he has kept all the commandments, Jesus begins His response with a test: “If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21). John Paul underlines Jesus’ words, “If you wish...” In Jesus’ use of the word “if,” we see the gift of freedom handed to humanity, an act of love, a gift of choice. Giving up one’s possessions is massive, but the rich young man does not realize that he need not look far to see how to do it. Christ is our example, love personified (§20). This reveals the final teaching of this chapter: The conversation between the rich young man and Christ will continue throughout humanity (§25). Mankind will always seek to understand their meaning.

In the second chapter, we get to the heart of the encyclical: human freedom. John Paul first tackles the relationship between freedom and law. Freedom is “authentic and complete” when we comprehend and accept the law of God (§35). The modern concern for autonomy has overreached limitations and cut out God and his Divine Wisdom and Revelation (§36). Man has forgotten that God is the author of the moral law, and we behave as Adam and Eve did when they

determined what is good and evil on their own (§35). God established the natural law, which “is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by [Him], whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided” (§40).

The gift of freedom, however, was preceded by a command, “The Lord God gave man this order” (Genesis 2:16). Even though God commanded that we shall not kill (Exodus 20:13), we are free to respect the dignity and value of our neighbor, and to love them as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Laws, both natural and divine, give us boundaries for our freedom. By saying that Adam and Eve could eat of any tree in the garden except for one (Genesis 3:1-3), we see that our freedom outweighs any “limits” imposed on us. A similar comparison would be to allow your child to run anywhere on the hillside except for the cliff because it is dangerous. Through genuine freedom, we see that our end is God, for He is freedom itself. Our good actions, freely chosen, allow us to walk on that path to Him. Our evil acts, also freely chosen, direct us off that path.

The second portion of the second chapter focuses on the relationship between the role of conscience and truth. “The relationship between man’s freedom and God’s law,” John Paul writes, “is most deeply lived out in the ‘heart’ of the person, in his moral conscience” (§54). Conscience, quoting the Second Vatican Council’s definition, is “the sanctuary of man, where he is alone with God whose voice echoes within him” (§55). Natural and divine laws are given to mankind as the standard of morality, whose task is to universally tell humanity what is right and wrong. As for the role of conscience, whose mission is to “love,... do good and avoid evil,” it focuses on the particular situations we face every day (§59). “Like the natural law itself and all practical knowledge,” John Paul explains, “the judgment of conscience also has an imperative character: man must act in accordance with it” (§60). Our conscience is subject to the commands

of God and that of natural law, and when we act according to its judgments, we find the manifestation of freedom and truth (§61). While our conscience is not infallible and fully capable of error, we must form it to conform to the truth (§62, 64). It is formed not so that it is free *from* the truth but instead that it is formed *for* the truth (§64). The Church is “the teacher of truth,” John Paul explains, “[and her] charge is to announce and teach authentically that truth which is Christ, and at the same time with her authority to declare and confirm the principles of the moral order which derive from human nature itself” (Ibid).

In the final sections of chapter two, John Paul tackles the “fundamental option” and the moral act itself. In brief, the fundamental option theory believes that so long as one makes a primary choice of being “for” or “against” God, any actions after that do not impact the state of one’s soul. In a sense, there is no “good” or “bad”; you are “for” or “against” God, and so long as that fundamental choice does not change, all is well (§68). But all is not well, as John Paul explains. We choose to go to Hell not only because we choose to be “against” God in and of itself, but we decide to go to Hell whenever we commit a mortal sin. Through these grave sins, “[we lose] ‘sanctifying grace,’ ‘charity,’ and ‘eternal happiness’” (Ibid). This is because these grave sins have their object as grave matter, which “is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent” (§69). This teaching, reaffirmed by the Church, is “permanently valid” and can not and will not be softened (Ibid).

It is not enough to have God as our “fundamental option.” As humans, we are made to act, and these actions ultimately define us and determine our eternal destiny. John Paul begins the final section of chapter two by saying, “The relationship between man’s freedom and God’s law, which has its intimate and living center in the moral conscience, is manifested and realized

in human acts” (§71). Our acts are moral “because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them” (Ibid).

He defines the morality of acts as “the relationship of man’s freedom with the authentic good” (§72). In mankind’s broken nature, we often attempt to judge actions as good on a subjective basis, so it is essential to know what truly good actions are. God is “the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness” (Ibid). John Paul then explains that we have reached morality when we order our acts to this authentic good (determined by our reason) and freely choose to pursue it (Ibid). In pursuing our ultimate good, God, we then learn that the moral life is “teleological” in that we have determined an end (*telos*), a goal (§73).

In dealing with the good, John Paul warns us against the idea of “teleologism,” which makes “good” relative and even undefined (§75). Two prominent groups of theologians use this defective method called the “consequentialists” and “proportionalists.” The consequentialist “claims to draw the criteria of consequences deriving from a given choice.” The proportionalist claims to draw the criteria of consequences “by weighing the various values and goods being sought, [focusing] on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the ‘greater good’ or the ‘lesser evil’ actually possible in a particular situation” (Ibid).

The heart of the matter here is the moral act. John Paul teaches that for an act to be good, “its object [must be] in conformity with the good of the person with respect for the goods morally relevant to him” (§78). Morality depends on this “object,” he teaches (Ibid). There are three aspects of an act that John Paul describes in §74: the object, the end, and the circumstances. For any action to be judged as a “good” action, it must be good in all three aspects. Revisiting the proportionalists, John Paul describes their method as defining the object of an act as

“pre-moral,” meaning that there is “no moral status” (§74). Any goodness of the object would be based on the intentions of the person performing the act and the consequences in their foreseeable effects and proportions (§75). John Paul does not wish to dismiss the importance of intentions and consequences. Still, he firmly states that this “weighing of goods and evils foreseeable as the consequence of an action” does not make actions morally good or bad (§77). He then states that the morality of human acts “[depend] primarily and fundamentally on the ‘object’ rationally chosen by the deliberate will” (§78). The object, again, is the proximate goal of the action, freely chosen by the individual. It “determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person” (Ibid). Good intentions are not enough, he states, but what does matter is if the object “is capable or not of being ordered to God” and therefore, “an act is good if its object is in conformity with the good of the person with respect for the goods morally relevant for him.” Our works are good when they are pleasing to God (Ibid).

Despite the “good intentions” of people, there are acts that are deemed “intrinsically evil” for they are “incapable of being ordered to God” (§80). John Paul categorizes specific acts by their general consequence: “Whatever is hostile to life itself,... whatever violates the integrity of the human person,... whatever is offensive to human dignity...” (Ibid). He gives examples of these acts, such as homicide, abortion, euthanasia, torture, slavery, prostitution, etc. Here, we have the fundamental maxim of this second chapter, and arguably of the encyclical: “It is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it” (§80). It is reiterated that no “good” intention can change this reality. He goes further to say that an intention is good “when it has as its aim the true good of the person in view of his ultimate end [God]” (§82). If a given act is “incapable of being ordered to God,” no good intention can justify doing it.

The closure of this chapter describes the above teachings as being centered on the old and new covenants, the Commandments, love itself, and the virtues (§82). “The moral quality of human acting,” John Paul writes, “is dependent on this fidelity to the commandments, as an expression of obedience and of love” (Ibid). Without objective moral order, knowing “what we must do to gain eternal life” would be impossible. The Church teaches us what is intrinsically evil and directs us to those authentic goods which “[promote] man in his dignity and vocation” (§83). John Paul calls on the world’s bishops not to simply “warn the faithful about the errors and dangers of certain ethical theories” (obviously referring to proportionalism) but also to “show all the inviting splendor of that truth which is Jesus Christ himself” (Ibid).

The final chapter of *VS* addresses the modern-day situation. He first states that the contemporary issue is the loss of the “essential bond between Truth, the Good, and Freedom” (§84). Man needs to accept that only in truth can he find salvation and that only in the law of God can they find their true good (Ibid). Contrary to modern man’s claims that following objective and universal laws will restrict their freedom or even damage their individuality (§85), we can only find freedom in Christ and His teachings, for He is the “high road” we can follow to find freedom (§87). Quoting St. Augustine, John Paul emphasizes that following Christ means we are “both servant and free” (Ibid).

The separation of faith and morality is “one of the most acute pastoral concerns of the Church” in a world that is becoming more secular (§88). People act as if God did not exist or claim they love and serve Him, but in reality, they “walk in darkness” through hypocritical actions (§89). John Paul urges that it is through the witness of our faith and our conformity to the divine commands that others can rediscover their faith, and the most “supreme witness” to such a faith is martyrdom. This witness of self-sacrifice is “an affirmation of the inviolability of the

moral order” (§92), and we see countless examples throughout scripture to modern-day saints (§91). It is a witness who directly rejects the theories of proportionalism (§90), for it holds that there are objective moral norms (authentic goods and intrinsic evils). It would be better to die than to stray from this order. Holy martyrdom can prevent society from falling into a “headlong plunge into the most dangerous crisis which can affect man: the confusion between good and evil” (§93).

The profound witness of martyrdom is not something all will have to face (*Ibid*), but it is something that we should be ready to make. Such faith may seem impossible, but “Christians are not alone,” John Paul reminds us (§94). The Holy Catholic Church never lacks compassion; she is the Teacher of Truth and a loving Mother (§95). Yet, as all loving mothers must be, she enforces her truths with loving firmness, a firmness that even Christ Himself expressed during His life on earth (§95, 96). He states that “[b]efore the demands of morality, we are all absolutely equal” (§96). All must work together to respect human dignity and our shared journey to heaven, even in the political and social sphere (§100, 101). No matter what is going on in the world or how difficult the journey may be, the norms of morality must be upheld and respected (§102). The “ultimate source of the inner division of man” comes from our First Parents, Adam and Eve, who wished to be the ones who determined good and evil under the temptations whispered by the serpent (Genesis 3:5, *Ibid*). John Paul offers these powerful words in the face of temptation:

[T]emptations can be overcome, sins can be avoided, because together with the commandments the Lord gives us the possibility of keeping them,... Keeping God’s law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible... For God does not command the impossible.³

To conclude the encyclical, John Paul addresses the role of the bishops (to whom this is addressed). Harkening back to the rich young man's question, John Paul reminds bishops that

³ *VS*. §102.

the faithful turn to them and that when the Church replies, it “contains the voice of Jesus Christ, the voice of the truth about good and evil” (§117). They are to bring the faithful to Christ, to be “authentic teachers” (§114), and to “ensure that the faithful are guarded from every doctrine and theory contrary to [the word of God]” (§116). They must fulfill their apostolic mission and “[insist] the right of the faithful to receive Catholic doctrine in its purity and integrity” (§113).

John Paul entrusts us all to Mary the Mother of Mercy in concluding remarks. She is the one all can turn to in this valley of tears, in the long and tiresome journey to our eternal bliss in Heaven. Mary “understands sinful man and loves him with a Mother’s love” and is “the model of all those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28, §120). Finally, he hands over the following steps to the world’s bishops: “I now pass this evaluation on to you, in obedience to the word of the Lord who entrusted to Peter the task of strengthening his brethren, in order to clarify and aid our common discernment” (§115).

After publishing the encyclical, many in the mass media (both secular and religious) gave their remarks. The New York Times published an article by Peter Steinfels (an American Catholic writer) only months after *VS* was promulgated:

Although the encyclical may be less sensational than its advance notices, it is no less important. At the very least, it will stimulate an important assessment of the state of Catholic moral theology, a development that will affect the Catholic faithful and, indeed, the church's role in public life.⁴

Steinfels discusses one group that was the most vocal about their opinions about the encyclical: the proportionalists. In her research article titled *Veritatis Splendor, Proportionalism, and Contraception*, Catholic author Janet Smith highlights Fr. Richard McCormick, an American Jesuit, moral theologian, and defender of proportionalism, as one of the most vocal critics:

⁴ Steinfels, Peter. “Papal Encyclical Says Church Must Enforce Basic Morality.” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1993, sec. 1.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/03/us/papal-encyclical-says-church-must-enforce-basic-morality.html>.

It is well known that proportionalists protested that [VS] misrepresented their views. When the encyclical was first issued, Father Richard McCormick charged: “[T]he encyclical repeatedly states of proportionalism that it attempts to justify morally wrong actions by a good intention. This, I regret to say, is a misrepresentation.” He also charged “Not a single theologian would hold that a good intention could sanctify what has already been described as a morally wrong act.”⁵

Smith argues that proportionalist critics may struggle with VS because of its steadfast reliance on the Church's magisterium, particularly on the teachings on intrinsic evil, “a terminology that proportionalism has to some extent redefined.”⁶ John Paul and proportionalist thinkers disagree on what “intrinsic evil” means, she states.⁷ She believes that the issue lies in the question of who determines an act to be intrinsically evil:

[Proportionalists] should, however, acknowledge that what they mean is that they believe it is never morally right to do what is morally wrong or intrinsically evil by their standards. They should also acknowledge that they do say that it is sometimes morally right to do what the magisterium teaches to be intrinsically evil. This is what [VS] is attributing to [them].⁸

As Smith reminds us, it behooves us to recall the intention of the encyclical. It is not an encyclical written to attack proportionalism but rather “to clarify Church teaching and to assert some fundamental Catholic moral principles that proportionalists have called into question.”⁹ Some clergymen did praise the encyclical after its promulgation. McCormick collected a series of reactions to VS in *Some Early Reactions to Veritatis Splendor*:

Cardinal Roger Mahoney praised the encyclical for its "magnificent vision of the Christian life" and its "stunning" insight that "the moral life is a response to the gift of faith and a path to perfection." Cardinal Bernard Law said that it "presents a teaching which has to be pondered and appropriated at a deeper level of consciousness." Bishop Donald W. Wuerl called the letter "a beacon that shines in the midst of the gloom of confusion."¹⁰

⁵ Janet L. Smith, “Veritatis Splendor, Proportionalism, and Contraception,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): p. 308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114009806300401>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. p. 311.

⁸ p. 319.

⁹ p. 308.

¹⁰ Richard A. McCormick, “Some Early Reactions to Veritatis Splendor,” *Theological Studies* 55, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): p. 482., <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399405500303>.

Interestingly, one reaction to *VS* may neutrally sum up the entire encyclical. It is Bishop Alfred C. Hughes' simple comment: "[John Paul] is basically reasserting that there is an objective moral order." As McCormick put it, "nothing new" is presented in *VS*.¹¹ What may seem to be a semi-cynical comment is the truth about *VS* and encapsulates the entire purpose of the encyclical: reaffirming the longstanding moral teachings of the Catholic Church. I believe this is the reason for its praise and rejection: John Paul is not presenting any new teachings or erasing old ones.

What happens when those entrusted with the task of the encyclical (§115), namely the world's bishops, wish to impose "exceptions" to the moral law? In Germany this year (2023), this is already happening. As a result of the German Synodal Way, a vote has passed to create a "Blessing Ceremony" for same-sex unions and others who are not permitted to receive sacramental marriage.¹²

The German Synodal Way began in 2019. It is a discussion in response to the ongoing clerical sex abuse scandals in the Church. It questions whether the German Bishops' Conference can develop Church teaching on matters of sexuality, church authority, the sacraments, and Church doctrine itself.¹³ In the fourth forum, "Living Love in Sexuality and Partnership," the result of the ballot approved the implementation of the "Blessing Ceremonies for Couples Who Love Each Other." In the document formulated for this discussion, the argument is made that allowing these unions to be blessed follows the Two Great Commandments: loving God and neighbor. "God is present where people love each other," it states. If the Church claims to follow

¹¹ Ibid. p. 482.

¹² AC Wimmer, "German Bishops Announce Plans to Bless Same-Sex Unions, Allow Laypeople to Baptize and Preach at Mass," Catholic News Agency, March 31, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253883/german-bishops-announce-plans-to-bless-same-sex-unions-allow-lay-people-to-baptize-and-preach-at-mass>.

¹³ Deutsche Bischofskonferenz und ZdK. n.d. "Was Ist Der Synodale Weg?" Der Synodale Weg Official Web Page. Accessed March 24, 2023. <https://www.synodalerweg.de/was-ist-der-synodale-weg>.

the same Two Great Commandments, then they argue that we ought to love these people by allowing them this blessing upon their union.¹⁴

The Catechism of the Catholic Church holds a firm stance on homosexuality:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.¹⁵

Although the Catechism does not outrightly define homosexual acts under the category of mortal sin, it is understood in Catholic moral teaching that it is gravely sinful.¹⁶ Particularly in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas categorizes homosexuality as one of the species of lust which is gravely sinful.¹⁷ Of the gravely sinful, lustful acts, he deems homosexuality among the gravest of them all.

Further, in 2021, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded to a letter of “dubium,” which posed the question of whether the Church has the power to bless same-sex unions. The response was “negative.” It provides a concrete explanation as follows:

[O]nly those realities which are in themselves ordered to serve [proper] ends are congruent with the essence of the blessing imparted by the Church. For this reason, it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage.¹⁸

¹⁴ Der Synodale Weg. 2023. “Blessing Ceremonies for Couples Who Love Each Other.” Presentation of the Synodal Forum IV, in *Life in Succeeding Relationships - Living Love in Sexuality and Partnership*. 9-11 March, 2023. p. 3. https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/englisch-SV-V/ENG_SV-V-Synodalforum-IV-Handlungstext_SegensfeiernFuerPaareDieSichLieben_Les2.pdf

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2011), sec. 782, accessed April 21, 2015, sec. 2357. <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/>.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Secunda Secundae*, 92-189, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Ila-IIae, q. 153, art 3 & 4. pg. 458-459.

¹⁷ Ibid. q. 154, art 11 & 12. pg. 483 & 485.

¹⁸ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “Responsum... to a Dubium Regarding the Blessing of the Unions of Persons of the Same Sex,” March 15, 2021, p. 1. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/15/210315b.html>.

A proportionalist argument for blessing same-sex unions is seen within the Synodal Way document itself. It attempts to argue that since this blessing is not a sacramental wedding, it is simply “not as evil” and ought to be integrated.¹⁹ The good outweighs the bad, they attempt to contend, and “where faith is involved, what is good is worthy of a blessing,” and “[t]he Church is enriched by the love of these couples. Such mutual love calls for a blessing. God is present where people love each other.”²⁰ To the bishops who voted in favor of this proposal, it seems that the main reasoning for the support is that it is better to “love,” accept and even bless those who are “discriminated against” than to point them, in true love, to their ultimate end as the shepherds of the Lord’s flock (§114).

I believe the moral principles of *VS* would confirm that there is no possibility of blessing same-sex unions. Sticking to John Paul’s maxim in §80, “it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it,” it would seem that same-sex unions would fall under the category of “evil” because they are contrary to the natural law, and “under no circumstances can they be approved.” Approaching this from the judgment of a moral act provided at the end of the second chapter of *VS*, we see the object of blessing same-sex unions is to bless individuals who have chosen mortal sin freely. This object is not ordered to the “couple’s” ultimate end, God, since mortal sin is “[an] act by which man freely and consciously rejects God, his law, the covenant of love that God offers” (§70). An act must be good in the three aspects outlined by John Paul (§74). The object of this action is evil. Therefore, it is not moral to bless same-sex unions.

Regardless of this proportionalist-leaning mindset, the Synodal Way fails the test of discerning moral acts defined in *VS*. No claims of mutual love or good intentions can defend

¹⁹ Der Synodale Weg. 2023. p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

doing evil so that good may come of it. These homosexual acts, even if claimed to be love, cannot be called such as they are intrinsically evil and offend the Lord. As the *Responsum* simply states, “[God] does not and cannot bless sin: he blesses sinful man, so that he may recognize that he is part of his plan of love and allow himself to be changed by him. He in fact ‘takes us as we are, but never leaves us as we are.’”²¹ The German Bishops must lead their flock to God as their ultimate end and, like the rich man, give up their worldly desires and lust to come and follow Christ. It is then that Christ will bless them.

In conclusion, the Splendor of Truth, Christ, will be with us until the end of time. He beckons us to come and follow Him and embrace our true freedom by following His Convenental Laws of Love. Like the rich young man, we must always return to the question of what we must do to inherit eternal life. The Good Teacher, through His Church, takes us by the hand and leads us to His Truth. The world’s bishops must embrace their task of “vigilantly teaching the Word of God” (§116) and ensure that the flock does not get led astray, even if martyrdom is the price they pay for it.

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “*Responsum...*” P. 2.

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