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The cornerstone of true love and happiness: Natural Law and the Perennial Truth about Good and Intrinsically Evil Acts

1. DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

"DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD" (*Rom 12:2*). This word of the Apostle quoted as title of chapter II of *Veritatis Splendor* (*VS*) could be regarded as its Motto. Through *VS* the Church once again reconfirmed its strict resistance to any attempt to adapt the eternal moral teachings of the Church to the *Zeitgeist* that had crept deeply into Catholic moral theology and threatened to undermine two pillars on which both natural law and the moral teachings of the Church rest:

- 1) the objectivity of moral values;² and 2) the consequence of the splendor of truth and of persons: namely that any disrespect and acting or wishing evil against any person, whether God, an angel, or a human person, is always and everywhere morally wrong, is an *intrinsece malum* under all circumstances.³ On these two pillars also the other Encyclical whose 50th anniversary we are celebrating, rests: *Humanae Vitae* that teaches that contraception belongs to this class of intrinsically evil acts, because it is directed against human persons, against the objective meaning and value of human sexuality, and against God-creator.

To have dedicated the first public Conference of JALHF to this perennial teaching of reason and of the Church was not solely motivated by the wish to clarify and reconfirm the perennial truth taught by these Encyclicals but also by the need to address a claim made by two new members of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV): namely that a new "Papal moral theological paradigm" denies the intrinsic moral wrongness of contraception affirmed by HV and the existence of intrinsically evil acts in general (though these are solemnly affirmed by *Veritatis Splendor*).

Professor Maurizio Chiodi delivered⁴ a speech entitled "**RE-READING HUMANAE VITAE (1968) IN LIGHT OF AMORIS LAETITIA (2016)**". He is a new member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, founded by Pope John Paul II in order to explain and defend the truths the Church teaches about human life in *Humanae Vitae* and other documents.

Notwithstanding his membership in PAV, Chiodi does not only reject openly a central moral teaching of the Church on contraception, admirably stated in *Humanae Vitae*, namely that any single contraceptive act that separates the unitive from the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, is intrinsically wrong in any situation.⁵ Chiodi even asserts that responsible parenthood can *oblige* a married couple to use artificial birth control.

Chiodi invokes Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on the family, *AMORIS LAETITIA*, as presenting a new model and paradigm for moral theology that, according to Chiodi, eliminates the notion (solemnly and magisterially laid down in *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, and *Veritatis Splendor*) that contraception is an *intrinsically evil human act* that is wrong anywhere and at any time, and teaches that there are not any human actions that are intrinsically wrong under all circumstances". The same position is also defended by Gerhard Höver who has published the article "'Time is greater than space': Moral-theological reflections on the Post-

Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*“ on the Homepage of the Pontifical Academy for Life and also rejects the notion of intrinsically evil acts as “too narrow”.⁶

Chiodi wants to make what is morally good or bad in the transmission of human life entirely dependent on concrete situations. Drawing out the lines of a purely consequentialist proportionalist ethics, Chiodi suggests that the moral quality of a human action can never be determined universally “by a general rule,” but depends on a proportion between good and bad consequences of human actions in concrete situations. Understood in this general way, the situation ethics Fr. Chiodi defends would also deny the intrinsic wrongness of abortion and euthanasia, and of many other acts listed in *Veritatis Splendor*, by Cicero, and in the Bible as acts that are morally wrong *under all circumstances and in all situations*.

It is worth noting that this opinion has nothing to do with blindness of conscience, lack of ethical knowledge or of personal imputability invoked so often by Rocco Buttiglione in the present debate. No, Chiodi implies an entirely objective “duty to contracept” in certain situations and claims, in contradiction to both *HV* and *VS*, that there are no human acts that are morally wrong regardless of situations.

Both of these tenets of a consequentialist-proportionalist ethics have been solemnly condemned by the Church. The untruth of this proportionalism is not only subject to solemn Papal magisterium, however, but can be recognized by human reason as well.⁷ Socrates, Plato, Cicero, members of other religions, and some atheists have forcefully defended these truths.

Not only among the inner attitudes and fundamental moral options some are always good, such as gratitude and love, others always evil, such as hatred, ingratitude or envy. Rather, *Veritatis Splendor* stresses that absolute moral calls and universally binding and exceptionless obligations, which must never be disobeyed, also refer to the sphere of external human actions, whose moral character as well must not be judged solely in terms of the sum-total of their consequences.⁸ Any attempt to separate the fundamental option or the fundamental moral attitude from the moral goodness of actions, denying that the latter could be intrinsically, i.e., by their essence and essential end (*finis operis*), morally wrong, is misguided and gravely erroneous according to both: reason and faith. This has been magnificently expressed in *Veritatis Splendor*:

“80. Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature “incapable of being ordered” to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed “intrinsically evil” (intrinsic malum): they are such always and per se, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances. Consequently, without in the least denying the influence on morality exercised by circumstances and especially by intentions, the Church teaches that “there exist acts which per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object.””⁹

Containing the word truth in its name, the Encyclical insists that ethics is based on the foundation of truth. Therefore, even though the judgment of conscience represents the highest subjective norm for moral actions, our first obligation is that our conscience itself conform to the truth and base itself on its knowledge. Conscience receives its extraordinary ultimate subjective moral authority only – even if it is de facto based on error – from the truth which it always must *intend* as ground of its verdict.

These fundamental tenets of *Veritatis Splendor* can also be shown to be true by philosophical reason. The Encyclical itself, quoting Rom 2:14-15, stresses this in no uncertain terms, referring to the Biblical teaching on a natural law inscribed in the heart of every human being.¹⁰

The thesis of Josef Fuchs S.J., and other fathers of the “new paradigm”, that no finite good could be the object of absolute imperatives in the moral sense of the term, first of all contradicts the fact that there are absolutely required inner responses to finite goods. Evidently, the adequate inner attitudes towards finite

beings and especially towards other human persons: e.g., love, respect, justice, etc., are required *always* and *absolutely*.¹¹ They bear absolute moral value. Even in the case in which actions of killing are allowed, for example in the defense of a child against his murderer, the right inner attitudes (for example, love and respect of the a criminal aggressor, instead of wild rage and hatred for him) are certainly required absolutely and always; but they have as their object finite goods (human persons).¹²

On closer reflection, it becomes clear that at least the inner responses to finite persons are absolutely and ‘intrinsically good’ or intrinsically evil everywhere and in all situations.

There is a radical equivocation in the term “absolute” at the root of the proportionalist consequentialist ethics’ that denies absolute moral obligations related to human persons.

2. A RADICAL EQUIVOCATION OF ‘ABSOLUTE’ AT THE ROOT OF THE CHIEF ARGUMENT OF TELEOLOGICAL ETHICS

In addition, at the root of this main argument for the alleged impossibility that finite goods can be the objects of absolute obligations, there is a radical equivocation in the term ‘absolute’. A study of these radically different meanings of ‘absolute’ will demonstrate the bearing of such a distinction for a critique of teleological ethics. There is indeed a first sense of absolute in which no finite good can be absolute: No finite good (for example, no patient) is the absolute, i.e., the infinite good (*id quo maius nihil cogitari possit*).

There is secondly a moral sense of ‘absoluteness’ which directly corresponds to the first metaphysical one: the sense in which the absolute good (God) calls for a surrender which is so total that to give it to any creature would indeed be an idolization of it. Think, for example, of the act of adoration which, when turned to a creature, such as a fellow-physician or patient, would be blasphemy: the hymn of St. Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro te*, is most beautiful when God is its object, but would express an evil act as soon as man were taken as its object. Similarly, the infinite good (God) alone must be loved ‘above everything else’. As soon as such acts that are owed to God, i.e. acts whose proper object can only be the absolute good, turn towards finite goods, finite (relative) goods are absolutized, even if they are such high goods as health, human life, or patients. If indeed such an idolization of finite goods were to occur in an ethics which recognizes absolute moral obligations towards finite goods, this ethics would be vulnerable to the objection launched against it by purely teleological ethics, namely, that it idolizes finite goods.

No trace of such an idolization of the world can be found, however, in deontic ethics that recognizes absolute moral demands imposed upon us by finite goods. For a third sense of ‘absoluteness’ has nothing to do with such an absolutization of the relative. We have in mind here a ‘purely ethical’ sense of absolute. An absolute obligation in this sense only says that an act is absolutely due to a good, that this good, once the general conditions of its becoming actually morally relevant are met (that a person encounters it, is in possession of her reason and freedom, etc.), unconditionally calls for such a response or respect, and that, as long as the obligation exists, it can never be suspended by a reference to consequences. Examples of such absolute obligations would refer to the immorality of taking actively an innocent human life or the forbiddenness of committing or assisting suicide.

An absolute obligation in this sense can just as well refer to the infinite good as to finite goods. We absolutely ought to love both God and man; we absolutely ought to abstain from intentionally killing an innocent man or from violating other obligations toward finite goods. On the other hand, not even all responses to the absolute being are prescribed in this third ethical sense of ‘absolute’. The so-called evangelical counsels, for example, express an invitation to a special total donation to God that is not a commandment, i.e., not an absolute moral demand, albeit the object and motivating ground of this form of life is the absolute good. On the other hand, certainly, the discussed attitudes (such as respect, love) that have finite goods as object are absolutely called for in the (third) moral sense of this term. Many external actions are likewise ‘absolutely called for’. Denying this would result in an untenable moral dualism, as we shall see.

A fourth sense of absoluteness refers to the objective existence of norms and moral obligations, both norms regarding the absolute being and obligations which have finite goods as their object. Both kinds of norms and obligations can in this sense be absolute.

A further, fifth, sense of 'absoluteness' that is important for the ethical discussion surrounding the consequentialist teleological position refers to the necessary universality of eternal truths. The empiristically inspired denial of the absolute generality of necessary ethical facts and norms constitutes a major methodological-epistemological reason why many consequentialist ethicists argue that moral norms can at best apply to most cases (*ut in pluribus*), but never to all individual instances of a certain type of action (*ut in omnibus*). Thus, if the existence of absolute in the sense of apodictically certain (*synthetic a priori*) truths about moral reality can be established, a major advance in the refutation of consequentialist teleologism is made.

A sixth sense of 'absolute' which is important for our discussion refers to obligations which are not only objective but which, in addition, cannot ever be suspended or suppressed by higher ones. While, to stay with S. Kierkegaard's example in *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham's higher religious obligation to obey God, to be an instrument of God's will who is Lord over life and death, and to sacrifice everything to him, might have made the killing of the innocent permitted, there are other obligations which are absolute in the sense that they can never be suspended. (Some of the absolute obligations in this sense, such as the obligations forbidding injustice and to abstain from condemning someone innocent to death, could not even be broken by God, while others depend also on the nature of the subject of the moral act, for example man, and would not necessarily have to be 'fulfilled' by an absolute subject of moral perfection.) Absolute duties in this sense are the opposite of *prima facie* duties in Ross's sense that can precisely be suppressed by higher duties. Such absolute duties in the sphere of medical action include never to kill intentionally an innocent human being, regardless of race and sex, whether born or unborn, young or old; never to lie to a patient, never to use human persons as mere objects of experimentation without concern for their good or in harming them, etc. It is clear that the consequentialist teleologism in ethics denies 'absolute duties' of this sort in relation to any finite good and claims that all moral obligations towards finite goods are *prima facie* duties.

One single case of an 'absolute obligation' in the specifically ethical (third) sense towards a finite good, or one single instance of the type of 'absolute' obligations which cannot be suppressed by higher ones, would suffice to disprove purely teleological ethics. While the purely theoretical denial of 'absolute obligations' in these senses is possible, no culture in the world fails to recognize such 'absolute' obligations. Chapter 15 of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* brings this out very beautifully when Sancho Pansa observes that even a gang of wretched thieves and robbers cannot live without some principles of justice that are respected by them as absolute.

Seventh, and finally, there is an 'existential absoluteness' of the moral sphere which forbids to regard it ever as a means towards other ends or as 'negotiable' for higher goods, even moral goods. In other words, the "thou shalt (not)" of the moral imperative is such that even if I could bring about greater moral good in others as consequence of my immoral deed, I would never be permitted to commit it. There lies a certain 'self-containedness' and absoluteness in the moral sphere which forbids me to look 'outside of it' and to 'trade' it in for some other good. The moral evil is something 'absolutely wrong' that I should never do and the morally obligatory act something that is absolutely good in the sense that I absolutely ought to do it. Therefore, the moral subject cannot have himself represented by other moral agents who will act better than he himself would act, if only he commits an immoral action. The moral subject must not leave the position his duty demands him to fill out, even if the moral effect of his violation of a moral duty were to lead to a greater moral good than the one which comes from doing his duty.

The importance of these distinctions for our critical task is obvious because now it is clear that, and in which sense, there are absolute duties towards nonabsolute goods and that it is, above all, in no way an argument against such absolute obligations to point at the non-absolute nature (in the metaphysical sense 1) of the goods to which they refer.

Instead of denying that any act whatsoever that is directed at a finite good could be intrinsically good or evil, Chiodi could reduce this claim to external human actions that intend consequences in the (physical) world outside of the action itself, claiming that such actions could never be intrinsically good or evil. Thus, according to the teleological ethics, notwithstanding the fact that we owe love and respect always and everywhere to any person, committing active euthanasia or condemning the innocent to death may be permitted when the consequences of not killing or not condemning the innocent would include, for example, racial unrest and result in many more deaths than killing one man unjustly. This so-called 'Caiaphas principle' would only refer to the external action.

This version of teleological ethics, too, can be criticized, however, and in various manners:

THE DESCRIBED THESIS OF CONSEQUENTIALIST TELEOLOGISM DENIES THE UNITY OF MAN

First, this thesis denies the unity between the inner man and his external actions.

In a well-known book Ginters presents an analysis of *Ausdruckshandlung* (expressive action) that seems to recognize this fact of the unity between internal attitudes and those external actions that express these inner attitudes and thus must be judged in light of a criterion other than their consequences (success). But, as Spaemann has shown in various articles critical of 'universal teleological' ethics, Ginters seeks then to reduce the value of *Ausdruckshandlung* to the principle of purely teleological ethics according to which the proportionality between good and bad effects of one's actions is the only criterion for determining good actions and discerning them from evil ones. Regardless of whether or not Spaemann's interpretation and critique of Ginters is correct, at any rate the thesis that, while inner acts are intrinsically good or evil, external actions are right and wrong solely in view of their consequences, completely breaks up the deep unity of the person, notably the unity between her inner life (being) and her external *Tat* (action).¹³ It overlooks the central thesis of Karol Wojtyła's book *The Acting Person*, that the person's being manifests itself primarily in her free action so that between the being morally good or evil of the person and her actions we find an inseparable and necessary bond. The organic unity that unites the absolutely required inner attitudes with the sphere of external interpersonal actions is denied if one thinks that the intrinsic goodness of interior acts could exist regardless of any intrinsic goodness or evilness of external actions.

It is impossible to have respect for a person superactually and always, and then, nonetheless, be justified in uttering calumnies and lies about her, or beating her up, or commit partial birth abortion,¹⁴ to use just a few striking examples. Likewise, it is impossible that a doctor respects the dignity and the mystery of human sexuality, but then rape his female patient. This external act is by its nature evil even when its effect may be that, for example by virtue of a tyrannical order and whim of a ruler who orders me to commit these evil deeds, hundreds of lives are saved. Here, the interior attitudes and the external actions are absolutely incompatible with each other.¹⁵

Consequentialist ethics denies the unity of man also in another respect. It creates an intolerable dualism between body and soul, separating the interior life of man from his bodily and embodied actions. The ambiguous term 'dualism' means here not the distinction between soul and body which to hold is perfectly justified by the data, but a divorce between the mental attitudes and the bodily sphere of human existence.¹⁶ Man's lived body is precisely—in the phenomenon of expression, in our feeling of the body from 'within', and in many other ways—organically united with the human spirit. Hence, an attitude of kindness and truthfulness towards the other is absolutely incompatible with telling him actual lies, torturing him, humiliating him, sexually abusing him, etc. (We speak here of an intelligible 'logic of expression' between inner attitudes and outward bodily behavior and do not preclude, of course, that some objective necessity such as a life-saving operation may justify the inflicting of pain on another man by a merciful doctor. Again, the principle of doubleeffect justifies actions of selfdefense by which the aggressor is hurt or killed. Also such actions do not contradict the essence of an interior attitude of love or kindness. These cases, however, are essentially different from those in

which the entire meaning, intention, and nature of the external bodily action radically contradicts the required inner attitudes. This precisely applies to the examples we used, where it is morally and even psychologically impossible that a person with purity of heart rapes a woman or performs pornographic external acts or produces indecent materials, or that a merciful and loving man tortures the innocent in order to obtain important information.) Any view, therefore, which declares the ethical quality of bodily actions to be relative to their consequences only, instead of recognizing their essential relationship to inner attitudes, contradicts the unity of body and soul both in the subjectperson and in the object-person. For there are mean forms of speaking and bodily relating to another person, forms of external actions that violate essentially and necessarily the dignity both of the subjectperson and of the objectperson of moral actions. To this group of actions belong such deeds as unfaithfulness, sexual perversions, torture, and so on.

Finally, purely teleological ethics contradicts also the unity of the moral principle which underlies, on the one hand, morally good but fruitless and, on the other hand, successful moral actions. For, as Kant put it, it is clear that also an action that fails to be successful but was undertaken with full commitment and the activation of all our strength retains its full moral value and “sparkles like a jewel.” It is clear that the success of an action as such cannot add anything to its moral value. But if the effects (consequences) were the sole standard for judging moral qualities of actions, this fact would become totally inexplicable. The moral goodness of the ineffective good action would have to be explained by some purely internal ‘rightness’ of the agent’s response to a morally relevant object and to other factors (the circumstances, and so forth), while only the successful action would be explicable in terms of its consequences. But how can one and the same type of heroic action, whose success is quite uncertain at the beginning, be made dependent on two entirely different ethical principles and foundations? Given the essential sameness of the moral quality of successful and unsuccessful actions, such a dualism in the ethical foundation of external actions is untenable.

The champions and followers of the utilitarianism of ‘purely teleological ethics’ pride themselves with getting away from an ethical legalism and with rediscovering the autonomy and dignity of the person. Their position seems to recognize the concreteness of a person’s situation and of her problems. Seemingly, it gives full weight to each individual’s moral decisions and frees man from being enslaved by some universal standards whose generality of ‘always’ or ‘never’ allegedly forgets the concrete moral subject and the infinite complexity of situations, which permits only moral imperatives valid *ut in pluribus* (in the majority of cases), if morality is to avoid the reproach of being a depersonalizing legalism and ‘ruleworship’.

However, we discover upon closer examination that precisely the thesis that the consequences of actions alone provide the clue for their moral character implies a total depersonalization of morality. A rigorous consequentialist position results in a total overlooking of the factor of motivation and *Gesinnung* which distinguish an action of a Pharisee from that of a saint, also when both actions have exactly identical consequences.¹⁷

Another aspect of the depersonalization of morality through consequentialist teleologism consists in this position’s overlooking many important moments in the objective but personalistic structure of the human action itself. The specifically personal dimension of morality, nay the person herself, is not only overlooked but also actively negated in this ethics. Instead of a new personalistic ethics it is an antipersonalistic ethics. For if the person and her actions become a mere means with respect to consequences, he or she is degraded as person. Such a consequentialism goes directly against the personalistic principle enunciated by Kant (and in *Love and Responsibility* and elsewhere by Karol Wojtyła) that “a person must never be treated solely as a means but always simultaneously as an end in herself.” Any reduction of the moral value of an action (as well as of objectpersons of human actions) to mere functions with respect to results is thus the moral attack on the person—in the name of ethical personalism. This antipersonalism of ethical consequentialism emerges especially when one considers the essential truth about the person formulated by the Platonic Socrates in the *Republic*, the *Gorgias*, and elsewhere, that moral goodness is *the good for the person*, the ‘proper good of the soul’. If, then, the person is reduced in what is the perfection of man and of any person qua person to the function of acts for

consequences, we are confronted with a program of radical antipersonalism and, as Tadeusz Styczeń has shown, of—anonymous—antitheism.

Thus we find, as ultimate consequence of this position, a radical instrumentalization of morality. In spite of all subjective intentions to achieve a new personalism, and the talk of a new personalism in purely teleological ethics, we must speak both of a forgetfulness of the ethical subject (person) and of the specific moral dimension of morality, and of an active attack on the person. To overlook and to degrade both the person as moral agent and the specifically moral dimension of moral acts constitutes perhaps the most fundamental defect of the new consequentialist teleologism in ethics. (The emphasis on a transcendental dimension of morality in the 'fundamental option' cannot remedy this serious flaw, not only because it is inconsistent with the utilitarianconsequentialist part of this position, but also because it banishes the personal motivation and decision into a sphere completely outside that of inner-worldly human actions which are to be explained ethically.) In the calculus of effects to which this position leads, the primary end of the world that lies in moral goodness (and in the glorification of God which solely can be realized through moral values) is forgotten. The specifically moral qualities as such are usually not included in the *Güterabwägung* (calculus of goods and evils in view of their proportionality). This exclusion of moral values themselves from the relativity of finite goods (human moral values are certainly limited) contradicts the thesis that no finite (created) good can command unconditional respect. Moreover, it is usually not primarily because of a respect for the absoluteness of the moral sphere that moral values are not included in the *Güterabwägung*, but rather because almost exclusively morally relevant goods are considered important by this ethics. The properly moral values and disvalues are omitted from the calculus. The free love of the good in accordance with its true value, the heart of morality, cannot even come into sight when the inner invisible intention (the measure of love, for example), which counts ultimately in the determination of an action's moral value, is overlooked and only the consequences are stressed.

To see the error of a moraltheological paradigm that believes that general principles that make actions intrinsically good or bad are signs of rigidity and "narrowness," as Chiodi interprets the "new paradigm," the best method is simply to direct our mental eye on acts that show themselves clearly to be intrinsically evil, always and everywhere. Pope Francis himself gives, in *Laudate et Exsultate*, a large list of such intrinsically evil acts that can never and nowhere be good or permitted. He merely has to draw the logical consequences of his own insights to reject the "new paradigm" Chiodi ascribes to him and to recognize it to be an old and grave ethical error. Let me show this by just recalling a splendid example of intrinsically evil and intrinsically good acts told in the Old Testament in book Daniel. Two impure old men and judges hide in the garden of a rich man and watch impurely his chaste wife, who thinks to be alone, taking a bath in her pool - naked. They approach her lustfully and ask her to commit adultery with them. Can such an act of asking a married woman to commit adultery ever, for any reason whatsoever, be justified? Obviously not. They threaten her to tell her husband and the people a lie if she refuses to accommodate to their evil desire; they will say that they discovered her committing adultery with a young man. Can such a threat of lying in order to force Susanna and confront her with the alternative: either you lose all your good reputation or you sin with us, ever be justified under any possible circumstances? Evidently never! Upon Susanna's refusal in spite of all their evil threats, they do what they had threatened and tell a public lie about Susanna. Can such a vitious lie ever, under any circumstance and in any situation, be justified morally? Is it rigid to believe that this act is intrinsically evil regardless of any, however so complex, situation? Evidently not! The old men calumniate the woman, ruining by their evil lie her good reputation in Israel. Can such a calumny ever, in any situation, be morally permitted? Evidently not! The old evil judges demand death penalty for Susanna for her alleged adultery. Can a demand of death penalty for a person they know to have been innocent, ever be just, under any conceivable and possible circumstance? Evidently never! They abuse their office as judges and break their oath always to judge according to justice and the law. Can such breaking of their holy oath as judges ever be justified, even if it were to avoid unrest, or for any other reason? Evidently never! The people, enticed by the unjust men, blindly rush Susanna to the place of her intended execution, without conducting any careful examination into the truth of the accusations levelled

against a woman of perfect reputation. Can such a careless judgment over life and death of a person ever be just? Evidently never! Can God ever, in the complexity of any situation, want men to commit any of these or countless other intrinsically evil acts: adultery, lies, calumnies, unjust judgments, etc.? Never!

In his magnificent defense of Susanna, the young prophet Daniel, by a simple and yet ingenious method, uncovers the whole viciousness of the two mean men whom two angels punish with death, and gladdens the people by unfolding the glorious splendor of truth about good and intrinsically evil acts before them.

Thus the splendor of truth shows us the error of the “new paradigm”. May God prevent that Pope Francis ever falls into the trap Father Chiodi puts to him! Espousing this “new paradigm” would make the Pope guilty of the most grievous moral heresy! But drawing the logical conclusions of his appeal to holiness and his examples of intrinsically evil acts in *Gaudete et Exsultate* would make him a worthy successor of Paul VI who rejected the false majority report, to whose conclusions he was first inclined, and followed the true minority report, publishing *Humanae Vitae*.

The focal point of the spiritual universe, the glorification of God through the knowing, free, and conscious assent to the good, must never be forgotten but rediscovered and discovered ever more deeply, if a new ethical paradigm and not the destruction of ethics and moral theology by an old error is to be brought about. All effects and consequences of moral actions put together cannot amount to the value and sublimity of the smallest morally good act, which surpasses all nonmoral goods in value and belongs to an entirely new and higher order.

It is the concern for this most central value of any person, human or divine, moral goodness, which has, in its pure positive significance, precedence over all good effects of bad actions, which can never justify committing morally evil acts.

Many authors who fight, in the name and under the semblance of personalism, against the alleged “legalism” of *Veritatis Splendor* in fact abandon a central content of each personalist ethics and of the whole tradition of religious moral teaching. The basic message of *Veritatis Splendor* is neither a legalism nor a sect of ethical absolutes, not even a specifically and exclusively Christian ethics. Rather, the “absoluteness” of the moral calls and the obligatory unconditional rejection of acts that are in themselves evil lives in the heart of morality as such and especially of Christian morality.

And intrinsically evil acts are not compatible with the most fundamental morally good option, the loving affirmation of the absolute good: God. It is a grave error to believe the positive fundamental moral option for goodness, for God, can be preserved, while we commit intrinsically evil acts. How can one understand otherwise the words, through which the absolute God himself reveals Himself as ultimate addressee of any inner-worldly moral actions: “*The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*”

And how else can one understand his words to the evil ones: “*He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'*”¹⁸ What words might reveal more deeply the inner unity between the fundamental option and the specific interpersonal actions, as well as the absolute character of the moral act that is directed to fellow human beings? What words could insist more on the glory of human dignity, and better teach us that to recognize and respect always a person glorifies God? The splendor of truth, and the holiness of God radiate from these words. Perhaps this is the deepest sense of the word of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, the first half of which used to be the motto of the Pontifical Academy for Life but that we will quote here in its entirety: “*Gloria enim Dei, vivens homo; vita autem hominis visio Dei.*” (For the living man is the glorification of God; the life of man, however, is the vision of God). The complete sentence of Saint Irenaeus expresses the truth that not man’s biological life is the highest good (also the devil and damned possess life) but a life rooted in the truth, the Good and in God. This is therefore the Motto of the John Paul II Academy for Human Life and the Family:

"Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita hominis visio Dei" ("The living man a glorification of God: the life of man the vision of God").

1 Lecture delivered in abbreviated form in the first international conference of the John Paul II Academy for Human Life and the Family, entitled “Human Life, the Family and the Splendour of Truth: gifts of God: Humanae Vitae 50 – Veritatis Splendor 25” (Rome, Hotel il Cantico, Via del Cottolengo 50, May 21, 2018). The author is, since 2017, President of Jahlf (John Paul II Academy for Human Life and the Family) Founding Rector of the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein (IAP), (1986-), Full Professor (catedrático) emeritus of the IAP (1986-2009), of the IAP-PUC and of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (2004-2012), and of the IAP-IFES (International Academy of Philosophy – Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein, Granada, Spain: 2012-2017). At present, he is Director of a Dietrich von Hildebrand Institute for Philosophy and Realist Phenomenological Research at the Gustav Siewerth Akademie in Bierbronn, Germany. He is also at present founding Editor of the book series *Realist Phenomenological Philosophy* (2015- present). The first published volume in this series was (Josef Seifert, Stephen D. Schwarz und Wolfram Schrems, Ed.), Balduin Schwarz, *Der Irrtum in der Philosophie*. 2e Aufl., (Unveränderter Neudruck der ersten Aufl., mit einer neuen Einleitung der Herausgeber, drei späteren Aufsätzen von Balduin Schwarz zum Irrtumsproblem und Schriften Nicolai Hartmanns und Josef Seiferts über das Buch von Schwarz). *Realistische Phänomenologische Philosophie*. Philosophische Studien des Dietrich von Hildebrand Lehrstuhls an der Internationalen Akademie für Philosophie – Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein Granada. Hrsg. Josef Seifert. Bd. III. (International Academy of Philosophy Press, Create Dpace/Kindle Independent Publishing, 2015). <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B015GHM40Q>

2 See *Veritatis Splendor*, 53, where any historical and cultural relativism is sharply rejected, while acknowledging the important role of history.

3 This is not to deny that intrinsically evil acts can likewise be committed by cruel, sadistic, and senseless torturing of animals or by willfull destruction of beauty in nature and art.

4 Dec. 14, 2017, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

5 *Humanae Vitae* states this thus:

“Excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means. Neither is it valid to argue, as a justification for sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive, that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one, or that such intercourse would merge with procreative acts of past and future to form a single entity, and so be qualified by exactly the same moral goodness as these. Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser ... evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good,” it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Rom 3. 8) — in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general. Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong” (Paul VI, Encyclical Humanae Vitae, n. 14).

“When the spouses through contraception deprive the exercise of their conjugal sexuality of its potential procreative capacity, they attribute to themselves a power which belongs to God alone: the power to decide in the last instance the coming to existence of a human person. They attribute to themselves the qualification of being not the cooperators of the creative power of God, but the ultimate holders of the source of the human life. From this perspective, contraception is to be objectively judged to such an extent illicit, that it could never, for any reason, be justified. To think or to speak the contrary, equals to hold that in human life there could be given situations in which it would be licit not to recognize God as God” (John Paul II, Address to Participants of a Study Seminar on Responsible Procreation, September 17, 1983).

6 http://www.academyforlife.va/content/dam/pav/documenti%20pdf/2018/01_Hoever_pdf.pdf.

Originally published in German in: *Marriage, Families & Spirituality* Vol. 1 - 2017, 3-18. See my longer discussion of Höver’s position in my Interview <https://onepeterfive.com/interview-josef-seifert-on-his-dismissal-amoris-laetitia-the-fight-for-an-authentic-catholic-life-ethic/>. See likewise Gerhard Höver/Franz Böckle: *Ja zum Menschen : Bausteine einer Konkreten Moral* (München: Kösel, 1993), and [Franz Böckle](#); [Gerhard Höver](#); [Ludger Honnefelder](#), *Der Streit um das Gewissen* (München: Kösel, 1995).

7 See Josef Seifert: “The Splendor of Truth and Intrinsically Immoral Acts I: A Philosophical Defense of the Rejection of Proportionalism and Consequentialism in *Veritatis Splendor*”. *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* UKSW 51 (2015) 2, pp. 27-67; “The Splendor of Truth and Intrinsically Immoral Acts II: A Philosophical Defense of the Rejection of Proportionalism and Consequentialism in *Veritatis Splendor*”. *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* UKSW 51 (2015) 3, pp. 7-37; *Neues moraltheologisches Paradigma oder alter ethischer Irrtum*, (Mainz: Patrimonium Verlag, 2018).

8 The entire second chapter, section 2 of *Veritatis Splendor* (54-64) develops this thesis.

9 VS 80. Denying this truth creates a false Manichean contrast between inner positive fundamental

moral options and outward-directed actions which would not possess any unchanging positive or negative moral significance.

10 In my mentioned previous articles and my new book I try to understand and even dramatize the reasons that seem to speak in favor of proportionalist ethics and its denial of intrinsically evil actions, especially discussing the serious difficulties for an ethics of moral absolutes: that they can make martyrdom obligatory. I try to detect as well the fundamental ethical errors in the thesis that no finite good could ground absolute imperatives in the moral sense of the term.

11 This fact is also admitted by the adherents of the purely teleological ethics in that they assert a 'transcendental sphere of morality' that would not be dependent on consequences. And the moral goodness of an action is declared to be based fundamentally on the presence or absence of the right 'fundamental option', a thesis which flatly contradicts another assertion which many regard as the teleological thesis: that the moral quality of human acts depends solely on their consequences. Yet, prescind from the question of such a contradiction for the moment, and concentrating on the 'fundamental option' as a 'transcendental sphere' behind the domain of external action, we must recognize the following. Ethics would then only encompass praxeology as the theory of external actions which would have to be judged according to their consequences, whereas a separate discipline, a transcendental theory of morals, would analyze those fundamental moral options and attitudes which are good regardless of the question of their consequences. Whatever we may think of this distinction, and of the tenability of divorcing the sphere of external action from that of interior attitudes, the very mention of fundamental moral options proves that the proponents of consequentialist ethics presuppose that attitudes which have the neighbor (a finite good) as object can bear absolute moral value and that there are unconditional obligations with reference to finite goods.

12 Such obligations, however, which demand absolutely and unconditionally that we take the right fundamental inner attitudes towards finite beings and persons, prove that nonabsolute goods in the metaphysical sense can indeed become the object of absolute moral duties.

13 R. Ginters, *Die Ausdruckshandlung. Eine Untersuchung ihrer sittlichen Bedeutsamkeit* (1976). Ginters maintains that the *Wirkungshandlung* (effectdirected action) participates in the moral quality and "obligatory character of the inner position (response)." See also R. Spaemann, "Über die Unmöglichkeit einer rein teleologischen Begründung der Ethik", in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 88. Jg. I. Halbband (1981), S. 70-89, pp. 87-88.

14 The horrible form of abortion/infanticide (legally permitted in the US through President Clinton's Veto against the two third Congressional vote against permitting it), in which the crane of the partially born baby, brought before into a breach-position, is crushed before the head emerges from the womb in the birth process.

15 Hence, the version of ethical consequentialism and 'teleologism' under consideration leads at this point to a total divorce between the inner man and his outer action—a divorce which contradicts the essence of the person and which 'depersonalizes' as it were external human actions.

See also Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Morality and Situation Ethics*. With a Preface of Bernhard Häring and an Epilogue by Alice von Hildebrand. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press 1966).

16 See the far more detailed criticism of this view in Josef Seifert, *Leib und Seele. Ein Beitrag zur philosophischen Anthropologie* (Salzburg: A. Pustet, 1973); *Das Leib-Seele Problem und die gegenwärtige philosophische Diskussion. Eine kritisch-systematische Analyse* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 21989); *What is Life? On the Originality, Irreducibility and Value of Life*. Value Inquiry Book Series (VIBS), ed. by Robert Ginsberg, vol 51/Central European Value Studies (CEVS), ed. by H.G. Callaway (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997).

17 Kierkegaard in his critique of Hegel's „worldhistorical ethics," Kant in his critique of utilitarianism, and Plato in *Republic II* (in his interpretation of the story of the ring of Gyges and in his comparison of the best life with the worst consequences and of the worst one with the best consequences) bring out forcefully the untenability of ethical consequentialism which makes the moral value of an act dependent on effects which are external to its essence and its personal relationship to its object and end. See Tadeusz Styczeł's contribution to the volume, Mariano Crespo (ed.), *Menschenwürde: Metaphysik und Ethik* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998).

18 *Math.* 45:40.