

he counsel simple conformity. Instead he offers a practical religious remedy which may point the way for us in a contemporary world where the prevailing question is often: Since practices shape us as persons, into which practices shall we place our bodies, our minds, our selves?

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## MORAL THEOLOGY

### VERITATIS SPLENDOR AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL THEOLOGY

Presenter: John P. Boyle, University of Iowa  
 Respondents: Anne E. Patrick, Carleton College  
 Mary A. Elsbernd, Loyola University Chicago

John Boyle raised a number of hermeneutical questions elicited by *Veritatis Splendor*. Given the variety of literary types (homiletic, discursive, devotional) and sources (Scripture, tradition, conciliar documents) employed in the document, how ought their moral implications (and the magisterial authority of these implications) be understood? Should the fact that the encyclical formally addresses only bishops and not "all men and women of good will" impact one's interpretation of the text? Is the interpretation changed if one reads *Veritatis Splendor* as a papal *cri de coeur* against moral secularism and relativism in the contemporary world?

Boyle also presented several critical questions on the content of *Veritatis Splendor*. Does the text move too quickly from the Christ of the New Testament to concrete moral directives for the contemporary world? Does the encyclical present—from a Thomistic standpoint—a correct notion of "conscience"? Are the explanations of "fundamental option" and "proportionality" accurate? Are the references to moral law and moral virtue properly conjoined? Does the encyclical effectively reduce the moral theologian's "critical function" in the Church?

Anne Patrick likewise noted the "mixed genres" in *Veritatis Splendor* and the hermeneutical problem this raises for moral theology. She thought *cri de coeur* an apt way of understanding the text, adding that concern over sexual

morality is a major, though unstated, basis for the pope's anxiety. Patrick affirmed the pope's call to exercise freedom within limits, observing that this has helped her (in parish settings) introduce such topics as gun control. Finally, she warned against fighting subjectivism with an equally misguided authoritarianism.

Mary Elsbernd gave several examples of how *Veritatis Splendor* misuses citations from *Gaudium et Spes* to support points inconsistent with the latter document. For example, *Veritatis Splendor* presents a relatively dualistic and individualistic anthropology, supporting it with truncated or inaccurate quotations from *Gaudium et Spes*. A similar move occurs in the encyclical's use of the latter text to emphasize a morality of law and precept. For Elsbernd, close intertextual study shows that *Veritatis Splendor*, though using conciliar documents, moves away from their spirit.

Subsequent discussion ranged from claims that the encyclical inappropriately condemns all developments in moral theology since Vatican II to claims that it rightly reiterates a moral tradition which is a pastoral necessity today. Specific points were also raised concerning the text's interreligious insensitivity and the lack of nuance in its "call to perfection" drawn from the parable of the rich young man.

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## NORTH AMERICAN THEOLOGY

### DOING CHRISTOLOGY IN A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT

Presenters: J. J. Mueller, St. Louis University  
Terrence W. Tilley, Florida State University

The North American Theology group addresses the issues of theological inculturation by attempting to come to terms with the dominant culture in the United States through dialogue both with the classical North American religious philosophy and issues and problems of importance in contemporary North American culture.