

**Catholic Education, Catholic Identity, and  
Education for Citizenship:  
A Selective Inquiry Based on  
Catholic Moral Teaching**  
天主教教育、天主教身份和公民教育：  
天主教倫理教導的選擇性探索

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[ABSTRACT] This article explores two documents from the Catholic moral tradition: Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (RN) (On Capital and Labor) (1891) and John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (VS) (The Splendor of Truth) (1993). It focuses on how their teachings can guide Catholic educators, especially those working in Catholic schools, in thinking about Catholic identity and education for Catholic identity in relation to education for citizenship. The final section offers some basic guidelines and suggestions for nurturing a sense of socio-moral responsibility / citizenship in Catholic schools today.

## Introduction

How can we educate students in Catholic schools for responsible involvement in society? Louis Ha has referred to this question as a "double worry."<sup>1</sup> First, it raises concerns about "Catholic identity," that is, about how a sense of Catholic identity can inform efforts in Catholic schools to educate for socio-moral responsibility. Second, the question draws attention to the importance of "citizenship education" in Catholic schools, that is, the role of Catholic schools to help prepare their students to be responsibly involved citizens who contribute to the common good of society. The question can also be viewed as the primary question to address in teaching Catholic social ethics. It asks us to consider how we can teach an ethical outlook grounded in Catholic Christian faith and relate this outlook to prevailing social norms and values. As such, the question concerns the intersection, overlap, and possible conflict between a Catholic Christian ethic and the dominant views of society. In this article I explore two papal documents, Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (RN) (On Capital and Labor) (1891) and John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (VS) (The Splendor of Truth) (1993), as resources that can guide us in thinking about how Catholic schools can be grounded in a sense of Catholic identity while also preparing students to be responsible members of society. In the concluding section I focus on teaching Catholic social ethics in Catholic schools in our contemporary postmodern era.

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<sup>1</sup> Ha Kelson Louis, "Strategy of Teaching Catholic Social Ethics in Hong Kong Primary Schools," article presented at the *International Conference on Teaching Catholic Social Ethics and Civic Education*, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, March 17-19, 2017).

## ***Rerum Novarum*: Engagement, Critique, and the Betterment of the World**

When Gioacchino Cardinal Pecci became Pope Leo XIII in 1878 few people expected him to be an influential pontiff. Leo's predecessor, Pius IX, was afraid to leave the Vatican because of hostility directed toward him by people throughout the increasingly liberal European states, and during his long pontificate (1846-78) he became more and more distant from most of the people of the Church and the larger world. After Pius IX's death, many thought that his successor would also be bound by a severely limited ability to engage the world beyond Vatican City. However, Leo XIII steered a new course for the Church. He led the Church once more into active engagement with the social concerns of the day by using the distance that had developed between the Church and the broader social world to offer a critically reflective and even prophetic critique of the excesses of industrial capitalism. In doing so he became a champion of the rights and dignity of the human person, and reconnected the Church with the concerns of the lay Catholic faithful throughout the world. Leo XIII's vision of how the Church can relate to the broader world was expressed most fully in his encyclical RN, the foundational document of Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>2</sup>

“The condition of the working classes is the pressing question of the hour” addressed by the encyclical (n. 60, see also n. 2). More fully, RN identified a number of social ills affecting the working

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<sup>2</sup> See Katherine Burton, *Leo XIII: The First Modern Pope* (New York: D. McKay, 1962), and Edward T. Gargon, *Leo XIII and the Modern World* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961). In the analysis that follows I have been guided by Burton's and Gargon's analyses. However, in striving to present a balanced and accurate understanding of RN's social outlook I have also heeded the cautionary remarks of Michael Walsh. He argues, essentially, that we end up with a distorted and false understanding of RN if we fail to appreciate the ways in which RN is based on a late medieval and not a modern outlook on life. See Michael Walsh, “The Myth of *Rerum Novarum*,” *New Blackfriars* 83 (2012): 155-162.

class, including a decline in public morality (n. 1), the exploitation of workers by greedy employers, and the gap between the wealthy few and the many impoverished workers of the world and their families (n. 3). Leo XIII also expressed concerns about a lack of social institutions that could advocate for the rights of workers and public authorities who were failing to protect the rights of the poor (n. 3 and n. 14).

Underlying the pressing question of the working classes was another issue, an issue hinted at by the Latin title of the encyclical, which means "revolutionary changes." Great changes had taken place in the world during the century that was ending at that time, including changes due to the Industrial Revolution, new scientific discoveries, the expansion of railroads, changes in the distribution of the population throughout the world, and the emergence of a global economy. Yet, few changes had taken place in the Church during that century. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Vatican in particular, had become isolated from the rest of the world. Leo XIII signaled at the beginning of RN that he sought to lead the Church beyond this isolation by showing how it could respond to the revolutionary changes taking place during this era.

To address the problem of the isolation of the Roman Catholic Church from the world, RN offered, essentially, a *two-pronged educational approach*, that is based on *two key concepts* and an underlying *sense of the distinctive contribution of Christians and the Church to discussions of socio-moral issues*.

RN approached the issue of education for socio-moral responsibility by proposing that the Church can help the broader world address pressing social questions, beginning with the concerns of the working classes, through both the teachings of the universal Church and the educational efforts of Christian societies and

associations. On the one hand, RN suggested that there is an essential role for the universal Church to play in addressing social issues, stating that: “We affirm without hesitation that all the striving of [people] will be vain if they leave out the Church” (n. 16, see also n. 19). According to Leo XIII, through its teaching the universal Church can encourage the development of “moral qualities” or “virtues” (n. 24), affirm and support the essential function of the state to “serve the common good” (n. 32), and affirm the family as foundational for society (n. 36). Overall, “the Church does her utmost to teach and to train men [and women], and to educate them.” (n. 26). The universal Church has a morally enriching perspective to share because, unlike secular society, it does not “exclude the idea of futurity” – in other words, the Church has a broadly inclusive perspective that looks to the future of this life and the next (n. 21). As such, the Church can more readily recognize what from a religious perspective is in accord with “the commandments of God” and what from a moral perspective is objectively right and good (n. 26).

On the other hand, RN suggested that religious associations (that is, “confraternities, societies, and religious orders which have arisen by the Church’s authority and the piety of Christian” people [n. 53]) play an important role in educating for social responsibility. They provide an alternative to private associations not based on sound principles (n. 54). The “most important” of these religious associations are “workingmen’s unions” (n. 49). However, in discussing “workingmen’s unions” Leo XIII did not reference modern labor unions; which were first founded in the 1790s, gained international recognition by the 1880’s, and were well established at the time RN was written. Instead, he referred to medieval workingmen’s guilds (ns. 3 and 49). Labor unions seek to protect the common interests of groups of workers in society. Religious associations, like the medieval workingmen’s guilds, have both a

more secure foundation and broader vision. They are based on shared religious convictions (not just common interests), and strive to contribute to the common good of society (which goes beyond the more limited concern of labor union to secure social protections for workers). Overall, religious associations as envisioned in RN are private associations for discussing and seeking "social betterment" in the light of Christian faith (n. 57). For people who have been worn down by inhuman labor conditions, such organizations can provide an "incalculable service" by being a "haven where they may securely find repose" (n. 61). That is, religious organizations can be shelters or places of safety that address the material needs of people, but also go beyond this to nurture a shared religious vision of life that kindles hope in the future and a commitment to seeking greater justice in society as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, RN suggested that local Catholic organizations and the universal Church should work in tandem to address pressing social ills. For instance, while local Catholic associations address the plight of specific poor people and model the importance of caring for the poor (n. 29), the universal Church can argue in public forums of discourse that the rights of "the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration" (n. 37).

At the heart of RN's two-pronged approach to Christian moral education for social responsibility are two key concepts: *reason* and *right reason*. Drawing insight from the work of Thomas Aquinas, Leo XIII claimed that reason is the "predominate element" in

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<sup>3</sup> In striving to understand how Leo XIII thought about religious associations it is helpful to note that during his years of ministry before being elected pope, he was involved and sometimes took a leadership role in Christian associations that founded hospitals, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and even banks. These associations were committed to addressing specific social needs based on the Christian beliefs of their members. Although not mentioned in RN, the St. Vincent DePaul Society (founded in 1833) and the Knights of Columbus (founded in 1882) are two prominent private Christian associations that have sought to address social issues in the public realm. In 1895 Leo XIII bestowed an apostolic blessing on the Knights of Columbus in recognition of the organization's work as a private religious association.

“human creatures” that distinguishes us “from the brute” (n. 6). Moreover, reason enables us to link “the future with the present” so that we can be masters of our own actions, and strive to act in accord with “the eternal law and the power of God” (n. 7). Through reason we can recognize our duties to self, others, and God in this life and imagine the life to come after death. Essentially, reason enables human beings to recognize and then act in accord with “right reason” or the natural law, that is, the structure or order that is a natural and essential part of the world. (see ns. 32 and 52, and footnote 38). For instance, Leo suggested that when we as human beings think/reason about the family, we can recognize that a family is a small society that is “older than any State” (n. 12) and that has “rights and duties which are prior to those of the community” (n. 13). Right reasoning also enables states to recognize and act in accord with the common good of society (n. 32).

One of the problems of the times, according to Leo XIII, is that there were groups and individuals who, rather than directing persons to reason and right reason, appealed to the human tendency to give in to narrow self-interests and other immoral qualities. Specifically, “there are not a few who are imbued with evil principles and eager for revolutionary change, whose main purpose is to stir up disorder and incite their fellows to acts of violence” (38). There are also private societies and associations that “are in the hands of secret leaders, and are managed on principles ill” (n. 54).

Religious associations are essential to the Church’s strategy for educating for social responsibility as presented in RN because they counter groups and individuals who appeal to immoral qualities and ill principles. Because of the influence of such groups and individuals the socio-moral teaching of the Church may fall on deaf ears or not to be recognized and heeded. However, religious associations provide a

haven where reason and a search for what is in accord with right reason can prevail against all effort to encourage distorted understandings of personal and social life. In fact, "every nation can witness to what religious associations have accomplished for the human race." Hence, "it is the duty of the State to respect and cherish them" (n. 53). In addressing the conditions of the working class, Leo XIII contended that Catholic religious organizations have and can continue "to better the condition of the working class by rightful means," that is, means that are in accord with right reason (n. 55).

According to Leo XIII, the insights of Christian associations are due to more, however, than their ability to be forums where right reason can prevail. Christian associations can make a distinctive contribution to discussions of moral and socio-moral issues because of their unique nature as private societies. More fully, "private societies" stand in contrast to the "larger society," or society as whole. The larger society is "civil society" or "public society" and is oriented to the common good of all its members. In contrast, private associations, including Christian societies, are oriented to the "private advantages of associates" (n. 51). Yet, Christian organizations as private societies, as indicated earlier, go beyond many other such societies in that their distinctive outlook is not limited by a concern for the advantages of members. Rather, Christian associations have a "share in the work of the gospel," that is, the work of preaching the good news of Christian faith within the world. As such, they provide forums for looking at moral and social issues from the broader and more insightful perspective of Christian faith, and viewing all people in the light of the Christian call to love others (n. 55). Hence, Christian associations are private societies, but their work has public significance. They make a distinctive contribution to public discourse because the broad and inclusive perspective they bring to issues, based as it is on an



expansive religious view of the world, can extend, deepen, and enrich right reason.

Leo XIII concluded RN with a reflection on the universal Church. He contended that the Church, as a whole, and “every minister of holy religion,” in particular, ought to seek “to secure the good of the people” and arouse “charity” as an “antidote against worldly pride and immoderate love of self” (n. 63). Essentially, Leo XIII called all Christians to recognize and embrace the public dimensions of Christian faith so that they can address the ills of their society. He also suggested that the universal Church, in a way that is parallel to the work of local, Christian associations, can draw insights from its religious outlook on life to make a distinctive contribution to public moral discourse, and in the process affirming yet also deepening social understandings of what is and is not in accord with right reason and the common good of society.

At that time, the primary venue for Christian moral education was the Sacrament of Confession (now known as Reconciliation), and the discipline of moral theology was concerned primarily with training priests to be confessors. To incorporate the insights of RN, the Church had to move beyond an exclusive focus on teaching people to avoid personally immoral actions, and to begin to nurture Christian virtues and a sense of Christian socio-moral responsibility. From the time of RN to the present Catholic educators have sought to show Catholics how they can engage others within and beyond the Church in dialogue about pressing socio-moral issues, and how they can analyze social issues from the expansive perspective provided by Christian faith in order to contribute to the betterment of human life.

Additionally, a renewal in Catholic education was underway at the time RN was released. This renewal was sparked by Leo XIII’s 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (AE) (Of the Eternal Father). The

encyclical offers a Christian philosophy for Catholic schools premised on the idea that the development of a capacity for right reasoning provides a foundation for authentic learning, and that education in Christian faith should include an exploration of how faith can aid and even expand right reasoning. Based on AE, the renewed social outlook and educational approach of RN, and subsequent statements on Catholic education (most notably Pius XI's 1929 *Divini Illius Magistri* [Christian Education of Youth] and the Second Vatican Council's 1964 *Gravissimum Educationis* [Declaration on Christian Education]), Catholic schools have become and remained central to the educational ministry of the Church, and have focused on both offering an education in Christian values and virtues and educating students to be citizens who can address social issues from a Christian moral outlook. Hence, from the dawn of the twentieth century to the present, Catholic schools have embraced a dual commitment to nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and educating Catholics to be responsible citizens in the societies in which they live.

### ***Veritatis Splendor: Freedom, Truth, and the Grace of God***

In 1978, almost a hundred years after Leo XIII opened the doors of the Church to the world, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla became Pope John Paul II. His election as pope was thirteen years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, at which the Church fully embraced dialogue with the world. On the eighth ballot of the 1978 conclave, the conclave turned to Wojtyla from Poland. As they considered him it became clear that the 58-year old Cardinal, who had been well-known and well-respected since his participation in Vatican II, had the energy and determination to provide the

leadership the Church needed at that time, and he received 103 of the 109 votes cast.<sup>4</sup>

Through his pastoral guidance, outreach to the world (visiting 129 countries during his pontificate), and consistent focus on the world-transforming nature of Christian faith, John Paul II shaped every facet of the Church's life. In terms of the social teachings of the Church, he clarified the central teachings and expanded their scope. Additionally, he sought to provide a new articulation of the foundations of the Church's teaching on morality and Christian moral education, including Christian education for social responsibility. The fullest expression of this new articulation is found in *Veritatis Splendor* (VS).

The specific problem addressed by VS is “an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine” that is due to the influence of certain contemporary “currents of thought.” This problem is found, on the one hand, in the field of moral theology. That is, within theological debates “certain interpretations of Christian morality” have been advanced that “are not consistent with ‘sound teaching’ (2 Tim 4:3),” and that are ultimately “incompatible with revealed truth” (n. 29). On the other hand, this problem is a pastoral issue, which John Paul suggested has plagued the Church since its early days. However, he contended that the temptation to give into self-centered and immoral currents of popular thought had reached a point of crisis in the Church and society at that time (n. 30).

Questions have been raised about the extent to which John Paul II in VS described accurately and evaluated fairly interpretations of

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<sup>4</sup> See George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper, 1999, 2001).

Christian morality presented in contemporary moral theology.<sup>5</sup> However, because the focus of this article is Christian education for socio-moral responsibility and not moral theology, I will not address this issue. Rather, I will focus on examining the pastoral problem explored in the encyclical.

As already noted, John Paul II's underlying concern in VS was to safeguard sound moral teaching. To show how the Church's pastors can teach people to recognize and reject currents of contemporary thought that lead them away from a commitment to living in accord with objective moral truth, VS offered an *educational approach that is grounded in an understanding of God as Teacher and the teaching ministry of the episcopacy*. This approach is based on *two key concepts* and a call to develop a deep sense of the need to ground all human thought and action in an *openness to the grace of God*.

VS's approach to moral education is based on the premise that "revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to [humanity], but to God alone" (n. 35, see also n. 99). Hence, John Paul II suggested that God is the first and ultimate moral educator. From a Christological perspective, "Christ is the Teacher" and people should turn to Christ for answers about "what is good and what is evil" (n. 8). From a Trinitarian perspective, God inscribes in the hearts of all people the natural law to guide them in determining what morally must be done and what must be avoided. Jesus affirms the natural moral law, and as the

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<sup>5</sup> See James Gaffney, "The Pope on Proportionalism," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael Allsopp and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 60-71; Charles E. Curran, "Veritatis Splendor: A Revisionist Perspective," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael Allsopp and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 233-242; and Josef Fuchs, "Good Acts and Good Persons." *The Tablet* 247 (1993): 1444-1445.

“new Moses” rearticulates the “commandments of the Decalogue” and the moral principles by which human beings are called to live (n. 12). Then, persons and communities who are open to the saving grace of Jesus can be guided by the Spirit (n. 21).

John Paul II contended that “Jesus Christ primarily entrusted the ministry of teaching” to bishops, and that the pope and bishops as the ecclesial magisterium have a duty to safeguard sound moral teaching, that is, the moral teaching of the Church based on Scripture and the living apostolic tradition (n. 5). VS contended that the moral competence of the Church and its ecclesial magisterium is exercised not just in teaching the people of the Church, but teaching all people since the possibility for “authentic moral growth” can be realized only when people, whatever their background and beliefs are, live in accord with the “universal moral norms” taught by the Church (n. 96). Additionally, “the Church finds its support – the ‘secret’ of its educative power – not so much in doctrinal statements and pastoral appeals to vigilance, as in constantly looking to the Lord Jesus” (n. 85).

As teachers of morality, the bishops of the Church, according to VS, have two tasks: to “warn the faithful about the errors and dangers of certain ethical theories” and to “show the inviting splendor of truth which is Jesus Christ himself” (n. 83). In carrying out these tasks, the bishops are called by God to present “a clear and forceful presentation of moral truth” with “profound and heartfelt respect” and love for all people (n. 95). Ultimately, the bishops are called to help people form their consciences so that they can recognize and live in obedience to moral truth, rather than giving into the attraction of false values (see ns. 54, 58, and 60).

At the heart of VS’s approach to Christian moral education are two key concepts: *freedom* and *truth*. Both concepts were central to the writings of Karol Wojtyla and Pope John Paul II. According to

VS, because morality concerns the voluntary or free pursuit of what is known through reason as being morally good, freedom is central to morality and "there is no morality without freedom" (ns. 71 and 34, quote from n. 34). To understand the true nature of human freedom, we must, John Paul II argued, recognize that freedom is dependent on truth. Essentially, John Paul II pointed out that when our voluntary acts are in accord with our true nature as human beings and with the order of objective moral values in the world, our actions are free acts that enhance and further develop our freedom to act in relation to others and the world. In contrast, when our voluntary actions are not in accord with truth (acts such as lying, cheating, and adultery, for instance) our lives and relationships are inevitably diminished rather than enhanced. Moreover, VS pointed out that some acts are intrinsically evil, that is, they can never be in accord with truth and can never enhance human freedom because they violate "the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person" (n. 97, see also ns. 79-83 and 96). Such acts include "homicide, genocide, abortion" and other acts that are hostile to life, violate the integrity or dignity of the human person, or "coerce the spirit" (n. 80).<sup>6</sup>

VS also discussed freedom as a gift that must be "received like a seed and cultivated responsibility" (n. 86). We begin to cultivate the seed of freedom by loving God and neighbor and keeping the commandments (n. 13). Then, to move toward mature freedom we must be willing to follow God and be led by the truth to grow morally (n. 17). Hence, in our lives we are called to journey toward truth and freedom, and toward greater union with God (ns. 13, 15, 27, ad 42). Ultimately, Christians have a vocation to freedom, that is,

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II offered an expansive, and arguably an overly expansive, understanding of what should be regarded as being intrinsically evil. For a helpful discussion of this issue see James T. Bretzke, "Debating Intrinsic Evil: Navigation between Shibboleth and Gauntlet" in *Horizons* 41/1 (2014): 116-129.

we are called to live in obedience to divine law and in doing so to strive to achieve “true personal freedom” (ns. 17 and 83, quote from n. 83).

VS added that freedom has a “tragic aspect” because we are tempted to betray our “openness to the True and Good,” that is, to no longer ground our freedom in a commitment to truth (n. 86). VS suggested that in our contemporary era people have given in to this temptation to such a great extent that we are now experiencing a “genuine crisis,” a crisis of freedom and truth (n. 5). In some cases, this crisis involves the “exalting of freedom,” that is, making subjective moral judgement and voluntary action the absolute norm or value. In these instances, we see clearly a loss of “the sense of the transcendent,” a sense that our moral judgments must be anchored in a commitment to seeking what is objectively true and good. In other cases, denying the existence of transcendent truth and goodness has led to a denial of “the very reality of human freedom.” Those who deny human freedom hold, essentially, that there are no transcendent truths and values to guide human action and that human life is conditioned, even determined, by social and contextual factors beyond human control (n. 32). To address distorted understandings of human freedom, VS proposed that bishops should assess the moral situation of the world and present anew the splendor and beauty of truth and Jesus as the Truth, and to call people to once again anchor their use of human freedom in a commitment to truth.

VS suggested that moral education can be envisioned as involving efforts to help people embrace “freedom of conscience” as “freedom ‘in’ the truth.” In this sense, “the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess, developing them from the starting point of the primordial act of

faith" (n. 64). Stated differently, as human beings we have intertwining senses of faith and morality. These aspects of our personhood beckon us to raise questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives, and to seek what is morally good in society and to seek God. VS called the bishops as moral educators to encourage the development and strengthening of conscience so that Christians are able (or better able) to distinguish between the appeal of what is truly good and the appeal of false options that diminish rather than enhance our freedom.

VS also proposed that the bishops are to seek "the renewal of social and political life" (ns. 98-101). VS suggested that this involves challenging "ways of looking at" humanity, "society and the world" that are not grounded in a true understanding of the "moral sense" and the "religious sense" present within each human person (n. 98). It also entails making way for the "authentic freedom of the person" by working against the various forms of totalitarianism found in the world. These are based on a denial of both transcendent truth and "the transcendent dignity of the human person." Within these forms of totalitarianism the "force of power takes over" in the absence of a sense of objective morality to guide social life, with a resulting failure to respect fundamental human rights (n. 99). John Paul II also called the bishops to address "an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism, which would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible" (n. 101).

To understand VS we must also recognize that in it John Paul II claimed that all human striving, including morality, must be grounded in an openness to the grace of God. As John Paul II pointed out, "To imitate and live out the love of Christ is not possible for [the human person] by [his/her] own strength alone." We must rely on the



guiding grace of the Spirit (n. 22). On a personal level, the importance of being receptive to God's grace as a moral guide is illustrated by the problem of an erring conscience that is due to invincible ignorance. As VS explained, invincible ignorance is "an ignorance of which the subject is not aware" and "is unable to overcome by" him/herself (n. 62). Essentially, John Paul II drew attention to the fact that we are affected by the limitations of human finitude and sin, and we need to turn to God to help us overcome these limitations. On a social level, John Paul II noted that striving to be a consistent witness to moral truth in everyday life, "even in the most ordinary circumstances," can be difficult, and we require the grace of God, prayer, and sometimes even heroic moral commitments to make our way in the world (n. 94). Sometimes, VS noted, in witnessing to the truth Christians are called to martyrdom (n. 76).

The significance of VS for religious education for socio-moral responsibility and civic engagement can be seen more clearly if we first look back to Leo XIII and RN. While RN utilized Thomistic understandings of reason and right reason, it incorporates into Catholic social thought modern foci on human rights and individuality (that is, on the nature of each person as a distinctive and unique subject who stands apart from society).<sup>7</sup> While these foci have provided a starting point for the Church to engage the broader world, an emphasis on individuality has also led in some cases to loss of moral insight, and this loss was highlighted by VS.

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<sup>7</sup> Ernest L. Fortin shows clearly how RN incorporates a modern understanding of human rights into a medieval, Thomistic outlook on life. However, Fortin fails to appreciate the larger purpose of RN when he claims that it seeks to reclaim a premodern social outlook. RN shows how the Church can *begin* (not end) with a premodern outlook, and then move forward from there to engage the world while at the same time *retaining* a distinctive socio-moral stance that remains in continuity with the established traditions of the Church. See Ernest L. Fortin, "'Sacred and Inviolable': *Rerum Novarum* and Natural Rights," in *Theological Studies* 53:2 (1992): 203-233.

VS offered, essentially, a corrective approach to education for Christian personal and social moral responsibility. While it affirmed the importance of human rights (see for example, ns. 13, 27, 31, 51, 84, and 96), it showed how the Church, in its desire to move beyond isolation to engagement beginning with RN, failed to consider adequately how it could distinguish between the positive and negative, life-giving and death-dealing, aspects of contemporary culture. VS called bishops as moral educators to strive to show how moral outlooks distorted by a morally relativistic and overly individualistic focus often lead not to self-fulfillment and human flourishing, but to self-frustration and the disintegration of the moral fabric of society. VS also sought to correct distorted understandings of freedom as freedom of personal choice that have led to a forgetfulness of God, and that have directed people away from the guidance provided by the moral wisdom of Christian communities and faith traditions. At the same time, VS outlined how a commitment to seeking what is objectively true and good can enable people to distinguish moral error from moral truth, and then mature morally and spiritually. It also explored how society can be renewed through a renewal of morality.

The temptation to turn to overly subjective and relativistic understandings of morality is, arguably, even greater today than it was in the mid-1990s. For many of those who recognize the dangers of this temptation, VS is regarded as being a valuable resource for understanding the ways moral outlooks have become distorted, and then renewing our sense of morality. Hence, VS has had a significant influence on ways of looking at moral issues and moral education within and beyond the Church. One commentator has even claimed that "it may well turn out to be one of the most important

papal texts in modern history.”<sup>8</sup> For Catholic educators working in Catholic schools, VS is, arguably, a call to ground efforts to nurture senses of Catholic identity and Christian moral responsibility in a relationship with God and an understanding of the Church’s moral teaching. At the same time, Catholic school educators should take to heart VS’s teaching that we should be attentive to overly subjective and other distorted understandings of human freedom, and strive to help people to recognize how personal and social morality should be anchored in a commitment to seeking what is objectively right and good as a necessary foundation for moral choices that can lead to authentic human flourishing.

## **VS: A Critical Perspective**

While VS has been an important resource for Christian moral education, it also has some significant limitations. Most notably, while VS sought to show how the bishops can foster dialogue about “the renewal of social and political life” (ns. 98-101), it has had only limited success in this regard because it presented a non-dialogical stance on multiple levels. First, while VS did discuss the role of the Church to teach all people, the Church’s teaching was presented as being unidirectional, not dialogical: the ecclesial magisterium takes a stance against what it sees as the moral corruptions of contemporary culture and announces and, hence it is presumed, teaches moral truth.<sup>9</sup> Because VS failed to recognize the sincere attempts by people

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Gregg, “*Veritatis Splendor*: The Encyclical that Mattered,” in *Crisis Magazine*, April 16, 2013, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2013/veritatis-splendor-the-encyclical-that-mattered>. See also George Pell, “Human Dignity, Human Rights and Moral Responsibility,” in *Catholic Moral Teaching in the Pontificate of John Paul II*, ed. Kevin T. McMahon (Wynnewood, PA: Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, 2004), 1-18.

<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that VS is dialogical in that 1) VS’s chapter 1 reflection on Jesus’ dialogue with the rich young man (Matthew 19) attempts to draw people into dialogue

within contemporary culture to be guided by a sense of transcendent truth and value, many people have been unable to hear and appreciate its message. Many of those who have encountered it, have perceived it to be an attempt by the ecclesial magisterium not to teach and guide, but to impose its views on the world.<sup>10</sup>

Second, VS envisioned relations within the Church in non-dialogical ways. The pope and bishops (that is, the ecclesial magisterium) were regarded as being the primary moral teachers and as having privileged moral insight. VS even posited that the voice of the ecclesial magisterium contains "the voice of Jesus Christ, the voice of the truth about good and evil" (n. 117). From this privileged position, VS contended, the ecclesial magisterium discerns which moral options are in accord with truth. It then has the responsibility to "announce and teach authentically," "declare and confirm the principles of the moral order," and "pronounce on moral questions" (n. 64). VS left no room for the people of the Church to participate in the moral discernment of the Church. It did not acknowledge that each person is a unique manifestation of the image of God who can make a distinctive contribution to efforts to discern and act in accord with what is morally good and true. VS also failed to acknowledge the commitment that developed within the Church during the

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about fundamental moral questions, and that this sets the stage for the discussion in the following chapters, and 2) VS builds upon the Vatican II posture of dialogical engagement with the world, especially as presented in *Gaudium et Spes*. However, for a discussion of the structure of VS to support the claim that VS does not offer a substantive discussion of the importance of dialogue about fundamental moral questions, see Edward R. Sunshine, "Veritatis Splendor et Rhetorica Morum: The Splendor of Truth and the Rhetoric of Morality," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael Allsopp and John J. O'Keefe, (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 157-176. For an argument refuting the claim that VS stands in continuity with the dialogical posture of Vatican II see Mary Elsbernd, "The Reinterpretation of *Gaudium et Spes* in *Veritatis Splendor*," *Horizons* 29 (2002): 225-239.

<sup>10</sup> See Richard A. McCormick, "Some Early Reactions to *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 581-506. McCormick provides an excellent summary of both positive and negative reactions to VS.

hundred years before it was issued, to respect the moral discernment and decision-making of local Christian communities around the world. (In addition to RN see for example Paul VI's *Octogesimo Adveniens* [The Eightieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*] n. 4). Hence, VS backed away from the commitment to dialogue about moral issues within and beyond the Church that has been a hallmark of the Church's approach to addressing socio-moral issues since RN. In doing so it moved the Church back towards the isolation from the world that plagued it in the latter half of the nineteenth century and hindered its mission to preach the gospel.

VS's failures to acknowledge the sincere efforts of lay men and women to lead good moral lives and to respect the moral responsibilities of local Christian communities, have been seen as signs of distrust that have led some people of faith to distance themselves from the institutional Catholic Church. VS's assertion that the voice of the ecclesial magisterium contains the voice of Christ (essentially equating the ecclesial magisterium with Christ) has also been seen by many to reveal a lack of critical self-awareness within the leadership of the Church that could lead (and, in fact, too often has led) to abuses of power and failures to address misdeeds and mishandling of issues by members of the episcopacy (such as in the current crises of sexual abuse within the Church).

Overall, among those who have a heightened sensitivity to the moral complexities of our times and the overly subjective and distorted understandings of morality found in our contemporary era, VS is often seen as a clarion call to reassert a commitment to seeking what is objectively true and good. Yet, for those who begin socio-moral reflection with a commitment to dialogue, based on respect for all persons as made in God's image, VS tends to be regarded as a document that privileges the voices of a few (the

ecclesial magisterium), and excludes the voices of many. For Catholic educators working in Catholic schools, VS does demonstrate clearly the importance of anchoring a sense of Catholic identity in an understanding of the moral teachings of the Church and a commitment to seeking moral truth. Yet it does not provide a fruitful guide for educating Christians to develop a sense of social-moral responsibility that can enable them to enter into conversation with all people of good will in addressing issues concerning the common good of society.

### **Insights for Catholic Education and Teaching Catholic Social Ethics**

Today, the Church is led by a pontiff, Francis, who is very different in some ways from John Paul II. For instance, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) (The Joy of the Gospel), Francis recognized the need for a "sound 'decentralization'" (n. 16) in the Church, with socio-moral issues again being addressed when appropriate at the local level first. In EG Francis also renewed the commitment to dialogical engagement that has been central to the Church since RN (ns. 169-179). Guided by the outlook articulated by Pope Francis, and drawing insight from the tradition of Catholic socio-moral thought, especially Leo XIII's RN and John Paul II's VS, I propose in this concluding section to offer some basic guidelines and concrete suggestions for nurturing a sense of socio-moral responsibility / citizenship in Catholic schools today.

First, I propose that education for socio-moral responsibility in Catholic schools be grounded in a sense of Catholic identity as inclusively catholic (small "c") and at the same time distinctively Catholic (capital "C"). From the time of RN to the present a hallmark

of Catholicism has been Catholics' willingness to work with all people of good will in public forums to address pressing socio-moral issues. While this commitment was downplayed during the pontificate of John Paul II, Pope Francis has vigorously reaffirmed it. Today, an openness to seeking universal/catholic moral understanding is at the core of Catholic identity.

At the same time, Catholicism's valuing of inclusivity sets the Church apart from many persons and groups. In striving to look at moral issues from a universal perspective, the Church opposes all individualistic, religiously sectarian, and nationalistic outlooks. In discussing the importance of Catholic involvement in public discussions of socio-moral issues in RN, Leo XIII called Catholics to speak out against all forms of narrowly self-interested or ideological ways of thinking. In VS John Paul II re-affirmed Catholicism's commitment to seeking universal moral truth, suggesting that all forms of moral reasoning that are not based on a recognition of "the transcendent dignity of the human person" can never lead to a sound conclusion, and as a result can only diminish human freedom if they become the basis for action (n. 99). Overall, one of the primary and distinctive characteristics of Catholic identity is the conviction that there are universal moral truths and, while these universal moral truths can never be known fully – just as God can never be fully known – human beings should strive in all instances to realize as full a measure as possible of universal justice, love, and peace rather than to accept the more limited aim of striving to realize some relative moral good in a specific social context.

In teaching social ethics in Catholic schools, educators can begin with a focus on catholic/universal openness and inclusivity. In the early grades, teachers can introduce the idea that there are natural moral laws such as the law to respect people as people, and discuss

the importance of obedience to moral laws. They can stress that we call natural moral laws "catholic" or "universal" because they apply to everyone and all societies. As children progress through the primary grades, educators can discuss how the moral law comes into play in exchanges between people as they strive to treat each other fairly, and how when people make agreements with one another each person is morally responsible, except of course in mitigating or unusual circumstances, for holding up their end of the deal. In junior high, as young people develop a reflective sense of self-identity, socio-moral education can begin to focus on the importance of developing a sense of moral selfhood that is lived out in just and caring relations with others in society. In the early years of high school as young people continue to mature the focus can shift again and educators can explore how our sense of moral selfhood is grounded in a social order, that is, socio-moral norms and laws and legal obligations. Educators can return to and then explore more fully in the later years of high school how socio-moral norms can be grounded in a moral outlook that is catholic/universally open and inclusive. At that point, educators can guide students in reflecting on how a mature moral perspective is grounded in a sense of moral truth and value as being prior to all societies and how a moral outlook can lead a person to be more open to the transcendent, especially the transcendent dignity of the human person.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the term "citizenship" can be introduced in the early grades and be explained in terms of our obligations to obey the laws of society and treat others fairly. Then, in junior high and high school, teachers can lead students to deeper and deeper levels of

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<sup>11</sup> My discussion of moral education draws insight from my own experience as an educator and Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. See Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," in *Moral Education ... It Comes with the Territory*, ed. David Purpel and Kevin Ryan (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1976), 176-195.



reflections on the moral obligations of a person as a citizen, the moral responsibilities of citizens to adhere to just social norms and laws and oppose social injustices, and the meaning of justice and other catholic/universal values as the foundation of citizenship.

To complement explorations of catholic morality, Catholic educators can explore the distinctive nature of a Catholic moral outlook. In the early years of grade school, educators can discuss how Catholic moral norms *support* natural, universal/catholic moral laws. As children mature and begin to focus on the morality of exchanges and relationships between people, educators can discuss how Catholic norms can make us more aware of what is morally right, good, and true and how they can, thus, help to *protect* people against unfair treatment. In junior high, educators can emphasize how Catholic moral norms can inform the development of a sense of moral selfhood. Then, in junior high and high school, as educators guide people in discussing how universal moral norms are prior to and foundational for socio-moral norms and values, they can discuss how a Catholic moral outlook, as grounded in an expansive, universal, and transcendent sense of moral truth and value, can *enrich and even expand* a person's understanding of socio-moral norms and the obligations of citizenship. At this point, educators can explore how a Catholic moral outlook can help people recognize the distorting influences of overly individualistic, sectarian, and nationalistic perspectives.

In some Catholic schools today many of the students are not Catholic. In these schools Catholic educators can distinguish between learning about, learning from, and learning to be. They can begin by inviting all students to *learn about* the distinctive tradition of Catholic morality, which includes the development of Catholic Social Teaching and the modern renewal of moral theology – both of

which began with RN. Concretely, in grade school educators can introduce the Catholic story and how concerns for personal and social morality are essential to this story. They can also discuss the core concepts of CST and moral theology in concrete terms; for example, providing and then discussing examples of loving and just actions. Then, beginning in middle school and throughout high school, students can explore the Catholic moral tradition and its core concepts in greater and greater depth. Moreover, the facts and concepts of the Catholic moral tradition can be presented in an academically rigorous manner, and students can be tested on their knowledge of the tradition.

Since the Catholic moral tradition emphasizes the universal nature of moral truth and value, Catholic educators can also invite students of all faiths and philosophical commitments to *learn from* this tradition, that is, to compare and contrast the Catholic moral tradition with their own moral perspective in order to refine and further develop their sense of how their moral outlooks are grounded in a search for universal and transcendent truth and value. For Catholic students, Catholic educators can guide them in *learning to embrace* the Catholic moral tradition as foundational for their own moral perspective. Concretely, educators can guide students in learning from and learning to embrace the Catholic moral tradition through such learning activities as journaling, personal reflection and discussion exercises, service learning, and conversations with respected and trusted adult members of a faith community in a safe environment.

Additionally, in teaching social ethics in Catholic schools, educators should guide students in learning both critical and narrative modes of moral reflection. On the one hand, there is a strong tradition in Catholicism of reliance on right reason or what today is

more commonly called critical reflection. Educators can teach students to reflect critically on socio-moral issues by modeling for them how we can step back from these issues and strive to evaluate them from a perspective that is as universally inclusive/catholic as possible. The US Catholic bishops have suggested that critical, socio-moral reflection can be guided by seven fundamental themes drawn from Catholic Social Teaching: the life and dignity of the human person; the call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; an option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God's creation. In the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, the Catholic Education Office offers five core values to guide critical reflection on socio-moral issues: truth, justice, love, life, and family. Those teaching social ethics in Catholic schools can work from guidelines for moral reflection that are grounded in the Catholic moral tradition, and that have been developed for that context. If no such guidelines exist, Catholic educators can develop them or they can adopt or adapt the three principles for guiding socio-moral reflection presented by John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*: the dignity of the human person, solidarity, and subsidiarity. Using available guidelines for moral reflection, educators can teach students to step back from their particular life perspectives and to think about how they, in evaluating and making decisions about moral issues, can seek to realize as full a measure of objective truth and value as possible. However, Catholic educators need to consider the developmental readiness of their students and the developmental appropriateness of the guidelines for moral reflection they use. Many students may not be ready to begin to discuss some of the more complex concepts of the Catholic moral tradition, such as solidarity and subsidiarity, until the latter years of high school. Still, educators can begin in grade school to help students develop abilities for critical reflection. For instance,

educators can lead grade schoolers into critical reflection by having them look at social problems, and then inviting them to imagine ways in which positive changes could be made in society to address these problems. Additionally, educators can promote greater understanding of social issues from the beginning of grade school through high school by illustrating the core concepts of the Catholic moral tradition with concrete examples and case studies.

On the other hand, the history of Catholicism includes the development of Catholic Social Teaching and the modern renewal of moral theology. These moral trajectories are parts of the narrative or story of Catholicism that embodies the moral wisdom of the Church – a wisdom that cannot be conveyed by a set of principles, themes, or values alone. Moreover, we can understand the Catholic moral tradition better by exploring these moral trajectories and reflecting on both their strengths and limitations. Concretely, beginning in the grade school years students can begin to explore the story of the Catholic moral tradition by discussing, for example, Pope Leo XIII's efforts to reach out beyond the walls of Vatican City to explore how the Church could address the pressing social issues of the day, Pope John XXIII's effort to open the windows of the Church that culminated with the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II's focusing on renewing a sense of the splendor of truth and authentic freedom and the need to turn in all things to God for guidance, and Pope Francis's call to attend to the importance of experiencing and sharing the joy of the Gospel. Most people appreciate a good story; and the Church has many good stories to tell that convey aspects of the Catholic moral tradition. By sharing and discussing these stories throughout grade and high school, educators can guide students in learning about and learning from the moral wisdom embodied in the Catholic moral tradition. (In exploring RN and VS I have told part of the story of the Catholic moral tradition in this article.) Then,

beginning in the high school years students can be invited to explore possible connections between their life stories and the narrative of Catholic morality, and consider what they can learn from the Catholic story (both its past and its continual unfolding) that can inform their efforts to narrate the ongoing unfolding of their own personal and communal moral journeys.

However, educators should keep in mind that an ability for narrative coherence (that is, an ability to think of one's life as a coherent whole with a thread of continuity running from one's past to the present and then projecting outward to the future) does not develop fully until the early young adult years (usually between the age of 20-25). Additionally, people's capacity to draw insight from narrative reflection on their lives can deepen and mature as they move throughout the adult life cycle. Hence, in sharing and discussing the narrative of the Catholic moral tradition in the high school years, educators should encourage the development of a commitment to ongoing and even life-long study and reflection of the Catholic moral tradition.

Second, I propose that in teaching social ethics in Catholic schools, educators teach people how to engage in both dialogical and dialectical modes of public discourse. As already noted, based on a respect for the transcendent dignity of all human persons the Church has, since the issuance of RN, been committed to engaging in public dialogue about what is morally good and true in addressing socio-moral issues. Theologically, this commitment is based on the premise that God is present in the life of each person, each religious community, and each social and political community throughout the world. Building upon this tradition of dialogue, educators in Catholic schools can teach students about the importance of dialogue, including dialogue about moral issues, and model dialogical

processes of inquiry and engagement. Correspondingly, they can encourage respect for human rights and religious and political freedoms as being foundational for authentic dialogue. They can also encourage people to resist non-dialogical ways of relating to others (going beyond citizenship education, we can note that this should include teaching about the importance of dialogue within the Church), because such ways of relating fail to respect the dignity of persons and the integrity of communities.

Given that many students in Catholic schools today are not Catholic, educators can model and foster a commitment to dialogical inquiry, including socio-moral inquiry, by sharing Catholic traditions with students and then inviting students from other religious traditions to share their experiences of their own traditions. Educators in Catholic schools can also incorporate materials on other religious traditions into the curriculum for religious and moral education, and invite local religious leaders from those traditions to address their classes. In particular, educators can explore how the great religious traditions of the world, while grounded in an openness to God/the divine, offer resources for forming and informing an understanding of the socio-moral dimensions of life. For instance, educators can explore how a Christian vision of welcoming and working to bring about the fuller realization of the Reign of God, a Jewish understanding of *tikkun olann* (repair of the world) as the spiritual purpose of life, and the Confucian concept of the cultivation of *ren* (humanity) as the ultimate goal of life, can all provide a foundation for robust socio-moral visions. Ultimately, Catholic educators should strive to show how people of diverse religious traditions can work together as citizens to seek the common good of their society. Similarly, educators can encourage students to explore socio-moral issues from differing perspectives, and consider how

those who hold these perspectives can be brought together for mutually enriching conversations.

Moral education for responsible involvement in the society should also teach the art of dialectical inquiry. Dialectical inquiry is based on the premise that we can develop a fuller understanding of life by examining contrasting, competing, or sometimes even opposing personal, social, moral, and spiritual perspectives. Educators can from grade school through high school teach dialectical inquiry by discussing in age appropriate ways the dignity of the human person and human rights and then juxtapose this discussion with an exploration of the belief that we are called to welcome and work to bring about the fuller but not yet realized Reign of God in the world. Similarly, at all grade levels educators can encourage in age appropriate ways the moral development of each person as a unique person, but then discuss how our lives would be severely impoverished if they were not shaped by participation in civic and religious communities and the moral insights of established traditions. During the high school years educators can also teach about how, in striving to develop the virtue of citizenship, people need to learn to balance sometimes dialectically opposed commitments to seeking what is in the best interest of our country domestically, on the one hand, and how our country can and should be committed to contributing to the common good of the world community on the other. From a religious perspective, teaching dialectical inquiry can help student understand the limitations of critical reflection and develop a fuller appreciation of human dependence on God's guidance in making sense of the complexities of our lives and world.

Third, I propose that in teaching social ethics in Catholic schools, educators can invite students to learn the practice of moral

discernment. In everyday life, discernment is the ability to judge well, to make choices that lead to the best possible outcome. Theologically, discernment involves learning to be attentive to where one does or does not experience the guiding presence of the Spirit (from a Christian perspective) or the Divine or Ultimate (or in whatever way one refers to the transcendent dimension of life and the world if one is an adherent of a religious tradition other than Christianity). The practice of moral discernment unites dialogical and dialectical reflection with critical and narrative reflection. Socially, moral discernment is the art of bringing together the various ways people look at socio-moral issues, reflecting critically on these perspectives, holding contrasting and opposing viewpoints in dialectical tension, and then striving to understand the best way to move forward (to narrate one's way from the present toward the future) in a concrete context or situation. Theologically, the practice of discernment is grounded in a recognition of our ultimate dependence on God, and can guide us to see how with God's guidance we can edge our way beyond the influences of sin, selfishness, and violence in our lives and world, and glimpse the tremendous beauty and goodness of the created world and the splendor of truth and Truth as a guide for our moral and religious journey through life.

Educators can lay the foundation for teaching discernment in grade school by affirming and then nurturing children's natural senses of spirituality and morality, and discussing how they are both ways of connecting with the transcendent dimensions of life, that is the "bigger picture" of life. Beginning in the middle school years, as a sense of selfhood develops, educators can explore how we can develop a deeper understanding of our lives and life possibilities when our sense of moral selfhood is related to our spirituality, and we are open to the guidance of God in our lives. As young people



mature in the later years of high school and beyond, educators can guide students in bringing both the social and religious aspects of their moral outlooks to bear on their efforts to make the best moral choices they can in addressing the complex moral issues of everyday personal and communal living.

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[摘要] 本文從天主教倫理傳統探討兩份教會文件：良十三的《新事》通諭（1891）和若望保祿二世的《真理的光輝》（1993）。本文的焦點是，這些訓導如何帶領教育工作者，特別是那些在天主教學校任職的人士，思考有關天主教身份和培育這身份與公民教育的關係。本文的最後部分提供一些基本指引，建議在今日的天主教學校如何培養社會道德／公民責任。