

Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor*

JOHN MARK SOLITARIO, O.P.

St. Gertrude Priory

Cincinnati, OH

How much does the Church rely upon the work of any one expert when she spells out her official teaching? How much should an individual reader be aware of this dynamic? Measuring up the presence of a theologian in a Church document, such as Serge-Thomas Bonino did for Saint Thomas Aquinas in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, is an important exercise for understanding the nature and development of Catholic doctrine.¹ If Saint Thomas is an authority to engage and develop carefully, this must also be the case for Saint Augustine of Hippo, the “Doctor of Grace” by whom Saint Thomas was so deeply influenced.² Mirroring Bonino’s method, here we identify and assess the presence of Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor*, the momentous moral teaching of Pope Saint John Paul II that continues to generate discussion.³ The encyclical’s use of Saint Augustine has not been without criticism.⁴ Nor has the legacy of this most revered of Christian

¹ See Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” trans. Dominic Langevin, O.P., *The Thomist* 80 (2016): 499–519.

² See Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. M. T. Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), for a study which shows Aquinas to be both a student as well as an innovator in a long tradition of scholarly Christian ethics begun by the saintly bishop of Hippo. See also Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering, eds., *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), for a collection of essays exploring various ways in theology as a whole in which St. Thomas Aquinas benefitted from and innovated upon St. Augustine.

³ For example, see the colloquium published in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 1 (2020), by Mariusz Biliniewicz, Renée Köhler-Ryan, Helenka Mannering, and Christian Stephens.

⁴ E.g., John J. O’Keefe, “No Place for Failure? Augustinian Reflections on *Veritatis*

teachers been unreservedly accepted by all dedicated to Catholic moral theology in the recent past.⁵ Nevertheless, Saint Augustine's profound presence deserves to be more fully treated. Not only are his works the most frequently cited of any Father in this outstanding papal encyclical but, as we shall see, an Augustinian spirit is evident from the formulation of its opening line: *The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God.*⁶ Although the document's indebtedness to the doctor of Hippo becomes apparent through understanding its explicit uses of his theology, I argue that even its title—*Veritatis Splendor*—is derived from Saint Augustine's masterpiece of inquiry into the mystery of God, his *De Trinitate*, and reveals a much more profound reliance on his thought than otherwise evident.

Bonino wants his project to be a service to the Church's teaching office as exercised by the magisterium; we believe that approaching *Veritatis Splendor* with eyes open for Saint Augustine will be of similar service. Bonino's particular objective is to "identify and analyze the Thomist doctrines referred to explicitly by *Amoris Laetitia* in order to receive them as an invitation to deepen, as a theologian, those aspects of St. Thomas' teaching that seem to possess today for the Magisterium a particular relevance for the life of the Church."⁷ He asserts that the Tradition of the Church is "bipolar" insofar as the magisterium necessarily "discerns what constitutes the Tradition" and in turn requires a knowledge of the

Splendor," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. M. E. Allsopp, and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City, Mo: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 16–37. See n10 below.

- ⁵ E.g., John Mahoney, S.J., "The Legacy of Augustine," in *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study in the Roman Catholic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 37–71. Mahoney is critical of the strong Augustinian "mood" which has clearly shaped moral theology in the Roman Catholic Church for fifteen hundred years. Although he characterizes St. Augustine as brilliant in his perception of life's contrasts (e.g., self-love vs. love for God, man's moral weakness vs. God's strength, etc.), he asserts that his influence has led to an unhealthy pre-occupation with achieving freedom from sin rather than growth in virtue, a tormented and utilitarian view of sexual pleasure, and an inflexibility with respect to concrete moral choices. Also relevant to our purpose, Mahoney notes how Pope Pius XI reverently defined Augustine's important relationship with Church teaching in the encyclical *Ad Salutem* (1930) and provided an "outstanding modern instance of the legacy of Augustine" (60) in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930) treating Christian marriage.
- ⁶ Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor [VS]* (1993), preamble. In this paper, I followed the Latin text and English translation as available at the Vatican website unless otherwise noted.
- ⁷ Bonino, "St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*," 501.

Tradition to be rightly interpreted as it issues new teachings.⁸ It is important, explains Bonino, to keep in mind that, when it adopts the work of any theologian, the magisterium need not try to recreate those doctrines in “their most perfect or pristine form.” Rather, it may take up an individual theologian’s teachings into a more authoritative project and “draw upon certain doctrines in order to represent the teaching of the Word of God for the benefit of the life and holiness of the Christian people.”⁹

The Church’s use of Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor* reveals this type of approach, although one not appreciated by John J. O’Keefe’s Augustinian study of the encyclical. O’Keefe sides with those who believed that Pope Saint John Paul II used Saint Augustine, along with other biblical and patristic sources, with “a reckless disregard for historical circumstances and the original context of the texts from which he quotes.”

¹⁰ For O’Keefe, the encyclical is absent of Saint Augustine’s eschatology and “runs the risk of being pressed into the service of a self-righteousness that has little room for human failure.”¹¹ In fact, for O’Keefe, “the Pope has embraced a view of Christian perfection similar to that resisted by Augustine.”¹² Acknowledging the aforementioned “bipolar” view of the Church’s Tradition suggested by Bonino, then, we set out to examine those relevant Augustinian citations in *Veritatis Splendor* which reveal Pope Saint John Paul II’s guiding principles and their original inspiration.¹³ Conversely, this investigation of the document’s Augustinian sources will also help to “test and confirm continuity within the living Tradition of the Church,”¹⁴ and therefore to rightly interpret *Veritatis Splendor*.

⁸ See Bonino, “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” 500. “Bipolar” is meant here in its more general sense such as “having or relating to two poles or extremities.” Langevin’s translation of the French “bipolaire” was part of a project entailing close collaboration with Bonino.

⁹ Bonino, “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” 500.

¹⁰ O’Keefe, “No Place for Failure?,” 16. Although O’Keefe considers a use of sources re-bound by the “rule of faith” to be within the rights of a pontiff, here he judged the consequences to be tragic, enlisting St. Augustine for a theology of perfection more Pelagian than Augustinian (32). I intend to show how much Augustine’s theological thought *does influence* Pope St. John Paul II’s work, producing salutary effects which remain consistent with Augustine’s theology of grace.

¹¹ O’Keefe, “No Place for Failure?,” 17.

¹² O’Keefe, “No Place for Failure?,” 32.

¹³ See Bonino, “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” 519.

¹⁴ Bonino, O.P., “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” 501.

As did Bonino with Aquinas, we limit the thrust of our attention in this project to the *explicit* references of Saint Augustine within the text or as indicated in the endnotes of *Veritatis Splendor*. Actually, this will prove an effective means to uncover a deeper use of Saint Augustine which permeates and shapes the document as a whole. In the first section, we locate the document's fifteen direct or indirect references to Saint Augustine (i.e., those quoted in the text of the encyclical versus those confined to a footnote). We compare these references to the document's use of other sources and describe how they are being used within the overall framework of *Veritatis Splendor*. The second section of the paper is divided according to the principal Augustinian themes taken up by *Veritatis Splendor*. Here we study the original context and meaning of the Augustinian references. While performing this comparison, we call attention as well to the new importance with which the magisterium has invested this fifth-century Father. We seek to understand how Saint Augustine's work is being used to support the work of the Church as she exercises her official teaching office in this particular encyclical. Having identified, contextualized, and then re-contextualized the citations of Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor*, in the concluding section we offer some observations on how a deeper knowledge of Saint Augustine's work has increased our ability to understand and to live the Church's teaching, especially concerning true moral freedom. Here we take the opportunity to refute those who, like O'Keefe and John Mahoney, believe that the Pope either altered Saint Augustine's work for his own purposes or used Saint Augustine's theology to impose upon the Church a set of views which are fundamentally outdated. We hope readers discover in the course of this study both something of the real Saint Augustine and a deeper appreciation for the way Catholic theology has developed by making reverent and intelligent use of his work.

Fifteen Explicit References to Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor*
Veritatis Splendor contains fifteen explicit references to Saint Augustine's corpus.¹⁵

¹⁵ Of the works in this table: *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus* is found in vol. 36 of *Corpus Christianorum Latina* [CCL]; *De Sermone Domini in Monte* in CCL 35; *Confessiones* in CCL 40; *De gratia et libero arbitrio* in *Patrologia Latina* [PL] 44; *De spiritu et littera* in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [CSEL] 60; *Enarratio in Psalmos* in CCL 39; *Contra Faustum* in PL 42; *De Trinitate* in CCL 50/A; *Contra mendacium* in PL 40; *De natura et gratia* in CSEL 60. For the idea and layout of this table, I am indebted to Bonino's own in "St. Thomas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*," 501–2.

	Location in Veritatis Splendor	Kind of Reference	Source Text	Source Theme	Use in Veritatis Splendor
1	Ch. 1, §13	Quote in text and source in note 23	<i>In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus</i> 41.10	Freedom from sin	Explains significance of the negative precepts of the Decalogue
2	Ch. 1, §15	Indirect reference in text and source in note 24	<i>De Sermones Domini in Monte</i> 1.1.1	Telling the significance of Sermon on the Mount	Support for importance of the Sermon on the Mount within Christ's teaching
3	Ch. 1, §17	Quote in text and source in note 27	<i>In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus</i> 41.10	Correspondence between serving God and freedom or serving law of sin and slavery	Explains gradualness of Christian freedom and perfection
4	Ch. 1, §21	Quote in text and source in note 28	<i>In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus</i> 21.8	Configuration of Christians as other "Christs"	Explains that conformity with Christ comes through a sacramental reconfiguration
5	Ch. 1, §22	Quote in text and source in note 29	<i>In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus</i> 82.3	The primacy of love in the moral life	Indicates how possible to follow Christ's teaching
6	Ch. 1, §23	Quote in text and source in note 30	<i>De spiritu et littera</i> 19.34	The old law fulfilled by grace	Summarizes "Pauline dialectic" of law and grace, showing primacy of grace
7	Ch. 1, §24	Quote in text and source in note 31	<i>Confessiones</i> 1.029, 10.40 // <i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i> 15	Prayer: "Grant what you command and command what you will" ⁹	Shows "inseparable connection" between grace and exercise of freedom

8	Ch. 1, §24	Remote reference in text and source note 32	<i>De spiritu et littera</i> 21.36, 26.46	Source Text	Source Theme	Explaining source of Aquinas's saying	The new law implies the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer
	Location in Veritatis Splendor	Kind of Reference	Source Text	Source Theme	Use in Veritatis Splendor		
9	Ch. 2, §41	Short quote incorporated into an argument	<i>Enarratio in Psalmos</i> , Ps 72, no. 16		God is the reference point for truth	Explains the context for human exercise of intellect and free will	
10	Ch. 2, §43	Quote in text and source in note 79	<i>Contra Faustum</i> 22.27		Definition of God's eternal law	Explains basis of law with respect to duties and rights in human action	
11	Ch. 2, §51	Quotation text and source in note 92	<i>De Trinitate</i> 14.15.21		The universal access which all men have to the truth of the natural law	Defends universality of the natural law	
12	Ch. 2, §81	Quotation in the text with citation in the footnotes (134)	<i>Contra mendacium</i> 7.18		Acts which are "themselves sins" are never justifiable	Shows foolishness of "necessary sins" and/or of ends justifying means	
13	Ch. 3, §87	Quote in text and source in note 140	<i>Enarratio in Psalmos</i> , Ps 100[99], no. 7		In charity and truth, the Christian is both servant and free	Explains that true freedom is found in obedience and love of God, as Jesus models	
14	Conclusion, §119	Quote in text and source in note 182	<i>In Johannis Evangelium tractatus</i> 26.13		Christ provides sufficiently for all members of his Body	Ensures the simplicity of assenting to Christ, an invitation for all	
15	Note 162	Citation of Trent's Decree on Justification, which quotes Saint Augustine	<i>De natura et gratia</i> 43.40		God does not command the impossible	Upholds Church's "constant teaching" with respect to following God's commandments	

Of these references, eight are found in chapter 1 (“Christ and the Answer to the Question about Morality”), four appear in chapter 2 (“The Church and the Discernment of Certain Tendencies in Present-day Moral Theology”), one is in chapter 3 (“Moral Good for the Life of the Church and of the World”), one is in the conclusion, and one is limited to an endnote. As we will see in the second part of this paper, the high concentration of Augustinian references in chapter 1 supports a scriptural groundwork for the moral life as a graced *sequela Christi* (see §§19 and 21) while the references in chapters 2 and 3 become more technical concerning law, sin, and the authentic exercise of freedom. Whereas the citations in chapter 1 are meant to elucidate what the New Testament says about following the law of God *in Christ*, the Augustinian references in chapter 2 are included so as to explain the necessary basis of human freedom in God’s eternal law, as well as to expose the foolishness of a permissive attitude toward sin. Chapter 3 and the conclusion, each containing only one reference to Saint Augustine’s teaching, once again keep Christ, the model of loving obedience and the source of moral strength, before our eyes. Overall, the document uses Saint Augustine to underscore fundamental truths before it proceeds to address current challenges to Christian moral freedom. He is treated as a respected and wise authority.

Mostly direct quotations, the Augustinians references in *Veritatis Splendor* come from a variety of locations within his corpus (we list them here in order of appearance): *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (2×), *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* (5×), *De Sermone Domini in Monte* (indirect reference), *De spiritu et littera* (2×, once indirectly), *Confessiones* (1×), *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (1×), *Contra Faustum* (1×), *De Trinitate* (1×), *Contra mendacium* (1×), *De natura et gratia* (1×; within a quotation from Trent). Apparently, the document favors Augustine’s *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, although the themes cited from this source, which include freedom from sin, the power of love, and union with Christ, are developed also by means of the other sources just mentioned.

Considering all the sources used by *Veritatis Splendor*, it is worth mentioning that fifteen out of forty-three patristic references belong to Saint Augustine. He is the third most-cited non-biblical source in *Veritatis Splendor*, after the Second Vatican Council (some 47×) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (19×). By comparison, Saint Ambrose of Milan is the second most-cited Church Father (5×). With the exception of Saints Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, and Gregory of Nyssa (all of whom are cited twice), no one else is cited more than once. The high amount of recourse to this “Doctor of Grace” signals that Saint Augustine is a pre-eminent patristic authority in the project of articulating just what the following of

Christ entails for his Catholic Church. The fifteenth and final reference to Saint Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor*, found exclusively within note 162, displays for us the larger-than-life quality of Saint Augustine's doctrine for the Church's teaching tradition as a whole. This reference is really a citation from chapter 11 of the Council of Trent's Decree on Justification. There we see the Church employing Saint Augustine's words from *De natura et gratia* to affirm that God's grace is always sufficient and that "God does not command the impossible."¹⁶ This example serves as an indication of how *Veritatis Splendor* means to use Saint Augustine in stating its own authoritative teaching,¹⁷ even if its assimilation of his teaching is sometimes subtle. Moreover, such a combination of magisterial and patristic teaching testifies to the importance given to this principle, which insists upon the sufficiency of grace in the Christian moral life.

Division and Analysis of Augustinian Themes Taken Up by *Veritatis Splendor*

In a survey of *Veritatis Splendor*, considerable thematic unity among the fifteen explicitly Augustinian citations emerges. Here we indicate six broad "groupings" among them, not for the purpose of making things artificially neat, but in order to appreciate some distinctively Augustinian claims put at the service of the modern magisterium. The groupings we have devised are: the conception of law that has God as its source, authentic growth in freedom, Christ present in the moral life of the Christian, the dynamic between law and grace, sin, and the sufficiency of grace.¹⁸ For convenience and brevity, we collapse these themes into three steps that follow the

¹⁶ See Council of Trent, sess. VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, ch. 11 (Denzinger- Hünermann, no. 1536).

¹⁷ See *VS*, §115.

¹⁸ These "Augustinian claims" of *Veritatis Splendor* might be compared with the "sevenfold splendor" which Michael Dauphinais identifies in "hierarchically descending sections," all connected to the theme of "gift" in the Christian moral life. The sections are: the priority of divine revelation, the encountering of that revelation in the incarnate Word, the priority of faith in Christ which grounds the moral life, the divine and natural laws as proceeding from God and leading human beings to their fulfillment, conscience as deliberate and free participation in the moral law, the importance of concrete moral actions in shaping the moral life, and the mercy Christ offers to every sinner. Although Dauphinais does not specifically analyze the use of Augustine in *Veritatis Splendor* (mentioning only two of fifteen Augustinian citations), the closeness of our "Augustinian claims" to what he identifies as the document's principal claims shows how important Augustine was as a source for developing these sections of *Veritatis Splendor*. See M. Dauphinais, "The Splendor and the Gift of the Christian Moral Life: *Veritatis*

progression of the three chapters of *Veritatis Splendor*. These three steps will be: (1) the believer's fundamental association with Christ, (2) the law of God understood as "medicine" and "light," and (3) the experience of obedience and freedom in the Christian moral life. Going back during each step to some of the pertinent locations in Saint Augustine's works serves to better re-contextualize these significant citations. Then we will be closer to our goal of grasping their significance for *Veritatis Splendor* and, more generally, our becoming aware of just how profoundly Saint Augustine's original doctrine is being used by the Church's teaching office today.

First, *Veritatis Splendor* teaches that there is no other way to live the Christian moral life than by seeking conformity to Christ and following his example. The fourth and fifth citations noted in the table above address this theme. The fourth, from *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus*, most directly addresses the Christo-centricity of the moral life as proposed by the encyclical: "Let us rejoice and give thanks," exclaims Saint Augustine speaking to the baptized, "for we have become not only Christians, but Christ. . . . Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ!"¹⁹ This quotation and the one that follows in *Veritatis Splendor* §22 serve to underscore the document's emphasis on "drawing near" and even "entering into" Christ in order to find the answer to life's most pressing questions.²⁰ Clearly, the conformity to Christ evoked here is more than mere moral identification, such as a profound admiration for or empathy toward a heroic or tragic

Splendor at Twenty-five," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 16, no. 4 (2018): 1261–312, at 1262–64.

¹⁹ *VS*, §21. David Meconi, S.J., begins his study *The One Christ* with this citation from St. Augustine. He offers an expansive treatment of Augustine's doctrine of deification as knowable through his theology of creation, the Incarnation, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, and the Church's sacramental life. Augustine believes that Christ's holiness, which Christians experience in the sacraments, bestows upon them an unmerited "participation" in the divinity. The result for the Christian believer, explains Meconi, is that he can no longer live for himself alone: "In the unitive love of God, all Christian souls become one in that they form one Christ. . . . Exclusive love [on the other hand] is ultimately not love at all, but a concupiscence that evaluates another person in terms of oneself and not in terms of true charity, God." Through its exposition of the Christian's vocation to love ever more in the manner Christ loved, Meconi's study supports the connection between the generally Christ-centered approach to morality in *Veritatis Splendor*, ch. 1, and the document's insistence in chapters 2–3 on discrediting theories which permit a conflict between object and intention in the case of specific moral choices. See Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 209–10.

²⁰ See *VS*, §8.

figure. Rather, this “new life” (see Rom 6:3–11) wherein the baptized are “clothed in Christ” (see Gal 3:27) is described by the encyclical in terms of conformity at the deepest level of their beings. The first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor* explains the disciple’s deep acquaintance and transformation as fulfilling what he naturally *is* in virtue of being made in the image of God. Further, it explains that conformity to Christ through grace is accessible to the one who practices the Beatitudes, which are “in their originality and profundity . . . a sort of *self-portrait of Christ*, and for this very reason are *invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ*.”²¹ Finally, in the Pope’s exhorting Christians to follow the *sequela Christi*, that is, to imitate Christ, *Veritatis Splendor* explains that this cannot be done in a superficial manner: “*Following Christ* is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him*.”²² In citation 4, Saint Augustine indeed emphasizes that to heed the invitation issued by Jesus to the rich young man entails that “we have become not only Christians, but Christ.”²³ This transformation into Christ is precisely how *Veritatis Splendor* presents the *sequela Christi*, which it explains is “the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality” (§ 19).

A closer study of the *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* helps us to understand the depth as well as the distinction of the Christian transformation that appears in the first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*. Citation 4 is originally part of a commentary on the following verses of John’s Gospel: “For the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed. *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes*” (John 5:20–23). Saint Augustine begins homily (the *tractatus*) 21 stating that the works of the Father and the Son vis-à-vis mankind are truly “inseparable” (see John 5:19).²⁴ With John 5:20, however, he feels that he must explain the apparent contradiction of “the Father loves the Son *and shows him everything that he himself does*.”²⁵ Saint Augustine says: “If the Father makes anything, he does it through the Son;

²¹ *VS*, §16.

²² *VS*, §21.

²³ *VS*, §21.

²⁴ St. Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus* 21.1, in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A., Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century [WSA] III/12 (New York: New City Press, 2009). This translation is used for all further citations from the *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus*, unless otherwise noted.

²⁵ Emphasis added.

if he makes it through his power and wisdom, it is not outside of himself that he shows him something to see, but it is in his very self that he shows him what he is doing.”²⁶ The bishop of Hippo explains in this homily the distinction between the difference and the unity of the Father and the Son and of the difference and the unity between the Father and the Son and us. It is this teaching which explains the truth as well as the limitations of citation 4: “We have become not only Christians, but Christ.” Saint Augustine’s original text reminds his listeners that Christ typically did not use a common possessive pronoun in his regular speech concerning the first person of the Trinity. Rather, he would distinguish “my Father” and “your Father,” “my God” and “your God.”²⁷ The great bishop further explained the significance of Christ’s words:

All the same, he is not Christ’s Father in the same way as he is also our Father; Christ, after all, never joined us to himself so as to make no distinction between himself and us. He, I mean, is the Son equal to the Father, and co-eternal with the Father; we on the other hand have been made sons through the Son, adopted through the only Son.²⁸

This, then, qualifies the way in which we are to understand citation 4: “Let us rejoice and give thanks.”²⁹ Although Saint Augustine’s original lesson is much the same as that of *Veritatis Splendor*, in the former, conformity to Christ means growing into the “fullness of Christ . . . head and members.”³⁰ Christ remains distinctly the Head of the Body. We remain the members who experience our sonship toward the Father *through and in constant reference to him*. It is within this special likeness that the Christian receives a truly supernatural hope for moral freedom and perfection.

Second, *Veritatis Splendor* presents God’s eternal law as the source of all other laws, including the natural law and the divine revealed law. Therefore, God’s law can be experienced as mankind’s indispensable “medicine” and “light.” Five of the document’s uses of Saint Augustine either focus on God’s revealed law in its content (citations 1 and 2) or explain why the eternal law, which encompasses God’s design for all things, ought to be the basis for human behavior (citations 9–11). Here we treat one sample

²⁶ St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 21.2.

²⁷ St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 21.3; see John 20:17

²⁸ St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 21.3.

²⁹ See Meconi, *The One Christ*, 213: “The Son of God became human so humans may become one with God, but that does not mean that humans will become God the same way the Son is God.”

³⁰ St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 21.8.

from each subgroup. First, we observe citation 2, which merely references book 1 of *De Sermone Domini in monte* without any quotation. Pope Saint John Paul II states in *Veritatis Splendor* §15 that “the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ [is] the *magna carta* of Gospel morality.”³¹ At this point in its first chapter, *Veritatis Splendor* presents the divine law as revealed first in the Decalogue and then fully manifested in Christ. Whereas the Decalogue lays out those “basic condition[s] for love of neighbor,” as well as for love of God, Christ’s life and sacrificial death *embodies* this authentic love for the Father and mankind.³² The encyclical uses Saint Augustine (and, incidentally, his teacher Saint Ambrose) to explain the extent to which Christ has “the fullness of the Law;” the Mosaic law will actually be the “image” of Christ, who “brings God’s commandments to fulfilment, particularly the commandment of love of neighbor, by interiorizing their demands and by bringing out their fullest meaning.”³³

Although the term *magna carta* as used in *Veritatis Splendor* only bears indirect reference to Augustine’s reflection *De Sermone Domini in monte*, Saint Augustine’s text leaves little doubt that the Sermon contains Jesus’s words which are meant to inform the entire Christian moral life:

If anyone were to ponder with piety and seriousness the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ gave on the mount, I believe that we would discover there, as far as norms for high moral living are concerned, the perfect way to lead the Christian life. We would not be rash enough to make this promise ourselves, but we deduce it from the very words of the same Lord.³⁴

Saint Augustine here recalls the Lord’s words at the end of the Sermon to defend this claim: “Anyone who hears these words of mine and does them I shall compare to a wise man who built his house upon rock. The rain fell, floods came, the winds blew and battered that house, and it did not fall, for it was built on rock” (Matt 7:24–25). Clearly, Jesus is saying at its conclusion that one who heeds the lesson of the Sermon is in the position

³¹ For an illuminating exposition of Augustine’s teaching on the Sermon and the Beatitudes as containing the “perfect rule of life” taught by Christ, see Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 134–67 (ch. 6, “The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics”).

³² See *VS*, §§13–14.

³³ *VS*, §15.

³⁴ St. Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte* 1.1, trans. Michael G. Campbell, O.S.A., in *New Testament I and II*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, WSA I/15–16 (2014). This translation is used for all further citations from *De Sermone Domini in Monte* unless otherwise noted.

to attain true *beatitudo*. Of course, this was his starting point as he began the Sermon with the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–11). With comparison to the old law, Saint Augustine continues his discourse, reflecting upon the true greatness of the new law of Christ in comparison with the old:

It was the one God who gave the lesser precepts, through his holy prophets and servants, to a people for whom it was still opportune to be bound by fear, in accordance with a most just ordering of times. And through his Son he gave the greater ones to a people for whom it was fitting to be set free by charity. Since the lesser ones were given to those not yet fully mature and the greater ones to those who had come of age, they were given by him who alone is competent to dispense the appropriate medicine to the human race, suitable for its time.³⁵

Here we see Saint Augustine's understanding that the old and new laws are fundamentally related and function as that "medicine" designed by Providence for the care of mankind. God's eternal law, here mediated through the divine revealed law, is salutary and designed to make man more himself. Moreover, there is a fullness in Jesus's teaching of those "greater precepts" which depend on a freedom generated by love. Saint Augustine's original vision in *De Sermone Domini in monte* seems germane to the purposes of *Veritatis Splendor*, which assesses Christ's tour through various commandments, adding a positive precept to each (see Matt 5:21–48). The encyclical says the following: "Jesus shows that the commandments must not be understood as a minimum limit not to be gone beyond, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey towards perfection, at the heart of which is love (cf. Col 3:14)."³⁶ This appears very much the spirit of Saint Augustine's teaching as he "piously and seriously"³⁷ considers the greatness of the Lord's words in the Sermon. In light of the concerns expressed by O'Keefe (see note 10 above), it is important to note that Saint Augustine later qualified his teaching on the Beatitudes and human perfection in his *Retractationes*. There, he cites the apostles as evidence of the interior peace and a "certain perfection" (*quadam perfectione*) which the children of God can attain in this life, with the understanding that their struggles with the bodily passions continued and they only reached complete peace (*pacem plenissimam*) and perfection in heaven.³⁸ We see that *Veritatis Splendor's*

³⁵ St. Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte* 1.2.

³⁶ *VS*, §15.

³⁷ See St. Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte* 1.1.

³⁸ St. Augustine, *Retractationes* 1.19[18].1–2 (Latin in *PL* 32; English in Ramsey,

use of *De Sermone Domini in monte* does not contradict these later qualifications offered by Saint Augustine. Nevertheless, the saint's later sobriety concerning the possibility of perfection in this life offers a word of caution to those who would underestimate the lingering influence of the passions as the graced soul moves through this life toward its heavenly fulfillment.

Second, looking at the other subgroup (citations 9–11) which explains why the law of God ought to be the basis for human behavior, we focus on citation 11, taken from book 14 of Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Here we learn that God's law *illuminates* our fundamental nature like nothing else, if only we welcome this "light." Chapter 2 of *Veritatis Splendor*, where this excerpt from Saint Augustine finds a new home, forms a steady argument to show that human freedom cannot be detached from God's law. The Pope affirms that human freedom finds unique value in assisting reason in "discovering and applying the moral law. . .[with the] creativity and originality typical of the [acting] person."³⁹ To place freedom and divine law at odds actually would contradict what is found in Scripture (see Gen 2:16–17), which depicts them as both coming from the Creator and being entrusted to mankind.⁴⁰ Notably, *Veritatis Splendor* defines eternal law in Saint Augustine's words as "the reason or the will of God, who commands us to respect the natural order and forbids us to disturb it."⁴¹ The document will explain natural law as that through which the eternal law applies to rational human beings who regulate their own "life and actions," even as it further explains the unique privilege of those divine laws which have been explicitly revealed.⁴² *Veritatis Splendor* carefully explains that no law taking the eternal law as its source is meant to remain something remote or extrinsic as it applies to human beings. Instead, God's law was given to Israel as a "gift and sign of election" in the form of the Decalogue. Furthermore, with the sending of Christ's Spirit, God's law has been placed in the hearts of believers not only to enlighten their minds but to incline their affections according to God's will. In this context, it truly becomes "a law of perfection and of freedom" for men and women.⁴³ Thus chapter 2 of *Veritatis Splendor* explains that the eternal law, applied to mankind and

New Testament I and II, 17).

³⁹ *VS*, §40.

⁴⁰ See *VS*, §41.

⁴¹ *VS*, §43; see citation 10 in table above.

⁴² *VS*, §§44–45, 50.

⁴³ *VS*, §§ 44–45.

knowable in both the “natural law” as well as the divine revealed law, is something truly illuminating for free human agents.⁴⁴

To bolster this argument of *Veritatis Splendor* on the connection between living God’s law and experiencing true freedom, chapter 2 incorporates a crucial passage from Saint Augustine’s search for the image of God in man. The document’s opening words stated: “The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator.” Although no citation to Saint Augustine appeared there, our study of §51 reveals that *Veritatis Splendor* borrows its opening language and direction from *De Trinitate* 14.15.21. We provide citation 11 in full, as well as the surrounding lines from Saint Augustine’s original text:

Then where are these standards written down, where can even the unjust man recognize what being just is, where can he see that he ought to have what he does not have himself? *Where indeed are they written but in the book of that light which is called truth, from which every just law is copied, and transferred into the heart of the man who does justice, not by locomotion but by a kind of impression, rather like the seal which both passes into the wax and does not leave the signet ring?* As for the man who does not do justice and yet sees what should be done, he is the one who turns away from that light, and yet is still touched by it. But the man who does not even see how one ought to live has more excuse for his sin, because not knowing the law he is not a transgressor; yet from time to time he is touched by the brilliance of truth everywhere present, when he receives a warning reminder and confesses.⁴⁵

In this rich text, Saint Augustine explains that to have contact with “the brilliance of truth everywhere present” (*splendore aliquoties ubique prae-*

⁴⁴ In his essay following the release of *Veritatis Splendor*, Livio Melina highlights Pope St. John Paul II’s “rediscovery” after a tragic separation in the era of technological advance of that which joins human freedom and objective truth: the human person’s orientation toward the Good, manifest in the existence of the natural law, “shows the way” toward an authentic freedom (“Moral Questions and Evangelization Today,” *Communio* 21, no. 2 [1994]: 208–28). Melina holds this Gospel-supported insight (cf. Jn 8:32) in contrast with alternative ethical systems based on personal preference, utility, or consensus (222–23).

⁴⁵ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.15.21, in *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., WSA I/5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991). All following English translations of *De Trinitate* are from this source unless otherwise noted. Italicized text in the above quote denotes citation 11; see *VS*, §51.

*sentis veritatis*⁴⁶) is the special prerogative of all men. He holds that, in virtue of their powers of memory, thinking, and willing, all men may “turn to the Lord” just as they are able to turn toward themselves in reflection. What follows in *De Trinitate* 14.15.21 supplies a moral exhortation which serves to indicate mankind’s upward calling in Christ. The Christian life clearly necessitates a conversion from the state of the *image of God* tragically deformed by sin to the state of the image “renewed in the recognition of God.”⁴⁷ Saint Augustine explains that this renewal is not completed at baptism, which only begins the process by removing a person’s sins. Rather, it is for man to “keep faith in his mediator” and progress toward the stage of “curing the debility [of the tarnished *image*] itself.”⁴⁸ Saint Augustine maintains, much along the lines of the *sequela Christi* promoted in chapter 1 of *Veritatis Splendor*, that the human person’s achieving “perfect likeness” to God happens in an especially Christological mode, given his and our common humanity.⁴⁹ With Saint Augustine’s special emphasis on the renewal of the “image of God,” reaching perfection in being able to *see* God, we cannot help but see the resemblance with the programmatic words of the preamble of *Veritatis Splendor*:

The *splendor of truth* shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Truth enlightens man’s intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the Psalmist prays: “Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord” (Ps 4:6).⁵⁰

Evidently, the document radiates an Augustinian conception of the Christian moral life as *enlightenment* and *image restoration* through the grace-filled presence of Jesus. We can see a thematic and even verbal resemblance with *De Trinitate* 14 in *Veritatis Splendor*’s title line. The use of Psalm 4

⁴⁶ Emphasis added. See *PL* 42:15, 21.

⁴⁷ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.16.22: “Induite novum hominem, qui renovatur secundum imaginem eius qui creavit eum”; see Col 3:9.

⁴⁸ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.17.23.

⁴⁹ See St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.24.

⁵⁰ “*Veritatis splendor* in omnibus Creatoris operibus effulget, praesertim vero in homine facto ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei (Cf. Gen. 1:26): veritas illuminat intelligentiam hominisque libertatem informat qui hac ratione ad Dominum cognoscendum atque amandum adducitur. Propter hoc psalmista precatur: ‘Leva in signum super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine!’ (Ps. 4, 7)” (emphasis added; difference in verse number original to the Vatican-site Latin and English, for difference between the Vulgate and vernacular versions).

in particular has an Augustinian ring. In his commentary on this psalm, Saint Augustine explained the joy as well as responsibility of the Christian who bears the stamp of God's image.⁵¹ The beauty of the image, captured in the moral lives of the saints, attracts others toward belief and powerfully announces to the world God's glory.⁵² More than the other citations discussed so far, citation 11 reveals the extent to which the magisterium has assimilated Saint Augustine's doctrine and wants the entire Church to benefit from his theological perspective. Anyone who, like O'Keefe, would criticize *Veritatis Splendor* for an omission of Saint Augustine's eschatology or theology of grace should reconsider Pope Saint John Paul II's message in light of these sources.

The third and final theme from *Veritatis Splendor* which we address for its Augustinian underpinnings is the unity of law and grace, obedience, and freedom in the Christian moral life. The majority of Augustinian citations in the encyclical aid our understanding of this central dynamic (see citations 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, and 15). *Veritatis Splendor* wages war against proportionalism and the relativization of moral norms. Furthermore, it upholds the Church's revelation-and-reason-based teaching 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."⁵³ Moral teaching such as this aids and illumines, calling men and women to be "restored" in the light of the new law given in Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 of *Veritatis Splendor*, entitled "Moral Good for the Life of the Church and the World," begins with the following affirmation: "Only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to *do* the Truth."⁵⁴ Obedience to the truth as it has been designed by God is presented as a pre-condition for authentic human freedom. Even if obedi-

⁵¹ In *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 4, no. 8, Augustine comments upon an alternate Latin version of Ps 4:7 which reads, "The light of your countenance is stamped upon us, O Lord." He says: "The human individual has been made in God's image and likeness, something which has been corrupted by sinning. Therefore true and eternal gladness is ours if we are minted afresh by being born again" (trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B, in WSA III/15 [2000]; unless otherwise noted, English translation of *Enarratio in Psalmos* is taken from WSA III/15–20 [*Expositions of the Psalms*, vols. 1–6]). Augustine further explains that just as a citizen must "render unto Caesar" the tax-money bearing his stamp, so too human beings ought in justice to turn to the Lord, rendering their souls to God.

⁵² See Melina, "Morality and Evangelization," 228.

⁵³ *VS*, §80.

⁵⁴ *VS*, §84; cf. Pope St. John Paul II, Address to those taking part in the International Congress of Moral Theology, April 10, 1986, 1.

ence to God's law frequently serves to remind us of our proneness to sin, fundamentally it is meant to uphold the dignity of *who we are* by God's design: "Freedom then is rooted in the truth about man, and it is ultimately directed towards communion."⁵⁵ It is Jesus Christ who teaches mankind to use its freedom not in selfish rebellion but in obedient love of God.⁵⁶

In loving after the example of Christ, who was obedient always to the designs of the Father, Christians too are called to make "the gift of self in service to God and one's brethren."⁵⁷ In its third and final chapter, *Veritatis Splendor* once more uses Saint Augustine's words to explain this paradox of "obedient freedom." Saint Augustine's logic, quoted at some length in the encyclical, unfolds throughout a moving discourse:

In the house of the Lord, slavery is free. It is free because it serves not out of necessity, but out of charity. . . . Charity should make you a servant, just as truth has made you free. . . . You are at once both a servant and free: a servant, because you have become such; free, because you are loved by God your Creator; indeed, you have also been enabled to love your Creator. . . . You are a servant of the Lord and you are a freedman of the Lord. Do not go looking for a liberation which will lead you far from the house of your liberator!⁵⁸

Once again, a closer view of Saint Augustine's passage (citation 14 in our table) in its original context will assist our reading of *Veritatis Splendor*. Taken from his *Enarratio* on Psalm 100 [99 in the Septuagint], the passage was a commentary on the second verse: "Serve the Lord with gladness!" The paragraph immediately preceding, which comments on "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!," addresses a theme we have already noted in Saint Augustine's thought: the vestiges of God contained in creation as well as man's *likeness to God* cause him to rejoice and to further seek God out, growing in knowledge and love.⁵⁹ The second verse of Psalm 100 with Saint Augustine's accompanying commentary in the *Enarratio* appropri-

⁵⁵ *VS*, §85.

⁵⁶ *VS*, §§86–87.

⁵⁷ *VS*, §87.

⁵⁸ St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 100[99], no. 7: "Libera servitus est apud Dominum; libera servitus, ubi non necessitas, sed caritas servit. . . . Servum te caritas faciat quia liberum te veritas fecit. . . . Simul es servus et liber: servus, quia factus es; liber quia amaris a Deo a quo factus es: immo etiam inde liber, quia amas eum a quo factus es. . . . Servus es Domini, libertus es Domini; non te sic quaeras manumitti, ut recedas de domo manumissoris tui" (quoted in *VS*, §87).

⁵⁹ Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 100[99], no. 6 (trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., in WSA III/19 [2003]).

ately matches the movement of *Veritatis Splendor*; here we see mankind, fallen and in the process of being remade *in accord with God's image*, called toward the paradox of obedient freedom: "In the house of the Lord, slavery is free."⁶⁰ In the original text, Saint Augustine assures his reader that, unlike all other forms of servitude, in the service of the Lord there is "no complaining, . . . no grumbling, no resentment. No one begs to be emancipated from that service, because it is so delightful that all of us have been redeemed."⁶¹ He exhorts anyone who experiences the Lord's service as bondage to be patient, because these chain-like sufferings—attributable to past sins rather than to the Lord—will be made into "adornments" in time. As seen above in the excerpt used by *Veritatis Splendor*, the ultimate measure for the freedom experienced while in service to the Lord is love: "[You are] a free person because you are loved by God who made you; and moreover free because you love him by whom you were made." Thus love is said to make all the difference, making what would be forced effort into something voluntary and free. The connection to the truth about Christ and human nature, created, fallen, and redeemed is also stated there: "Servum te caritas faciat quia liberum te veritas fecit" ("Love has made you a servant because truth has made you free"⁶²). Saint Augustine connects this statement to the example and teaching of Christ in at least two Scripture passages which *Veritatis Splendor* has already referenced in chapter 3: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32) and "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Saint Augustine's lesson, re-presented with similar argumentation in *Veritatis Splendor*, is beautiful in its original prose. Both carry this message: God's servant, once a slave of sin but now freely a servant in imitation of Christ's charity, can and must rejoice in his new-found freedom.

Understanding *Veritatis Splendor* and Moral Theology with Augustinian Intuitions

With this paper we have tried to recognize in a way similar to Bonino in his study of the explicit references to Saint Thomas Aquinas in *Amoris Laetitia* that an investigation into the Augustinian citations in *Veritatis Splendor* is only the beginning of a larger project. In Bonino's own words,

⁶⁰ A dynamic translation of "Libera servitus est apud Dominum" in *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 100[99], no. 7 (CCL 39:1397), as translated in *VS*, §87. Boulding translates as "Slavery to the Lord is freedom" in WSA II/19.

⁶¹ St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 100[99], no. 7.

⁶² St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps 100[99], no. 7 (trans. mine).

to remain with only a study of the explicit references “leaves in the shadows everything in the document that springs from the profound fertilization of general Catholic culture and magisterial teaching that has transpired through many centuries of symbiotic activity with [in our case, Augustinian thought].”⁶³ We have attempted in the previous sections to show that a study of the explicit references to Saint Augustine leads one quite naturally to see other ways in which his theological thought shapes the words of the magisterium in *Veritatis Splendor*. We especially pointed out both the footnotes and the terminology that reveal a tradition of Augustinian “fertilization” with respect to the magisterium.

Exceptional among the citations from *Veritatis Splendor* that we explored was book 14 of *De Trinitate*, the original context of citation 11 (see the table above). It offers a truly remarkable synopsis of Saint Augustine’s great quest to find the image of God in man. The great African bishop explains there that many aspects of God’s creation, but most especially his own image placed within man’s deepest being, make man receptive to the “splendor of truth” and the light of faith. Saint Augustine holds such a graced encounter to be possible even for the habitual sinner:

But when the mind truly calls its Lord after receiving his Spirit, it perceives quite simply—for it learns this by a wholly intimate instruction from within—that it cannot rise except by his gracious doing, and that it could not have fallen except by its willful undoing. . . . Not that it remembers him because it knew him in Adam, or anywhere else before the life of this body, or when it was first made in order to be inserted into this body. . . . Yet it is reminded to turn to the Lord, as though to the light by which it went on being touched in some fashion even when it turned away from him.⁶⁴

This is the same process which, as we have seen, is described in chapter 1 of *Veritatis Splendor*. Moral conversion begins by *meeting Christ* in his Church and thereby availing oneself of God’s grace. At this point, given its native ability to know and to love its Creator, the soul can “turn to the Lord” and be both healed and enlightened. Repeating the injunction to “turn to the Lord” again in *De Trinitate* 16.22, Saint Augustine indicates the path that must be taken by the one who has welcomed the “brilliance of truth”⁶⁵:

⁶³ Bonino, “St. Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” 499.

⁶⁴ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.15.21.

⁶⁵ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.15.21.

[The human soul] cannot reform itself in the way it was able to deform itself. As [the apostle] says elsewhere, *Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man who was created according to God in justice and the holiness of truth* (Eph 4:23). “Created according to God” means the same as “to the image of God” in another text. But by sinning man lost justice and the holiness of truth, and thus the image became deformed and discolored; he gets those qualities back again when he is reformed and renovated.⁶⁶

Chapter 2 of *Veritatis Splendor* reflected on this profound interior renewal which comes when God’s law in the Holy Spirit is embraced. As for the mention of man being “created according to God” or “to the image of God” in both his creation and restoration to grace, *Veritatis Splendor* teaches this lesson from its first paragraph.⁶⁷ The document makes multiple references to either Christ as the “image of God,” Christians being especially in Christ’s image, or all human beings possessing the image of God.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, scholars like O’Keefe and Mahoney seem to miss the significance of this deeper inculcation or “fertilization” with Augustinian thought in *Veritatis Splendor*. Indeed, the encyclical directs one along the same “high road” as did Saint Augustine, but never forgets that God’s grace, coming from a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, is what makes this journey possible. O’Keefe is right to bring attention to Saint Augustine’s mature and more nuanced assessment of the human condition and the fullness of peace that he believed only to be attainable in heaven. But the African bishop’s later *Retractiones* do not negate his theology

⁶⁶ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 16.22.

⁶⁷ The formulation *ad imaginem Dei* appears in Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.16.21. We see this unique phrase appear in the first paragraph of *Veritatis Splendor* with reference to Gen 1:26 but not to St. Augustine: “Veritatis splendor in omnibus Creatoris operibus effulget, praesertim vero in homine facto ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei...” (Cf. Gen. 1:26). See J. E. Sullivan, O.P., *The Image of God: The Doctrine of St. Augustine and Its Influence* (Dubuque, IA: Priory, 1963), for an early study of Augustine’s developing quest for the image of God in man in *De Trinitate*, with special attention given to the moral dynamism involved in his most mature triad of acts of self-knowledge, self-love, and memory in the human being who is mindful of his Creator. See also D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), for a careful account of how Aquinas, as the reader of Augustine *par excellence*, gradually came to understand Augustine’s account as providing not merely a set description of how man was created, but as indicating a dynamic tendency toward perfection to the image of God present within fundamental human nature when it is open to grace.

⁶⁸ For examples, see *VS*, §§19, 38, 99.

of Christian perfection as it is meant to begin in this life. Nor do the reflections of Pope Saint John Paul II forget the Christological basis for authentic moral transformation, which can start now, in this life:

[Christ] forms us according to his image, in such a way that the traits of his divine nature shine forth in us through sanctification and justice and the life which is good and in conformity with virtue. . . . The beauty of this image shines forth in us who are in Christ, when we show ourselves to be good in our works.⁶⁹

Mahoney's criticism of a long-lingering Augustinian "mood" taken up by the Pope (see note 5 above) fails to acknowledge the virtuous freedom which the "Doctor of Grace" presented and hoped for as a real possibility. Saint Augustine's assessment of fallen humanity, as sober as it is, anticipates the enlightenment, healing, and freedom to love that are never far away for the soul who looks to Christ. The magisterium clearly holds out a similar hope.

In *Veritatis Splendor* the Church consistently shows a willingness to hear, reference, and respond to patristic and Augustinian thought in order to advance a compelling theological account of morality for an age tempted to deny the reality of sin as well as the possibility of virtue. Like the young man in the Gospel account, people today can expect to hear from the Church a law and love that can transform and raise human beings to unforeseen heights. The Catholic Church rightly directs such seekers—those who would recognize both the just demands of God's law and their desire for mercy and healing—to her Redeemer.⁷⁰ We see through the encyclical's words and their sources the affirmation that a life surrendered and lived according to the Truth revealed in Christ is indeed a life of obedient love, profound freedom, and transcendent beauty. N-V

⁶⁹ *VS*, §73. The words used are those of St. Augustine's contemporary, St. Cyril of Alexandria.

⁷⁰ *VS*, §§103–5.