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THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH AS PRESENTED BY JOHN (8:32) IN LIGHT OF TRUTH AND CONSCIENCE AS DISCUSSED IN THE ENCYCLICAL VERITATIS SPLENDOR

Abstract

Given the extraordinary endangerment of truth, freedom, and moral action by subjectivism, individualism, and relativism in the contemporary world, the need has been recognized to recall the source of truth, freedom, and morality, which is provided by Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. The purpose of this paper is to show how the teachings from the encyclical can be applied to the current moral dilemmas facing contemporary society, especially the relativization of truth, and to contribute to the spread of understanding of Christian values and their importance for the individual and society. Therefore, this paper provides a more extensive analysis of the encyclical, as well as its connection to John's theology of truth. The paper deals in detail with the concept of truth in both contexts, analyzing biblical references, philosophical interpretations, and theological discussions. At the very beginning, the central role of truth in the Christian faith and its connection to human freedom is emphasized. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the historical development of the concept of truth, including the Hebrew and Greek views of truth, and John's theology of truth. Particular attention is paid to the interpretation of the key verse from the Gospel of John: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free". The second part of the paper is devoted to an analysis of the relationship between truth and freedom and truth and conscience in the encyclical. The aim of the paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the content and significance of the encyclical for the Church, as well as to consider how the teachings from the encyclical, and John's Gospel, can be applied to the challenges facing contemporary society.

Keywords: Splendor of Truth; truth; freedom; conscience; Gospel of John

DAS KONZEPT DER WAHRHEIT DARGESTELLT VON JOHANNES (8,32) DISKUTIERT IM LICHTE VON WAHRHEIT UND GEWISSEN GEMÄSS DER ENZYKLIKA VERITATIS SPLENDOR

Zusammenfassung

Angesichts der außerordentlichen Gefährdung von Wahrheit, Freiheit und moralischem Handeln durch Subjektivismus, Individualismus und Relativismus in der gegenwärtigen Welt ist die Notwendigkeit erkannt worden, sich auf die Quelle von Wahrheit, Freiheit und Moral zu besinnen, wie sie in der Enzyklika Veritatis Splendor von Papst Johannes Paul II. dargelegt wird. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es zu zeigen, wie die Lehren der Enzyklika auf die aktuellen moralischen Dilemmata der heutigen Gesellschaft – insbesondere auf die Relativierung der Wahrheit – angewendet werden können, um so zur Verbreitung des Verständnisses christlicher Werte sowie ihrer Bedeutung für den Einzelnen und die Gesellschaft beizutragen. Daher bietet diese Arbeit eine umfassendere Analyse der Enzyklika sowie ihrer Verbindung mit der johanneischen Theologie der Wahrheit. Die Untersuchung befasst sich eingehend mit dem Begriff der Wahrheit in beiden Kontexten und analysiert entsprechende biblische Bezüge, philosophische Interpretationen und theologische Diskussionen. Zu Beginn wird die zentrale Rolle der Wahrheit im christlichen Glauben und ihre Verbindung mit der menschlichen Freiheit hervorgehoben. Es folgt eine detaillierte Analyse der historischen Entwicklung des Wahrheitsbegriffs, einschließlich der hebräischen und griechischen Auffassungen von Wahrheit sowie der johanneischen Theologie der Wahrheit. Besonderes Augenmerk gilt der Auslegung des Schlüsselverses aus dem Johannesevangelium: „Ihr werdet die Wahrheit erkennen, und die Wahrheit wird euch frei machen.“ Der zweite Teil der Arbeit widmet sich der Analyse der Beziehung zwischen Wahrheit und Freiheit sowie zwischen Wahrheit und Gewissen in der Enzyklika. Ziel der Arbeit ist es, ein tieferes Verständnis des Inhalts und der Bedeutung der Enzyklika für die Kirche zu gewinnen sowie zu untersuchen, wie die Lehren der Enzyklika und des Johannesevangeliums auf die Herausforderungen der heutigen Gesellschaft angewendet werden können.

Schlüsselwörter: Glanz der Wahrheit; Wahrheit; Freiheit; Gewissen; Johannesevangelium

Introduction

„The splendor of truth shines in all the works of the Creator and especially in man who is created in the image and likeness of God” (cf. Gen 1:26), Pope John Paul II began the Encyclical Veritatis Splendor. The Encyclical,

published in 1993, focuses on certain questions of the Church's moral teaching. However, "what is truth," Pilate asked Jesus (cf. Jn 18:38), and today, contemporary society and the individual stand before the same question. Jesus, of course, answered this question on several occasions - "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), "The truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32), "your (Father's) word is truth" (Jn 17:17), and the Spirit of Truth will guide you into all truth (Jn 16:13).

To understand more clearly Jesus' statement "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32), with which John Paul II begins (31) and ends (34) his discourse on the truth that liberates in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, a hermeneutical explanation of its meaning is necessary. Jesus' statement, namely, forms a contextual inclusion in the Pope's further reflections on truth, freedom, and conscience throughout the following four chapters. The Pope points to the effect of Jesus' statement to reveal to the whole world the connection between truth and the freedom of the human person and his conscience (VS 54-64). However, it contains an imperative of knowing expressed through the condition: you will know. The sentence itself contains the main concept that needs to be carefully considered, and that is truth.

1. Historical Development of Truth

Modernity describes human progress but also many challenges that people face, from digitalization, an "instant" way of life, through multiculturalism, the crisis of marriage and family to relativism (of life). The importance of truth in all these novelties of the modern world has been particularly lost today, becoming exclusively subjective with the rejection of the existence of any "objective truth". This is in paradox with the true in man, and that is the question of the Pilate's "what is truth" (Jn 18:38), because every person at some point in their life asks that question and seeks it. That is why it is important to discuss the (im)possibilities of "objective truth". The generally accepted definition of Thomas Aquinas is *Veritatis est adaequatio rei et intellectus* or "The truth is compatible reality with intellect" whereby reality not being the reality of the existence of a cat or a forest, but what is at its core beyond the visible (Lasić, 2012). However, despite the truth being revealed and offered to everyone (*Deus revelatus*), the essential remains hidden (*Deus absconditus*). It is possible to get closer to her and get to know her more, only in her publication (Lasić 2012).

Philosophers have been dealing with the idea of truth for centuries, so Kant will say that truth consists “only in the agreement of knowledge with itself with complete abstraction from all objects in general”, and Hegel interprets truth “as that which is whole, which is greater than its parts and which contains them in itself as canceled and at the same time as individual stages of self-realization of that whole.” E. Husserl and M. Scheler, on the other hand, say that “truth is the product of a mutual correlation between consciousness and object”, while, in contrast, K. Jaspers, M. Heidegger, and J.-P. Sartre imply truth “as that which is revealed as meaning in the course of the execution of existence itself.”¹ However, for believers, truth is not just a definition, but a Person. This is reflected in the biblical interpretation of truth - the Hebrew word *emeth* and the Greek word *aletheia* and their variants.

1.1. The Hellenistic spectrum of truth

In the philosophical tradition of Western civilization, truth (Greek: *aletheia*) is usually associated with the classical definition according to Thomas Aquinas: *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei* - Truth is the correspondence between reality and reason (Lasić, 2012). In antiquity, truth was a judgment about reality, but this judgment was subject to a deterministic understanding of reality. It was with such a challenge that St. John measured himself (Górka, 2003). Already in the Hellenistic period, truth was identified with the absolute, indestructible, unchanging and invisible good. Furthermore, the Greek word *aletheia* consists of the prefix “a” which means “not” and the verb “lanthanein” which means “to be hidden”. Thus, the literal translation of this word would be “that which is not hidden” (Popowski, 1997). Moreover, in Greek philosophy, *aletheia* is much more than just a fact, it implies a deep understanding of things and arriving at the truth through thought and research. According to this, truth is accessible to all, always open and visible (Jagodić, 2024).

1.2. The Hebrew Spectrum of Truth

However, it is also necessary to look at the Old Testament concept of truth. In the Old Testament, several terms are used for truth - they are “emeth” (Heb. אֱמֶת), *omnan* (Heb. אֱמִנָּה), *kuwn* (Heb. כּוּן), *tsedeq* (Heb.

¹ “Truth”, (Istina). Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013. – 2024., u: <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/istina>.

צדק), aken (Heb. אָכַן). The noun “emeth” (Gen 42:6; Ex 18:21; Jš 22:22; Ps 25:5) is derived from the Hebrew verb אָמַן “aman” (cf. 2 Cor 1:20) which means: to be firm, secure, trustworthy.² Therefore, truth is the property of what is established, verified, what can be relied on. The term truth in relation to God means faithfulness and trust (De La Potterie 1993). It is also important to mention the interpretation³ according to which God ends his creation with the words bar Elohim la’asot (בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים לַאֲסוֹת) (cf. Genesis 2:3), so the last letters of each of those words form the word emet:

Figure 1. The end of the creation of the world according to Genesis 2:3



Source: https://hebrew4christians.com/Glossary/Word_of_the_Week/Archived/Emet/emet.html

With this in mind, the words with which the biblical account of creation ends “from all his work that he has done” (Heb. la’asot) actually say that truth is action, not being. Also, the same source mentions that emet (אֱמֶת), contains the first, middle and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which indicates that the truth covers all things and lasts from the beginning (א) to the end (ת). The word omnan (Heb. אֱמָנָן) is a derivative of the word oman, which means true, real, and is mentioned in Job 34:12 (*Indeed*, God never does evil, nor the Almighty when he perverts the right.) and Job 36:4 (*Indeed*, I have no words for a lie, with you a man is perfect in knowledge). We meet the word kuwn⁴ (Heb. כּוּן) in Psalm 5:10 “There is no truth in their mouth, their heart is full of wickedness; their throat is an open grave, and they flatter with their tongue”, which actually equates truth with sincerity, honest speech, and originally the meaning is to be upright, to set, to be sure.⁵ The word tsedeq (Heb. צֶדֶק) is a derivative of the word tsadaq (Heb.

² Downloaded from: theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450.

³ https://hebrew4christians.com/Glossary/Word_of_the_Week/Archived/Emet/emet.html. Downloaded: 1.10.2024.

⁴ Downloaded from: theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450.

⁵ The word truth comes from the words trīewth, trēowth which means “faithfulness, constancy”, that is, from the word true (trēowe, trýwe) ‘steadfast, loyal’; related to

אָרֶךְ) which means to be right, correct, righteous, cleansed, and we also find it in Ps 52:3 “You love evil more than good, and lies more than the *truth!*” The word aken (Heb. אָכַן) means firm, secure, and is found in Jer 8:8 “*Indeed, the lying pen of the scribe has turned it into a lie!*”

It can be said that the concept of truth in the Old Testament means walking in God’s law, as well as God’s plan. Moreover, in the biblical sense, the word truth is never limited by intellectual understanding (Krasicki & Albin, 2023).

The notion of truth in both the Hellenistic and the biblical perspective is multi-layered and complex. There is a difference in interpretations, however, both currents had a great influence on the development of Western culture and philosophy. Therefore, understanding these two starting points also helps to understand how (have) people throughout history dealt with the question of truth and how they defined it.

2. John’s spectrum of truth

John knows all the expressions (Hebrew and Greek) that speak of truth, but he himself does not come up with a definition of truth. In the Corpus Joanneum, the form of the noun truth, not counting adjectives, is found in 34 places, of which 17 times in John’s Gospel. What makes John’s way of writing about the truth special is his scope and breadth and the art of applying the truth (Górka, 2003). John’s theology is the theology of revelation; therefore, the concept of truth occupies a special place in it. It is often spoken about the Ivan’s truth, which denotes God’s being, divine reality, God’s being that is revealed in man. He develops the apocalyptic and wisdom theme of revealed truth accepted by the New Testament. The Greek word for truth is *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια),⁶ which means to expose, to open, to make clear, and it is related to Plato’s reality versus unreality, heavenly versus earthly. This, in turn, is completely complementary to Ivan’s dual-

the German *treu*, *truce* which means *truce*, *cease fire* (cf. Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/truth_n?tab=factsheet#17397989, 1.10.2024.).

⁶ The etymology of the word *aletheia* says that it consists of two words α (Alpha – the first letter of the alphabet) which in this case represents negation and the word *lanthano* (λανθάνω) which means to be hidden, invisible (theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450). In this context, *aletheia* is unconcealed, unforgotten, which in a way indicates that when we talk about truth, we are talking about a living being, which is characterized by memory or forgetting (cf. <https://www.ontology.co/aletheia.htm>, 3.10.2024).

ism (Utley 1996, p. 113). When *alētheia* is analyzed as a noun, it is revealed that Jesus is the fullness of grace and truth (1:14, 17), the focal point of the testimony of John the Baptist (1,32-34; 18:37), then, that Jesus speaks the truth (8,4,44-46), that He is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), that he sanctifies them in the truth, that is, Jesus (Logos, 1:1-3) is the truth (17:17). Furthermore, if the adjective *alēthēs* (genuine/real, credible) and *alēthinus* (real) are analyzed, it can be seen, that it is the true testimony of Jesus (5:31-32; 7:18; 8:13-14), that He is the true light (1:9), the true bread (6:32), the true vine (15:1), the true witness (19:35) (Utley 1996, p. 113). John's use of the word truth is also connected with freedom and conscience (8:32).

2.1. *Hermeneutics John 8:32*

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

The context of that passage is a long and very difficult discussion between Jesus and the Jews that extends all the way to the end of the eighth chapter. Jesus calls the neophytes (8:30) to rise above Jewish ideas. He teaches that receiving the truth he proclaims ensures true freedom. Unfortunately, some do not understand Jesus' words. Jesus talks about the true attitude of his disciples and calls for a deepening of faith. True disciples faithfully listen to Jesus' teaching. They receive it and allow their lives to change under its influence (1 John 2:14; John 5:38). Those who do so, according to Jesus' imperative, know the truth. The word to know (Gr. *ginosko*; Heb. *yada*) means to know absolutely, to unite closely by becoming one.⁷ Therefore, that verse does not refer to accumulated human knowledge, but to the truth that is the Person, Jesus Christ, with whom one becomes one, if he becomes acquainted.⁸ It can also be said that two more meanings are contained in that verse, namely reliability and truth versus deception, which is complementary to Jesus' life and ministry. Which means that a lot of “empirical knowledge”, true knowledge, cannot set anyone free (Ecclesiastes 1:18) (Utley 1996). Therefore, receiving the revealed teaching of Jesus means knowing Jesus because he is the truth and the word (14:6). Whoever receives the truth, allows it to take root in his interior⁹, therefore the truth will set him

⁷ Downloaded from: theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450.

⁸ *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (cf. Gal 3:27).*

⁹ The center of the interior is the heart (Heb. *lēb*), and the heart is the center of physical life, a metaphor for a person (cf. Acts 14:17; II Cor 3:2-3; Jas 5:5), the center of spiritual life (i.e. morality, conscience), the center of the thought life (ie, the mind, cf. Mt 13:15;

free (Martin and Wright 2015). *Praxis*¹⁰ and rejecting the works of darkness (Jn 3:20) will verify the works of believers (John 3:20) (Górka).

2.2. *Truth as the word of the Father*

For John, truth is not only God's being but also the Father's word (Jn 17:17; cf. 1Jn 1:8). Christ heard that word from the Father (Jn 8:26). This word is the truth that he came to proclaim (Jn 8:40,45) and to which he came to testify (Jn 18:37). At the same time, truth is the word that Christ addresses to people, which leads to faith in him (John 8:31). The difference between this and the Old Testament revelation is strongly emphasized: "The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17), because with Christ and through him came the most complete revelation. The Christian novelty is that Jesus himself is the Truth (Jn 14:9) because the word became flesh and carries within itself the fullness of revelation, allowing us to know the Father (Jn 1:18). Jesus is also the Way to the Father because he is the Truth and as such conveys the revelation about the Father (John 17:8). That Christ is the Truth reveals his divine nature - the Only Begotten - God, who is in the bosom of the Father (Jn 1, 18).

2.3. *Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life*

It can be said that Jesus was a perfect teacher who embodied everything that the Old Testament announced, as he himself said that he came to fulfill the Law (Mt 5:17), therefore He is the very Law. His teaching was not just a set of rules, but a living and personal relationship with God. Jesus showed that faith is not only expressed in words, but also in actions. By his example, he showed how to treat others, how to pray and how to believe in God (Krasicki and Albin 2023). Jesus was more than a teacher - he was the Way¹¹, the

24:48; Acts 7:23; 16:14; 28:27; Rom 1:21; 10:6; 16:18; II Cor 4:18; II Pt 18:7 is synonymous with the mind), the center of will (i.e. the will, cf. Acts 5:4; 11:23; I Cor 4:5; 7:37; II Cor 9:7), the center of feeling (cf Mt 5:28; Acts 2:26.37; 21:24; Ephesians 6:7; II Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6 [ie Christ in our hearts, Eph 3:17]). (Cf. Cf. Bob UTLEY, Ivan. 1, 2, 3 John Commentary, in: Free Bible Commentary, http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/hrv/VOL04_croatian.pdf, 1.10.2024, 189).

¹⁰ But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God. The word practices (Greek: poieo) means an act, to do or to do. It differs from the Greek root prasso which means to perform repeatedly or habitually (theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450).

¹¹ The word path is Greek. hodos (ὁδός) which means active path, walking, progress (cf. theWord, Bible Software, version 5.0.0.1450).

Truth and the Life, that is, the only way to reach God (John 14:6). Jesus is the Father's gift to people so that people may have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus is Eternal Life (Gr. *zoe*, ζωή), and that life is more than mere physical, bodily existence. It is life in truth and freedom. Also, Jesus received everything he handed over to us (Jn 8:18), so it can be said that God the Father was Jesus' teacher. Jesus is the embodiment of the reality announced by the Law (John 1:17) and invites everyone to believe in him (John 3:12; 8:45-47) (Krasicki and Albin 2023).

2.4. The implication of Jesus as Truth in the life of believers

Jesus announces the coming into the world of the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:7; 15:26; 16:13), the Spirit testifies about Christ (Jn 15:26; 1Jn 5:6) and introduces the disciples to all truth (Jn 16:13) as would understand the true meaning of Christ's words (John 14:26). Jesus calls the Spirit the Truth because it allows faith to understand the truth of Christ. John strongly emphasizes the role of truth in the life of believers. A believer must strive to be a friend of the truth (John 18:37; 1 John 3:19). When a Christian enters a new life by faith, life in the Spirit (Jn 3, 3-8; Krasicki, 2021), he must constantly strive to be under the influence of the truth (Christ and the Holy Spirit) that resides in him (2Jn 4). Truth is a condition of life in the Spirit, that is to say holiness. Listening to the word and the fullness of revelation, man lives by the Spirit. With his faith, which is a response to God who is revealed (Krasicki, 2022). New directory), he confirms his choice and keeps his word (John 14:15). This can be done by a man who has known Christ and the Holy Spirit, that means the truth.

According to John, *aletheia* is also the inner principle of moral life. It gives full Christian meaning to old biblical expressions: "doing the truth" means embracing and adopting the truth of Jesus, Jesus himself (Jn 3:21). That is why the believer should "walk in the truth" (2 John 4: 3 John 3 - the spectrum of truth Langkamer) this means fulfilling the commandment of love. Confessing their sins (1 Jn 1:6), believers walk in the truth. Worship in spirit and truth springs from within (Jn 4:23). This is actually where conscience can be discovered as a place of encounter with God and as an incentive for moral action. That is why the Spirit is truly active in those whom he has reborn, and he makes everything possible. In conscience, the believer is called to cooperate with the truth (3Jn: 8). Therefore, the truth of John is the truth of the gospel of the revelatory word of the Father present in Jesus Christ and enlightened by the Spirit. It is received in faith.

3. The Pope's conception of truth in *Veritatis Splendor*

Man carries within himself a thirst for absolute truth (No. 1). Subjectivism, individualism and ethical relativism (No. 32) are evils that influence today's mentality and encourage evil deeds. That's why the pope addresses bishops and professors of moral theology in a special way. In particular, bishops are transmitters of truth, and moralists help distinguish good deeds. Before leaving the Earth, Christ promised his disciples, "I still have much to say to you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes - the Spirit of Truth - he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak of himself, but he will speak what he hears and will announce to you what is to come." Following the beginnings of the Church, the Spirit of Truth leads the disciples-believers towards the truth. An example is the attitude of the disciples towards Gentiles and Gentiles, as evidenced by the Acts of the Apostles. First, Philip goes to Samaria and gathers many believers (Acts 8:6), the meeting between Peter and Cornelius, a Roman officer and his family, during which they convert to faith in Christ (Acts 10:25-45) and Paul's announcement to Barnabas in Mala Asia, where the Church gathers a large number of believers (Acts 13, 48-49). Even today, the Spirit of Truth directs the Church to all the truth, finding ways and tools to bring the Good News to new generations. The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (hereinafter: GS) – About the church in the modern world is one of the tools to bring the Gospel of Jesus closer to the believers of the modern age. Related to truth and freedom, GS emphasizes the conscience as the place where man hears God's voice and can enter into dialogue with him. This definition of conscience fits with the theology of the truth of St. John. Conscience is connected to truth and cannot function without it (no. 4) because moral evaluation takes place in conscience. This means rejecting the effects of evil (cf. John 3:20). However, true freedom is also expressed only and only through the truth, and John Paul II wants to emphasize that. in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* - Splendor of Truth. John's theology presupposes a judgment between faith and unbelief between good works and bad. However, modern theologians try to reduce judgment to making decisions about how a person must organize his life (VS 55). Many are also bothered by the Church's Magisterium, which, according to them, causes a conflict of conscience (VS 56), and this is precisely what opposes Christ as the Truth and the Spirit of Truth who guides the faithful. Unfortunately, many believers poison their

conscience with their own ideology and thereby depart from freedom. In this chapter, John's theology of truth will relate to the Pope's conception of truth, which is undeniably connected to human freedom and conscience.

3.1. *Truth and freedom*

The Croatian word freedom comes from the proto-slavic and old-slavic *svoboda* (Russian: *svobóda*, Polish: *swoboda*), and in translation it would mean *to be who you are* or *belonging to* or *originating from*. Furthermore, there is an interpretation according to which word freedom consists of two words, the first is *own*, from word *svo* in proto-slavic, and the second one, also comes from proto-slavic word *buditi*, *to wake*, which roots are in proto-indoeuropean word, which is closed to sanskrit word *b^hewd^h*, in translation *to be awake*, *to be concious*. Literally, sanskrit word *bodháyati* means *state of awareness of yourself* or, even, more precisely *a talent to be aware of yourself*; the reason to translate it as a *talent* comes from slavic's roots and protoind. word *déb₃rom, dhāt₁* which translation is *the one who gives, supports, the one who creates*.¹²

If the truth is the Person, and the freedom is belonging to the Truth who appears in the Person of Jesus Chris (cf. Jn 14:6), then given contexts of words freedom very well explains the freedom that comes from the truth. Even the Christ himself invites to vigilance (cf. Lk 21:36; Mk 13:33,37; 14:34), therefore, from this perspective we could conclude he invites to freedom (cf. Gal 5:1), conscious and conscientious living.

It can be heard that this time is the period of the so-called post-truths, which actually define alternative facts spoken by politicians, product advertisements or the opinion of an expert. But those who follow Jesus should remember his teaching about truth and implement it in their life (Sibley 2021). Already at the beginning of the encyclical (no. 6-27), the Pope explains the doctrine of the relationship between freedom and truth, interpreting the parable of the rich young man (Mt 19, 16-22; Mk 10, 17-31; Lk 18, 18-30). This is where the true meaning of freedom is revealed (Pozaić 1994). "And look, someone approached him and said: Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?"

"Someone" can represent every person who has asked himself about the meaning of life, because the Good attracts and calls everyone to himself (VS 6). Furthermore, that "someone" in this case is a pious Israelite, obviously

¹² Hrvatska Enciklopedia, 10, Sl – To, urednik, Slaven Ravlić, Leksikonski zavod Miroslav Krleža, Zagreb 2008, 23.

unfulfilled by the observance of legal regulations, The Laws, turns to Jesus who raised new questions about the moral good with his teaching (VS 7). Jesus first answers him that only one is good (Mt 19, 17) so that only God can answer his question about the good. The Pope says that to ask about the good is, in fact, to turn to God. Every man was given freedom at the beginning of creation (Genesis 2:16), created in God's image, God revealed himself through the Decalogue, as the one who is "the only good", the model of moral action (VS 10). However, if only God is Good, no human effort can fulfill the Law, but the fulfillment can only come from and through God, by sharing in Goodness (VS 11). Jesus answers the young man to keep the commandments, but the young man persistently continues asking him "Which ones?" (Mt 19, 18). Jesus answering his commandments, as if he focused on those who are destined to take care of the good of the person, the image of God (VS 13), neglecting the love for God, but this only proves that the conversation is with a scholar of the law (VS 14). The young man replies that he did all that, but it's as if he himself realizes that he lacks something, then Jesus said to him "Do you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And then come and follow me" (Mt 19:21). The Pope says that perfection requires that maturity in self-giving to which man's freedom is called and continues that man's freedom and God's law are not in conflict but refer to each other (VS 17). In simple words, man's freedom is in fulfilling the Law of God, and he can achieve this by ceasing life "according to the flesh", because he sees the need not to stop at the minimum requirements of the law, but to live them in their fullness (VS 18). Jesus invites the young man to follow him, to agree with his person, to share his life and destiny (cf. Jn 8:32). To follow Christ does not mean to imitate him outwardly, but to become a part of His body, to cling deep within to the One who loved to the end (Jn 13:1) (VS 20-21). Thus, respecting and fulfilling the Law gives a certain freedom, but true freedom is found in complete surrender to Jesus, perhaps first of all, following the Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1-12; Lk 6, 20-23). Jesus' invites to perfect love shows us the way to that perfection, and his life is the greatest example for all Christians (Duzel 2016). As the Pope says, freedom is a gift by which man can choose God willingly, and, freedom is already visible in the image of God in man (VS 34). Misunderstood freedom presupposes even the complete exclusion of the Absolute, which should be the source of value, while freedom itself appears as an absolute (VS 32). The elimination of truth creates an untrue moral judgment of conscience. The disappearance

of the universal truth about the good that is accessible to human knowledge ultimately leads to a change in the conception of conscience. Such a vision is associated with individualistic ethics according to which each person stands before his own truth (VS 32). This makes the truth a lie, something that does not exist according to the definition of truth and according to the understanding of St. Ivan. That is why today's man feels the antinomy between moral law and conscience, between nature and freedom (VS 32). Truth presupposes freedom, because if there is no truth, slavery arises. Freedom is the foundation of the human person by the act of creation. Man desires to be with God in his conscience (VS 55).

3.2. Truth and conscience

One of the main themes in *Veritatis Splendor* is dealing with contemporary moral debates. The Pope talks about conscience in numbers 54 to 64 (Pozaić 1994). The starting point about conscience is the text of St. Paul from Rom 2:14-16 where the apostle of the people claims that they are heathens by their own law because it is written in their hearts (Čovo 1995). According to GS, conscience is the “sanctuary” of man, in which God’s voice resounds, leading man not to blindly follow the letter of the Law, but to creatively approach all the tasks that God has entrusted to man” (VS 55). The relationship between freedom and The Law is related to the individual’s moral conscience. That is why conscience can be defined as a person’s witness to the moral law, his faithfulness or unfaithfulness, and God himself (VS 56). and the practical witness, that is, the judgment of conscience is always a practical judgment of discernment (VS 59), which orders that one always does good and avoids evil (Čovo 1995). Conscience seeks the truth, and it is the basis of a person’s integrally understood rights. Furthermore, the encyclical explains how it is conscience “the closest norm of personal morality” and therefore the authority of its voice derives from the truth about moral good and evil, which it is called to listen to. Thus, it is not the conscience that makes the Law, but it confirms it by practicing it (VS 60). However, human conscience is expressed in several ways that are not always good, because they deviate from the truth about man as God’s image and creation (VS31), which reminds us that the Law warns about man’s dependence on God, and conscience about man’s dignity. By preserving the natural relationship between freedom and the Law, the court of conscience mandates the necessary connection between freedom and truth, because man has responsibility, which he expresses through freedom and

the decision not to commit evil (VS 61). But how to know for sure that the conscience is protected “against the possibility of error”?

The natural law “written in our hearts” is a prerequisite that is necessary, but not sufficient for a correct judgment of conscience. The conscience first of all, must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Romans 9:1), it must be pure (2Tim 1:3), it must not defile God’s word (2Cor 4:2), as well as that it must constantly question itself (Romans 12:2), and to shape and make it the subject of “constant conversion” (VS 62-64). Therefore, according to the Pope, it is important that a “natural kinship” occurs between man and true good (VS 64), and there is only one Good (Mt 19:17), and only he who does the truth comes to the light (cf. Jn 3, 21). Virtue opens space for man to become complementary to truth, especially the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. “Faith that works in love and kindles hope (LG 41) is really the fundamental option of a Christian, but with the intention of bearing fruit” (VS 66) (Čovo 1995).

Conclusion

Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, deeply explored the connection between truth, freedom and conscience. Starting from the evangelical foundation, where Jesus presents himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Pope leads us through considerations about truth, freedom and conscience. Truth, which is presented in the Holy Scriptures as an attribute of God, becomes a concrete person in Jesus Christ, and its acceptance brings true freedom. By understanding the identity of truth, we understand Jesus’ call to know the truth that will set us free (cf. Jn 8:32). In the deep connection between John’s theology of truth and the papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, the immutable foundation of the Christian faith is recognized: Jesus Christ is truth incarnate. This truth, which was the center of John’s Gospel, also becomes the central focus of the Pope’s reflection. If a person rejects God’s plan of truth, he rejects both the Revelation and the natural law written in his heart (Romans 2:15). The encyclical reminds us that truth and freedom are inextricably linked. Freedom is not arbitrariness, but the ability to choose the good, and this is possible only in the light of truth. The young man who came to Jesus by obeying every letter of the law, nevertheless, realizes that this does not make him completely free. Jesus invites him to follow him. This call consists in the conversion of the heart (Mt 5, 1-6), in becoming awake, conscious. What else is freedom, but to

“be yourself”, following the natural law that was inscribed in us from the beginning (Genesis 1, 26-27). Freedom is in listening and receiving God’s Word. Knowing the Truth, which is a Person, then It leads to freedom and frees the conscience. The truth, which is revealed in God’s law written in the hearts of people, becomes the basis of moral action. Conscience, as an inner voice, is called to distinguish good from evil, always in the light of truth. The believer receives a new life through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit introduces him to the complete truth. Only such truth can bring a correct judgment of conscience. Freedom is therefore in an inextricable connection with conscience and truth. However, the modern world often relativizes the truth, questioning the existence of objective moral norms. The Pope warns us about the dangers of such an approach, because it leads to the loss of freedom and calls into question the very dignity of man. *Veritatis Splendor* is a strong call to return to the sources of the Christian faith. The truth, as a fundamental pillar of Christian life, invites us to a constant search for meaning and a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. By accepting the truth, we free ourselves from the shackles of sin and open ourselves to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. The encyclical reminds us that the Christian life is a journey, and the goal of that journey is communion with God, which is realized in truth and love.

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