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## **Doing Bioethics in the Light of *Dignitas Personae***

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## Abstract

[The recent document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dignitas Personae* addresses a number of contemporary issues. However a matter that may not be given such attention is the treatment by the Congregation of the relationship between faith and reason. The issue is crucial because in the field of Bioethics we are frequently engaged in dialogue with our secular counterparts and debating public policy and legislation.

There are very practical matters to resolve about how to conduct oneself as a Catholic Bioethicist, Philosopher or Theologian in the public forum in which much of Bioethics is conducted. An approach to take has been to explain the issues as a matter of pure reason and of natural law and to seek to win support for a natural law approach without expecting an audience to listen to claims made from a faith perspective.

It seems to me that, as a matter of recent history, that approach is a failure. The UK is probably the clearest example of a concerted effort to take that approach by Catholic intellectuals and the UK probably leads the way in the Western World in terms of adopting evil public policies that are aggressively bigoted in the active exclusion of religious views and of natural law concepts, particularly the rejection of the Pauline Principle and moral absolutes that are at the core of natural law explanations. UK public policy also rejects any notion of sexual ethics other than that there be consent.

The article suggests that a pure reason approach to secular discussion sells us short by leaving out important elements, such as the theological virtues, and what we know of human and divine love and the communion of persons revealed in the person of Christ and in the Blessed Trinity. St Thomas taught that the theological virtues are not derived from reason but from revelation. To proceed in these debates without those Christian presuppositions robs us of much that is important to understanding our moral tradition, including, I argue, an understanding of moral absolutes and the Pauline Principle.

From a Catholic perspective, what we have to offer is an alternative approach to philosophical analysis that constructively builds upon shared understanding, mutually seeking the transcendent. In that we can accept the different cultures within our pluralistic society as raw data and can work to identify goodness as a common ground and knowable. That then permits us, in a culturally inclusive way, to transcend differences between religions and cultures while still founded upon those differences. That approach is especially open to the Christian notion of love, asking simply that it be considered as an alternative and asking the very practical question whether a civilisation based on a notion of love as gift of self is a better civilisation than the alternatives.

Basically I am claiming that Christian Philosophy has much to contribute to Bioethics from a tradition of exploration of human nature and identifying doctrines that are good for mankind and justified in human terms. As a Christian philosopher I am formed by faith but willing to test its propositions, knowing that God loves us and wants what is good for us.]

## Doing Bioethics in the Light of *Dignitas Personae*

The document *Dignitas Personae* “addresses some recent questions in the light of the criteria expressed in the Instruction *Donum Vitae* and which also examines some issues that were treated earlier, but are in need of additional clarification”.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of attention will no doubt be on the Congregation’s teaching on questions such as freezing embryos, freezing eggs, the use of contraceptives and other forms of early interception, gene therapy and the use of stem cell lines from prohibited sources. Of particular interest is that the Congregation has prohibited human-animal hybridization referring to it as representing an offense against the dignity of human beings on account of *the admixture of human and animal genetic elements capable of disrupting the specific identity of man*. This would seem to have moral implications for human-animal transgenesis<sup>2</sup> which is also an admixture of human and animal genetic elements.

No doubt there will also be significant interest in the Congregation having clearly identified three major issues involved in reproductive technology:

- a) the right to life and to physical integrity of every human being from conception to natural death;
- b) the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse;
- c) the specifically human values of sexuality which require “that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses”,

The lack of respect for the life of the embryo in the process is more heavily emphasized in this document as intrinsic to the IVF process. Especially in relation to ICSI but inclusive of IVF, a contrast is made in relation to the domination of the embryo and quality control. There is a lack of love in the relationship formed during the actual origin of the child in the manipulative acts of a technologist in the laboratory:

Indeed ICSI takes place “outside the bodies of the couple through actions of third parties whose competence and technical activity determine the success of the procedure. Such fertilization entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dignitatis Personae* 20 June 2008 n.1  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, John Fleming and Ray Campbell “Ethics and Human-animal Transgenesis” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* Vol 6 no 4 Winter 2006

domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children.<sup>3</sup>

It would appear to be on the basis of (b) that the Congregation declares that it is ethically unacceptable for frozen embryos that are unwanted by their parents to be put at the disposal of infertile couples as a *treatment for infertility*, and further that the issue of prenatal adoption is considered problematic and not an acceptable solution to the problem.<sup>4</sup> This ought to settle the debate that took place in the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

However an issue that may not be such a matter of immediate interest is the relationship between faith and reason in Bioethics about which the document has something to say. The issue is crucial because in the field of Bioethics we are frequently engaged in dialogue with our secular counterparts and debating public policy and legislation.

There are very practical matters to resolve about how to conduct oneself as a Catholic Bioethicist, Philosopher or Theologian in the public forum in which much of Bioethics is conducted. An approach to take has been to explain the issues as a matter of pure reason and of natural law and to seek to win support for a natural law approach without expecting an audience to listen to claims made from a faith perspective.

It seems to me that, as a matter of recent history, that approach is a failure. The UK is probably the clearest example of a concerted effort to take that approach by Catholic intellectuals and the UK probably leads the way in the Western World in terms of adopting evil public policies that are aggressively bigoted in the active exclusion of religious views and of natural law concepts, particularly the rejection of the Pauline Principle and moral absolutes that are at the core of natural law explanations. UK public policy also rejects any notion of sexual ethics other than that there be consent.

There has been discussion and speculation about differences in approach between the present Pope and his predecessor on the matter of the development of public policy and law in a democratic, pluralist society. This document and *Donum Vitae* might be expected to reflect any differences that are there to be found, each reflecting the different pontificates. Of particular interest in this document is the emphasis that is given to *Trinitarian anthropology* (n. 8 and 9) and the descriptions of natural law (n. 6 and 7). Reason and faith are described as not mutually exclusive but supporting each other and intersecting.

The present Pope, writing then as Professor of Theology at the University of Regensburg, wrote a critique of the treatment of the relationship between Philosophy and Theology in the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*. He referred

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<sup>3</sup> *Dignitatis Personae* n.12-17

<sup>4</sup> *Dignitatis Personae* n.19

<sup>5</sup> See my own article: Nicholas Tonti-Filippini "The Embryo Rescue Debate: Impregnating Women, Ectogenesis, and Restoration from Suspended Animation" *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* Spring 2003 pp.111-137 and the subsequent Colloquy: The Embryo Rescue Debate *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* Autumn 2003

to there not being a radical enough rejection of a doctrine of man divided into philosophy and theology and the tendency for a schematic representation of nature and the supernatural being merely juxtaposed<sup>6</sup>.

He described as a fictional starting point the claim that it is possible to construct a rational philosophical picture of man intelligible to all and on which all men of goodwill can agree, “the actual Christian doctrines being added to this as a sort of crowning conclusion”.<sup>7</sup>

The approach in *Gaudium et Spes* to Philosophy and Theology that seems to merely juxtapose them is evident in the following passage (GS n. 62):

Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith. The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which effect life and which demand new theological investigations. Furthermore, theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another.

In the same article, Ratzinger was highly critical of the Thomists saying that it can hardly be disputed that as a consequence of the division between philosophy and theology established by the Thomists, a juxtaposition has gradually been established which no longer appears adequate. “There is, and must be, a human reason *in* faith, yet conversely, every human reason is conditioned by historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist”.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that a debate rages between Thomists over whether a pure reason model or a more Augustinian Thomism properly represents St Thomas<sup>9</sup>.

Arguably *Dignitas Personae* (DP) is to be contrasted to *Gaudium et Spes* in this respect when in referring to the mysteries of creation and the incarnation, it seems to express a view more consistent with Cardinal Ratzinger. His view would seem to be reflected in *Dignitas Personae* (n.7) which, quoting John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* (n. 45) states:

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Ratzinger “The Dignity of the Human Person” in Herbert Vorgrimler (ed) *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* Vol V (Burns & Oates: London 1969), pp. 115-163 I am grateful to my colleague Prof Tracey Rowland for identifying the quotations from Cardinal Ratzinger.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to my colleague A/Prof Tracey Rowland for drawing my attention to the Thomists’ differences of opinion. I read with interest the contributions to Vol 83, Summer 2009, Issue No.3 of the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, which was devoted to a discussion of contemporary Thomisms.

The respect for the individual human being, which reason requires, is further enhanced and strengthened in the light of these truths of faith: thus, we see that there is no contradiction between the affirmation of the dignity and the affirmation of the sacredness of human life. “The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsel whereby God predestines men and women ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son’ (*Rom* 8:29)”<sup>10</sup>.

This issue is reflected in the debate over what is sometimes disparagingly called the “Hellenization of the early tradition”<sup>11</sup> which may also be attributed to the influence of St Paul based on his background and philosophical education as a Roman citizen and the Hellenic influences on Roman culture. In relation to natural law the scriptural text most often quoted is St Paul’s letter to the Romans:

When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do instinctively things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, to which their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.<sup>12</sup>

St Paul’s attitude to philosophy is confusing. He is negative about philosophy but evidently used the language of philosophy of the period and locality in which the Stoics had much influence and he would have been familiar with Aristotle of whose works the Stoics made free use. His reasoning reflects Aristotle, of an earlier period, and Stoics of the day – Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Cicero.

Historically St Paul would have had a Greek philosophical training as a Roman citizen and clearly used Stoic arguments. He clearly believed that knowledge can be attained through reason and that ethics is constituted by knowledge. That is to say, he was a cognitivist. In relation to the Stoic Naturalist Ethics of the period, it is worth mentioning that they adopted the cardinal virtues (wisdom, justice, courage and temperance) and believed in inherent the goodness and purposefulness of human nature, and that the end of human beings was in community. St Paul would not have shared their belief that all people are manifestations of the one universal spirit (pantheism), but he clearly had adopted the view that the Stoics share with Christ that we should live in brotherly love and readily help one another.<sup>13</sup>

In his interesting account of the influence of Stoic philosophy on St Paul, Troels Engber-Perdersen suggests that St Paul adopts the same logic of their reasoning and

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<sup>10</sup> *Dignitas Personae* n. 7

<sup>11</sup> This is discussed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in His “Faith, Religion and Culture” in *Truth and Tolerance* Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2004 pp. 90-95 in which he argues that there is simply a congruence of Greek Philosophy and Biblical themes that had in any case occurred before Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 2:14-16

<sup>13</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmeyer SJ *Paul and his Theology: A Brief Sketch* Prentice Hall New Jersey 1989 pp. 27-34; also Troels Engber-Perdersen *Paul and the Stoics* T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2000.

simply substitutes *Christ* for *Reason* in explaining righteousness in terms of love and *communio*.<sup>14</sup>

Comparing St Paul to the Stoics, they both claim that goodness is knowable. For the Stoics that is through reason, but for St Paul it is through Christ (Gal 1:16, 2Cor 4:6). In *Corinthians* he makes the revealing comment: “Jews demand signs, Greeks desire wisdom but we proclaim Christ crucified” (1Cor 1:22-25). Also in the same letter he seems to embrace communitarianism using language of the Stoics (1 Cor 1:10-11) and elsewhere he shares the dominance of will and reason over pain and suffering (Gal 5:24) and concludes that joy is the proper response to suffering (Phil 2:17, 1:17-18), both Stoic claims.<sup>15</sup>

St Paul had of course been a Pharisee and trained under the major Jewish scholar Gamaliel (*Acts* 22:3) but his teaching in relation to Pharasaic Law seems to differ depending on the audience. He addresses Gentiles, Jews and Greeks differently. The dominant motif in his teaching is, of course, not reason, natural law or Pharisaic Law, but the Christ event is most evident in *Galatians*, and he claims authority on the basis of his “meeting” with Christ on the Road to Damascus.

In relation to claims about the Hellenisation of Christianity through St Paul, it is worth noting that Pope John Paul II says something that reinforces this view in his analysis of two difficult passages.

In the very familiar submission and headship passage of *I Corinthians* (11:2-16), St Paul asserts that Christ is the head of every man, man is head of woman, and also that man is image of God’s glory but woman is a reflection of man’s glory, as woman came from him. He says also that man is not created for sake of woman, but woman is created for the sake of man. In his analysis of this passage and the related passage in *Ephesians*, Pope John Paul II asserts:

The motif of “head” and of “body” is not of biblical derivation, but is probably Hellenistic (Stoic?). In *Ephesians* this theme is utilized in the context of marriage (while in *First Corinthians* the theme of the “body” serves to demonstrate the order which reigns in society). From the biblical point of view the introduction of this motif is an absolute novelty.<sup>16</sup>

Developing the submission and headship theme in *Ephesians* 5: 22-33, St Paul writes that husband and wife should defer to one another in obedience to Christ, and that wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord: Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is husband head of his wife. Just as the Church submits to Christ, wives submit to their husbands. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her.

On this passage Pope John Paul II writes in *Mulieres Dignitatem* (n 24) that St Paul was rooted in the customs of the time. Adapting the teaching, the Pope writes that

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<sup>14</sup> Troels Engber-Perderson *Paul and the Stoics* T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2000

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Pope John Paul II *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* Pauline Books & Media, 1997, p. 382

there should be mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ, and that the husband is “head” in order to give himself up for his wife. The Pope asserts that “subjection” is not one-sided but mutual. I mentioned these treatments of St Paul by Pope John Paul II to a Pauline Conference<sup>17</sup> recently and was greeted by what can only be regarded as a seething response by a recent convert from Lutheranism.

What is clear about St Paul’s treatment of Pharisaic Law is that he adapts to particular audiences but always asserts supremacy of the Christ event, and in relation to righteousness he says several seemingly inconsistent things:

- He requires both following the Law but that Christ is the fulfilment of the Law (Gal 2:15-21, 3:15-24, 4:1-3, Rom 9-11);
- Following Christ, but neutral about the Law (Philippians 3:4-9);
- Following Christ but not the law (Philippians 3:49)
- Attributes Law to Christ (Gal 3:7-11, 2:19-20); and
- Asserts Christ (grace) necessary to follow the law (Romans 7:7-25, 2:12-25).<sup>18</sup>

In *Galatians*, he testifies to his own personal encounter with Christ from whom he learned the Gospel, not through encounter with the Apostles (1:11-18), and disparages conformity with the Law: circumcision counts for nothing with Christ (5:2) and he asserts that the whole of the law is summed up in commandment to love one another (5:15) - Christ the new creation: active faith through love (6)

In relation to the natural law, the Church usually refers to the *Romans* (2:14-16) passage. However it is not clear in the tradition that natural law is a matter of pure reason, rather it is seen as having a divine authorship. Pope Leo XIII, quoting St. Thomas, appealed to the “higher reason” of the divine Lawgiver:

“But this prescription of human reason could not have the force of law unless it were the voice and the interpreter of some higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be subject.” Indeed, the force of law consists in its authority to impose duties, to confer rights and to sanction certain behaviour: “Now all of this, clearly, could not exist in man if, as his own supreme legislator, he gave himself the rule of his own actions”. And he concluded: “It follows that the natural law is *itself the eternal law*, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them *towards their right action and end*; it is none other than the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the universe”. St Thomas *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 91, a.2.<sup>19</sup>

Pope John Paul II also connected natural law directly to divine revelation when he wrote:

Man is able to recognize good and evil thanks to that discernment of good from evil which he himself carries out by his *reason, in particular by his*

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<sup>17</sup> *A Pauline Colloquium* conducted by the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, Melbourne July 27-8, <http://www.jp2institute.org/media/pauline-colloquium-programme-and-registration.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Troels Engber-Perdersen *Paul and the Stoics* T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2000

<sup>19</sup> Leo XIII encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum*, 1888, n. 8  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_1-xiii\\_enc\\_20061888\\_libertas\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas_en.html)

*reason enlightened by Divine Revelation and by faith*, through the law which God gave to the Chosen People, beginning with the commandments on Sinai. Israel was called to accept and to live out *God's law as a particular gift and sign of its election and of the divine Covenant*, and also as a pledge of God's blessing. Thus Moses could address the children of Israel and ask them: "What great nation is that that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (*Dt 4:7-8*).<sup>20</sup>

Then we have the then Cardinal Ratzinger declaring that "Reason has a wax nose" and "Reason will not be saved without the faith, but the faith without reason will not be human."<sup>21</sup>

On the other side of the coin, Pope John Paul II asserted:

"Every people has its own native and seminal wisdom which, as a true cultural treasure, tends to find voice and develop in forms which are genuinely philosophical. One example of this is the basic form of philosophical knowledge which is evident to this day in the postulates which inspire national and international legal systems in regulating the life of society."<sup>22</sup>

In our own time, an example of that seminal wisdom is surely to be found in the International Human Rights Instruments which assert:

- "...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,..."
- "Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person..."<sup>23</sup>

An analysis of the texts of the covenants shows that "Dignity" in this context implies the inestimable worth of each member of the human family and "rights" presume to identify what is needed for human beings to flourish. The International instruments therefore presume that human goodness is knowable and can be specified.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, n. 44

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html)

<sup>21</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger An address to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, "Current Situation of Faith and Theology" (1996) <http://www.ourladywarriors.org/dissent/ratzsitu596.htm> Accessed 18th June 2008

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II *Fides et Ratio* (1998) n. 4

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_15101998\\_fides-et-ratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html)

<sup>23</sup> See the preambles of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>; or the *International Covenants on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*; <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cesr.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> See my doctoral thesis *Human Dignity: Autonomy and Sacredness in the International Human Rights Instruments* available from the University of Melbourne [http://dtl.unimelb.edu.au/view/action/singleViewer.do?dvs=1250825170935~58&locale=en\\_AU&search\\_terms=SYS%20=%20000008617&adjacency=N&application=DIGITool-3&frameId=1&usePid1=true&usePid2=true](http://dtl.unimelb.edu.au/view/action/singleViewer.do?dvs=1250825170935~58&locale=en_AU&search_terms=SYS%20=%20000008617&adjacency=N&application=DIGITool-3&frameId=1&usePid1=true&usePid2=true)

Pope John Paul II encouraged philosophers, but again sought to connect their endeavours to Scripture:

“They should be open to the impelling questions which arise from the word of God and they should be strong enough to shape their thought and discussion in response to that challenge. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate the genuine ethics which humanity needs so urgently at this particular time. The Church follows the work of philosophers with interest and appreciation; and they should rest assured of her respect for the rightful autonomy of their discipline. I would want especially to encourage believers working in the philosophical field to illumine the range of human activity by the exercise of a reason which grows more penetrating and assured because of the support it receives from faith.”<sup>25</sup>

The teaching of these three Popes at least, Leo XIII, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, would seem to suggest that there is to be no dichotomy between faith and reason. Rather the teaching would suggest that as philosophers we would be foolish to ignore Scripture and that our discipline should properly consider the nature of the Creator and the relationship between created and Creator, and seek to test theological propositions against reason, seeking justification rather than accepting them simply as a matter of faith. From a protestant perspective our humanity may be too “fallen” to be able to do that, but from a Catholic perspective we have trusted in the role of reason as an important contributor to our Tradition, but not in isolation from faith and the Scriptures.

That suggests that as Bioethicists we should participate in public debate openly as Christians rather than try to engage in an exercise of pure reason. I would suggest that we should be open about our faith because subterfuge is beneath dignity and would only breed suspicion, in any case. In a pluralist society we can approach this by insisting on being willing to listen to others, willing to encourage their contribution from their own cultural beliefs, and willing to test our own Christian concepts, and in that way seek common ground by seeking to identify human goodness and the virtues. That provides a mutually respectful pathway towards seeking human transcendence together in recognition of our differences but also our commonalities.

In this respect I have been greatly encouraged by finding links between Alasdair MacIntyre and Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI in MacIntyre’s emphasis on culture and tradition and the historical development of ideas, and his rebuttal of the notion of pure reason building a morality from the ground up without the benefit of culture<sup>26</sup>; John Paul II’s recognition of native and seminal wisdom and his encouragement to philosophers to consider questions from the Word of God; and finally, Benedict XVI’s insistence on the connectedness of philosophy and theology.

In that way a Catholic Philosopher has much to contribute to Bioethics from our traditional exploration of human nature and identifying doctrines that are good for mankind and justified in human terms and our acceptance that we are formed by faith

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<sup>25</sup>Pope John Paul II *Fides et Ratio* n. 106

<sup>26</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* University of Notre Dame Press 1981

but willing to test propositions from Revelation, knowing that God loves us and wants what is good for us.

However, I do think that a response is needed to Cardinal Ratzinger's "wax nose" concept and would conclude that reason may not be saved without faith BUT goodness is a property that is recognisable even by those who are unfamiliar with the Gospels, and that in a pluralist society we can mutually seek to identify a common understanding of human goodness.

It is relevant that in making a distinction between cardinal and theological virtues, St Thomas Aquinas claimed that all virtues other than the theological are in us by nature, according to aptitude and inchoation, but not according to perfection, and the theological virtues are from without.

"Sic ergo patet quod virtutes in nobis sunt a natura secundum aptitudinem et inchoationem, non autem secundum perfectionem: prater virtutes theologicas, quae sunt totaliter ab extrinseco"<sup>27</sup>

By "from without" I understand him to mean that the theological virtues are revealed to us by God rather than the product of our own reasoning.

That does raise questions about many of the issues that have been developed in *Dignitas Personae* in relation to the emphasis placed on Trinitarian Love:

By taking the interrelationship of these two dimensions, *the human and the divine*, as the starting point, one understands better why it is that man has unassailable value: *he possesses an eternal vocation and is called to share in the trinitarian love of the living God.*(n. 8)

and

These two dimensions of life, the natural and the supernatural, allow us to understand better the sense in which *the acts that permit a new human being to come into existence*, in which a man and a woman give themselves to each other, *are a reflection of trinitarian love*. "God, who is love and life, has inscribed in man and woman the vocation to share in a special way in his mystery of personal communion and in his work as Creator and Father" (n.9)

These passages raise something of a challenge to a natural law approach because the Trinitarian mystery is only known through Divine Revelation and these passages suggest that we should understand human love in marriage in imitation of the love between the divine persons and hence that the truth of that communion of persons informs our human relationships because the *imago dei* is not of single person but of a Trinity. That then suggests that human nature being understood relationally through the relationship of the Divine Persons, and the nuptial mystery and *communio* can only be fully understood through Divine Revelation.

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<sup>27</sup> St. Thomae Aquinatis *Summa Theologiae* (Marietti: Taurini/ Romae 1952) Prima Secundae Partis Q. 63, Art I

This does however seem to be consistent with St Thomas's view about the theological virtues being understood only through Divine Revelation.

One of the most difficult aspects for us as Catholic Bioethicists to argue in a pluralist context, particularly a bigoted secularist context, is the Pauline Principle<sup>28</sup> that underlies our morality and the related claim that there are absolute moral norms.

We generally take the Pauline Principle from the passage in *Romans* (3:8):

Why not say--as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say--"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

From which we draw the conclusion that one must not do evil in order that good may come.

In *Veritatis Splendor* Pope John Paul II gave expression to this principle in his analysis of the moral act in terms that identified the need for the object of the act to be capable of being orientated towards God represented in the following excerpts:

"Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the voluntary ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. If the object of the concrete action is not in harmony with the true good of the person, the choice of that action make our will and ourselves morally evil, thus putting us in conflict with our ultimate end, the supreme good, God himself" (n.72)

"... the moral life ...consists in the deliberate ordering of human acts to God, the supreme good and ultimate end (telos) of man. ... But this ordering to one's ultimate end is not something subjective, dependent solely upon one's intention. It presupposes that such acts are in themselves capable of being ordered to this end, in so far as they are in conformity with the authentic moral good of man, safeguarded by the commandments." (n.73)

"The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will ..." (n. 78)

"In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person. The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour." (n.78)

"By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather that object is the

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<sup>28</sup> John Finnis offers a robust defence of the Pauline Principle in his *Moral absolutes: tradition, revision, and truth* Catholic University of America Press 1991

proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.” (n.78)

Expressed in these terms of a teleology that involves the Creator, it is difficult to understand the Pauline Principle expressed in terms of the object of the act unless one invokes the relationship to the Creator and in so doing that set of beliefs about the Creator that we can only know through Divine Revelation.

I would suggest that the Pauline principle can be understood in terms of loving relationship as a desire to preserve authenticity of love. When one discusses the nature of the moral act, the notion of an absolute does emerge in the context of understanding moral acts as expressive of human love of another. Doing evil then contradicts that loving relationship but especially so when we understand love in the sense that Christ’s gift of self on the Cross gave to the meaning of love.

There does seem to be a gap in natural law accounts based on reason alone when it comes to explaining absolute moral norms and the Pauline Principle. This is of course the central issue in relation to proportionalism, situation ethics and the fundamental option. What they lack is an adequate account of authentic human love. However it would seem that we cannot achieve an adequate account of authentic human love from reason alone. As St Thomas expresses it, the theological virtues come from without.

Basically because the moral act is to be understood in terms of communion with God, it would seem difficult to posit communion with God as natural ultimate end, as a matter of pure reason, unless reason predicates existence of a creator who creates us for love of us (*agape*) and wants our love (*eros*) in return<sup>29</sup>, and this notion of God seems to be peculiar to the Christian faith. It is also the case that the theological virtues (faith, hope and love), depend on both the *agapeic* and *erotic* notion of the Creator’s love and in our understanding of that love we rely on the grace of God in revealing Divine Nature to us, and we rely on Christ and his sacrifice on the Cross for our understanding of the authenticity of love as complete gift.

I am sympathetic to the task of new natural law which seeks to engage the secular world in argument based on pure reason and without assistance from revelation. It would be wonderful if with reason alone we could lead others to a position that did not contradict the moral truths of our faith. However when it comes to the true nature of love and hence the existence of moral absolutes and the Pauline Principle, I doubt that it is achievable.

From my experience in chairing government committees I am convinced that there is a better way in which we may encourage people to seek ideal solutions to ethical problems, based on their own personal and cultural beliefs. In that respect I do not see two distinct projects in being both Christian and a philosopher. Rather I am a Christian who is willing to both listen to others and to subject my beliefs to philosophical scrutiny alongside theirs, and to ask the question, whether living

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<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est* 2005 n.3-8  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)

according to these beliefs is a more coherent, consistent, happier and more fulfilling way to be, by the latter I mean living according to the aim to give of myself to others and thus to strive to be like my Lord and Saviour.

In this respect I disagree with the double life mentality proposed by German Grisez, whom I nevertheless much admire, when he wrote:

“Similarly, I consider it the responsibility of the person who is both a Christian and a philosopher to remain faithful to both ways of life, to resist all demands from either side to choose between them, to deny nothing for the sake of lessening the tension, and thus to become a bridge between the gathering of those sons and daughters of the Church who believe and those men and women who philosophize.”<sup>30</sup>

There should be no such division. On the other hand I agree with Grisez when he says in the same article,

“.. I do not think that philosophy can begin with universal doubt. In fact, philosophers who imagine that their thinking is altogether presuppositionless have not managed to set aside all presuppositions, the better to keep them unaware of their presuppositions, the better to keep them without subjecting them to critical scrutiny.”<sup>31</sup>

In western culture, the greatest divide between a Catholic understanding and secularism occurs at the level of understanding conjugality. We do need a conceptual framework to build a bridge by achieving a philosophical analysis of affectivity and communion of persons and the radical oneness of human and divine love (agape, erotic and filial), but the content for that analysis will be from Revelation.

There are different models of philosophical analysis in Western culture. Firstly there is the dominant secular view which undertakes philosophical analysis as the splintering and deconstruction of reality. In that context we can assess a philosophical work by the number of distinctions made and defended! This popular philosophical approach reduces the role of reason to narrative only. There is no objective reality and goodness is not knowable.

From a Catholic perspective what we have to offer is an alternative approach to philosophical analysis that constructively builds upon shared understanding, mutually seeking the transcendent. In that we can accept our cultures as raw data and can work to identify goodness as a common ground and knowable. That then permits us, in a culturally inclusive way, to transcend differences between religions and cultures while still founded upon those differences. That approach is especially open to the Christian notion of love, asking simply that it be considered as an alternative and asking the very practical question whether a civilisation based on a notion of love as gift of self is a better civilisation than the alternatives.

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<sup>30</sup> Germain Grisez “Faith, Philosophy and Fidelity” in *Fidelity* Vol 3 no. 8, July 1984 p. 20 In a recent email exchange Professor Grisez referred me to this article as representative of a view that he still holds.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

In that way we can seek to lead public reason towards accepting the propositions of *Dignitas Personae* (n .9), such as:

Respect for that dignity is owed to every human being because each one carries in an indelible way his own dignity and value. *The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family*, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Procreation which is truly responsible vis-à-vis the child to be born “must be the fruit of marriage”.<sup>32</sup>

and that:

Christian marriage is rooted “in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in Christ the Lord, God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony: the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus”.(n. 9)

Basically I am claiming that Christian Philosophy has much to contribute to Bioethics from a tradition of exploration of human nature and identifying doctrines that are good for mankind and justified in human terms. As a Christian Philosopher I am formed by faith but willing to test faith propositions, knowing that God loves us and wants what is good for us.

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<sup>32</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Donum Vitae*, II, A, 1: AAS 80 (1988), 87.