

METHOD AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL ETHICS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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The article proposes a Catholic ethical method for the 21st century. To that end, the authors first address the magisterium's concerns with relativism and distinguish relativism from Bernard Lonergan's perspectivism. After proposing perspectivism as an epistemological tool that accounts for a plurality of Catholic ethical methods, the authors explore virtue ethics, virtue epistemology, and a Christian stance that contribute to a reconstructed Catholic ethical method. The article concludes with a definition of chastity from two methodological perspectives that have different anthropological and normative implications.

A RECENT NOTE in this journal addressed the issue of ethical method and highlighted its fundamental importance for Catholic theological ethics in the 21st century.¹ We would add to that judgment the importance of making one's ethical method transparent. Also recently the International Theological Commission published a document entitled *Theology*

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¹ James F. Keenan, S.J., "Vatican II and Theological Ethics," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 162–90.

Today (hereafter, ThT), which recognizes a “plurality of theologies”² and specifies a plurality of perspectives, principles, and methodological criteria for doing theology.³ There is also a consistent call from the academic community of Catholic ethicists for an ongoing “faithful reconstruction”⁴ of moral theology and its transformation into a holistic “theological ethics.”⁵ All this suggests a need for reflection on the method of such a reconstructed and transformed ethics. Method is a foundational variable dividing Catholic ethicists, and different methods are at the root of many anthropological and normative differences among them. It is imperative, then, to investigate Catholic ethical method. Here we investigate it with two specific purposes in mind: first, to elucidate our own method and, second, to issue an invitation to Catholic ethicists to dialogue. Such dialogue, we believe, is mandated by the present divisions among them, by the need to clarify different and legitimate Catholic ethical methods, and above all by faithfulness to the Christian injunction not to “quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19).

Bernard Lonergan defines method as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”⁶ Operations comprise such processes as gathering evidence; understanding, marshaling, and weighing evidence; making judgments and evaluating their truth; and deciding to act. To construct a normative pattern, ethical method must account for both epistemic claims about how we know ethical truth and normative claims about the content of that truth. We begin with a definition: *Catholic ethical method is a theological method that proposes both an epistemology for reaching ethical truth and a normative pattern for reaching a definition of human dignity and formulating and justifying norms for its attainment, all this within the Catholic tradition.*

² International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html, no. 5 (all URLs cited herein were accessed on August 9, 2013).

³ This pluralism extends to the application of principles and is reflected in the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ document *The Challenge of Peace*: “The pastoral letter makes specific applications, observations and recommendations which allow for diversity of opinion on the part of those who assess the factual data of situations differently,” Summary (<http://old.usccb.org/sdwp/international/TheChallengeofPeace.pdf>).

⁴ See, e.g., Bryan N. Massingale, “Beyond Revisionism: A Younger Moralistic Looks at Charles E. Curran,” in *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*, ed. James J. Walter, Timothy O’Connell, and Thomas A. Shannon (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 253–72, at 267.

⁵ Norbert Rigali, S.J., “On Presuppositions of Theological Ethics,” *Horizons* 38 (2011) 211–29, at 211–12.

⁶ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, repr. 2003) 4.

In this article, we address two issues. First, we explore and address the charge of moral relativism leveled implicitly and explicitly by the magisterium against Catholic ethicists whose ethical method leads to normative conclusions different from the magisterium's. We propose Lonergan's perspectivism as an epistemological tool that accounts for a plurality of Catholic ethical methods while maintaining an objectivist metaethic. Second, we explore virtue ethics, virtue epistemology, and a Christian stance that contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of Catholic ethical method and the development of a theological anthropology that defines human dignity and leads to the formulation and justification of ethical norms that facilitate, and do not frustrate, its attainment.

RELATIVISM OR PERSPECTIVISM?

On his March 2012 *ad limina* visit to the Vatican, Bishop John Quinn of Winona commented on the growing concern among young people with "the prison of relativism."⁷ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in his homily at the opening of the 2005 conclave, spoke of the "dictatorship of relativism" which "does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate standard consists solely of one's own ego and desires."⁸ In our article, we are specifically concerned with *moral* relativism, which denies the existence of universal, objective, valid-for-all-circumstances ethical truth. Such truth is necessary, the magisterium argues, as the foundation for absolute norms that assert that certain acts—contraceptive and homosexual acts, for example—are intrinsically evil and can never be morally justified regardless of intention, context, or circumstance. Concern about relativism is undoubtedly warranted in the 21st century, but magisterial teaching fails to discern the difference between *relativism*, which rejects all objective ethical truth, and *perspectivism*, which acknowledges that there is objective ethical truth, albeit partial. It also fails to discern legitimate theological pluralism, which ThT advances as an essential criterion of Catholic theology. We consider relativism and perspectivism in turn in more detail.

The Magisterium on Relativism

In modern times, moral relativism has been the subject of much magisterial concern. Pope Pius XII condemned "situation ethics," which, he

⁷ Benjamin Mann, "Bishop Sees New Generation Seeking Truth, Rejecting Relativism," *Catholic News Agency*, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/bishop-sees-new-generation-seeking-truth-rejecting-relativism/>.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "Cappella Papale Mass 'Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice,' Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals" (Monday, April 18, 2005), http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

believed, is a form of relativism that denies universal ethical truth.⁹ Pope Paul VI warned of moral relativism that claims that “some things are permitted which the Church had previously declared intrinsically evil,” and that this vision “clearly endangers the Church’s entire doctrinal heritage.”¹⁰ In his *Veritatis splendor*, Pope John Paul II warned of the dangers of relativism, which detaches human freedom from any objective or universal foundation and proposes certain methods “for discovering the moral norm” that reject absolute and immutable norms and precepts taught by the magisterium. Some Catholic ethicists complain that in *Veritatis splendor* John Paul falsely accused them of “canonizing relativism.”¹¹ In both a 1993 speech to the presidents of the Asian bishops’ conferences¹² and a 1996 speech to the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the bishops’ conferences of Latin America,¹³ Ratzinger called relativism “the gravest problem of our time” and warned that it denies the existence of objective truth.¹⁴ This concern with relativism and its impact, especially in the area of morality, has continued to be a central concern of his pontificate as Pope Benedict XVI.

These and other magisterial statements not only fail to distinguish between relativism and legitimate theological disagreement on objectivist claims to ethical truth but also mistakenly conflate such legitimate disagreement and relativism. Philosophical ethics can aid in distinguishing between the two.

Metaethical Relativism

The Second Vatican Council’s *Optatam totius*, the Decree on Priestly Formation, and more recently ThT highlight the essential importance

⁹ See Pius XII, “Allocution to the Federation mondiale des jeunes femmes catholiques [World Federation of Catholic Female Youth],” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS)* 34 (1952) 413–19; “Nuntius radiophonicus de conscientia christiana in iuvenibus recte efformanda [Radio Message on Rightly Forming the Christian Conscience in Youth],” *AAS* 34 (1952) 270–78; and Instruction of the Holy Office, February 2, 1956 in *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum, et declarationum . . .*, 33rd ed., ed. Henricus Denzinger and Adolphus Schönmetzer (Rome: Herder 1965) no. 3918.

¹⁰ Paul VI, “Allocutio ad Sodales Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris [‘Address’ to Members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer],” *AAS* 59 (1967) 960–63, at 962. *Veritatis splendor*, footnote 131].

¹¹ Maura Anne Ryan, “‘Then Who Can Be Saved?’ Ethics and Ecclesiology in *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael E. Allsopp and John J. O’Keefe (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995) 1–15, at 11.

¹² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures,” <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZHONG.HTM>.

¹³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Relativism: The Central Problem for the Faith Today,” <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZRELA.HTM>.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, “Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures.”

of philosophy for doing theology.¹⁵ Philosophical ethical theory distinguishes three levels of ethical discourse, namely, moral judgments, normative ethics, and metaethics.¹⁶ These distinctions shed light on understanding claims that a particular moral position is an expression of relativism. Endowed with reason and the ability to choose, humans make moral judgments on the basis of what they believe is right, obligatory, or good. This is the realm of daily moral decision making. These daily moral decisions serve as the source for both normative ethics and metaethics. It is the obligation of all rational persons to make moral judgments in light of what they think is right or wrong. It is the task of theological ethicists to critically reflect on, analyze, and develop these moral judgments into a comprehensive, systematic, rational ethical theory.

The synopsis and synthesis of daily moral judgments into an ethical theory is the area of normative ethics and metaethics. Normative ethics formulates and justifies norms, rules, or laws that prescribe right actions and good motives and proscribe wrong actions and bad motives. Metaethics—literally, above or beyond ethics—is the foundation of all normative ethics and daily morality. It asks two foundational questions. First, do moral terms like *good* and *right* have any meaning; second, if they do have meaning, how is that meaning justified?

Modern metaethical inquiry emerged in the early part of the 20th century with G. E. Moore's seminal work, *Principia Ethica*,¹⁷ and since then various metaethical theories on the meaning of moral terms have been developed. Nihilism claims that moral facts, moral truths, and moral knowledge do not exist and that therefore ethics is a meaningless discipline.¹⁸ Emotivism asserts that moral terms are defined by individual emotions and desires; and since emotions are relative to each individual, there is no objective or universal truth.¹⁹ Relativism holds that there are no universal truths; moral truth and moral terms are defined either socially or individually. Social or cultural relativism claims that moral judgments are nothing more than descriptions of customs or practices of a society or culture.²⁰ Personal relativism or

¹⁵ *Optatam totius* no. 15, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html; ThT nos. 64–66.

¹⁶ See Henry J. McCloskey, *Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969) 7; and John D. Arras, Bonnie Steinbock, and Alex John London, "Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context," in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, 5th ed., ed. John D. Arras and Bonnie Steinbock (London: Mayfield, 1999) 1–40.

¹⁷ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (1903; New York: Cambridge University, 1968).

¹⁸ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 1977) 11.

¹⁹ On emotivism, see Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1944).

²⁰ See Henry Veatch, "Does Ethics Have an Empirical Basis," *Hastings Center Studies* 1 (1973) 50–65, at 52–53; and David F. Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2004) chap. 9.

subjectivism argues that moral judgments are nothing more than judgments about one's personal emotions or feelings.²¹ This latter is the type of relativism castigated in Ratzinger's claim that relativism's "ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires." Both social and personal relativism deny that the good can be defined universally; they therefore assert that there is no objective basis on which to justify claims to universal truth and absolute norms or intrinsically immoral acts.

Objectivist metaethical theories claim both that moral terms do have meaning and that their meaning can be justified.²² In Catholic theological ethics, the moral terms *good* and *right* are defined in relation to *human dignity*, *human fulfillment*, *human flourishing*, or some cognate formulation. What is good or right facilitates human dignity and flourishing; what is bad or wrong frustrates human dignity and flourishing. Virtually every Catholic theological ethicist espouses an objectivist metaethics and defines the good or right on the basis of what facilitates human dignity. There are, however, among them a variety of theological anthropologies and understandings of human dignity, and this variety explains the different formulations and justifications of norms facilitating or frustrating human dignity.

Sometimes these formulations and justifications are at variance with magisterial formulations and justifications. For example, whereas the magisterium teaches that artificial contraception within a marital relationship frustrates human dignity and is therefore intrinsically immoral, social scientific data clearly show that the vast majority of Catholic couples approve of artificial contraception and, by implication, do not accept either that it frustrates human dignity or that it is intrinsically immoral.²³

Reflecting on the reasoned and conscientious experience of these married Catholic couples, we could formulate a moral norm different from the magisterium's, as follows. Whether or not artificial contraception facilitates or frustrates human dignity depends on the reasons for choosing or not

²¹ Veatch, "Does Ethics Have an Empirical Basis" 55.

²² William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973) 97–102. Veatch distinguishes between four types of absolutist theories: supernatural, rationalist, intuitionist, and empirical. Catholic natural law is considered an empirical absolutist theory. See Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic* 81–85.

²³ Studies in the United States indicate 75 to 85 percent of American Catholics, who consider themselves good Catholics, approve a form of contraception forbidden by the church (see William V. D'Antonio et al., *Laity American and Catholic: Transforming the Church* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996) 131; James D. Davidson et al., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997) 131. For a similar situation in England, see Michael Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholicism in England: Customary Catholicism and Transformation of Religious Authority* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991) 177. A 2010 survey of English Catholics reveals that "just 4 per cent of Catholics believe the use of artificial contraception is wrong" (Christopher Lamb, "Few Now View Contraception as Immoral," *Tablet* [18 September 2010] 45).

choosing it and on how it impacts one's relationships with oneself, one's spouse, and one's God. The difference between the magisterium's formulation and justification of a moral norm that facilitates human dignity and alternative formulations and justifications may or may not indicate metaethical relativism, but whether they do can be determined only by careful, case by case analysis of the reasons for their formulation and justification.

If there is difference of opinion about specific norms that facilitate or frustrate human dignity, this does not *eo ipso* indicate a relativistic metaethical theory. To prove relativism it is not sufficient simply to demonstrate that basic moral judgments or norms are different. One also needs to demonstrate that these moral judgments or norms "would still be different even if they were fully enlightened, conceptually clear, shared the same factual beliefs, and were taking the same point of view."²⁴ Such a standard is high and, for this reason, William Frankena believes metaethical relativism has not been proven. The fact that people disagree with the magisterium on basic moral judgments or norms, such as the absolute norm forbidding contraception, in and of itself proves nothing. It may be that people deny the existence of universals, in which case they are certainly relativists. It may also be that they have a different objective definition of human dignity and the norms that facilitate or frustrate it, in which case they would be not relativists but objectivists.

Objectivism does not per se eliminate difference either in definitions of human dignity or in the formulation and justification of norms that facilitate its attainment, as is well illustrated by the magisterium's documented evolution of its own moral teachings related to slavery, usury, religious freedom, and torture.²⁵ These are clear examples of the magisterium's evolution of its understanding of human dignity, frequently assisted by the scholarly contributions of theologians and accompanied by a corresponding evolution in the formulation and justification of norms. Catholic ethicists can espouse and defend metaethical objectivism and still disagree on the objective definition of human dignity and the norms that facilitate or frustrate it. What accounts for this variability is the second question of metaethics, namely, the epistemic justification of the definition of ethical terms. Lonergan proposes perspectivism as a theory that justifies truth claims and contrasts it with relativism.

Perspectivism vs. Relativism

Lonergan's theory of perspectivism argues that different definitions derive from different perspectives. Perspectivism adequately accounts for

²⁴ Frankena, *Ethics* 110.

²⁵ See John T. Noonan, "Development in Moral Doctrine," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 662–77, at 674–75; and Bernard Hoose, *Received Wisdom? Reviewing the Role of Tradition in Christian Ethics* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994).

the different definitions of human dignity and the norms that facilitate or frustrate it, and addresses magisterial charges of relativism aimed at those who disagree with some of its absolute norms. Writing on the nature of historical knowledge, Lonergan notes: “Where relativism has lost hope about the attainment of truth, perspectivism stresses the complexity of what the historian is writing about and, as well, the specific difference of historical from mathematical, scientific, and philosophic knowledge.”²⁶ Relativism concludes to the falsity of a judgment; perspectivism concludes to its partial truth.

Lonergan cites three factors that give rise to perspectivism in human knowledge, including moral knowledge. First, human knowers are finite, the information available to them at any given time is incomplete, and they cannot attend to or master all the available data. Second, knowers are selective, given their different socializations, personal experiences, and ranges of data offered them. Third, knowers are individually different, so we can expect them to have different interpretations of the available data. The theologian-knower trained in the philosophy of Plato—Augustine for instance—will attend to different data, achieve different understanding, make different judgments, and act on different decisions compared to the theologian-knower trained in the philosophy of Aristotle—Aquinas for instance. Augustine and Aquinas produce different theologies, both of which are necessarily partial and incomplete explanations of a very complex theological reality. They are like two viewers at fourth-story and 13th-story windows of the Empire State Building; each gets a different, and less partial, view of all that lies outside the window. We could expect that if they ascended to a higher story, they would get a different, and, again, still partial view.

Every human judgment of truth, including every judgment of ethical truth, is a limited one based on limited data and understanding. “So far from resting on knowledge of the universe, [a judgment] is to the effect that, no matter what the rest of the universe may prove to be, at least *this* is so.”²⁷ It is precisely the necessarily limited nature of human sensations, understandings, judgments, and knowledge that leads to perspectivism, not as to a source of falsity, but as to a source of partial truth. Though Augustine said it on the basis of God’s incomprehensibility, his restating of earlier Greek theologians, cited in ThT, is apropos and accurate here: “*Si comprehendis non est Deus*” (if you have understood, what you have understood is not God).²⁸ Aquinas agrees: “Now we cannot know what

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 217.

²⁷ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, 1957) 344, emphasis added. See also *Method in Theology* 217–219.

²⁸ Augustine, *Sermo* 52.16, in Migne, *PL* 38.360; and ThT no. 97 (our translation). For a detailed analysis, see Victor White, *God the Unknown* (New York: Harper, 1956); and William Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971).

God is, but only what God is not; we must, therefore, consider the ways in which God does not exist rather than the ways in which God does.”²⁹

No single objectivist definition of human dignity comprehensively captures the full truth of human dignity. Perspectivism, however, accounts for the plurality of partial truths embedded in various definitions. It is a theory of knowledge that presents human persons as they exist, that selects those dimensions of the human person that are deemed most important for defining human dignity, that interprets and prioritizes those dimensions if and when they conflict, and that formulates and justifies norms that facilitate, and do not frustrate, the attainment of human dignity. The only way for humans to achieve knowledge that is universal is via perspectives that are particular.³⁰ It is focus on different particular perspectives that leads to different and partially true definitions of human dignity and the formulation of different norms that facilitate or frustrate it.

In summary, there is broad metaethical agreement within Catholic theological ethics. First, it accepts some version of metaethical objectivism; there *are* objective definitions of human dignity. Second, it defines the ethical terms *good* and *right* in relation to some objective definition of human dignity or some cognate formulation. Third, given different perspectives, it can and sometimes does disagree on both the specific definition of human dignity and the formulation and justification of norms that facilitate or frustrate its attainment. Fourth, Lonergan’s theory of perspectivism, which recognizes the inherent limitations of human knowledge, helps account for the different definitions of human dignity and the different formulations and justifications of norms that facilitate or frustrate it. Fifth, the variability that arises from perspectivism is an essential part of an objectivism that recognizes universals; the good is *objectively* defined as human dignity. Different objective definitions of human dignity are not *eo ipso* a form of relativism that denies universals.

“Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria”

ThT illustrates Lonergan’s insight into and perspectivist method of reaching moral truth and its justification. The method can account for the difference in objectivist definitions of the good defined as human dignity and the difference in the norms that facilitate or frustrate it. We consider each definition in turn.

The word *perspectives* in ThT’s subtitle highlights the reality of a “plurality of theologies” in Catholic theology that are “undoubtedly necessary and

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*)1, q. 3, preface (our translation).

³⁰ Massingale, “Beyond Revisionism” 258.

justified.”³¹ ThT distinguishes between the “legitimate pluralism of theology” as a rational enterprise, which “can be evaluated in relation to a common universal truth,”³² and relativism, which does not recognize a common universal truth. It cautions, with the long tradition of Catholic theology, that theology cannot know the fullness of divine truth. The plurality “results primarily from the abundance of divine [theological] truth itself, which human beings can only ever grasp under its specific aspects and never as a whole, and moreover never definitively, but always, as it were, with new eyes.”³³ Searching for unity among the plurality of theologies, ThT formulates the following criterion to guide this search. Catholic theology

attempts to integrate a plurality of enquiries and methods into the unified project of the *intellectus fidei*, and insists on the unity of truth and therefore on the fundamental unity of theology itself. Catholic theology recognizes the proper methods of other sciences and critically uses them in its own research. It does not isolate itself from critique and welcomes scientific dialogue.³⁴

In the case of Catholic theological ethics, however, this criterion leaves unanswered the question, What truly constitutes the unity of ethical truth? Is it a truth reflected in a univocal definition of human dignity and corresponding univocal norms that facilitate its attainment? Or is it a more perspectival account of truth reflected in plural definitions of human dignity that recognize and embrace the difference in fourth-story, 13th-story, and various 21st-story accounts of human dignity and the difference in the formulation and justification of norms that facilitate its attainment?

ThT and Catholic tradition itself give some indication of the answers to these questions. ThT’s chapter 2, part 4, entitled “Responsible Adherence to the Ecclesiastical Magisterium,” discusses, first, the nature and authority of the various levels of the magisterium and magisterial teaching and, then, the proper relationship between the magisterium, theologians, and theologies. This section ends with a call for responsible adherence to the magisterium, but it also recognizes the importance of dialogue between theologians and the magisterium and the “chronic collisions or contrasts” that can threaten this relationship.³⁵ That is part of the inevitable tension in relationships “wherever there is genuine life.”³⁶ And “while ‘dissent’ toward the magisterium has no place in Catholic theology, investigation and questioning [are] justified and even necessary if theology is to fulfill its task.”³⁷ One must distinguish between dissent from the magisterium as an authoritative teaching body and dissent from what the magisterium teaches. Catholic tradition justifies the latter, never the former.

³¹ ThT no. 77.

³³ Ibid. no. 77.

³⁵ Ibid. no. 42.

³⁷ Ibid. no. 41.

³² Ibid. no. 78.

³⁴ Ibid. no. 75.

³⁶ Ibid.

The young Ratzinger underscores the need for the investigation and questioning of what is taught.

Not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition; in other words, not every tradition that arises in the Church is a true celebration of the mystery of Christ. There is a distorting, as well as a legitimate, tradition. . . . Consequently tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically.³⁸

Thanks to changing socio-historical perspectives, there has been a major evolution in the Catholic tradition of the definition of human dignity, and this evolution has been reflected in Catholic moral norms about what facilitates or frustrates attaining human dignity. At one time, the tradition approved slavery; then it condemned it as violating human dignity. It condemned the taking of interest on loans and then approved it. It approved torture and then condemned it. It condemned religious freedom and then approved it as an inviolable human right. These developments in Catholic moral teaching are intrinsically linked to the evolution in methods and theologies, guided by evolving historical, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. The definition of human dignity is part of that development as are the corresponding formulation and justification of norms that facilitate its attainment.

All contemporary Catholics can agree that the good and the right are defined in terms of human dignity, but human dignity itself is subject to multiple Catholic objectivist definitions guided by theological perspectives, principles, and criteria that recognize the understanding of human dignity as an evolving reality. Formulating and justifying norms that facilitate or frustrate the attainment of human dignity must be done as a communion-church through the dialogue of charity recommended by John Paul II,³⁹ recognizing that there will be partial truths and disagreements on specific definitions of human dignity and the particular norms that facilitate or frustrate its attainment. These disagreements, however, we repeat, are not to be automatically labeled as relativism; rather they reflect a perspectival objectivism. Such perspectival objectivism is well within the parameters of both ThT's "plurality of theologies" and a pilgrim church in search of practical ethical truth.

SOURCES FOR A RECONSTRUCTED ETHICAL METHOD

The second part of this article explores the sources involved in the reconstruction of an ethical method that promotes the search for practical ethical truth. First, we explain the shift toward virtue, which is a Copernican-style

³⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 3:170–98, at 185.

³⁹ *Ut unum sint* no. 17.

revolution in Catholic ethical method. This shift is evident in virtue ethics and virtue epistemology. Second, we present a Christian vision or stance that serves as a hermeneutical lens for the selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration of the sources of moral knowledge.⁴⁰

Virtue: Ethics and Epistemology

The call for renewal in moral theology at Vatican II emphasized bringing “forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.”⁴¹ This emphasis on charity reflects earlier Catholic theological efforts to reform the manual method for doing moral theology.⁴² Though the council did not issue a specific call for a shift to virtue ethics from the legalistic and reductionist approach of the manuals, contemporary Catholic ethicists have been investigating and developing such a shift.

Virtue Ethics

Normative Catholic method for the formulation and justification of norms initially focused on two methodological approaches, deontology and teleology. Deontology emphasizes rules, obligations, and duties; teleology emphasizes the consequences of actions and the maximizing of their good or value.⁴³ The council’s call for a focus on charity and the renewed attention to virtue ethics in philosophical ethics and especially the work of Alasdair MacIntyre have been an impetus for transforming Catholic ethical method from an ethics of law or consequences to an ethics of virtue.⁴⁴ Virtue ethics

⁴⁰ The four established sources of moral knowledge, Scripture, tradition, secular disciplines of knowledge, and experience, are often referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Space limitations prevent our exploring the sources and their selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration to define human dignity and formulate and justify norms that facilitate attaining human dignity; we reserve this for a later essay. For scholars who have explored these sources in relation to method, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Cincinnati: Fortress, 1985) 4–7; Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 47–55; Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006) 182–96; James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004) 9–41; and Todd A. Salzman, *What Are They Saying about Roman Catholic Ethical Method?* (New York: Paulist, 2003).

⁴¹ *Optatum totius* no. 16, *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America, 1965).

⁴² See Gerard Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959).

⁴³ See Todd A. Salzman, *Deontology and Teleology: An Investigation of the Normative Debate in Roman Catholic Moral Theology* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1995).

⁴⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

gives precedence, not to the actions of agents, but to their personal character formed in their moral communities and learned through the imitation of respected role models in those communities. We share with MacIntyre the judgment that neither deontology nor teleology offers an adequately comprehensive ethical method, indeed that, because of them, “we have—very largely if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.”⁴⁵ We join with him and the many other modern ethicists who advance virtue ethics as a normative ethics more promising to the moral life than deontology or teleology.⁴⁶

With the shift from deontology and teleology to virtue ethics comes also a fundamental methodological shift in what John Greco labels the “direction of analysis,”⁴⁷ which is a Copernican-style methodological shift. Traditional approaches to ethics understand the normative properties of an action in terms of the normative properties of the act involved—for example, its intrinsic meaning or consequences. The direction of analysis is from acts to persons. We judge an act to be right or wrong based on law or consequences, and morally evaluate the person’s character as virtuous or vicious based on the acts chosen. A virtue approach to ethics understands the normative properties of acts in terms of the normative properties of persons. The direction of analysis is from personal character to personal acts. In other words, “virtue theories make rightness . . . follow from an action’s . . . source in a virtue, rather than the other way around.”⁴⁸ This methodological shift prioritizes persons over acts, virtues over rules and consequences, and the subject over the object.

Some Catholic ethicists have returned to the virtue theories of Aristotle and Aquinas and combined their visions of virtue with modern philosophical and theological developments and insights to methodologically construct a virtue ethic.⁴⁹ Aristotle defined virtue as “a state of character concerned with

⁴⁵ Ibid. 2. See also G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958) 1–19; Philippa Foot, “Moral Beliefs,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958–1959) 83–104.

⁴⁶ In addition to Foot and MacIntyre, whom most judge to be the preeminent contemporary virtue theorists, other important theorists in the field of virtue ethics will be introduced as our article unfolds.

⁴⁷ John Greco, “Virtue Epistemology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue/>.

⁴⁸ Guy Axtell, *Knowledge, Belief, and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) xiii.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., James F. Keenan, S.J., *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 1996); and “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 709–29; Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008); Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Simon G. Harak, S.J., *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Virtuous Character* (New York: Paulist, 1993); William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos,

choice, lying in a mean.”⁵⁰ Aquinas stands in Aristotle’s tradition but rephrases Aristotle’s definition. A virtue for him is a habit or disposition ordered to an act.⁵¹ As character states or habits, virtues explain not only why a person acts this way on this particular occasion but also why the person can be relied on to act this way always or, given human frailty, most of the time. Virtues also involve a judgment of truth and a choice of action. They involve *phronesis* or practical wisdom, which is the ability to reason correctly about practical decisions. Without *phronesis*, Aristotle argues, no virtue is possible.⁵² For Aquinas, the virtue that corresponds to *phronesis* is *prudentia* or prudence, which is, therefore, a cardinal virtue. Without prudence, he argues, no other virtue is possible. Virtue ethics is informed by interdisciplinary research between theology and secular disciplines of knowledge to construct a comprehensive virtue theory. In terms of application, virtue ethics is used to explore sexual,⁵³ ecological,⁵⁴ genetic,⁵⁵ legal,⁵⁶ and professional⁵⁷ ethical issues.

Virtue Epistemology

Central to a theory of virtue is the notion that virtues are not only pre-conditions for human flourishing but also constituents of that flourishing. “A virtue is a character trait that human beings, given their physical and psychological nature, need to flourish (or to do and fare well).”⁵⁸ The person

2008); Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, “Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 432–73.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6.1106b, ed. Lesley Brown, trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford University, 2009) 29.

⁵¹ *ST* 1–2, q. 49, a. 1 and q. 49, a. 3.

⁵² See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 2002) 12.

⁵³ See Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University, 2000); John Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003); Farley, *Just Love*; Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2008); and *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2012).

⁵⁴ Louke van Wensveen, “Virtues, Feminism, and Ecology,” in *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology No. 16*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New York: Paulist, 2011) 137–56.

⁵⁵ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Genetics and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006).

⁵⁶ Lawrence B. Solum, “Virtue Jurisprudence: A Virtue-Centered Theory of Judging,” *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003) 178–213.

⁵⁷ William F. May, “Virtues in Professional Life,” in *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology* 95–116.

⁵⁸ Rosalind Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics,” in *Virtues and Reason: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, ed. Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 57–75, at 68.

with the virtue of justice will *be* a just person who will, therefore, *act* justly. Moral virtues are bases of excellent human being and functioning, and so too “epistemic virtues are bases of excellent epistemic [being] and functioning.”⁵⁹ The moral virtues facilitate the attainment of human dignity; the epistemic or intellectual virtues facilitate the attainment of true knowledge to define human dignity and to formulate and justify norms that facilitate its attainment. “Moral responsibility for what we do is often . . . dependent on epistemic responsibility for what we believe.”⁶⁰ The shift toward virtue in ethical method has parallels with a shift toward virtue in epistemology and, combined with Lonergan’s perspectivism, can ground a virtuous perspectivist epistemology. This epistemology accounts for pluralism in ethical methods as well as in definitions of human dignity and in the formulation and justification of norms that facilitate its attainment. To explain virtuous perspectivism, we define virtue epistemology and its methodological shift, the types and interrelationships of epistemic virtues, virtue epistemology’s parallels with Lonergan’s perspectivist epistemology, and illustrate the application of virtue ethics and virtue epistemology with a specific example.

Virtue epistemology is a relatively new movement in philosophy, developing over the last 30 years. While the discipline includes diverse schools and methods, they all adhere to four basic commitments: (1) Virtue epistemology is a normative discipline. (2) Rational persons and communities are the foundational source of epistemic value and the foundational focus of epistemic evaluation.⁶¹ (3) Greco’s “shift in the direction of analysis” evident in virtue ethics is applied to virtue epistemology, and this shift distinguishes it from traditional epistemological methods. “Non-virtue theories try to analyze virtuous character in terms of justified belief, defining the former in terms of dispositions to achieve the latter.” Greco proposes a directional reversal, “defining justified belief in terms of virtuous character. Virtuous character is then defined in terms of successful and stable dispositions to form belief.”⁶² “Justified beliefs,” Christopher Hookway explains,

are those that issue from responsible inquiries of virtuous inquirers. It is a mistake to put it the other way round: epistemic virtues are those habits and dispositions that lead us to have justified beliefs. The primary focus is on how we order activities directed at answering questions and assessing methods of answering questions; it is not upon the epistemic status of beliefs.⁶³

⁵⁹ Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University, 2007) 7.

⁶⁰ James A. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993) vii.

⁶¹ John Greco, *Virtue Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (Boston: MIT, 2012).

⁶² John Greco, “Agent Reliabilism,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999) 273–96, at 290.

⁶³ Christopher Hookway, “Cognitive Virtues and Epistemic Evaluations,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2 (1994) 211–27, at 211, 225.

(4) The intellectual virtues are prioritized in the search for justified belief and knowledge.

Intellectual Virtues

An epistemic or intellectual virtue is “an innate ability or acquired habit that allows one to reliably achieve some intellectual good, such as truth in a relevant matter.”⁶⁴ Epistemic virtues include “faculty-virtues” such as imagination, perception, memory, intuition, introspection; and “character virtues” such as reliability, responsibility, conscientiousness, perceptiveness, carefulness, and open-mindedness. Faculty-virtues are indispensable to account for knowledge from the past. Character virtues are indispensable to account for ongoing intellectual achievements and developments such as understanding and wisdom that presuppose past knowledge but also build on and transcend it. The development, exercise, and prioritization of the intellectual virtues in the theological ethicist impact the marshaling of evidence to justify a theological anthropology that defines human dignity and to formulate and justify norms that facilitate its attainment.

Interrelationship between Epistemic and Ethical Virtues

Virtue epistemologists agree on the directional shift in epistemology and the centrality of intellectual virtues in the process of attaining knowledge. They disagree on the interrelationship between virtue epistemology and virtue ethics, on whether or not and how epistemic appraisal is related to ethical appraisal, on whether or not and how the epistemic *ought* relates to the ethical *ought*. Lorraine Code agrees with Greco’s and Ernest Sosa’s directional shift in epistemology that emphasizes the cognitive activities of a person in community guided by the social practices of investigation. She criticizes Sosa, however, for not integrating the insights from ethical virtue theory with virtue epistemology. Specifically, Code believes that epistemology should emphasize virtues that relate to human agency in the process of attaining and justifying knowledge. To that end, she proposes *responsibilism* as a virtue epistemology theory that posits the agent’s epistemic responsibility as the primary intellectual virtue in virtue epistemology. Responsibility emphasizes both the knower as active agent and the agent’s choice as essential elements in the pursuit and justification of knowledge. All other intellectual virtues emanate from this central virtue.⁶⁵ It is on the basis of responsibility that we can ensure accountability and impute praise or blame to the person for epistemic claims.

⁶⁴ John Greco, “Virtue Epistemology.”

⁶⁵ See Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

James Montmarquet agrees with Code that ethical virtue theory and virtue epistemology should be more closely aligned. Code, however, focuses on *responsibility* as the foundational intellectual virtue for epistemic claims, whereas Montmarquet focuses on *conscientiousness*, which he defines as an appropriate desire for truth.⁶⁶ He specifies conscientiousness in three categories of regulative virtues. The virtue of *impartiality* includes openness to an other's ideas, willingness to exchange ideas and learn from an other, suspense of personal bias toward an other's ideas, and recognition of one's own fallibility. The virtue of *intellectual sobriety* disposes the sober-minded inquirer, "out of sheer love of truth, discovery, and the excitement of new and unfamiliar ideas, to embrace what is not really warranted, even relative to the limits of his own evidence." The virtue of *intellectual courage* includes "the willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popularly held beliefs, perseverance in the face of opposition from others (until one is convinced one is mistaken), and the determination required to see such a project through to completion."⁶⁷ The different virtues of responsibility and conscientiousness account for different selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration of the sources of moral knowledge to define human dignity and to formulate and justify norms for its attainment. They also emphasize both the need to justify one's definition of human dignity and normative claims in dialogue with others and the courage to revise, if necessary, one's perspective based on this process.

Reliabilism vs. Responsibilism

An emphasis on the responsibility and conscientiousness of the knower-agent, we suggest, is necessary in virtue epistemology but is not sufficient. One can be very responsible and conscientious in intellectual activity and still be incorrect in one's knowledge claims. While all virtue epistemologists accept the change in the direction of analysis, defining justified belief and knowledge in reference to their source in the virtues, they disagree on how to define virtuous character. For Greco, who represents the "reliabilist" school, virtuous character is "defined in terms of successful and stable dispositions to form belief" and a consequential focus on "reliable success in producing true belief."⁶⁸ For Hookway, who represents the "responsibilist" school, a virtuous character decentralizes "questions of the epistemic status of beliefs in favor of questions of agency and inquiry."⁶⁹ The reliabilist

⁶⁶ Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Guy Axtell, Alvin Goldman, Ernest Sosa, and Hilary Kornblith, *Knowledge, Belief, and Character* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) xiv.

⁶⁹ Ibid. xiii–xiv.

school focuses on getting knowledge right; the responsibilist school focuses on the agent's motives in seeking justified knowledge.

The reliabilist/responsibilist debate, we suggest, ought not to be construed as an either/or but as a both/and debate. Guy Axtell argues that there is a shared assumption in virtue epistemology of a "dual component" account of the justification of true knowledge that reflects a complementarity between reliabilism and responsibilism. An account like this integrates "constraints on the agent's faculty reliability" such as imagination, perception, and memory, "with constraints on the agent's responsibility in gathering and processing evidence."⁷⁰ Linda Zagzebski's "dual component" account of the justification of true knowledge balances the *motivation* of the knower with *success* and objective reliability in achieving true knowledge. The intellectual virtues have "a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end."⁷¹ In Sosa's virtue perspectivism a proposition is reflectively known by a person "only if *both* he is rationally justified in believing it *and* he is in a position to know . . . whether it is true."⁷² Greco's "mixed theory" account of justification is that "an adequate account of knowledge ought to contain both a responsibility condition and a reliability condition. Moreover, a virtue account can explain how the two are tied together. In cases of knowledge, objective reliability is grounded in epistemically responsible action."⁷³ A dual-component virtue epistemology, which we espouse, seeks an integration and balance between reliabilist and responsibilist accounts of justified belief and knowledge.

Virtuous Perspective

The emphasis in virtue ethics on the agent rather than on the agent's actions is replicated in virtue epistemology's holistic emphasis on the knowing subject rather than on the subject's separate Scholastic faculties of intellect and will. This emphasis on the knowing subject and the subject's virtues, the directional shift in analysis, and the complementarity proposed by Sosa, Zagzebski, and Greco between the subjective motivation of the knowing subject and the subject's success in achieving true knowledge all closely parallel perspectivism. According to Lonergan, human knowing is not simply "taking a look" at reality. It is endlessly discursive, cycling and recycling through various levels of cognitive operations until knowledge and truth are reached in the judgment, deliberated on, and a decision is made for action

⁷⁰ Ibid. 188.

⁷¹ Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996) 134.

⁷² Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991; repr. 1995) 28, emphasis original.

⁷³ Greco, "Virtue Epistemology."

according to the truth achieved in the judgment. Knowing begins with attention and cycles on through perception, imagination (sometimes as memory), insight, conceptualization, deliberation and weighing of evidence, and culminates in the judgment of truth.⁷⁴ It is in the judgment of truth and only there that genuine human knowledge and truth are achieved.

Perception is critical in the process of coming to know. Perception, Lonergan argues, is a function of a subject's relationship to an object, the subject's active patterning of the object in the phenomenal world. The phenomenal object does not simply impress itself upon rational subjects, as it impresses itself upon nonrational animals; nor do rational subjects simply construct or project it. Rather, the appearances of the phenomenal world are shaped by the subjects' attention, interests, loves of varying intensity, immediate and ultimate goals, emotional interactions, and in general the character lens through which they view the object.⁷⁵ According to virtue epistemology, that character lens is shaped by both the intellectual and character virtues. The phenomenal world that persons encounter and attend to is not a world of naked sense data that is "already out there now real,"⁷⁶ but a world shaped by subjective interpretations called perceptions. Perception is an exercise of a person's practical reason leading to choice. What we "see" is a function of who we are, and who we are, according to virtue epistemology, is fashioned by the intellectual and character virtues we adopt, define, and prioritize. Both virtue epistemology and perspectivism emphasize that this adoption, definition, and prioritization is influenced, in turn, by social context and historical narrative.

Who we are as knowing subjects is discerned, in particular, by responding to two of Lonergan's factors for knowing. First, human knowers are selective, given their past socialization, personal experience, range of data offered to them and, we add, given the intellectual and character virtues that knowers adopt, prioritize, and excel in. Second, knowers are individually different, and, given all the variables just enumerated, we can expect them to make different selections of data and exercise different intellectual and character virtues.

In her virtue epistemology, Code articulates similar factors for knowing. Traditional epistemology underestimates the impact of contextual and social dimensions of the knowing subject. It does so because it begins with the object, not the subject. Beginning with the knowing subject, as virtue epistemology and perspectivism do, requires that we give greater attention to those dimensions that shape, first, the subject and then, as a consequence, the knowledge claims of the subject. Drawing from MacIntyre, Code argues that we understand the knowing subject and the subject's virtues through lived

⁷⁴ Lonergan, *Insight* 273–74.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 190.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 251; see also Lonergan, *Method* 263.

narrative,⁷⁷ which is the context for adopting, prioritizing, and excelling in virtue. Integrating a virtuous perspective into ethical method recognizes the essential engagement of the theological ethicist—his or her perspective or stance—in the discipline. Klaus Demmer argues that theological ethics “inevitably contains a biographical element that reflects the personality of theologians and their particular life story.”⁷⁸ This life story is especially evident in the habits of virtues, moral and intellectual, that shape the perception of the theological ethicist and his or her selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration of the sources of moral knowledge. This personal narrative provides an adequate context for evaluating epistemic claims and highlights the richness and complexity of criteria for evaluating such claims.

Rooting epistemology in the knowing subject’s character and virtues revealed through the subject’s narrative history highlights the complexity of formulating and applying criteria for epistemic evaluation. All knowledge claims are made in a particular historical, social, and cultural context, all of which helps fashion the knowing subject’s narrative and knowledge claims. In traditional epistemologies, the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of knowledge and their impact on the knowing subject’s narrative history are largely ignored. Virtue epistemology and perspectivism acknowledge these variables and attempt to integrate them more fully into epistemological theory. Their integration marks a fundamental transition from classicism, where knowledge is a static, permanent achievement, to historical consciousness, where knowledge is a dynamic, ongoing process. This distinction is as valid for epistemology as it is for Christian ethics or any other discipline.

In the Christian tradition, ethics is never learned or done in isolation, but always in community. Thus Jennifer Herdt comments that “contemporary revivers of virtue ethics . . . have enthusiastically embraced the notion that habituation in virtue takes place within the context of a community and its practices.”⁷⁹ Since community is essential to the individual’s perceiving, understanding, judging, deciding, and acting, an ongoing challenge for virtue ethics and virtue epistemology is to discern the particularity of the plural perceptions of community and how these plural perceptions impact the definition of human dignity and the formulation and justification of norms that facilitate its attainment. In the Christian community, believers learn a Christian perspective or stance, and that stance, we assert, fundamentally shapes the virtuous perspective of Christian theological ethicists.

⁷⁷ Code, *Epistemic Responsibility* 222.

⁷⁸ Klaus Demmer, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, ed. James F. Keenan, trans. Roberto Dell’Oro, foreword Thomas Kopfensteiner (Washington: Georgetown University, 2000) 1.

⁷⁹ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue* 350.

CHRISTIAN STANCE

Charles Curran argues that perspective or stance “is drawn from the visual experience and expresses the way we look at something that puts everything else into focus.”⁸⁰ A foundational question to be asked of Christian ethical method, then, is what perspective or stance guides the Christian ethicist in her perception of reality. Metaethical objectivism justifies the claim that the good can be defined. In the Christian tradition, it is defined as human dignity or a similar cognate; perspectivism, virtue ethics, and virtue epistemology explain the epistemological foundations to justify that definition. Faith in the living Christ provides the vision, stance, or hermeneutical lens to formulate that definition and to formulate and justify norms that facilitate attaining human dignity. Curran, drawing from what he calls the “fivefold Christian mysteries,” formulates a Christian stance that serves as a paradigm and point of departure for Christian ethical method.⁸¹ “Curran’s stance,” observes James Gustafson, “demonstrates the significance of ‘postethical’ levels of moral discourse or, in other words, of background beliefs and loyalties that provide a larger framework of justification and orientation for ethics without being a sufficient condition for determining particular moral action.”⁸² Curran proposes that the following mysteries are inherent in a Christian stance: creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny.⁸³

The mystery of creation nurtures the belief that God has created the universe and everything in it, including human beings and sexuality, and that God’s creation is fundamentally good. Through rational reflection on the universe and God’s creation, humans have the capacity to discern ethical truth. Sin is a demonstrable reality of human existence; it came into creation through human actions, contrary to God’s plan. Though the mystery of sin does not destroy the basic goodness of God’s creation, it does deform it. It impacts human reason, the ability to discern the meaning of human existence, the call to holiness, and the recognition of and respect for human

⁸⁰ Curran, *Catholic Moral Tradition Today* 30.

⁸¹ Charles E. Curran, *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1982) 38–44; *Catholic Moral Tradition Today* 30.

⁸² James M. Gustafson, “Charles Curran: Ecumenical Moral Theologian Par Excellence,” in *A Call to Fidelity* 211–34, at 225–26.

⁸³ Other scholars (e.g., James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] 242–48; and James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World* 33–35) have proposed Christ as the foundational stance for Christian ethics. While Christ is the *norma normans non normata*, proposing him as foundational stance raises the question of Christology. We concur with Curran that, given the complexity of christological questions and the danger of a narrow Christology (*Catholic Moral Tradition Today* 31–32), and further, given that the mysteries Curran cites are directly related to questions of Christology, these mysteries may adequately account for a Christian stance.

dignity. The mystery of incarnation, says Curran, asserts that Jesus is fully human and fully divine and “supports and strengthens the fundamental goodness of everything human.” It eliminates the possibility of any dualism between body and soul or spirit and flesh. If sin deforms the human image of God in creation, the mystery of redemption, “the successful struggle of Jesus against the power of sin and evil,” restores that image. “Resurrection destiny” or “the fullness of the reign of God” and the triumph of Jesus over evil, sin, and death, exist in the tension between the “already” and “not yet.” Christian ethics must “live with an eschatological tension between the present time of redemption and the unrealized future of resurrection destiny.”⁸⁴

For Curran, stance “serves as an interpretive tool in understanding the basic mysteries of Christian life.”⁸⁵ For Philip Keane, stance “is a creative, integrating, imaginative grasp of the meaning of life.”⁸⁶ A Christian ethicist’s stance—the selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration of these and other mysteries—shapes her perspective and guides the process of formulating a definition of human dignity and the norms that facilitate its attainment. Oftentimes an ethicist’s stance is implied rather than stated in her writings. Drawing attention to stance, however, is crucial to Christian ethical method. It may shift the focus from the formulation and justification of specific norms for the moral life, which often polarizes Christian ethicists, to perspectives on creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny. Focusing on the Christian mysteries that shape a particular stance may provide common ground for constructive and charitable dialogue and build community. The calls of Vatican II and ThT for constructing interdisciplinary theological methods could foster such dialogue and community building.

VIRTUOUS PERSPECTIVE: CHASTITY

We illustrate the interrelationship between a virtuous perspective and a Christian stance by asking which virtue is central for defining human dignity in sexual ethics. In Christian tradition, chastity is that central virtue. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a succinct definition of chastity: It is

the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of [the hu]man in his [and her] bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which [the hu]man’s belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of *a man and a woman*.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Curran, *Catholic Moral Tradition Today* 33–34.

⁸⁵ Curran, *Moral Theology* 43.

⁸⁶ Philip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 65.

⁸⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2337. We have corrected the *Catechism*’s language to be gender inclusive. The gender exclusive language of the *Catechism* and most magisterial documents is an indicator of stance.

Chastity: A Traditional Stance

The *Catechism's* definition of chastity, closely informed by other magisterial teachings, suggests a stance on the selection, interpretation, prioritization, and integration of four Christian mysteries, creation, incarnation, redemption, and sin, and asserts two claims, one anthropological and the other normative. Anthropologically, the mystery of creation recognizes the fundamental goodness of God's creation in general and of human sexuality specifically. Normatively, according to the phrase we have underscored in the *Catechism's* definition of chastity, human sexuality can be realized morally only in a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. Elsewhere, creation's design for human sexuality is referred to as ontological or sexual complementarity between a man and a woman, whereby a man and a woman, though fundamentally equal and complete in themselves,⁸⁸ are incomplete as a couple.⁸⁹ Sexual complementarity completes the couple in marriage by bringing the male and female and their physiological and psychological elements together in a unified whole. Creation is designed to complete man and woman as a couple in complete and lifelong mutual self-gift. The mystery of the incarnation affirms the "inner unity" of body and soul, mind and spirit, in human sexuality; there is no dualism. The mystery of redemption recognizes the possibility of the successful integration "into the relationship of one person to another in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman."⁹⁰

Original sin, however, has damaged the fundamental goodness of creation, including human persons and their sexuality. The Christian tradition has generally been suspicious of sexuality and has regarded human sexuality in general as "objectively disordered" as a consequence of original sin,⁹¹ but this morally suspicious view of human sexuality is gradually being corrected in the tradition. Heterosexual orientation is objectively ordered; marital sexuality is fully affirmed as good; and heterosexual marital reproductive sexual acts are morally good. Creation, incarnation, and redemption fully affirm the goodness of heterosexual, marital sexuality; and the virtue of chastity, as defined in the *Catechism*, specifies how this good is to be realized. Original sin, however, continues to damage the goodness of human sexuality in both the ontological and moral orders. Homosexual orientation is one instance of this ontological damage and is an "objective disorder." Mark Jordan makes an important association between original sin and

⁸⁸ John Paul II, "Authentic Concept of Conjugal Love," *Origins* 28 (1999) 654–56, at 655.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, "Letter to Women" no. 7, *Origins* 25 (1995) 137–43, at 141.

⁹⁰ *Catechism* no. 2337.

⁹¹ Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) 34.

homosexual orientation that is evident in a subtle revision, approved by the Vatican, to the US bishops' *Always Our Children*.⁹²

In the original letter, sexual orientation is described as a "fundamental dimension" of human beings; in the revised version, it is a "deep-seated dimension." . . . "Fundamental" might suggest that sexual orientation is part of one's being as a divine creation, while "deep-seated" only implies that sexual orientation is stubborn. Humanity is fundamental; Original Sin is deep-seated. Homosexuality is more like Original Sin than like humanity.⁹³

According to the CDF, a homosexual orientation "is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil";⁹⁴ if acted on, this orientation leads to intrinsic evil in the moral order.

The *Catechism's* definition of chastity and its suggested selection, interpretation, and integration of the Christian mysteries contain an anthropological claim and a normative claim. The anthropological claim is that creation (1) justifies only heterosexual orientation and heterosexual mutual self-gift as objectively ordered and natural; and (2) prescribes that mutual self-gift can be realized only in sexual complementarity between a man and a woman in marriage; concomitantly, the mystery of sin justifies homosexual orientation and homosexual mutual self-gift as "objectively disordered" and unnatural. The normative claim is that only reproductive sexual acts, or at least sexual acts of a reproductive-kind,⁹⁵ within a heterosexual marriage can be moral; all non-reproductive sexual acts, heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, are immoral.

Chastity: An Alternative Catholic Stance

An alternative Catholic stance agrees with the *Catechism's* suggested selection of four Christian mysteries to define chastity. Further, it accepts the *Catechism's* definition of the authentic integration of a person's sexuality into human relationship and the practical living out of that relationship in fidelity and commitment to another person. This alternative stance, however, discards the final clause that limits this integration to heterosexual relationships and extends it to homosexual and bisexual relationships. Discarding and extending the final clause are contingent on the relationship of the mystery of sin to sexual orientation and have implications also for the mysteries of creation and redemption.

⁹² USCCB, "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers," <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/always-our-children.cfm>.

⁹³ Jordan, *Silence of Sodom* 47.

⁹⁴ CDF, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" no. 3, *Origins* 16 (1986) 377–82, at 379.

⁹⁵ See John Finnis, "Law, Morality, and Sexual Orientation," *Notre Dame Law Review* 69 (1994) 1049–76, at 1067.

Relying on secular disciplines of knowledge, some Catholic ethicists disagree with the traditional stance on the mystery of sin that justifies the claim that homosexual orientation is “objectively disordered.” Credible science finds that homosexual orientation is a not-infrequent reality in creation. Peer-reviewed scientific literature has documented that human sexual practice has been remarkably varied across time and cultures⁹⁶ and has identified same-sex practice as a natural component of the social system in over 300 species of vertebrates.⁹⁷ Based on such studies, James Allison challenges the claim that a homosexual orientation is objectively disordered. “There is no longer any reputable scientific evidence of any sort: psychological, biological, genetic, medical, neurological—to back up the claim.”⁹⁸ In fact, there is substantial scientific evidence to the contrary. In addition, it is accepted in contemporary scientific and theological literature, including the *Catechism*⁹⁹ and other magisterial documents,¹⁰⁰ that people do not choose their sexual orientation. Sexual orientation, “the sustained erotic attraction to members of one’s own gender, the opposite gender, or both—homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual respectively,”¹⁰¹ is given and not chosen. It is a result of a mix of genetic, psychological, and social “loading.”¹⁰² Such evidence leads evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden to assert: “To the extent that information about nature can inform theological discourse on human and biological diversity, the message for full and proper inclusion of gay, lesbian, and transgender persons is clear and unequivocal.”¹⁰³

On the basis of the evidence of the contemporary sciences, some Catholic ethicists argue, the mystery of sin does not justify the claim that homosexual orientation is objectively disordered in the ontological order. This theological claim, according to the CDF, is contingent on whether homosexual acts

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols., trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988–1990).

⁹⁷ See Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999).

⁹⁸ James Allison, “The Fulcrum of Discovery or: How the ‘Gay Thing’ Is Good News for the Catholic Church,” unpublished essay, p. 9, <http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/pdf/eng59.pdf>.

⁹⁹ *Catechism* no. 2358.

¹⁰⁰ USCCB, *Always Our Children* no. 5.

¹⁰¹ Richard C. Pillard and J. Michael Bailey, “A Biological Perspective on Sexual Orientation,” *Clinical Sexuality* 18 (1995) 1–14, at 1.

¹⁰² This terminology articulates our position that homosexual orientation is neither exclusively genetic nor exclusively social in origin. See John E. Perito, *Contemporary Catholic Sexuality: What Is Taught and What Is Practiced* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 96.

¹⁰³ Joan Roughgarden, “Evolutionary Biology and Sexual Diversity,” in *God, Science, Sex, and Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Aana Marie Vigen, with John Anderson (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2010) 89–104, at 103.

are intrinsically immoral: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; *and thus* the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.”¹⁰⁴ The central reason why homosexual orientation is labeled objectively disordered is that it has a “strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil.” If it can be established that homosexual acts are not intrinsically evil, then the understanding of the mystery of sin that justifies the claim that homosexual orientation is objectively disordered must be reconsidered.

Scientific and theological arguments have much to tell us about the morality of homosexual acts between homosexual couples. Regarding the judgment that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and therefore violate chastity and frustrate human dignity, credible social-scientific studies indicate that this is not the case. Lawrence Kurdek, who has carried out extensive social-scientific research on gay and lesbian couples, reports that they experience levels of relationship satisfaction similar to those of heterosexual couples.¹⁰⁵ A growing body of peer-reviewed social-scientific data demonstrates that committed, stable, and justly loving gay and lesbian unions are as personally complementary and fulfilling as heterosexual ones. Gay and lesbian acts of making just love are as unitive as heterosexual acts of making just love. An equally impressive body of social-scientific data shows that, contrary to magisterial claims with no supporting evidence, partnered gays and lesbians raise children to be every bit as healthily developed and heterosexual as the children of heterosexuals.¹⁰⁶

Some Catholic ethicists reject the magisterium’s normative claim that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, but disagree on how to describe these acts. Richard McCormick, for example, labels homosexual acts as premorally evil. Such acts are “pre-moral evils in that their sheer presence does not *necessarily* make the total act or relation of which they are a part

¹⁰⁴ CDF, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church” no. 3, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence A. Kurdek, “What Do We Know about Gay and Lesbian Couples?” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14 (2005) 251–54; “Differences between Partners from Heterosexual, Gay, and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68 (2006) 509–28; “Lesbian and Gay Couples,” in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan*, ed. Anthony R. D’Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson (New York: Oxford University, 1995) 243–61; “Are Gay and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples *Really* Different from Heterosexual Married Couples?” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004) 880–900. See also Ritch C. Savin-Williams and Kristin G. Esterberg, “Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Families,” in *Handbook of Family Diversity*, ed. David H. Demo, Katherine R. Allen, and Mark A. Fine (New York: Oxford University, 2000) 207–12; and Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz, *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex* (New York: Morrow, 1983).

¹⁰⁶ See Salzman and Lawler, *Sexual Ethics* 173–75.

‘morally evil or sinful.’”¹⁰⁷ For McCormick, such acts can be considered premorally evil because “homogenital acts always depart from the ideal or the normative.”¹⁰⁸ Other Catholic ethicists reject this judgment because of its implicit anthropological and normative implications. These disagreements must be sorted out to substantiate our claims to redefine the mysteries and the implications these redefinitions have for the virtue of chastity.

The claim that homogenital acts depart from the ideal or normative can be made only if there is a definition of the normative, and that normative is established based on a heterosexual anthropological norm. According to this anthropology, heterosexual orientation is the norm, and anything that departs from this norm is “objectively disordered.”¹⁰⁹ There is tension in McCormick’s thought here. On the one hand, he resists labeling homosexual orientation an objective disorder. On the other hand, by labeling homosexual acts premorally evil, he implies not only that these acts are nonnormative but also that there is something normative in the human person that makes such acts nonnormative. Exploration of this tension will provide us with an essential anthropological and normative insight that warrants a revision of the traditional definition of the mystery of sin in relation to homosexual orientation.

McCormick presents and critiques the CDF’s 1975 Declaration *Persona humana*, regarding human sexuality, homosexual orientation, and its moral correlation with homosexual acts. Regarding human sexuality, the CDF states:

The human person, present-day scientists maintain, is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered one of the principal formative influences of a man or woman. In fact, sex is the source of the biological, psychological and spiritual characteristics which make a person male or female and which thus considerably influence each individual’s progress towards maturity and membership of society.¹¹⁰

McCormick notes the problematic between claiming, on the one hand, that one’s sexuality as reflected in one’s sexual orientation is “one of the principal formative influences in the person” and, on the other hand, that in the case of persons with a homosexual orientation this principal influence is disordered. Such a statement means, quite simply, “that the person is disordered.”¹¹¹ McCormick responds to this statement by claiming that the CDF

¹⁰⁷ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *Notes on Moral Theology, 1981 through 1984* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984) 11, citing Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Moral Methodology: A Case Study,” in *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*, ed. Robert Nugent (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 78–92, at 91, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *Critical Calling: Reflections on Moral Dilemmas since Vatican II* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 312.

¹⁰⁹ CDF, “Vatican List of Catechism Changes,” *Origins* (1997) 251–62, at 257.

¹¹⁰ CDF, *Persona humana* no. 1.

¹¹¹ McCormick, *Critical Calling* 310.

has drawn too close an association between the immorality of homosexual acts and the objective disorder of homosexual orientation, such that the orientation itself becomes morally decisive. In effect, McCormick is resisting the CDF's moral method of moving from an established definition of homosexual acts as intrinsically evil to an anthropological claim that homosexual orientation is disordered. The latter claim has moral implications from the former, because, as the argument runs, while a homosexual inclination is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic evil. McCormick resists this move to draw a moral correlation between homosexual acts and homosexual persons, and asks, "What is achieved by designating homosexual orientation as a 'disorder'?"¹¹²

We believe that McCormick's own thought shows a similar correlation, not between homosexual acts as *intrinsically* evil and homosexual orientation, but between homosexual acts as *premorally* evil and homosexual orientation. We pose the following questions: What is achieved by designating homosexual acts as premoral evils? Does this label not insinuate a negative judgment on homosexual orientation, aligning it with a definition of the mystery of sin that justifies the claim that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder similar to that advanced by the CDF? After all is said and done, is not a "premoral evil," precisely as "evil," a "disordered" value? It seems to us that one could draw a similar conclusion on the disorderedness of the person's orientation from McCormick's statement that homosexual acts are a premoral disvalue and from the CDF's statement that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered."¹¹³ Both take their stance on the unproven anthropological perception and claim that heterosexual orientation is the norm of sexual morality for humans and that homosexual orientation must therefore be objectively disordered. We believe that labeling heterosexual acts as normative, and acts that depart from this ideal as premorally evil, does not give the human sexual person due consideration. The interrelationship between a premoral value or disvalue and sexual anthropology requires further consideration.

By claiming that heterosexual acts are normative, one has already made a judgment about sexual anthropology and implicitly affirmed the magisterium's position that heterosexual orientation is, in the words of Jordan, a "fundamental" normative dimension of humanity as a "divine creation" and that a homosexual orientation is "deep-seated" and "stubborn," "more like original sin than like humanity." Any sexual expression that deviates from that norm is therefore by definition at least premorally evil. McCormick and other ethicists, however, leave room for the possibility that some homosexual acts, while they may be premorally evil, are not morally evil and may,

¹¹² Ibid. 311.

¹¹³ CDF, *Persona humana* no. 8.

indeed, be morally good. McCormick's resistance to labeling homosexual orientation disordered, and his further assertion that some homosexual acts can be morally good,¹¹⁴ would seem to imply that homosexual acts are not premoral evils. What may be at the root of this dilemma, and a way out of it, is how we define sexual orientation in relation to sexual anthropology and determine premoral disvalue in light of this anthropology.

Homosexual acts, whether judged intrinsically or premorally evil, are being measured against an already defined sexual anthropology that posits *heterosexual* orientation, rather than simply *sexual* orientation, as normative for human beings. This is a classicist and deductive approach to anthropology, and it betrays fundamental methodological commitments. It is classicist, because it accepts heterosexual orientation as the absolute and unchanging anthropological norm. While this may be true statistically, as the magisterium realizes,¹¹⁵ there are people with a permanent homosexual orientation who do not choose that orientation; for them, a homosexual orientation *is* normative. The classicist approach is also deductive, because it accepts that heterosexual orientation is normative and deduces from that principle that all homosexual activity is morally or premorally evil. Catholic ethicists who oppose this stance typically use a historically conscious and inductive method that looks at human beings in their particularity and draws out anthropological generalizations that reflect this particularity.

From a historically conscious worldview, defining anthropology is a necessarily ongoing venture,¹¹⁶ and the definition of what constitutes a premoral value or disvalue must be in dialogue with anthropology. As an anthropology evolves, the definition of what constitutes a premoral value and disvalue will also evolve. Historical consciousness recognizes the givenness of sexual orientation and the need to incorporate it as an essential component of sexual anthropology. It further recognizes that heterosexual and homosexual orientations, as integral parts of the "biological, psychological and spiritual characteristics which make a person male or female,"¹¹⁷ are normative for heterosexual or homosexual human beings respectively. An ethical method that assesses sexual behavior must be founded on that anthropological insight, and must formulate its values and norms for assessing sexual persons and sexual acts in light of that insight. A Christian stance, in turn, that selects, interprets, prioritizes, and integrates Christian mysteries as a hermeneutical lens to view reality, must allow those mysteries to be informed by an accurate anthropology.

¹¹⁴ McCormick, *Critical Calling* 309.

¹¹⁵ CDF, *Persona humana* no. 8; USCCB, "Always Our Children" no. 6.

¹¹⁶ See McCormick, "Human Significance and Christian Significance," in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics*, ed. Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Scribner's, 1968) 233–61; *Notes on Moral Theology: 1981 through 1984* 181–82.

¹¹⁷ CDF, *Persona humana* no. 1.

If the scientific data and our revision of certain Catholic theological arguments are correct, then homosexual acts are not intrinsically evil and, when holistically complementary, just, and loving,¹¹⁸ can be morally good. If homosexual acts are not intrinsically evil, then the CDF's central reason for labeling a homosexual orientation objectively disordered is void. The interpretation of the mystery of sin and its implications for the other mysteries and their relevance for the virtue of chastity and their anthropological and normative implications for the sexual person must be revised in light of that correction. The mystery of sin does not justify the claim that homosexual and bisexual orientations are "objectively disordered" and unnatural; they are more like humanity as created than like original sin. The mystery of creation justifies that heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual orientations, and heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual mutual self-gifts, are objectively ordered for heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual persons respectively. It further justifies that holistic complementarity, that is, *an integrated orientation, personal complementarity, and biological complementarity*, can be realized between a man and a woman, a man and a man, and a woman and a woman, depending on the person's sexual orientation. The mystery of incarnation affirms the "inner unity" of body and soul, mind and spirit, in human sexuality; there is no dualism. The mystery of redemption justifies that the integration into the relationship of one person to another can occur in the complete and lifelong mutual self-gift of a man and a woman, a man and a man, and a woman and a woman.

To define the normative, then, we propose the following definition of a premoral value and disvalue with regard to homosexual and heterosexual sexual acts. Sexual activity that is consonant with one's sexual orientation and that strives for sexual integrity in light of one's orientation is a premoral value; sexual activity that is not consonant with one's sexual orientation and that does not strive for sexual integrity in light of one's orientation is a premoral disvalue. While this definition may seem to reflect the moral plane, rather than the premoral plane, it does not. Until all the variables of the human person adequately considered are assessed, one cannot make a *moral* judgment on whether or not a particular sexual activity *actually* integrates the sexual person and his or her human relationships and is therefore morally right, or *actually* disintegrates the person and his or her relationships and is therefore morally wrong. This revised definition provides a hermeneutical lens to justify both a definition of human dignity that includes sexual orientation as an objective, intrinsic dimension of the

¹¹⁸ For a full explanation of these criteria for sexual morality, see Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "Catholic Sexual Ethics: Complementarity and the Truly Human," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 625–52; *Sexual Person* 156–61; *Sexual Ethics* 60–86.

sexual person and a definition of chastity, allied to the virtues of justice and love, as “the successful integration of [heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation] within the person and thus the inner unity of [the hu]man in his [and her] bodily and spiritual being.”¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

There are differences in Catholic definitions of chastity because there is a foundational difference in a Christian stance toward the interpretation and integration of the Christian mysteries that lead to different definitions of human dignity and the norms that facilitate or frustrate its attainment. For some, human sexual dignity rests only in heterosexuality, and for them only reproductive-type sexual acts within marriage facilitate human dignity. For others, human sexual dignity rests in heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, and both reproductive-type and nonreproductive type *holistically complementary, just, and loving* sexual acts facilitate human dignity. The different definitions of chastity, human dignity, and acts that facilitate or frustrate human dignity reflect virtuous Christian perspectives from different stories of the philosophical-theological Empire State Building and account for the variability in how the evidence is marshaled and construed into a comprehensive and comprehensible normative pattern or method.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Catechism* no. 2337.

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