

Article

Conscience and Truth

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Abstract: The immediate background to this essay is the contemporary expression of the relationship between conscience and truth in Catholic theology. The methods pursued are historically and textually based. Historically, there is a clear development in how Catholic theology has dealt with this relationship. Textually, three significant theologians are cited to explain this development (Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Alphonsus de Liguori). The conclusions reached indicate a strategy for a more robust Catholic expression of how conscience and truth can be explained.

Keywords: conscience; truth; anthropology; doctrinal; pastoral

1. Introduction

Doing the truth in love is a biblical way to explain the Christian moral life. In contemporary moral theology, this is frequently expressed as the duty to follow one's conscience. How and why this change in terminology has become accepted is the argument of this essay. The issue identified is that of certainty. Although both truth and conscience, taken unto themselves, can be examined in terms of their particular binding force, it is the space in which the two overlap that is the focus of this paper. The certainty of truth is one thing; the certainty of conscience is another. Where truth and conscience meet in the practical life of a disciple raises the question: is it the same modality of certainty that is applicable?

Conscience-duty as an obligation can have a preliminary appeal for Catholics: it relates religious belief to an idea not confined to the sphere of faith. The significance of conscience is acknowledged outside of formal religious churchgoers, confirmed by the International Day of Conscience sponsored by the United Nations since 2019. This initial appeal weakens with the consideration that there is no general acceptance of what conscience means. The UN text describes conscience as a moral compass guiding humanity towards a brighter and better future. This remit could be described in other ways, such as the Russian *sovest* or the Chinese *liang zhi*. If asked whether I have a duty to follow my conscience, I could reply, 'it all depends'. This is not necessarily an evasive response. Conscience does not have a fixed and shared definition. If there is no consensus on what conscience means, this is very much the case with the question of Pilate: 'what is truth'. Truth can be called certain; so too can conscience. What binds a person is the truth as perceived and applied in conscience. This is a debate that has been central to the Catholic tradition, and it is the reason why the explanation of certainty is central to that debate.

2. The Contemporary Catholic Understanding of Conscience

The Catholic acceptance of the final dignity of conscience has been a begrudging one, although the concept has never been formally repudiated. Catholicism, however, has come to be more and more identified as a creed of authority. Truth and conscience, rather than conscience and truth, would have been a more typical title for Catholic debate. In the earlier decades of the last century, Catholic defenders of conscience became vocal by critiquing totalitarian ideologies, including Church ones. Conscience appealed to the Catholic instinct for the common good that respects the particular good of an individual's life, including the rights of conscience. In the later decades of the twentieth century, the debate about the



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duty to follow conscience was increasingly forced on the Church by events outside ecclesial circles. This duty has become symbolic for the Catholic Church in the contemporary world. Freedom of conscience is not a concession granted by clerical authority to restless believers. Moral conscience has its own dignity. Accepting this publicly has been a cutting-edge challenge for the Church, as Catholics have come to value autonomy in all aspects of their life.

When the law forces individuals into an action, as it frequently did do during the brutal periods of the last century, Catholics have been encouraged to disobey the law if it contravenes truths identified by personal conscience. The logic of not being subjected to oppressive political regimes was increasingly applied in other areas of Catholic life. A law should not be obeyed if it forces unjust behavior (such as the legalization of abortion or forced conscription into an army involved in an unjust war). Using similar logic, an injunction that does not give due consideration to specific circumstances (such as a Church ban on contraception) need not be obeyed.

The duty to follow conscience, never denied in the private forum by Catholic theology, was now being expressed in a public forum. Conscience was being appreciated as having intrinsic dignity that was not conditional on ecclesiastical authority. State and Church were expected to be transparent in making laws that were sufficiently moral and appropriately flexible to address truths that citizens or the baptized both held to be essential interior commitments.

Two differing interpretations of conscience and truth were being presented. One stressed freedom, the other truth. The former offered an understanding of Catholicism as nourished by the freedom of the children of God. The latter gave priority to Church authorities who were presumed to be capable of interpreting the truth in its minutest details. The free judgments of conscience and the truth's claims to authority became difficult to reconcile. Freedom for the conscience of a Catholic was safeguarded, partially by using a principle of the classic moral tradition. This was expressed by what was referred to as the pastoral solution. The debate about this traditional principle focused on whether it was valid outside of the private sphere of confession-like encounters. Did pastoral solutions also apply in the public forum?

Consequently, the exploration of conscience as a confrontation between freedom-claims of the individual and the truth-claims of authority developed in a particular way within the Catholic Church. Often, these debates were explored within the context of the divergent interpretations of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Council II 1965). The debates were not confined to academic discussions; they became an animated issue for people with no particular interest in the hermeneutical technicalities of conciliar texts.

Historical developments offer one line of clarification. Conscience has biblical connotations. Typically, mainstream Catholic moral theology has not been very concerned with a comprehensive biblical exegesis. The translation of Saint Jerome, wording the scriptural understanding of *syneidesis* (acting with spiritual insight/consciousness) with the more Roman concept of *synderesis* (acting with knowledge/deliberation) has had a significant impact on how the Catholic understanding of conscience developed. Contemporary translations of scripture are no longer dependent on the Vulgate version. This has led to a renewed scholarly study of Jerome's translation. The Catholic tradition can, in time, incorporate these insights. Meanwhile, there are two important questions to ask about how the recent tradition developed in the first place.

Though accepting that the contemporary Catholic debate about conscience and truth has come to be formulated in a particular way, there is a legitimate theological question to ask. Is it inevitable that the entitlements of conscience and truth are incompatible for Catholics? Can the symptoms of the historical confusion between conscience and truth be identified more accurately? Scrutinizing these questions through historical texts is enlightening. Three authors who are classics for the Catholic tradition are of particular importance (all are Doctors of the Church): Augustine (354–430), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Alphonsus de Liguori (1696–1787). The choice of these authors is not to be equated with

excluding others as if they were of no importance for the tradition. The contribution of John Henry Newman is of obvious importance and merits a substantial study in itself.

3. Augustine and the Anthropological Basis of Conscience

Augustine was born a pagan. Educated in classical literature and philosophy, he dallied with various systems of belief before his conversion to Christianity. In his *Confessions* (397–8), he describes the winding path to that conversion, which included diversions and delays. Even after a number of his friends had converted, he hesitates: he wants to be certain about his decision. In this state of indecision, he continues to dither, because he is waiting for certitude. His conscience addresses him, a conscience already in turmoil because of his unjustified delay:

The day had come when I should be naked to myself and my conscience [*conscientia mea*] muttered within me. ‘Where is my tongue? Indeed, you kept saying how that would not cast off the burden of vanity for an uncertain truth. Behold, matters are now certain, and you are still burdened. And they are receiving wings on freer shoulders, others who have neither so worn themselves down in seeking nor spent ten years and more thinking about it.’ Thus, I was inwardly gnawed and violently confused with horrible shame. (Strohm 2011, p. 9)

Conscience speaks to Augustine from within his internal self, but it eventually incorporates perspectives outside of himself. The ambivalence of his initial position and subsequent behavior reflects the etymology of the Latin *conscientia*. It is indeed knowledge (*scientia*), but with a comprehension that is influenced by others (*con*). A widespread use of the term ‘subjective’ does not quite catch the tenor of Augustine’s text, though it is unquestionable that his position is an acceptance of subjective responsibility. Augustine is alert to that which others are saying and eventually do, but he does not attribute his conversion to these external factors alone.

Conscience knows everything about Augustine (his ten years of indecisiveness), but it knows something above and beyond this. In this way, Augustine introduces the appreciation of transcendence to the Catholic tradition. It is conscience that comes to know the superior character of Christian knowledge. Augustine’s conscience appreciates how his friends have made more sensible use of their time. Conscience is placed at a strategic liminal position: it is on the boundary between the self and the other. Crucially, its primary location is within the self, to which it returns when it has absorbed knowledge from the outside. Apart from introducing transcendence as the overarching context for a consideration of conscience, Augustine gives due consideration to what we now call the psychological dynamics of decision making.

In this way, we can see that the noteworthy contribution of Augustine to the conscience–truth relationship is an anthropological understanding of religion. The otherness of God and the importance of society are acknowledged, but in a way that never denies the significance of one’s own self. The memory (*anamnesis*) that characterizes human life needs to be helped from outside of the self in order for one to be fully aware of it. This assistance from outside is not something that is placed in opposition to the human *anamnesis*. It is, in fact, directed towards it. In Socratic terms, the assistance from outside the self has a maieutic function, enabling the self to more fully understand itself. Nothing foreign is imposed on the conscious self: what comes from ‘outside oneself’ in fact assists the human memory in its interior openness to reach truth (Berry 2017, p. 88). Consciousness of oneself is integral to the Augustinian understanding of conscience.

The significance of the contribution of Augustine in determining the relationship between conscience and truth is his emphasis on understanding this as an anthropological concern. In the chronicle of his own life history, he integrates his reconstructed past into an imagined future, which can provide his life with a reliable degree of unity and purpose. Conscience is not isolated from the self, nor is truth an unwarranted imposition from outside. Neither conscience nor truth can be properly understood without an explicit basis in the proper understanding of the human person as a person-with-others:

The self as understood in today's world would have been regarded with horror by Augustine. He would see our modern-day notion as displaying the kind of arrogance and self-sufficiency which he thought was a consequence of the human's sinful postlapsarian existence . . . He would look at the modern concept of the self as a prime example of the restlessness we experience until we find out rest in the Almighty. (Conroy 2018, p. 4)

4. Aquinas and the Doctrinal Formulation of Conscience

After Augustine, the early Middle Ages (ca. sixth to tenth centuries) were not a notably vibrant period for Catholic theology. Significant challenges were dealt with through local Synods: these were principally concerned with ecclesial discipline or the lack thereof. On a pastoral level, the relationship between conscience and truth is implied in the Celtic Penitentials of the period. These were dependent on how individual priests interpreted binding moral norms. This comparative neglect of a theological exploration as to how subjective conscience relates to non-subjective truth was to change in the Later Middle Ages (ca. eleventh to fifteenth centuries). The most significant contribution came from Thomas Aquinas:

As for what God wills for us, we may know in some way as to its general nature, for we know that what God wills he wills because it is truly good. Hence, whoever wills a thing because of any real quality of goodness has a will conformed to the divine will with regard to the reason for willing it, which is the formal or common will. (Aquinas 1966, p. 83)

Since conscience is a certain dictate of reason, since it is the application of knowledge to activity, is an act of the will bad when it goes against a mistaken reason, and does a mistaken conscience bind, which amounts to the same question? . . . when reason is mistaken in its judgment, even though not issuing from God, it is nevertheless put forward as true, and therefore as issuing from God from whom all truth comes. (Aquinas 1966, p. 61)

Conscience, for Aquinas, is not a superior moral sense. It is a function of the same human mind that considers other questions such as those in physics, metaphysics, mathematics, or art. Conscience applies the theory of morality in practice. This presupposes that conscience and truth are not essentially contradictory. Conscience may be most required when it comes to a practical issue needing to be dealt with, but it would be a misunderstanding to give it a status independent of intelligence. Truth is also the object of conscience, because it is not a self-determining faculty guaranteeing a good life. Conscientious people are not necessarily wise. It is the virtue of prudence that links conscience and truth in the significant texts of Aquinas. Virtue includes a desire for what is good and confirms conscience in the judgment about what is right or wrong in a given situation. Properly speaking, as Aquinas presents it, conscience is a judgment on a particular matter to be decided in the here and now. To warrant a good outcome is the deliberative role of prudence:

It is regrettable that 'prudence' is often used to indicate a passive attitude. The prudent person sits on the fence and makes sure she is not caught napping. For Aquinas, prudence is an active virtue—the first of the cardinal virtues. It is the prow of the ship (in Paul Claudel's striking image) that actively channels the latter into the safety of the harbor. Conscience can err, as the above quotations indicate. And, if wrong, conscience may—or may not—incur blame.

Aquinas offers a distinctive doctrine for understanding the relationship between conscience and truth. It is more formally articulated than Augustine's but within the same Catholic tradition. Prudence is the fundamental virtue in decision making: conscience is of assistance for reaching conclusions that are beyond reasonable doubt. Certainty is not the same in all the sciences. It is a mark of the intelligent person to reach the level of certainty

appropriate to a particular science. Since mathematical conclusions cannot be replicated in moral matters, the virtue of prudence takes on a particular significance.

In dealing with moral matters covered by the binary of conscience–truth, there are so many variables and eventualities that prudence is a prerequisite to attaining the level of certainty in a decision of conscience that merits being called a right decision. There may be remaining doubts and worries that can cause anxiety (in the language of Aquinas: *sollicitudo*). However, if the decision made in conscience is a prudent one, there should be no subsequent vacillation.

Considered speculatively, the texts chosen from Aquinas are an important advance of that which is implicit in the position of Augustine. This was not so apparent in the pastoral practice of the time. The explanation is historical. Ten years before the birth of Aquinas, the reforming Fourth Lateran Council (1215) issued decrees on the necessity of annual confession:

The faithful of both sexes who have reached the age of reason should individually and truthfully confess their sins at least once a year to their own pastor and should, within their possibilities, fulfil the penance imposed . . . (Denzinger 1995, p. 812)

The priest should be discreet and prudent, like an expert doctor using wine and oil on the bruises of the wounded. He should diligently establish the situation of the penitent and of circumstances of the sins, to prudently establish what advice to give and what remedy to apply . . . (Denzinger 1995, p. 813)

The Order of Preachers (Dominicans) that Aquinas joined was founded in 1216, just one year after this pastorally minded Council. The earliest Constitutions of the Order gave special importance to the sacrament of confession as pivotal to their mission in the Church. The fruit of good preaching was harvested in this sacrament, to echo a phrase of the fifth Master of the Order, Humbert de Romans. For a thorough understanding of the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas, this pastoral concern needs to be considered:

In his defence of study and teaching by religious Orders . . . Thomas quotes *Inter cetera* of the Fourth Lateran on preaching and confession several times . . . and sets out to prove that ‘happily there can be a religious order instituted to aid bishops in these two areas’; and then drives the point home further on when he states, with reference surely to his own Order, that ‘indeed such an Order was instituted by the Apostolic See for these areas, as one may see from its very name. (Boyle 2005, p. 299)

With the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas was filling a gap (so to speak) in the summist system of theology that was customary at the time. The gap was a doctrinal one. In the haste to be pastoral, the doctrinal basis of the *cura animarum* was neglected. The relationship between that which is pastoral and that which is doctrinal was a challenge in the era of Aquinas. It remains a tension within the Catholic Church, as can be observed in the struggle to reach a shared understanding of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

I have summarized Augustine’s contribution to the relationship between conscience and truth as an anthropological one. In a correspondingly summary, I consider the contribution of Aquinas as a doctrinal understanding of the same question.

It was pastoral practice rather than doctrinal formulae that was to become problematical. With the support of the Fourth Lateran Council, auricular confession, once practically unknown within the Church, became normative. The requirements of the Council were exacting. The priest had to be able to facilitate the most uninstructed penitent to confess their sins. The majority of priests were very poorly educated, and to be of assistance to them, a new category of *summa confessorum* became popular.

The relationship between conscience and truth was entering a different phase within the Catholic Church. Apart from the complexities involved in the decision of what constitutes a sin, the obligatory nature of the Fourth Lateran legislation was not clear:

Teaching some forty years after the Council, Thomas Aquinas found it necessary to discuss the obligatory nature of the decree on annual confession if one was not conscious of having sinned seriously. He conceded that this was not required by divine ordinance (*ex iuro divino*) but was a matter of being bound by a positive law . . . Aquinas's justification for confessing all one's sins, which he qualifies as 'those he remembers' is not juridical but medicinal. A doctor does not treat just one ailment, but the whole state of the patient and its complications. (Mahoney 1987, p. 20)

Much depended on the attributes of the priest hearing auricular confessions. The Council of Trent (1545–1643) eventually acknowledged the magnitude of the damage inflicted by unqualified priests, although its reforms were painfully slow to be implemented. In the relationship between conscience and truth, the pendulum was shifting decisively toward that of the 'truth' identified by the authority of the priest to forgive sins. Ignorant priests were one thing. Zealous priests were another, provided they were not the ignorant ones. The greatest damage was debatably inflicted by zealously ignorant priests. Catholic theology, in the tradition represented by Augustine and Aquinas, needed a defender of conscience within its understanding of truth. Alphonsus de Liguori (1686–1787) offered this prospect.

5. Alphonsus de Liguori and the Pastoral Circumstances of Conscience

The most striking feature throughout his writings is how Alphonsus starts his *magnum opus* on moral theology with a treatise on conscience. Trained as a lawyer at the University of Naples, and writing at a time when legal categories were foremost in moral theology, he favored a different option:

Take note, dear reader, that I have burned both ends of the candle in giving meticulous consideration to the opening treatise on conscience. It is the one that begins the path towards all moral theology. It was my wish to provide a more accessible study-outline for my students. (De Liguori 2019, p. 7)

The definition given to conscience with its evaluation of a mature decision was a significant contribution to the recovery of an equilibrium between conscience and truth. It is a pastoral understanding, building on the doctrinal understanding of Aquinas and the anthropological insight of Augustine:

Conscience can be defined: it is the judgment or practical instruction of reason by which we judge what is to be done here and now because it is good or avoided because it is evil. (De Liguori 2019, p. 10)

Conscience is formed when after deliberation and discernment, it is determined and settled by a definitive judgment of reason that something is to be done or avoided. To do something against such a formed conscience is a sin. (De Liguori 2019, p. 26)

Alphonsus wrote a moral textbook for the students of his recently founded Redemptorist Congregation, with a first edition in 1748 and a ninth in 1785. Moral theology had evolved in a particular way after the Council of Trent (1545–1563). It became a practical science to prepare ecclesiastical students for their future ministry as priests. Particular emphasis was given to the administration of the seven sacraments, for the most part to the sacrament of confession. The theoretical framework of the science was a legal one: divine law, natural law, ecclesiastical law, positive law. Alphonsus accepted that framework, though with a particular understanding of the twin purpose of studying the science in the first place. Moral theology starts with the study of conscience. The exit point is also conscience. Alphonsus' moral theology had begun as a commentary on the manual of the Jesuit Hermann Busenbaum (1609–1668). Until the fifth edition (1763), Alphonsus used the text of Busenbaum on conscience as a basis for his own commentary. By this stage, however, the thinking of Alphonsus had matured to the point at which he offered his own tract on conscience. Though of its time in the terminology used, Alphonsus did not consider that

he had to make a choice between conscience or law. His emphasis is on conscience, but conscience within the law. This indicates his distinctive contribution. *Mea conscientia* was not, for Alphonsus, the lonely drama it seems to have been for Luther. Conscience is indeed a theatre of tensions, but it is played out within the community of the Church. The nuanced position of Alphonsus on conscience–truth is particularly evident when he deals with the possibility of a conscience that is invincibly erroneous:

Secondly, we affirm that a person with an invincibly erroneous conscience not only does not sin by acting in accordance with it. Indeed, he is obliged to follow it in all circumstances. Here is the reasoning for both points. A person does not sin because, though the action itself may not be good, nevertheless it is good according to the conscience of the person who acts. A person is bound to follow such a conscience (which is the proximate measuring standard) anytime it recommends the person to act in this way. (De Liguori 2019, p. 11)

Moral truth is ultimately recognized by its presence within the individual conscience. Not surprisingly, the understanding of an erroneous conscience came to the forefront after the acceptance of Alphonsus as a trustworthy point of reference for moral theology. The proclamation of Alphonsus de Liguori as a Doctor of the Church in 1871, less than ninety years after his death, gives a sense that the relationship between conscience and truth was now formulated in a definitive way for Catholics. However, the approval of the authority of Alphonsus overlapped with the climax of an ultramontane Church—the definition in 1870 of the Pope’s infallibility in matters of faith and morals. Alphonsus, who favored prudential decisions of conscience based on internal reasoning, was now promoted as a figure of authority who could not be questioned. His teaching on the dignity of conscience, even if in error, began to lose support within the public life of the Church up to the end of the last century.

The explanation for this is complex, though it should include the growing unease of the Church’s magisterium with that which was perceived as a mistaken interpretation of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council:

The erroneous conscience, by sheltering the person from the exacting demands of truth, saves him—so went the argument. Conscience appears here not as a window through which one can see outward to that common truth that founds and sustains us all Conscience here does not mean man’s openness to the ground of his being, the power of perception for what is highest and most essential. Rather, it appears as subjectivity’s protective shell, into which man can escape and there hide from reality. (Ratzinger 2007, p. 16)

The reduction of conscience to subjective certitude betokens at the same time a retreat from truth the departure from truth that took place beforehand and now takes its revenge is the actual guilt, which first lulls man into false security and then abandons him in a trackless waste. (Ratzinger 2007, p. 22)

Ratzinger’s argument is that conscience should not become a cage that locks us into our own subjective world. Were that so, we would not be able to challenge our innate tendency towards self-interest. Conscience should open us to the truth that exists outside of ourselves. This, in Ratzinger’s worldview, necessitates the truth of God in Christ. Ratzinger’s essay was written in 1991, soon after the fall of Communism. He quotes approvingly the Patriarch of Moscow, who saw in the collapse of the Soviet system an opportunity for society to return to ‘eternal moral values’ (Ratzinger 2007, p. 21). The argument then moves from a critique of totalitarian systems to an evaluation of Western liberal democracies. In Ratzinger’s judgment, there is a drift towards superficial conformity to prevailing opinions in order to make us acceptable in the eyes of non-critical fellow citizens.

He calls it the tyranny of relativism, because it becomes a dictatorship of subjective feelings. For him, Catholics should oppose the idea that progress has inevitably replaced fundamental truths about human life (ontologically grounded truth, in his technical language). Unless we take up this challenge, truth-claims will be presumed to be arrogant

and insensitive. Belief in conscience then becomes a charade, since there would be no co-knowing of truth. There would only be that which seems good at a particular time to the isolated person. Fashions change. If our decisions imply an adjustment to the prevailing winds, conscience becomes no more reliable than a chameleon:

Error, the 'erring' conscience, is only at first convenient. But then the silencing of conscience leads to the dehumanization of the world and to moral danger, if one does not work against it. (Ratzinger 2007, p. 21)

The argument of Ratzinger is academically attractive. He believes, correctly, that when the center of the Christian message is not sufficiently expressed, 'truth becomes a yoke that is too heavy for our shoulders, from which we must free ourselves' (Ratzinger 2007, p. 41). The position of Alphonsus is not about truth understood in this sense. Hence, when Alphonsus speaks of the possibility of erroneous conscience, it is not about the truths of the faith. It is about the rightness of a practical decision that has to be made here and now. This is not incorporated adequately into Ratzinger's analysis of conscience and truth.

Though Ratzinger's lecture on conscience and truth continues to be debated in academic circles, it is another text of his that may become more significant in the future. As Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger came to a decision to resign as pope. It was a decision of conscience, the type of practical judgment that is taken under particular (even if unique) circumstances. He was addressing a group of cardinals on another matter that dealt with forthcoming canonizations. He began his address with the historic disclosure that he had come to a decision to resign as pope. He spoke in Latin. Some of his listeners did not understand what he was saying.

Having interrogated my conscience again and again before God, I have come to the certain knowledge that, on account of my advancing age, I no longer have the strength to adequately administer the Petrine ministry. (Benedict XVI 2013)

Did his conscience err? Did Benedict XVI later regret his decision? We do not know, but nothing subsequent to his decision can invalidate its moral rightness. His resignation speech is a terse statement of the practical steps of coming to a decision in conscience consistent with the knowledge available at the moment of the decision. It is compatible with the truth-claims of Catholicism that he had defended in the earlier work cited.

6. Conclusions: Assessing the Contemporary Catholic Understanding of Conscience

The debate on conscience and truth within the Catholic Church of the last century was shaped by ecclesiological debates.

It was one thing for Catholics to object to a secular state's control over their individual conscience, and another thing altogether for them to demand that the church itself recognize their right to exercise their conscience publicly and privately against church law. (Cajka 2021, p. 9)

Matters of conscience were dealt with in the sacrament of confession. The lack of depth in the understanding of conscience was gradually unmasked. The words put in the mouth of the country priest resonated with many others: 'what then remains of confession? It barely skims the surface of conscience. I don't say dry rot has set in underneath: it seems more like petrification' (Bernanos 1937, p. 97).

Augustine's emphasis on human interiority, Aquinas's articulation of a doctrinal framework, and Alphonsus's sensitivity to the particularities of life point towards a more logically coherent model for the Catholic understanding of conscience and truth. Among other arguments would be the stress on how Catholic moral theology continues to have insufficient scriptural underpinnings. In his recent study *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, James Keenan gives a compelling narrative of other advantages to this position. Moral agency for the believer can reach a level of certainty that does not oppose truth with conscience but gives both a common home, at the same time, in the considered decision of a particular moment (Keenan 2022, p. 336).

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