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Primacy of Conscience: A Pastoral Theological Construction of Agency for Catholic Moral Decision-Making

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PRIMACY OF CONSCIENCE:
A PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF AGENCY
FOR CATHOLIC MORAL DECISION-MAKING

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the University of Denver and
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ABSTRACT

A significant pastoral problem for some Catholics flows from the dissonance they experience when attempting to integrate certain Church teachings with the leading of their conscience as they make moral decisions. All Catholics do not accept every established moral answer or position provided by the Church and integrating those differences between the Church teaching and one’s conscience can be difficult—a difficulty affecting parishioner, priest, and Church. This problem is, in part, rooted in and reinforced by the fact that there are two theological strands in the Church’s tradition regarding morality. One strand suggests that the moral response is to obey normative Church moral teachings, whereas the other strand suggests that the moral response is to follow your conscience which is informed by Church teaching. The pastoral problem of understanding and exercising conscience while striving to be informed by and responsible to normative Church teachings is at the heart of this research in order to ameliorate the polarization and division that is currently present in this arena.

One of the unstated assumptions and/or insufficiently developed concepts within the primacy of conscience debate between obedience to tradition and following individual conscience is the status of agency as it relates to primacy. The principal thrust of this study of primacy of conscience is that agency is a critical element in understanding the meaning and function of primacy of conscience within the relationship between the social group (as reflected in the terms tradition and teaching) and the individual (as reflected in the term primacy of conscience)—an agency that is interdependent and at times in conflict. This pastoral
theological study employs Larry Graham’s psychosystemic approach to pastoral theology as it expands the conversation by identifying the pastoral problem of primacy of conscience and the role of agency from a pastoral theological methodology that examines relevant personal and pastoral experience, historical antecedents to the problem, and appropriate conceptual theological and secular resources.

As this study reviews the long and varied history of conscience in the Catholic tradition as illustrated in several critical historical moments, it identifies the problematic character of the two strands within the tradition and reveals the importance of a more developed understanding of agency in light of the tradition’s inherent ambiguity. By integrating Albert Bandura’s systemic Social Cognitive Theory, this study offers an enhanced understanding of agency from a disciplined behavioral scientific perspective on the social-personal interfaces involved in decision-making in general (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion) which apply to moral concerns and, consequently, amplifies an understanding of primacy of conscience that can inform priestly counsel to Catholics seeking moral guidance.
| Chapter One: Introduction to the Pastoral Problem | 1 |
| Expanding the Problem of Conscience | 9 |
| The Potential for Constructing New Theological Understandings | 14 |
| A Systemic Perspective of Agency in Clarifying Primacy of Conscience | 16 |
| Location and Identity | 23 |
| Literature and Resources | 24 |
| Outline of Chapters | 32 |
| Chapter Two: Emerging Pastoral Theology | 38 |
| A Pastoral Theological Illustration of Primacy of Conscience | 46 |
| Exploring the “Lost” | 55 |
| Contemporary Advances in Pastoral Theology | 60 |
| Vignette from a Systemic Perspective of Agency | 72 |
| Theological Anthropology at the Crux of Pastoral Theology | 76 |
| Chapter Three: The Problematic Tradition of Conscience | 80 |
| Primacy of Conscience Examined | 86 |
| Historical Review | 91 |
| Traditionalist and Revisionist Schools | 115 |
| Legalistic and Personalist Perspectives | 123 |
| Understanding Ambiguity within the Tradition | 137 |
| Summary | 146 |
| Chapter Four: The Lens of Agency | 150 |
| A Catholic Study of Conscience in the 1970’s | 160 |
| Social Cognitive Theory Background and Overview | 178 |
| Social Cognitive Theory and Self-reflectiveness | 186 |
| Social Cognitive Theory and Perceived Self-efficacy | 189 |
| Social Cognitive Theory and Social Persuasion | 192 |
| Summary | 195 |
| Chapter Five: A Pastoral Theological Construction of Primacy of Conscience | 198 |
| Synthesis and Primary Conclusions | 200 |
| Illustration of Primacy of Conscience | 224 |
| Reflection upon Pastoral Conversation | 247 |
| Future Research | 250 |
| Conclusion | 252 |
| Bibliography | 254 |
| Appendices | 282 |
| Appendix A | 282 |
| Appendix B | 285 |
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL PROBLEM

For pastoral theology contends that unaddressed theological issues often arise from the particularity of human experience, including the actual practice of ministry, and that further interpretation of what actually takes place in concrete experience has the potential for constructing new theological understandings or clarifying unresolved matters in the tradition.¹

Some Catholics experience dissonance when attempting to integrate certain Church teachings with the leading of their conscience as they make moral decisions. As a priest for the last twenty two years, I have experienced numerous Catholics, myself included, struggling at times between following their conscience and being obedient to the authority of the Church’s teaching. Frequently this dissonance is addressed confidentially within the context of pastoral care, counseling, or confession and the topics are quite diverse (e.g., contraception, pacifism, divorce, obligation to pay taxes, sexual orientation). Yet occasionally this experience of dissonance for Catholics gets writ large, as recent public controversies during the United States’ presidential elections of 2004 and 2008 clearly demonstrate.² In either instance, what becomes immediately apparent is that not all Catholics accept all established moral answers provided by


the Church and that managing differences between the Church teaching and one’s conscience can be difficult—a difficulty affecting parishioner, priest, and Church.

In ministering as a priest, I have observed manifestations of this difficulty ranging from the affective and cognitive to the behavioral and organizational. It is not uncommon for adults to feel as if they are being treated like children or to judge the Church as antiquated, irrelevant, or rigid. Disengagement and/or acquiescence reflect just a portion of the range of behaviors that accompany this struggle. On the organizational level, priests, as representatives of both the pastoral ministry and hierarchical governance of the Church, can feel caught “between a rock and a hard place” to the degree that it seems like they must side either with the parishioner or the Church teaching. This conflict observed in my pastoral work is clearly documented as a larger problem for U.S. Catholics in general and is reflected in several studies that identify the gap between Church teaching and the actual beliefs and practices of many Catholics.3

In many instances a critical pastoral problem emerges, regardless of the particular moral issue being engaged, if the result of an individual’s moral decision-making differs from a specific normative Church teaching. Although potential complications are manifold in this

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situation, at base a serious pastoral problem comes into play. Some pastoral careseekers and providers are unclear as to whether or not Catholics can simultaneously be faithful to the tradition and authority of the Church while occasionally differing from it because of the guidance of their conscience as related to a specific moral topic. Does such a difference necessarily translate into a compromised or deficient status within the Church (e.g., being considered anything from unfaithful or sinful to even heretical or not truly Catholic)?

Central to this pastoral problem is the fact that the normative teaching of the Church has two strands in the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic that can readily give rise to quite the moral conundrum. One strand suggests that the moral response is to obey the specific teaching regarding the topic at hand. Yet the other strand suggests that the moral response is to follow one’s conscience, even if it differs from a specific normative moral teaching of the Church. Very often the moral teachings of the Church and the dictates of a Catholic’s conscience coincide, yet that is not always the case. When it is not, how to understand and navigate that dissonance can be both complicated and troublesome. The pastoral problem of understanding and exercising conscience while striving to be informed by and responsible to normative Church teachings is the starting place of this research.

Addressing the Pastoral Problem

Pastoral theology not only recognizes, but also employs pastoral problems such as the one identified as resources that may lead toward greater understanding, if not amelioration and/or resolution of a given pastoral problem. This project is pastoral theological in method and purpose, as it addresses occasions when Catholics experience dissonance when attempting to integrate certain Church teachings with the leading of their conscience as they make moral
decisions. By pastoral theology, I mean “…the branch of theology which
develops theoretical understandings of and practical guidelines for the ministry of
care.”4 The pastoral theological method that I am utilizing has several features. It
begins with theological questions that arise in pastoral practice and serve as a
ground and generative guide for the method. It moves to the tradition to see how
the tradition has addressed those questions. If the tradition has not adequately
addressed them, pastoral theology refines and refocuses the questions for
contemporary exploration. To develop more adequate theological answers,
pastoral theology draws upon contemporary resources, from both theology and
secular sciences.5

In order to anecdotally illuminate the theological questions of this dissertation as
they arise in pastoral practice, I will first draw upon one example of my personal
experience as a Catholic struggling with following specific Church teachings and the
leading of conscience while making a moral decision. My personal experience is being
engaged for principally two reasons. First, on an illustrative level, this example is
appealed to in order to concretize and illuminate the type of questions and complications
that can surface for a Catholic when encountering the two strands in the tradition regarding
being a moral Catholic. Second, on a more profound methodological level, this personal
experience reflects how “…pastoral theology contends that unaddressed theological issues

4 Larry Kent Graham, Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to

5 Nancy Ramsay, “A Time of Ferment and Redefinition,” in Pastoral Care and
Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms, ed. Nancy J. Ramsay (Nashville, TN: Abingdon
often arise from the particularity of human experience, including the actual practice of ministry…”6 In this example, my particular experience is an expression of an encounter with an unaddressed theological issue arising for me on a very personal level. Yet also, as a priest in ministry for over twenty years, in the actual practice of ministry I have witnessed and journeyed with a variety of Catholics encountering and struggling with the very same unaddressed theological issue I had come to recognize, even though the specific content has differed substantially from person to person (e.g., birth control, sexual orientation, and divorce). Both my experience and my pastoral assessment of the similar experience of others have led me to identify the pastoral theological problem to be addressed by this dissertation.

My Personal Pastoral Theological Double-bind

After thirteen wonderful and formative years as a member of a religious order within the Roman Catholic Church (i.e., the Congregation of the Mission), I terminated my relationship with the religious order, left active ministry as a Roman Catholic priest, and later was married.7 Without going into great detail or the whole process of that life-altering choice, I can readily state that the final decision to not fulfill what were explicitly understood as lifetime vows, both as a member of a religious order and as a priest, was profoundly difficult on a variety of levels. The normative teaching of the Church regarding the permanency of ordination to the priesthood was then and still remains very

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6 Graham, Discovering Images of God 2.

7 The Church is broader than Roman Catholicism and includes all other Christian denominations. Yet in order to avoid repeated use of the lengthier phrase “Roman Catholic Church,” from this point forward in this study the term “Church” will only refer to the Roman Catholic Church unless otherwise noted.
clear. Comparable to the Catholic understanding of the sacrament of matrimony, the sacrament of holy orders is understood as being for the lifetime of the person receiving the sacrament. Similarly, permanent vows in a religious order are clearly considered just that—permanent!

How was and am I to understand this decision morally, both as it relates to myself as well as the Church? Can the act of breaking permanent lifelong vows, whether they be those of being a member of a religious order or a priest, ever be morally justified, given it is counter to the normative teaching and tradition of the Church? Given this normative teaching, is such a choice and act necessarily darkened by the shadow of being judged as wrong, unfaithful, sinful, or the like? Or can such a choice ever be considered a responsible and moral act, even though differing from normative Catholic teaching?

When considering the possibility of terminating my permanent vows with the Congregation of the Mission and leaving active ministry as a Roman Catholic priest, in addition to being aware of the normative teaching of the Church regarding the permanency of vows in a religious order and priestly ordination, I was also aware that the Church teaches its members, whether lay or cleric, that they are obliged to follow their consciences in all matters. In fact, I even knew that the Church has a doctrine called primacy of conscience, although I was not particularly well versed in it at the time.

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8 The functional terms “normative teaching of the Church” and/or “tradition” will be used when referring to the teaching role of the Church. The more technical Roman Catholic term Magisterium, which also refers to the teaching role of the Church, will be kept to a minimum simply because the other terms are more readily accessible in their meaning.

9 In like fashion, for purposes of ease, when the terms “Catholic” or “Catholicism” are used they will only refer to Roman Catholics and Roman Catholicism (e.g., not Eastern Orthodox, Coptic Catholic Church, and Polish National Catholic Church) unless otherwise indicated.
Primacy of conscience is basically the doctrinal name for what has been described thus far as the obligation to follow one’s conscience, even if it differs from normative Church teaching.\(^{10}\) How was I to understand the responsibility and obligation to follow my conscience if it seemed to be moving in a direction that was inconsistent with the Church’s normative teaching regarding the permanency of religious vows and ordination? I did know that the Church’s understanding of primacy of conscience presumed that Catholics act from an informed conscience, that is, a conscience that is engaged with and formed by the Church tradition as well as other relevant secular resources related to the matter in question. The Second Vatican Council stated that secular scientific insights have a significant role in the formation of a Catholic’s understanding of faith and, consequently, conscience.\(^{11}\)

Given that I have multiple theological degrees, am gifted with being relatively intelligent, and am an ordained priest, I am inclined to say that I was, by and large, as informed as the next person, and probably more than most. In short, I would say that my

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\(^{10}\) Significant terms introduced in this first chapter (e.g., primacy of conscience, pastoral theology, and the legalistic and personalist schools) will receive only the barest definition in this chapter as is necessary for the flow. Focused elaboration and development of the terms will be forthcoming in the subsequent chapters.

\(^{11}\) For example, “In pastoral care sufficient use should be made, not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology: in this way the faithful will be brought to a purer and more mature living of the faith.” This quote is taken from “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes),” in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O. P. (Collegeville, IN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 966-967. This text will serve as the reference for all Second Vatican II documents used in this dissertation. Further, an English translation of Latin titles for Church documents will be used in this dissertation for ease of reading. The original Latin title will be given in the first reference to any particular text and will be retained if used in quotes by any other author.
choice fulfilled the expectation of being made from an informed conscience, yet therein lies the rub and a principal question of this dissertation. Just as I was aware of the Church’s position regarding the permanency of religious vows and ordination (i.e., a topical normative Church teaching), I knew that primacy of conscience also stood among the array of normative Church teachings within the tradition. A Catholic making a moral decision from an informed conscience can be, as I was, confronted by ambiguity in the tradition of the Church. How does the Church’s normative teaching regarding primacy of conscience stand in relationship to other normative Church teachings (e.g., the permanency of religious vows and ordination) when one does not seem to reinforce the other? Is there a pecking order or trump card among them?

At first blush it can seem as if the principal question is whether or not a Catholic can deviate from normative Church teaching and not be considered wrong and/or sinful. As important as that question may be, it is far from the only relevant question in play. Upon deeper examination it becomes clear that the situation is much more complicated. As stated earlier, the Church has two strands in the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic—one strand stating that a Catholic follow Church teachings regarding any particular moral topic and the other strand stating that a Catholic must always follow one’s conscience, even if it differs from Church teaching. When those exceptions occur where the leading of conscience differs from the normative teaching of the Church, in a sense, a situation is created that is analogous to what is called, in psychological terms, a double-bind. That is, either choice or direction is, at least in part, a losing proposition (i.e., conformity to a given normative teaching may go against the mandate to follow one’s conscience which may be suggesting an alternative course or, conversely, conformity to following one’s conscience
may go against the mandate to conform to a specific normative Church teaching). In short, fulfilling both mandates can seem mutually exclusive, resulting in a “damned if you do or damned if you don’t” situation, so to speak.

**Expanding the Problem of Conscience**

This particular experience of some Catholics and the unaddressed theological issues that give rise to it is not an esoteric theological conundrum irrelevant to the Catholic population at large in the United States. Although my personal and pastoral experience suggested that this pastoral problem of the primacy of conscience in relation to obedience to established Church teaching was broad in scope it has become increasingly concrete and clear that this question can and frankly does affect many members of the Church and is far from resolved. The presidential campaigns of 2004 and 2008 are two major public events that blatantly manifest the breadth of its potential embrace for Catholics in the United States. The understanding and exercise of primacy of conscience became an explicit topic of discussion for many Catholics during both these elections, from Catholics in the pews to the National Catholic Conference of Bishops, and the tension and lack of clarity is indisputable.

So as another example of how “unaddressed theological issues often arise from the particularity of human experience” as well as an expression of the two strands within the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic, I will draw upon the most recent 2008 U. S. presidential election as a concrete and large scale expression of the theological and moral conundrum Catholics may face regarding understanding and applying primacy of conscience as related to normative Church teachings. Although both U. S. presidential elections drew national attention and press coverage regarding the topic of primacy of
conscience, I will limit my focus to the latter election of 2008 for three principal reasons. First, one example will be sufficient to make the necessary point. Second, the 2008 election resulted in a large number of Catholics being the subject of judgment as related to the normative Church teaching on abortion and conscience. Third, and most importantly, the very problem identified regarding two strands within the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic was clearly manifest within and by the representative teaching authorities of the Church itself. It is important to not confuse this public example with my own experience or actual practice of ministry, although presumably this event did translate into the actual practice of ministry for those who were directly

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12 Given that I will not review the 2004 U. S. presidential election, a brief summary is in order. During the election, presidential candidate Senator John Kerry, a Roman Catholic, was the principal target of judgment and potential penalty by the Church hierarchy due to his pro-choice political platform. Senator Kerry argued that a Catholic, be they a candidate or a voter, could support a pro-choice position due to the Church’s teaching about the obligation to follow one’s conscience, that is, the doctrine of primacy of conscience. Archbishop Chaput of the Archdiocese of Denver and some like-minded bishops argued and lobbied that Senator Kerry should be penalized by denying him communion due to his pro-choice status and its inherent relationship to the topic of abortion. They prioritized the Church’s normative teaching on abortion, suggested that a pro-choice platform such as Kerry’s primarily supported abortion rather than moral decision-making, and basically skirted the issue of primacy of conscience. Senator Kerry did not reside in the location under these bishops’ jurisdictions and was never denied communion by the bishop where he resided.

13 It is paramount to underline that the specific moral issue (i.e., abortion) being addressed in this public example of the muddled understanding of primacy of conscience in the 2008 election is not the focus of the dissertation. As important as the topic of the value of life is, whether addressed when discussing abortion, capital punishment, weapons of mass destruction, or an array of other relevant domains, this example is included in order to concretize and illuminate the scope of the confusion and potential complication contemporary U. S. Catholics may encounter related to integrating any specific normative Church teaching and the obligation to follow one’s conscience.
involved with the situation and it commensurate pastoral care. In sum, this public example draws upon a large-scale concrete experience to demonstrate the contemporary confusion and complication operative regarding the Church’s teachings related to primacy of conscience and, consequently, the context potentially affecting U.S. Catholics’ understanding and exercise of primacy of conscience.

Immediately upon the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States, Father Jay Scott Newman, pastor of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Greenville, S.C. stated the following in his homily on November 9, 2008.

In response to this [election], I am obliged by my duty as your shepherd to make two observations:

1. Voting for a pro-abortion politician when a plausible pro-life alternative exists constitutes material cooperation with intrinsic evil, and those Catholics who do so place themselves outside of the full communion of Christ’s Church and under the judgment of divine law. Persons in this condition should not receive Holy Communion until and unless they are reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance, lest they eat and drink their own condemnation.

2. Barack Obama, although we must always and everywhere disagree with him over abortion, has been duly elected the next President of the United States, and after he takes the Oath of Office next January 20th, he will hold legitimate authority in this nation. For this reason, we are obliged by Scriptural precept to pray for him and to cooperate with him whenever conscience does not bind us otherwise. Let us hope and pray that the responsibilities of the presidency and the grace of God will awaken in the conscience of this extraordinarily gifted man an awareness that the unholy slaughter of children in this nation is the

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14 Drawing upon the 2008 U. S. presidential election is not an attempt to do public theology, as that has distinct characteristics that will not inform the methodology of this dissertation. For further reference on public theology, see Larry Kent Graham, “From Relational Humanness to Relational Justice: Reconceiving Pastoral Care and Counseling.” in Pastoral Care and Social Conflict, eds. Pamela Couture and Rodney Hunter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 220-234.
greatest threat to the peace and security of the United States and constitutes a clear and present danger to the common good.\textsuperscript{15}

As Father Newman interpreted his obligation to fulfill his duty as a priest and pastor, it is fairly clear in his first observation that his judgment is that those who voted for President Obama (i.e., according to Newman, a “pro-abortion” politician) have committed a sin that needs attention. Curiously, although he refers to the binding character of conscience in his second observation as it may condition cooperation with the newly elected president, the statement does not seem to recognize the possibility that such a dynamic may have been operative for those who voted for Obama and were conscious of the fact that his political platform is pro-choice. In short, Father Newman’s statement predominantly reflects the strand of the tradition that suggests that the moral response for Catholics is to obey the specific teaching regarding the topic at hand, in this instance, abortion. The exercise of conscience, as presented by Father Newman, seemingly applies to only social and civic responsibilities and teachings, but not to those of the Church.

For those sitting in the pews who voted during the 2008 election, these words were anything but indifferent. One can just imagine how this message might have been received by the members of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Greenville or in the Diocese at large. But actually we need not speculate nor wonder as to how Father Newman’s message was received by the official representatives of the Diocese itself.

\textsuperscript{15} Father Jay Scott Newman, “Homily on November 9, 2008 [emphasis added],” retrieved 11/22/2008 from http://www.catholic.org/politics/story.php?id=30564; the full text of the homily is available at this URL.
In slightly more time than Christians claim it took Jesus to rise from the tomb, on
November 14th, Monsignor Laughlin from the Office of Administration for the Diocese
of Charleston issued the following response to Father Newman’s homily.

As Administrator of the Diocese of Charleston, let me state with clarity
that Father Newman’s statements do not adequately reflect the Catholic
Church’s teachings. Any comments or statements to the contrary are
repudiated. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Man has the
right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral
decisions.” ….Christ gives us freedom to explore our own conscience and
to make our own decisions while adhering to the law of God and the
teachings of the faith. Therefore, if a person has formed his or her
conscience well, he or she should not be denied Communion, nor be told
to go to confession before receiving Communion.16

Monsignor Laughlin’s response, in contrast to Fr. Newman’s homily, predominantly
reflects the strand of the tradition that states that Catholics must follow the leading of
conscience, even if it differs from normative Church teaching. Although the Monsignor
claimed and intended that his response on behalf of the Diocese would be a statement of
clarity, it is not far-fetched to think that even after this sincere effort, perhaps the
Catholics of South Carolina, as well as other U.S. Catholics, were still a bit confused.17

The fact of the matter is that Fr. Newman and Monsignor Laughlin do not reflect
some bizarre difference of opinion between themselves regarding how to be a moral
Catholic. Their expressions are actually manifestations of two well established positions
regarding conscience within Catholic moral theology—the legalistic perspective and the
personalist perspective. In very broad strokes, the legalistic perspective emphasizes Church


17 For a more in-depth perspective on the topic, see Laurie Goodstein, “U.S. Bishops
teaching as the dominant way by which the objective dimensions of morality are understood. It claims that this morality is founded upon the existence of absolute and universal moral principles. Furthermore, it considers the Church hierarchy as the principal means by which moral truth is expressed. The personalist perspective elevates the personal responsibility and autonomy of individuals when it comes to morality. Although it acknowledges the Church as a great and unique resource regarding moral matters, it emphasizes conscience as the mediator of the divine moral law. Additionally, it opposes ethical systems that claim to be founded upon absolutist principles.18

The Potential for Constructing New Theological Understandings

If a relatively intelligent priest with multiple theological degrees finds himself muddled and mired when trying his best to be a responsible moral Catholic, is it surprising to find in the actual practice of ministry that any numbers of Catholics have also found themselves painted into the corner of this moral conundrum within the tradition? If Catholic Senator Kerry, in the midst of a presidential campaign where one media gaff may turn the political tide, and an Archbishop, whose national statements are presumably well measured and pastorally strategic, find themselves in an unresolved theological logjam regarding primacy of conscience, would we expect to discover that their experience regarding the doctrine itself is an anomaly and that no other Catholics are similarly stumbling over this log on their Catholic moral roads? If duly placed Catholic teaching authorities in the same historical moment and geographical context, who are obliged by office to serve and teach the very same Catholic constituency,

radically differ, if not contradict one another, is it not possible to claim that a serious pastoral problem is present, requiring sustained reconsideration of key theological issues within the tradition? The question of primacy of conscience is an “unresolved matter in the tradition” that extends well beyond a Catholic Senator and Archbishop, well beyond a Monsignor and a pastor, and even well beyond an individual Diocese and its membership for that matter.

As stated earlier in the summary sketch of the pastoral theological method employed, after a particular pastoral problem emerges, the focus turns to the tradition to explore how it has addressed the issues at hand. If the tradition has not sufficiently addressed them, as is the case with primacy of conscience, pastoral theology refines and refocuses the questions for further examination in order to develop more adequate theological answers. This examination appeals to the insights of both theology and secular sciences. The theological resources that I will principally use for this purpose are historical Catholic documents (e.g. Second Vatican Council) and Catholic moral theology, especially from the personalist perspective. These will be used to set both the historical and contemporary context of the debate on primacy of conscience in general as well as focus upon current perspectives of the meaning and function of primacy in particular. In addition to utilizing these theological materials, the secular material I will use is principally Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), especially his research on agency. In order to establish a broader and

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19 For the sake of efficiency, the acronym SCT will be used to represent Social Cognitive Theory throughout the dissertation unless the full term is required for the sake of clarity.
contemporary context for engaging the intersection between both theological and psychological interpretations and critiques of the concept of conscience, I will also draw upon Thomas Srampickal’s comparative analysis of conscience as articulated in both the documents of the Second Vatican Council and several major schools of empirical psychology.20

A Systemic Perspective of Agency in Clarifying Primacy of Conscience

Even a cursory review of the pastoral problem presented reveals an array of dynamics that contribute to its complexity. The need to reflect upon, understand, if not integrate differences is clearly operative and is manifest in a variety of ways. For example, 1) the relationship between the two theological strands in the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic; 2) the relationship between differing interpretations of what is the moral choice in a given circumstance; 3) the relationship between differing parties in the Church ranging from parishioner to priest; and 4) the relationship between differing voices of authority ranging from pastor to diocesan representative. This list is far from exhaustive, yet even these obvious examples point to the fact that the pastoral problem is clearly both relational and multi-faceted.

Relational differences always have the potential of being interpreted from an either-or perspective that can, in turn, result in polarization. The question of who is right and who is wrong can readily introduce itself into relational differences and potentially result in one party being pitted against the other. This possibility is far from hypothetical, as the examples reviewed testify to this reality. Further, the question of who is right and

who is wrong is far from merely an academic exercise, as it bears real substance and consequence in the lives of Catholics and the Church (e.g., denying communion to a person). Engaging differences within relationships inevitably has an influence on those involved. That is, being in relationship involves agency or power and the impact of that agency may be particularly difficult in the face of differences that are of high value for the parties involved. In short, one dimension of all relationships is the presence of agency which inherently and necessarily has a real affect, whether positive or negative, upon all the participants.

Understanding the multitude of relationships present in this pastoral problem as well as the embedded agency or power within those relationships presses for an approach or perspective that is capable of constructively engaging those particular dynamics. A systemic perspective is well suited for just such an endeavor, inasmuch as it is highly relational and recognizes the dynamic of agency within relationships. In order to address the complexity of primacy of conscience as a pastoral theological construction of agency for Catholic moral decision-making, this dissertation will principally appeal to a systemic perspective both in the arguments made as well as the resources drawn upon. Therefore, a brief introduction to a systemic perspective is in order as well as a basic orientation to how systemic theories will be employed.

First and foremost, a systemic perspective is oriented toward understanding how things influence one another within the context of the whole. Whether one draws upon the classic systemic theory claim that “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts” or Thich Nhat Hanh’s spiritual tenet that “we are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness,” a systemic perspective views reality through a holistic lens. The very title
of Ken Wilber’s systems theory book *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* captures the inclusivity of this approach—a systemic perspective examines the context as a whole including the relationships within it.21

In understanding whatever might be considered the whole within a given reality, a systemic perspective examines the relationships that comprise the whole as well as the various influences operative within those relationships. A systemic perspective emerges from a particular context or whole by attending to the complex interactions that comprise the relationality within it. As applied to the pastoral experience, the diversity of potential relationships has the breadth and depth of whatever demographics might be considered within the overall context. A systemic perspective will often have the following characteristics: attention to ongoing processes and transactions; emphasis on the whole rather than the parts; appreciation for the cooperation and mutuality of influences; and openness to both/and thinking rather than seeing possibilities only in terms of either/or.22

Very broadly defined, “…systemic thinking is a view about the universe, or a picture of reality, that affirms that everything that exists is in an ongoing mutual relationship with every other reality.”23 Throughout this dissertation, a systemic perspective will be understood and employed in this fashion. Furthermore, from this systemic perspective, this research will integrate systemic theories, specifically Larry Graham’s psychosystems approach to pastoral care and counseling and Albert Bandura’s

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22 Graham, *Care of Persons* 39.

23 Ibid., 40.
Social Cognitive Theory. Although Graham and Bandura’s systemic theories emerge from differing disciplines, pastoral theology and social psychology respectively, both find a common mooring and great resonance in the preceding broad definition and common characteristics of a systemic perspective.\textsuperscript{24}

This very broad definition of a systemic perspective develops throughout the dissertation as Graham and Bandura’s systemic theories are explored in greater detail and applied to the question of primacy of conscience, especially in terms of agency. As the systemic perspective is elaborated in this research, the question as to how a person’s agency is systemic and not merely individualistic is both critical to the pastoral problem at hand and vital as a theoretical underpinning of this dissertation. Both Graham and Bandura’s systemic theories examine this question in detail and offer substantial constructive possibilities. For example, Social Cognitive Theory examines the reciprocal and interactive agential framework within which personal and social dynamics emerge and are operative such that one cannot be fully understood in isolation from the other (e.g., individuals are both products and producers of social systems).\textsuperscript{25} Finally, although a general orientation will be given to both of these systemic theories, only particularly salient and relevant dimensions will be engaged in depth (e.g., agency) due to the

\textsuperscript{24} A systemic perspective manifests itself within a variety of disciplines and corresponding theories. Very broadly, the difference between a perspective and a theory is that the former is broader and general while the latter is more focused and specific. For example, Alfred North Whitehead’s Process and Reality is a classic within the field of philosophy, just as Murray Bowen’s Family Therapy in Clinical Practice is a classic within the field of psychology. Both theories are rooted in a systemic perspective while each pursues a particular relevant trajectory and expression within their given disciplines.

necessary limits of this research and the possibility of substantial meaningful outcomes and contribution.

Agency is one dimension and way to understand and examine systemic relationality and its inherent multiplicity. Moral decision-making inherently involves and reflects agency, and an unclear and/or underdeveloped understanding of it seems to be central to the pastoral and theological problem of the relationship of primacy of conscience to normative Church teaching. Further interpretation suggests that a systemic understanding of agency is important in addressing the issue. The primary interpretation of agency in this dissertation is drawn from Bandura’s SCT that understands agency as the capacity “…to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions.” Core questions that relate to agency are: 1) how are moral decisions understood and made in circumstances when normative Church teaching and primacy of conscience seem to be at odds?; 2) what might be the understanding and role of agency in the process for all parties involved?; and 3) when agencies conflict, how are disparate claims adjudicated?

One of the unstated issues within the primacy of conscience debate between topical normative Church teaching and following individual conscience is the status of agency as it relates to primacy. It is the argument of this dissertation that the act of claiming primacy of conscience to guide moral decisions that may occasionally differ from Church teaching requires an adequate view of agency that systemically combines individual authority with

26 A similar term for agency is power. Further, the term “authority” is commonly used when identifying a person, role, or group that has a particular claim to express agency or power within a particular relationship and/or context. Although all three terms will be used throughout this dissertation, agency will be the primary focus and terminology employed.

communal teachings and norms. The doctrine of primacy of conscience inherently speaks of such agency, yet this has not been sufficiently developed. Primacy of conscience reflects an agency by which Catholics, both clergy and laity, engage both the Church’s normative teaching and one’s own context, and can be morally responsible and faithful to the tradition and authority of the Church, even if Catholics make specific judgments that put them in opposition to certain Church teachings or if their judgments are ultimately wrong.

The thesis of this dissertation is that a constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of conscience in the Roman Catholic tradition, when primacy is amplified by the implications drawn from social psychologist Bandura’s SCT view of agency, is a critical resource for helping contemporary U.S. Catholics and their spiritual guides to make moral decisions that are informed but not controlled by the established tradition of the Church. The personalist view of primacy of conscience will be addressed in detail in Chapter 3, but for the moment suffice it to say that the personalist perspective moves toward examining the importance of agency within the relationship between the individual Catholic and the Church, although not from the discipline of social psychology. I will argue that the personalist strand of the debate on conscience is consistent with and supported by a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning and function of primacy with respect to the exercise of conscience. Further, I will contend that the personalist position resonates with and is enhanced by the identification of agency as a central construct inherent within the concept of primacy.

This turn toward agency brings several questions about primacy of conscience into the foreground. This dissertation reflects my attempt to examine several of those questions. For example:
• How is agency predominantly understood within the current debate regarding conscience, and in what other ways might it be understood?
• Is there something beneficial within the concept of primacy of conscience that has either been “lost” or not yet discovered within the tradition?
• Does the concept of “primacy” within the tradition of conscience hint at or even push toward a certain interpretation of agency?
• What difference or benefit might a systemic perspective of the human person within society offer regarding understanding primacy of conscience and agency in conversation with Church teachings and authority?
• Might we better and further understand primacy in light of the insights regarding agency from Bandura’s SCT?
• How might the personalist perspective of primacy of conscience be bolstered by SCT’s systemic perspective and insight into agency?

My attempt to explore and respond to these and other questions comprises Chapters 2 through 5 of this research. Before entering the core of this research reflected in those chapters, three final pieces will be addressed. First, I will identify my personal location given that the pastoral theological method for this dissertation recognizes and employs contextuality. That is, the pastoral theological method for this research acknowledges that the specifics of the social situation influence and inform the pastoral theological reflection itself in both content and process. Second, the principal literature that informs and serves as resources for this dissertation will be examined. Finally, an outline of the chapters will orient the reader as to how the research will unfold and progress throughout the dissertation.
Location and Identity

I need to identify my own social location and context, as it is inherently and necessarily an influence operative in this research. I am a middle-aged, middle-class, Caucasian citizen of the United States who is married with two children and living in Colorado. I come from an Irish Roman Catholic family of ten and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1987. I was in a religious order for thirteen years and left ordained ministry as a Roman priest in order to marry. I am currently a Ph.D. candidate with a concentration in psychology and religion specializing in pastoral theology. Prior to accepting a call to serve as a pastor and priest in an alternative Catholic community, I had a private pastoral counseling practice. As the opening of this chapter states, I have experienced the topic of this dissertation both in my personal life and in my practice of ministry.

In terms of the theoretical context of this dissertation, I locate myself within the pastoral theological framework that was synthesized by Seward Hiltner and modified/enhanced by subsequent pastoral theologians who nevertheless retain foundational dimensions of his seminal insights (e.g., Larry Graham). This pastoral theological framework will readily emerge with much greater detail within Chapter 2. In terms of the scope of this research, given the historical and geographical breadth and diversity of Catholicism, as well as the significant shifts marked by the Second Vatican Council, this dissertation's principal location of this pastoral problem will be post-Vatican II Catholicism in the United States, even though the debate is situated within a broader historical and geographical context.
Literature and Resources

Before delving into the heart of the research, a dissertation literature review is pretty standard fare. Given that the research is usually focused within a specific domain (e.g., English literature), the review serves as a basic platform that orients the reader on at least three levels. First, the review sets the overall parameters of the field and literature being engaged by the dissertation. Due to the breadth of a discipline’s literature related to almost any specific topic, these parameters within the field itself function as a preliminary identification of the resources being considered for the research and the limits operative (e.g., historical periods, geographical locations, and languages). Second, within these overall identified parameters, often the review sketches dominant and/or significant positions within the literature that will have a bearing on the research, whether that is historical background, cutting-edge theory, or whatever is pertinent to the project. Generally this also includes a position(s) that the dissertation intends to advance as well as any differing position(s) that must be addressed given a potential challenge that it might present to the direction the research is taking. Finally, the literature review usually narrows in focus as principal theorists and corresponding texts are identified. At the end, within the limits identified, these resources serve as representative voices within the given field and, although far from exhaustive, are adequate to move the research forward.

Clearly this structural and methodological approach to a literature review within a dissertation has and does serve a vital purpose, even if it may, at times, seem to distract from the primary focus of the dissertation. However, research methodologies and topics differ substantially and the structure of the dissertation should correspond to and work with those differences in a responsible manner that best suits the project itself. Inasmuch
as this dissertation is founded upon a pastoral theological method that is by design cross-disciplinary, the normal structure of a literature review just described is not well suited to serve the purposes of this research. Specifically, this dissertation broadly incorporates four fields of research—pastoral theology, moral theology, historical theology, and social psychology. The cumbersome, if not counterproductive, nature of navigating an initial literature review across such an array of fields and commensurate resources is probably readily apparent. Nevertheless, a dissertation’s identification and delimitation of the literature and resources operative in the research is important and vital.

The value of an initial review of the literature and resources mooring a pastoral theological dissertation can be readily accomplished by understanding how pastoral theology engages its resources and, therefore, what presentation of literature is appropriate. Basically three points not only sketch a framework for understanding how the literature and resources are operative within this dissertation, but also set a general and partial understanding of the pastoral theological method that will be employed. First, cross-disciplinary studies such as pastoral theology, by definition, draw upon literature and resources from varying fields. The primary research of a given field, understandably, emerges from the field itself (e.g., moral theology, historical theology, and social psychology) and not from cross-disciplinary applications. Therefore, the cross-disciplinary researcher, in this instance a pastoral theologian, generally appeals to the theory and claims of a given field in a summary fashion that is intended to illuminate or enhance an understanding of the topic at hand. Further, as it is not its principal purpose,

28 Chapter 2 will develop the pastoral theological method in detail, including its cross-disciplinary structure.
pastoral theology as cross-disciplinary research rarely, if ever, directly advances the specific fields themselves, as it draws upon their resources in order to enhance theological insight. For example, the benefit that pastoral theology receives from a neuro-scientific understanding of brain activity ordinarily does not further neuro-science in an immediate or direct way.

Consequently, the charge of the cross-disciplinary researcher is to accurately and responsibly represent whatever given disciplines are being integrated into the research. In addition to the more obvious dimensions of accurately representing a given field (e.g., statements that correctly present the theory and research), a significant reflection of the responsible use of the integrated resource is to not overextend the claims being made by the cross-disciplinary application. In this research, for example, it is essential to be clear that the final result will be a pastoral theological conversation informed and illuminated by the insights of moral theology, historical theology, and social psychology, but is not in the final analysis a moral theology, historical theology, or social psychology as such. That being the case, although in-depth literature reviews are appropriate within the specific fields themselves, they are not well suited to cross-disciplinary studies both due to the nature and limits of the method itself (i.e., the integration of the theory and claims of a given field in a summary fashion) as well as pragmatic concerns (i.e., the sheer quantity that would be involved across multiple fields).

Second, as a dimension of an accurate and responsible use of multiple fields, identifying the portion of the discipline being integrated is critical, as it also functions to avoid an overextension of what might be claimed. For example, even though this research draws upon social psychology, it integrates a very small portion of what social
psychology incorporates. SCT is but one expression of the many theories that fall under the larger umbrella of social psychology. Further, Bandura’s framing of social cognitive theory represents only one expression of a variety of social cognitive theories. Resources like social psychology or, more specifically in this limited instance, SCT are employed with the interest of potentially gaining insight and perspective into the question and problem the theological project is addressing. Both the possibilities and limits of the contribution of SCT will be identified and explored. However, it is not incumbent upon pastoral theology to identify, let alone resolve, the differing positions within social cognitive theory itself, provided the theory and research being employed (e.g., SCT) still has formative power within its own field.

Third, although an in-depth initial review of the literature across an array of disciplines is not well suited for the opening chapter of a cross-disciplinary dissertation, it should be noted that the depth of literature and resources informing the project are embedded throughout the text. Ultimately, greater exposure and engagement with the variety of literature operative in the research emerges, even if not in the form of an initial literature review. The depth of resources reflected in the footnote references alone is but one example of the resources being integrated. Further, as another reflection of a responsible use of multiple fields, the process for and development of a bibliography is vital. The bibliographic procedure reflects a comprehensive identification of potentially pertinent resources that may relate to the topic at hand.29 From the inception of this dissertation, the bibliographic procedure has functioned to identify and substantiate the current status of literature regarding the topic.

29 The bibliographic procedure used for this dissertation is in Appendix A following the Bibliography.
as well as what contributions might be possible. The bibliographic procedure, in turn, results in a bibliography that reflects and serves as a greater platform of potential resources informing the research. In sum, the bibliography functions as a broad and efficient review of the potential literature informing the cross-disciplinary research.

With those three points in mind, the remaining portion of this section regarding literature and resources will identify principal theorists and literature from the fields of pastoral theology, moral theology, historical theology, and social psychology that contribute to this cross-disciplinary conversation. These authors and their work represent a stable perspective within their corresponding disciplines, but are neither exhaustive nor definitive. They resonate well with the pastoral and theological problem central to this dissertation, and offer credible resources for constructively responding to it. The outline of chapters reflects where each discipline will receive its principal development.

As a cross-disciplinary methodology, pastoral theology frames the structure and discourse of the entire dissertation, whether explicitly or implicitly. In Chapter 2 pastoral theology is explicitly addressed with significant detail, as it articulates the methodology present throughout the dissertation. This methodology can be seen as having several intersecting movements within the overall pastoral theological enterprise: reflecting on personal and pastoral experience; defining a pastoral theological problem to be addressed; identifying the historical antecedents to the problem; and finding appropriate conceptual resources—both theological and secular. All of these are parts constructively work together according to the pastoral theological methodology.

As Chapters 3 and 4 explore historical theology, moral theology, and social cognitive theory, pastoral theology provides the intersection of these resources as they
illuminate and inform the pastoral theological question being addressed. For example, the pastoral theological method has given rise not only to the theological question itself, but also to identifying and critically evaluating relevant resources that potentially promise a better understanding of and/or responding to the pastoral need inherent in the situation. In short, pastoral theology is a methodological standpoint that orders all the parts of this study. In terms of a specific pastoral theology, Larry Graham’s work provides a contemporary expression of a method for pastoral theology that initially emerged in the late 1950’s with Hiltner’s text *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding*. This method of pastoral theology, as noted previously, is a contextual pastoral theology, but what makes Graham’s framing particularly well suited for the research of this dissertation is the systemic perspective it brings to understanding relationships and agency. The principal pastoral theological texts drawn upon from Graham are *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care* and *Counseling* and *Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care among Lesbians and Gays*. In addition to Graham, an array of theologians who similarly locate themselves within pastoral theology are engaged as well throughout the dissertation.

In terms of historical theology, within the last decade Linda Hogan has emerged as one of the more noted historical theologians researching the topic of conscience within Catholicism. Her text *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition* stands

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31 Larry Graham is the principal advisor of this dissertation. Other pastoral theological articulations were available, but Graham was a student of Hiltner and his own formulations of pastoral theology are well attested in the field and seem relevant to this topic. After due consideration, his work was chosen as a major methodological orientation.
as a prominent contemporary expression of research in this arena.\textsuperscript{32} Although Hogan’s historical embrace of the topic exceeds the parameters of this dissertation, her research of the 13th century with Thomas Aquinas up and through the Second Vatican Council reflects the general historical orientation of this project.

Yet beyond simply the timeframe and topic of conscience, Hogan’s historical methodology is especially relevant to substantiating and understanding the moral conundrum regarding encountering two strands within the tradition when a Catholic is making moral decisions. Rather than minimizing differences in the Church’s teaching, Hogan intentionally and specifically brings them into the light. In short, the differences within the tradition regarding conscience are concretely identified within the historical texts as well as the potentially commensurate tension, ambiguity, and confusion that may surface for Catholics. Additionally, the majority of the historical texts presented on the topic of conscience are from the Church itself in the form of Conciliar and Papal statements, especially from the Second Vatican Council. This is due to not only the authoritative claim they hold for Catholics, but also the public and comprehensive character they reflect in terms of normative Church teaching regarding the doctrine of primacy of conscience.

In terms of moral theology, two principal moral theological perspectives within Catholicism that have consolidated since the Second Vatican Council are engaged—the Revisionist and Traditionalist schools. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick are representative of the Revisionist school and Germain Grisez is representative of the Traditionalist school. Further, their research reflects the dominant Catholic framings of

\textsuperscript{32} Hogan.
the doctrine of primacy of conscience, namely, the personalist and legalistic perspectives. Given the prominence of these moral theologians for Catholicism within the United States, the corpus of their work spanning over twenty five years has been consulted for the moral theological mooring of this project regarding conscience. Even though these three moral theologians specifically represent the Catholic moral theological field, they also resonate with and reflect a relatively similar position in the ecumenical dialogue within the Christian communion at large, especially as related to Christian ethics and morality.33

In terms of social psychology, as noted previously, the research of Bandura represents not only a fraction of the discipline itself, but also only a portion of the social cognitive theories available as well. Over the last three decades, Bandura’s research with SCT has explored a systemic understanding of relationality. Broadly SCT complements and contributes to the resources of this research on two foundational levels. First, it shares and enhances the dynamics and dimensions of contextuality and a systemic perspective that are operative in the pastoral theological method I am utilizing. Graham’s work with agency as an important dimension of power explores the pastoral and theological situation in systemic terms. The integration of Bandura’s work gives social scientific grounding for this view, and offers resources Graham does not for relating this to the personalist view of primacy of conscience. Second, within the SCT systemic theoretical framework, agency and its dimensionality have been at the forefront of its research. SCT offers more disciplined behavioral science research and theory on the

33 For a more in-depth discussion of the broader ecumenical dialogue, see James Gustafson, Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).
social-personal interfaces involved in decision-making in general (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion) which apply to moral concerns and, therefore, have implications for amplifying an understanding of primacy of conscience. Given the introduction of SCT in 1986 with Bandura’s seminal work *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, this text serves as the starting point of the subsequent corpus of SCT literature.\(^{34}\)

**Outline of Chapters**

Chapter 2 develops in depth the pastoral theological method employed in this dissertation. Graham’s work *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds* serves as the principal pastoral theological method of this research. It is systemic in nature and draws upon foundational pastoral theological principals present in Seward Hiltner’s pastoral theology *Preface to Pastoral Theology*. This method reflects upon and integrates concrete human experience, theological resources, and cognate resources in the process of pastoral theological construction. It constructively contributes to both pastoral theology and practice. Graham’s contribution of systemic thought to the understanding of pastoral theology is of particular importance, as it presents a framing of agency that is highly relevant to an enhanced understanding of primacy of conscience. Although the pastoral theological method that I am using is Protestant in origin, it will be related to Catholic moral reflection in order to contribute voices and resources to the debate and problem that heretofore have not been included.

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The constructive character and foundation of pastoral theology will be laid out in this chapter, particularly as it recovers and develops dimensions of the Catholic tradition. Also, the theological resource and role of primacy of conscience will be introduced. Similarly, foundational aspects of Bandura’s SCT will be introduced as a relevant social psychological resource for this research in its understanding of agency. In order to illuminate the pastoral theological method being employed, a pastoral vignette will be integrated throughout the chapter as a means to concretize both the need and difficulty experienced by some Catholics when making moral decisions that may differ from certain Church teachings or tradition. Finally, the importance and inevitability of theological anthropology within pastoral theology will close out the chapter.

Chapter 3 addresses the Catholic tradition in order to explore what resources the Church has to offer in order to understand and address questions regarding the doctrine of primacy of conscience. The principal theological resources employed will be drawn from the fields of historical and moral theology. Both Catholic historical and moral theology surface two points directly related to this research—the presence of ambiguity and the necessity for agency. First, both theologies present a tradition that has diversity and, therefore, corresponding ambiguity. Second, this shared conclusion of a diverse tradition that inherently faces ambiguity necessitates understanding agency more fully when examining primacy of conscience.

After establishing a working definition and theological framework of primacy of conscience, the historical portion of this chapter will begin from the point of Thomas Aquinas and his articulation of the doctrine of primacy of conscience. The long and varied history of conscience in the Catholic tradition will be reviewed in summary fashion vis-à-vis
three critical historical moments—the Reformation and subsequent Council of Trent (1545-1563) as symbolized by Martin Luther, the rise of modernism and the subsequent Syllabus of Errors (1864) as symbolized by John Henry Newman, and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

This historical review of the doctrine of primacy of conscience from Aquinas to and through the Second Vatican Council culminates with the Church’s call to recover and reclaim conscience within the tradition. This mandate from the Second Vatican Council ultimately results in the subsequent consolidation of the legalistic and personalist perspectives regarding the doctrine of primacy of conscience. These two perspectives reflect the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools respectively and will be illuminated through a review of the Basic Goods Theory as expressed by Grisez and the Proportionate Reason Theory as expressed by McCormick and Curran. This summary examination will demonstrate the incontestable ambiguity in the tradition and thereby argue for the necessity of both understanding and exercising agency when considering primacy of conscience.

The diverse and even contradictory trajectories of the doctrine that have been shown through the historical review will be summarized by Hogan’s historical theological understanding of ambiguity within the Catholic tradition of conscience and drawn upon to support the development of the doctrine of primacy of conscience through a pastoral theological interpretation of personal and communal agency. Operating from a historicist perspective, the concept of a homogenous tradition is rejected, as the diversity, plurality, and permeability of contexts exist across both time and topic. Hogan’s work demonstrates this type of plurality within the Catholic tradition regarding conscience and
reflects a historicist sensibility and analysis, even if not overtly. Ultimately, in addition
to identifying the personalist perspective on conscience as one of the two dominant
contemporary perspectives within the field of moral theology, her historical analysis
bolsters the personalist perspective on the topic.

Chapter 4 addresses the concept of agency as interpreted through the lens of
Bandura’s perspective on SCT. Bandura’s insight into agency and its implications can
help recover, as well as amplify and expand the initial understanding and role of primacy
within the doctrine of conscience. By drawing upon SCT, as one distinct and well
established social cognitive theory, this chapter intends to offer support for the
personalist view of conscience when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn
from an SCT understanding of agency.

The chapter opens with framing the limits of how scientific theory and data is
employed, especially in terms of agency and SCT. Then a recent historical mooring and
baseline follows to provide an understanding for the contemporary intersection between
psychology and Catholic moral theology regarding the concept of conscience. Thomas
Srampickal’s comparative analysis of conscience will serve as one expression of the
broader context in its exploration of both theological and psychological interpretations
and critiques of the concept of conscience. His research includes the concept of conscience
in the empirical psychology of his day, an examination of the use of the concept of conscience
in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and a synthesis of how the empirical
psychologies during the period of the Second Vatican Council intersect with the understanding
of conscience operative in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.
From this historical location, an overview of Bandura’s SCT serves as a starting point for understanding his theory and research regarding agency. SCT will serve as the platform for understanding individual and communal agential dynamics as related to the possible meaning and function of primacy when exercising conscience. Bandura’s SCT view of agency integrates critical psychological and anthropological advances operative from a systemic perspective. From the systemic foundation of SCT, more nuanced dimensions of the theory will be considered. This will include what SCT considers the normative cognitive dynamics of self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion as they may relate to better understanding agency within the exercise of primacy of conscience.

Bandura’s conceptualization of agency facilitates a more sophisticated interpretation of the dynamic interplay between the agency of the individual and the Church when considering the exercise of primacy of conscience (i.e., agency operates within a reciprocal individual and communal interaction). This chapter principally explores dimensions of agency beneficial for interpreting the meaning and function of primacy of conscience from a personalist Catholic viewpoint, including both a broad examination of individual and communal agential dynamics from a SCT systemic perspective as well as specific dimensions and factors operative in the exercise of agency itself. SCT presents agency in a way that supports and amplifies the personalist interpretation of primacy of conscience and its prioritization of the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters while taking seriously the communal agency of the tradition. This systemic perspective resonates and aligns readily and profoundly with the personalist perspective where authoritative moral agency finally resides in the primacy of conscience of the acting moral agent. Primacy of conscience becomes the moral
voice of the individual expressing initiating agency as it emerges as an expression of the
Church community. It neither ignores nor displaces normative Church teaching, just as
normative teaching neither ignores nor displaces it.

Chapter 5 functions constructively to develop an enhanced understanding of
primacy of conscience through a pastoral theological integration of agency as understood
through Bandura’s SCT. Informed and supported by the depth of research in the
preceding chapters (e.g., pastoral theology, moral theology, historical theology, and
social psychology) regarding the topic of conscience and agency, this chapter interprets
and synthesizes those resources and concrete experience as it attempts to construct an
enhanced pastoral theological understanding of primacy of conscience. This pastoral
theological construction of agency for Catholic moral decision-making is intended to
better clarify the unresolved matter in the tradition when a Catholic encounters the two
strands of normative Church teaching and primacy of conscience. Possible amelioration
and/or resolution of the pastoral problem identified will be explored and illuminated vis-
à-vis examples of pastoral practice. In short, Chapter 5 will begin to articulate how both
the Church and the Catholics that comprise it might benefit from a pastoral theological
articulation of the doctrine of primacy of conscience from a personalist perspective, when
primacy is amplified with the implications drawn from Bandura’s SCT view of agency.
There are occasions when the use of valuable data is hindered because basic theory is inadequate.\textsuperscript{35}

Whether one makes a cursory contemporary review or an extensive historical study of pastoral theology, it is immediately apparent that the term is anything but univocal. Regardless of whether the pastoral theology is principally Catholic or Protestant in origin, the content, meaning and purpose for theological reflection pertinent to pastoral situations is quite diverse. That being said, it is vital to locate and define the pastoral theology operative throughout this dissertation, given this project is pastoral-theological in both method and purpose. Additionally, as I articulate my pastoral theological method, several dimensions of the pastoral problematic identified in Chapter 1 will be engaged and illustrated, especially the paradigmatic shift between individualistic and systemic thinking as well as the role of agency within relationships.

First, an overview of this chapter is in order. It will begin by identifying and elaborating dimensions of my pastoral theological method, including its compatibility with Catholicism. A pastoral vignette will serve as a means to illustrate both the need and complication experienced by some Catholics when making moral decisions that may differ from certain Church teachings or tradition. The constructive character of pastoral theology

\textsuperscript{35} Hiltner, Preface 7.
will be engaged, particularly as it recovers and develops dimensions of the Catholic
tradition. The resource and role of primacy of conscience will be introduced, but will receive
its principal development in Chapter 3. Similarly, dimensions of Albert Bandura’s SCT will be
identified as a resource for this dissertation in its understanding of agency, but Chapter 4 will
engage in greater detail its contribution to this research. Larry Kent Graham’s contribution of
systemic thought to the understanding of pastoral theology will be incorporated, especially as it
articulates a framing of agency. Finally, the importance of theological anthropology within
pastoral theology will close the chapter.

Currently, three general definitions substantially cover the diverse continuum of
how pastoral theology is understood. One view positions the pastoral theological project
within the development and articulation of “…practical principles, theories, and
procedures for ordained ministry in all of its functions.”36 Basically this approach is
limited to establishing procedures and/or techniques that chart the normative course by
which ministry is delivered, predominantly if not exclusively by a denomination’s
publicly recognized ministers. A second view focuses pastoral theology within the
parameters of practical theology and, more specifically, the theory and practice of
pastoral care and counseling.37 In this instance, the practical quality of the work is most
salient, as theological reflection is predominantly directed toward the development of
pastoral caregiving practices. The third and final view frames pastoral theology as “a

36 Rodney J. Hunter, ed. Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville, TN:
Abingdon Press, 2005), 867.

37 Ibid.
form of theological reflection in which pastoral experience serves as a context for critical
development of basic theological understanding.”38

Without calling into question the particular pastoral value possible in the first and
second view of pastoral theology, given that they are complementary rather than
competitive with the third view, this dissertation will limit its method to the third or last
approach where “…pastoral theology is not a theology of or about pastoral care but a
type of contextual theology, a way of doing theology pastorally.”39 Consequently, as this
method engages theology pastorally, it generates new theological understandings in order
to better address the pastoral issue or question at hand. In reflecting upon this method of
pastoral theology, John Patton distinguishes between context and contextuality.40 The
former is understood as the overall situation or location pertinent to a given circumstance
whereas the latter is the recognition that these particularities of the social situation
influence and inform the pastoral theological reflection itself in both content and process.

Although this approach to pastoral theology currently enjoys substantial currency
within the field, this has not always been the case.41 In 1958 Seward Hiltner’s ground-
breaking work Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding
introduced a systematic integration of a variety of resources in the creation of this now

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid, emphasis in original.


41 Carrie Doehring, Emmanuel Lartey, Joretta Marshall, Teresa Snorton, and Peggy Way are just a fraction of the many contemporary published pastoral theologians located in this approach in addition to those who are appealed to directly in this dissertation.
prevalent contextual pastoral theological method. The array of specifics Hiltner identified to nuance his pastoral theology is less of a concern in this research than the seminal and enduring foundational theoretical structure he coined. As noted in the opening chapter, this pastoral theological method has several dimensions. Beginning with theological questions that emerge in pastoral practice, it explores the tradition to see how those questions have been addressed. If the tradition’s response seems deficient, pastoral theology refines and refocuses the questions for contemporary exploration. In constructing more adequate theological responses, pastoral theology also draws upon contemporary resources, from both theology and “cognate secular materials”\(^{42}\) The term cognate secular materials or sources basically refers to the sciences and other disciplines that are not explicitly theological (e.g., psychology, human biology, cultural anthropology, sociology, ethnography), yet are relevant to the conversation at hand.

The prescient quality of Hiltner titling his work a “Preface” clearly has been born out, as a number of noteworthy critiques and advances have transpired in the nearly five decades since he penned his work.\(^{43}\) For example, William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle’s *Pastoral Theology in Historical Perspective* augments Hiltner’s initial shepherding perspective and corresponding functions of healing, sustaining, and guiding with an additional pastoral function of reconciling.\(^{44}\) In a similar vein some three plus decades

\(^{42}\) Ramsay, 5.


later, Carroll Watkins Ali’s *In the Name of Survival and Liberation: A Preface to Pastoral Theology in the African-American Context* appealed to the importance and limits of contextuality and added the pastoral functions of survival and liberation as relevant for the African-American community.\(^{45}\) Larry Kent Graham’s work *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* made the paradigmatic shift from an individualistic approach to a systemic one.\(^{46}\) Graham’s advance will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, the principal theoretical formulation—pastoral theology is dialectically and contextually constructed by drawing upon secular knowledge, theology, and the practice of ministry in the process of advancing theological understanding—basically remains in force today both within the field and this dissertation. As pastoral theology is created, three basic dimensions of Hiltner’s pastoral theology remain foundational to this day. Watkins Ali summarizes them as being:

1. Hiltner’s methodological approach set the precedent for bringing theological reflection to bear on concrete human experience;
2. Hiltner’s approach is provisional and encourages the identification of a problematic within the ministry situation as the conceptual basis for pastoral theological reflection; and
3. Hiltner’s approach is interdisciplinary and employs cognate resources.\(^{47}\)

It needs to be emphasized that pastoral theology is not simply a method or process of handling data; it also has a theological output. These three dimensions summarized by


\(^{46}\) Graham, *Care of Persons*.


42
Watkins Ali inform the process of developing more adequate theological understandings of and responses to the pastoral problem at hand and the corresponding theological issues present. In other words, this method of doing theology pastorally generates pastoral theological advances.

The theological problem that is at the heart of this dissertation, arising from the pastoral practice that will be described and documented, is how to address theologically two strands in the Church’s tradition regarding being a moral Catholic. One strand suggests that the moral response is to obey, whereas the other strand suggests that the moral response is to follow your conscience. These two strands reflect an ambiguity and create conflict, inasmuch as the Church seems to offer contradictory advice as Catholics are faced with moral decision-making. How does a lay person, priest, or pastoral theologian address this theological conflict responsibly and faithfully? This dissertation examines and advances that theological question by developing the underdeveloped doctrine of the primacy of conscience through the theological creativity of pastoral theology.

A Protestant Pastoral Theological Method for Catholicism?

Certainly and sadly Christian history is rife with manifestations of how Catholics and Protestants have been anything but civil, let alone Christian, to one another. Theology has been no exception. The documents of the Council of Trent overflow with examples: “And if anyone should read or possess books by heretics or writings by any author condemned and prohibited by reason of heresy or suspicion of false teaching, he incurs immediately the sentence of excommunication.”48 In short, if someone possessed a book by Martin

Luther they were considered damned to hell, given the understanding of the consequences of excommunication at the time.

With the pall of that historical backdrop, this research would be remiss to not address at the outset the compatibility and appropriateness of applying Hiltner’s pastoral theological method to Catholicism. The most critical concept to underscore is the distinction between method (the process) and content (the product). Hiltner’s method addresses how pastoral theology is done, not what its outcome will necessarily be. The simplest and strongest precedent that parallels this contemporary theological application is Thomas Aquinas’ integration of Aristotelian philosophy with his theological investigations. In this work, the Church’s theology integrated a philosophical method from the Greek culture without potential concerns regarding content prohibiting the integration. Similarly, a pastoral theological method developed by a person of Protestant faith can be engaged without detriment to Catholic pastoral theological inquiry and its outcomes.

Not only does Hiltner’s method intersect denominational lines, but it also crosses disciplinary ones as it requires a pastoral theological interaction with the sciences or other cognate resources. Employment of cross-disciplinary methodologies is a long standing practice within Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular with Aquinas as its model. Specifically within pastoral theology, Clebsch and Jaekle’s research demonstrates that “in every historical epoch, pastoring has utilized—and by utilizing has helped to advance and

transform—the psychology or psychologies current in that epoch.” Similarly, in the spirit of Aquinas’ integrative theological endeavor, the Second Vatican Council, as quoted in Chapter 1, calls for this type of interaction with secular sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology) in the document “Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.” Consequently, the sciences or other cognate resources, like SCT, as conversation partners with pastoral theology are not only compatible with Catholicism, but also actually part of its historical and current tradition.

Finally, and very much to the point at hand, John McDonough Cassem’s dissertation at Catholic University of America addresses this question in detail from the perspective of the renowned contemporary Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan and affirms the feasibility of this integration and application. His research reflects an ecumenical age that strives to overcome an adversarial history by responding to the Second Vatican Council call: “In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with others in the search for truth and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships.” Not only are Christians (i.e., Catholics and Protestants) identified under a common moniker by Catholics, they are also called to collaborate with “others in search for truth and genuine solution[s].” In sum, peoples of

50 Clebsch and Jaekle, 68.
52 John McDonough Cassem, An Analysis of Seward Hiltner’s Systematic Pastoral Theology and its Value and Application to Contemporary American Pastoral Theology, Ph.D. Dissertation (Catholic University of America, 1979).
other faiths as well as the sciences are valued as conversation partners and resources for theological reflection.

**A Pastoral Theological Illustration of Primacy of Conscience**

Watkins Ali’s articulation of the three salient dimensions of pastoral theology can be illustrated in a pastoral vignette. The vignette will illustrate how theological questions not previously seen can arise and even shape new theological understandings. It will be helpful to now provide a cursory sketch of how this process will be manifest in this research on primacy of conscience, but full development will obviously only occur as the dissertation proceeds. Primacy of conscience can be more fully understood through attending to these three critical elements that have been overlooked or minimized: the actual experiences and resolutions of dedicated and faithful Catholics, neglected yet pertinent resources in the tradition, and a critical appropriation of cognate secular materials. That is, this illustration of pastoral practice is not merely reflecting theologically on an experience, but also engaging questions with the possibility of different and advanced theological perspectives.

The first dimension Watkins Ali identifies is bringing theological reflection to bear on concrete human experience. To that end and consistent with the pastoral methodology itself, a brief pastoral vignette will be introduced here in order to locate the type of human experience that this research is theologically reflecting upon. Sue came into my office with a story not terribly uncommon, yet often terribly troubling in the tension, confusion and disempowerment it reveals.\(^5\) Her problem was that she was taking “the pill,” fully knowing the Roman Catholic Church forbids this and other

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\(^5\) This vignette reflects a composite of various actual pastoral experiences, from casual conversations and discussions to counseling sessions and confession.

46
artificial means of contraception. Yet along with her acknowledgement of this “officially” forbidden behavior, she also struggled to explain and justify her choice as one that made sense to her given all her circumstances. From her perspective, they already had more children than she and her husband could adequately provide for given the fact they lived below the poverty line and there were already likely signs of their children being stunted from the family’s impoverishment. Further, she was fearful of the short and long-term consequences of her husband’s violent and abusive behavior, especially when he was intoxicated, for her present children. Resisting his sexual advances carried its own threat and the thought of divorce further complicated the inadequacies of providing for the children and was equally or more looked down upon by the Church. Therefore, the use of artificial contraception seemed to her to be the best possible choice in her world that was far less than an ideal one. Nevertheless, given her Roman Catholicism, she knew the Church’s teaching and wanted to do the right thing, even if that simply meant talking it over with a priest and getting his perspective. Sue considered herself a “good” Catholic and had always been taught to follow her conscience and was not sure if that was, in fact, what she was now doing by taking the pill.

First, in terms of the concrete human experience that will focus this theological reflection, it is indisputable that some Catholics like Sue experience dissonance when attempting to integrate certain Church teachings with the leading of their conscience when they make moral decisions. What becomes immediately apparent in the human experience is that not all Catholics accept and practice all established moral answers provided by the Church. This human experience sits squarely within the exercise of conscience and the corresponding question of and tradition regarding its primacy.
Benedict Ashley appeals to an array of data to illustrate the difference between normative Catholic teaching and some Catholics’ actual behavior as well as their perception of the impact, or lack thereof, of these choices on their standing as a Catholic:55

…Between 1963 and 1990, the percentage of Catholics attending Church at least once a week fell from 71 percent to 40.5 percent. In 1972, 21 percent of Catholics saw nothing wrong with premarital sex; by 1990, the number had risen to 44 percent. In 1987, 70 percent of Catholics surveyed said “yes” in answer to the question, “Can one be a good Catholic without going to Church every Sunday?” Sixty-eight percent said “yes” to the question, “Can one be a good Catholic without obeying the Church’s teaching on birth control?” Thirty-nine percent responded “yes” to the same question about abortion.56

These topics (i.e., Church non-attendance, premarital sex, birth control, and abortion) and others like them have been and remain problematic and areas of dissension. They are indicative of a potential tension and problem that surfaces, inasmuch as non-compliance with normative Church teaching on these topics may be considered sinful, as interpreted from a limited magisterial perspective—a “good” Catholic neither believes nor does these things, at least not without erring or sinning!

Although the data from these surveys was not explicitly attempting to explore the presence and/or function of primacy of conscience, they clearly relate to the concrete human experience being examined. What is of particular interest with this data is that some degree of deviance from official Church teaching does not necessarily result in

55 In this dissertation, the term “normative” when applied to Church teaching relates to it being common or prevalent. This may, and often does, translate into it having a dominant quality as well. Similarly, the term “normative” when applied to Church teaching does not relate to it being right or moral.

these persons experiencing themselves as sinful, rather they continue to identify themselves as “good” Catholics. Further, these numbers do not merely reflect outliers or anomalies that may either be too difficult and/or without sufficient merit to interpret. Rather, they identify a dynamic that is fairly substantial. In fact, entire organizations with tens of thousands of members exist that reflect groups that consider themselves “good” Catholics, although differing with certain magisterial positions of the Church. How is this to be accounted for and what key, if any, might primacy of conscience hold in its understanding?

Therefore in reflecting upon the concrete human experience just identified, the theological resources that I will principally use are historical Catholic documents (e.g., Second Vatican Council and other magisterial texts) and Catholic moral theology, especially from the personalist school as reflected in the work of Charles Curran and Richard McCormick. These theological resources will be used to set both the historical and contemporary context of the debate on primacy of conscience in general as well as focus upon current perspectives of the meaning and function of primacy in particular. These resources, without doubt, clearly support the legitimacy and complexity of Sue’s question and uncertainty as well as other Catholics in similar situations. For example, the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” states:

57 Nonetheless, these Catholics are often judged negatively by other lay Catholics who disagree with them. This reflects another distinct pastoral problem that is not the focus of this study. However, this problem might potentially be ameliorated as well if the group judging negatively integrates the doctrine of primacy of conscience.


59 The personalist and legalistic schools reflect the dominant positions operative in the debate on conscience and both will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.
Lay people should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city….Let the lay people not imagine that their pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let lay people take on their own distinctive role.⁶⁰

The second dimension of the pastoral theological method Watkins Ali presents is “the identification of a problematic within the ministry situation as the conceptual basis for pastoral theological reflection.” As pastoral practice demonstrates, managing the differences between the Church teaching and one’s conscience can be very complicated. As a priest, I have witnessed these complications revealed in the affective and cognitive as well as the behavioral and organizational. This complication manifest in pastoral practice is confirmed by a number of research studies, especially within the arena of the Church’s teaching on contraception and the actual beliefs and practices of many Catholics.⁶¹

In those instances when a Catholic’s moral decision-making differs from the Church’s normative teaching, a serious pastoral problem often emerges. Independent of the specific moral issue being addressed and the array of complications that may be involved in the situation, the serious foundational question is whether or not Catholics can simultaneously be loyal to the Church’s teaching while occasionally differing from it


because of the leading of their conscience as related to a given moral issue. Is a Catholic’s status within the Church necessarily compromised if following one’s conscience in a particular instance leads to differing from normative Church teaching?

Generally there are two interpretations of this problem. One interpretation of the discrepancy between Church teaching and many Catholics’ actual beliefs and practices is that it reflects deterioration caused by influences external to the Church. Therefore, some Catholics “…are alarmed by what they see as a collapse of Christian moral standards in the Church and a disastrous compromise with liberal Protestantism and still worse with secularism.”62 From this perspective, “…the core of Catholic identity has been lost. These people who dissent, who have adopted other sources of authority as their guide for moral life and liturgical consciousness, have thrown away the crowning glory of Catholicism.”63 Although this negative interpretation attempts to explain sources of influence contributing to this dissonance or gap, it does not seem to address how and/or why these Catholics continue to identify themselves as “good” Catholics, and not simply converts to liberal Protestantism or secularism.64

A second interpretation—the one which forms the basis of this study—is that these types of data, both from pastoral care experiences and sociological studies, reflect the functioning of the long standing traditional, albeit increasingly submerged and

62 Ashley, 79.


64 Although multiple-regression analyses are not currently available to interpret this problem, it is the assumption of the author and suggested by other studies that there are a number of relevant factors operative in the current situation and not just one sole factor.
underdeveloped, Catholic doctrine of primacy of conscience. At first glance in these experiences of dissonance, the principal concern often seems to be the topical one, be it contraception, terminating artificial life support, or any specific moral issue. Yet in the Church moral decision-making itself has an inherent, and largely unrecognized, ambiguity and tension in its position on obedience to the authority of Church teaching and the obligation to follow one’s conscience, even if conscience leads in a different direction than the Church normatively teaches.\footnote{Hogan, 2.}

In short, the pastoral problem identified reflects both individual and institutional complications regarding primacy of conscience. From this second interpretation which situates primacy of conscience as operative and central in its interpretation, one could certainly wonder, if not make the argument that Sue is merely and essentially applying Paul VI’s directive to parents in the Encyclical “The Development of Peoples (\textit{Popularum Progressio})”:

\begin{quote}
It is finally the right of the parents having completely examined the case to make a decision about the number of their children; a responsibility they take upon themselves keeping in sight their duty to God, themselves, the children already born, and the community to which they belong, following the dictates of their conscience instructed about the divine law authentically interpreted and strengthened by confidence in God.\footnote{Claudia Carlen, ed. \textit{The Papal Encyclicals} vol. 5 (Ann arbor, MI: The Pierian Press, 1990), 190.}
\end{quote}

The third dimension of this pastoral theological method that Watkins Ali identifies is its interdisciplinary character, especially its employment of cognate resources. The critical appropriation of cognate secular materials informing this research is from the field of psychology. Specifically, I have chosen Bandura’s work as my principal resource from the discipline of social psychology in order to expand and explicate the agential dimensions.
involved in an act of claiming primacy of conscience. Conscience is not an explicit term employed by Bandura nor is it synonymous with behavior, cognition, or a combination of the two. Nevertheless, conscience is inextricably related to both cognition and behavior inasmuch as the exercise of conscience necessarily involves both judgment and action, which are central concepts in Bandura’s thought as well as in Catholic moral reflection. As defined by Catholic moral theologian Charles Curran, “conscience is generally understood as the judgment about the morality of an act to be done or omitted or already done or omitted by the person.”

Bandura’s SCT, as one among a number of social cognitive theories, is particularly relevant for this research for three reasons. For starters, he enjoys both prominence and longevity within his field, especially in terms of research on agency and its dimensionality. Additionally, his conceptualization of agency facilitates a more sophisticated interpretation of the dynamic interplay between the agency of the individual

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68 The identification of and distinction between Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) within the array of social cognitive theories will be addressed in detail in Chapter 4.

69 “Since Bandura first introduced the construct of self-efficacy in 1977, researchers have been very successful in demonstrating that individuals’ self-efficacy beliefs powerfully influence their attainment in diverse fields (see Stajkovic and Luthans 1998, for meta-analysis of research on the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and achievement outcomes).… Bandura also further situated self-efficacy within a social cognitive theory of personal and collective agency that operates in concert with other sociocognitive factors in regulating human well-being and attainment. He also addressed the major facets of agency—the nature and structure of self-efficacy beliefs, their origins and effects, the processes through which such self-beliefs operate, and the modes by which they can be created and strengthened…. A search for the term ‘self-efficacy’ in most academic databases reveals that, by the year 2000, over 2500 articles had been written on this important psychological construct.” Frank Parajes, “Overview of Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy,” Retrieved 11/12/2002 from http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/eff.html, (2002), 8.
and the Church operative in the exercise of primacy of conscience (i.e., agency operates within a reciprocal individual and communal interaction). Finally, his research examines cognitive and behavioral dimensions of agency (i.e., the role of self-reflectiveness,\textsuperscript{70} perceived self-efficacy,\textsuperscript{71} and social persuasion\textsuperscript{72}) that have implications for unexplored dimensions of the function of primacy of conscience.\textsuperscript{73}

Finally, in broadly locating primacy of conscience within this pastoral theological method, an additional comment is in order lest the reader be confused regarding the focus of this research. Almost any discussion of conscience inevitably calls forth illustrations, that is, how might understanding primacy of conscience manifest itself in the context of any real or hypothetical moral situation? Certainly the contextuality of this pastoral theological method necessitates engaging concrete human experience and refrains from purely abstract analysis. Therefore, although specific moral examples that are vital to human agency (e.g., Sue’s question regarding contraception or others within the arena of sexuality) will be occasionally used in this dissertation in order to both inform and illustrate the principal concept being addressed (i.e., primacy of conscience) and the


concrete situation from which it emerges, it is important to recognize that this research is not attempting to further a particular analysis of any given moral issue or topic. Enhancing the theological and pastoral resources available to Catholics, be they lay or cleric, regarding the challenge of negotiating certain official Church teachings and following their conscience is the exclusive interest of this research. The diverse topics or issues actually operative as the content occasionally engaged by primacy of conscience ultimately remain for individuals and ministers to determine as is relevant for their lives, community, and world.

**Exploring the “Lost”**

For many Catholics like Sue, often there surfaces a sense of something being “lost” or absent. Most Catholics will readily claim to being called to follow their conscience, yet this is not necessarily synonymous with having sufficient clarity or direction as to what that actually means in principle and practice. Although many Catholics join with common secular and religious parlance in readily appealing to the concept of "following one's conscience," often this may be as generic and diffuse as "following a gut feeling" and, therefore, not truly reflective of the Church's tradition of conscience nor adequate for its fully functional exercise. A superficial, if not biased, interpretation of this dynamic would place the dominant, if not sole, responsibility for this lacking upon the individual. It might sound something like, “If you would have simply taken the time to inform yourself, you would not find yourself in this quandary.” Yet upon deeper examination, it is irrefutable that this alone is not the sole factor operative in this conundrum.
Fine tuning the second dimension Watkins Ali has identified regarding “a problematic within the ministry situation as the conceptual basis for pastoral theological reflection,” Lapsley and Patton have articulated how recovering and discovering a dimension of theology that has been “lost” can be both illuminating and vital. Patton claims that "…a characteristic element in pastoral theology [is] recovering a dimension of an important human problem that has been lost or insufficiently emphasized in contemporary theology.”74 From one perspective, for something to be lost simply means that its current whereabouts are unknown or unclear, but it still exists and potentially can be recovered and found. Thus the method functions constructively by retrieving and recovering as well as emphasizing and elaborating insufficiently engaged or developed theological concerns. Graham articulates the constructive and nuanced character of this pastoral theological process:

For pastoral theology contends that unaddressed theological issues often arise from the particularity of human experience, including the actual practice of ministry, and that further interpretation of what actually takes place in concrete experience has the potential for constructing new theological understandings or clarifying unresolved matters in the tradition.75

Basically, exploring what was “lost” serves not only as an entry point to the “unaddressed theological issues” (e.g., confusion about and/or loss of agency in the exercise of conscience), but it also can potentially construct enhanced theological insights and resolve contemporary problematic or complicated questions in the tradition.


75 Graham, Discovering Images of God 2.
“Unaddressed theological issues [that] often arise from the particularity of human experience” generate problems like the one some Catholics experience when trying to integrate certain Church teachings, whether they are unresolved or misunderstood matters in the tradition (i.e., primacy of conscience). Examining the pastoral data (i.e., the setting and acts of ministry and the personhood of the one carrying out the act of ministry) in light of theology and cognate secular knowledge is precisely how the tradition is experienced as living. In a sense, what is “found” is seldom, if ever, in the identical state in which it was lost and therein lies the constructive process. Highlighting this methodological dimension of something being “lost” is particularly apropos for this project inasmuch as critical theological dimensions of conscience have been demonstratively lost or insufficiently emphasized, at least in terms of their accessibility and prevalence within contemporary laity and clergy alike.

A salient example of Catholic pastoral theology recovering what has been lost is clear in the Second Vatican Council as it addresses nothing less than the topic at hand—primacy of conscience. First, it is important to note that early in the Second Vatican Council’s proceedings John XXIII recognized that “the deposit of faith or revealed truths are one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another.” In short, John XXIII was identifying the possibility, if not the actuality, that the resources of the faith tradition are not always fully accessible to the faithful, be they lay or cleric, due to potential complications and/or detriments in their transmission. Or harkening back to Patton’s words, “a characteristic element in pastoral

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76 Vatican Council II, 268-269.
theology [is] recovering a dimension of an important human problem that has been lost or insufficiently emphasized in contemporary theology.”

Therefore, in order to ameliorate how the interpretation and subsequent presentation of the faith tradition has been or can be compromised, the Second Vatican Council was charged with making its work “predominantly pastoral in character.” The Second Vatican Council was principally doing pastoral theological work as the Church was “bringing herself up to date where required,” part of which was recovering what was lost or compromised in the historical transmission of the tradition. Even an extremely brief review of the tradition related to primacy of conscience will readily demonstrate this point.

When the Second Vatican Council examined the tradition regarding primacy of conscience, it did not confront theological subtlety and nuance, but rather a blatant example of the tradition being formulated in a manner that was far from being “without violence to its meaning and significance.” Primacy of conscience was present as early as the third century, as reflected in Lactantius’ relatively obscure statement that “unless the act is done freely and from the heart it is an accursed abomination.” Aquinas’ oft quoted, enduring, and topically relevant “Anyone upon whom the ecclesiastical authorities, in ignorance of the true facts, impose a demand against his clear conscience

77 Ibid., 715.

78 Ibid., 712.

should perish in excommunication rather than violate his conscience,”80 continues to reveal how primacy of conscience has long enjoyed its place within the Catholic tradition and moral teaching.

That being said, it is difficult, if not flatly impossible, to reconcile the relatively recent Church statement by Pius IX in 1864 when he promulgated “Condemning Current Errors (Quanta Cura)” in response, or maybe better said, in reaction to the rise of modernism. “Condemning Current Errors” condemned:

…that erroneous opinion which is especially injurious to the Catholic Church and the salvation of souls, called by our predecessor Gregory XVI insane raving, namely, that freedom of conscience and of worship is the proper right of each man, and that this should be proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society.81

Primacy of conscience was being lost in the tradition, or at least insufficiently emphasized, and the Second Vatican Council from its pastoral approach and concern was attempting to recover it.

Hardly more than a century following Pius IX’s tenure, the Second Vatican Council begins a broad recovery of the doctrine of primacy of conscience, as its original “meaning and significance” truly colors an array of magisterial documents from “The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (Lumen Gentium)”82 and “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”83 to the “Declaration on Religious Freedom


81 Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals* vol. 2, 381.


The degree of this recovery and, by extension, how lost it had become is certainly manifest in the “Declaration on Religious Freedom” which states:

The human person sees and recognizes the demands of the divine law through conscience. All are bound to follow their conscience faithfully in every sphere of activity….Therefore, the individual must not be forced to act against conscience nor be prevented from acting according to conscience, especially in religious matters.

This dissertation, in the spirit and trajectory of the Second Vatican Council and through the pastoral theological methodology identified, will continue and further the recovery of dimensions of the tradition of primacy of conscience that have been lost as well as explore dimensions that were never adequately or fully developed. One particularly relevant resource for understanding this dynamic of “losing or recovering,” let alone developing, dimensions of tradition is historicism. This will be addressed in the next chapter as a lens to understand and work with the ambiguity within the tradition that complicates this pastoral situation and theological question.

**Contemporary Advances in Pastoral Theology**

Given the provided distillation of Hiltner’s principal pastoral theological insight, a variety of contemporary definitions of pastoral theology that appeal to this theoretical mooring are possible. Graham states that pastoral theology’s


85 Ibid., 801.

86 In addition to the definitions provided at the beginning of this chapter, also see Nancy Ramsay “A Time of Ferment and Redefinition,” in *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 4-6; and Andrew Lester, *The Angry Christian: A Theology for Care and Counseling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 9-11.
task is to develop theory and practice for the ministry of care. It draws the resources for its creative work from the setting and acts of ministry, the living tradition, cognate secular knowledge, and the personhood of the one carrying out the act of ministry. Methodologically, these resources are ordered by praxis… Pastoral theology, like practical theology, contributes not only to the formulation of theory and practice relevant to the ministry of care, but also recovers, corrects, and expands viewpoints in other branches of theology and ministry.87

In Graham’s Care of Persons, Care of Worlds, from which this definition is taken, he provides a particular advance of a substantial limitation within Hiltner’s original formulation which happens to be extremely relevant for this research—the paradigmatic shift from an individualistic to a systemic perspective. A systemic perspective, as defined by Graham, is “a manner of interpreting reality which emphasizes togetherness, ongoing processes and interactions, and cooperation and reciprocal influence rather than autonomy and separateness.”88

Even though Hiltner was uniquely insightful, he was still a man of his times and this is manifest in the individualistic approach operative in his pastoral theology.89 Not only were Hiltner and the psychological culture in which he was embedded still deeply invested in psychodynamic theories of the self,90 but also the religious culture surrounding him predominantly, if not exclusively, associated ministry with the acts of

87 Graham, Care of Persons 23-24, emphasis added.

88 Graham, Care of Persons 263. This theoretical construct will be further developed as Graham’s and Bandura’s writings are addressed later in this chapter as well as Chapter 4.

89 Watkins Ali, In The Name of Survival 74-76.

the pastor or formally recognized minister—an individual, if you will.\footnote{Watkins Ali, \textit{In The Name of Survival} 74-75.} Both of these influences reinforced an individualistic quality to his pastoral theology, not surprisingly given this \textit{zeitgeist}. This individualistic slant is symbolically revealed in Hiltner’s employment of Anton Boisen’s term “living human documents” as a dominant pastoral theological metaphor.\footnote{Hiltner, \textit{Preface} 51.}

Hiltner was not alone in this limitation, as it captivated the imagination of the pastoral theological field at the time.\footnote{Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century,” in \textit{Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings}, ed. Robert C. Dykstra (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 16.} This individualistic orientation ultimately consolidated into the field’s dominant paradigm of the era—the clinical pastoral perspective. The weight of this paradigm was reflected and reinforced by the discipline’s principal reference text \textit{The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling}. Nancy Ramsay identifies both its prevalence and features:

\textit{The clinical pastoral perspective that predominates in the Dictionary is more clinically focused on relationally conceived selves in the immediacy of their lived experience with their social context often in the background. It values an existential focus on being over doing that recognizes moral issues but does not take up their political and social consequences.}\footnote{Ramsay, 9, emphasis in original.}

Whether we examine prominent influences like Rogers, Freud, and Fromm prior to the publication of \textit{Preface},\footnote{See E. Brooks Holifield, \textit{A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization} (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983).} or subsequent contributors following a similar trajectory, the
clinical pastoral perspective emerging from it largely mirrors the dominant individualistic model of care in much of the United States culture at the time within these disciplines.96 Not surprisingly other disciplines as well labored under the limitations of an individualistic orientation, not the least of which is the arena of moral theology where the debate regarding primacy of conscience has predominantly been located.

It is vital to stress that identifying a theory or even a paradigm’s limits does not necessarily undermine any and all value it might enjoy, whether in the past or present. For decades the clinical pastoral perspective contributed to great gains in pastoral theology, care and counseling and many persons continue to be its beneficiaries.97 Nevertheless, the clinical pastoral perspective only goes so far in what it is capable of accomplishing. In other words, the limitation was less about what it did accomplish than the recognition of what it neither did nor could adequately address. As noted earlier, “there are occasions when the use of valuable data is hindered because basic theory is inadequate”98—this was one of those occasions inasmuch as the psychology employed was highly individualistic. The basic theory with its corresponding individualistic bias was incapable of adequately examining and integrating “valuable data” from the social context and arena, be it the impact of race, culture, gender, power, or class.99


97 Ramsay, 9.

98 Hiltner, Preface 7.

As previously noted though, Hiltner left the door of theological development and advancement wide open predominantly by virtue of the method itself as well as identifying his work as a preface rather than a final word on the subject. The field of pastoral theology, informed by systemic perspectives and developments emerging in psychology and other social sciences, began to recognize the individualistic character of its focus and the commensurate limitations. Further, inasmuch as the theory incorporates reflection upon and examination of the pastoral data (i.e., the setting and acts of ministry and the personhood of the one carrying out the act of ministry), it also became apparent from this perspective that amelioration and/or resolution of pastoral problematics were often hobbled due to the lack of sufficient attention to and integration of the social context with all its influencing factors, be they constructively or destructively oriented.

A number of pastoral theologians started knocking on this door of theological development and advance by exploring alternative metaphors that were systemically rather than individualistically oriented.\(^{100}\) New systemic metaphors like the “living human web” came to the fore.\(^{101}\) One of the principal emerging paradigms eclipsing the clinical pastoral paradigm was the communal contextual paradigm that Ramsay describes succinctly:

> The communal contextual paradigm draws on the ecological metaphor of a web to describe tensively held dual foci. The first is on ecclesial contexts that sustain and strengthen community practices of care. The second is on


the widened horizons of the field that conceive of care as including public, structural, and political dimensions of individual and relational experience.  

Nevertheless, even with the theoretical progress and promise inherent in a systemic perspective, the unique challenge remained as to how to not simply trade one problem for another. In other words, how can providing a corrective for the limitations of an individualistic perspective by integrating a systemic perspective not unintentionally result in a systemic perspective that similarly loses sufficient sight of and appreciation for the individual?

Psychosystemic Pastoral Theology and Agency

This was the theoretical and practical conundrum facing pastoral theologians during this time of development and transition. It was a task of integration that needed to incorporate what was of value in both individualistic and systemic perspectives, all the while minimizing, if not striving to eliminate, the complications that occur when either perspective is taken to the extreme at the exclusion of the other. Obviously this broad sweeping theoretical challenge for pastoral theology’s paradigm has implications for whatever pastoral issue or need may arise, but it has particular import for this discussion of primacy of conscience inasmuch as a vital dimension of the problem itself is how to best understand the relationship between the individual and the Church in terms of agency.

Sensitive to and uncomfortable with the unnecessary polarization between either the individual or the social being the dominant or exclusive focal point for care, Graham unsuccessfully sought an extant coherent theory that could “…synthesize individual

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102 Ramsay, 1.
healing with a fuller engagement with the world.”¹⁰³ In time, both the very absence of and need for such an integrated theory for pastoral theology gave rise to Graham outlining a new theoretical framework which he subsequently labeled, “psychosystemic.”¹⁰⁴

This neologism draws upon an understanding of and the interaction between both the words “psyche” and “systemic.” According to this theory,

the term, ‘psychosystemic,’ refers to the reciprocal interplay between the psyche of individuals and the social, cultural, and natural orders. This interplay is not neutral or static; it is value-laden and teeming with possibilities. The character of persons and their worlds come into being by the mutual influences of each upon the other.¹⁰⁵

The key to addressing this theoretical and practical conundrum was neither approaching it as an “either-or” proposition thereby losing sight of the individual or the context, nor even as a “both-and” proposition by merely standing the individual and context both side by side without any real interaction, let alone integration. The psyche and the system are part of one another such that “…psyches create systems and systems create psyches.”¹⁰⁶ To speak comprehensively of one without the other is not only contrived, it is inadequate and inaccurate. One cannot and does not exist without the other and understanding their relationship is potentially a source of great pastoral theological insight, especially in terms of agency.

¹⁰³ Graham, Care of Persons 12-13.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 41.
Although Graham identifies four dimensions of systemic thinking that inform the psychosystemic perspective, the dimension that is particularly vital to the pastoral problematic at hand is the “…affirmation that all elements of the universe are interconnected, standing in an ongoing reciprocal relationship to one another.” The advances of psychology, particularly family systems theory, and process theology inform this systemic perspective and its commensurate reciprocal interconnectedness and relationality. These contemporary influences nuance and elaborate what, nevertheless, has been a seminal and enduring theological perspective of and metaphor for relationality within Christianity—namely Paul’s analogy of the Church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12).

This interconnectedness and relationality bears a variety of qualities that have a bearing upon the dynamic and interactive process of a person living in the world, including contextual organization, creativity, bi-polar power, contending values and reciprocal transactions. Graham’s summary states:

The universe consists of an interacting systemic whole, organized from smallest to largest units, or components. These components are actual occasions of experience, persons, families, societies, culture, and nature. They are linked by five interrelated connecting elements. Contextual organization refers to the identity and continuity of a component or entity. Contextual creativity points to the capacity for intentionality and change. Bi-polar power describes the inherent capacity for an entity to be

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107 Ibid., 39-40.

108 Ibid., 39.

109 Ibid., 21-23.

110 Of course this understanding of relationality was not unique to Paul and Christianity, as Aristotle’s reflections on “the one and the many” certainly precede Paul’s and undoubtedly influence Paul as his mission moved into the Greco-Roman world.
influenced by and to influence others. Contending values delineated the qualitative dimension of an entity’s becoming and influence upon others. Reciprocal transactions account for the mutual exchanges of power, creativity, and values in and between organized and changing entities.111

Certainly insight into the question of primacy of conscience can be gained by focusing the exploration through any of these given lenses, but understanding the concept of bi-polar power is uniquely illuminating as it interprets agency.

Given the prevalence of an array of psychological diagnoses incorporating the word “bi-polar,” from the outset it is important to clearly state that the term is not being employed in accord with DSM-VI nomenclature for any given clinical psychological diagnostic category.112 Rather, “bi-polar power refers to the capacity of each element within the system and the system as a whole to receive and to provide influence.”113 The bi-polar character of power is precisely in the combination and interaction of both agency and receptivity.114 As such, no given party, be it the individual or the Church, is solely a source of influence or, conversely, the recipient of influence. Every entity, whether an individual or social one, is caught up in an inextricable web of agential and receptive interactions through the exercise of both agential and receptive power.

Graham, revealing his mooring in process theology, describes agential power as “the energy by which creativity reaches its goals, and which complements the capacity of

111 Graham, Care of Persons 68-69. For further elaboration on these five psychosystemic connectors, see Care of Persons 49-69, esp. 62-65.


113 Graham, Care of Persons 63.

114 Ibid.
organized structures to be receptive.”\textsuperscript{115} Creation comes into being by virtue of agential power which, in turn, presumes receptive power. Ultimately, and most broadly understood, power is “…the capacity to influence and to be influenced by the environment”\textsuperscript{116} and, more specifically, power is a manifestation and expression of the relationality of agency, both by way of initiation and reception.

Psychosystemic Pastoral Theology and Social Cognitive Theory

Although Graham clearly made advances upon the limitations identified in Hiltner’s original work, certainly other pastoral theologians have as well. Nevertheless, Graham’s particular accomplishment and its now well established position within the field of pastoral theology is uniquely suited for this research regarding agency precisely because of both its systemic perspective and its appreciation for agency. Recalling the thesis of this dissertation, a constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of conscience in the Catholic tradition, when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn from a SCT view of agency, is a critical resource for helping contemporary U.S. Catholics and their spiritual guides to make moral decisions that are informed but not controlled by the established tradition of the Church. Few, if any, pastoral theologies are better suited to interpret and integrate SCT’s view of agency than psychosystemic pastoral theology. A cursory overview will quickly demonstrate the resonance of the distinct, yet similar, systemic theories that interpret agency in a manner that provides a corrective for the limitations of an individualistic perspective by integrating a systemic perspective without losing sight of and appreciation for the individual. In short, both

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 262.
Graham’s and Bandura’s theories affirm, reinforce and expand the necessary agential foundation of a personalist view of primacy of conscience.

Although not without nuance and difference, agential power as defined within the psychosystemic perspective fundamentally resonates with Bandura’s definition of agency. For Bandura, agency means the capacity “…to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions.” At a minimum, “making things happen by one’s actions” presumes both agential power as a source of influence and receptive power which reflects the structured context being affected or influenced.

The psychosystemic perspective is both supported and elaborated by Bandura’s SCT and research. Similar to Graham’s theoretical framing, SCT posits that human functioning results from a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. This dynamic interplay functions such that “…internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally.” This bi-directionality essentially corresponds to Graham’s bi-polar power and view of reciprocal transactions, consequently according to Bandura, agency functions interactively for the individual and the social system:

Although the self is socially constituted, by exercising self-influence human agents operate generatively and proactively, not just reactively, to shape the character of their social systems. In these agentic transactions, people are

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118 Graham, Care of Persons 63-64.

119 Bandura, Social Foundations of Thought and Action.

producers as well as products of social systems. Personal agency and social structure operate interdependently.¹²¹

Therefore at the core, and most critically, SCT examines the reciprocal and interactive agential framework within which personal and social dynamics emerge and are operative such that one cannot be fully understood in isolation from the other. Like the psychosystemic perspective, this framing of agency facilitates understanding and integrating individual and communal agential dynamics. Both must be present if the Catholic view of primacy of conscience is to assist parishioners and priests, and become more fully intelligible to the tradition itself. Defining and explicating dimensions of agency are beneficial, if not essential, for interpreting the meaning and function of primacy of conscience, especially from a personalist Catholic viewpoint. The psychosystemic perspective and SCT present agency in a way that supports the personalist interpretation of primacy of conscience and its prioritization of the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters while not losing sight of the importance of the communal agency of the Church tradition.

In exploring a personalist Catholic viewpoint, Chapter 3 will situate agency within the debate between the legalistic and personalist schools regarding primacy of conscience. The principal thrust of this examination of primacy of conscience will be that agency is a critical element in understanding the meaning and function of primacy of conscience within the relationship between the Church as a social group and the individual as a member—a primacy whose structure implicitly places the concept of agency at the center as interdependent of and at times in conflict with the social group,

¹²¹ Ibid., 15.
the Church. Further, Chapter 4 will enhance this discussion with both a broad examination of individual and communal agential dynamics from a SCT systemic perspective as well as specific dimensions and factors operative in the exercise of agency itself. Yet to come full circle within the present chapter, a brief examination and application of bi-polar agency from a systemic perspective to our previous vignette is in order.  

Vignette from a Systemic Perspective of Agency

We can readily concretize this conversation regarding agency from a systemic perspective that identifies a bi-polar power consisting of agential and receptive dimensions by revisiting the brief pastoral vignette of Sue. It will serve as an application of the pastoral theological method which opens a venue for understanding this concrete human experience and relational dynamic. Given the bi-polar character of power, it is necessary to examine this question from both the position of Sue and the Church as they interact. The first examination will be from the perspective of the Church exercising agential power and Sue manifesting receptive power and the second examination will be the reverse. One irrefutable explicit intent of the Church’s teaching is that it makes a difference or has influence in how Catholics understand and attempt or strive to live their lives. It is intended, if not expected, to be influential and formative in a Catholic’s life. Sue certainly acknowledges this in her recognition of and respect for engaging the Church’s teaching. She is neither ignorant nor simplistic in her engagement of her tradition. Over the course of Sue’s life through a variety of

122 Clearly Bandura’s counterpart term bi-directionality could be applied here as well, but for both sake of ease and given the more extensive review of Graham’s term bi-polar, the use of Bandura’s term will be withheld until Chapter 4 when his theory is addressed in detail. Most importantly, the outcome of the illustration will be unaffected, as the concept behind the terms is essentially the same.
sources, from parents and family members to priests and religious education teachers, the Church has exercised agential power and influence in the formation of her worldview just as she has expressed receptive power by incorporating it into herself.

At first blush, it seems relatively straightforward that agential power or influence exercised by the Church is manifest in the teachings of the tradition, yet that alone does not help fully understand or explain her complicated situation. Upon further examination, what becomes immediately apparent is that Sue’s ambiguity in this situation is not simply of her own making. Even if the Church’s teaching on reproduction, especially contraception, were absolutely homogenous, definitive and clear (which, by the way, it is not), Sue’s problem would remain, given that the more foundational source of the problem lies elsewhere. As stated earlier, the Catholic Church’s teaching on moral decision-making itself has an inherent, and largely unrecognized, ambiguity and tension in its position on obedience to the authority of Church teaching and on the obligation to follow one’s conscience.

Historically when the doctrine of primacy of conscience was originally formulated there were views of natural law that argued a rightly informed conscience would be in line with the moral teachings of the Church since there could really be no alternative available. That is, there was a presumed natural affinity between human conscience, natural moral law, and the teaching of the Church. Both the problem and possibility of today is that the assumption of this coherence as well as views of natural law, let alone the Church’s capacity to know it, have been and are being reinterpreted in light of any number of modern advances. Chapter 3 will examine this development in more detail.
Sue’s complication, uncertainty and ambiguity are not simply about the specific topic of contraception. She is also confused about the teachings regarding primacy of conscience or, at the heart of the matter, the relationship of her agency with the Church’s. Just as the Church has influenced her perspective on reproduction, especially in terms of contraception, it has similarly contributed to the formation of her perspective regarding agency and decision-making as reflected in the doctrine of primacy of conscience. In short, Sue’s situation and corresponding struggle regarding moral decision-making, in part, is the by-product of the Church’s influence and agential power in its teaching related to agency. This is the inherently complicated tradition that has been “handed down” to her. Because the Church has both “lost or insufficiently emphasized in contemporary theology” primacy of conscience and the role of agency in addressing important human problems, the individual alone does not shoulder the responsibility for the pastoral problematic at hand. Sue’s receptive power is partly the embodiment of the Church’s agential power and influence as it has communicated theological ambiguity related to primacy of conscience and, therefore, agency.

In reversing the roles, Sue also is in the position of agential power while the Church is positioned in the receptive role. As a faithful and informed Catholic, she is cognizant of the Church’s position on artificial contraception while at the same time being well aware of the Church’s teaching of primacy of conscience, even if somewhat uncertain or unclear of its application. Being positioned within the sacramental vocation of marriage, she has a vantage point of understanding and responsibility both as wife and mother. In light of years of experience in these roles, her conscience, as she understands it, is leading her to take contraceptive measures in order to accomplish what she perceives as the greatest overall good.
On the one hand this direction seems to directly contradict the Church’s specific moral teaching regarding artificial contraception, yet on the other hand it also seems to conjure up and resonate with the Church’s teaching regarding following her conscience—a potentially more profound and deeply rooted teaching. Sue’s agency includes her influence in naming the problem, if not one source of its cause (i.e., confusion and ambiguity in the Church’s doctrine of primacy of conscience).

The Church, in this instance, now stands in the receptive role as it relates to the quandary being presented by Sue. How the Church receives her agential power and influence is less important, at least in the immediate point being made in this research, than the direction itself. That is, whether the Church receives Sue’s power with condemnation and rejection or affirmation and acceptance, the key point is that the Church is acting with receptive power as revealed in a response, whatever that might be. Nevertheless, if the Church receives it by excommunicating her, it is also, in turn, acting agentially. This is an expression of the reciprocal nature of agency identified by Bandura and Graham. This brief analysis illuminates the bi-polar quality of power, even if in very simple and less than comprehensive terms.

One might argue that this is purely theoretical and without consequence, as Sue hardly has power on par with the Church and therefore, in fact, really does not nor cannot truly exercise agential power that really corresponds to the Church being in the position of receptive power. Whether or not that may or may not the case, as one could readily appeal to any number of individuals whose agential power, even if exceptional, has in fact consolidated change in institutions and organizations, it is sufficient in this research to recall that we are not actually dealing with an individual as such or alone, but rather the demographic of individuals,
be they lay or cleric, who constitute and express the agential power being symbolized in this vignette through the person of Sue.

Before moving on to the next chapter, which will engage theological resources regarding primacy of conscience, a pastoral theological claim that is implicitly operative in this research needs to be made explicit. The concept of agency is a theoretical means of framing not only human interaction, but the human person as well and, as such, is an inherently anthropological concept. Similarly, be it specifically the legalistic or the personalist approach to the doctrine of primacy of conscience or the general framework of the Traditionalist or the Revisionist toward the Catholic tradition, clearly a significant, if not primary anthropological claim is at hand. Unless and until the anthropological issue regarding the presence and function of agency within the doctrine of primacy of conscience is recognized and appreciated, it is unlikely that the breadth and depth of the pastoral problematic being presented can be either truly understood and/or ameliorated. The important role of anthropology merits further attention, even if only at this point to underline its vital role.

**Theological Anthropology at the Crux of Pastoral Theology**

Whether or not the most pressing deficiency in pastoral care was or still is the lack of an adequate theological anthropology as claimed by Lapsley, clearly how we understand the human person, theologically or otherwise, factors enormously into how we experience ourselves and the worlds we create.\(^{123}\) From the pastoral theological perspective, ultimately the question of primacy of conscience, let alone the more foundational consideration of human agency, is grounded in the question of and necessity

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for a theological anthropology. How do we theologically understand the human person’s existence and experience within the human community? The conversation is clearly not exhausted by appealing merely to the spectrum of sciences and their informative and divergent claims, as they generally and intentionally lack the theological perspective. Nevertheless, they are a critical conversation partner in the question and serve well as a significant starting place.

Pastoral theology necessarily incorporates theological anthropology, whether or not it is explicitly identified, and the sciences make a vital contribution to the conversation. Wolfhart Pannenberg claims that theological anthropology’s starting point should not be dogmatic presuppositions about humanity, but rather should “…turn its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology and examine the findings of these disciplines with an eye to implications that may be relevant to religion and theology.”124 Within Catholic theology this perspective is well established from Aquinas to Karl Rahner, at least in implicitly and in principle, given the theological axiom of grace building upon nature.125 As will be evident in the next chapter, these resources have been overlooked and/or minimized in the process of understanding primacy of conscience as an expression of interactive human agency.


125 This is not an endorsement of the inherent dualism reflected in this traditional theological construct that continues to remain in force within significant Catholic theological conversations, but merely its recognition.
Inasmuch as conscience assumes an individual interacting within a context of an array of relationships, the question of a psychological theory of personality naturally emerges as a potential candidate to orient a theological anthropology. Casting a vote for a particular candidate has great bearing on the direction of this research and its subsequent under-girding theological anthropology, since “…each personality theory is an attempt to give some insight into the complex process of identity formation, meaning making, and interaction with others and the society.”126 Though a number of personality theories and, therefore anthropologies are possible, this research will limit itself to the anthropological mooring of SCT for the following reasons.

First and foremost, as has been already noted, SCT explicitly and extensively explores and explains the interactive dynamic of human agency that is particularly relevant for research on primacy of conscience. Secondly, without overthrowing or losing the insights rooted in psychological theories that highlight the individual,127 SCT’s foundation within social psychology and its systemic perspective invite a new voice into the pastoral theological conversation that has, until relatively recently, been predominantly listening to the more individualistically oriented psychological theories.128

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127 It is important to note that how a psychological theory predominantly presents itself does not necessarily encompass the breadth of its theoretical perspective. For example, psychoanalytic theory at surface in its practice may appear highly individualistic, but Freud in his theory, and presumably his practice, clearly took into account social context, be it as limited as the parental and familial or as broad as the societal.

128 Social psychology and therefore SCT have been and are the beneficiaries of conversation and interaction with psychological theories that highlight the individual. These disciplines are highly permeable.
Therefore the anthropological claim of SCT theory and, therefore, a principal one that informs the theological anthropology of this research is that the human experience inherently and necessarily incorporates agency. Or in Bandura’s words, “the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness.”\footnote{Bandura, “Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective,” 1.}

In the quest to “exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life,” individuals depend upon and are formed by a variety of voices and resources in their worlds, not the least of which are those that are considered reflections of the sacred or divine. The Church’s tradition is one such voice and resource in the world, however beneficial or detrimental it may in fact be. Sue and Catholics like her, as they try to live their lives productively, responsibly, and faithfully, are truly affected by the Church’s agency as reflected in its teachings. The next chapter will examine the Church’s teaching and tradition regarding primacy of conscience and, consequently, agency.
CHAPTER THREE

THE PROBLEMATIC TRADITION OF CONSCIENCE

“The truth is that many of the key theological texts on conscience, including very recent ones, can be used either to promote or to curtail personal autonomy. The texts pull in both directions.”130

As the preceding chapter noted, a theological problem regarding primacy of conscience has arisen from pastoral practice: the role and understanding of agency between the individual and the Church’s teaching or tradition. Although any number of factors may contribute to the struggle many Catholics experience with both following their consciences and being obedient to the authority of the Church, the inevitability of agency in the face of ambiguity within the tradition will be the focus of this research.131 This chapter will explore the Catholic tradition regarding primacy of conscience through the disciplines of historical and moral theology. Nevertheless, this dissertation is a pastoral theology and, as such, even though it draws upon other disciplines to inform itself, it is not to be confused with the type of work and corresponding methodologies of those other disciplines. In other words, this chapter is intended to inform the pastoral theological process of this dissertation, but is neither historical nor moral theology.

130 Hogan, 5.

131 For example, developmental issues related to authority, cultural, ethnic, or gender variables that may also factor into and necessarily affect the relationship between the individual and the Church.
Therefore, the historical and moral theology employed in this chapter present the current context in which this pastoral theology is located, but this research does not attempt to directly refute or reinforce any position from a historical or moral theological methodology.

An overview will be helpful prior to addressing the tradition of conscience. This chapter will engage the Catholic tradition in order to explore what resources the Church has to offer in order to understand and address questions regarding primacy of conscience. Historical and moral theology will be the principal resources employed. After establishing a working theological framework of primacy of conscience, a historical review will broadly track the doctrine of primacy of conscience from Aquinas to and through the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent consolidation of the legalistic and personalist perspectives regarding the doctrine. These two perspectives reflect the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools respectively and will be illuminated through a review of the Basic Goods Theory and the Proportionate Reason Theory. This summary examination will demonstrate the incontestable ambiguity in the tradition and thereby argue for the necessity of both understanding and exercising agency when considering primacy of conscience. As stated earlier, if the tradition has not adequately addressed the question at hand or even has contributed to its complication and lack of clarity, pastoral theology attempts to refine and refocus the question for contemporary exploration. The pastoral theological method utilized in this dissertation functions constructively by retrieving and recovering, as well as by emphasizing and elaborating, insufficiently engaged or developed theological concerns.
Catholic historical and moral theology, each in their own way, surface two points directly related to this research—the presence of ambiguity and the necessity of agency. First, both theologies present a tradition that has diversity and, therefore, corresponding ambiguity. Hogan’s historical work surfaces diversity and ambiguity directly and explicitly, whereas the moral theology of Grisez, McCormick and Curran manifest it indirectly and implicitly by virtue of representing differing schools of thought (i.e., legalistic and personalist). Second, this shared conclusion of a diverse tradition that inherently faces ambiguity necessitates understanding agency more fully when examining primacy of conscience. Further, although both theological methods point to the question of agency and address it within the limits of their disciplines, neither provide a constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of conscience, when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn from a SCT view of agency, though they do implicitly make the case for it.

As stated in Chapter 1, the technical term Magisterium will be keep to a minimum when referring to the Church’s teaching role, as the functional terms “normative Church teaching” and/or “tradition” are more immediate, if not clearer, in meaning. Some of the most salient theological questions that have surfaced in pastoral practice regarding the question of primacy of conscience have been illustrated in the vignette about Sue. Distilled down, those theological questions are encapsulated in how a Catholic, whether lay person or cleric, responsibly and morally navigates the ambiguity inherent in the two differing approaches within the Church’s tradition regarding moral decision-making. The choice often is framed as “simply and always obey the normative teaching of the
Church,” or “follow one’s conscience that is informed, but not bound, by that very teaching.”

The Church's teachings on conscience and its primacy seem to assume an approach within which an individual potentially can make informed moral and religious decisions effectively.\(^{132}\) Nevertheless, as briefly noted in the preceding chapter’s example of the Second Vatican Council’s own recovery and development of the concept of conscience, historically the Church’s teachings regarding conscience, let alone its primacy, have neither been consistent nor readily available. In short, the Catholic doctrine of primacy of conscience has been diversely understood and employed as the tradition’s way to understand the challenge of managing religious and moral questions while remaining faithful to the Church. The ambiguity of this complicated reality and history has, in turn, contributed to the pastoral problem at hand.

Currently, an understanding of the doctrine of primacy of conscience remains unresolved not only within the academic arena, but also within the day-to-day existence of Catholics where its presence is requisite in order “to do good and avoid evil”\(^{133}\) and its absence is problematic. Inevitably any number of factors contributes to this lack of clarity, yet there is a structural ambiguity in the tradition that gives rise to the difficulty some Catholics experience

\(^{132}\) Although the term “individual” will be employed, this research recognizes that an individual inherently and necessarily exists within a community and society. Use of this term is not reflective of an underlying individualistic anthropology. The anthropology inherent in Graham’s and Bandura’s theories reflect the socially situated context of an individual—an individual is necessarily a social individual.

\(^{133}\) United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Catechism of the Catholic Church (St. Louis, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 438. Even though this catechism is academic in character and substance, in this instance this text is intentionally and principally being used given its authoritative status for the intended audience of lay and clerical Catholics.
when attempting to integrate following conscience and being obedient to the authority of the

Church that merits particular focus. As Hogan aptly notes:

The Catholic approach to conscience is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand conscience is regarded as the most fundamental and directly personal way that the individual apprehends moral goodness and truth. The Church’s constant but little publicized teaching is that conscience must always be obeyed. However, there is also an expectation that the judgments of conscience will be in agreement with Church teaching. As a result there is an immediate and inevitable tension between conscience and the other moral authorities in Catholicism.\(^{134}\)

Hogan argues “…that the current disagreements about the authority of conscience vis-à-vis Church teachings are an inevitable consequence of the Church’s failure to confront the ambiguities in its own understanding of conscience.”\(^{135}\) As this chapter moves to “clarify unresolved matters in the tradition” through a brief historical review of conscience and its primacy, a principal outcome will be confronting the illusion of theological homogeneity within the tradition. Not only will this review illuminate some of the origins of the conundrum of the pastoral problem identified, but more importantly it will serve to demonstrate the inescapability of exercising agency when making moral decisions and/or exercising primacy of conscience given the ambiguity operative in the tradition. The presence of theological heterogeneity necessitates reflection and choice which, in short, demands exercising agency which must, therefore, be adequately understood and nuanced in order to do so responsibly. An “informed conscience”—the classical Catholic term in moral theology—presumes being informed about agency and not simply theological topics. An informed conscience is a term that identifies that the individual is engaged with and therefore informed by relevant

\(^{134}\) Hogan, 2.

\(^{135}\) Ibid.
resources regarding the moral question at hand. The Church teaching is considered a principal, if not the principal, relevant resource to engage.

The problem is not that Catholicism has a fundamentally and irreversibly flawed tradition of conscience, but rather that the understanding and application of the role of conscience, particularly its primacy, has been lost and/or underdeveloped in the course of time. During different historical periods various aspects of the doctrine were considered for a variety of reasons, creating holes or even contradictions that resulted, on closer examination, in an ambiguous status for the teaching. This ambiguity is particularly pronounced in the relationship between the individual’s agency and the authority or agency of the Church’s teaching. How can agency within the context of the relationship between an individual and the Church be better understood and shared? This project addresses that question precisely at the point of an individual’s agency as interpreted through the doctrine of primacy of conscience. Therefore, conscience is not the question, but rather its relationship to Church teaching and tradition by way of its agency and primacy!

The principal thrust of this examination of primacy of conscience is that agency is a critical element in understanding the meaning and function of primacy of conscience within the relationship between the social group (as reflected in the terms tradition and authority) and the individual (as reflected in the term primacy of conscience). Primacy of conscience offers a structure of decision-making that inherently places the concept of agency at the center as interdependent with the tradition and at times in conflict with it.
Primacy of Conscience Examined

Before engaging the historical review of the tradition, it will be helpful to establish first a basic understanding of primacy of conscience and the limits that will be operative in this research regarding conscience. As defined by Catholic theologian Charles Curran and widely agreed upon across both the legalistic and personalist perspectives, “conscience is generally understood as the judgment about the morality of an act to be done or omitted or already done or omitted by the person.”

Although the concept of conscience emerges even in biblical literature, this study’s point of departure addresses the idea of conscience (conscientia) and its primacy beginning with the work of Thomas Aquinas, because of both its clarity of articulation and enduring influence. Aquinas’s principal discussion of the topic of conscience appears in the *Summa Theologica*. His early forays into the conversation regarding conscience occurred in Commentary on the Sentences (a text comparable to a dissertation) and *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* (questions 16 & 17) while he was at the University of Paris from 1257 until 1259.

Aquinas engages what was at that time the critical debate regarding the difference between the judgment of conscience by which some particular thing or action is judged good or

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136 Curran, 3.


139 Hogan, 75.

140 For the development of this teaching in the scholastic period, see Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, vol. 2 (Louvain, Belgium: Abbaye du Mont César, 1948), 103-350.
evil (syneidesis) and the “...habit of practical reason by which one knows the first principles of the natural law—do good and avoid evil, act according to right reason” (synderesis).\(^{141}\) In sum, Aquinas understood conscience as the application of the known first principles of natural law (synderesis) to the particularities of one’s conduct (syneidesis).\(^{142}\) Further, it is within this tension between the particularity of syneidesis and the generality of synderesis that Aquinas articulates the role of the primacy of conscience.\(^{143}\) My research will focus upon primacy of conscience within the arena of syneidesis, or the appropriateness of individual conduct, and is not a full analysis of all factors in any given moral decision.

A key factor in the discussion of conscience is the long-standing doctrine of primacy of conscience. Primacy of conscience, briefly stated, is the obligation to follow one’s informed conscience, even if it differs from Church teaching.\(^{144}\) It presumes knowledge of and engagement with the Church’s tradition and teachings, yet it orders the relationship in a way that retains limited freedom, responsibility, and ultimately, personal agency; that is, following one’s conscience cannot be mere conformity, as choice and responsibility are inescapable dimensions of human existence and supported by Church teaching. At the same time, neither is

\(^{141}\) Curran, 7.

\(^{142}\) Hogan, 60.

\(^{143}\) After having addressed the nature of conscience in the “Pars Prima” of the Summa Theologica (question 79 article, 13), Aquinas proceeds to deal with the authority of conscience in the “Prima Secundae” of the Summa Theologica (question 19, article 5). The latter text is particularly relevant to his discussion of primacy of conscience.

it simply a matter of substituting one’s own predilections for Church authority, since
conscience is always informed by and engaged with the moral tradition of the Church.

Primacy of conscience, dating back to Aquinas,145 states “every conscience, true or
false, is binding in the sense that to act against conscience is always wrong.”146 The Catholic
tradition states that “every one of us is bound to obey [our own] conscience”147 as informed by
“a law inscribed by God”—a tradition reinforced in the promulgation of the new 1983 Code of
Canon Law.148 How primacy functions in relationship to conscience might be most succinctly
expressed in the following decree:

Women and men have the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as
personally to make moral decisions. They must not be forced to act
contrary to their conscience. Nor must they be prevented from acting
according to their conscience, especially in religious matters.149

For example, if the Church did not consider slavery a sin, but the person’s conscience
considered it such, it would be immoral for that person to practice slavery regardless of the
Church’s permissive stance. To conform to a teaching one does not believe is tantamount to
going against conscience, or in other words, not recognizing and exercising its primacy.

145 Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I-II, 19, 5.
92.
148 James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel, eds. The Code of
should be noted that within Catholicism the code of canon law is both scholarly and
authoritative, not unlike the official catechism.

149 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 439.
Finally, it should be noted that the obligation to follow conscience is not the assurance of error-free judgment.\textsuperscript{150}

This position continues to be reinforced in the doctrine of the Church, even if relatively submerged or misunderstood. The ultimate point of choice and responsibility resides in the individual who resides in the Church. Conscience, inasmuch as it is human, cannot be adequately understood, let alone exercised, in a theoretical or practical vacuum devoid of operative constructs for an individual’s agency. The doctrine of primacy of conscience implicitly speaks of such agency, yet these dimensions have been “lost” in the doctrine’s understanding and/or are not yet fully understood and articulated.

The very word “primacy” implies a hierarchy of power that bears implications for the understanding and exercise of conscience. Yet whether one attends to the limited space afforded conscience and its primacy in the texts intended for the everyday Catholic, or one examines the current debates among Catholic moral theologians, the tradition of conscience does not currently command adequate attention, especially in terms of the nuance of agency and power. The Vatican’s current Catechism of the Catholic Church, a hefty 803 page text, has only five pages dedicated to the discussion of conscience in general and primacy of conscience merits little more than a mention. The section of conscience is placed within Part 3 of the text (Life in Christ) which comprises 190 pages, including 113 pages discussing the Ten Commandments and normative moral teachings.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 441.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 421-612.
This dissertation will exclusively address moral decisions where primacy of conscience and agency are determinative in outcomes opposed to the Church’s normative teaching. Primacy of conscience emerges as a possibility only if and when a conflict or difference with the tradition exists. This research is focused upon and limited to those exceptional moments when conscience differs from dominant strands of tradition and authority precisely because that is the only context in which the possibility of primacy of conscience might be exercised. Further, it is predominantly within that arena of tension and difference that complications and pastoral needs emerge regarding the exercise of conscience. It is certainly both recognized and emphasized that conscience is often in accord with and affirming of tradition and authority, but those moments and dynamics seldom introduce complications as well as pastoral needs and therefore do not merit the same degree of attention nor include the possibility of primacy of conscience being operative.

Finally, the distinction between authoritative and infallible teaching will be maintained as well in order to remain within the boundaries of *syneidesis* (i.e., the particularities of one’s conduct). Authoritative teaching from the Church bears varying degrees of weight or leverage, yet at the end of the day remains non-infallible teaching.152 This teaching, in fact, constitutes the vast majority of Church teaching and certainly is what most commonly presents itself in pastoral settings and questions of conscience. Infallible teachings in the Catholic Church, regardless of how one understands them and whether or not they are accepted, remain at an extreme minimum. Presently the Church has only two doctrines that have been proclaimed as infallible teaching—papal infallibility and the immaculate conception of Mary. Neither are

direct moral teachings from the Church on a specific issue and, as such, are engaged in different theological arenas and are not relevant for this research.\textsuperscript{153} Therefore, the Church’s authoritative or non-infallible teaching regarding any particular moral topic chosen for the purpose of demonstration or illumination in this dissertation fall within that realm. Granted “…‘non-infallible’ is a convoluted way of saying ‘capable of being wrong,’\textsuperscript{154} and my personal preference would be to simply use the term “fallible,” nevertheless the term “non-infallible” is the dominant nomenclature within these Catholic theological conversations and will consequently be used when necessary.

\textbf{Historical Review}

The long and varied history of conscience in the Catholic tradition will be reviewed in summary fashion vis-à-vis several critical historical moments—the Reformation and subsequent Council of Trent (1545-1563), the rise of modernism and the subsequent “Syllabus of Errors” (1907), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the subsequent consolidation of two principal schools of Catholic moral theology (i.e.,

\textsuperscript{153} The doctrine of papal infallibility was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX at the First Vatican Council in 1870. The First Vatican Council’s document “\textit{Pastor Aeternus}” states that “the Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith (c.f. Lk. 22:32)—he proclaims in an absolute decision a doctrine pertaining to faith and morals.” This quote is taken from “\textit{Pastor Aeternus}” and reiterated by the Second Vatican Council in “The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church” in \textit{Vatican Council II}, 380. Both this statement regarding papal infallibility and the immaculate conception of Mary pertain to faith and not morals. Pius IX is the only Pope that has formally and historically made this type of proclamation. This is attested to in Henrich Denzinger’s \textit{Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum} (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1995), a text that serves as a dominant, if not the principal, source and collection of important Church documents.

the Traditionalist and the Revisionist) as well as two corresponding distinct perspectives regarding conscience (i.e., the legalistic and the personalist). Key influential figures from those periods that will be engaged are Martin Luther, John Henry Newman, Germain Grisez, Richard McCormick, and Charles Curran. The first two figures will be discussed in summary fashion addressing the broader historical background. The latter three will be explored in some detail inasmuch as they represent contemporary voices of the larger debate of Christian morality and ethics from the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools as well as the legalistic and personalist perspectives.

Seminal concepts and expressions of conscience pre-dated the work of Aquinas by thousands of years. In terms of philosophical influences, in the Greek tradition, reaching as far back as the fifth century B.C.E., Democritus of Abdera is credited with what is possibly the first written use of the term *syneidesis* in reflecting upon conscience.\(^{155}\) In the Latin tradition, dating back as far as 100 B.C.E., both Cicero (106-46 B.C.E.) and Seneca (3 B.C.E. - 65 C.E.) employ and consider the term *conscientia*, which is roughly the Latin counterpart to the Greek word *syneidesis*.\(^{156}\) In terms of Jewish and Christian religious influences, scripture scholars have aptly noted its presence in the Hebrew bible,\(^{157}\) the Talmud and Jewish casuistry,\(^{158}\) let alone New Testament

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157 Ibid., 671-676.

158 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines casuistry as “that part of ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules of religion and morality to particular
studies, particularly the Pauline corpus. These sources and the array of subsequent works that attempt to further enhance an understanding of conscience, from Roman casuistry and Patristics to the Penitential tradition and resources from the early Middle Ages, were the murky theological waters into which Aquinas waded. For as of yet, clarity and systematic articulations of conscience were still a distant horizon. Hogan summarizes the location into which Aquinas enters as follows:

Prior to Aquinas, thinking on the subject [i.e., conscience] is random and disconnected. Although some significant features of both the nature and tasks of conscience had been established, there was no coherent account of the role of conscience in Christian life....Aquinas was both a great synthesizer and an original thinker. One can see this in his work on conscience, which became a benchmark for all subsequent work on this topic.

Although far from resolving all the questions before him, not to mention that Aquinas’ conclusions, even if enjoying favor, were not uncontested, his work significantly clarified and enhanced the debate of his day and largely remains currently in force in its most general instances in which circumstances alter cases or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties.”


160 Scholarship on conscience in this period can be found in Philippe Delhaye, The Christian Conscience (New York: Desclee, 1968).


162 Scholarship on conscience in this period can be found in Timothy Potts, “Conscience,” in Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Recovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600, eds. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

163 Hogan, 85.

164 Ibid.
terms. Yet what is of particular importance here, as noted earlier, is that Aquinas identified the tension between the particularity of *syneidesis* and the generality of *synderesis* as the location of the role of the primacy of conscience. Aquinas framed primacy of conscience as moral possibility and responsibility in the application of the known first principles of natural law (*synderesis*) to the particularities of one’s conduct (*syneidesis*). In that framing he advanced the debate which explicitly examined the question of authority, both of the Church teaching and the individual as one created in the image and likeness of God. In essence, Aquinas was exploring the question of agency between the individual and the Church in their relationship with God. The debate regarding where authority and agency reside within the doctrine of conscience, although far from settled then or even now, was not seen as particularly problematic for several hundred years, even if ultimately very important. Then on October 31, 1517, its importance became extremely clear, as an Augustinian priest put the issue of primacy of conscience front and center in the Church’s life in the form of 95 theses nailed to a Wittenberg door.

**Reformation and Trent**

Martin Luther basically drew upon Aquinas’ doctrine of primacy of conscience as he exercised it in his own life and context, both as he drove the original nail into the door to post his beliefs and throughout the remainder of his life as he steadfastly hammered home his position. In words that resound to this day, as Luther was pressed to retract his writings, he faithfully and adamantly claimed at the Diet of Worms in 1521:

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Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen

“Neither safe nor right to go against conscience” is nothing short of a doctrinal distillation of primacy of conscience.

Religious freedom and conscience were indisputably placed at the forefront of the Reformation. Ernest Zedeen goes so far as to claim that with Luther “…a new era in the history of freedom, that of religious freedom of the individual conscience” was inaugurated that was bound by the Word of God present in the scriptures—not Popes or councils. The Church’s response to Luther, from strict doctrinal positions articulated during the Council of Trent to disciplinary actions to the extreme point of violence, testifies to the hierarchy’s recognition that a vital and volatile issue was at play. Clearly the Church was conscious of the specific challenges Luther presented in the 95 theses themselves and their potential fallout. But probably more importantly, the Church realized the under-girding power and potential threat the exercise of primacy of conscience could and, in this instance did, present. The assumption that the two moral theological strands in the tradition—one strand suggesting that the moral response is to obey the Church’s teaching rooted in natural law and the other strand

166 Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesammtausgabe (Weimar, 1883), 7, 833, 4-9. The translation is Michael Baylor’s in Action and Person, Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 1.


suggesting that the moral response is to follow your conscience as it interprets and applies that teaching—would conveniently and coincidentally coincide was shattered as Luther exercised primacy of conscience. Below the surface of the 95 thesis, therefore, was the question, if not challenge, of agency.

In response to the explicit and implicit challenges born of Luther exercising primacy of conscience, not only as a Catholic but also as a priest, the Church’s hierarchy, vis-à-vis the decisions and declarations of the Council of Trent, systematically initiated a comprehensive attempt to stabilize Catholic doctrinal definitions and corresponding boundaries with commensurate disciplinary actions. In short, the Council of Trent created the equivalent of litmus tests to determine Catholic, or conversely, Protestant identity and, as such, exercised enormous agency. The purpose of this research is not the specific doctrinal or ecclesial statements themselves, but rather how through these various proclamations the Church was simultaneously heightening its agency and suppressing primacy of conscience. Therefore, examining one canon from the Council of Trent will serve to illuminate the degree of agency being exercised, as disagreeing with Church teaching was cast in the gravest of terms—comply or be cast out.

Although the content of the Council of Trent was broad and diverse, the fundamental structure of it was simple, uniform, and unequivocal. Canons were formulaic in their structure; that is, if a person holds a given doctrinal tenet that has been identified as incorrect, they are considered anathema and summarily excommunicated.¹⁶⁹ For example, Canon 14 states:

If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that

no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema.¹⁷⁰

At the time, certainly Lutherans, not to mention other reformers, are in the crosshairs of this canon and the recipients of its anathema. Anathema essentially means a curse from God (see Galatians 1: 8-9) and, by extension, those who are anathema are also excommunicated from the Church. Excommunication, by definition, means not being in communion with the Church. Further, being in communion with the Church was understood, at that time, as the only means of salvation. In short, the array of canons from the Council of Trent, like Canon 14, became the measuring stick by which salvation was assessed, or from the alternative perspective, damnation was identified.

At the surface justification is the explicit theological issue at hand in this canon, yet again it needs to be emphasized that the point being demonstrated here is the extreme degree of agency that under girds the theological statement itself and the consequences it has if a person exercises primacy of conscience. Claiming that disagreement with Church teaching, or basically the exercise of primacy of conscience, results in excommunication (i.e., damnation) is nothing short of the Church’s most extreme expression of agency with dire consequences for the doctrine.

The overall result of the Council of Trent was that primacy of conscience and with it a certain understanding of agency quickly found itself being submerged or worse within the tradition. Clearly it was not lost by happenstance, but rather was consciously and intentionally reinterpreted and/or avoided precisely because of the perceived and/or real threat it presented.

regarding the hierarchy’s agency. A plethora of issues were inevitably at play within the Church during the Reformation and beyond, yet for the purposes of this research the relationship between the agency of the Church and the individual is the focus. In short, the Church had a tradition of accepting conscience and its primacy, though it was not very well developed and not very central, even in Aquinas’ works, but under the press of the Reformation’s emphasis upon individual choice and conscience, the Church shifted and lost or subordinated the doctrine altogether.

Understandably the Church and its hierarchy historically made claims to authority and consequently agency, all the while without denying that individuals exercised agency as well. After all, what is the long standing doctrine of free will other than, among other things, a fundamental and profound expression of individual human agency within the context of the social group? Nevertheless, there was never a clear articulation as to the relationship between the agency of the Church and that of the individual. It is the question of Graham’s bi-polar power or Bandura’s bi-directionality in which agency functions interactively for the individual and the social system that still lacked a sufficient articulation. This lack of clarity regarding how authority and agency are shared was manifest in the earlier debates regarding primacy of conscience. Yet after the Council of Trent, at least from the hierarchy’s perspective, the confusion had come to an end as it basically became not a question of how, but if agency was shared. Agency was

\[171\] Without addressing the psychology and anthropology operative at the time the concept of free will was articulated, suffice it to say that free will is understood as that which allows humans the capacity and necessity of choice (i.e., agency), even to the extent of potentially differing from what is considered to be God’s will.
at the fore, and the hierarchy had received, not surprisingly at their own hand, the lion’s share or more.

Certainly there were any number of pre-Trent and Augustinian teachings that the Council of Trent explicitly tried to defend and stabilize, yet the principal point in this historical review is to recognize two outcomes distinct from the theological and/or ecclesiological specifics addressed. First, the doctrine of primacy of conscience became submerged or lost after, what might be considered, one of its most public expressions in the person of Luther. Second, the Council of Trent ushered in what was to become the foundational paradigm of agency for the Church’s teaching for roughly the next four hundred years, with the scale radically tipping to the Church’s side. McCormick summarizes this paradigm of teaching and agency that had it roots in the Council of Trent’s reaction to the Reformation and became enhanced across time until the Second Vatican Council. Principally there were the following three characteristics:

… (1) an undue distinction between the teaching and learning function in the Church, with a consequent unique emphasis on the right to teach— and relatively little on the duty to learn and the sources of learning in the Church; (2) an undue identification of the teaching function with a single group in the Church, the hierarchy; (3) an undue isolation of a single aspect of teaching, the judgmental, the decisive, the ‘final word.’ Thus it was taken for granted by many that on any moral problem, however complex, *Roma locuta causa finita*. The term ‘Magisterium’ came to mean the hierarchical issuance of authoritative decrees.¹⁷²

This *modus operandi* of the Church regarding teaching was highly juridical, whether pertaining to issues of faith or morality, and resulted in consolidating an imbalance in agency between the individual and the Church precisely in terms of the

dynamics Graham and Bandura identify as initiation and reception. Recall from Chapter 2 that most broadly understood, power is “...the capacity to influence and to be influenced by the environment” and, more specifically, power is a manifestation and expression of the relationality of agency, both by way of initiation and reception. More often than not rather than speak of power as such, Catholic theology generally uses the term “authority” which implicitly incorporates the concept of power as it relates to the Magisterium. Basically, the Church had become the dominant initiator and the individual the submissive receiver. Although the individual theoretically retained the possibility of differing from Church teaching given the doctrine of primacy of conscience was still in the record of the tradition, its exercise came at quite a cost, as such difference was judged as sinful and wrong with the consequence being identified in eternal terms. Although the concept of social persuasion was not operative at the time, it does not mean the dynamic itself was not functioning. Chapter 4 will address the dynamic of social persuasion, both in terms of its positive and negative affects.

The pastoral theological question of whether or not something has been “lost” in the tradition is particularly apropos for this project, as this historical review already reveals that critical theological dimensions of conscience have been demonstrably lost or insufficiently emphasized, at least in terms of their accessibility and prevalence within

173 Graham, Care of Persons 262.

174 A pastoral theological and social psychological framing of human agency and power is used throughout this dissertation given its specific focus. Nevertheless, these terms do not contradict a Catholic understanding of authority as it relates to the human person and community. Any consideration of the divine origins of authority are not within the purview of this research, yet for a summary discussion of the topic see G. J. McMorrow, “Authority,” in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2d ed. vol. 1 (New York: Thomson & Gale, 2003), 918-921; and S. E. Donlon, “Ecclesiastical Authority,” in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2d ed. vol. 1 (New York: Thomson & Gale, 2003), 922-923.
the thought of laity and clergy alike. Further, and very much to the point of this research, this historical dynamic arising from pastoral practice, writ large in the Council of Trent’s response to the Reformation, surfaced and heightened the theological problem regarding primacy of conscience—the role and understanding of agency between the individual and the Church’s teaching or tradition.

Modernism

The 19th and early 20th centuries also serve as an illuminating, even a powerfully reinforcing period, regarding the submergence or even rejection of the doctrine of primacy of conscience and its implicit connection to agency between the Church and individual. For over three hundred years the Council of Trent’s definitions and boundaries continued to be tested by way of the differing theological and religious perspectives emerging from the variety of Reformation Churches (e.g., Lutheran, Presbyterian, Calvinist, Anabaptist), yet this was far from the Church’s only challenge to its authority and agency as related to individuals as well as social groups. The Church’s claim to be the sole, or at least primary, voice of knowledge and truth was also called into question by philosophers and intellectuals. In a sense, Descartes’ philosophical “cogito ergo sum” paralleled Luther’s religious “Here I stand, I can do no other,” as yet another profound anthropological expression of the individual and agency.

Without attempting to review the array of philosophies over that period of time or trying to pinpoint what might be considered the beginning of modernism, suffice it say that the collective impact of the burgeoning philosophical and intellectual investigations into the questions of epistemology, human experience, reality, and God radically challenged the Church. Unlike bygone eras, at this moment in history the teaching of the Church was often seen as anything but the source of privileged authority and insight. Rather than being sought to
shed light upon the matters at hand, the Church was regularly identified by many of these philosophers and intellectuals as casting a shadow that was stifling or even strangling human development and progress.

For the purposes of this historical review, the 19th century will be the point of entry for modernism and the Church’s subsequent response to it, including one of its most recent explicit and forceful attempts to suppress primacy of conscience. Whether or not 19th century progressive thinkers like Darwin, Freud, Marx, Hegel and Nietzsche as well as the implications of their theories served as “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” modernism clearly was perceived as a threat by the Church to its authority and agency, not unlike the Reformation. As an expression of the perceived collective possibilities for human progress, modernism focused on the capacity of individuals and societies to create and advance their environments and experience, especially by employing reason and its by-products of the sciences and technology. From biology and psychology to economics and philosophy, modernism thrived upon a critical analysis of

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175 Some scholars would consider Descartes as “early modern” and his philosophy as the harbinger of modernism. Certainly the Church’s theology, from the point of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* and throughout the Enlightenment and the Kantian revolution, was critiqued and challenged by the emergence of what has come to be known as modernism. This critique and challenge is symbolized, but not exhausted, by the philosophical exploration of epistemology, objectivity, subjectivity, and interpretation. Modernism is a relatively elastic designation and, as such, the 19th century as an entry point is not a claim about this being particular historical marker for philosophy. Rather, the 19th century principally is employed in this research for two reasons. First, it marks when the Church began formally using the term “modernism” in its proclamations. Second, the 19th century marks a profound consolidation of the Church’s response to the philosophical and intellectual initiatives that began with Descartes, particularly in terms of the understanding of conscience. For a summary discussion of the Catholic perspective on modernism and the modernist movement, see J. J. Hean, “Modernism,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. vol. 9 (New York: Thomson & Gale, 2003), 752-757.
the human experience through a variety of lenses with the goal of furthering human progress and weeding out whatever seemed to hobble its achievement.

Not surprisingly, the Church was seen as responsible for impeding progress in a variety of ways, yet the claim to divine revelation and its inherent natural-supernatural dualism probably stands head and shoulders over the rest. Modernism considered the Church’s teaching to be simply human products that, as such, may change over time in light of new and more sophisticated understandings. The concept of an objective unchanging truth that the Church was exclusively, or at least particularly, privy to know and teach authoritatively was ironically, if you will, anathema to the modernists.176 The Church, for its part, responded not unlike it did with the Reformation. As in the review of the Council of Trent, the reason for examining the Church’s response to modernism is not the specific doctrinal or ecclesial statements themselves, but rather to show how through these various proclamations the Church was simultaneously heightening its agency (specifically initiation) and suppressing primacy of conscience. Therefore, exploring three related principal documents from this period will serve to demonstrate the Church’s on-going, if not explicitly enhancing, suppression and/or rejection of the doctrine of primacy of conscience.

176 The encyclical and decree The Syllabus of Errors: Condemning the Errors of the Modernists (Lamentabili Sane) by Pope Pius IX used the term “modernists” in response to the teachings of Jesuit priest Father George Tyrrell as well as the work of Father Alfred Loisy, as reflected in his text The Gospel and the Church (London: Isbister & Co., 1903). Seldom was this label self applied, nor were these intellectuals even inclined to self identity as a coherent group. For scholarly discussion on these individuals and their era, see John Ratté, Three Modernists: Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, William L. Sullivan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968).
In 1864 Pope Pius IX issued the encyclical “Condemning Certain Errors” that addressed the issue of modernism by, as its title notes, “condemning certain errors.”\footnote{177} Attached to this encyclical was the decree “The Syllabus of Errors: Condemning the Errors of the Modernists.” This encyclical and decree were Pius IX’s attempt to retain dominant authority and agency in teaching not only within the Church itself, but also in relationship to all individuals and society at large. He denounces modernism’s challenging tenets:

… they chiefly tend to this, that that salutary influence be impeded and (even) removed, which the Catholic Church, according to the institution and command of her Divine Author, should freely exercise even to the end of the world -- not only over private individuals, but over nations, peoples, and their sovereign princes; and (tend also) to take away that mutual fellowship and concord of counsels between Church and State which has ever proved itself propitious and salutary, both for religious and civil interests.\footnote{178}

Exercising influence “not only over \textit{[emphasis added]} private individuals, but over nations, peoples, and their sovereign princes” is inherently a claim to agency (i.e., initiation) that is dominant, if not grandiose. “Over” implies, if not demands, a hierarchical order such that all opinions and perspectives are not afforded equal weight or agency.

In “The Syllabus of Errors,” Pius IX enumerated 65 specific errors of modernism that were officially condemned and, therefore, carried with them penalties comparable to the canons of the Council of Trent. For example, as it most specifically relates to the doctrine of primacy of conscience, error number 7 states: “In proscribing errors, the

\footnote{177}{Although modernism encompasses an array of what was deemed erroneous by the Church, it actually had subsets and, in this instance, it was naturalism that was specifically being condemned.}

\footnote{178}{Carlen, \textit{The Papal Encyclicals}, vol. 1, 382.}
Church cannot demand any internal assent from the faithful by which the judgments she
issues are to be embraced.” 179 Or in other words, the Church’s teaching can and, by
virtue of authoritative documents such as “The Syllabus of Errors,” does demand internal
assent from the faithful regarding what the Church judges as erroneous. Given the
inherently confusing structure of the document itself, that is, the double-negative quality
of the text, it is worth making a point of clarification. Lest it be misunderstood due to the
style of writing in the document, anything said in the text is an error as it falls under the
overall umbrella of “The Syllabus of Errors.” So the above example is ultimately
proclaiming that in proscribing errors, the Church can demand any internal assent from
the faithful by which the judgments she issues are to be embraced. It parallels the
confusion of using the words like non-infallible, yet it was the medium of expression of
that day within the Church.

In addition to Pius IX’s assertion of the Church’s right to exercise influence over
social groups and their leaders, “Condemning Certain Errors” in 1864 quotes, and thereby
reasserts, Gregory XVI’s extreme rejection of the notion of liberty of conscience
specifically as related to the individual. In 1832 Gregory XVI condemned liberty of
conscience and stated that it was “insanity” to suggest that:

…liberty of conscience and worship is each man’s personal right, which
ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted
society; and that a right resides in the citizens to an absolute liberty, which
should be restrained by no authority whether ecclesiastical or civil,
whereby they may be able openly and publicly to manifest and declare any
of their ideas whatever, either by word of mouth, by the press, or in any
other way. 180

179 Ibid., vol. 3, 89.

180 Ibid., vol. 1, 237.
Again, although the statement at large seems to support conscience, it is a radical repudiation of it inasmuch as such thinking is considered insanity by Gregory XVI.

Following the French Revolution in particular, but inclusive of the American Revolution as well, democracy was interpreted as in opposition to the Church in both its emphasis of individual liberty and distinction between Church and State. At present in the United States, the separation between Church and State is, by and large, a given that is uncontested, even if differently interpreted. Roughly a century ago though, Americanism was identified and condemned as a form of modernism with separation of Church and state as one particular manifestation. As R. Scott Appleby notes, “Both Americanism and modernism were condemned in broad strokes….The two heresies were seen by their opponents as inextricably linked, with Americanism being the cultural, political, and ecclesio-political expression of modernism’s theological and philosophical project.”

The Church’s battle against modernism came to a head in 1907 with Pius X issuing the encyclical “Doctrine of the Modernists (Pascendi Dominici Gregis).” In this document Pius X went as far as to declare that modernism is “the synthesis of all heresies” inasmuch as it denies the existence of unchanging truth and consequently the Church’s role and right to authoritatively teach it. In short, it was heresy to reject the Church’s claim to privileged objective and eternal knowledge through revelation and, to


the point of this research, the corresponding agency inherent in claiming to teach with this level of authority to all levels of society.

The intellectuals and philosophers exploring the insights of modernism were not simply external threats the Church had to hold at bay, but were also within the ranks of the Church itself, including the clergy. These were individuals who believed the Church needed to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by modernity. Consequently, the encyclical “Doctrine of the Modernists” culminates with Pius X obliging Bishops to exercise regular and vigilant internal scrutiny for any signs of modernism within the clergy.

Lest what We have laid down thus far should pass into oblivion, We will and ordain that the Bishops of all dioceses, a year after the publication of these letters and every three years thenceforward, furnish the Holy See with a diligent and sworn report on the things which have been decreed in this Our Letter, and on the doctrines that find currency among the clergy, and especially in the seminaries and other Catholic institutions, those not excepted which are not subject to the Ordinary, and We impose the like obligation on the Generals of religious orders with regard to those who are under them.  

A number of clergy were identified and disciplined during this period, but possibly most prominent of them all was John Henry Newman. Newman was a renowned Anglican priest and professor at Oriel College in Oxford University as well as the founder of the Oxford Movement directed toward the reform of the Anglican Church. Among other things, the Oxford Movement visioned a “High Church” that integrated ancient Christian doctrine and practice in contrast to what was the prevalent "Low

\[183\] Ibid.

Church" Protestantism of the day. After spending the first half of his life as an Anglican, in 1845 Newman converted to Catholicism and became, among others things, the voice for the recovery and appreciation of the doctrine of primacy of conscience.

Although welcomed into the Roman communion with favor for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was his giftedness as an intellectual and theologian, that very talent ultimately complicated his life, as Pius IX proclaimed the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870. Newman opposed the formal definition of papal infallibility and, as would be expected, quickly found himself the object of the hierarchy’s disdain. As interesting as his rationale was regarding the doctrine of papal infallibility, the issue of relevance here is how he justified this dissenting opinion. As noted earlier, the Oxford movement attempted to recover earlier Christian doctrines and practices. Therefore, Newman’s theological method regarding the understanding of tradition afforded him access to Aquinas’ articulation of primacy of conscience. Similar to Luther with the 95 theses, at least in terms of process although not by way of scale, Newman exercised his primacy of conscience as he differed with the hierarchy of the Church over the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Without examining Newman’s theological nuance regarding conscience as he develops it through his exploration of Scripture and the Catholic tradition in order to make his case before the hierarchy of the Church, a summary expression of primacy of conscience is present as he addresses a Catholic’s relationship and responsibility to both conscience and the Pope. Although Newman clearly had his own understanding and expression of primacy of conscience, it differed more in subtlety rather than substance.
from that of Aquinas. Newman employed a historical method that both moored his work in the tradition and limited his vulnerability to accusation.

In his letter to the Duke of Norfolk in the fifth section addressing the issue of conscience, Newman writes:

> It seems, then, that there are extreme cases in which Conscience may come into collision with the word of a Pope, and is to be followed in spite of that word. Now I wish to place this proposition on a broader basis, acknowledged by all Catholics, and, in order to do this satisfactorily, as I began with the prophecies of Scripture and the primitive Church, when I spoke of the Pope's prerogatives, so now I must begin with the Creator and His creature, when I would draw out the prerogatives and the supreme authority of Conscience.\(^{185}\)

In contrast to the domineering agency expressed by Pius IX which heavily weighted the Church’s teaching over both individuals and societies, Newman argues for a much greater degree of agency within the person as an expression of primacy of conscience. Newman closes out his famous letter to the Duke of Norfolk, somewhat tongue in cheek and colloquially, stating:

> Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts, (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please—still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.\(^{186}\)

At the time Newman’s work reflected anything but the position of the hierarchy in its rejection of primacy of conscience, yet like many prescient thinkers who did not receive support in their lifetimes, it was only a matter of time until his insights regarding primacy

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\(^{185}\) John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching Considered* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1900); Newman’s other principal work on conscience is his “Sermon 17: The Testimony of Conscience.”

of conscience and religious liberty would be recognized. The Second Vatican Council, which opened on October 11, 1962, was just that time.

The Second Vatican Council

This section of Chapter 3 will go into more detail than the two brief historical reviews of the Reformation and modernism, given it holds a contemporary status that sets the current stage and understanding of the debate on primacy of conscience. After almost four hundred years of the Church suppressing and/or rejecting the doctrine of primacy of conscience, the Second Vatican Council marks the Church’s first hierarchical and official movement toward recovering its tradition regarding conscience. In examining this recovery, three broad points will be reviewed. First, the need for reclaiming conscience within the tradition will be established through the call of the Second Vatican Council to update moral theology. This process will be examined specifically through the manualist tradition which had come to symbolize the Church’s control over moral theology and, consequently, the teachings it obliged its membership to follow, whether lay or cleric. Second, as the updating of moral theology emerges from the Council’s call and diverse moral theological perspectives contribute to the conversation of updating moral theology, and specifically an understanding of conscience, two contemporary schools of Catholic moral theology emerge—the Traditionalist and the Revisionist. The similarities and differences of these schools will be reviewed, including how they are presently represented in the legalistic and personalist perspectives regarding conscience. Finally, a summary of Hogan’s historical theological understanding of ambiguity within the Catholic tradition of conscience will be reviewed, given the two current schools of Traditionalist and Revisionist with their corresponding legalistic and personalist perspectives do, in fact, differ and stand in tension, thus embodying the very ambiguity being identified.
As John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council with his address in St. Peter’s Basilica, he identified the task at hand for the Church as that of bringing herself up to date where required. The breadth of this overall process was extensive and remains in process to this day, yet for the purposes of this research the focus will be limited to the arena of moral theology. Further, within the domain of moral theology, the doctrine of primacy of conscience and role of agency are the place of examination. Given what previously has been reviewed historically and attitudinally regarding the Church’s response to the Reformation and modernism and the corresponding suppression and/or rejection of primacy of conscience, this “updating” of moral theology would require more than simply a veneer, especially in the arena of understanding the relationship of agency between the Church and the individual.

The Second Vatican Council simply and blatantly stated that, “…special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology.”\(^{187}\) That “special attention,” as McCormick interprets it, was specifically addressing the limitations of the manual tradition—a tradition steeped in an imbalance of agency.\(^{188}\) The manual tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within moral theology is a predictable by-product of a Church that since the Reformation had been attempting to stabilize Catholic doctrinal definitions and corresponding boundaries by unilateral decrees that deprived individuals, including priests and theologians, of agency when it came to understanding moral decision-making. In a sense, the manual tradition was a micro expression of the Church’s macro trajectory as related to the understanding of the


\(^{188}\) McCormick, The Critical Calling 5.
relationship of agency between the Church and individuals, both lay and cleric. Hogan summarizes the manuals themselves thus:

Most of the manuals of this period exhibited identical philosophical and theological presuppositions. They also followed a common structure and discussed moral problems in a uniform manner. They each began with a section on “general moral theology,” involving a consideration of human acts, the nature of morality, conscience, law and sin. The second section of each manual involved an exposition of particular sins, identifying the nature, species and seriousness of particular sins. They focused on the acts themselves rather than on any other features of the situation….The third and final section of the manuals presented the canon law of the sacraments, thus framing morality entirely in a penitential context.\(^{189}\)

The manual tradition was principally applied within the pastoral context, in particular, in order to control the priests’ responses in the confessional. Recall that even priests were suspected and accused of being Modernists. The manuals themselves, developed by a closed group of theologians, were focused on practical application rather than methodological consideration or theoretical reflection. In short, the manuals set the terms of morally acceptable behavior as defined by the Church’s canons and was communicated through its representatives, more often than not, in the sacramental forum of confession. What is of particular note here in terms of agency is that even priests and many theologians were not afforded a role in discerning Catholic moral decision-making. Given that priests literally had the manuals in hand with moral answers anticipating certain circumstances, the exercise of primacy of conscience was simply out of the equation. Basically, priests were instructed to apply moral answers without even necessarily knowing the moral theological method and assumptions that gave rise to the very moral directives they applied.

\(^{189}\) Hogan, 97.
The manual tradition was symbolic of how Catholic moral theology, especially its closed and controlling character, required an updating—an updating that would necessarily explore the assumptions and positions that gave rise to the very manuals themselves. From the vantage point of twenty-five years after the Second Vatican Council, McCormick’s hindsight identifies seven areas in moral theology that have undergone major reexamination: the rejection of legalism, the depth of moral life, the social character of moral life, the centrality of the person in moral thought, the tentativeness of moral formulations, the nature of the moral Magisterium, and the rejection of paternalism in moral pedagogy for a pedagogy of personal responsibility. Ultimately, whether it be these seven areas articulated by McCormick or others that might be highlighted by different moral theologians, the updating of Catholic moral theology broadly required the development of precisely what the manual tradition lacked and symbolized—an explicit normative method accessible to individuals other than only the authors of the manuals (e.g., theologians, clergy in parish ministry, and parishioners).

This is not to suggest that the manual tradition was devoid of a normative method for moral theology in the development of the manuals themselves, as their very uniformity attested to a high level of normative method being at play. Whether it was remnants of Thomism or dominant strains of Neo-Scholasticism, the manuals relied heavily upon normative method in their construction. Thomism is the theological framework developed by Aquinas in the thirteenth century and predominantly articulated in the *Summa Theologica*. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Neo-Scholasticism is the attempt to recover and develop the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages.

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which was largely founded upon the work of Aquinas. Although there is a clear and strong intersection between Thomism and Neo-Scholasticism, the systems are clearly distinct and differ in a variety of ways, yet those nuances are not necessary for the current discussion.

Nevertheless, the principal point at hand is that the normative method for moral theology operative was implicit and not incorporated explicitly in the manuals themselves. The application of the normative method for moral theology remained exclusively with the ecclesiastical authors of the manuals, thus hobbling, if not eliminating others from doing and applying moral theology. Manuals essentially gave the moral conclusions to most theologians, priests and laity, but neither the normative method for moral theology by which these conclusions were determined nor, therefore, the purview to engage that normative method was afforded to anyone other than the select authors themselves. Ultimately the manualist tradition is undergirded with an understanding of agency inasmuch as few were afforded access to the normative method for moral theology and most were simply expected to accept the conclusions it produced. Basically, the Second Vatican Council’s updating of moral theology called for a normative method to be made explicit, that is, more broadly shared and understood, thus overturning the narrow and controlled status it had previously labored under. This direction clearly had implications for understanding the relationship of agency between the Church and its members when addressing the Catholic moral decision-making.

Although the scope of the development of an explicit normative method in Catholic moral theology with respect to issues of moral guidance and matters of conscience is enormous, rife with nuance, and beyond the scope of this research, it is
accurate to claim that this moral theological project launched at the Second Vatican Council has predominantly consolidated into two principal schools after the inclusion of a variety of theological voices that had previously been excluded—the Traditionalist and the Revisionist. These two schools will be respectively represented by Grisez’s work with Basic Goods Theory as well as by McCormick and Curran’s work with Proportionate Reason Theory. Further, Basic Goods Theory represents the legalistic perspective while Proportionate Reason Theory represents the personalist perspective in terms of understanding primacy of conscience. As Todd Salzman notes:

Much of the focus in the renewal movement has been to formulate a coherent normative method and draw out its logical implications for Christian ethics. [The Traditionalists and Revisionists]…are the two main schools undertaking this methodological reconstruction. Method, especially with regard to the foundation and formulation of norms, is frequently considered the area of renewal in Catholic moral theology; however, method itself is rarely defined. 191

Traditionalist and Revisionist Schools

Given the dynamics already reviewed in the historical backdrop preceding the Second Vatican Council, it is not surprising that the theological latitude present in the updating of moral theology that followed the Council’s directive in “The Decree on the Training of Priests” was still fairly circumscribed. 192 Consequently, any updated Catholic moral theology and method, be it from the Traditionalist or Revisionist school, inevitably addresses natural law theory due to both its prominent historical and continuing contemporary role. Therefore, a summary theoretical background for understanding the

191 Todd Salzman, What are they saying About Catholic Ethical Method (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 6, emphasis in original.

foundation that both the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools incorporate will be helpful. Both are built upon the theory of natural law which, in turn, is related to and located within the broader arena of contemporary moral and ethical discourse (i.e., moral judgments, normative ethics, and meta-ethics). Finally, it should be recalled, this is simply a review of the moral theological context within and by which this pastoral theology is located and informed, but is not an attempt to engage or further this discussion along the philosophical lines of moral theology. The advance and contribution of this research will emerge within Chapters 4 and 5.

Consistent with what many philosophical ethicists distinguish as three levels of ethical discourse, natural law theory also addresses moral judgments, normative ethics, and meta-ethics. The three dimensions of ethical discourse identified here are very broad theoretical categories that are understood in very diverse manners. This general framework is sufficient to understand the general framing of natural law theory as well as its continuing theoretical mooring. Rooted in the human capacity to reason and choose, moral judgments are made as attempts to accomplish what is considered right, obligatory, or good. Moral decision-making is the fare of this arena and is basically what Aquinas called *syneidesis* or the judgment of conscience by which some particular thing or action is judged good or evil. Moral judgments ultimately influence or determine the particularities of one’s conduct and are the focus of this research inasmuch as they are an expression of agency and potentially an exercise of primacy of conscience.

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Within the realm of moral judgments, an array of philosophical distinctions are present depending upon the given theorist, but their review is not essential for the topic at hand. Yet given this research focuses upon primacy of conscience within the arena of synoikesis, it is vital to address what both philosophical ethicists and natural law theory distinguish as “possible” and “actual” moral judgments. The portion of Curran’s definition of conscience that speaks of “an act to be done or already done” reveals the presence of both possible and actual moral judgments. Curran notes that conscience relates to “…the judgment about the morality of an act to be done or omitted or already done or omitted by the person.” The moral judgments in this definition are possible and actual respectively. Although both inherently fall under the umbrella of agency in that they ultimately relate to action or deliberation about it, they function differently both in terms of their relationship to normative and meta-ethics as well as primacy of conscience.

From the perspective of philosophical ethicists and natural law theory, moral judgments relate to normative and meta-ethics. Possible rather than actual moral judgments provide the grist for developing the norms and/or generalizations that correspond to normative and meta-ethics. Actual moral judgments, although informing normative and meta-ethics, have a degree of uniqueness and particularity that, given the diversity of individuals and contexts, is ill suited for the type of reflection required for the development and articulation of normative and meta-ethics. In contrast, possible moral judgments serve this task well, given they “…suspend the

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194 As McCormick rightly notes, for a comprehensive treatment of the topic of normative ethics, one must consider the philosophical discussions of cognitivism, noncognitivism, emotivism and so on as well as the distinctions between deontologists and teleologists. See McCormick, The Critical Calling 49.

195 Curran, 3, emphasis added.
particularity of actual moral judgments and seek to formulate norms that can extrapolate
common aspects of human experience in the form of generalizations.”¹⁹⁶ As summarized by
Salzman:

The synopsis and synthesis of possible moral judgments into such a theory
is the area of normative ethics and meta-ethics. Normative ethics attempts
to answer questions about what is good, right, or obligatory and to
formulate laws, rules, norms, or guidelines for the attainment of values
designated within that definition. Normative ethics proposes norms that
prohibit or prescribe: (1) actions (e.g., “do not kill”); (2) dispositions,
motivations, or types of character (e.g., “respect life”); and (3) actions that
entail descriptions of both the act and the motive (e.g., “do not
murder”).¹⁹⁷

Basically meta-ethics, as it relates to normative ethics, is yet another level of
reflection and analysis that addresses both the understanding of the ethical terms
themselves (e.g., “right,” or “good”) and how claims to moral knowledge may actually be
known. The former is essentially a question of semantics, that is, what does this word
mean and how is the term used, whereas the latter is an epistemic question, that is, how
can we claim to know this to be so. Both normative and meta-ethics are considered and
questioned from a variety of perspectives, not the least of which is insights gained from
postmodernism. As William Frankena describes meta-ethics, it focuses its deliberation
toward the meaning of ethical terms as well as how ethical and value judgments are
justified.¹⁹⁸

Although some would question whether or not differentiating meta-ethics from
normative ethics is even a meaningful or fruitful distinction, it is worth identifying given

¹⁹⁶ Salzman, 7-8.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 8.

the role of natural law theory within Catholic moral theology, from either the Traditionalist or Revisionist school. These kinds of thought about ethics (e.g., meta-ethics and normative ethics) have essentially been operative and a matter of debate since the time of Aquinas and remain even to this day. As stated earlier, Aquinas identified the difference between the judgment of conscience by which some particular thing or action is judged good or evil (syneidesis) and the “…habit of practical reason by which one knows the first principles of the natural law—do good and avoid evil, act according to right reason” (synderesis).\(^{199}\) Synderesis is basically a natural law theory term that attempts to address the epistemic dimension of meta-ethics. In short, we can apply these general ethical constructs of moral judgments, normative and meta-ethics to natural law theory and see a long-standing parallel dating back to Aquinas and beyond. Recall that Aquinas understood conscience as the application of the known first principles of natural law (synderesis) or normative and meta-ethics to the particularities of one’s conduct (syneidesis) or moral judgments. Further, it is within this tension between the particularity of syneidesis and the generality of synderesis that Aquinas articulates the role of the primacy of conscience.

In order to be clear regarding the focus of this research within the broad context of Catholic moral theology in particular and ethics in general, a summary is in order at this point. It is from the basic mooring of ethical method just reviewed, including its relationship to a natural law framework, that the updating of Catholic moral theology as called for by the Second Vatican Council has proceeded. Further, the principal sticking point or difference between the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools lies in the arena of normative and meta-ethics—specifically how objective truth is understood. Clearly this

\(^{199}\) Curran, 7.
has implication for moral judgments, but the principal difference is not located there. Although normative and meta-ethics are clearly a part of the overall development of moral theology, this dissertation relates specifically to the arena of moral judgments. It is within this context that primacy of conscience and its inherent agency is being examined. Nevertheless, a general understanding of the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools is in order, especially in order to identify the principal difference that has profound implications for how the relationship of agency between the Church and an individual is framed.

The conversation of normative and meta-ethics which, in the Catholic context includes the theory of natural law, is predominantly philosophical and, as such, extremely theoretical and abstract. In addition to the broad ethical framework of moral judgments, normative ethics, and meta-ethics that both the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools share, further commonalities deserve attention. Although far from exhausting the common moral theological ground, let alone the philosophical, shared by the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools, four prominent and vital similarities are clearly present. Consistent with the Catholic moral theological tradition, both approaches:

1) accept an objectivist meta-ethical theory (i.e., natural law theory), even if nuanced differently
2) define good or right as that which facilitates authentic personhood as understood through a natural law lens
3) recognize reason, experience, scripture and Tradition as significant sources of moral knowledge in the development of normative method
4) respond to the Second Vatican Council’s call for a renewal of moral theology, especially the limits manifest in the manualist tradition.
Each of these similarities merits further development to better appreciate how their common ground is understood and shared.

First, each position supports natural law for humans as an expression of an objectivist meta-ethical theory such that they acknowledge the existence of a universal moral truth that can be justified through both reason and revelation. Reason and faith are both required and are not seen in opposition to one another in the process of articulating normative claims for what contributes to the realization of authentic personhood. Jacques Maritain succinctly distills this ontological foundation of natural law for the human person.

There is by the virtue of human nature, an order or a disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the essential ends of the human being. The unwritten law, or natural law, is nothing more than that.200

Second, flowing from the preceding objectivist anthropological assumption, both positions broadly define right or good as that which contributes to the accomplishment of authentic personhood, or corollary terms like “integral human fulfillment” and “human flourishing.”201 The first principle of practical reason is employed in order to realize the “essential ends of the human being” toward which humans are naturally inclined or oriented. In other words, to the extent that the first principal of natural law, which states that “good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided,” is followed, authentic


201 Salzman, 18.
personhood is realized. This first principle is the basis of every other precept of the natural law and is foundational in the theoretical framing of conscience.  

Third, whether one be a Traditionalist or a Revisionist, four sources of moral knowledge are recognized—reason, experience, scripture and tradition. The identification and application of these sources in the development of normative method is consistent with Catholic moral theology. Nevertheless, how these sources are interpreted as well as how they are weighed and leveraged definitely differs between the two approaches, especially in terms of understanding objective moral absolutes. This will be explored in more detail as the legalistic and personalist perspectives are broadly reviewed and illustrated through the examples of Basic Goods Theory and Proportionate Reason Theory.

Fourth, even with this substantial common mooring in natural law theory, both positions recognize certain pitfalls and limitations within Catholic natural law theory, especially as articulated by the manualist tradition. Consequently both seek its remediation, albeit in differing manners. It must be remembered that the critique of the manualist tradition did not begin with the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools, but rather emerged at the Second Vatican Council and its charge to address this problem. In short, both positions are responses to that unique call of the Second Vatican Council for renewal within moral theology. Specifically, the principal shortcoming was the lack of an explicit normative methodology which excluded broader participation in the development and/or application of moral theology.

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202 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia-IIae, 94, 2.
The Legalistic and Personalist Perspectives

As previously noted, within the two broader moral theological schools (i.e., Traditionalist and Revisionist), the legalistic and personalist monikers have emerged as specific expressions and applications of these two schools’ foundational thought. Further, within the Catholic debate regarding conscience, Basic Goods Theory is one particular, if not the principal, expression of the Traditionalist school, whereas Proportionate Reason Theory is one particular, if not the principal, expression of the Revisionist school. Having touched upon the common ground of the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools, these two specific theories (i.e., Basic Goods Theory and Proportionate Reason Theory) will be reviewed in order to illuminate how they ultimately differ in their framing of agency and, therefore, primacy of conscience. Common parlance might simply and somewhat accurately label the legalistic and personalist perspectives as the conservative and liberal views respectively. Yet there is a bit more nuance that is worth noting in order to understand the principal difference between them that ultimately has implications for agency and primacy of conscience.

The current Catholic discourse following the Second Vatican Council regarding conscience, its primacy, and any ensuing problems and tension is predominantly within moral theology and is framed philosophically as expressed in the normative ethical method previously reviewed and its positioning within natural law theory. Contemporary Catholic moral theological debate on conscience reflects the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools that, as noted, broadly coalesce into these two divergent perspectives (i.e., the legalistic and the personalist). Nonetheless, both perspectives address the question regarding moral
responsibility and authority, which inherently incorporates both individual and communal agency.\textsuperscript{203}

The legalistic perspective places an emphasis on Church teaching as the primary or central means for knowing the objective dimensions of morality. Consequently it considers the Magisterium (i.e., Church teaching) as the principal vehicle for moral truth. Additionally, this moral truth is considered to have absolute and universal moral principles that Church teaching is able to uniquely and authoritatively articulate. In contrast, the personalist perspective ultimately prioritizes the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters. Nevertheless, this prioritization presumes a relationship with Church teaching such that moral matters are necessarily informed, but not controlled and predetermined by it. An informed conscience is the mediator and final arbiter of the divine moral law taught by the Church. Consequently, it rejects any account of morality that relies on absolutist principles.\textsuperscript{204}

The legalistic and personalist perspectives function differently. The legalistic position implicitly reinforces a perspective that suggests that individuals are, in fact, inadequate or incompetent to make or facilitate responsible moral decisions that differ from the Church teaching. From this approach, the dissonance is ultimately suppressed by conformity to the truth as communicated through the Church teaching. Primacy of conscience is conflated to a wholesale acceptance of the Church’s interpretation of “absolute and universal moral principles,” often articulated as natural laws.\textsuperscript{205} Although

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{203} Hogan, 2.
\textsuperscript{204} Hogan, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{205} Mark Graham, Josef Fuchs on Natural Law (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 10-11.
\end{flushleft}
differing from the manualist tradition in a variety of ways, not the least of which is an explicit normative method, the legalistic perspective remains similar since there are occasions where the final outcome is a given (e.g., intentional contraception is never morally justified).

In contrast, the personalist position affirms a Catholic’s capacity to be competent and responsible in making or facilitating moral decisions that differ from the Church teaching without denying natural law. Using this approach, the dissonance is finally suppressed by faithfully following the doctrine of primacy of conscience that “prioritizes the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters” and recognizes the legitimacy of occasional differing from Church teaching. From the personalist perspective, primacy of conscience becomes the manifestation of loyalty to conscience in the search for truth and right solutions. For example, although the normative Church teaching regarding intentional contraception is considered, an individual may knowingly and responsibly differ from this teaching by exercising primacy of conscience. Such an act does not refute the potential or inherent value of the normative teaching, but rather denies its universal and absolute application. Natural law remains a normative basis to inform moral decision-making, but also affords the possibility of difference in the arena of specific moral judgments through primacy of conscience.

To further an understanding of how these two perspectives are currently manifest and operative in Catholic moral theology, I will review Basic Goods Theory and Proportionate Reason Theory. Both theories are the most prominent representations of the legalistic and personalist perspectives and, therefore, the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools respectively. Clearly quite a number of theologians fall within these
categories of the legalistic and personalist perspectives as well and are party to these conversations. Nevertheless, for the purposes present in this research the major trajectories are sufficiently illuminated through the three principal theorists I have identified. What is of particular importance here is that these theories clearly acknowledge the question of individual and communal agency, albeit with differing configurations and conclusions as to how this relationship of agency is understood and distributed. By virtue of that very difference being present and current, the reality of ambiguity in the tradition is identified as a challenge, if not an obstacle, that needs to be addressed.

Germain Grisez, along with John Finnis and Joseph Boyle, from the Traditionalist school manifest the legalistic perspective inherent within the Basic Goods Theory for moral decision-making. The claim that “the good is to be done and evil is to be avoided,” articulated by Aquinas and referred to previously, was, for him, the first principle of practical reasoning or *synderesis*. Practical reason first identifies what might be done, prior to indicating what should be done. As such and in both capacities, it serves as a foundation for human choice and behavior. Similarly, according to Grisez and Basic Goods Theory, the first principle of practical reason, “…articulates the intrinsic, necessary relationship between human goods and appropriate actions bearing upon them.”\(^\text{206}\) In short, the first principle of practical reason does not direct what is to be done (i.e., a given specific act), but rather simply identifies what is to be incorporated in doing

any permissible act (i.e., doing good and avoiding evil). It addresses the values operative in the process, but not the content to which it applies.

This principle is considered self-evident and does not, according to the theory, emerge from engagement with the natural world nor one’s awareness of human nature. As such, it is very consistent with the natural-supernatural dualism of Thomism and reflects an objectivist meta-ethical theory. It essentially appeals to and retains revelation as one component in the process of knowing. Curiously, if not ironically, one of natural law theory’s foundational assumptions is the existence of the supernatural as well as the ability to know it. Clearly this claim and those like it stand under the critique of modern philosophy as briefly reviewed, and yet its accuracy is, in this instance, beside the point inasmuch as it remains a claim, rightly or wrongly, still being asserted. Therefore, Catholics, at least those attending to the Church’s teaching, must take it into consideration.

In order to engage the content to which the first principal of practical reason applies, Basic Goods Theory introduces the concept of basic goods. Basic goods are


209 For example, Kantian and/or analytical philosophers might argue that Basic Goods Theory appeals to a specific meaning of the words “good” and “evil.” For a summary discussion, see Mark LeBar, “Kant,” in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2d ed. vol. 5, general editor Donald Borchert (New York: Thomson & Gale, 2005), 36-38; and Scott Soames, “Philosophical Analysis,” in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2d ed. vol.1, general editor Donald Borchert (New York: Thomson & Gale, 2005), 144-157.
“aspects of our personhood, elements of the blueprint which tells us what human persons are capable of being, whether as individuals or joined together in community.” There are eight basic goods, which are divided into two categories. The first category is “non-reflexive” goods—human life, knowledge and aesthetic appreciation, and skilled performances of all kinds. The second category is “reflexive” goods—self-integration, authenticity, justice and friendship, religion or holiness, and marriage. In broad terms, the distinction between non-reflexive and reflexive goods is that the former are *reasons for choosing undefined by the choice itself* while the latter are both *reasons for choosing and partially defined by the choice itself*.

The first principle of practical reason and the basic goods identified are not sufficient in and of themselves. With only these two components, there is no structure in place to make moral choices when a multiplicity of goods is in play or, even in conflict. Basic goods provide a reason for choosing to act, but do not facilitate prioritization among the basic goods themselves. In order to fill this void, Basic Goods Theory introduces the first principle of morality which states: “In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will

210 Grisez and Shaw, 54.

211 Ibid., 205-216.

212 Although Basic Goods Theory does not exclude a variety of influences (e.g., emotions) in the moral decision-making process, clearly its dominant lens is a cognitive one as it prioritizes reason and logic. For an overview of the role of emotion in the development of moral and immoral behavioral patterns, see David M. Cimbora and Daniel N. McIntosh, “Understanding the Link between Moral Emotions and Behavior,” in *Psychology of Moods*, ed. F. Columbus (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), 1-27.
those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment.”

Finally, the generality of the first principle of morality is countered or balanced by the provision of intermediate principles which are located in eight modes of responsibility (e.g., “one should not be moved by a stronger desire for one instance of an intelligible good to act for it by choosing to destroy, damage, or impede some other instance of an intelligible good…”). These intermediate principles are not prescriptive or prohibitive regarding specific acts (e.g., theft), but are intended to facilitate recognizing choices that may or may not violate the first moral principal. It is from these eight modes of responsibility that specific norms for behavior are derived and identified as good, wrong, obligatory, or permissible.

Although even this summary presentation of Basic Goods Theory begs the question as to its practicality and viability for most Catholics, given the fairly complicated structure for moral decision-making it offers, that is neither the purpose of this review nor this dissertation. What is relevant to this research and important to note is one critical end result or conclusion of the theory, as it determines an understanding of agency between Church teaching and an individual. Beginning with the first principal of practical reason and ending with specific norms derived from the eight modes of responsibilities, Basic Goods Theory concludes, in part, with the establishment of absolute negative norms. Absolute norms relate to those acts in which the willingness

213 Grisez and Shaw, 80.

214 Ibid., 212.

215 Ibid., 254.
itself to perform them comprises a will that is inherently incompatible with an open disposition to integral human fulfillment.\textsuperscript{216} These norms are negative in determining inherent incompatibility and absolute in their definitive status allowing no exception. In short, Basic Goods Theory states that some acts are never morally justified, or in the classical terminology of Church teaching, are always intrinsically evil.

At first blush this may seem not only reasonable, but also possibly necessary. Few, if any, would want to argue that genocide is not intrinsically evil. Yet by establishing the theoretical construct of absolute negative norms, Basic Goods Theory opens the door for any, or at least many, particular examples to be presented as potential candidates. Not surprisingly, an array of Church teaching regarding intrinsically evil acts is immediately presented for review. The specific example of Sue is a case in point. Deliberate contraception is defined by Church teaching as intrinsically evil and, therefore, never morally justified, either by the Church itself or by theologians applying Basic Goods Theory. Nothing more need be said.

There are ample dimensions of Basic Goods Theory that have the possibility of diverse conclusions or outcomes, especially as competing basic goods are assessed through the first principal of morality. Nevertheless, the legalistic quality emerges at this point of absolute negative norms inasmuch as there is little or no place for discussion or initiating agency if something is absolutely defined by Church teaching. It is clear in the establishment of absolute negative norms that Basic Goods Theory represents:

\ldots the legalistic model [that] is characterized by an emphasis on Church teaching as the central way by which the objective dimensions of morality are known. It regards the Magisterium as the primary vehicle of moral truth.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 256-259.
Furthermore, it argues for the existence of absolute and universal moral principles…

It is worth noting that when Basic Goods Theory is applied to the Church’s teaching of intrinsically evil acts, those teachings are affirmed.

Given the focus on agency in this research, what is particularly important to recognize is how this understanding and distribution of agency is extremely skewed in the direction of Church teaching being the initiator and the individual being the receiver. Given that “experience” and “reason” represent two of the four primary sources of moral knowledge, it is curious at best and radically distorted at worst, that lay persons who have received the vocation of marriage and potentially the privilege and responsibility of child rearing are not afforded more agency in this arena, especially in terms of being significant initiators rather than exclusively receivers. This final product of absolute negative norms is, in fact, the most profound rub between Basic Goods Theory and Proportionate Reason Theory, including how it distorts the understanding of agency.

Given the common mooring of Proportionate Reason Theory with Basic Goods Theory in natural law theory, it is not surprising that the two theories resonate in a variety of domains. Proportionate Reason Theory “…has never denied the validity of any norm in se taught by the Magisterium and the premoral values that those norms seek to promote and protect.” Therefore, Proportionate Reason Theory does not disagree with Basic Goods Theory’s general reiteration of those terms flowing from natural law theory. Both Proportionate Reason Theory and Basic Goods Theory agree with and work from

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217 Hogan, 28-29.

218 Salzman, 31.
long standing foundational values and norms that are very general and operative in
natural law theory. This is not to suggest that the specific Basic Goods Theory’s
articulation of eight basic goods, eight modes of responsibility as intermediate principles,
et cetera is also present within Proportionate Reason Theory. Both theories’ general
constructs of principles, values, and norms are basically compatible and, by and large,
express what is predominantly a similar method flowing from natural law theory. That
being the case, the review of Proportionate Reason Theory focuses on the difference
between the theories.

Proportionate Reason Theory arrives at a differing conclusion regarding the
possibility of absolute negative norms and this is the crux of the difference between the
two theories. Proportionate reason “is the moral principle used …to determine concretely
and objectively the rightness or wrongness of acts and the various exceptions to
behavioral norms.”219 The term reason is technically understood as “a premoral value,
i.e., a conditioned, and thus not absolute, value which is at stake in a total act.”220
Therefore the term reason is neither to be misinterpreted as an individual having a
“serious reason” nor a “good intention.” Reason, as understood in Proportionate Reason
Theory, is related to “ratio in the act…the premoral [value] the agent seeks to
promote.”221

219 James J. Walter, “The Foundation and Formulation of Norms,” in Moral Theology:
Challenges for the Future, ed. Charles Curran (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 129,
emphasis added.

220 Salzman, 33.

221 Walter, 132, emphasis in original.
The term “proportionate” can readily conjure the image of weighing in or adding up the values and disvalues present in any given moral consideration. This is a misinterpretation of the term, inasmuch as that approach basically results in consequentialism’s understanding of “total net good.” Proportionate, in this theory, is to be understood as predominantly relational rather than mathematical. As Walter states:

‘Proportionate’ refers to a proper relation (debita proportio) that must exist between the premoral disvalue(s) contained in or caused by the means and the end (ratio) or between the end and the premoral disvalue(s) contained in the further ends (consequences) of the act taken as a whole.222

This is not to suggest that weighing consequences does not come into play in considering whether or not a proportionate reason exists. It is simply to say that consequences are only one aspect of the entire act to be considered and must be done in relationship to premoral values and disvalues. In summary, proportionate reason basically can be understood as the proper relation between premoral values/disvalues of the means and the end or consequences.

Proportionate reason parallels the function of Basic Goods Theory’s first principle of morality, as it too considers the competing values and disvalues of any given act and/or norm. Not unlike how Basic Goods Theory’s eight modes of responsibility serve as intermediate principles to nuance the generic or abstract character of the first principle of morality, Proportionate Reason Theory has criteria that accomplish essentially the same end with the generic or abstract character of proportionate reason. Those criteria themselves need not be specifically reviewed in this context, yet suffice it to say that they

222 Ibid.
function so as to assess whether or not proportionate reason or proper relation exists in any given moral consideration.223

What is distinct is how proportionate reason methodologically frames assessing the morality as related to the whole act through examining how premoral values/disvalues stand in relationship to the end or consequences. Although Basic Goods Theory does this as well in many or most instances, in certain cases Basic Goods Theory establishes absolute negative norms that stand independently, regardless of whatever relationship might be operative with various ends or consequences. The outcome or consequence never enters the consideration in those instances because intrinsically evil acts can never be morally engaged. Proportionate reason does not methodologically or structurally afford norms an independent status, therefore all acts are considered as a whole (i.e., inclusive of means and end).

Similar to the summary presentation of Basic Goods Theory, Proportionate Reason Theory also begs the question as to its practicality and viability for most Catholics, given the fairly complicated structure for moral decision-making it also offers, yet again that is not the question at hand. What is pertinent to this project and important to note is how agency is framed in this theory. The personalist quality emerges at the point of denying the establishment of absolute negative norms inasmuch as there is always a place for discussion and decision as an individual engages proportionate reason. It is obvious in the rejection of absolute negative norms that Proportionate Reason Theory represents:

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[The personalist model that] prioritizes the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters. It also focuses on conscience as the mediator of the divine moral law. Furthermore, it rejects any account of ethics that relies on absolutist principles.224

It is worth noting that when Proportionate Reason Theory is applied to the Church’s teaching of intrinsically evil acts, many of those teachings are affirmed, even if the conclusion is arrived at through a differing process (i.e., proportionate reason) than that of Basic Goods Theory. The example of contraception being intrinsically evil, and therefore never morally justified, is not among them though.

Seen through the lens of agency, Proportionate Reason Theory affords the possibility of ameliorating the imbalance in the distribution of agency that occurs with Basic Goods Theory when engaging absolute negative norms. Instead of being extremely skewed in the direction of Church teaching as the initiator and the individual as the receiver, the individual also may function as the initiator and the Church teaching is the receiver. Without overthrowing the Church’s teaching role in initiating agency, the individual informed by Church teaching is supported by the possibility of exercising agency in the form of initiation as well. In fact, this is precisely the point where primacy of conscience potentially comes into play when difficult and important moral decisions are made in the face of ambiguous traditions.

Ultimately the fundamental difference regarding absolute negative norms is a critical and key difference at the normative and meta-ethical level for the Traditionalist and Revisionists schools. Consequently, any particular systems of moral theology that flow from these schools (i.e., the legalistic perspective with Basic Goods Theory and the

224 Hogan, 28-29.
personalist perspective with Proportionate Reason Theory) are necessarily limited to and stymied by this sticking point when it comes to achieving a consensual position for the Church at large. Ambiguity in the tradition regarding primacy of conscience remains largely due to the inherently elusive and indefinite dimension of the normative and meta-ethics conversation. This is the perennial question that has plagued these discussions since the Enlightenment and the rise of modernism. It is the question of synderesis (i.e., the first principles of natural law) that has yet to be resolved and, therefore, continues to complicate the question of syneidesis (i.e., the particularities of one’s conduct). Our focus is moral judgments and agency as understood and manifest in primacy of conscience.

Catholic moral theology and its inherently philosophical methodology have responded to the Second Vatican Council’s call for updating, especially in terms of overcoming certain limitations inherent in the manualist tradition. Nevertheless, the debate regarding primacy of conscience remains far from resolved and is unlikely to find consensual ground soon given the nature of the conversation regarding the understanding of absolute negative norms. However, consensus between the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools as well as the legalistic and personalist perspectives is present in terms of identifying the question of agency as central in the doctrine of primacy of conscience.

After more than four decades, the personalist perspective has sound, even if contested, footing within the Catholic tradition. Hogan provides a succinct summary of the personalist perspective which serves as the basis for her historical theological contribution.

[The personalist perspective]…operates on the basis that ethical values derive their authority, not from some static and abstract notion of human nature but from their promotion of the good of the person ‘integrally and
adequately considered.’ This is the ethical model proposed in both “Gaudium et Spes” and in “Dignitatis Humanae”...[It includes] (1) a greater recognition of the role of history and change in ethics; (2) a focus on the moral significance of intentions and circumstances in addition to the act itself; (3) a greater degree of sophistication in categorizing the different kinds of moral norms and the kinds of claims they make; and (4) a rethinking of the relationship between the individual and Magisterium on the basis of the relocation of moral authority.225

One may wonder whether or not moral theology may have reached the point of diminishing returns as it attempts to address the question regarding moral responsibility and authority, which inherently incorporates the question of agency, both individual and communal. Neither school contests whether or not this question includes primacy of conscience, yet it is questionable as to whether or not one more philosophical slant will resolve the fundamental difference between them. Conscious of this limit, Hogan’s research engages the very same question of primacy of conscience from a historical theological vantage point in order to bolster the personalist perspective.

Understanding Ambiguity within the Tradition

At the opening of this chapter, ambiguity in the tradition over time was identified as contributing to the theological problem regarding primacy of conscience that has arisen from pastoral practice. The role and understanding of agency between the individual and the Church’s teaching or tradition presents itself as one possible path for ameliorating the pastoral problem of how to theologically address the two strands in the Church’s tradition regarding being a moral Catholic. As the Church seems to offer contradictory advice regarding moral decision-making, ambiguity becomes apparent and agency becomes requisite. In order to affirm and bolster the personalist perspective, it is

225 Hogan, 127.
helpful to examine Hogan’s historical theological study on conscience in the Catholic tradition as it presents the ambiguity and commensurate difficulty flowing from the Church’s tradition.

Not only does Hogan’s research deepen the dimensionality of the history and debate regarding primacy of conscience, but also more importantly, it profoundly reveals the ambiguity that significantly contributes to the pastoral problem being addressed. Further, her historical examination of conscience implicitly calls forth the need for an enhanced understanding of agency, as is evident from her research that Catholics cannot simply apply an answer that is so apparent and given. Often the expression of having an informed conscience is misinterpreted as knowing “the answer,” rather than being in authentic engagement with the tradition. Theological or moral “forks in the road” require choices that necessitate agency and Hogan has found a drawerful. By amply presenting the ambiguity within the doctrine’s various trajectories, the call for and necessity of better understanding agency is blatant and paramount, given the practice of morality presumes both judgment and behavior.

In a sense, the detail of the material covered by Hogan is less significant in and of itself than what she accomplishes by reviewing it at large. Her goal—one she aptly achieves—is to argue “…that any reading that glosses over the inherent contradictions in the theology and politics of conscience is inadequate.”

This is not to suggest that she disregards the material because of the contradictions, rather it is to highlight her recovery of critical theological dimensions of conscience that have been lost or insufficiently emphasized—the diversity and plurality (i.e., contradictions) that has always existed has

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226 Ibid., 3.
been found. This recovery is key to relieving the complications caused by the misconception of theological uniformity.

The method employed by Hogan is basically a hermeneutics of suspicion, used for constructive purposes in historical theology. Contrary to presuming consensus, and sensitive to many Catholics’ misperception that such a consensus actually exists, her method consciously and effectively explores the breadth of the tradition. In writing of her methodology, Hogan claims:

A central purpose of this study is to problematize the history of conscience and to suggest that a hermeneutics of suspicion is necessary when looking at the story of conscience as implied in current theological debates. Therefore, in examining the history of conscience in the Catholic tradition I intend to confront rather than to neglect the many confusions and contradictions.227

Without reviewing the array of material in her historical research, Hogan confronts a multitude of “confusions and contradictions.”

Given the historical review within this chapter and other examples throughout the dissertation that partially reflect or parallel Hogan’s historical work, one example will be explored. This example of her method will be limited to a single contemporary authoritative text from the Second Vatican Council that in and of itself captures our discussion of the legalistic and personalist tradition and discloses an inherent ambiguity in the tradition. In her words, “the truth is that many of the key theological texts on conscience, including very recent ones, can be used either to promote or to curtail personal autonomy. The texts pull in both directions.”228 This manifestation of ambiguity is somewhat distinct from that which is revealed through a comparative

227 Ibid., 5.

228 Ibid.
historical analysis that highlights differing claims over time. A passage from the Second Vatican Council that seldom, if ever, achieves a consensual understanding serves to illustrate her method and point:

Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests on observing this law, and by it they will be judged. Their conscience is people’s most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God, whose voice echoes in their depths…. Through loyalty to conscience, Christians are joined to others in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems…..

Hogan analyzes the ambiguity of this Vatican II excerpt as follows:

In the early part of the passage the work of conscience is described simply as obedience to the objective moral law. The task of conscience is to obey. Yet, in the later sentences the idiom changes substantially. The paradigm of law is abandoned. Instead, it is the voice of God echoing in one’s depths that orients the person to seek the good in each situation.

Although she does not explicitly appeal to the legalistic and personalist schools in this portion of her analysis, essentially ambiguity within the text lies, in part, in its incorporation of both voices, with the former being the legalistic and the latter being the personalist. This intentional dynamic, as these theological texts are the product of extended conversations, or maybe better said negotiations, begs the question as to how a


230 Hogan, 111.

231 Additionally, many including this author, would argue that dimensions of the ambiguity are rooted in linguistics, subjectivity, and the variety of critical lenses that reflect postmodernism.
Catholic is to understand tradition as reflected in Church teachings, especially in the face of ambiguity.

When Sue and many Catholics like herself, who know the Church’s teaching, or at least something of it, and want to do the right thing, seek to talk it over with a priest and get counsel, ambiguity plays a key role in the conversation, both on the part of the layperson and the priest. Some individuals seeking guidance may have the hope, or even expectation, that the experience of ambiguity exclusively resides within themselves and that by being better informed of the tradition by “one who knows,” they will achieve resolution. Alternatively, other individuals may be well aware of the ambiguity within Church teaching that exists outside of themselves and are actually desiring counsel as to how to manage it—a potential invitation to explore primacy of conscience. From the priest’s perspective, the ambiguity within the tradition may be anything from complication that is avoided or denied to a resource that is employed in a variety of ways, not the least of which is engaging primacy of conscience. In short, the pastoral setting and those occupying it are truly and significantly affected by the presence of ambiguity within the tradition and, therefore, it necessitates attention and understanding.

Returning to the Second Vatican Council text analyzed by Hogan as an example of her method, it is critical to recognize that even though this ambiguity in the tradition of conscience is unresolved, it is anything but unconscious. Commenting upon this theological text that, as previously stated, is at least a product of extended conversations if not negotiations, Cardinal Ratzinger claimed, “the fathers of Vatican II were anxious not to allow an ethics of conscience to be transformed into the domination of subjectivism, and they were not willing to canonize a limitless situation ethics under the
guise of conscience."²³² This negotiated compromise of a “text that pulls in both directions” reflects the Church consciously developing its doctrine in the midst of tension between differing theological perspectives, yet it does not resolve the type of ambiguity it produces nor the consequences that flow from it for Catholics like Sue. In fact, it contributes to it, especially in any attempt to avoid or deny the ambiguity’s existence.

In addressing the presence of ambiguity within the Church’s teaching, Hogan’s identification of her task as “clarifying unresolved matters in the tradition” holds a nuance worth profiling. Her claim is to clarify unresolved matters— clarity is the goal, not resolution.²³³ Confronting the illusion of theological homogeneity within the Catholic tradition is a primary objective in accomplishing her goal. In this instance, clarification enhances ambiguity, given it highlights confusion and contradiction and, as such, may exacerbate the lack of resolution, or at least one restricted by singularity of thought, belief, and practice.

Some Catholics assess themselves and others on the basis of conformity with an assumed homogenous Catholic tradition. From this perspective, Catholic tradition is considered monolithic and fixed; therefore, the only real question is whether or not one’s beliefs and practices rightly conform. The tradition is considered devoid of any multiplicity that would lead to contradictions or confusion. In short, any real interpretation of tradition is unnecessary because of an assumed theological harmony and


²³³ One could argue that Hogan may, in fact, seek resolution, but this would not be the resolution of theological homogeneity, but rather the understanding and acceptance of the management of theological diversity.
unity. Hogan’s clarification (i.e., deconstruction) of this theological worldview of uniformity within the arena of conscience is, in fact, representative of a broader theological methodology (i.e., historicism) that extends well beyond the topic of conscience and even Catholicism itself, but merits a summary inclusion given its role and relevance.

Rooted in the advances of postmodernism, the historical dimension of human experience has come to the fore as a vital, if not central, component in any critical study. The historicist perspective actually undergirds Hogan’s work and operates out of the “assumptions of human situatedness, particularity, and plurality that have come to characterize Western thought.”234 The analysis of conscience provided by Hogan clearly reveals that ...our current context is the product of the vagaries of complex and varied historical processes that have preceded our era and of our own contemporary responses to and transformations of these processes.235

This historicist understanding of and appreciation for the complexity and development of context is better elaborated and astutely articulated in Sheila Davaney’s pragmatic historicism, George Lindbeck’s post-liberalism, and David Tracy’s revisionist theology.236

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236 See Sheila Greeve Davaney, Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000); George Lindbeck, The
Operating from a historicist perspective, the concept of a homogenous tradition is rejected, as the diversity, plurality, and permeability of contexts exist across both time and topic. This historicist theological methodology understands tradition as follows:

Traditions of meaning, value, and practice are, thus, always specific and concrete, developing in localized, not general or abstract ways, intertwined with other social and cultural factors. They are, therefore, internally pluralistic. Every tradition is in reality many traditions, conglomerations of distinctive and even heterogeneous interpretations, sets of meanings and practices that cannot be assimilated to or reduced to any universally present factor.237

Ultimately Hogan’s work demonstrates this type of plurality within the Catholic tradition regarding conscience and reflects a historicist sensibility and analysis, even if not overt.238

Lest these theological sources be undercut or underappreciated as viable and vital contributors to the discussion because they are not directly situated within Catholicism, the work of Catholic theologian Terrance Tilley merits attention. Not only does Tilley engage Lindbeck and Tracy as theological conversation partners, he competently demonstrates within the Catholic tradition the type of plurality identified by historicism. In his Inventing Catholic Tradition, Tilley juxtaposes Pius IX’s famous papal “Syllabus of Errors” (1864) with the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on Religious Freedom” (1965). The former stated that it was an error to believe that “every person is

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237 Davaney, 112.

free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, that person shall consider true.”  

Whereas the latter authoritatively proclaimed that “the human person has a right to religious freedom…. In matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to one’s own beliefs. Nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with one’s own beliefs, whether privately or publicly.” The contradiction is obvious and the subsequent confusion predictable.

Tilley not only concretely manifests the internally pluralistic character of the Catholic tradition, but also presses the matter by questioning the Catholic understanding of the development of doctrine that posits continuity as an essential element in its operation. Confronted with the blatant contradiction of these two documents, in his introduction to the “Declaration on Religious Freedom,” eminent Catholic theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J. stated:

The notion of development, not the notion of religious freedom, was the real sticking point for those who opposed the Declaration even to the end. The course of development between the “Syllabus of Errors” (1864) and “Dignitatis Humanae” (1965) still remains to be explained by theologians.

By dislodging this one fundamental assumption of continuity regarding the development of doctrine and tradition, Tilley demonstrates the validity and importance of

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241 Although less extreme, similarly relevant examples of the internal plurality of tradition can be found throughout Catholicism. For example, see Rome Has Spoken: A Guide to Forgotten Papal Statements and How They Have Changed Through the Centuries, eds. Maureen Fiedler and Linda Rabben (New York: Crossroad, 1998); and William A. Christian Sr., Oppositions of Religious Doctrines (NY: Herder, 1969).

the historicist perspective. He claims that “nearly thirty-five years later, no convincing
theory of development has accounted for the ‘course of development’ that allows a clear
contradiction in 1965 of what the highest magisterial authority in the Church taught in
1864.” Further, by locating this challenge within the Church’s highest-level
discussions regarding the development of doctrine, Tilley implicitly lays claim to a
similar analysis of the entire spectrum of doctrines. The development of doctrine is more
complexly understood than simply the question of continuity, yet deconstructing this one
dimension radically reframes its understanding.

Regardless of the final outcome, or more likely even if there is one, in the debate
over the Catholic theological construct of continuity within the development of doctrine
and tradition, the very fact that Tilley and others can make this an arguable case is, in
and of itself, extremely relevant to the pastoral problem at hand that is caught up in the
tradition’s ambiguity, all the while necessitating real and practical judgment and action.
In the face of undeniable diversity and multiplicity within the Catholic tradition, however
interpreted and managed barring outright denial, agency must be operative, from the
generation and transmission of the teaching to its reception and application.

Summary

It is neither the intent nor the capacity of this research to resolve the tension and
ambiguity in the tradition between the Traditionalist and Revisionist schools and their

243 Terrence W. Tilley, Inventing Catholic Tradition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books,
2000), 117.

244 For a classic presentation on the questions and understanding of the development of
doctrine, see John Henry Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,
2d ed. (London: James Toovey, 1846).

245 For example, John Henry Cardinal Newman and John Courtney Murray, S.J.
corresponding expressions, inasmuch as to do so would be the equivalent of achieving theological homogeneity. The debate between the legalistic and personalist perspectives will continue well beyond this work as “the texts pull in both directions” and the two corresponding perspectives prioritize differing values and configurations. Just as Hogan’s work bolsters the personalist perspective without resolving the debate or difference, similarly my goal is not to clear the balance of the debate, but just to further tip the scale in the direction of the personalist perspective.

Given the absence of a pastoral theological perspective and the relevance of Bandura’s insights and empirical research in these debates, I believe an important contribution is possible in the ongoing engagement of this pastoral theological conundrum. I intentionally locate the problem as pastoral theological rather than moral, ethical, or philosophical in order to broaden the base of the conversation. Further, it is my contention that the debate’s impasse will not achieve significant progress by the simple turn of yet another screw (i.e., just one more text interpreted in just the right light after the fashion that so many other texts have already been considered). In other words, the current direction of the conversation tends to be yielding diminishing returns. Rather, approaching the issue from another legitimate theological discipline that has not found a voice in the conversation may truly contribute to loosening the logjam. This is an example of how “pastoral theology, like practical theology, contributes not only to the formulation of theory and practice relevant to the ministry of care, but also recovers, corrects, and expands viewpoints in other branches of theology and ministry.”

As a pastoral theologian, I press the discussion for theoretical coherence and practical

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246 Graham, Care of Persons 23-24, emphasis added.
applicability. In this respect, the pastoral theological task, informed by the priestly work of providing moral guidance to conscience-driven parishioners, tilts toward the personalist interpretation. When so tilted, not only is ambiguity in the tradition more fully recognized, but so also do matters of personal agency come into prominence.

The principal thrust of this dissertation’s examination of primacy of conscience is that agency is a critical element in understanding the meaning and function of primacy of conscience within the relationship between the social group (as reflected in the terms tradition and authority) and the individual (as reflected in the term primacy of conscience)—an agency that is interdependent and at times in conflict. One of the unstated assumptions and/or insufficiently developed concepts within the primacy of conscience debate between obedience to tradition and following individual conscience is the status of agency as it relates to primacy. This turn to agency brings several questions about primacy of conscience into the foreground. Does the concept of “primacy” within the tradition of conscience hint at or even push toward a certain interpretation of agency? How is agency predominantly understood within the current debate regarding conscience and what other ways might be understood? Is there something beneficial within the concept of primacy of conscience that has either been “lost” or not yet discovered within the tradition? How can we further understand primacy in light of Bandura contemporary insights regarding agency?

The next chapter will explore these questions regarding agency. Clearly the personalist view of primacy of conscience has been well articulated by moral and historical scholars like McCormick, Curran, and Hogan, yet a constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of
conscience in the Catholic tradition, when primacy is amplified with the implications
drawn from a SCT view of agency, is another critical resource lacking in the conversation
and understanding.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE LENS OF AGENCY

In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems.

Personal agency and social structure operate interdependently.247

Graham’s pastoral theology in Care of Persons, Care of Worlds examines the pastoral and theological context in systemic terms and clearly considers agency to be an important dimension of power. As discussed in Chapter 2, his work and Bandura’s resonate well with one another and are broadly compatible in that they share a systemic perspective on relationality, and they emphasize the importance of agency. Yet from the outset of this chapter it is critical to state that the character of their theories and commensurate contributions differ substantially. Graham considers agency as an important dimension of power, and looks at the pastoral and theological situation in systemic terms. Bandura’s research with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) gives social scientific grounding for a systemic perspective, and offers resources Graham does not for relating this perspective to the personalist view of primacy of conscience. Graham’s pastoral theology locates Bandura and this project regarding primacy of conscience in a pastoral, theological, and systemic context. From that location, Bandura offers more disciplined behavioral science research and theory on the social-personal interfaces

involved in decision-making about moral concerns. In short, the pastoral theological method sets the context and SCT norms the claims.

From the discipline of social psychology and its corresponding methods of research, SCT examines the interaction of social structures and individuals (e.g., the Church and its members) through Bandura’s idea of reciprocal determinism. The problem of either the Church or the individual having moral agency can be better addressed from this systemic perspective. Within the structure of what he calls “reciprocal determinism,” Bandura speaks of agency and human intentionality in ways that some social psychologies do not. Consequently, his work compared to other perspectives can better amplify moral theology that requires agency and rejects deterministic explanations of moral lives. Bandura’s theorizing about agency includes discussion of self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion. All of these are important for illuminating agency in primacy of conscience and are not present in Graham’s pastoral theology.

By drawing upon SCT, as one distinct and well established social cognitive theory, this chapter intends to offer support for the personalist view of conscience when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn from an SCT understanding of agency. Catholic moral theologians recognize and accept agency as a factor in the question of primacy of conscience; nevertheless its understanding and articulation is still capable of further development. Generally, in Catholic moral theology and in the debate regarding conscience in particular, agency is understood and articulated philosophically and is a common notion with varying interpretations. Hence, Catholic moral theology and the particular question of conscience can benefit from the array of resources available within the scientific field that may illuminate the
conversation. As I will show, SCT is once such resource. SCT both aligns with and amplifies
the important concept of agency within the doctrine of primacy of conscience and illuminates
the corresponding theological conversation on a variety of levels.

This chapter will first address how science, and more specifically social science, is understood and employed by pastoral theology. An historical study of empirical psychologies and the Catholic notion of conscience will provide a contemporary mooring for and example of the intersection between theology and psychology as related to the question and understanding of conscience. The second portion of this chapter will provide the background of SCT as well as a summary orientation to the theory, especially as it addresses the systemic and relational character of the human experience as related to agency and decision-making. As the SCT understanding of agency is further examined, additional dimensions of the theory will be considered that are relevant for better understanding agency within the exercise of primacy of conscience. This will include what SCT considers the normative cognitive dynamics of self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion. But before this dissertation engages any of the specific details of the scientific theories and/or studies being considered, it is vital to be clear about the possibilities and limits of this cross-disciplinary venture.

Science as a Resource in Pastoral Theology

One need not be an historical theologian to readily recognize that Catholicism’s historical relationship with science has been not only ambiguous, but even conflicted at times. On the one hand Aquinas’ theological application of science through the integration of Aristotelian philosophy stands to this day as a remarkable, if not revered, cross-disciplinary venture within Catholic theology. On the other hand, questions, thoughts, and theories flowing
from intellectuals, be they philosophers or scientists, have not always been so well received, as the Church’s response to modernism clearly reflects as a case in point. Given the muddied waters of this historical relationship between the Church and its use science, it is important to begin this chapter by clearly stating what is and is not intended as an outcome through an appeal to the field of science in order to amplify an understanding of agency, and what implications scientific resources might bring to bear upon interpreting the meaning of primacy of conscience.

First and foremost, a scientific perspective is not included here in order to function as the final arbiter regarding how agency is to be correctly understood. That is, it does not provide proof of both the existence and intricacy of agency, let alone that the legalistic perspective is wrong whereas the personalist perspective is right. Although the existence of agency is a given within Catholic moral theological circles, that is not actually the case within the scientific field. In this particular debate regarding conscience, Catholic theologians primarily question where moral agency resides. Yet some scientists question not where, but whether agency even exists (at least agency as it is framed within these theological conversations). Within the scientific field itself, the jury is still out on this question. Cases from many positions are researched, made, and argued; consequently, science cannot and does not prove, disprove, or resolve any and all questions about the existence of agency and any corresponding agential dynamics. Even if relatively committed to certain similar methodological moorings, the theories and

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practices of science are not homogenous and scientific disciplines indisputably carry content and conclusions that stand in tension and remain in question, not unlike the discipline of theology. In short, science informs this theological research as one among a number of authoritative, but not determinative, resources.

Second, given the indeterminate quality of the scientific debate regarding agency, it is critical to identify that neither this chapter nor this dissertation is a study on agency. Therefore, the array of scientific views regarding agency will not be considered, although it is important to note the range of the continuum. On one end, some theories call into question the very existence of agency, all the while being labeled reductionistic and deterministic by others, including the Church.249 On the other end of the continuum, reputable scientific voices (e.g., Bandura) are making a claim for an understanding of agency that resonates with that of Catholic theology as regards human society and individuals. These claims, even if not definitive, certainly are among a body of credible provisional knowledge that has emerged from science and social science. As such, scientific attempts to shed light upon the question of agency, not the least of which is social cognitive theory, merit the attention of pastoral theology. In sum, SCT is the location on the continuum regarding the scientific research that will be explored.

Yet just as science broadly understood does not provide a sole position on the question of agency, neither does social cognitive theory. Bandura’s SCT is actually but one expression within a number of social cognitive theories and, in certain dimensions, the differences between

them are not merely nominal. Although any number of differences are operative between SCT and the broader circle of more “traditional” social cognitive theories, it is most important to note in light of the focus of this dissertation that the latter take a less agentic or intentional view of human conduct. For example, more “traditional” social cognitive theories significantly attend to automatic and unintentional processes that do not conjure the concept of agency, let alone intentionality, while SCT integrates these automatic and unintentional processes as in relationship on some level to both agency and intentionality. Other social cognitive theories may, to a degree, integrate these automatic and unintentional processes as in relationship to both agency and intentionality in the same way that Bandura does, but their belief in the possibility of agency may be quite different from that of SCT. Therefore, similar to this chapter not being a study on agency, it is also not intended to be a study on social cognitive theory at large. SCT is the principal social

cognitive theory being explored as one voice among social cognitive theories. Further, SCT has unique dimensions that are not operative in every social cognitive theory and would even be contested by some.

In accord with the methodology of this pastoral theology, cognate sources like social psychology or, more specifically in this instance, SCT are engaged in order to potentially offer insight and perspective into whatever question or problem the theological project is addressing. Yet, as noted above, the scientific resources themselves often stand in tension with differing positions within their respective fields. It is neither the role nor the capacity of pastoral theology to resolve those differences, yet it is the responsibility of pastoral theology to appeal to those resources in accurate and credible ways. In this instance, therefore, both the possibilities and limits of the contribution of SCT need to be identified.

The possibility of SCT amplifying an understanding of agency and the implications it may bear for understanding primacy of conscience deserve attention given SCT’s legitimate status within the field of social psychology and its relevance to the topic at hand. The contribution of this specific scientific trajectory may be waning in the face of new neuroscientific research, yet at present it is neither considered antiquated nor irrelevant. The limits of SCT also need to be identified, even if not explored. SCT does not represent the perspective of all social cognitive theories regarding the concept of agency, let alone that of the scientific field at large. In short, SCT offers a limited and provisional scientific contribution to the theological question and conversation regarding agency, but does not include the extremely diverse and contrary scientific perspectives that also exist. Finally, in terms of the broad limits and possibilities of pastoral theology engaging the sciences, it is vital to recognize that the end
product, at least in this particular project, is a conversation informed and illuminated by a scientific perspective, but is not a scientific conversation as such.

Therefore, as summarized in Chapter 2, SCT will be employed in this dissertation in order to expand and explicate some of the agential dimensions involved in an act of claiming primacy of conscience. One dimension of conscience, given its engagement of judgment and action, is that it is an expression of agency. Not only does the ambiguity inherent within the Catholic tradition, as noted in the previous chapter, necessitate an understanding and exercise of agency, but also the very term “primacy” within the doctrine itself suggests, if not demands, an appreciation for the role of agency in moral decision-making when choices differ from the normative teaching of the tradition. An enhanced understanding of agency will not eliminate ambiguity within the tradition, yet it can better facilitate, both for the individual and the Church, an ability to manage the challenges and opportunities present within the tradition’s ambiguity.

Bandura’s systemic insight into agency and its implications can help recover, if not amplify and further, the initial understanding and role of primacy within the doctrine of conscience. At the core and most critically, SCT examines the reciprocal and interactive agential framework within which personal and social dynamics emerge and are operative such that one cannot be fully understood in isolation from the other.251 This framing of

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agency facilitates understanding and integrating individual and communal agential
dynamics that must be present if the Catholic view of primacy of conscience is to better
assist Catholics and become more fully intelligible to the tradition itself, especially given
its ambiguity about various levels of responsibility for moral decisions.

Rather than an “either-or” approach that pits the individual and the Church against
one another, Bandura’s systemic conceptualization of agency presents a “both-and”
framework that affords both parties unique expressions of agency. The general terms of
initiating and receiving introduced by Graham when discussing agency are explored in
greater detail through the SCT framing of reciprocal determinism. As Bandura presents
behavioral scientific research and theory on the social-personal interfaces involved in
decision-making about moral concerns, SCT’s view of agency examines cognition,
behavior, the environment, and their reciprocal interaction in a fashion that enhances an
understanding of primacy of conscience. Specifically, Bandura’s research examines
cognitive and behavioral dimensions of agency (i.e., the role of self-reflectiveness,252
perceived self-efficacy,253 and social persuasion254) that potentially engage and amplify
unexplored dimensions of the function of primacy of conscience. These will be explored
in greater detail when this chapter enters its major section on SCT and addresses its
background, provides an overview of its systemic perspective of reciprocal determinism, and
its understanding of agency.


With that framing in mind before going into the major SCT portion of this chapter, a relatively recent historical mooring will be helpful in understanding the contemporary intersection between psychology and Catholic moral theology regarding the concept of conscience. In order to accomplish this end, the research of Thomas Srampickal will be drawn upon. This research represents what was, at the time, a moderately progressive cross-disciplinary study regarding empirical psychology and a Catholic understanding of conscience. First, his research and conclusions regarding the concept of conscience in empirical psychology will be reviewed. From that point, his examination of the use of the concept of conscience in the documents of the Second Vatican Council will be sketched. Finally, Srampickal’s synthesis and conclusion of how these empirical psychologies influential at the time of the Second Vatican Council intersect with the understanding of conscience operative in the documents of the Second Vatican Council will be provided. The era of Srampickal’s research coincides with the emergence of the legalistic and personalist perspectives regarding conscience that have consolidated in the ensuing decades and remain to this day.

In addition to providing a historical platform for entering the conversation between psychology and Catholic theology regarding primacy of conscience, Srampickal’s research identifies two conclusions particularly relevant to this dissertation. The two principal points that will be drawn from Srampickal’s work are as follows. First, there is a need in the documents of the Second Vatican Council for an improved understanding and articulation of the social nature of the person. Srampickal’s critique of the Second Vatican Council’s documents remains relevant to this day and stands on its own. Second, psychology is a

unique and important scientific resource for understanding the dynamics related to the formation and development of conscience. Although this dissertation does not intend to further the exploration of conscience along the lines of the particular empirical psychologies Srampickal employed, it does agree with dimensions of his conclusions and will explore them through SCT.

A Catholic Study on Conscience in the 1970’s

Slightly more than a decade after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Srampickal’s *The Concept of Conscience in Today’s Empirical Psychology and in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council* became the principal resource that identified and elaborated both the resonance and dissonance present between Catholic theological and select modern psychological perspectives on the concept of conscience. Srampickal’s comparative analysis of conscience serves as one expression of the broader context of the day in its exploration of the intersection between both theological and psychological interpretations and critiques of the concept of conscience.256 Although his research on the concept of conscience in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and empirical psychology is principally limited to the Catholic arena, substantial overlap exists across Christian denominations.

The study and understanding of conscience, like so many other dimensions of the person and society, underwent substantial, if not radical, reformulation in the modern era. This dissertation does not provide an extensive review of that history as it emerged and developed. Nevertheless, Srampickal’s research affords a sufficient summary entry point

into this reformulation regarding conscience by virtue of his comparative analysis of the empirical psychology of the time and what were the recently drafted documents of the Second Vatican Council. Although other disciplines, especially philosophy and its impact on theology through the emergence of existentialism and phenomenology, played significant roles in this modern reformulation, Srampickal’s focus, like that of this dissertation, is the impact and contribution of psychology for the understanding of conscience in relationship to the Catholic tradition.

Conscience and Empirical Psychology

The three main psychological theories integrated into Srampickal’s research are cognitive-developmental, identification, and learning theories. From approximately 1950, “…empirical psychology began to show a great interest in and concern for the study of conscience. This resulted in a more systematic study—both in theoretical formulation and in empirical investigations—of conscience.”257 The investigation into conscience through these various theoretical orientations and corresponding empirical explorations provides insight into the dimensions and development of conscience.258 Nevertheless, the contribution of psychology toward the reformulation of the concept of conscience in the modern era began well before the 1950’s, as Sigmund Freud’s introduction of psychoanalytic psychology profoundly altered the conversation and understanding at the turn of the century. As Srampickal notes: “From the psychological point of view, the theory that had been influencing the ‘concept of conscience’ up to a

257 Srampickal, 1.

258 Ibid., 2.
quarter of a century ago was the ‘superego’ concept of the Freudian depth psychology.”259

Although the influence of Freud will be implicitly addressed in the section on identification theory, it is worth noting, in the very broadest of strokes, Freud’s understanding of conscience as it relates to the super-ego. In the context of the basic elements of the psychic apparatus coined by Freud—the id, the ego, and the super-ego—the phenomena of conscience principally reside in the super-ego. The super-ego, initially formed by authorities’ external demands, principally parental, on the child’s ego, eventually displaces these authorities and serves as its own locus of power as it reflects an internalized manifestation of those primal external authorities and their demands.260 In Freud’s words, “The super-ego takes the place of the parental function, and thenceforward observes, guides and threatens the ego in just the same way as the parents acted to the child before.”261

Certainly one cannot limit Freud’s insight into conscience simply to its relationship to the super-ego, as his forays into that question were both broad and deep, nevertheless the function of the super-ego stands front and center in the conversation as it relates to the psychic structure.262 According to Paul Lehmann, “…for Freud, the neurotic

259 Ibid., 1.


262 For example, see Sigmund Freud’s The Origins of Psychoanalysis (1910); Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1922); The Problem of Lay Analysis (1927); Civilization and Its Discontents (1930); and The Problem of Anxiety (1936).
and the societal aspects of the phenomena of conscience meet in the super-ego and its operation. In a word, conscience is the super-ego.”263 This claim alone gives a sense of the historic impact Freud’s theory and practice had on the substantial and radical reformulation of the concept of conscience in the modern era. In this dissertation, Freud’s influence will be implicitly referred to and covered by Srampickal’s review of identification theory. Therefore, a brief review of the empirical psychology employed by Srampickal is in order.

The first of the empirical psychological theories to be addressed is cognitive-developmental theory. These approaches into the investigation of the phenomena of conscience are well represented through the renowned work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Although of historical import and influential at the time of Srampickal’s research, it is important to note that these theories, or at least dimensions of them, are both dated and fairly controversial (e.g., the concept of stages, at least strictly defined). Therefore, the material is reviewed here inasmuch as it is part of the historical conversation between psychology and Catholic theology that Srampickal addresses. What is of note from these theories though, inasmuch as it relates to this dissertation and is not strongly contested or controversial, is the claim that moral development includes and is influenced by the interaction between the person and the environment.

Cognitive-developmental theories principally attend to the cognitive dimensions of moral responses. Further, these moral responses are understood as moving through

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263 Lehmann, 39, emphasis in original.
developmental changes that correspond to shifts within the cognitive structure.\textsuperscript{264}

Cognitive-developmental research predominantly focused on the variables that affect and alter a child’s moral thinking and judgment. Without going into the detail of the theories of Piaget or Kohlberg as they reflect cognitive-developmental approaches into the investigation of the phenomena of conscience, there are points of agreement or intersection between these theorists that reflect the general thrust of the cognitive-developmental perspective.

At the time of Srampickal’s research, empirical psychology accepted the theoretical structure of stages. Both Piaget and Kohlberg identified stages that posit a ‘natural,’ if not universal, pattern of moral development that correlates to maturation-growth. Although there is currently substantial critique of both theories, it is worth noting their stages at least as an historical context of cognitive-developmental theories. For example, Piaget claimed a child’s moral development occurs in basically two stages that are qualitatively different.\textsuperscript{265} The first stage (heteronomous) is located at approximately age 7 and the second stage (autonomous) is placed around the age of 9. Adult constraint and egocentricity are principal factors in the development of the first phase. Maturation, intellectual development and social experiences are the principal casual factors in the development of the second phase. Kohlberg, building upon the work


of Piaget, posited three levels that consisted of six stages. The first level of Preconventional Morality consisted of Stage 1 (Obedience and Punishment Orientation) and Stage 2 (Individualism and Exchange). The second level of Conventional Morality consisted of Stage 3 (Good Interpersonal Relationships) and Stage 4 (Maintaining the Social Order). The third level of Postconventional Morality consisted of Stage 5 (Social Contract and Individual Rights) and Stage 6 (Universal Principles).

Certainly there are additional points of resonance as well as dissonance between the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg, not to mention early cognitive-developmental theorists like J. Mark Baldwin, George Herbert Mead, or their predecessors, but those are not necessary here, given the brief nature of this review. What remains relevant for this research from the cognitive-developmental approach is the claim that moral development is interactional inasmuch as maturational factors that are internal interact with environmental factors that are external. As will be seen later, this final point is central to the systemic insight of SCT.

In addition to cognitive-developmental theories, identification theory is examined in Srampickal’s research. Identification approaches into the investigation of the phenomena of conscience are represented by Srampickal through a variety of theorists. As examples he recognizes, R. R. Sears, E. Maccoby, H. Levin, W. Allinsmith, R.

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269 Srampickal, 254-255.
Grinder, R. Burton, J. M. Whiting, and I. L. Child as important contributors to the empirical study of conscience from the perspective of identification theory. Nevertheless, these expressions of identification theory clearly harken to and are built upon the renowned work of Freud. Certainly psychoanalytic psychology itself does not directly fit within the usual understanding of empirical psychology, yet the impact of Freud and psychoanalysis looms so large in relationship to this theory that Srampickal finds it necessary to delineate the research he draws upon. Specifically he notes:

Here we are not interested in the clinically-based psychoanalytical theory of identification and conscience, but in a more empirically-oriented theory of identification and conscience development. This latter has of course drawn its major inspiration from the psychoanalytical and the stimulus-response theories.  

Identification theory approaches the question of conscience from the perspective of inner control integrated through identification with the parents whereby the child internalizes the values espoused by the parents, whether verbal or behavioral. According to this theory, normally conscience is established in childhood around the age of six. The child’s dependency upon the parent, expressed as anxiety over the potential loss of love and/or necessary material resources for survival, is the basic motive for identification. Ultimately, the early parent-child relationship and corresponding care or training serve as the principal factors that contribute to identification which, in turn, also fosters the development of conscience.  

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270 Ibid., 106.

271 Ibid., 106-121.
Whereas cognitive-developmental theories principally attend to the cognitive dimensions of moral responses, identification theories predominantly focus upon a variety of relational factors that contribute to the development of conscience. In short, according to identification theory, a chain of interrelated factors are involved in the development of conscience: conscience develops as a result of the child’s internalization of parental values through a special form of learning. This learning has its motives, and the strength of these motives varies according to certain factors in the early parent-child interaction.272

Ultimately the development of conscience is interpreted as a unique type of self control.273 Specifically it is considered the child’s inner control as distinguished from both external control of the child and the child’s self-control based upon punishment and reward. The distinguishing factor of this inner control, as interpreted by identification theory, is the dynamic of the early parent-child identification.274

The third and final of the empirical psychological theories to be addressed is learning theory. Srampickal presents three types of learning theory relevant for interpreting conscience: classical conditioning theory,275 instrumental learning theory,276 and observational learning theory.277 These theories, as Klaus Foppa states,

272 Ibid., 109.


274 Ibid.


…are not concerned exclusively with the explanation and systematic representation of the learning processes, but are more or less general theories of behavior, which merely happen to start from the common assumption that the environmental influences operative in learning processes are of major importance for our understanding of the ways in which the individual adapts to his environment. 278

Deeply rooted in experimental models, learning theories and their corresponding research focus on the acquisition and modification of behavior which, in turn, give rise to principles that frame an understanding of the development and function of conscience.

Bandura’s initial research began in the arena of learning theories, specifically observational learning theory. In hindsight, it is clear that observational learning theory was the harbinger of Bandura’s later development of SCT. Whereas classical conditioning and instrumental learning assume direct reinforcements (i.e., the subject’s direct experience of rewards and punishments), observational learning posits, while not denying the role of direct reinforcements, that the subject’s observation of models also contributes to the learning process. What is of particular interest in this distinction between observational learning and both classical conditioning and instrumental learning is the function and affect of the observation itself. For example, from an observational learning perspective, if a parent models certain behavior in a given situation, whether that behavior is reinforced or punished, the child can learn from that observation. In short,


learning as part of the formation and development of conscience is affected by social interaction, either through direct or observed experience.

These three categories of empirical psychology—cognitive-developmental, identification, and learning theories—contributed in unique ways to the understanding of the dimensions and development of conscience. Certainly differences in understanding the dimensionality and development of conscience exist not only between the three broad theoretical categories identified, but also within those categories themselves. Nevertheless, Srampickal gleans several claims about the nature, dimensionality, and development of conscience that surface from these various approaches and their corresponding research. And while other psychologies than those he cites may given better explanations for these processes, he lays the groundwork for interpreting the relationship between conscience understood psychologically and primacy of conscience understood theologically.

First, in very general terms regarding its nature, conscience relates to subjective interiorization, however that is understood to be realized or accomplished. That is to say, conscience relates to a person’s response from within and does not solely rely upon external sanctions, whether actual or imagined. These various theories recognize, each in its own manner, that this interior response neither develops nor exists in isolation or a vacuum, given the social and environmental character of experience. Finally, according to these theories, a person’s internal response is centered or located in the domain of moral values, regardless of how they are understood to be constructed, such that there is a
sense of obligation as to how individuals think and feel they should act in any given circumstance.²⁷⁹

Second, the internal response rooted in morals and values is understood as having three basic dimensions—thinking, acting, and feeling.²⁸⁰ These dimensions, although interrelated, have unique functions as related to a person’s internal response. Srampickal gives a succinct summary as follows:

The cognitive dimension judges and evaluates one’s intentions, actions, conflict situations, etc., in light of one’s values. The behavioral dimension urges one to behave in accordance with these evaluations. The emotional dimension mobilizes ‘aversive’ feelings—fear (anxiety), shame, and guilt—and ‘pleasant’ feelings—satisfaction, joy, etc.—and motivates the individual to restore (or maintain) the integrity of his values.²⁸¹

Third, in terms of the development of conscience, there are a variety of ways to interpret the learning process—cognitive learning, identification, and learning theories (i.e., classical conditioning, instrumental learning, and observational learning). Further,

²⁷⁹ Srampickal, 336.

²⁸⁰ It should be noted that the research reviewed by Srampickal did not show high consistency either within single dimensions or across dimensions (see Srampickal, 337-338).

²⁸¹ Ibid., 336, emphasis in original. It is worth noting that since Srampickal’s project in 1976, substantial data is available from mainstream attitude research. The three dimensions that he employs (i.e., Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive) are generally seen as the three components of attitudes. That said, from the perspective of mainstream attitude research, a person’s evaluative reaction to any given attitude object (e.g., the morality of a particular act, or substance, or belief) would be able to be understood using these dimensions. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, exploring how morality may be understandable as a special case of attitudes might further the understanding of the formation and development of conscience. At a minimum, examining how the research and literature addresses where attitudes come from and how they function being relevant to specifically moral attitudes would further enhance this conversation. For further reference, see Alice H. Eagly and Shelly Chaiken, “Attitude Research in the 21st Century: The Current State of Knowledge,” The Handbook of Attitudes, eds. Dolores Albarracín, Blair T. Johnson, and Mark P. Zanna (New York: Routledge, 2005), 743-764.
the learning process, understood differently according to each given theory, incorporates a variety of dimensions in the development of conscience. For example, the learning process includes a person’s maturation, intellectual development, empathy potential, and temperament as well as aspects of familial relationships (i.e., love and nurturance, discipline and training, parental values and example) and extra-familial relationships (i.e., peer-groups, society at large).²⁸²

Not surprisingly after reviewing the array of data and conclusions related to and emerging from these various theories in their investigation into the phenomena of conscience, Srampickal states that one clear definition does not clearly emerge. Nevertheless, given the empirical character of the psychology reviewed, Srampickal does claim to be able to make an empirical description of conscience. As he states, “we may describe conscience as patterns of moral-value-centered response which constitute a rather consistent, stable, and identifiable dimension of the individual’s psychic organization.”²⁸³ With this description, Srampickal begins his exploration of conscience within the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

Conscience and the Second Vatican Council

Srampickal’s research regarding the concept of conscience in the documents of the Second Vatican Council remains stable within Catholic moral theology and, as such, is relevant to understanding primacy of conscience. Further, although this dissertation is not employing the empirical psychologies that Srampickal did, his cross-disciplinary research connecting empirical psychologies to the moral and ontological views of

²⁸² Ibid., 339.

²⁸³ Ibid., 338, emphasis in original.
conscience in the documents of the Second Vatican Council reflect a certain theological precedent and provide a type of grounding for the research at hand. In addressing the documents of the Second Vatican Council related to conscience, Srampickal states the intent and limits of his research as follows: “…our purpose is not to trace the historical development of the doctrine of conscience contained in the documents, nor to elaborate upon that doctrine, but to draw out the idea of conscience contained in them.” Toward that end he identifies three goals. First, his research cites all the instances and documents where the term conservatia is operative. Second, building upon those citations, he analyzes the concept of conscience present in those texts. Third and finally, given the term conservatia has diverse functions within the various documents, he presents a critical synthesis of the concept of conscience after reviewing all the relevant texts.

The Latin term conscientia (as well as its various Latin cases) appears seventy two times in the original Latin versions. These occurrences of the term conscientia span six documents, several of which are major works of the Second Vatican Council, as their very titles testify—“Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication (Inter Mirifica)”; “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”; “Declaration on Religious Liberty; Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)”; and “Decree on the Training of Priests.” From reviewing these texts, Srampickal’s broadest summary is that “this all goes to show that the term conscientia as found in the council documents has different shades of meaning.

284 Ibid., 344.

285 Ibid., 345-355.
in different contexts.” Nevertheless, his critical synthesis predominantly attempts to “reconcile” and minimize the theological and textual differences rather than explore them.

The overall result of Srampickal’s synthesis of the concept of conscience consolidates into two dimensions—the ontologico-religious dimension and the moral dimension. The ontologico-religious dimension is the transcendent location where the human encounters God and, as such, is principally a theological, if not mystical, claim. The moral dimension, however, is further differentiated by Srampickal as having both fundamental moral and expressive moral dimensionality. According to Srampickal, the fundamental moral dimension is defined as “…man’s basic moral orientation: the call to love and do good, and to avoid evil.” Recall from Chapter 3 that the “…the first principles of the natural law (i.e., do good and avoid evil, act according to right reason) is synderesis.” The fundamental moral dimension, therefore, is an extension of the ontologico-religious dimension, as it relates to the role of God manifesting the concept of the natural law within the person. His research neither attempts to deny or affirm the theological claims inherent in the ontologico-religious dimension or the fundamental moral dimension (synderesis), but rather works largely from the position that this is a point where theology and psychology do not readily intersect. Srampickal’s research differentiated these dimensions of conscience

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286 Srampickal, 366.
287 Ibid., 372-375.
288 Ibid., 374.
289 Ibid., 378-379.
and limited his research almost exclusively to the expressive moral dimension. This dissertation aligns with that delimitation.

The expressive moral dimension identified by Srampickal i.e., the judgment of conscience by which some particular thing or action is judged good or evil) is the point where Srampickal identifies the intersection of theology and psychology, even if without a simple overlay. As developed in Chapter 3 and identified as focal in this research, the judgment of conscience by which some particular thing or action is judged good or evil is *syneidesis*. Srampickal’s work is predominantly located in the expressive moral dimension of conscience or *syneidesis*, as it corresponds to and is illuminated by empirical psychology. He concludes that the actualization of conscience “…is effected through the *expressive dimension*: in thinking, acting, and feeling. Therefore, the various moral responses like moral judgment, self control, altruistic behavior, guilt feelings, etc., (which empirical psychology has investigated in detail) are not mere superficial responses.”

Ultimately the development and formation of conscience “…develops with the human personality; and hence its development is subject to the processes and vicissitudes of the development of the individual.” In short, Srampickal’s research lays claim to the contributions empirical psychologies—cognitive development, identification, and learning theories—offer to the understanding of the development and formation of conscience. This claim holds true for the contribution of SCT as well.

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290 Ibid., 386, emphasis in original.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid., 390.
In addition to the nuance of the moral and expressive dimensions in the formation and development of conscience, Srampickal’s research also offers an important insight into what is lacking in the Second Vatican Council’s documents. In his examination of the concept of conscience, Srampickal’s research explicitly concludes that the theological anthropology operative in the Second Vatican Council’s documents is deficient in its understanding and articulation of the social character of the human person. In no uncertain terms, Srampickal states:

…it should be remarked that the council texts—especially article 16 of “Gaudium et Spes”—do not sufficiently emphasize the social nature and social awareness of man in his basic experience of the fundamental law of conscience. Man experiences not only the relationship and dependence on God, but also his interrelationship and interdependence on his fellowmen, and this latter experience is an essential substratum of man’s experience and awareness of the fundamental law.293

Consistent with the language of his time, Srampickal speaks of this deficiency as related to the social nature and awareness of a person. Although systemic theory was gaining a foothold in a variety of ways at the time of his research, not the least of which was the clinical practice of family therapy, Srampickal did not explicitly label this deficiency as systemic. Nevertheless, clearly what he termed social by way of “interrelationship and interdependence” is a profound dimension of what is currently understood as systemic.

In identifying that the Council’s documents “do not sufficiently emphasize the social nature and social awareness of man,” Srampickal’s research further claims that this is particularly evident and relevant in the arena of the formation and development of conscience—the very area to which empirical psychology adds insight. To his point

293 Ibid., 374.
regarding the intersection and relevance of the social nature and awareness of a person as conscience is formed and developed, he argues:

[In the formation and development of conscience] ...one’s education, social experience, cultural milieu, etc., as the council indicates, comes to play their role. However, except for mentioning the importance of conscience formation and for referring to certain factors related to this formation, the council does not treat this aspect of the phenomena of conscience.²⁹⁴

Ultimately, Srampickal concludes that empirical psychology substantially enhances the understanding and articulation of the expressive moral dimension of conscience, specifically in terms of its development and formation. Further, empirical psychology also offers a preliminary resource for engaging the Second Vatican Council’s deficiency regarding the social dimension of the formation and development of conscience.²⁹⁵

Although the empirical psychologies considered by Srampickal do, to a minor degree, contribute to understanding the social dynamic within the development and formation of conscience in the expressive moral dimension, nevertheless they still come up against the inherent limits operative within the theories themselves. The dominant psychologies that Srampickal drew upon for his research did not include a systemic perspective and remained largely individualistic, even with accounting for the social variables operative in the various theories. In short, Srampickal’s research and conclusion point to the possibility that social psychology may provide a fuller understanding of the social dynamic in the formation and development of conscience, especially in terms of its expressive moral dimension. His work both foreshadows and

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 375.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 390.
points toward the value of exploring a systemic psychological perspective such as the one SCT provides.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the pastoral theology method is this dissertation draws upon a theological anthropology that seeks to integrate the sciences and their vital contribution to the discussion and understanding of religion and theology. Srampickal’s research contributes to the development of a more informed and sophisticated theological anthropology vis-à-vis the empirical psychologies of his day, as they inform the question of the phenomena and concept of conscience. Nevertheless, his contribution is currently dated and did not sufficiently address the underdeveloped social dimension of the human person in the Second Vatican Council documents. This supports the case for exploring the possible contributions of SCT’s systemic perspective.

Before examining what SCT has to offer, one final point regarding Srampickal’s research is worth noting. As Chapter 2 states, sometimes recovering and discovering a dimension of theology that has been “lost” can be both illuminating and vital. This final point regarding Srampickal’s research serves as an example as to one methodological way relevant theological material in the tradition can be lost. A clear example in Srampickal’s research of how important material may be lost in the theological analysis is the choice to principally focus on one document, even though multiple texts and applications of the term conscientia have been identified.

According to Srampickal’s review of the citations in these various documents, only the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” formally addresses the concept of conscience in article 16. Therefore, as he states, “…our study consists in

296 Ibid., 371.

177
primarily analyzing article 16 of “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” Srampickal’s decision to focus his research primarily on article 16 by virtue of assessing it as “formally” addressing the concept of conscience narrows the possibility of benefiting from the wealth of diverse material in the whole body of texts. It should be noted that article 16 is the example reviewed in Chapter 3 where Hogan’s method intentionally explores the internal tension and ambiguity present within even one article. It seems apparent that Srampickal’s critical synthesis and work, although identifying real differences in the texts of the Second Vatican Council regarding the use and meaning of the term conscientia, leans toward articulating a relatively unified expression of the material. This direction of his synthesis results in limitations in the final outcome and conclusion. It is worth noting that his analysis of empirical psychology did not lean as readily toward “reconciling” the differences in the various psychological theories and approaches examined.

Social Cognitive Theory Background and Overview

Over the course of a career spanning almost six decades, Bandura has been a prolific writer both in terms of theory and research. In order to both understand SCT and distinguish it from other more “traditional” social cognitive theories, a brief review of the historical emergence of social learning theory is beneficial. Miller and Dollard’s publication of Social Learning and Imitation in 1941 is generally acknowledged as a

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297 Ibid., 356.

298 Bandura has authored and/or co-authored over three hundred books and articles beginning in 1953 until the present. Since 1986 he has worked on 192 books and articles that build upon SCT. See http://des.emory.edu/mfp/BanBiblioNumbered.pdf for a complete bibliography of Bandura’s work.
significant historical marker of the emergence of social learning theory. \textsuperscript{299} Influenced by, yet moving beyond the prevalent behaviorism of the era that was championed by theorists like B. F. Skinner, Miller and Dollard introduced a theory of social learning and imitation that shifted from the behaviorist notions of associationism in favor of drive reduction principles.\textsuperscript{300} Behavior was still a major focus of their theory and work, yet it was from the position that people model observed behaviors which are either reinforced or extinguished through environmental reinforcement and that human behavior is motivated by internal drives. In short, Miller and Dollard claimed that if humans were motivated to learn a particular behavior, that particular behavior could be learned by clear observations. Further, through imitation of an observed action an individual could establish that behavior and be rewarded (i.e., positive reinforcement).

Social learning theories of this era that worked with and built upon Miller and Dollard’s seminal work basically share three common tenets: 1) humans learn through experience and observation (i.e., vicarious learning); 2) humans model behavior based on identification (i.e., similarity and emotional attachment); and 3) consequences influence whether or not an individual will repeat a behavior (i.e., reward vs. punishment contingencies). It is from this context that Bandura’s SCT was to emerge. The publication of \textit{Social Learning and Personality Development} in 1963 marked his initial

\textsuperscript{299} P. Miller and J. Dollard, \textit{Social Learning and Imitation} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941).

\textsuperscript{300} Parejes, “Overview,” 1.
studies on the acquisition of self-evaluative standards for self-directedness and reflects the beginning of his SCT trajectory.301

After slightly more than a decade, Bandura made a significant contribution to his theory as he introduced the element of self-beliefs into social learning with his 1977 article “Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change.”302 This modification of a predominantly behavioral model by the inclusion of a cognitive variable gave birth to what was to become SCT. Finally, in 1986 Bandura articulated and established his SCT in depth and detail with the publication of Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory.303

Very broadly, SCT posited a perspective of human functioning that affords a primary role to cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes in human adaptation and change. The human person is understood as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating rather than as a reactive organism formed and led by environmental factors or driven by hidden inner impulses. In her book Educational Psychology: Developing Learners, scholar Jeanne Ormrod outlines SCT’s main principles as: 1) individuals learn through the observation of others; 2) learning is an internal process that may or may not change behavior; 3) behavior is self-directed (as opposed to the behaviorist perspective that behavior is determined by the environment);


4) individuals behave in specific ways in order to achieve goals; and 5) reinforcement and punishment have unpredictable and indirect effects on both behavior and learning.\textsuperscript{304} In short, SCT presents human functioning as the result of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. In doing so, it both explains how an individual acquires and maintains certain behavioral patterns, while also providing the basis for developing, implementing, and evaluating intervention strategies and programs.\textsuperscript{305}

More specifically, the concept of reciprocal determinism serves as the central theoretical construct within SCT that frames the human functioning resulting from the interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors.\textsuperscript{306} Individuals are both influenced by and influencing the contexts within which they find themselves; that is,


\textsuperscript{305} K. Glanz, B. Rimer, and F. Lewis, \textit{Health Behavior and Health Education. Theory, Research and Practice} (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons, 2002). Glanz et al provide succinct definitions of additional concepts and/or terms used in SCT: “1) Environment: factors physically external to the person; provides opportunities and social support; 2) Situation: perception of the environment; correct misperceptions and promote healthful forms; 3) Behavioral capability: knowledge and skill to perform a given behavior; promote mastery learning through skills training; 4) Expectations: anticipatory outcomes of a behavior; model positive outcomes of healthful behavior; 5) Expectancies: the values that the person places on a given outcome, incentives; present outcomes of change that have functional meaning; 6) Self-control: personal regulation of goal-directed behavior or performance; provide opportunities for self-monitoring, goal setting, problem solving, and self-reward; 7) Observational learning: behavioral acquisition that occurs by watching the actions and outcomes of others’ behavior; include credible role models of the targeted behavior; 8) Reinforcements: responses to a person’s behavior that increase or decrease the likelihood of reoccurrence; promote self-initiated rewards and incentives; 9) Self-efficacy: the person’s confidence in performing a particular behavior; approach behavioral change in small steps to ensure success; 10) Emotional coping responses: strategies or tactics that are used by a person to deal with emotional stimuli; provide training in problem solving and stress management.”

\textsuperscript{306} Bandura, \textit{Social Foundations of Thought and Action}. 181
agency is determined by and determinate of the array of relationships that constitute reality. As Pajares summarizes:

The foundation of Bandura’s conception of reciprocal determinism [is] the view that (a) personal factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events, (b) behavior, and (c) environmental influences create interactions that result in a triadic reciprocality.\textsuperscript{307}

It should be noted that the deterministic dimension of the theory relates to the process of reciprocity between and among the various factors and is in no way suggestive of a purely behavioral or material understanding of human functioning.\textsuperscript{308}

SCT by its very structure incorporates an individual’s cognitions, behaviors, and the social factors or environment, as well as the interplay among them. This dynamic interplay of reciprocal determinism functions such that “…internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally.”\textsuperscript{309} It is neither entirely individualistic nor purely social in its frame of reference. In other words, the individual may be one particular locus of the pastoral “data” that surfaces or bears some unresolved or lost theological issue, yet interaction with an array of influences necessarily makes the process inherently communal and contextual.

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, Bandura’s research with SCT gives a social scientific grounding for a systemic view of agency as well as its dimensionality.

\textsuperscript{307} Pajares, “Overview,” 1, emphasis in original.


(i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion) through the theoretical construct of reciprocal determinism. The body of SCT research by Bandura and others is extensive and incorporates substantial empirical behavioral measures.\textsuperscript{310} A significant portion of SCT research is located within the arena of education, learning, and it relationship to a person’s aspirations and achievements in life. For example, a 2001 study with a sample of 272 individuals tested a structural model of the network of sociocognitive influences that shape children's career aspirations and trajectories.\textsuperscript{311} In addition to individual studies, a number of meta-analyses related to SCT are also available.\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{310} Appendix B provides a small sampling of abstracts reflecting the types of research that SCT has drawn upon in reaching its conclusions.

\textsuperscript{311} A. Bandura, C. Barbaranelli, G. Caprara, and C. Pastorelli. “Self-efficacy Beliefs as Shapers of Children's Aspirations and Career Trajectories,” Child Development 72, (2001): 187-206. Abstract: This prospective study tested with 272 children (aged 11-15 yrs) a structural model of the network of sociocognitive influences that shape children's career aspirations and trajectories. Familial socioeconomic status is linked to children's career trajectories only indirectly through its effects on parents' perceived efficacy and academic aspirations. The impact of parental self-efficacy and aspirations on their children's perceived career efficacy and choice is, in turn, entirely mediated through the children's perceived efficacy and academic aspirations. Children's perceived academic, social, and self-regulatory efficacy influence the types of occupational activities for which they judge themselves to be efficacious both directly and through their impact on academic aspirations. Perceived occupational self-efficacy gives direction to the kinds of career pursuits children seriously consider for their life's work and those they disfavor. Children's perceived efficacy rather than their actual academic achievement is the key determinant of their perceived occupational self-efficacy and preferred choice of worklife. Analyses of gender differences reveal that perceived occupational self-efficacy predicts traditionality of career choice.

Dualism within the Pastoral Situation

First and foremost, SCT facilitates an enhanced reflection upon, if not the theoretical elimination of, a form of dualism when understanding the relationality of agency (i.e., social group vs. individual). Agency is a critical element in considering and understanding the relationship and/or balance between the social group (i.e., tradition and authority) and the individual (i.e., primacy of conscience)—an agency that is interdependent and at times in tension. SCT recognizes the complications and concerns about dualism when understanding the agency of both the social group and the individual.

Theorizing about human agency and collectivities is replete with contentious dualisms that Social Cognitive Theory rejects. These dualities include personal agency versus social structure, self-centered agency versus communality, and individualism versus collectivism....Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences.\(^{313}\)

As this conversation moves to specific considerations regarding agency (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion), it is vital to not let any particular focus obscure the overall systemic perspective operative. The systemic perspective of SCT remains the foundational backdrop regardless of any specific dimension of agency being examined that may conjure an individualistic perspective (i.e., the term “self”).

As SCT has developed over the years, the concept of human agency has become increasingly nuanced, especially in understanding perceived self-efficacy. Bandura “…distinguishes among three modes of agency: direct personal agency; proxy agency that relies on others to act on one’s behest to secure desired outcomes; and collective agency exercised through group action.”314 Although each of these modes sheds light on the question of agency and potentially the understanding of primacy of conscience, the focus of this research is within the arena of direct personal agency. Of course, given the fundamental platform of SCT, direct personal agency is always social and systemic inasmuch as it is situated within the social system and is both informed by and informing of the social group.

Consequently, the remainder of this chapter will explore dimensions of agency beneficial for interpreting the meaning and function of primacy of conscience from a personalist Catholic viewpoint. It will focus upon specific dimensions and factors operative in the exercise of agency itself (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion). Ultimately, this contribution from SCT helps interprets agency in a way that supports and amplifies the personalist interpretation of primacy of conscience and its prioritization of the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters while taking seriously the communal agency of the tradition. As self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion are reviewed, each dimension will include a brief connection to the broader question of primacy of conscience and agency which will be addressed in depth in Chapter 5.

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Social Cognitive Theory and Self-reflectiveness

In his article “Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective,” Bandura argues that “the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness.” According to SCT, several core features mark the capacity of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Of these four core features, I will focus on self-reflectiveness. Self-reflectiveness is particularly relevant for the discussion of agency and perceived self-efficacy and, consequently, for the understanding of conscience as well. Individuals have the capacity and proclivity to reflect upon their actions as well as any corresponding thoughts and feelings those actions may engender. In the process of examining or reflecting upon one’s own functioning within the social group, or of being self-conscious if you will, individuals may explore a range of issues—mixed motivations, conflicting values, diverse perspectives, and even the meaning attributed to this or that experience.

According to Bandura:

In this metacognitive activity, people judge the correctness of their predictive and operative thinking against the outcomes of their actions, the

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316 Ibid., 6-10.

317 As noted earlier, differing psychological perspectives yield different insights. Although SCT illuminates this discussion of conscience in a variety of ways, clearly it lacks when attempting to interpret the persistent elusiveness of the “unconscious.” The scope of this project prevents integrating psychodynamic models, yet Eric D’Arcy’s The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory (New York: Scribner, 1996) specifically sheds light from a perspective that incorporates the unconscious dimension of the human psyche. Also see, Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).
effects that other people’s actions produce, what others believe, deductions from established knowledge and what necessarily follows from it.\textsuperscript{318}

Self-reflection is a normative cognitive dynamic, one that Bandura believes to be “distinctly human.”\textsuperscript{319} Some evidence would call into question the claim that self-reflection is distinctly human, inasmuch as dolphins, chimps, and elephants exhibit self-reflection, even if quantitatively different from that of humans.\textsuperscript{320} Nevertheless, few, if any, would deny that normatively humans exercise this cognitive function. “Hence [self-reflection] is an important feature of SCT’s understanding of agency. Through self-reflection people make sense of their experiences, explore their own cognitions and self-beliefs, engage in self evaluation, and alter their thinking and behavior accordingly.”\textsuperscript{321}

Clearly there are any number of factors that could contribute to the quality, or lack thereof, of a person’s self-reflection (e.g., intelligence, education, and time devoted to the process) and how one makes sense of experience. Yet the principal purpose here is simply to identify self-reflection as a dimension of agency that has implications for primacy of conscience. More specifically, self-reflectiveness as a normative cognitive process and an expression of agency illuminates how the term “primacy” within the doctrine of primacy of conscience can be better understood. Self-reflection inherently suggests an open quality to the process of a person engaging the world; that is, there are a


\textsuperscript{320} For example, see Kathleen M. Dudzinski, and Toni Frohoff, Dolphin Mysteries: Unlocking the Secrets of Communication (New Haven: Yale College, 2008).

\textsuperscript{321} Pajares, “Overview,” 2.
variety of ways for an individual to make sense of experiences in order to direct one’s thinking and behavior.

Therefore, by implication and application, the results of the self-reflective process could contribute to whether or not a Catholic is inclined to exercise primacy of conscience when making a moral decision. According to SCT’s framing of reciprocal determinism, inevitably self-reflection is socially situated and influenced; hence, self-reflection is anything but an isolated or independent act. Consequently, Catholics making moral decisions from an informed conscience engage in self-reflection that is necessarily informed by the tradition of the Church. Self-reflection, not unlike primacy of conscience, is a systemic act located within a particular person, inasmuch as dimensions of the content and experience being reflected upon arose from the social context that influenced the person.

The doctrine of primacy of conscience, as previously noted, carries with it the expectation that a Catholic have an informed conscience. Historically in the pastoral setting, more often than not, a Catholic having an informed conscience was considered synonymous with the person knowing the normative teaching of the Church on whatever might be the relevant topic involved in the moral decision-making process. Certainly an informed conscience includes the teaching of the Church, but with the implications of SCT it is clear that it involves much more. The process of a person arriving at an informed conscience involves self-reflection (i.e., a metacognitive activity by which people judge the correctness of their predictive and operative thinking against the outcomes of their actions, the effects that other people’s actions produce, what others
believe, deductions from established knowledge and what necessarily follows from it).\textsuperscript{322} Further, it is within the context of reciprocal determinism (i.e., internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally)\textsuperscript{323} that self-reflection occurs. Hence, an informed conscience does not equate with a Catholic simply knowing the Catechism, but is a complex social psychological dynamic process that begins with self-reflection. This is not to suggest that Catholics are or should be conscious of this complexity, but recognizing its presence is key to better understanding how, if not why, the term “primacy” functions and is present within the doctrine.

**Social Cognitive Theory and Perceived Self-Efficacy**

Perceived self-efficacy is one of the most important dimensions of personal agency arising from self-reflectiveness.

Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs in their capacity to exercise some measure of control over their own functioning and over environmental events. *Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency.*\textsuperscript{324} Whether or not individuals can have an impact or effect upon reality radically influences their readiness or reluctance to engage a situation.\textsuperscript{325} A number of meta-analyses support


\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 14-15.

\textsuperscript{324} Bandura, “Social Foundations of Thought and Action,” 21, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave.\footnote{Bandura, “Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective,” 1.}\footnote{Bandura, “Self-efficacy,” 71-81.} Self-efficacy beliefs influence fundamental orientations in thinking such as being pessimistic or optimistic as well as whether thinking or acting is inclined to be self-hindering or self-enhancing.\footnote{Bandura, “Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective,” 1.}

Perceived self-efficacy broadly relates to a person’s sense of agency; consequently, it relates to a sense of moral agency as well. Morality necessarily and ultimately incorporates action or behavior—“avoid evil and do good.” Perceived self-efficacy beliefs influence a person’s behavior which, in turn, inevitably contributes to how a person lives a moral life. Morality is not simply what one thinks, believes, or feels, but also is what one does or how one acts in light of all that has informed that behavior. Therefore, moral decision-making is an expression of agency that is influenced by a person’s perceived self-efficacy.

It should be noted that even though self-efficacy beliefs can influence relatively global claims such as a person being pessimistic or optimistic, specificity regarding
perceived self-efficacy is vital. As Pajares summarizes Bandura’s precaution to researchers seeking to predict academic outcomes from students’ self-efficacy beliefs, he urges that readers would:

…be well advised to follow theoretical guidelines regarding specificity of self-efficacy assessment and correspondence with criterial tasks. This caution has often gone unheeded in educational research, resulting in self-efficacy assessments that reflect global or generalized self-perceptions of competence and that bear slight resemblance to the criterial task with which they are compared….The result is often confounded relationships and ambiguous findings that obfuscate the potential contribution of self-efficacy beliefs to the understanding of academic performances.329

In addition to acknowledging the importance of not muddling or overextending claims of perceived self-efficacy, it is also important to note that perceived self-efficacy can apply in many directions. A person’s perception or assessment of agency within the social group does not, in and of itself, have a trajectory related to traditions or positions espoused by the social group. A person could have an accurate perception of self-efficacy that acknowledges a very limited ability to determine if a behavior is “good or evil” in a certain instance. For example, a complicated and technical medical ethical issue may exceed the understanding of a person who is very conscious of how that complexity may limit the ability to assess the moral issues in play. Yet at the same time, that person could have an accurate perception of self-efficacy that acknowledges a very strong personal capacity to follow or conform to teachings from an authoritative body that is perceived as capable of such determinations. In short, perceived self-efficacy is

about a person’s perception of personal agency and is neither over and against the social
group nor oriented in any specific direction in terms of content.

As this relates to the Catholic context, the focused, yet open quality of the
personalist perspective can support individuals in their belief that they can make a
difference and may foster a readiness to engage a situation. Inasmuch as the personalist
perspective ultimately places responsibility on the person for moral decision-making, this
inherent assumption supports the possibility of self-efficacy. Primacy of conscience is an
exceptional and particularly powerful expression of the degree to which self-efficacy may
be operative for an individual within the Church.

The social group, in this instance the Church, is one major factor that can either
foster or frustrate the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura has identified four
main sources of influence in the development of people’s beliefs in their efficacy,
including “…mastery experiences, seeing people similar to oneself manage task demands
successfully, social persuasion that one has the capabilities to succeed in given activities,
and inferences from somatic and emotional states indicative of personal strengths and
vulnerabilities.”330 Although all four sources are relevant to the development of
perceived self-efficacy, given the discussion at hand regarding primacy of conscience, I
will focus on the influence of social persuasion as it may relate to perceived self-efficacy.

Social Cognitive Theory and Social Persuasion

Social persuasion can have a significant influence on a person’s perceived self-
efficacy. The principal point regarding social persuasion for this dissertation, similar to
that of self-efficacy, is to identify social persuasion as a relevant factor in understanding

agency and, therefore, primacy of conscience. According to SCT, social persuasion is expressed by the social group in a variety of ways that can both positively and negatively influence a person’s sense of perceived self-efficacy. On the positive side of the ledger, “social persuasion is a . . . way of strengthening people’s beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed.” Bandura’s research claims that social persuasion influences perceived self-efficacy and can contribute to the following positive effect.

People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise. To the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed, they promote the development of skills and a sense of personal agency.

On the other hand, social persuasion can undermine perceived self-efficacy much more readily than it can enhance it. Internalized negative social persuasion regarding perceived self-efficacy can result in avoidance of possibilities for fear of failure or lack of perseverance in the presence of complications. In short:

...people who have been persuaded that they lack capabilities tend to avoid challenging activities that cultivate potentialities and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. By constricting activities and undermining motivation, disbelief in one’s capabilities creates its own behavioral validation.

It is important to make the distinction that internalized negative social persuasion that compromises perceived self-efficacy is not the same as negative social persuasion that functions morally as a prohibitive social norm. The former is about the negative

331 Ibid., 3.
332 Ibid.
333 Ibid.
334 Ibid.
impact of social persuasion upon a person’s belief in the capacity to accomplish a task (e.g., everyone says a three minute mile is impossible, so I must not be able to achieve it), while the latter is about social persuasion that contributes to enforcing social norms by way of prohibition (e.g., an employer cannot exclude a candidate on the basis of race because it runs counter to our social value of all persons being created equal). In this dissertation, when discussing negative internalized social persuasion, the focus is exclusively related to the negative impact of the social persuasion upon a person’s perceived self-efficacy and is not about the impact of specific social moral values or content.

Social persuasion can enhance people’s belief in their capacity to succeed or, in this pastoral context,competently make moral choices. Even if it is cliché within the United States, the proverbial “you can grow up to be whatever you want to be, even President,” captures the sentiment of a positive social influence that is open to and supportive of an individual’s achievement. The research of Holden, Moncher, Schinke, and Barker led them to conclude that “…to the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed, they promote development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy.”

Social persuasion is expressed in many forms, but given the pastoral issue being addressed, I will limit it to the context of the message communicated regarding a person’s ability and competency to make moral choices in relationship to the Catholic tradition. Not unlike the complexity of perceived self-efficacy, it is important to acknowledge that

social persuasion can apply in a multitude of ways as well. It is vital to not simplify the concept of social persuasion or the experience of Catholics making moral decisions by readily and simplistically applying a negative or positive label. Pastoral experience suggests that many Catholics have, to some degree, lost a sense of not only how, but also even if, they can manage their own religious and moral questions. Nevertheless, it would be presumptuous and beyond the scope of this research to claim clarity as to what has or has not functioned as positive and negative social persuasion in this situation.

Social Persuasion and Moral Norms

Even though primacy of conscience supports a sense of perceived self-efficacy, the social assessment and determination of what is considered right or wrong for society remains principally within the social group. Neither primacy of conscience nor perceived self-efficacy is a veiled expression of moral individualism, nor the rejection of the legitimacy and necessity of socially based moral values and norms. The inherently holistic quality of a systemic perspective does not dilute, let alone dissolve, moral values and norms for the social group. SCT reframes and enhances an understanding of the interactional or self-society dynamic of experience and reality in an attempt to lessen limitations and complications operative within a dualistic perspective. Nevertheless, moral values and norms (e.g., “avoid evil and do good”), however structured and interpreted, remain in force within a systemic perspective such as SCT.

Summary

Overcoming, or at least diminishing, the type of dualism addressed in this dissertation within the relationship between the individual and a social group is a vital contribution to constructive and productive relationality, whatever the context. This contribution is present in
the SCT systemic perspective and its interpretation of agency where “…people are producers as well as products of social systems. Personal agency and social structure operate interdependently.” With this systemic perspective as the theoretical construct from which the relationship between the individual and the social group is understood, primacy of conscience neither ignores nor displaces normative Church teaching, just as normative teaching neither ignores nor displaces it. This systemic perspective resonates and aligns readily and profoundly with the personalist perspective. Authoritative moral agency arises within the context of social and personal interactions and is expressed in the primacy of conscience of the acting moral agent. Primacy of conscience becomes the moral voice of the individual expressing agency emerging through self-reflection and expressed on behalf of the Church community.

In addition to the value of understanding the concept of agency systemically, SCT examines and articulates specific dimensions and factors operative in the exercise of agency (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion). Self-reflection is a basic and inherent cognitive process for a person that is part and parcel of the process by which a person develops an informed conscience. From a Catholic perspective, self-reflection amplifies an understanding of primacy of conscience through normative cognitive and behavioral dynamics. By more fully understanding the complexity of an informed conscience, the term “primacy” takes on clearer and deeper meaning within the doctrine. Further, this self-reflection relates to the development of self-efficacy beliefs that inevitably affect what a person may or may not achieve in one’s life and for the Church. Finally, social persuasion also has a

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profound role in the process, as it comes full circle and lays a foundation that supports and affects a person’s self-reflection and perceived self-efficacy.

SCT explores and expands unarticulated and/or underdeveloped assumptions about accountability in relation to acts of conscience. Self-reflection is inclined to surface these assumptions both for the individual and the social group. Similarly, Bandura’s view of perceived self-efficacy and social persuasion illuminate unarticulated and/or underdeveloped assumptions in the doctrine of conscience regarding a person’s capacity to act morally and the inevitable interactions with social influences. Given the insights of SCT, the doctrine of primacy of conscience may be amplified by understanding it as a systemic process by which the individual and social group construct one another through the exercise of agency which is inclusive of the dynamics of self-reflection, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion.

The personalist perspective on conscience is consistent with and supported by this more comprehensive understanding of the meaning and function of primacy with respect to the exercise of conscience. Further, I contend that the personalist position is enhanced by the identification of agency as a central systemic construct inherent within the concept of primacy and can be a vital resource for supporting Catholics in making moral decisions that are informed but not controlled by the established tradition of the Church. The final chapter of this research will begin to articulate how both the Church and the Catholics that comprise it might benefit from a pastoral theological articulation of the doctrine of primacy of conscience from a personalist perspective, when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn a social cognitive view of agency.
CHAPTER FIVE

A PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF PRIMANCY OF CONSCIENCE

Above the Pope as an expression of the binding claim of Church authority stands one’s own conscience, which has to be obeyed first of all, if need be, against the demands of Church authority.\(^{337}\)

Primacy of Conscience: Distillation for Dissemination

As this chapter engages the final phase of this dissertation’s constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of conscience in the Catholic tradition, it will naturally draw upon the breadth and depth of research present in the preceding chapters. Nevertheless, given the pragmatic quality of pastoral theology as it informs and is informed by pastoral care and ministry, this chapter will shift the expression and style of writing that has been present up to this point in order to strive toward maximizing the accessibility of its content. The academic quality and character will not be compromised, but references in footnotes will be kept to a minimum and the anecdotal aspect of the content will be heightened. Therefore, it will not make further explicit reference to the detail previously developed unless required by quotation. It presumes the foundation of research operative throughout this dissertation, yet will turn toward a more conversational tone that is consistent

with actual pastoral care encounters. This shift will be especially evident in the section that presents a hypothetical pastoral conversation for the purpose of illustration.

I am convinced of and committed to the value of this research for the local Catholic community I pastor, the Ecumenical Catholic Communion of which our community is affiliated, and the array of Catholics of whatever stripe that might benefit from this pastoral theology of primacy of conscience. I recognize and prioritize my primary responsibility of having this chapter bear a caliber of academic pastoral theology consistent with the preceding chapters. At the same time, as a pastoral theologian I can state that our discipline is not only oriented toward advances in pastoral theology alone, pastoral theology also intends to inform and enhance pastoral care and ministry as it strives for the well being of individuals, communities, and society.

The relational and pragmatic character of the discipline of pastoral theology presses for a medium of expression that is as inclusive as possible in order to maximize its potential benefits. In a sense, if a “run of the mill” Catholic on the street or in the pew cannot make general sense of what is being claimed in this chapter as the implications and conclusions of this research, then the mark has been somewhat missed. In order to moor this conversation in a manner that strives toward being both accessible and applicable to as many Catholics as possible, the overall contribution of this chapter will be clearly divided into three general sections—synthesis, illustration, and future research.

The first section will present a synthesis of the research in the preceding chapters and its constructive pastoral theological appropriation and interpretation of the personalist view of primacy of conscience, when primacy is amplified with the implications drawn from a Social Cognitive Theory’s view of agency. Consequently, the section will still lean toward
the genre of writing (i.e., theoretical) that has been operative in this dissertation thus far. The synthesis section will begin with a brief a summary of the personalist view of primacy of conscience, but the major contribution of the section, if not the dissertation, consists of an enhanced articulation of primacy of conscience. The second section will explore potential expressions of this pastoral theology of primacy of conscience ameliorating and/or resolving dimensions of the pastoral problem identified throughout the dissertation. This exploration will be illuminated vis-à-vis an example of a hypothetical conversation in pastoral practice. The genre of writing will substantially shift in this section toward one that is more conversational in tone and much less abstract. The illustration section will reflect how the contribution of this research might manifest itself through what a potential conversation regarding primacy of conscience that incorporates a pastoral theological construction of agency might sound like. Finally, the third section will give a summary of possible directions for further research.

Synthesis and Primary Conclusions

A Personalist View of Primacy of Conscience

This synthesis will principally engage and amplify the personalist view of primacy of conscience in the Catholic tradition and will not explicitly examine the legalistic perspective. A brief summary of the personalist view of primacy of conscience will be helpful before examining how the insights of SCT regarding agency contribute to a fuller interpretation of the term “primacy” within the doctrine. The personalist perspective, just like the legalistic, emerged from the Second Vatican Council’s call for a renewal of moral theology. Consequently, both share a common historical and theoretical background with differences emerging in limited arenas. As documented in this research, the Church, dating
back to Aquinas, understands conscience to be the application of the first principles of natural law (i.e., *synderesis*) to the particularities of one’s conduct (i.e., *syneidesis*). Within the tension between the particularity of *syneidesis* and the generality of *synderesis*, Aquinas located the role of the primacy of conscience. In short, the doctrine of primacy of conscience, even if not fully developed or articulated, has always raised and addressed the question of agency or moral authority and the term “primacy” has been pivotal in engaging that question.

The personalist perspective engages this tension by identifying and prioritizing the role of personal autonomy for socially situated and informed individuals in the exercise of primacy of conscience. In an attempt to examine and potentially bolster the personalist perspective, the focus of this research regarding primacy of conscience has been within the arena of the particularities of individual conduct (i.e., *syneidesis*). Consequently, human cognition and behavior have understandably come to the fore as avenues for potential insight. Psychology, in turn, naturally presents itself as a prime candidate for consideration as a relevant resource. Further, social psychology stands as particularly well suited to illuminate understanding how an individual functions within a social system such as the Church.

Although not intentionally attempting to address a personalist perspective of conscience, Srampickal’s research on conscience waded into waters that flow well with the personalist perspective. Through a comparative analysis of empirical psychologies with the documents of the Second Vatican Council regarding conscience, Srampickal further nuanced the arena of what has historically been understood as addressing the particularities of one’s conduct. His fuller articulation includes an understanding of the expressive moral dimension of conscience. Further, and more importantly, his research identified the expressive moral dimension of conscience as a unique domain for the formation and development of conscience.
The dynamics of the formation and development of conscience resonate with the insights offered by psychology and are themselves manifestations of agency within the person and Church.

A number of insights from psychology tend to support a personalist view of primacy of conscience which espouses that a dimension of moral value and authority emerges from a socially situated individual pursuing the good for the person and society. Psychologically, moral values are not understood as absolutely determined by a static view of either the person or society, but rather moral values emerge and develop through a variety of individual and social processes across history and context. Broadly understood, the personalist view of primacy of conscience recognizes this complexity and identifies four dimensions that factor into understanding and applying moral values in one’s life within the Church and world. Hogan summarizes the four dimensions as follows:

These include (1) a greater recognition of the role of history and change in ethics; (2) a focus on the moral significance of intentions and circumstances in addition to the act itself; (3) a greater degree of sophistication in categorizing the different kinds of moral norms and the kinds of claims they make; and (4) a rethinking of the relationship between the individual and Magisterium on the basis of relocating moral authority.338

Although this research has touched upon all four dimensions in varying degrees, the principal and explicit focus has been and remains the fourth point of “relocating moral authority,” that is, reframing the understanding of the relationality of agency through primacy of conscience.

338 Hogan, 127.
Primacy of Conscience: Reframing the Relationship of Agency

Within the demographic identified for this research (i.e., post-Vatican II Catholicism in the U. S.), if not for the current population of the United States at large, the moral charge to “follow your conscience” seems ubiquitous. Yet the broad presence of a concept does not necessarily correlate to the depth of its understanding. This moral charge provides an extremely basic framework for conscience and the broad strokes of the Catechism of the Church, as important as they are for Catholics, are not sufficient for fully understanding conscience, let alone exceptional circumstances when an individual’s choice is prioritized for the person over the normative teaching of the Church (i.e., primacy of conscience). An enhanced understanding of the meaning and function of primacy and its inherent agency provides a fuller and better basis for interpreting and appropriating the personalist understanding of conscience for guiding contemporary U.S. Catholics and their spiritual guides in making moral decisions that are informed but not controlled by the established tradition of the Church.

The integration of a systemic perspective moves toward improving the pastoral problem regarding understanding the exercise of primacy of conscience as an expression of agency. When the relationality of agency or power is predominantly framed dualistically, underlying dynamics of dominance and submission may be engendered and can become problematic. In contrast, when the relationality of agency or power is principally framed systemically, whether one considers it bi-directional, multidirectional, or reciprocal, underlying dynamics of mutuality and interdependence are fostered, and the pastoral relationship may be less vulnerable to complications that may be conjured from a dualistic perspective.
As stated in Chapter 2, an adequate theological anthropology is vital for a viable pastoral theology that informs and is informed by pastoral care and ministry. The theoretical advance operative in a systemic perspective readily translates into an enhanced theological anthropology. Recall that the theological problem that is at the heart of this dissertation, arising from pastoral practice, is how to theologically address two strands in the Church’s tradition regarding being a moral Catholic. This dissertation’s examination of the theological question at the base of that problem, explored through the doctrine of primacy of conscience, identifies agency as a key and critical component for better understanding the meaning and function of the term “primacy.” Theologically reflecting upon the pastoral experience as a context for the critical development of a theological understanding of the Catholic tradition of primacy of conscience, both through its recovery and enhancement, points to an understanding of agency as vital—agency which inescapably has implications for one’s theological anthropology.

A theological anthropology integrating SCT presents the agency of a socially situated person in a way that supports and amplifies the personalist interpretation of primacy of conscience and its prioritization of the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals engaging moral issues while also integrating the communal agency of the tradition. The term “primacy” reflects a systemic perspective of both strands of the Church’s tradition as expressed by an individual’s moral decision-making. Theologically, a systemic perspective of agency acknowledges that individuals are both influential of and influenced by the tradition, just as they are both producers and products of the Church’s teaching. Conversely, the same interactive creative dynamic applies to the Church as well. In short, a systemic view of agency incorporates the relationality and interaction of both the influence of Church teaching and
the influence of a person’s conscience in moral and religious decision-making, as they co-create one another.

When the fundamental question is framed as to whether moral authority is ultimately located with the individual or with Church teaching, the assumption is that the answer is either one or the other. A systemic theological anthropology alters the question by exploring the array of interwoven and interdependent relationships that collectively contribute to any final outcome or moral decision. Consequently, the entirety of moral authority ultimately resides within the overall system and cannot be located exclusively and ultimately with either the individual or the Church’s teaching. Morality and moral decisions are a collaborative social venture and product emerging from the Church through the individual with all parties bearing unique dimensions of responsibility for its development and realization regarding any given moral issue. In short, the exercise of primacy of conscience is a manifestation of a systemic theological anthropology that recognizes and supports an underlying understanding of agency that necessarily incorporates all parties as both initiators and receivers.

Although a systemic theological anthropology and its framing of agency are couched in relatively contemporary terms, it is actually far from a foreign concept within Catholicism. The long standing theological concept of the priesthood of all believers readily resonates with a systemic theological anthropology and an interactive understanding of agency. Without going into the history or nuance of the concept of the priesthood of all believers, especially in terms of the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism during the Reformation, the Council of Trent and beyond, it has been
and remains a foundational theological construct rooted in baptism for Christians of all stripes.

The Second Vatican Council states in the “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church” that “…the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another, each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.”339 As for most Christians, the sacrament of Baptism is the foundational initiation rite for Catholics and constitutes entrance into the priesthood of Christ. For Catholics and many other Christians, it is also the first of the three sacraments of initiation and is followed by Eucharist and Confirmation. All Catholics during their baptisms are anointed with sacred chrism as priests, prophets, and leaders.340 Each of these baptismal roles is a manifestation of agency afforded to the Church’s entire membership by virtue of baptism, even if ordained ministers have unique expressions and responsibilities regarding those roles.

Certainly the theological construct of the priesthood of all believers is tangential to the principal doctrine of primacy of conscience that is being examined in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, as it is a foundational religious tenet that is also compatible with, the application of a systemic theological anthropology and corresponding understanding of agency. In a very broad sense, it is important that what is being claimed here for the


340 The normative ritual celebration of Baptism includes this anointing, though in emergencies or for other pastoral reasons this portion of the sacrament may be omitted. In that sense, every baptized Catholic has not literally received this anointing; nevertheless, the intent and understanding is extended to all Catholics.
doctrine of primacy of conscience also work with other important theological doctrines, such as the priesthood of all believers being co-creating agents with God. A similar example of theological compatibility in the arena of systemic agency could be made with the vital Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ (e.g., Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). Not that compatibility is a theological litmus test, but it bodes well if enhancing one theological construct also could potentially contribute to other theological constructs.

Fundamental Pastoral Shifts

Moored in a systemic theological anthropology, this pastoral theological interpretation of primacy of conscience accomplishes three fundamental practical pastoral shifts. Two of the shifts can be noted as focus is placed upon an individual (i.e., the pastoral care receiver or the pastoral care provider) and the third shift relates to the relational dynamic between individuals and the Church as a whole. One shift is for the pastoral care seeker experiencing dissonance with a certain Church teaching. This shift highlights the possibility of differing from the Church through an understanding of primacy of conscience without that difference necessarily being considered synonymous with disloyalty, infidelity, or even sin, either by the hierarchy or by other Catholics. Concretely, this implies that the Church can affirm and support occasions when a Catholic differs from Church teaching on a specific topic and invokes primacy of conscience. This affirmation and support addresses the core pastoral issue at hand (i.e., agency), as it reinforces the possibility that Catholics are adequate and competent to responsibly make a moral decision that differs from the Church teaching without necessarily incurring a compromised status within the Church. The implications of this change should not be underestimated.
To permit differing from Church teaching by individual Catholics as an embodiment of agency and an exercise of primacy of conscience, even if not normative, radically alters the moral decision-making landscape and removes in principal the possibility of any commensurate negative social persuasion and judgment by the Church hierarchy or its membership. Indeed, understanding primacy of conscience in this way may function as positive social persuasion that does not negate the value of normative teaching, but rather offers the possibility of the normative teaching developing in light of the difference that is expressed.

In addition to primacy of conscience affording the possibility of differing from normative teaching without necessarily compromising a member’s status or calling into question one’s competency, this shift may also mitigate any misperception that there are no real options for a person experiencing dissonance with a certain Church teaching. Granted there are limited options as to what is considered the normative teaching of the Church, but primacy of conscience clearly states that there are real options as to how a person relates to that teaching. The possible elimination of the perception that obligatory foregone conclusions exist alters the pastoral conversation and care from its very outset.

The second shift relates to the pastoral care giver or the person ministering to the Catholic who experiences differences from Church teaching; it may ameliorate the potentially complicated situation for the priest or pastoral care provider as representatives of the Church. At times the pastoral problem may manifest itself within the pastoral relationship itself. The pastoral care provider, often the priest, may be implicitly or explicitly positioned as “the judge” or the one who knows the answers and, consequently, will adjudicate the moral question at hand (e.g., the manualist tradition). The other side of this coin is that
the pastoral care seeker presenting the moral question may be implicitly or explicitly positioned as the one who is ignorant and/or incapable of making the moral decision in question. Basically, the starting place of the pastoral engagement may be vulnerable to or fraught with a conscious and/or unconscious polarization that may reflect a relationship of dominance and submission or, in other words, a distorted relationship of agency that may compromise the quality of the pastoral care offered and received.

Rather than the pastoral situation being cast from the beginning as an “either—or” proposition (i.e., the Catholic is either following Church teaching or is not, or that primacy of conscience does not require serious engagement with Church teaching) that is assessed by the pastoral care provider, engaging differences with Church teaching can become a “both—and” proposition reflected upon in a collaborative pastoral conversation (i.e., the Catholic is both differing from a specific Church teaching and adhering to the Church teaching of primacy of conscience). The priest or pastoral care provider is thereby relieved of feeling caught in irreconcilable contradictions when caring for the person and representing both the ministry and governance of the Church. Rather than the minister being potentially positioned from the outset of the pastoral conversation in a role of determining approval or disapproval, the ambiguity within the tradition can be jointly engaged through an enhanced understanding of primacy of conscience and agency that is supported by the Church. This can be a concrete manifestation of the Second Vatican Council’s identification of the limits and roles of the pastoral relationship.

Let the laity realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem, even every grave problem, that arises; this is not the role of the clergy: it is rather the task of lay people to
shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with careful attention to the teaching authority of the Church.\textsuperscript{341}

The third shift can be understood by focusing not principally on the pastoral care seeker or the pastoral care provider, but rather on the relationship between the two as they stand within the tradition of the Church. As both parties responsibly engage the teaching of the Church in order to discern from an informed conscience, two relational dynamics are operative. In broad terms, we can speak of these two relational dynamics as teaching and learning. Both teaching and learning are expressions of agency, with the former being initiating and the latter being receiving. More often than not and for very good reason, given the breadth of its resources, Church tradition is predominantly positioned in the role of teacher, while the individual is positioned in the role of learner. This is a relatively normative structure when one looks at an individual in relationship to the social group and the socialization process. Nevertheless, clearly the cumulative teaching expressed by the social group (e.g. the Church) that is passed on as tradition has been learned over the course of time and is the by-product of many individuals’ insights and contributions. Even if somewhat veiled or given a low profile, the Church is as much about learning as it is about teaching. There is little question here as to what is the cart and what is the horse—one who teaches must have first learned.

Granted Copernicus and Galileo did not, at the time, receive the support of the Church that their insights actually deserved; however, the Church did eventually learn from what they had to offer. Countless examples could be given of how the Church has been and is a learner, regardless of how well or poorly the learning process itself might be. Further, it is this very learning that serves as the basis for the Church to function as a teacher. For the Church, a

\textsuperscript{341} “Pastoral Constitution,” Vatican Council II, 944.
unique dimension of the learning process is considered to be by way of divine revelation, yet it is by no means the only source of the Church’s learning venture. Whether or not one believes in the theological concept of divine revelation or, if so, how it is to be understood, there is ample learning that occurs within the Church that is not complicated by such a mysterious concept.

The exercise of primacy of conscience may function as exceptional moments when individual Catholics shift from what is generally the normative role as learners vis-à-vis Church tradition, to functioning as potential teachers for the Church. Primacy of conscience does not necessarily function as teaching, but it may and certainly has in the past. In such an instance, the Church may be in the position to consider, if not learn, new possibilities. To recognize through the doctrine of primacy of conscience that both Catholics individually and the Church collectively are able to occupy either the role of teacher or learner may significantly transform the pastoral relationship. Given the ambiguity within the tradition itself, a relational agency where all parties may either be initiating as teachers or receiving as learners regarding any given moral issue seems appropriate, if not necessary. Primacy of conscience reflects this type of relational agency.

Even if obvious, it is important to explicitly note that the teaching and learning function is by no means limited to the occasional and potential moments of the exercise of primacy of conscience. In fact, given the exceptional quality of primacy of conscience, it is understandably not the normative location of the teaching and learning functions within the Church. Catholic theologians, be they lay or cleric, have long served in both of those capacities as they have fulfilled their theological vocation. Yet even those bearing the title and function of theologian have struggled with the balance and integration of the complementary dynamics of
teaching and learning as related to the tradition of the Church. The Second Vatican Council addressed this issue as it shifted the Church’s understanding regarding the tradition in order to better appreciate and recover a balanced integration between the functions of teaching and learning.

McCormick provides a clear summary of this shift beginning with three characteristics of the mindset prior to the Second Vatican Council.

Church teaching has had “… (1) an undue distinction between the teaching and learning function in the Church, with a consequent emphasis on the right to teach—and relatively little on the duty to learn and the sources of learning in the Church; (2) an undue identification of the teaching function with a single group in the Church, the hierarchy; (3) an undue isolation of a single aspect of teaching, the judgmental, the decisive, the ‘final word’.”

From this position, following the Second Vatican Council, the Church has subsequently developed a more balanced and integrated notion of the teaching function within the Church. Three characteristics clearly reflect the identified shift.

From the perspective following the Second Vatican Council regarding Church teaching, “…(1) the learning process is seen as essential to the teaching process; (2) teaching is a multidimensional function, of which the judgmental or decisive is only one aspect; (3) the teaching function involves the charisms of many persons.”

The Church tradition is comprised of both learning and teaching with theologians performing these functions normatively and according to their unique charisms. Nevertheless, primacy of conscience is a unique example as to how any Catholic may, in fact, function as a teacher within the Church, even if it is not realized until well after the person’s life on earth has ended (e.g., Copernicus and Galileo). Given not all of us are Copernicus or Galileo, of course

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342 McCormick, Critical Calling 19.

343 Ibid., 20.
the individual’s conscience, as it is informed by Church teaching, may be changed as well. In short, teaching and learning (i.e., initiating and receptive agency) always comprise a two-way street that is mutual and interactive.

Specific Social Cognitive Theory Amplification of Agency

SCT helps nuance an understanding of the term “primacy” within the doctrine as one examines the dimensionality of agency. The systemic framing of agency by SCT examines cognition, behavior, the environment, and their reciprocal interaction. From these interactions, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of agency (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion) potentially engage and amplify unexplored dimensions of the function of primacy of conscience. An SCT understanding of agency incorporates the mechanisms of self-reflection, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion as potential human factors within the formation and development of conscience. Hence, primacy of conscience can be amplified to be inclusive of, but not exhausted by, a systemic understanding of agency that articulates these interrelated dynamics operative for the individual and the social group.

From a SCT systemic perspective, primacy of conscience is an expression of agency on behalf of the individual and the Church that includes the normative cognitive, behavioral, and relational dimensions of self-reflection, self-efficacy, and social persuasion. Fundamentally conscience is one’s personal and subjective discernment of good and evil in the context of a relationship with God and creation that is influenced by, influential of, and located within the Church. Although certainly personal and subjective, conscience is also inherently and necessarily a relational dynamic in its formation and development as well as its exercise. As such, conscience is a social dynamic that incorporates and relates to
the array of domains that contribute to one’s experience of reality, not the least of which is the Church’s teaching and the corresponding faith community. Conscience is ultimately an individual expression of socially situated agency, as an individual attempts to accomplish good and avoid evil in the context of any and all relationships.

In very simple terms, the exercise of primacy of conscience is a manifestation of agency within a social system (i.e., the Church) which, from the perspective of SCT, would incorporate self-reflection, self-efficacy, and social persuasion inasmuch as these are normative human functions. Although it would take a researcher like Bandura to measure how these three specific dimensions of agency might be operative within the exercise of primacy of conscience, the implications of SCT suggest that primacy of conscience, as an expression of agency, would manifest the dimensionality of self-reflection, self-efficacy, and social persuasion. Therefore, each dimension will be briefly reviewed in order to explore the implications SCT has for the exercise of primacy of conscience and to amplify its understanding.

Self-reflection

Self-reflection is a dimension of agency that resonates profoundly with primacy of conscience. As Bandura states, “people are not only agents of action but self-examiners of their own functioning. The metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one’s thoughts and actions is another distinctly core human feature of agency.”

This self-examination ranges from judging one’s predictive thinking with the actual outcomes to the effects that other people’s actions produce, what they believe, and established bodies of

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knowledge.\(^{345}\) Even at surface the very existence of self-reflection supports one dimension of a
personalist perspective of primacy of conscience. Self-reflection does not simply imply, but
rather obliges and demands, that reflection or consideration be incorporated into the act of
judgment as a dimension of agency. It claims that within the normative cognitive and
behavioral process, human agency has a reflective and constructive character.

An understanding of primacy of conscience which incorporates a self reflective quality
cannot simply be a process of informing and conforming to a set of pre-determined answers
without any alternative possibility. Self-reflection is anything but the self being programmed
according to prescribed dictates, although it presumes and requires a context with content from
which to reflect. Although certain responses may be anticipated, even preferred and expected
by the Church, regarding any number of moral questions, a variety of potential outcomes is the
\textit{sine qua non} of authentic self-reflection and an understanding of the function of primacy. The
qualifying term “primacy” presumes something akin to the process of self-reflection. As
primacy of conscience includes self-reflection, a personal and autonomous quality must be
operative otherwise it would not authentically be self-reflection.

Nevertheless, self-reflectiveness is not principally about the presence of options
when it comes to decision-making. Rather it is from and with the existence of options
that the complex process of self-reflection emerges as a dimension of agency for
individuals in their unique and diverse contexts. Further, understanding this complex
process of self-reflection enhances an appreciation for how the term “primacy” operates
in relationship to the exercise of conscience, especially as Catholics’ consciences are
informed.

\(^{345}\) Ibid.
A potential concern that may arise in the face of considering a term like self-reflectiveness within the exercise of primacy of conscience is that it conjures individualism or extreme subjectivity that is unfettered by the tradition and the Church. In fact, by exploring self-reflection with some specificity, that is anything but the case. Self-reflection is a profoundly social construct, as it judges anything from the correctness of one’s thinking against the outcomes of one’s behavior, to the effects of the other’s behaviors, beliefs, and established knowledge upon one’s self. Self-reflection identifies a cognitive dynamic that ultimately affects behavior, but it does not have a determined trajectory as related to specific content proposed by or operative for the social group. That is, the outcome of self-reflection, in theory, may reinforce or deviate from the normative teaching of the social group (e.g., the Church). In practice, more often than not, self-reflection reinforces the social norm which, in turn, contributes to the social norm being maintained. In the instance of primacy of conscience, the self reflective process is the exception to the norm and deviates from Church teaching.

As pastoral theology recovers and/or enhances theology, self-reflection integrated into an understanding of primacy of conscience offers much more than simply an argument for the personalist perspective vis-à-vis an enhanced framing of agency. Primacy of conscience presumes engagement with the tradition so that the individual can make moral decisions from what has been historically termed “an informed conscience.” How does a Catholic arrive at the point of having an informed conscience? In its most simplistic historical expression having an informed conscience meant knowing and reflecting upon what the Church teaches, yet clearly that is not sufficient as the ambiguity of the two strands within the tradition regarding being a moral Catholic demonstrates. A more comprehensive understanding of the processes by which a Catholic’s conscience becomes informed can be achieved by integrating the contemporary
insights of psychology, in this case, social psychology. Self-reflectiveness as articulated by SCT identifies a number of processes by which an informed conscience is realized.

The content of the Church’s normative moral teaching is a portion of what contributes to a Catholic having an informed conscience, yet that content is but on factor in the process of self-reflection. For example, Srampickal’s research models how psychology can offer insight into the process of conscience formation and development. Inevitably these processes, whether rooted in older empirical psychological expressions or more contemporary systemic theories, can assist in better understanding that by which an informed conscience is achieved. The psychological processes by which conscience is formed and developed are not principally located in the specific content of any particular moral teaching. Rather, dimensions of the formation and development of conscience are principally located within an array of relationships with social groups that form and are formed by the person, not the least of which is the Church. Further, the role and nuance that SCT offers regarding self-reflection as an expression of agency can illuminate and enhance how an informed conscience is understood to emerge and function. An informed conscience may be manifest, in part, by the normative cognitive process of self-reflection and all that entails, not the least of which is how it relates to perceived self-efficacy.

Perceived Self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy, as a dimension of agency, presents itself as an integral dimension of the process to be considered as it stands in relationship to self-reflectiveness. Moral decision-making and primacy of conscience are about making a difference in an individual’s life and world—achieving the good and avoiding evil. How and to what degree individuals perceive themselves as capable of maximizing good and
minimizing evil by virtue of their choices and corresponding behaviors can be a manifestation of perceived self-efficacy. Individuals’ perceptions as to whether or not they can have an impact upon reality can affect their willingness or hesitancy to engage a situation. If people have a confident perception of their own efficacy, then they take on tasks and continue to learn in ways that could help them avoid evil and do good. If they doubt their own efficacy, they tend to sidestep challenging tasks or retreat from opportunities and hence their development as skillful people stagnates. Stagnation is likely to leave them less ready to confront challenges, including moral ones, even moral ones that would help them comply with Church teachings that they accept. People’s stagnation diminishes their agency. Consequently, perceived self-efficacy is foundational to person’s agency.

Although perceived self-efficacy relates to people’s beliefs about their own abilities to provide levels of performance that make a difference in events that affect their lives, it is vital to underline that this dimension of agency is about the perceived capacity to make a difference or have an effect, not necessarily about being different. For example, a person can readily have a strong perceived self-efficacy that aligns with a given Church teaching. As a case in point, I can personally attest to the fact that a person can truly believe that putting Church teaching into practice can translate into making a positive difference in one’s life, if not the world. Catholicism is replete with individuals who would make this claim. Similarly though, the same could be said of the same person who, in another given instance, differs from a specific normative Church teaching. Again, I can readily identify this as true for myself as well as others I have encountered in ministry.
The point is that “perceived self-efficacy” refers to the consciousness internal to an individual and that he or she has the self perception of being able to have an effect upon that which is engaged. It does not relate directly to what concrete or strategic action is perceived as possibly realizing the desired outcome. So when Bandura claims that “self-efficacy beliefs may influence fundamental orientations in thinking such as being pessimistic or optimistic as well as whether thinking is inclined to be self-hindering or self-enhancing,”[^346] that does not translate into how these fundamental orientations may be specifically expressed in terms of actual moral teachings.

Broadly, the doctrine of primacy of conscience may potentially and implicitly reinforce perceived self-efficacy, inasmuch as it teaches that a member of the Church inherently has the possibility, responsibility and, therefore, capability of making a moral choice. Granted, the operative assumption of the Church is that a person with an informed conscience will generally align with and act according to the normative teaching within the tradition. Yet given that the doctrine of primacy of conscience is part and parcel of that normative teaching, moral choices are never simply by default. An informed Catholic responsibly making moral decisions within the tradition must ask the question of conscience, all the while recognizing that the outcome may or may not, in this instance and context, correspond to the normative teaching of the Church.

Although primacy of conscience may not directly foster self-efficacy beliefs as such, implicitly the doctrine structures the relationship between the individual and the Church in a manner that claims that a person’s moral decision-making can and does have an effect and make a difference. The term “primacy,” as it relates to acting from an

informed conscience, orders the relationship with the possibility of a unique expression of self-efficacy—responsibly differing from the normative teaching according to one’s conscience. Certainly, as stated earlier, self-efficacy can readily be operative when a person aligns with and acts upon normative Church teaching. Yet for the Church itself to teach that the individual, by virtue of the doctrine of primacy of conscience, can responsibly differ from the normative teaching is a poignant expression of and commitment to the possibility of an individual’s moral choice making a difference and having an effect.

Within the Catholic tradition, primacy of conscience may implicitly nurture, for both the individual and the Church, the development of self-efficacy beliefs that influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. Primacy of conscience could be considered the Church’s summary expression within moral theology that each individual can make a difference and have an effect when making moral decisions in light of the Church’s normative teaching. When the doctrine of primacy of conscience is amplified by the implications of self-efficacy, the exceptional moments of its exercise can be powerful opportunities to enhance and make visible the presence of perceived self-efficacy in the process of moral decision-making. In short, “primacy” is understood as a statement about the possibility and responsibility of the Catholic making a certain type of moral decision within the Church—one that may be different from the normative teaching, yet respected and accepted for the individual exercising primacy of conscience given the Church’s teaching.
Social Persuasion

In the previous section on perceived self-efficacy it was stated that primacy of conscience may implicitly reinforce perceived self-efficacy, inasmuch as it teaches that a Catholic inherently has the possibility, responsibility and, therefore, capability of making a personal moral choice that makes a difference. Similarly, primacy of conscience may be seen as an expression of social persuasion regarding the Church’s understanding of the role of the individual in the process of moral decision-making within the Church.

Bandura has identified social persuasion as one of the four main sources of influence in the development of perceived self-efficacy.347 Specially, social persuasion is a source of strengthening and/or weakening people's beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed. In terms of primacy of conscience, perceived self-efficacy relates to the person’s self perception about personal efficacy whereas social persuasion relates to the social group’s (i.e., the Church) perception of the role of the person and any commensurate positive and/or negative influence.

Positive social persuasion encourages confident perceptions of self-efficacy, hence supports people in taking on growth experiences and encourages their development of agency. The personalist view of conscience acts as positive persuasion and at least implicitly helps Catholics to develop confidence in their individual efficacy. It supports agency. Social persuasion can be negative, however, and negative social persuasion tends to have a stronger effect on self-efficacy than does positive social persuasion. It

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347 Bandura, “Self-efficacy,” 15. The other three main sources of influence are mastery experiences, seeing people similar to oneself manage task demands successfully, and inferences from somatic and emotional states indicative of personal strengths and vulnerabilities.
easily undercuts a confident perception of a person’s efficacy. Primacy of conscience can be a form of positive social persuasion simply by virtue of the fact that the Church as a social group is both the author and teacher of the doctrine. It is one of the Church’s principal statements to the individual about the understanding of how a Catholic relates to the Church when it comes to moral decision-making, especially in terms of agency.

Primacy of conscience acknowledges and supports an individual’s capacity to make an informed moral decision that differs from normative teaching and is unique to that person regarding a particular moral decision; consequently, it can be argued that primacy of conscience functions as a form of positive social persuasion. Given SCT claims that social persuasion can undermine perceived self-efficacy much more readily than it can enhance it, the Church does well when its social persuasion functions positively to strengthen and enhance the perceived self-efficacy of its membership. The term “primacy” within the doctrine implies that individuals have the capacity as well as the responsibility to follow their conscience when making moral decisions. As SCT research suggests, such positive social persuasion increases the likelihood for individuals to make greater efforts as well as sustain them. Further, as positive social persuasion can bolster perceived self-efficacy, such efforts may be more likely to succeed as well as contribute to an increased sense of personal agency. In short, primacy of conscience, as part of Church teaching, may function as positive social persuasion that can enhance people’s belief in their capacity to succeed or, in this pastoral context, competently make the moral choices they face.
Similarly, the personalist perspective may also position the Church toward positive Social persuasion by directly placing responsibility squarely on the shoulders of individual Catholics, thus implicitly recognizing their capacity to take on the task. Communicating that Catholics have the capacity to make an array of moral decisions, including potentially those differing from Church teaching by invoking primacy of conscience, truly expresses positive social persuasion that can benefit both individuals and the Church at large. As Bandura states, “social persuasion is a …way of strengthening people’s beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed.”

In summary, as the question of agency or moral authority is addressed vis-à-vis the doctrine of primacy of conscience, SCT’s research and theory on agency and the social-personal interfaces involved in decision-making affords a more fully developed and articulated understanding of the question. Broadly SCT frames the question of agency systemically and specifically it introduces the dynamics of self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion as related to agency for both the individual and the group. These insights help in better understanding how the term “primacy” functions within the doctrine as well as the complex factors that contribute to the process of informing one’s conscience. Ultimately the implications of SCT for an amplified understanding of primacy of conscience support and deepen the personalist perspective that identifies and prioritizes the role of personal autonomy for socially situated and informed individuals making moral decisions and potentially exercising of primacy of conscience.

348 Bandura, “Self-efficacy,” 3.
Illustration of Primacy of Conscience

The implications that SCT provides for a fuller understanding of primacy of conscience will be implicitly explored in some detail in this section. It will be in the form of a hypothetical dialogue that might occur in an actual pastoral encounter and, as such, will be conversational in tone. The conversation will contain expressions of the three foundational shifts and the potential amplification SCT affords. Upon completion, it will provide more of an anecdotal expression that reflects how current pastoral care and ministry could be transformed by a pastoral theological interpretation of primacy of conscience and agency. A summary reflection upon the conversation will identify some of the potential shifts operative.

Primacy of conscience, as an expression of agency within Catholic moral decision-making, applies to the range of moral issues and questions that a Catholic may encounter. As stated earlier, this research is not oriented toward examining any particular moral issue as such. Yet for the purpose of illustration, some moral issue is required so that the hypothetical conversation has a concrete character and is not overly abstract or disconnected from the experiences from which the problem of conscience arose in the first place. Sexual behavior and, more specifically, contraception have been the constant example used when a moral issue is required for the discussion to have some concrete mooring in order to more readily make sense. This will continue to be the case in this illustration and, even though not advancing the study of a given moral issue, the domain of sexuality and the specific topic of contraception is not an arbitrary choice.

There are several reasons that sexuality and contraception have been chosen as the illuminating example throughout this dissertation. There are two main reasons I have
picked these topics. First and foremost, the laity are the principal members of the Church that are called to the vocation of marriage.\textsuperscript{349} As such, these individuals have the experience of being in on-going sexual relationships as well as possibly raising a family. Conversely, celibate clergy who comprise the majority of the Church’s hierarchy that promulgates Church teaching, presumably have a much more limited experiential basis regarding sexual relationships upon which to reflect. From the Catholic theological perspective that experience is an important source of insight and understanding, it would follow that those who are called to the vocation of marriage and are sexually active would have unique and significant input regarding sexuality and contraception. Of course this is not to suggest that only those who have had or have a particular experience are able to reflect and/or comment upon it, yet it would certainly seem that those who do should not be left out of the equation. In short, given the focus on agency within this dissertation, sexuality and the morality of contraception are prime candidates for potential domains that lay Catholics should be able to express, at least in part, initiating agency as teachers and not be exclusively located in the position of receptive agency as learners.

Second, contraception among Catholics in the United States is among the most demonstrable behavioral deviances from normative Church teaching regarding sexuality. The Catholic Medical Association’s journal “The Linacre Quarterly” published an article regarding the use of contraception by women that drew upon the data of the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. There were 7,635 women in the sample, 2,250 of

\footnote{349 Even in the Roman communion, exceptions exist regarding married clergy (e.g., married permanent deacons; married priests who have transitioned to the Roman Church from another denomination such as the Episcopal Church).}
who were Catholic (29.5% of the sample) of which 48.8% practiced contraception and only 0.4% practiced the natural family planning advocated by Roman Catholic teaching.\textsuperscript{350} In their article “The Influence of Religiosity on Contraceptive Use among Roman Catholic Women in the United States,” Jennifer Ohlendorf and Richard Fehring conclude the following:

“The overall findings from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth indicate that US RC women between the ages of 15-44 have patterns of use of contraceptive methods similar to those of US women in general. The current use of contraceptive methods by US women and US RC women differ only by a percentage point. The 3 most frequently used methods of family planning by both US women and RC US women are the hormonal oral contraceptive pill, sterilization, and the condom.”\textsuperscript{351}

To the best of my knowledge there is no research that attempts to directly demonstrate a correlation between a Catholic’s choice to use contraception and an understanding and/or exercise of primacy of conscience. Nevertheless, given my pastoral experience and that of others as well, it is certainly a reasonable assumption that some portion among this group makes this linkage. In the research of Ohlendorf and Fehring cited above, when speculating as to possible rationales or framings by Catholics related to

\textsuperscript{350} The distribution of the contraceptive practices is divided accordingly: birth control pill 19.6%, female sterilization 13.9%, condoms 11.7%, and male sterilization 3.6%.

their data regarding use of contraception, the authors suggest the following as one among a number of possibilities.

A possible reason is that, although RC couples know the Church’s teachings on contraception and sterilization, they view themselves as “autonomous” adults, and downplay or ignore the role of the Church’s official teachings in forming their consciences on the issue of family planning.\(^{352}\)

The concept of primacy of conscience is not even introduced into the discussion as a dimension of conscience formation as well as an “official teaching” of the Church. Given the great disparity between the Church’s teaching and the practice of the laity in the case of contraception that such a blatant lacuna would exist in research sponsored by the institutional Church seems sadly negligent. This project sets a basis for addressing this lack.

Generally a conscious behavioral deviation by a Catholic from Church teaching, especially on an on-going basis, would be accompanied by a corresponding understanding or framing. That is, from the perspective of the Catholic choosing contraception, the act could minimally be framed or considered as at least one of two possibilities—an on-going sin or an exercise of primacy of conscience, as both are relatively common Catholic notions regardless of how well or poorly they are understood. The hypothetical pastoral conversation integrating primacy of conscience, therefore, will engage the issue of contraception in the overall context of sexuality as it is a domain particularly well disposed to illuminate the topic of primacy of conscience and agency.

\(^{352}\) Ibid., 142.
At this point the summary pastoral vignette from the beginning of Chapter 2 will set the foundation for the extended pastoral conversation that is to follow. Recall from Chapter 2 that Sue is struggling with her choice to use contraception while also being aware of the Church’s general prohibition regarding artificial means of contraception. Nevertheless, she feels she can explain and justify her choice as one that makes sense to her given the overall context of her family. Sue considers herself to be a “good” Catholic and had always been taught to follow her conscience and was unsure if that was, in fact, what her choice regarding contraception reflected. Sue is a regularly attending member of the Church, has served on the council of the Church, and the priest knows her fairly well. She informed the priest of the purpose of their conversation when she set the meeting time, so both were prepared for the conversation and needed little time to begin to address the topic in earnest.

Pastoral Conversation

Priest: When you called to ask if we could talk about primacy of conscience, I mentioned that it might be helpful to also explore and possibly expand how we understand the phrase “an informed conscience” as it relates to primacy of conscience. In your questioning and struggle to understand what the Church means when it says we should follow our conscience, you said your parents and teachers always taught you that you must have an informed conscience. You said you weren’t clear about what that actually means or how to get one. After all, it’s not like you can purchase it at a Catholic bookstore? As we discuss primacy of conscience in our lives, we can certainly explore

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353 This dialogue is an edited version of a transcribed recording of an actual pastoral theological role play.
the meaning of an informed conscience and even use it as our entry point for today’s conversation? How do you understand it?

Sue: I think my parents had a lot to do with how my conscience became informed, both for good and bad I guess. Although I was taught from very early on by my parents to follow my conscience, I didn’t get the nitty-gritty until later in my life. I am sure the road my parents had to walk affected what they taught me, even if they never spoke of it directly to us as kids. They had five of us in the family. Much later on as an adult, I found out that my dad went to the priest and said if my mom had another child, he would divorce her. So the priest said to my dad that the lesser of two evils is for him to have a vasectomy. It was the exception to the rule. The priest said that if that's what my dad intended to do, he would grant him the equivalent of a dispensation to seek a vasectomy.

Priest: I agree with you that our parents play a significant role in the process of developing an informed conscience, including the idea of following your conscience. In fact, there are many factors that come into play as Catholics develop an informed conscience. Our self-reflection includes anything from how we assess the outcome of our decisions, resources like the Bible or Catechism, and what others think and do as well. Are you wondering if what your dad did was exercise primacy of conscience?

Sue: No, not really. I wouldn’t think that involves dispensations. I do know it put his conscience at ease though. I am more trying to express how my dad or maybe my parents couldn't live up to the Church’s standard…and I haven't been able to live up to the standard as well. I think my parents taught me, whether they intended to or not, that the Church’s standards are unrealistic. An informed conscience meant you knew you
were set up for failure. I recall my dad often muttering, “easy for him to say” after leaving Church. I would joke with my sister that it was another common response to the priest, but not as benevolent as when we say, “And also with you.”

Priest: Okay, I have a better sense of where you are going now. Do you personally believe that the Church’s standards are unrealistic in general, or just certain ones? Do you really think that an informed conscience means that you are set up for failure?

Sue: No, not when you put it that way, but when it comes to birth control, the Church has such a high standard that doesn’t seem to take a lot of people, a lot of life, into consideration when it teaches about contraception. We are still surrounded by it. An Italian woman was beatified about two years ago, who died rather than have treatment for cancer. This was a modern woman who was a medical doctor with 3 or 4 children. She was pregnant and the treatment for the cancer would have killed the fetus. She refused treatment so that her child could be born. It was worth more for her to bring this life into the world than save her own. She deprived her children of a mother and the community of a doctor, yet the beatification speaks about what a saint she was. The model of holiness presented to women is to sacrifice your own life to give birth to a child. Whether it's your actual life like this woman, or your sanity and health, everything else is secondary to child-bearing. This is still the message and standard that Catholic women receive to this day—it is just so unrealistic and simplistic.

Priest: Well that circumstance and issue is a bit different than contraception, yet clearly it captures the stakes and emotion that are in play here for you. It sounds like you are saying two things here on a broad level, but correct me if I am wrong or missed
something. One point is that you and your family experience the Church’s teaching regarding contraception as an unrealistic standard. The other point is that not being able to achieve that standard has been difficult on the life of your family, both for your parents and yourself. A critical question is whether you consider a standard or moral teaching wrong or simply beyond your ability or desire to achieve it. How you understand and respond to that question may determine whether or not developing a different and lesser standard may actually be finding a way to deal with a sense of guilt or failure for not keeping the standard that you know is right, or exercising primacy of conscience by differing from a normative Church teaching. Do you think your parents’ or your experience contributes to an informed conscience beyond assessing, as you see it, that the teaching regarding contraception is a set up for failure for some people?

Sue: Maybe that is what I hope you will tell me, but to be completely honest it has always seemed like saying that Catholics are to have an informed conscience is just a tricky way to say we have to do just what the Church says. It suggests we have a role in the decision-making process, but not really. If what I eventually decide goes against or stands in opposition to a moral teaching like contraception, then I am told that my conscience must not be well informed. I am faulted and told that I need to go back and pray about this some more. Or I am directed to study the Catechism on the topic because supposedly it is very clear there. At the end of the day, it seems that the Church believes that if my conscience is well formed it will inevitably be in line with what the Catechism states.

Priest: I understand your experience thus far seems to suggest that an informed conscience can be presented like there really is only one correct answer. Are you open
to, or have you had the experience when, having an informed conscience aligns with Church teaching, even if you have fallen short of practicing it fully in your life?

Basically it is important to sort out whether or not you have a blanket rejection of any Church teaching you do not realize in your life as too high a standard. Can you see in your life where falling short doesn’t translate into saying the Church is just unrealistic?

Sue: I have not thought of it in that sense, but I can readily say that is not the case. I don’t simply say the Church is wrong because I haven’t achieved its standards or followed its teachings. You know of some of my struggles with fidelity in my marriage, but I have never come to the conclusion that the Church’s teaching against adultery is wrong.

Priest: Hold onto that thought for a moment. This is an important distinction because following one’s conscience is about doing what we think is right or good. Falling short of the Church’s standards does not necessarily mean the standards are wrong, as you stated when you mentioned the seventh commandment banning adultery. An informed conscience may lead us to recognize how we have failed or sinned, or it may lead us to consider that the teaching is off or wrong rather than ourselves. Does that make sense?

Sue: Absolutely! I think sometimes I find it so frustrating that I just lump it all together and it may seem a bit exaggerated. So you are telling me that an informed conscience isn’t one that always agrees with the Church, though it does at times, and that primacy of conscience isn’t really a ruse to suggest we can actually differ with the Church’s teaching and still be considered part of the faithful? So how come I think this way? I am an intelligent woman who has really taken this stuff seriously.
Priest: Whether or not it might be a bit of a characterization, certainly there are some Catholics who would argue that an informed conscience will always align with the Church teaching. It is not like you made all this stuff up in your head. It is one interpretation of natural law, but it is not the only one. Exploring interpretations of natural law probably won’t be helpful for us at the moment. I can certainly point you to some articles if you would like to read more about it later. For the time being, let’s look at the responsibility and obligation of having an informed conscience as being about the information and influences we see as part of what forms our conscience. Understanding having an informed conscience as a process or way of being in relationship is a good foundation. It really expresses that we are part of the Church, or in Paul’s terms, part of the Body of Christ. Let’s put on hold for the moment what possible conclusions might emerge from an informed conscience. You have identified the Catechism as one source of information. Have you found that helpful at times? Is there a way you can or do use it in your life?

Sue: Well to be honest I haven’t read much of it lately, but that is partly due to the fact that it seems like I am told to go back to the Catechism when I question or disagree with the Church. It is kind of used just as a rule book and not much else. I know it expresses the Church’s tradition, but it can’t be the only source of relevant information. When I am directed to the Catechism there seems to be the suggestion, like I said earlier, that I am somehow the problem and that the solution lays in the Catechism. I simply need to study and pray in order to correct my confusion and error. Frankly, I think it is an intentional way to demean adults by treating them like kids by sending them back to redo the lessons they seemingly didn’t learn well the first time round. I don’t
mind the Catechism, but it can’t be the end-all and be-all when it comes to informing ourselves.

Priest: It is good that you can identify that level of feeling around being told to engage the Catechism. Before we look at praying and studying more about a particular issue that you question or have difficulty with accepting or practicing like contraception, it may first be helpful to recognize if or how the Catechism has been a resource in your development of faith. It can prevent lumping the whole relationship into one negative category. Or maybe it is just something that you think relates to being a child. I am not sure, but let’s see. This may shift the experience of seeing the Catechism as something more than a rule book that is drawn out only when you differ with a specific Church teaching. Are there positions on moral topics that you would agree with in the Catechism, say like the Ten Commandments? After all, it has over a hundred pages on the Ten Commandments that reflect over an eighth of the entire text.

Sue: Even though I can’t recite them all like I could when I was a girl, I am not calling those into question. “Thou shall not kill” seems pretty obvious to me and I am definitely on board with that one. But I know “thou shall conceive” was not one of them and, if you ask me, it seems to be stretching the matter to try to make the case that they are somehow connected.

Priest: So could you say the Catechism might or does serve you in some capacity as a resource that expresses and supports your understanding of yourself as a moral Catholic?

Sue: Sort of funny, but I can’t recall really trying to see where I stood in agreement with the Catechism because it has mainly been used to correct me. But now
that you put it that way, sure I think there are definitely ways it represents what I believe and try to practice as a Catholic.

Priest: When you stated that you did not think “thou shall not kill” translates into “thou shall conceive,” you said “if you ask me.” Well even if it does not always seem to be the case, the Church is asking you about your stand on contraception for yourself and your family. Let me read something out of the Catechism for you. Remember we just agreed that this is a source that does at times represent what you believe and try to practice as a Catholic. It states: “[One] has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. ‘[One] must not be forced to act contrary to conscience. Nor must [one] be prevented from acting according to conscience, especially in religious matters’.”

Does that sound like an informed conscience inevitably aligns with every Church teaching?

Sue: No it doesn’t. What page is that hidden on? Even if it is in the Catechism, it doesn’t seem to get the press that all the other teachings seem to enjoy. You know as well as I do that certainly all clergy don’t seem to come from this perspective and, in all due respect, I can think of a particular clergyman with a whole lot more clout than you that didn’t. I have this very clear memory of sitting in front of a television with a neighbor watching Pope John Paul II in Monterey, CA in the early 80’s. He was giving a speech addressing a number of things, but what struck me most was the part about non-compliance with the Church’s teaching regarding contraception. One portion was about being selfish. He phrased it something like, “Why would we deprive our sons and daughters of siblings? Why would we deprive them, if not for our own selfish reasons?”

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354 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 439.
Priest: Talk about a generous portion of Catholic guilt.

Sue: And as a cradle Catholic it got me. It hooked me. I am depriving my son and daughter of siblings because I don't want the extra work. I am the problem—I am being selfish. So we had another child. Later it was like "Oh my God." What was that decision about? His speech really got me to that place of believing I'm being selfish. This person, this great spiritual person, this wise and holy man who doesn't know me from Adam was basically saying, “Well honey, you don't have any good reason to not have a child,” and I bought it. By our fifth child I finally got to the point of saying, "God damn, I really do have a good reason, a really good reason because I will deprive my children of a sane and healthy mother if I keep doing this.”

Priest: I am sure that was not an easy thing to say or realize in your life. This may reflect the point of where listening to yourself as well as the Church led you to exercise primacy of conscience regarding the question of contraception. As you were informed by the Church and your life, you came to your response regarding the perceived “thou shall conceive” mandate. The quote I read you not only expresses the teaching of the Catechism by which you are called to inform yourself, but also draws upon the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The last part is actually a quote from the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” As a priest, I certainly do not have as much clout as the Pope, but this statement from the Catechism that was painstakingly crafted by and representative of the Pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, and laity as a summary of the tradition and the Second Vatican Council sure does.

Sue: So are you saying John Paul II was wrong in what he said?
Priest: Well I wasn’t trying to say that as such…there is certainly a broader context that he was speaking from that I do not know. Let’s put it this way. A Pope’s voice is one among a number of voices Catholics are called to listen to as they discern moral choices. We can both see with our own two eyes that if we go to the Catechism we are taught that our conscience is another voice we are called to listen to when making moral decisions. Now this may not be altogether clear to either you or me as to how that exactly plays out in our lives, but I think we are together today to explore more fully what that might mean for both of us as Catholics. I can’t simply open up the Catechism and tell you what you should do in each and every instance. I can’t even do that for myself. Even if I were in agreement with whatever moral position the Catechism supports, I would still have to support your primacy of conscience because it is a teaching of the Church as well. A Catholic cannot have a fully informed conscience that does not include being informed about this teaching regarding primacy of conscience.

Sue: I certainly don’t regret the life of our children. They are wonderful gifts from God and life wouldn’t be the same without them. I just don’t feel comfortable with how that choice was made and, more to our point today, how that continues to affect me in terms of my on-going choice to use contraception. Between our financial situation, my husband’s alcoholism and behavior, and the sheer demand of it all, I just can’t have another child.

Priest: Do you feel like you did not or do not have a choice in the matter?

Sue: It’s not that I am saying I don’t have a choice, but I feel like my choice is not understood or supported by the Church. Frankly it feels like it is condemned. Are
you saying that it is my responsibility or fault because I am the only one who is making
the choice and I am free to do otherwise?

Priest: No I assure you that am not trying to find fault or judge you. I would
simply like us to broaden rather than narrow how we understand our choices. I want to
look at what context influences or affects the decisions we make. It is another angle on
understanding how we develop an informed conscience. From our previous
conversations I know that as a mom you have an idea of what is meant by peer pressure
and how it can affect children’s choices.

Sue: Of course, we talked last year about Billy’s problem with those other kids
and their drinking. My own mom told me about not hanging out with a bad crowd.
You’re not saying that the Pope and the Vatican is a bad crowd are you?

Priest: No, but I appreciate your humor. I want to use your understanding of peer
pressure as a general way to realize that our choices are influenced by others. We can
neither make decisions in complete isolation nor would we want to. We don’t live in a
vacuum. The influence and resources of those around us and those who have preceded us
is invaluable, even if sometimes confusing and even conflicting. When the Church
teaches that we must follow an informed conscience, it is another way of saying our
conscience must be influenced by the Church’s teaching as well as any other source
available that assists in our understanding the situation and moral decision in question.
Without getting lost in a bunch of technical psychological terms, let’s just say that the
tradition or teaching of the Church is like a form of peer pressure. Since it is not exactly
peers as such, it might be better to see it as social persuasion. The group, in this instance
the Church, wants us to do some things and not do other things, for the sake of
everyone’s good. This is real persuasion that has an effect and generally carries some form of consequence. Of course we might be hearing it through our peers, but they first received it from some form of the Church’s teaching, like the Catechism for example. Remember the big picture view that we discussed when we were looking at how peer pressure might affect your son?

Sue: Oh yeah that peer pressure usually just gets a bad rap, as if it is only what happens when some kids get other kids to do dumb or dangerous things. Of course we have all seen that happen, but it can also be present when peers pressure others to do good or creative things like in sports.

Priest: Yes, it can have either a positive or a negative influence. Social persuasion can be understood in a similar way. It is really neither good nor bad in and of itself. It is simply something that occurs as people relate to one another and we live in society—we are influenced by those we live with and this is a way to understand it on a large scale. Its affect on a person might be beneficial or detrimental and that is not determined simply by whether or not we are being told to do something or not do something. For example, “thou shall not kill” is a negative social persuasion. The Church is persuading people not to kill, so it is a prohibition. So even though it is negative social persuasion, it is a positive thing because it values and safeguards life. A positive social persuasion is the Church teaching us to work for justice and care for those suffering in poverty.

Sue: It sounds like you are trying to tell me that even though the Church is prohibiting contraception, it is a good thing. I have heard that before and it sounds like the same old same old.
Priest: I am actually just trying to introduce a basic idea about how we are influenced and affected by a group, but if you want to look at it regarding contraception we can. Basically, as you stated, the Church’s teaching about contraception is that prohibiting contraception is a good thing. But it is vital to recognize that this is not the Church’s only teaching that must be considered. Prohibiting contraception is the Church’s teaching or judgment on that topic in general, but is not a judgment of you in particular or your practice. As Catholics we are called to engage our tradition and listen to the voices of our leadership as they present the tradition. But it is important to not lose sight of the fact that the Church teaches that we are not to let those voices be heard so loudly that we cannot hear the voice of our own conscience. The Church exercises positive social persuasion when it says you can and must ultimately make that decision yourself based upon all the relevant information you have. This is the Church’s teaching about your ability and responsibility to make moral decisions. Remember before how you said there are a lot of things in the Catechism that you agree with? Can you agree with the Church that after listening and gathering all the information and influence that might matter, then you will follow you conscience?

Sue: I think that is what I have been doing, but somehow it seems so inadequate and isolating. In my own situation with the decision I've made, it has felt and continues to feel as if what I am doing when I appeal to my conscience is looking for the exception to the rule. Others have set the rules and my only option leaves me coming up short. My appeal is that I'm the exception because of my conscience, even if supported by the Church. I am exempting myself from the rule. It's much more difficult to say the rule is wrong, but I think it is. I feel like I am carving out my own space where I can survive,
but as an exception. I'm not breathing well. I'm on the life support of primacy of conscience which allows me an exception, but boy I really feel second rate. I feel like I'm just at the margin of my Catholic life here. I want to be able to receive communion like everybody else and not be looked down upon or look down upon myself because of what I have decided and am doing.

Priest: I understand how you don’t want following your conscience to leave you feeling at a loss, as if you were a second rate citizen. I hear the isolation you struggle with here. I don’t think the Church’s teaching intends to address how following one’s conscience might make a person feel. But I do know that how we understand those teachings might affect those feelings. Are you really an exception to the rule? Isn’t one of the rules to follow our conscience? Can there be moments when I faithfully and legitimately claim exception to one rule because I am following another rule? Might the Church, conscious or not, have created this confusing structure because it recognizes that one teaching might not cover every scenario? Isn’t that the case with “thou shall not kill?” That's clearly a rule, but there are also exceptions. The Church teaches about the right to self-defense. It teaches the just war theory. So on the one hand we might say that exceptions are the norm, but what if you are not expressing an exception. What if you are a voice possibly contributing to what might become a new teaching?

Sue: So now I am to just tell my friends and the Pope that I am a theologian? Do you have some paperwork that can go along with this claim?

Priest: Well let’s not concern ourselves for the moment as to how others might interpret what you are doing when claiming primacy of conscience and what it may or may not offer the Church. Let’s just focus on how you might understand it. We
recognize that sometimes primacy of conscience does conjure the idea of an exception to
the rule, yet it is actually following another rule. A person can faithfully differ from a
normative Church teaching precisely because of following another normative Church
teaching. When we exercise primacy of conscience we are informed by the tradition and
we are the part of the Church that has been identified by the Church itself as those who
may and must differ in accordance with the teaching on conscience. The teaching on
primacy of conscience does not exclude, let alone excommunicate, those who exercise it.
The very presence of the teaching acknowledges the possibility of it being among the
expected practices of faithful Catholics. Catholics who exercise primacy of conscience
are a part of the whole, not apart from the whole. Some folks would talk about this in
terms of the Church as a system where everything and everyone stands in relationship to
everything and everyone else. So can you be faulted for putting into practice the very
teaching that your parents taught you as a child and the Church continues to teach in its
Catechism?

Sue: It does get all jumbled together doesn’t it? Usually I feel like if something
is out of order, it must be me. It never really occurred to me that the lay of the land is
actually complicated and confusing outside of me.

Priest: Well not to further complicate matters, but there also can be times when
the stance a Catholic holds isn't merely a petition for an exception considering my
circumstances, but rather an expression of a perspective that really calls to task the
normal teaching of the Church. Take slavery for example. Those who critiqued the
Church’s normative teaching that accepted slavery weren’t simply saying that there are
occasions when an exception to slavery would be appropriate and acceptable. They were
saying the Church teachings were wrong. That is an example within the moral arena, but we can also look at scientists like Copernicus or Galileo. They weren't asking for an exception in their lives, they were saying as scientists that certain dimensions of the Church’s understanding of the universe were wrong for everyone. Granted they were called heretics and it took over four hundred years for the Church to acknowledge their insight and wisdom, but following one’s conscience might be making a contribution to the Church’s understanding and teaching. Martin Luther was uniquely positioned to understand deficiencies in the Church that not everyone else could see in the same way, or at least identify and address. His following of his conscience with “Here I stand, I can do no other” was a great contribution to the Church. Although it took quite some time, not unlike Copernicus and Galileo, the Second Vatican Council actually adopted most of his reforms even though they didn’t explicitly credit him as such. Three obvious examples are the liturgy going into the vernacular, the laity being more fully recognized as ministers, and Catholics being urged to read the Bible. Do you think your role as a wife and mother has given you some insight into bearing and raising children that celibate priests and theologians might not have?

Sue: Yes of course I do. I have been arguing that all along and I am not the only one. How many times have you heard the comment about people not wanting the Church to decide what goes on in our bedrooms? When I hear a comment like not wanting to have another child being framed as selfishness, I could just pull my hair out. It seems so ignorant, arrogant, and insensitive. I know it is not from the Bible and probably isn’t Christian, but that saying about not judging someone until you have walked a mile in their shoes makes a whole lot of sense to me. I feel like I am being told both what shoes
to wear and what road to walk. They give you the damn answer. The Church doesn’t know what's going on in my life, and yet they say, “If you were really following God's will you wouldn't be using birth control.” My voice must mean something. Parents are the ones who are having the children. Our experience must be worth something. I definitely have insight into what it means to be a mother that a celibate priest doesn’t have, but all I have ever heard or hear is that the Holy Mother Church is the teacher. When you use phrases like the deposit of faith, it's like a box that gets handed from one generation to the next and my job is to guard and hand on the “true teaching” no questions asked. I feel like I'm standing as an individual against the institution, against the Pope, against the bishop, and I don't have the theological fire power that those folks do to bring to bear. It feels like a very lonely decision and weak position.

Priest: Yeah I understand. It can seem like the deck is stacked when symbols like the Pope, or the tradition, or the Church all seem to claim one thing, even if there is not simply one thing to consider. It's interesting you use the word theological firepower. I think that's a powerful metaphor of agency. Where is power or agency present? Is it only in those symbols and persons? When we look at Church teaching, is power unidirectional? Does teaching come only from those symbols, the Pope, the tradition, the Church? Can you or women like you, or couples in the question regarding contraception also be teachers to the Church? A recent study by the Church itself shows that almost fifty percent of Catholic women in the United States choose to practice contraception. Do you have theological firepower as a member of the Church? Do you ever have a place to say things theological, for you to be teacher for the Church, or are the only
teachers of the Church always those who occupy institutional and ecclesial offices or roles?

Sue: I guess so…I certainly would hope so, but it hardly feels that way.

Priest: Primacy of conscience says that you are informed by the tradition and you inform the tradition. You have power or agency, just as everyone who is part of the Church does. Not that this means there are not real differences in power, but no one is without it. Everyone can and does make a difference, especially as they make moral choices that affect themselves and others around them.

Sue: So are you saying that though the Church would prefer we do it one way, our conscience inevitably leads us to do what right?

Priest: Yes and no. It is right to follow our conscience, but that does not necessarily mean that are choices will be what truly accomplishes what is good for others and ourselves. The Church says we are to follow our conscience, but there are no guarantees as to what the outcome will be. The obligation to act from an informed conscience does not assure that a person is doing good, but only that they think they are doing good. Just as part of the doctrine of primacy of conscience is having an informed conscience, it also states that primacy of conscience does not mean we are above making a mistake. It is called an erroneous conscience. An erroneous conscience can develop on two levels. On one level it can develop because someone did not inform themselves—neglected doing their homework so to speak. On another level, even if a person has informed themselves and done all they could, the final choice still may not be something good, even though the person seriously and sincerely thought that would be the case. Primacy of conscience is not individualism because it is informed by and done with the
Church according to its teaching. It is also not a guarantee that our decision will
necessarily achieve the good it is intended to achieve. Does that address your question?

Sue: Honestly, yes and no. It still has a confusing character to it.

Priest: It would be nice if the tradition was simple and clear, yet there is
ambiguity on a lot of levels. We can see from the commandment “thou shall not kill”
that rules are not always so black and white. We are called to listen to the Church’s
wisdom, but we are also called to contribute to it as well. The teaching of the Church
not only has ambiguity in it, there is also error. We can look across Church history and
think that some of its teaching might endure forever. But it is equally true that there is
plenty of stuff that’s been way off base and doesn’t even endure to this day. Who's going
to make a case for slavery in this day and age? The Church provides you with a
normative teaching that basically says, follow or lead. Probably we need to do both with
more of the former than the latter given the collective wisdom of the Church. It is simply
not as easy as, “Here’s the answer. You're good to go.” Can the Church be a strong
voice, but not the only voice? Listen to yourself and others as you journey in your life,
your ministry, and our world. We are all learners and teachers. There may be certain
arenas where we may be uniquely positioned to reflect upon the experience and
understand it in important unique ways. Your role and experience as a mother and wife
seems to be one. Primacy of conscience may be the Church telling us that in these
moments when it's confusing and there doesn't seem to be a clear answer, we're going to
trust you to try your best with all the resources you have been provided. And that doesn't
need to lock you out to live in the hinterlands, live at the margin of the Church, or live in
rejection. You are having the courage to be true to yourself and the community that has formed you. That's another way to say following our conscience.

Sue: I didn’t expect you would be able to take away the all confusion that I have lived with for some time now. It is different to see confusion or, as you put it, ambiguity as somewhat normal and part of the tradition. I do think this has been helpful.

Priest: Like any conversation, we have certainly wandered around, but I hope we have stayed centered enough on your question regarding primacy of conscience that it has been beneficial. I am certainly open to continue our conversation as you mull over and pray with what we have discussed today.

Reflection upon Pastoral Conversation

Without the priest necessarily needing to be explicit with Sue regarding the potential theological and psychological depth that can inform a pastoral theological understanding of primacy of conscience and agency, the pastoral conversation has an orientation that implicitly frames the relational dynamic in a manner that intends to engender and/or enhance the three shifts previously identified. In terms of shift for Sue: it allows her the possibility of differing from a normative Church teaching without that difference necessarily being interpreted negatively; it also reinforces the possibility that Catholics are competent and sometimes required as Catholics to responsibly make a moral decision that differs from the Church teaching. This shift may also contribute the following for Sue as well: mitigate any mistaken conception that there are no options available for her; ameliorate any potential reactive behavior for Sue if she is a person that struggles with authority that is perceived as domineering; and potentially transform or heal her pastoral relationship with the priest by positioning it as informational, dialogical,
and exploratory rather than judgmental and fixed. With this shift, the normative
cognitive dynamics of self-reflection, perceived self-efficacy, and positive social
persuasion may be enhanced for Sue as she considers the possibility of exercising
primacy of conscience. Finally, inasmuch as Catholics’ are called to operate from an
informed conscience, the role play also demonstrates how exercising the agency required
in informing one’s conscience also involves a step toward maturity. Sue has to examine
past understandings of what she was taught and critically update these in the light of
discerning judgments about her present circumstances. This, in turn, leads to the
possibility of revising her moral decision-making.

In terms of the shift for the priest, several benefits may be operative. First, it may
ameliorate the potentially complicated situation of being a representative of the Church
that is seen as conjuring the role of judge or arbiter of the question at hand. Second, it
may enhance the pastoral relationship by virtue of affirming Sue’s capacity to address the
moral decision in question. Finally, it may mitigate responsibility potentially being
abdicated by Sue through an unconscious desire to have the priest, in essence, make the
moral decision for her. It also may lessen any potential polarization and/or confrontation
within the pastoral relationship because the priest is not positioned in irreconcilable
contradictions while caring for Sue and representing both the ministry and governance of
the Church. In short, ambiguity within the tradition can be a resource rather than a
conundrum, as it is jointly engaged through primacy of conscience and an understanding
of agency that is supported by the Church. With this shift, the priest may function as a
source of positive rather than negative social persuasion in the process of supporting
Sue’s self-reflection and agency in the process of moral decision-making through a collaborative pastoral conversation.

From the perspective of the pastoral relationship between Sue and the priest, it allows the dynamics of learning and teaching to be fluid and interchangeable. At a minimum, the priest is located with Sue in the question instead of being the person with the answer. Rather than the relationship being fixed from the outset (i.e., the priest functioning in the teaching role through initiating agency and Sue in the learning role with receptive agency), either party may function in either role with its corresponding agency. As such, both parties may be enriched from the pastoral conversation in its dynamic interchange, as they journey together is searching for and discerning what might be the best moral course given the context and the question. In actuality, without trying to assess proportionality, both Sue and the priest function as learner and teacher. In sum, the pastoral relationship is framed systemically with all parties exercising various expressions of agency. Because neither the issue nor the pastoral relationship is cast in “either—or” terms, the pastoral care dynamic is more disposed to the possibility of on-going evaluation of the issue.

Finally, as the priest supports Sue’s possible exercise of primacy of conscience from the personalist perspective, the principal pastoral role facilitates and fosters her informing her conscience and supports the agency she requires in the moral decision-making process. From the personalist perspective, Sue is recognized as potentially competent and responsible for managing her moral decision-making. The perspective of and directives from the tradition are seriously engaged and considered, but the tradition’s affirmation about the primacy of conscience is determinative when conflicts, such as Sue’s, exist. As such, the pastoral
relationship holds in tension both the fluidity and stability of the tradition. Therefore, Sue can simultaneously be faithful to the tradition and authority of the Church while occasionally differing from it as related to a specific moral topic due to the guidance of her conscience. Pastoral care, through the integration of a personalist perspective of primacy of conscience, can be tailored to Sue’s specific needs, challenges, and context while also addressing the Church’s normative teaching, not the least of which is primacy of conscience.

Another person could visit the very same priest later that day and the conversation might look very different. Because of the unique context of each person and how the personalist perspective ultimately prioritizes the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals in moral matters, there is no pat predictable outcome. Certainly the normative teaching of the Church as well as the process of engaging primacy of conscience is predictable in its doctrinal stability, yet the individual results can and do vary. This is related to the very same moral issue by different persons, let alone across different moral issues and contexts.

**Future Research**

The question of future research is always an open-ended one with immeasurable possibilities. Nevertheless, some trajectories present themselves as both more immediate and more promising. One consideration seems to stand out as a particularly strong and promising candidate. Further exploration of the correlation between the contraceptive practices among U. S. Catholics and the exercise of primacy of conscience merits serious consideration for a variety of reasons. First, it is a strong (i.e., 48%) and demonstrable instance of Catholic behavior that deviates from normative Church teaching. Second, it is within an arena of life (i.e., human sexuality) where many Catholics may readily be in a teaching role as much as a
learning role in terms of agency. Third, social structures (e.g., National Survey of Family Growth) are currently in place that makes data collection relatively reasonable.

The development of instruments to examine the correlation of contraceptive practices among U.S. Catholics and the exercise of primacy of conscience can illuminate the degree to which theological understandings and motivations are related to the behavior. The trajectory of Ohlendorf and Fehring’s research and others like it regarding the contraceptive practices of Catholics points to the possibility of this correlation. Further research could move their work beyond the stage of speculative conclusions, especially as regards the suggestion of Catholics working from the psychological position of “autonomous persons” rather than theological position of primacy of conscience. It is very possible that a self-understanding and motivation that is moored in the psychological position of “autonomous persons” may correlate with a theological understanding and motivation rooted in primacy of conscience.

Given the empirical quality of SCT, the contraceptive practices of Catholics could also be examined in terms any of the three dimensions of agency examined in this dissertation (i.e., self-reflectiveness, perceived self-efficacy, and social persuasion). Perceived self-efficacy would be the point I would consider first, given the breadth of research and instruments available that address it, as well as it being particularly salient to the question of primacy of conscience. Research of this nature could empirically

355 Although not in the arena of contraceptive practices, some research correlates self-efficacy and dissent. Dissent is not necessarily interpreted as an exercise of primacy of conscience, yet there are parallel characteristics. For further reference, see Louise E. Parker, “When to Fix It and When to Leave: Relationships among Perceived Control, Self-Efficacy, Dissent, and Exit,” Journal of Applied Psychology 78, (1993): 949-959.
explore some of the theoretical considerations that have been presented throughout this research and lead to an even greater understanding of primacy of conscience.

Conclusion

A Catholic understanding of conscience that is both brief and broad may be age-appropriate for certain children and, in the most general terms and simplest circumstances, may even serve some adults on a very limited level. Nevertheless, in many or most instances, the stakes are too high and the questions too complicated for Catholics to simply appeal to the concept of "following one's conscience" without it having more clarity and sophistication. If “following one’s conscience” is merely code for a generic and diffuse understanding of “going with a gut feeling,” Catholicism, whether for the individual or the organization, will be left wanting. Such an approach does not even fully engage the Church's tradition of conscience, let alone an enhanced one that appeals to this pastoral theological construction of agency for Catholic moral decision-making.

This contemporary pastoral theological interpretation of the doctrine of primacy of conscience as related to agency can be a critical resource for helping contemporary U.S. Catholics and their spiritual guides make moral decisions that are informed but not controlled by the established tradition of the Church. Further, by drawing positively upon a doctrine that has been historically subordinated in the Church’s teaching, it helps Catholics better understand and collaborate with their Church when making moral decisions, even to the point of realizing the possibility of sometimes contributing to moral advances. The personalist perspective of primacy of conscience since the Second Vatican Council has made a significant contribution to the question of moral agency and authority. Its contribution is both reinforced and expanded through this pastoral theological construction of agency for Catholic moral decision-making.
This research is intended to take one more concrete step in making the necessary resource possible, understandable, and available for Catholics’ moral decision-making and the possibility of exercising primacy of conscience.
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APPENDIX A

Statement of Bibliographic Procedure—Donald A. Rickard January 9, 2006

My interest in recovering/reconstructing the traditional Catholic doctrine of primacy of conscience coalesced during an independent study in pastoral theology with Larry Graham. This research topic addresses my personal and ministerial experience as well as the situation of many other Catholics in the community. From this initial work with Graham, both a topic and several key theorists emerged that provided initial search terms for my research and selective bibliography. The selection criterion predominantly reflects specific terms as well as particular authors and/or theories. Although no date parameter was included in the selection criteria, the majority of relevant materials are from the mid-20th and 21st centuries. I expanded these initial search terms further by consulting the Library of Congress Subject Heading 23rd Edition, the ATLA Religion Index, and the Guide to Social Science & Religion in Periodical Literature for synonymous and/or related terms. Finally, I continued to amplify the search terms by noting additional keywords that surfaced in the process of searching my expanded list. The final search terms that guided my research are as follows:

1) Conscience, primacy of conscience, liberty of conscience, freedom of conscience, casuistry, guilt, primacy, and dissent

2) Pastoral theology, practical theology, pastoral care, pastoral counseling, pastoral psychology, care of souls, cure of souls, and ministry
3) Agency, power, self-efficacy, control, moral agent, moral agency, and mastery

4) Hiltner, Lapsley, Patton, Poling, Graham, Doehring, Curran, McCormick, Grisez, John Henry Newman, Hogan, and Bandura

5) Catholic Church, Catholicism, Second Vatican Council, sociology, United States, history, 20th century, membership, attitudes, Ex-Church members, and controversy(ies)

All of these terms were searched according to library catalogues (Taylor, Penrose, John Vianney, Denver Public Library, and Prospector), Online Databases (ATLA database--especially ATLA Religion and WorldCat, PYSCHLIT, Digital Dissertations, EBSCOhost EJS, Expanded Academic ASAP, and MLA), CD-ROM Databases (Catholic Periodical & Literature Index and Religious and Theological Abstracts), and Amazon.com. Authors were also searched under Social Science Citation Index and Arts & Humanities Citation Index.

The terms were searched as keywords, subject, subject heading, subject phrase, and author (when appropriate). Searches consisted of individual terms, dual terms, and multiple terms, moving from very general to the most specific until no hits emerged. The process was structured as follows: the first term from category #1 (i.e. conscience) was paired with one term from one of the next four categories (e.g. pastoral theology), until all the terms from categories #2-#5 had been paired with the initial category #1 term (i.e. conscience), resulting in 38 searches. Then I proceeded to the next term under category #1 (i.e. primacy of conscience) and did a similar pairing procedure, resulting in another 38 searches. Continuing in this fashion across all categories, the pairing process resulted in a matrix of 837 searches. From this point, I continued to search three terms following a similar organized sequence. I did not exceed combining more than three
terms, with the exception of some of the category #5 terms. Finally, additional resources were also identified vis-à-vis the footnotes and bibliographies of these previously identified sources.

The bibliography will primarily be divided broadly according to medium: monographs, edited books with essays, essays from edited books, journal articles, dissertations, and additional materials. Because of the interdisciplinary and interdenominational character of the research, ample materials were identified for the research. Nevertheless, the limited focused resources that emerged from a comprehensive search process clearly demonstrate this specific question and thesis has not been addressed.
APPENDIX B

8 Examples of Social Cognitive Theory research


Abstract: Two samples of family caregivers (Study 1, 169 Ss mean age 63.8 yrs; Study 2, 145 Ss mean age 60.2 yrs) of cognitively impaired older adults were, used to revise, extend, and evaluate a measure of perceived self-efficacy for caregiving tasks. The Revised Scale for Caregiving Self-Efficacy measures 3 domains of caregiving self-efficacy: Obtaining Respite, Responding to Disruptive Patient Behaviors, and Controlling Upsetting Thoughts. The 3 subscales show strong internal consistency and adequate test-retest reliability. Construct validity is supported by relationships between these 3 facets of perceived caregiving efficacy and depression, anxiety, anger, perceived social support, and criticism expressed in speech samples. The Revised Scale for Caregiving Self-Efficacy has potential uses for both research and clinical purposes.


Abstract: This prospective study tested with 272 children (aged 11-15 yrs) a structural model of the network of sociocognitive influences that shape children's career aspirations and trajectories. Familial socioeconomic status is linked to children's career trajectories
only indirectly through its effects on parents' perceived efficacy and academic aspirations. The impact of parental self-efficacy and aspirations on their children's perceived career efficacy and choice is, in turn, entirely mediated through the children's perceived efficacy and academic aspirations. Children's perceived academic, social, and self-regulatory efficacy influence the types of occupational activities for which they judge themselves to be efficacious both directly and through their impact on academic aspirations. Perceived occupational self-efficacy gives direction to the kinds of career pursuits children seriously consider for their life's work and those they disfavor. Children's perceived efficacy rather than their actual academic achievement is the key determinant of their perceived occupational self-efficacy and preferred choice of worklife. Analyses of gender differences reveal that perceived occupational self-efficacy predicts traditionality of career choice.


Abstract: Investigated the replicability of the factor structure of the Children's Perceived Self-Efficacy scales in Italy, Hungary, and Poland. The findings of this cross-national study support the generalizability of the factor structure of children's social and academic efficacy (aged 10-15 yrs). Perceived efficacy to resist peer pressure to engage transgressive conduct had a somewhat different factor structure for Hungarian children. Gender and national differences in the pattern of efficacy beliefs underscore the value of treating perceived self-efficacy as a multifaceted attribute. There were no overall gender differences in perceived social efficacy, but girls in all 3 societies have a higher sense of efficacy for academic activities and to resist peer pressure for transgressive activities.
Italian children judge themselves more academically efficacious than do Hungarian children and more socially efficacious than their counterparts in both of the other 2 countries. An analysis of the facets of academic efficacy revealed that Hungarian children have a high sense of efficacy to master academic Ss but a lower efficacy than their Italian and Polish counterparts to take charge of their own learning. Polish children surpassed their counterparts in academic self-regulatory efficacy.


Abstract: Tested the hypothesis that self-evaluative and self-efficacy mechanisms mediate the effects of goal systems on performance motivation. These self-reactive influences are activated through cognitive comparison requiring both personal standards and knowledge of performance. 45 male and 45 female undergraduates performed a strenuous activity with either goals and performance feedback, goals alone, feedback alone, or without either factor. The condition combining performance information and a standard had a strong motivational impact, whereas neither goals alone nor feedback alone effected changes in motivation. When both comparative factors were present, the evaluative and efficacy self-reactive influences predicted the magnitude of motivation enhancement. The higher the self-dissatisfaction with substandard performance and the stronger the perceived self-efficacy for goal attainment, the greater was the subsequent intensification of effort. When one comparative factor was lacking, the self-reactive influences were differentially related to performance motivation.

Abstract: This study explored whether self-efficacy and time perspective of homeless adults (N = 82) living in a shelter affected their coping strategies related to obtaining housing and employment. Participants with high self-efficacy searched more for housing and employment and stayed at the shelter for a shorter duration, whereas participants with low self-efficacy were more likely to request an extension of their stay at the shelter. Those high on future orientation had shorter durations of homelessness and were more likely to enroll in school and to report gaining positive benefits from their predicament, whereas those with a high present orientation had more avoidant coping strategies. Despite the predictive power of self-efficacy and future orientation of proactive search behaviors, there were no predictors of obtaining stable housing, which is a scarce resource in the area. However, a high present orientation predicted obtaining temporary housing. A present temporal perspective may be adaptive in finding short-term solutions to an unstable situation, such as homelessness. The role of time perspective in crisis situations is discussed, as well as the severe environmental constraints on the exercise of personal control over reality dictated by social, economic, and political forces.


Abstract: Studied the role of perceived emotional and interpersonal self-efficacy in psychological adjustment. 162 male and 162 female high school students aged 14-18 yrs in Italy were administered a scale developed to measure the perceived ability to regulate
one's own positive and negative affect. A structural equation model was used in which depressive social withdrawal, antisocial conduct, and prosocial behavior were considered as dependent variables that were influenced by perceived emotional self-efficacy directly and indirectly through perceived interpersonal self-efficacy. The results partially confirm the direct influence of perceived emotional self-efficacy on the dependent variables and fully confirm its indirect influence through perceived interpersonal self-efficacy.


Abstract: Tested the hypothesis that perceived self-efficacy to resist peer pressure for high-risk activities is related to transgressive conduct, both directly and through the mediation of open familial communication. 324 adolescents (aged 14-18 yrs) rated their self-regulatory efficacy, openness of communication with parents, and their involvement in delinquent conduct and substance abuse. Results of structural equation modeling confirm that a high sense of efficacy to ward off negative peer influences was accompanied by open communication with parents about activities outside the home and by low engagement in delinquent conduct and substance abuse. Both the posited direct and mediated paths of influences were replicated for males and females, although girls exhibited a slightly weaker direct relationship between self-regulatory efficacy and transgressive conduct.

Abstract: The causal role of students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic goals in self-motivated academic attainment was studied using path analysis procedures. Parental goal setting and students' self-efficacy and personal goals at the beginning of the semester served as predictors of students' final course grades in social studies. In addition, their grades in a prior course in social studies were included in the analyses. A path model of four self-motivation variables and prior grades predicted students' final grades in social studies R = .56. Students' beliefs in their efficacy for self-regulated learning affected their perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement, which in turn influenced the academic goals they set for themselves and their final academic achievement. Students' prior grades were predictive of their parents' grade goals for them, which in turn were linked to the grade goals students set for themselves. These findings were interpreted in terms of the social cognitive theory of academic self-motivation.