

***Amoris Laetitia*: Towards a Methodological and Anthropological Integration of Catholic Social and Sexual Ethics**

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Abstract

There is a long-noted anthropological and methodological divide between Catholic social and sexual ethics. We argue in three cumulative sections that Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* moves towards an anthropological and methodological integration of Catholic social teaching and Catholic sexual teaching. First, we explore *Amoris Laetitia*'s anthropological integration of Catholic social and Catholic sexual teaching; second, we explore its methodological integration of Catholic social and sexual teaching; finally, we demonstrate how the anthropological and methodological insights of *Amoris Laetitia* might provide a more integrated and credible response to a contemporary ethical issue.

Keywords

Amoris Laetitia, anthropology, Catholic sexual teaching, Catholic social teaching, conscience, ethical method, Pope Francis

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On the return flight from his visit to Africa, Pope Francis reflected on the complex relationship between reality and church teaching. When asked if the church should consider a change in its absolute prohibition of the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, the Pope responded that the question seemed too small: “I think the morality of the Church on this point finds itself in a dilemma: is it the fifth or the sixth commandment? To defend life, or is the sexual relation open to life? But this is not the problem.” The first problem in Africa, and indeed worldwide, is much bigger and more complex than the use of condoms. The first problem is the reality of “denutrition, the exploitation of people, slave labor, lack of drinking water . . . These are the problems.”¹ Condom use may or may not address a small part of the human problem, but the greater problem to be addressed is systemic social injustice and violations of human dignity throughout the world. The second problem is the relationship between church law and human dignity. Francis recalled a specious question put to Jesus by the Pharisees: “Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?” (Matt 12:10, NRSV). Jesus answered that any one of them would rescue his sheep on the Sabbath: “How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep!” (12:12). “Do justice,” is Francis’ answer, “but do not think whether it is allowed or not to heal on the Sabbath. And when all these are cured, when there are no injustices in this world, then we can talk about the Sabbath.”² Jesus’ response is prophetic and so is the pope’s. It foreshadows a shift in focus in how the magisterium and Catholic theological ethicists should prioritize questions relating to social justice and sexual ethics and how, therefore, they should approach those questions anthropologically and methodologically.

Pope Francis’ reflection on the relationship between HIV/AIDS prevention and the social injustice of poverty highlights some of the ethical and methodological inconsistencies, which Catholic ethicists have long noted, between Catholic social teaching (henceforth CST) found in documents such as *Populorum Progressio*³ and Catholic sexual teaching (henceforth CSexT) found in documents such as Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Persona Humana*. Since the Second Vatican Council,⁴ Catholic social ethics has been largely principle-oriented, relational-focused, dynamic, developmental, and inductive; Catholic sexual ethics continues to be largely law-oriented, legalistic, act-focused, static, and deductive. In this article, we argue that this methodological divide between Catholic social ethics and sexual ethics is bridged in Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Amoris*

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1. Gerard O’Connell, “Pope Francis on Paris Climate Change Summit: ‘It’s Either Now or Never,’” *America*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/popes-press-conference-flight-bangui-rome>.
 2. O’Connell, “Pope Francis on Paris Climate Change Summit.”
 3. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html (hereafter cited as PP). We focus on Paul VI’s PP in this article since it is a strong representation of CST methodologically and anthropologically, and 2017 is the fiftieth anniversary of its promulgation.
 4. See Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002).

Laetitia.⁵ Our article develops in three cumulative sections. First, we explore *Amoris Laetitia*'s anthropological integration of CST and CSexT; second, we explore its methodological integration of CST and CSexT; third, we demonstrate how the anthropological and methodological insights of *Amoris Laetitia* might provide a more integrated and credible response to a contemporary ethical issue.

Amoris Laetitia: Anthropology

Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* is in continuity with anthropological developments in both CST and CSexT and builds on those developments. It also more thoroughly integrates the method of CST into CSexT and creates an opening for the development of specific sexual norms. *Amoris Laetitia* reflects the anthropology developed in *Populorum Progressio* and in much of CSexT. The human person is: a free subject (not an object) (33; 153); in corporeality, the physical and spiritual are integrated (151); in relationship to the material world (277), to others (187–98), to social groups (222), and to self (32); created in the image and likeness of God (10); a historical being (193); and is fundamentally unique but equal to all other persons (54). There are, however, fundamental sexual anthropological developments in it. In its absolute proscriptive norms traditional Catholic sexual anthropology prioritizes the biological function of the sexual act over its relational and spiritual meanings; Francis emphasizes the relational and spiritual in moral decision-making. This is especially evident in his emphasis on personal conscience, discernment, and virtue, to which we now turn.

Pope Francis on Conscience

In both his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis brings to the fore again the Catholic doctrine on the authority and inviolability of personal conscience, especially as it relates to “irregular situations” in marital and sexual relationships.⁶ Although he clearly rejects relativism and affirms objective norms (*EG* 64), he warns that “realities are more important than ideas” and there has to be an ongoing dialectic between reality and ideas “lest ideas become detached from realities ... objectives more ideal than real ... ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom” (*EG* 231). Sociological surveys repeatedly affirm the significant disconnect between the proscriptive norms of the magisterium on sexual ethics, the absolute norms that prohibit artificial contraception, homosexual acts, and communion for the divorced and remarried without annulment, for example, and the perspectives of the Catholic faithful. According to these surveys, the majority of

5. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (hereafter cited as *AL*).

6. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).

educated Catholics judge that these norms are detached from reality, and they are following their consciences to make practical judgments on these and other moral matters.⁷

Francis calls for “harmonious objectivity” where ideas “are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis” (EG 232). Such objectivity can be found in personal conscience, even in the consciences of atheists. In his exchange with an Italian journalist on the issue of atheists, Francis commented, “the question for those who do not believe in God is to abide by their own conscience. There is sin, also for those who have no faith, in going against one’s conscience. Listening to it and abiding by it means making up one’s mind about what is good and evil.”⁸ The “making up one’s mind,” we argue, is not an endorsement of relativism which Francis clearly rejects, but an affirmation of the discernment of moral truth by conscience informed by external, objective norms and other sources like Scripture, tradition, science, and experience. His early statement on conscience seems to affirm our assessment.

We also must learn to listen more to our conscience. Be careful, however: this does not mean we ought to follow our ego, do whatever interests us, whatever suits us, whatever pleases us. That is not conscience. Conscience is the interior space in which we can listen to and hear the truth, the good, the voice of God. It is the inner place of our relationship with Him, who speaks to our heart and helps us to discern, to understand the path we ought to take, and once the decision is made to move forward, to remain faithful.⁹

This statement reflects a model of conscience very different from Francis’ two predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Francis’ model strikes us as more faithful to the long-established Catholic tradition and its teaching on the inviolability of conscience.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis brings again to the ethical forefront the ancient, but in the recent Catholic past largely ignored, Catholic teaching on the authority and inviolability of personal conscience. Indeed, his teaching on conscience is, in our judgment, one of the central teachings in *Amoris Laetitia*.¹⁰ He judges, correctly we agree, that “individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the church’s praxis in

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7. For a worldwide sociological survey of Catholic beliefs on a variety of sexual ethical issues, see Univision Communications, *Global Survey of Roman Catholics*, Executive Summary (New York, February 2014), <http://pelicanweb.org/2014RCSurveyExecutiveSummary.pdf>.
 8. Lizzy Davies, “Pope Francis Tells Atheists to Abide by Their Own Consciences,” *The Guardian*, September 11, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/11/pope-francis-atheists-abide-consciences>.
 9. Francis, “Jesus Always Invites Us: He Does Not Impose,” *Angelus*, June 30, 2013, <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/2013/06/jesus-always-invites-us-he-does-not.html>.
 10. See James F. Keenan, SJ, “Receiving *Amoris Laetitia*,” *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 193–212; Conor M. Kelly, “The Role of the Moral Theologian in the Church: A Proposal in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*,” *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 922–48; James T. Bretzke, “In Good Conscience,” *America* (April 8, 2016), <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/article/good-conscience>.

certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage” (303), or indeed of any complex ethical issue. He quotes Aquinas frequently throughout the document. Especially significant is Aquinas’ teaching that the more we descend into the details of situations, the more will general principles be found to fail.¹¹ The devil, as the popular saying goes, is always in the details. Francis concurs with Paul VI’s earlier statements on CST¹² that there is such an “immense variety of concrete situations” that his document, indeed any ethical document, cannot “provide a new set of rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases” (AL 300). The pathway to the moral solution of any and every situation is the pathway not of uninformed obedience to some rule but of an “internal forum” or conscience decision, an assiduous process of discernment guided by a spiritual advisor and a final practical judgment of conscience that commands a free subject to do this or not to do that (AL 300–5). Only such an informed conscience can make an ethical judgment about the details of any and every particular situation. “Truth,” *Dignitatis Humanae* teaches, “cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.”¹³ Such truth, we add, is reached only after a serious and conscientious process of discernment.

Amoris Laetitia on Discernment

The place of discernment in moral decision-making complements the role and authority of conscience and seeks to inform and form it. The emphasis on discernment in *Amoris Laetitia* is a distinct anthropological contribution to both CST and CSexT. Although it is hardly surprising to find discernment used frequently by a son of Ignatius of Loyola, it is surprising to find it used so centrally as a basis for guiding responsible decisions in the realm of sexual ethics. There are parallel historical developments in the displacement and reinstatement of the authority of conscience and discernment in the ethical life. Conscience was displaced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by magisterial authority, rules, and the demand for submission to them, as Pius X’s *Vehementer Nos* clearly shows. “The church,” Pius asserted, “is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock.” These two categories are so hierarchically arranged that “with the pastoral body *only* rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end.” The only duty of the flock and the flock’s consciences “is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to

11. AL 304; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1-2, q. 94, art. 4 (hereafter cited as *ST*).

12. See Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), 4, 49, 50, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

13. *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965), 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (hereafter cited as *DH*).

follow the Pastors.”¹⁴ This displacement of conscience, itself, was displaced and the primacy of conscience was reinstated to its traditional centrality in Catholic ethical life first by the Second Vatican Council and now by Francis. He has also reinstated the complementarity of discernment and morality. The intrinsic link between the spiritual and ethical life, so central in Aquinas and the medieval tradition, was effectively severed at the Council of Trent, where moral theology was aligned with canon law rather than with spirituality.¹⁵ This troubling disconnection and connection were codified and reinforced by the Manuals of moral theology that grew out of the *Ratio Studiorum*, the Jesuit model of study, which controlled the education of seminarians up to the Second Vatican Council.

In the Jesuit tradition, discernment is the art of prayerful decision-making that relies upon spiritual practices,¹⁶ including the practices of, we would argue, seeing, judging, and acting from a prayerful perspective informed by the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, Scripture, tradition, experience, and science. This approach is clearly reflected in *Octogesima Adveniens*¹⁷ and *Populorum Progressio*.¹⁸ In his commentary on *AL*, André Vingt-Trois, Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, writes that *AL* invites all pastoral workers and, we add, all Christians, to return to “meditating on the message of Christ and the Christian tradition of the family and to seek to understand how this message could help to accompany families in the challenges that face them today.”¹⁹ Discernment, Francis writes, requires “humility, discretion, and love for the church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God’s will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it” (*AL* 300). Discernment is much more than simply following rules and absolute norms and moves us from a deontological-type ethic to a virtue-type ethic, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope, charity, mercy, justice, and prudence, that helps us to see and judge from a uniquely Christian perspective to act in a uniquely Christian way. Seeing and judging may lead to acts that follow rules and

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14. Pius X, *Vehementer Nos* (1906), 8, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html, emphasis added.
 15. See Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, trans. Edwin G. Kaiser (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1961), 1:18; Charles E. Curran, ed., *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968), 12; George M. Regan, *New Trends in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1971), 25.
 16. James Martin, “Understanding Discernment is Key to Understanding *Amoris Laetitia*,” *America*, April 8, 2016, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/discernment-key-amoris-laetitia>.
 17. See Marvin L. Mich, “Commentary on *Mater et magistra* (Christianity and Social Progress),” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth B. Himes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 191–216 at 198, 203–4.
 18. See Allan Figueroa Deck, “Commentary on *Populorum progressio* (On the Development of Peoples),” in Himes, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 292–314 at 299–300.
 19. See Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner, “*Amoris Laetitia* Requires an Effort of Formation of Discernment,” *LaCroix International*, October 19, 2016, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/amoris-laetitia-requires-an-effort-of-formation-for-discernment/4085>.

guidelines presented by the church or they may lead to the act of challenging those rules and guidelines. Authentic discernment and an informed conscience allow for, and sometimes may even demand, dissent from magisterial teaching. Since conscience is a practical judgment that comes at the end of a deliberative process, it necessarily involves the virtue of prudence, by which, according to Aquinas, “right reason is applied to action.”²⁰

Amoris Laetitia and the Virtues

The shift from a focus on rules and acts to a focus on virtue is a third fundamental anthropological and methodological shift in *Amoris Laetitia*. Virtue focuses first on the character of a person rather than on her acts, on being rather than doing, but there is still an ongoing dialectic between virtue and acts. Acts are important, since they both reflect and, when repeated, shape virtuous character; virtue produces and manifests itself in acts. In virtue ethics, ethical agents and their characters come first, and their ethical actions come second; in virtue ethics, *agere sequitur esse*, action follows being.²¹ The focus in *AL* is not on acts and rules but on ways of being in the world, where the person is invited to strive to live a life like Christ in the service of God, spouse, family, neighbor, and society, all the while understanding that God’s mercy is infinite if we fall short. Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia*, “Love in Marriage,” is a beautiful reflection on St. Paul’s poetic passage on the nature of true love (1 Cor 13:4–7) and the virtues associated with it. Love is patient, directed towards service, generous, forgiving; love is not jealous, boastful, or rude. It is noteworthy that the virtue of chastity, so central in the traditional Catholic approach to love, sexuality, and marriage, and so often deductively applied as a legalistic submission to the church’s absolute proscriptive laws on sexuality, is mentioned only once in *Amoris Laetitia*, and this in the context of proving “invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons” (206). Rather than a focus on chastity, there is greater focus on the virtues of love (chap. 4, *passim*), mercy (27, 47, 300, 306), compassion (28, 92, 308), reconciliation (106, 236, 238), forgiveness (27, 236, 268), and prudence (262).

Prudence is a cardinal virtue that guides all other virtues and is a prerequisite virtue for both conscience and discernment. Aquinas argues, indeed, that it is an essential prerequisite for the possession of all other virtues. It discerns the first principles of morality, applies them to particular situations, and enables conscience to make practical judgments that this is the right thing to do on this occasion and with this good

20. *ST* 2-2, q. 47, a. 2.

21. See Daniel Statman, “Introduction to Virtue Ethics,” in *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*, ed. Statman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 1–41 at 7; Michael A. Slote, “Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24 (1993): 5–37 at 15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1993.tb00506.x>; Peter Van Inwagen, “Response to Slote,” *Social Theory and Practice* 16 (1990): 385–95 at 392, <https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract199016320>.

intention.²² Prudence is said to be a *cardinal* virtue because it is a *cardo* or hinge around which all other virtues turn, integrating agents and their actions and ensuring that they make the right virtuous choice.²³ It is not difficult to see how it is an essential hinge around which the practical judgment of conscience and its right, virtuous choice turns.

Amoris Laetitia and Method

Christoph Schönborn, Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, judges that *Amoris Laetitia* “is the great text of moral theology that we have been waiting for since the days of the [Second Vatican] Council.”²⁴ *Amoris Laetitia* notes that the dialogue during the 2014 and 2015 synods raised the suggestion of “new pastoral methods” that are tailored to different communities and the marital, familial, and relational realities of those communities (199). It not only affirms but also develops the anthropology of CST and CSexT, and incorporates CST’s methodological developments philosophically, focusing on inductive reasoning, historical consciousness, and an appreciation of culture, experience, and the sciences. It focuses theologically on Scripture and an ecclesiology, not of Pius X’s unequal society but of an equal communion, and bridges the traditional disconnect between moral theology and pastoral counseling.²⁵

Amoris Laetitia and Philosophical Method

A major methodological shift in CSexT in *AL* is from a deductive to an inductive ethical method. Deductive reasoning, which traditionally characterized both CST and CSexT, begins with a universally accepted definition of human dignity and universal principles or norms that facilitate or frustrate its attainment. Inductive reasoning, which is a central methodological development in Catholic theological ethics since Vatican II, begins with particular, cultural, social, and contextual definitions of human dignity and formulates and justifies norms that facilitate or frustrate its attainment. Inductive reasoning begins with particular situations to attain universal insights.²⁶ “It is *reductive*,” *Amoris Laetitia* notes, “simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being” (304, emphasis added). We must begin with the particular contextual reality of the human person to

22. Aquinas, *ST* 2-2, q. 47, a. 6.

23. Aquinas, *ST* 1-2, q. 65, a. 1.

24. Cindy Wooden, “*Amoris Laetitia*’ at Three Months: Communion Question Still Debated,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/amoris-laetitia-three-months-communion-question-still-debated>.

25. Norbert Rigali, “The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth,” *Chicago Studies* 25 (1986): 224–32 at 225.

26. See Richard B. Miller, *Casualty and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

discern what rule applies or what new rule needs to be formulated to address the reality. *Amoris Laetitia* cites with approval the International Theological Commission's statement that "natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject" (305). This is the only time, in fact, that Francis mentions natural law in the 256 pages of *Amoris Laetitia* and it is mentioned in the context of a warning against a deductive approach to moral decision-making and promotes natural law as "a source of objective inspiration for the *deeply personal process* of making decisions" (305, emphasis added).

Amoris Laetitia cites with approval, for the first time ever in CSexT, Aquinas' warning that, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects. "In matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles; and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all ... The principle will be found to fail, according as we descend further into detail."²⁷ Aquinas' principle has often been cited by Catholic theological ethicists to refute claims to absolute sexual norms. By citing this text from Aquinas, at the very least *Amoris Laetitia* is cautioning against a deductive, one-rule-fits-all approach to ethical decision-making and emphasizing the importance of particular contexts and circumstances and an inductive approach.

Second, *Amoris Laetitia* recognizes historical consciousness in its law of gradualness, borrowed from John Paul II, which acknowledges that the human being "knows, loves, and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth."²⁸ This is illustrated best in Francis' discussion of the morality of cohabitation. Nowhere in his exhortation does he condemn cohabitation in blanket fashion, as he surely would have to do if he were following Catholic marital and sexual norms. Contrary to the *Final Report* from the synods which condemns all cohabitation, he makes a distinction between "cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry" (53) and cohabitation dictated by "cultural and contingent situations" (294), like poverty that requires a "constructive response" that can lead to marriage when circumstances permit it. We have named the former non-nuptial cohabitation and the latter nuptial cohabitation.²⁹ Borrowing from Jesus' treatment of the Samaritan woman and applying the law of gradualness, he accepts the latter "in the knowledge that the human being knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth" (295). The church must never "desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God's plan in all its grandeur." Aware, however, of all the historical, cultural, psychological, and "even biological" mitigating circumstances, she must also never desist from accompanying "with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively

27. *AL* 304; *ST*, 1-2, q. 94, a. 4.

28. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 34, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html; *AL* 295.

29. Michael G. Lawler and Gail S. Risch, "A Betrothal Proposal," *U.S. Catholic*, June 2007, 18–22, <http://www.uscatholic.org/life/2008/06/a-betrothal-proposal>.

appear” (308). Acknowledging the law of gradualness, an overt expression of historical consciousness, Francis recognizes that some types of cohabitation may be genuinely loving relationships that will grow into marriages. The same law of gradualness may be conscientiously discerned to apply to other ethical issues, communion for the divorced and remarried, for instance.

We note a third shift, dependent on the first and second shifts, in philosophical method. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, ethical method and the approach to ethical questions, both social and sexual, were primarily classicist *and* deductive: they started with accepted traditional abstract ethical principles, formulated absolute norms from those principles in CSexT, and then applied those principles and norms to particular situations and acts. *Gaudium et Spes* opened the church to a different approach, a historically conscious, inductive approach that starts with the human person and the human situation and works upward to specific ethical rules and general ethical principles. It emphasized that, “[t]hanks to the *experience* of past ages, the progress of the *sciences*, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of *human culture*, the nature of man himself is revealed and *new roads to truth are opened*.”³⁰ This trilogy, human experience, culture, and science, is paradigmatic for an inductive approach and is widely reflected in *AL*.

First, *Amoris Laetitia* is based on “the joy of love experienced by families [that] is also the joy of the church” (1). It is grounded in experience and bases its reflections on both the experience of actual married life and the human sexuality complexly reflected in it and socio-economic factors like poverty and hunger that so impact it throughout the world (25). Relating human experience to the formulation of norms, Margaret Farley asserts, and we agree, that moral norms cannot become effective in the church merely “from receiving laws or rules,” for reception “entails at the very least a discernment of the meaning of laws and rules in concrete situations.”³¹ Such discernment requires reflection on human experience—personal, social, and religious—and the social sciences throw revealing light on that experience. We agree wholeheartedly with Farley’s further assertion that “it is inconceivable that moral norms can be formulated without consulting the experience of those whose lives are at stake.”³²

Second, *AL* recognizes and embraces the import of particular cultural contexts. This concern for the import of experiential and cultural particularity was initially evident in the two synods which presented surveys to, and requested feedback from, Catholic faithful on their lived experiences in relationship to church teaching. Taking these reflections to heart, *Amoris Laetitia* notes that “Each country or region ... can seek solutions [to ethical and/or pastoral issues] better suited to its *culture* and sensitive to its traditions and *local needs*” (3; emphasis added). The sciences, finally, can be helpful for the education, growth, and development of children in families (273, 280).

30. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 44, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (hereafter cited as *GS*), emphasis added.

31. Margaret A. Farley, “Moral Discourse in the Public Arena,” in *Vatican Authority and American Catholic Dissent*, ed. William W. May (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 168–86 at 177.

Amoris Laetitia and Theological Method

Amoris Laetitia demonstrates some theological development in its use of Scripture and a unique ecclesiological perspective when approaching marital, familial, and sexual ethical issues. First, there is a shift to virtue, highlighted best in chapter 4's beautiful reflection on First Corinthians (13:4–7). There is a fundamental shift from proscriptive rules to virtues and to Scripture as a pedagogical source for virtues in a marital and ethical life. *Amoris Laetitia*'s use of Scripture on issues like marriage and divorce, however, is at times selective and incomplete. It presents Matthew's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage (19:6), for example, but fails to note his permission of divorce in the case of *porneia* (Matt 19:9). It also fails to acknowledge the reality that the church has granted and continues to grant divorce via the Pauline Privilege, based on Paul's teaching in 1 Cor, 7:12–15, and has historically granted them via the so-called Petrine Privilege, based on marital situations caused by slavery.³³ It does not cite any scriptural text to condemn homosexual relationships and avoids much of the proof-texting of Scripture that earlier magisterial documents utilize when addressing specific ethical issues.

Second, much like CST that empowers local bishops' conferences to formulate and apply CST on the basis of their particular cultural and socio-economic contexts, *Amoris Laetitia* refers extensively to bishops' conferences and how they have responded to particular ethical questions with respect to married and family life (Korean bishops, *AL* 42; Spanish bishops, *AL* 32; Mexican bishops, *AL* 51). Pope Francis has made a concerted effort towards decentralization of power and an attempt to empower bishops' conferences. The consultation of the laity before and during both synods shows his commitment also to the *sensus fidelium* and ecclesial synodality. Some theological explanation is needed here. First, *sensus fidelium* is a theological concept which denotes "the instinctive capacity of the whole church to recognize the infallibility of the Spirit's truth."³⁴ It is a charism of discernment, possessed by the whole church, which receives a church teaching as apostolic and, therefore, to be held in both faith and *praxis*. One of the great debates as the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* was birthing was over who should be consulted about Catholic doctrine. Vatican theologians argued Pius X's position that it was only the hierarchical magisterium that determined doctrine, a claim that had become much more common since the definition of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council in 1870. Conciliar bishops and theologians responded with the more historically accurate claim that the church's faith was preserved in the faith of *all* believers, lay and clerical together. They argued that, although the hierarchical magisterium spoke *for* the church, it was also obliged to speak *from* the church and that, when

32. Farley, "Moral Discourse," 177.

33. See Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Catholic Doctrine on Divorce and Remarriage: A Practical Theology Analysis," *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 326–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563917698954>.

34. John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47.

it ignored a clear *sensus fidelium* in the whole church, it was being unfaithful to the church's rule of faith. *Lumen Gentium* is clear. "The body of the faithful *as a whole*," it taught, "anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 John 2:20; 2:27), cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidelium*) which characterizes the people *as a whole*, it manifests this unerring quality when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful,'³⁵ it manifests universal agreement in matters of faith and morals."³⁶ In the church now reemerging from the Second Vatican Council, which is believed to be not an unequal society but an equal ecclesial communion, any effort to evaluate a magisterial teaching will automatically include open dialogue, uncoerced judgment, and free consensus. That is the way genuine, authentic, and universal *sensus fidelium* is formed. Surveys of laity leading up to the synods and *Amoris Laetitia*, which attempt to include the voices from those surveys, clearly reflect a useful process for discerning *sensus fidelium*.

Second, this discernment is a complex process, which takes time, patience, and a commitment to the kind of honest and charitable dialogue that Pope Francis so appreciated at the 2014 Synod on Marriage and the Family and characterized as "a spirit of collegiality and synodality."³⁷ Some see a defining characteristic of his papacy as seeking to realize synodality, the ecclesiology of Vatican II that focuses on seriously journeying together and listening to the input from all quarters of the church, laity and clerics alike, to engage in charitable, honest, and constructive dialogue to discern God's will and the path the church must follow to live according to that will.³⁸ This requires what both John Paul II and Francis frequently refer to as "dialogue in charity." The two synods that laid the foundation for *Amoris Laetitia* modeled this dialogue in a way that synods in the past have not done. Synodality is a central and defining dimension of Pope Francis' papacy and will open the door to further dialogue and development in the church.³⁹

Amoris Laetitia and New Pastoral Methods

Pope Francis notes that the two synods preceding *Amoris Laetitia* "raised the need for new pastoral methods ... that respect both the church's teaching and local problems

35. Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints* [*De praed. sanct.*] 14, 27 (Migne, *PL* 44, 980).

36. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 12, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, emphasis added.

37. Francis, speech at the conclusion of the Synod on Marriage and the Family (Vatican City, October 18, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_conclusionone-sinodo-dei-vescovi.html.

38. The English word *synod* is linguistically significant. It derives from the Greek *syn*, meaning together, and *'odos*, meaning travelling or journeying.

39. See Vatican Radio, "Papal Election Anniversary: Synodality a Key Change Under Pope Francis," December 3, 2017, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/03/12/papal_election_anniv_synodality_a_key_change_under_francis/1297800.

and needs” (199). The concept of new pastoral methods in *Amoris Laetitia* draws from both philosophical and theological methods and, for those who interpret *Amoris Laetitia*, highlights a fundamental methodological distinction between moral theology and pastoral theology, between the objective and subjective realms of morality. Norbert Rigali addressed this issue already 30 years ago and his observations are especially relevant today in the post-*Amoris Laetitia* era. Rigali argued there has been and, we add, continues to be, a “chasm” for some Catholic ethicists between moral theology and its focus on the objective realm of morality and pastoral theology or moral counseling and its focus on the subjective realm of moral theology.⁴⁰ The former emphasizes objective norms, natural law, and magisterial teaching; the latter emphasizes pastoral guidance and subjective conscience. The result is a “two-moral truths theory,”⁴¹ one objective and the other subjective. This methodological distinction reflects an ongoing debate on the role and function of conscience in relationship to objective norms. To clarify the ethical implications of this debate, we return to our discussion on conscience.

It is common in contemporary theological ethics to distinguish between what is called the object-orientation and subject-orientation of conscience. The former highlights the external law or norm; the latter highlights conscience’s internal discernment, selection, interpretation, and application of the law or norm in light of a complex lived reality, all the contextual and relational circumstances of a given situation. Theological ethicists highlight different orientations, which lead to competing models on the interrelationship between magisterial teaching and conscience.

Both models of conscience are evident in Catholic tradition. Those who highlight an object-orientation argue that moral norms *must* be followed and, therefore, control the subjective conscience. Those who highlight a subject-orientation argue to the contrary that the subjective conscience is free and that, when it makes a moral decision, it *must* take into consideration not only moral norms but also immediate, concrete circumstances that can impact the selection, interpretation, and application of a norm. The two models are clearly evident in efforts to interpret *Amoris Laetitia*.

In his “Pastoral Guidelines for Implementing *Amoris Laetitia*,” Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia writes that “Catholic teaching makes clear that the subjective conscience of the individual can never be set against objective moral truth as if conscience and truth were two competing principles for moral decision making.”⁴² In “An Open Letter to Pope Francis,” Catholic philosophers Germain Grisez and John Finnis list several positions in *Amoris Laetitia* that they judge “contrary to Catholic faith,” which echoes Chaput’s stance.⁴³ In one sense, Chaput, and Grisez and Finnis are correct.

40. Rigali, “The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth,” 224–25.

41. Rigali, “The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth,” 225.

42. Charles Chaput, “Pastoral Guidelines for Implementing *Amoris Laetitia*” (July 1, 2016), repr. in *Nova et Vetera* 15 (2017): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2017.0000>.

43. John Finnis and Germain Grisez, “An Open Letter to Pope Francis,” *First Things*, December 9, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/12/an-open-letter-to-pope-francis>.

There is only one moral truth; conscience and moral truth are not two competing truths but two complementary principles for arriving at that one truth. In another sense, by prioritizing the external, object-orientation of a norm, objective moral truth *in itself*,⁴⁴ over against the subject-orientation of conscience, they are incorrect. An assertion of an object-orientation of conscience, obligating the subjective conscience simply to obey the moral truth in itself without any discernment, is contrary to Catholic teaching. Any conscience decision must discern moral truth in the subject in light of any and every relevant circumstance. We are in total agreement with Fuchs and Rigali. Moral truth is not something that objectively exists *in itself* over against the moral subject but something to be discerned by the knowing moral subject as existing *in myself*, that is within the moral subject.⁴⁵ Moral truth is knowledge within the knowing subject of the interrelationship between the moral object and the moral subject; moral truth exists only in the moral subject.⁴⁶ Pope Francis seems to defend this kind of prioritization of the moral subject and her or his conscience. This is evident in several different ways in *Amoris Laetitia*.

Speaking of those in the “irregular situation” of being divorced and remarried without annulment, he acknowledges both that they “can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for personal and pastoral discernment” (*AL* 298). In a footnote that became instantly famous, he cites the Second Vatican Council’s judgment that if they take the option of living as brother and sister the church offers them, “it often happens that faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffers” (*AL* 298n329).⁴⁷ For these reasons, the Pope continues, “a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply [objective] moral laws to those living in ‘irregular’ situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the church’s [objective] teachings, ‘sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families’” (*AL* 305). Acknowledging the influence on a conscience judgment of the various concrete factors and circumstances he has enumerated, the Pope advises that subjective “individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the church’s praxis in certain situations which do not *objectively* embody our understanding of marriage” (*AL* 303, emphasis added). His argument, of course, applies not only to marriage and divorce and remarriage, about which he is specifically speaking, but also to every other concrete personal moral situation.

It is clear that Francis holds and teaches what the Catholic church he pastors teaches but has been reticent to speak about in recent centuries, namely, a subject- rather than an object-orientation of conscience. To make a genuine conscience-judgment, as he argues in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, we need a “harmonious objectivity,” in which the

44. Josef Fuchs, *Christian Morality: The Word Becomes Flesh*, trans. Brian McNeil (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1987), 125.

45. Fuchs, *Christian Morality*, 125.

46. Rigali, “The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth,” 225–27.

47. See *GS* 51.

internal and external realities of people's concrete lives, which "simply are," are in continuous dialogue with intellectual ideas, which must constantly be "worked out." Intellectual ideas disconnected from concrete realities, Francis judges, "give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to [moral] action. What calls us to [moral] action are realities illuminated by reason" (*EG* 232–33). In the case of irregular situations, then, it is not the case that the norm has exceptions, which would be the case in an object-orientation focus; rather, it is that the norm has nothing to say in such situations without subjective understanding and application, which is the case in a subject-orientation focus of conscience.⁴⁸ In other words, an object-orientation gives priority to the norm and evaluates conscience on whether or not it conforms to the norm. The burden of proof is on the conscience if it claims exceptions to the norm. A subject-orientation discerns which norm applies in a situation and makes a conscience decision in light of that norm and all the morally relevant circumstances. In the case where a norm does not apply, for example, the norm prohibiting communion for a divorced and remarried couple where living as brother and sister would damage marital and familial relationships, another norm, which allows for participating in the sacraments, may apply. In addition, when irregular situations become regularized in terms of human experience, the objective norm must be revised to reflect that lived experience, just as the objective norm to allow slavery was revised to prohibit slavery or the norm to prohibit usury was revised to allow usury.

Methodologically, Francis' call in *Amoris Laetitia* for the "need for new pastoral methods" which "respect both the church's teaching and local problems and needs" places him firmly within tradition by prioritizing a subject- rather than an object-orientation of conscience, overcomes the chasm between moral theology and pastoral counseling, and places a single moral truth where it belongs, in the moral subject's conscience. In other words, "there is not moral law *and* conscience; there is only moral law *of* conscience, the moral law constituting conscience itself."⁴⁹

The established tradition in CST that the church "proposes *principles for reflection; it provides criteria for judgment* ... [and] it gives *guidelines for action*"⁵⁰ is more reflective of the prioritization of subject-orientation, whereas CSexT and the hierarchical magisterium's absolute proscriptive sexual norms are more reflective of the prioritization of object-orientation. Pope Francis' suggestion of new pastoral methods lights a pathway to greater methodological consistency between CST and CSexT by consistently prioritizing the subject-orientation of a discerning conscience over the object-orientation of norms external to the subject. We conclude with an example to illustrate possible new pastoral methods and a greater methodological integration of CST and CSexT.

48. Rigali, "The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth," 229.

49. Rigali, "The Unity of Moral and Pastoral Truth," 226.

50. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2423, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P8C.HTM, emphasis added.

The Integration of CST and CSeXT: An Example

An essential methodological consideration in *Amoris Laetitia* that explicitly brings together CST and CSeXT is the recognition of the impact the experience of poverty has on relational decisions. Francis offers the example of a couple who cohabit “primarily because celebrating a marriage is considered too expensive in the social circumstances. As a result, material poverty drives people into *de facto* unions” (294). Socio-economic realities profoundly impact human relationships, and this impact is often overlooked in magisterial teaching that proposes one-size-fits-all norms in CSeXT, as illustrated by an incident on Pope Francis’ visit to the Philippines in January 2015.

On his visit, a former homeless girl, Glyzelle Palomar, gave a heart-wrenching address to the Pope and some thirty thousand young people gathered for Filipino youth Sunday. In that address, she burst into tears recounting her experience of homelessness. “There are many children neglected by their own parents. There are also many who became victims and many terrible things happened to them like drugs or prostitution. Why is God allowing such things to happen, even if it is not the fault of the children? And why are there only very few people helping us?”⁵¹ Pope Francis responded to her with the profound compassion that characterizes his papacy, imploring Christians to learn how to weep in solidarity with those who suffer, especially the most vulnerable in society.

What was left unaddressed in both the Pope’s and the Philippine bishops’ responses to Glyzelle’s plight, and that of countless others like her, is the correlation between poverty and homelessness, especially among children, and the rigid stance of the Philippine bishops who stridently resist the legalization of birth control in the country. A Guttmacher Institute study indicates that 50 percent of all pregnancies in the Philippines are unintended and 90 percent of these unintended pregnancies are due to a lack of access to birth control.⁵² Only in 2012 did Filipino lawmakers pass a bill for free family planning and access to contraceptives, legislation that the bishops fiercely resisted and continue to resist.⁵³ On the flight home from the Philippines, Francis reiterated the church’s stance against artificial birth control and promoted natural family planning (NFP). He also recounted an encounter he had with a young Filipino woman who had seven children and was currently pregnant. He called this irresponsible and commented, “Some think ... that in order to be good Catholics we have to be like

51. Catholic News Agency, “What Pope Francis Learned from Homeless Girl: ‘Cry with the Suffering!’,” January 17, 2015, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/what-pope-francis-learned-from-homeless-girl-cry-with-the-suffering-19592>.

52. Lawrence B. Finer and Rubina Hussain, *Unintended Pregnancy and Unsafe Abortion in the Philippines: Context and Consequences* (New York: Guttmacher Institute, August 2013), <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/unintended-pregnancy-and-unsafe-abortion-philippines-context-and-consequences>.

53. Stephen Vincent, “Filipino Church Vows Continued Opposition to ‘Reproductive Health’ Bill,” *National Catholic Register*, December 20, 2012, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/filipino-church-vows-continued-opposition-to-reproductive-health-bill>.

rabbits—but no.”⁵⁴ Though we commend the Pope for advocating responsible parenthood, we respectfully disagree with his position that NFP is the *only* ethically legitimate method for realizing responsible parenthood.

There seems to be a surprising unawareness on the part of the Pope and bishops worldwide of how patriarchal culture, gender norms, familial relations, socio-economic, and political factors impact reproductive decisions in marriages. This unawareness is a reflection of the fundamental methodological distinction between CST and CSexT, the former prioritizing subject-orientation by offering moral principles and criteria for personal judgment of an informed conscience following careful discernment, the latter prioritizing object-orientation by offering absolute moral proscriptive norms for obedience. An integrated methodological approach that prioritizes subject-orientation would offer a general principle, responsible parenthood, for example, and allow a married couple to work out how to realize this principle through a discerning conscience that considers all the relational, social, contextual, and gender circumstances. We agree fully with Pope Francis’ earlier statement on the prioritization of first meeting basic needs, social issues relating to the fifth commandment, before we talk about “the Sabbath,” in this case sexual issues relating to the sixth commandment. *Amoris Laetitia* makes some progress in integrating the two methodological perspectives of CST and CSexT, especially in its reflection on economic-driven cohabitation, but more integration is needed.

This integration has profound implications for how we consider moral truth and how we formulate and justify norms to guide conscience. First, it is the role, function, and inviolable authority of conscience to determine whether or not a norm has anything to say about a particular life situation. Highlighting irregular situations, Pope Francis seems to indicate that not only is the situation irregular but the norm guiding the situation is also irregular, and conscience must discern which norm to select and how to interpret and apply it in any given situation. In the case of the divorced and remarried without an annulment, for example, it is not the case that a couple may be permitted to take communion as an exception to the general norm; it is that the norm itself does not apply to the different situations of all divorced couples. Second, as irregular situations gradually become regular, as is now the case with cohabiting couples already committed to marry one another, so-called nuptial cohabitators, and couples practicing artificial contraception in their marital relationship, there may need to be an “organic development of doctrine,”⁵⁵ perhaps similar to the development of the doctrines on slavery, usury, and religious freedom, that fundamentally changes the doctrine. Even though, at this point, *AL*

54. Sonia Narang, “Catholic Leaders Battle against Free Birth Control in the Philippines,” *Public Radio International*, January 22, 2015, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-01-22/catholic-leaders-battle-against-free-birth-control-philippines>.

55. See Gerard O’Connell, “‘*Amoris Laetitia*’ Represents an Organic Development of Doctrine, ‘Not a Rupture,’” *America*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2016/04/08/amoris-laetitia-represents-organic-development-doctrine-not-rupture>.

changes no specific Catholic doctrines,⁵⁶ its anthropological and methodological developments lay the foundation for an organic development of doctrine that can effect doctrinal change, in much the same way as Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* laid a sure foundation for the Second Vatican Council's *Dignitatis Humanae* and its entirely reformulated doctrine on religious freedom.

On the basis of *Amoris Laetitia*'s anthropological focus on conscience, discernment, and a virtue-based approach to decision-making, we can anticipate some normative development on moral, including sexual, ethical issues and, perhaps, a revision of some absolute proscriptive sexual norms that many of the faithful, via discerning consciences, have already revised and are at peace with. These developments will be supported by Francis' methodological focus on inductive reason, historical consciousness, appreciation of culture, integration of the sciences, explicit concern for the impact of socio-economic conditions on relationships, critical use of Scripture, a communion ecclesiology, and the introduction of new pastoral methods that acknowledge the reality and legitimacy of subject-oriented moral truth.

Conclusion

There remains much theological-ethical work to be done to draw out the full anthropological, methodological, and normative implications of *Amoris Laetitia* for Catholic sexual ethics, but it is clear that Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation will stimulate, indeed has already stimulated, debate around the ethical issues involved in irregular sexual situations that appeared magisterially settled with the publication of John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* in 1993. The items we have focused on in the grand plan of *Amoris Laetitia* will, we believe, be in the forefront of that theological debate and reflection: first, the reinstatement of the authority and inviolability of an informed conscience in making ethical decisions proceeding to action judged to be ethical and virtuous guided by new pastoral methods; second, the gradualness of growing into Christian and marital life it takes for granted; third, the emphasis on the virtues of love, mercy, and the prudential nonjudgment of other people and their situations; and fourth, Francis' articulated vision of church as essentially synodal. We have no doubt that in *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis has pointed the way, not to any abrogation of Catholic ethical doctrine but to its organic development, a renewed gospel, and therefore Catholic, way to approach it.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "the church's social teaching proposes *principles for reflection*; it provides *criteria for judgment*; it gives *guidelines for action*."⁵⁷ This trinity—principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for action—was implicit in *Populorum Progressio*, was introduced into CST in Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* in 1971, and was repeated in both the Congregation

56. See Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Amoris Laetitia: Has Anything Changed?" *Asian Horizons* 11 (2017): 62–74.

57. *Catechism*, 2423, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P8C.HTM, emphasis added.

for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* in 1986 and in John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in 1987. It is now an established part of Catholic socio-ethical teaching that increasingly underscores individual responsibility, which John Paul II accentuates when he teaches that the church seeks "to *guide* people to *respond*, with the support of rational reflection and of the human sciences, to their vocation as *responsible* builders of earthly society."⁵⁸ In social morality, the church guides; responsible persons, drawing on the church's guidance, their own practical judgment of conscience that prioritizes the subject-orientation over the object-orientation, and the findings of the human sciences, respond responsibly. Unfortunately, this model of relationship–responsibility still appears to apply only in social ethics. In sexual ethics, the place which one would expect to be "more than any other the place where all is referred to the informed conscience,"⁵⁹ a model antithetical to personal freedom and responsibility still applies. In sexual ethics, the hierarchical magisterium provides no principles and guidelines for reflection, judgment, and action, only absolute norms to be obeyed. Since both social and sexual ethics are exercised by the same persons, it appears to us illogical that there should be this double methodological standard. It also appears to us, however, that Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* lights a pathway for the transformation of this double standard to a single standard in both CST and CSexT. Francis appears to be aware of and submissive to *Dignitatis Humanae*'s teaching: "Truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (*DH* 1). Moral truth resides in the discerning conscience of the moral knower.

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58. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 1 and 41, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, emphasis added.

59. Jean-Yves Calvez, "Morale sociale et morale sexuelle," *Etudes* 378 (1993): 641–50 at 648.