‘For the love of God’? The First Commandment and sacramental confession in early modern Catholic Europe

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Before Judge Roy Moore lost the Senate special election in Alabama following allegations of sexual misconduct in 2017, he had been a leading spokesman of the evangelical ‘Hang Ten’ movement. Based on the claim that the Ten Commandments are the universally valid essence of law and therefore conducive to upholding public order, its members campaign for their posting in all US public buildings (Davis 2002). The evangelicals’ request not only violates the duty of religious neutrality of the state according to the US constitution; it also runs counter to the ancient – undeniably often blurry – Christian differentiation of sin and crime (see Schilling 1987). It is both oblivious of a history of Christianity characterised by a plurality of legal fora that distinguishes between the external forum and the forum of conscience (see the introduction; further, Prodi 2000), and ignorant about the historically contingent place of the Ten Commandments – or Decalogue – within Christianity. Indeed, since the time of the Church Fathers the seven deadly sins, not the Decalogue, had been the most important organising principle in Christian ethics (Casagrande and Vecchio 2000). Only around 1300 did the Decalogue become the more dominant point of reference, as John Bossy has demonstrated in a seminal essay (1988). The Decalogue’s hegemonic position was eventually consolidated in the sixteenth century with the European Reformation (see now Willis 2017), when the question of proper obedience to God’s Law developed into a contested point between competing Christian denominations. As Protestant soteriology denied that humans could save themselves through good works or sacraments, reformed churches promoted the correspondence between the Decalogue and external law. Conversely, the Catholic Church, emphasising the distinction between the spheres of law (body) and grace (soul), through the ‘power of the keys’ claimed exclusive jurisdiction over the moral sphere, externally in ecclesiastical tribunals and internally through the sacrament of penance in confession (see Monter 2017 and the introduction).

Since confession was the central institution for the examination of conscience, the shift from the seven deadly sins to the Decalogue was consequential, as it changed the crucial criteria for evaluation of moral action from a web of interconnected virtues and vices to a crisp legally

framed code. The seven deadly sins – pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth – focused on dispositions and behaviour detrimental to the social tissue of the community or to the self (Newhauser 2012) which, by showing how not to be, pushed to rid oneself of such dispositions and develop virtuous habits that helped to lead a good, socially adjusted life. The logic of the Decalogue was fundamentally different: threatening divine sanction, it enumerated and prohibited not comprehensive dispositions or ways of being, but specific acts. Crucially, the first three commandments[1] centred on the *individual's* relationship to God, a concern conspicuously absent from the seven deadly sins. The consequence was a transformation in the understandings of sin, with offences against God and religious obedience taking precedence over sin defined in social terms as a rupture of the Christian community. The shift was accelerated by the Reformation which historians consider to be an important element in the modernisation process, classically based on the triad of individualisation (Bossy 1970), social disciplining, either in Weberian or Foucauldian perspective (see Breuer 1986), and rationalisation through the rise of 'legalism' in church and state more widely (see Tierney 1982; Hartmann and Pennington 2008). The change in 'moral arithmetic'(Bossy 1988) affected all individuals in Western Christianity since, as discussed in chapter 3, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 had declared penance a sacrament and imposed *individual* confession to the parish priest at least once a year, thus putting into legislation a long-term move away from understanding penance primarily as a community ritual (Bossy 1975; Firey 2008).

This chapter will investigate some of Bossy's central questions further by focusing on sacramental confession, which during the Counter Reformation developed into the most important instrument of pastoral care for ensuring religious orthodoxy. As confession was intensified and as priests tried to apply the new moral code, they not only needed to engage discursively with their penitents' narration of their moral dilemmas, but also to navigate the tension between prescriptive norms and real-life experience (Myers 1996; Rusconi 2002; De Boer 2011). Some of the challenges that ensued can still be captured through the volumes of moral theology for theologians and the practical confessional manuals for penitents and priests (Tentler 1977), which represent a continuation and development of the works of medieval casuistry described by Emily Corran in chapter 3. Both genres are used here to investigate how

[1] The numbering of the Decalogue varies (see below); I follow the Roman Catholic tradition.

the shift from vices to Decalogue affected sacramental confession in order to probe Bossy's thesis that the new rule-based framework directed attention away from a concern with 'objective social relations' and community-oriented ethics. To make this manageable, I narrow the focus to the First Commandment ('Thou shalt have no other gods before me'), the Decalogue's logical anchor that emblematically embodied the awe-inspiring image of God as a lawmaker, which also cast an unprecedented spell on early-modern political theology (Courtine 1999; Willis 2017: 129–31). What is at stake here is not an appreciation of the theological meaning of the First Commandment but an examination of the problematic effects of the transition towards the new legal framework in terms of practical application and communication. As the analysis shows, the priests' growing practical experience in the examination of penitents in confession triggered a complex feedback effect. As a consequence, the imposition of legalism in the moral sphere appears more ambiguous and incomplete than the neat trajectory Bossy intimated.

The problematic Ten Commandments

Law codes, in as far as they lay down explicit rules sanctioned and backed by a rule-enforcing power, are generally believed to be 'rational' and 'efficient'. Yet, making sense of the Ten Commandments was often a confusing matter for theologians. Until the thirteenth century, the Ten Commandments were generally discussed not in standalone treatises for moral education but within Biblical commentaries (Lluch Baixuli 2013; Smith 2014). These raised a number of questions such as the relevance of the Mosaic Law for Christians and the Decalogue's form. The Commandments appeared in two distinct instances within the Old Testament (Exodus 20: 1-27 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-22) that were not entirely identical. Also, they were not dictated as ten short bullet points, but contained up to fourteen imperatives embedded in a more extended address by God to His people. Whichever version was adopted, a certain incoherence could not be denied. Crucially too, their numbering was, and still is, a source of disagreement: the prohibition of the making of 'graven images' was considered a second commandment in Jewish tradition (which Calvinism followed on the example of Origen and Jerome), whereas Catholic (and later Lutheran) tradition, in line with Augustine, included this in the First Commandment. In order to arrive at ten distinct commandments, Roman Catholic usage held 'thou shalt not covet they neighbour's house' as the ninth commandment and 'thou shalt not covet they neighbour's wife' as the tenth. In Jewish (and Calvinist) numbering, these last two commandments were

merged into one (the tenth) to keep within the perfection of the ten-point framework. In either case, the last precept(s) seemed incongruent. Unlike all the other precepts, they targeted intentions not actions. They were also somewhat redundant in as far as two other precepts already addressed the cognate sins of theft and adultery (Hartmann 1945; a table in Willis 2017: 30). The scriptural presentation of the Commandments was less efficient than one might expect of a law code, especially one that was divinely pronounced. This drew attention to the fact that, ultimately, convention and interpretation conferred their recognised and binding character.

To grasp how 'alien' to ethical discussions the Decalogue still was in the thirteenth century, it is worthwhile considering how Thomas of Aquinas (1225-74), arguably the most influential medieval theologian since Augustine, engaged with them. The Ten Commandments were not the structuring grid for his *Summa theologiae*[2] (but neither were the seven deadly sins), which remained indebted to an Aristotelian understanding of virtue-ethics (Sweeney 2012). Aquinas discussed the Decalogue and its difficulties twice in the *Summa theologiae* (*prima secundae*): first under the different types of law in qq. 90-7, and again more prominently in q. 100, dedicated to its understanding as an expression of the Law of Moses (Smith 2013). Shortly before his death in 1273, Aquinas devoted a series of vernacular Lenten homilies (Aquinas 2000) specifically to the Ten Commandments. They are indicative of the growing pastoral concerns surrounding the Decalogue towards the end of the thirteenth century, when the effects of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 also gave rise to the new genre of *summae* for confessors (Goering 2008).

Aquinas tackled the perplexing aspects of the precepts head-on. In *Ia IIae* q. 100 of the *Summa* he considered such questions as whether the individual precepts were suitably distinguished (a. 4), conveniently numbered (a. 5), expressed in convenient order (a. 6), and suitably formulated (a. 7). Article 4 started out with the theses that the precepts seemed unsuitable in instilling virtue (targeting actions), incoherent in character (mixing negative and positive commandments) and illogically divided (the distinction between commandments nine and ten). In his answers to the objections, Aquinas acknowledged the problematic variation in the enumeration and distinction of the Commandments, but argued that it was best and 'most

[2] References to the *Summa theologiae* indicate the standardised numbering of the *quaestiones*, common to all editions.

adequate' to follow Augustine, according to whom the first three Commandments referred to God, and the remaining seven to one's neighbours.

Both in the *Summa* and in his Lenten sermons of 1273, Aquinas explained that the Commandments expressed principles of natural law, instilled in humankind through the light of reason. As such, they needed no explicit promulgation to be obeyed. Yet, as human reason had been partly impaired by the 'law of concupiscence' after the Fall, God had repeated them for the 'convenience' of humankind in the form of divine positive law (Aquinas 2000: 65). This Decalogue should help humans on to a path of virtue and avoidance of evil: it was a starting point on the way towards justification without making truly just, as it imposed obedience through fear of punishment. The Mosaic Law, which 'coerced the hand but not the heart' (*Ia IIae*, q. 91, a. 5 ad 2), therefore failed in moving the will freely. Only the Gospel, Aquinas argued, through the law of love brought true freedom, disposing volition and intention in such ways as to inspire and enable truly virtuous action conducted by a free will following *recta ratio*. Importantly, although the Old Law did not contain a duty to love one's neighbour, this duty had been stipulated by Christ (Matt. 22: 37–40). A correct reading and understanding of the entire Decalogue hence presupposed the virtue of charity (*Ia IIae*, q. 100, a. 4 ad 1).

Given the perplexity surrounding the Decalogue, why did it become more prominent for Christian ethics in the late medieval period? To cut a long story short, two decisive factors can be suggested: one can be identified in the general expansion of written law, and especially canon law, following the rediscovery of Roman law (Hartmann and Pennington 2008), which fuelled a general drift towards codified rules. The second is the conceptualisation of confession as a *tribunal* of conscience following from its codification as a sacrament in 1215 (see also Prosperi 1996). A legally framed code corresponded better to the logic of this new understanding that came to undergird confession as a social institution. At the same time, pastorally minded theologians also believed that a clearly defined legal code would limit the 'proliferation of sin' caused by the sprawling, interconnected web of vices. Antonino da Firenze (1389–1459) and Jean Gerson (1363–1429) were amongst the most influential theologians to integrate the Decalogue into penitential manuals (Gerson 1998; Firenze 1483: 38v–49r). The Reformation accelerated the dominance of the Decalogue especially for Protestants (Christin 2003; Willis 2017: 1–14), but the emphasis on the Ten Commandments also increased in the Catholic world

after the Tridentine Catechism (1566) made their knowledge mandatory for the moral instruction of the faithful.

Yet, the new Tridentine emphasis notwithstanding, the vices lingered on in Catholic manuals of confession, together with the works of mercy, the senses, or the commandments of the Church, as a grid to interrogate penitents (Casagrande and Vecchio 2000: 217–20). Their advantage was twofold: they were easily memorised through acronyms such as the famous SALIGIA (*superbia*, *acidia*, *luxuria*, *invidia*, *gula*, *ira*, *avaritia*), which helped to organise 'families' of related flawed dispositions that induced sin by obstructing the correct operation of intellect and will, necessary for good judgement and prudence (Taylor 2006: 13–16, 110–13). Secondly, conceptualising moral conduct through the vices taught one how to be and not to be in order to avoid sin. Arguably, this was (and is) more conducive to shaping a comprehensive *habitus* applicable to the complexity of life than a legalistic code. It is debatable whether even the most rigorous adherence to the Decalogue automatically leads to acquiring a cogent understanding of Christian morality. That early modern theologians might have suspected the same point can be deduced from the fact that once priests swarmed out across the globe to apply the new Decalogue system 'in the confessional', they produced an ever-widening avalanche of explanations. These were set out in the practical manuals for penitents and priests published in the wake of the Council of Trent (1545-63), and, from 1600 onwards, in the volumes that catered for the teaching of the newly developing discipline of moral theology in universities and seminaries.

Understanding and explaining the First Commandment

The confession manual that most clearly marked the paradigmatic rise of the Decalogue may well have been that by the Spanish Augustinian eremite and canon lawyer Martín de Azpilcueta (1492–1586). The significance of his manual, first published in 1552, for the development of the post-Tridentine genre of the confession manuals was overwhelming, as has been widely recognised (Lavenia 2003). It remained strongly indebted to Aquinas and the pre-Reformation penitential *summae*, and Azpilcueta systematised and updated their lessons in order to provide assistance for the confessors' practical pastoral concerns. Compared to his medieval predecessors, Azpilcueta's explanations of the Decalogue are of unprecedented depth and scope

(Azpilcueta 1569).[3] The qualitative shift was expressed in quantitative terms: the exploration of the Commandments took up 230 pages, against (in order of appearance) forty pages for the precepts of the Church, sixty pages each dedicated to the seven sacraments and the seven deadly sins, and ten to the five works of mercy. His views on the First Commandment are of particular interest.

The First Commandment encapsulates what Bossy defined as characteristic of the Decalogue's new moral horizon: the focus on questions of obedience, the side-lining of social ethical questions, and most importantly the insistence on 'true belief' as the overriding concern of the confessional age (Bossy 1988: 216). At first sight, the First Commandment's particularly neat enunciation ('thou shalt have no other gods before me') seemed unproblematic; its most obvious understanding was the prohibition of idolatry. Luther, for instance, considered that breaking the precept essentially consisted of idolatrous practices, invocations of God for material gain, as well as intellectual and spiritual pride (Luther 1883: 250, 252). For Azpilcueta, however, matters were a little more complicated. He insisted that the understanding of the Commandment could not remain limited to the obvious prohibition of idolatry. He argued that honouring God meant knowing the *Credo* (the Creed), the *Pater Noster* (The Lord's Prayer), as well as understanding and taking the Eucharist, none of which were mentioned in the Decalogue. To ensure that future confessors had a more holistic grasp of the precept's meaning, he exposed the key parameters in an introductory chapter. His main priority was to hammer home that the duty to *love* God necessarily implied the duties of charity and love towards one's neighbour (Azpilcueta 1569: cap. IX, 64). Azpilcueta noted that one had to 'love with all the heart, soul, mind and force', but all within human means. God did not demand the impossible. As people had to eat, sleep and do 'other necessary things' of all kinds, the constant love of God did not impose 'thinking of God at every hour', but rendering this love present through the intention of the will and exterior actions. It implied a conscious will, consent, and intention to follow what God commanded, which was supported and aided by divine grace. To this end, it was helpful to increase the frequency of confession beyond the feast days, so that penitents approached the sacrament with adequate contrition, the prerequisite for a correct performance of confession and

[3] I use the first post-Tridentine Italian edition here.

for absolution (Azpilcueta 1569: cap. XI, 65–66). Indeed, true contrition could not be achieved without this entire love of God.

Throughout, Azpilcueta's preferred authority was Aquinas, read mainly through the perspective of Cardinal Cajetan's landmark commentary on the *Summa* (1517), which probably accounts for the pervading Aristotelian flavour. This is true also for the following three sub-chapters in which he examined how the distinct but interconnected mental dispositions of loving, believing and honouring God could be understood in terms of practice. The order of the sub-chapters articulated Azpilcueta's sense of priority. The principle of love of God and the shaping of *habitus* were preeminent, whereas the notion of obedience emerged as more muted. Interestingly too, Azpilcueta did not propose an abstract definition of faith. He approached the legalistic notion of offences against faith mainly through an outline of what was opposed to creating virtuous habits. In the first sub-chapter discussing 'how to love God well' (Azpilcueta 1569: cap. XI, 71–2), Azpilcueta started out with the most obvious sin, that of hating and despising God. This was the most important and fundamental sin because it separated man from God 'in a way no other sin does'. Such a disposition was not necessarily a deliberate act, but the consequence of a wider, unregulated, or badly regulated, direction of love towards beings or things other than God. In the first place, Azpilcueta mentioned exaggerated self-love, or loving one's spouse, family and political superiors, or any created thing more than God or in a fashion that diminished the love of God, so as to induce sin by desiring what was opposed to the precepts.

The final and most extensive sub-chapter addressed different *forms* of incorrect worship (Azpilcueta 1569: cap. XI, 75–84). Here Azpilcueta covered a wide spectrum. On the one hand, there was 'wrong worship', like Jewish or Muslim rituals; on the other, there was deficient worship. And finally, there were acts of 'superstition', that is, superfluous worship of the divine as well as wrong belief in, or acts of, black and white magic. Here, he mentioned a sample of magical practices like charms, treasure hunting, divination or the interpretation of dreams, consulting with 'gypsies', necromancy and the worship of creatures other than God. This could include the interior or exterior adoration of idols, the sun, moon or the devil, but Azpilcueta did not delve into a demonological definition of witchcraft, which in general had no traction amongst Iberian theologians (Levack 2006: 204–52). What mattered was the act of superstition, that is, incorrect worship as an offence against the First Commandment, but not the fear or belief on the

part of the theologian that such worship might be in any way effective. Conversely, Azpilcueta's stance implied that such beliefs could be and needed to be treated in confession, not on the scaffold (Lavenia 2013: 178–80).

At the other end of the spectrum, the category of deficient worship is equally intriguing: it targeted statements that considered interior worship alone as sufficient, denying that faith in God required any exterior ritual expression. Clearly, the downplaying of exterior worship could be evidence of heresy, as discussed under wrong belief, and mirror a variety of doctrinal challenges from Nicodemism to Lutheranism. But it seems likely that Spanish quietist devotional groups, like the so-called 'Alumbrados' (Pastore 2004), were Azpilcueta's main concern. In general, the multi-cultural reality of Mediterranean Europe, not least of the Iberian Peninsula, seems to have challenged the theologian's quest to arrive at a clear understanding and religious categorisation of people's often ambiguous conduct. A particularly puzzling question was the extent to which exterior cultural attributes like clothing reflected interior dispositions that allowed the conclusion to be drawn that the person practiced wrong worship. Azpilcueta condemned wilful disguising with the intention of deceit. As dress according 'to one's law' (on this notion Nongbri 2013: 76) was generally considered an expression of faith, he argued that adopting the costume or any other sign of the Infidels corresponded to an exterior declaration of (wrong) faith and therefore had to be considered an act of denial of faith in Christ. It was sinful, he stated, even when done out of fear (Azpilcueta 1569: cap. XI, 79). Azpilcueta, the most famous contender of amphibology and mental reservation (casuistical permissions for deception) (Zagorin 1990: 165–170), curiously did not accord costume the same communicative and semiotic ambiguity as language.

Azpilcueta's exploration of the First Commandment retained a practical flair that reflected the Iberian and Italian socio-religious realities in which he lived and worked. His definition of the essential interconnected and progressive steps of loving, believing and honouring God furthermore relied on an idea of creation of *habitus* and the Aristotelian ideal of the virtuous human being whose actions and dispositions are governed by *mediocritas* (the golden mean). His manual thus approached the commandments with a strong virtue-ethical anchor and not in strictly legalistic terms.

Teaching the First Commandment

Azpilcueta remained an important source for the theoretical volumes of moral theology that developed in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This new genre and discipline was marked by a massive Jesuit production, which corresponded to the order's needs as well as its strong position in this field through its teaching institutions. Jesuit volumes of moral theology replaced the commentary of Aquinas's *Summa* either by proposing the Decalogue as the structuring system (Sánchez 1634; Fagundez 1640; Tamburini 1659), or by according the Decalogue the central position within a broader framework defining moral action, law and conscience (Toledo 1600; Azor 1600). Although the move to the Decalogue is generally regarded as a modernising step, twenty-first-century scholars often judge the theoretical efforts that accompanied this move negatively. Ulrich Leinsle writes of a 'degeneration' into sterile 'Decalogue morality' and into casuistry (2010: 289),[4] while Michael Keenan considers the manuals' fixation on the confessional as the reason for a minimalistic and ultimately disappointing interpretation of the Decalogue (2013: 225). But this seems to misunderstand the *raison d'être* that brought the manuals about in the first place, which was to train theologians to examine sin in practice on the basis of a solid and cogent normative system. A comprehensive analysis of the bulky volumes produced for the teaching of moral theology being beyond the scope of this essay, the focus here will be on the logic that underpins their approach to the First Commandment and on the relationship between duties towards God and social duties.

Unsurprisingly maybe, early modern moral theologians uniformly considered it insufficient to discuss the First Commandment simply as a prohibition of idolatry. They therefore introduced the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as the structuring grid under the heading of the Commandment, or as a prelude or epilogue to its discussion. The instruction for priests by Cardinal Francisco de Toledo (1534–96), the foremost papal theologian and the first Jesuit Cardinal, illustrates this well. The volume was published posthumously in 1600, and the discussion of the First Commandment falls into a middle chapter of book four of a total of seven 'books'. As is typical for Toledo, who was also an excellent commentator on Aristotle and Aquinas, he introduced each chapter with a crystal-clear definition of what was at stake, starting out with a definition of sins in relation to the Decalogue. Like a lawyer, he explained that acts in transgression of the commandments were mortal sins, if they were severe and committed with deliberation and volition by a person in full command of their reason. Circumstances were

[4] Leinsle uses the term casuistry in the negative sense of the term. cf. Clarke and Corran's introduction.

decisive in evaluating the degree of sinfulness, and Toledo warned that confessional examination needed to take this into account. On the other hand, Toledo also stated that it was sufficient for believers to hold the Commandments simply, without necessarily doing so in view of the ultimate and higher end of charity. For example, it was sufficient not to kill, even if charitable action was not the prime intent (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. 1, 203). This was a position of indulgence by which merit was not linked to moral perfection or supererogatory acts,[5] whilst guilt could always be reduced depending on circumstances and intentions.

Toledo's explanation of what it meant to 'worship one God' divided the act into three steps. At the beginning was the understanding of the superiority and excellence of what was worshipped; from here followed the will to worship, leading to the final exterior act of worship. To accomplish the full meaning of the precept all three steps were needed and they had to be joined. The first exterior expression of the fulfilment of the Commandment was the sacrifice of Holy Mass. It was simultaneously the first act of faith, which, as he explained, was not 'contained in the precept, but presupposed in it' (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. 12, 231). The remaining chapters in the book then examined sins against the precept, such as blasphemy, superstition, divination and magic. Other offences were discussed in the preceding chapters dedicated to the theological virtues of Faith (heresy, apostasy, infidelity), Hope (despair, temerity), and Charity (hatred of God and of one's neighbour), which together laid the foundation for the examination of the first precept and the Decalogue more widely (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. 1, 202).

Juan Azor (1536–1603), the highly influential teacher at the Roman College of the Society of Jesus, adopted a slightly different approach. In the first volume of his *Institutiones morales*, also published in 1600, the discussion of faith was the starting point for the understanding of the First Commandment (book VIII). The argument began in logical order with the sources that provided the content of faith such as the sacred texts, the writings of the Church Fathers, the apostolic traditions and the decrees of church councils. As Azor explained, faith had to be 'known, believed and professed' (Azor 1600: Lib. VIII, cap. vii, 942). In consequence, his discussion of the sins against the First Commandment concentrated on heresy, schism and apostasy, as well as their punishment. The latter was the occasion for lengthy expositions on the

[5] This is in sharp contrast to the logic of supererogatory accountability sketched out by Schaeublin in chapter 6.

judicial apparatus of the inquisition and the power of inquisitors and bishops in prosecuting heresy, which give his pages the flavour of a manual of church law. The chapter has to be read alongside not a prologue, as in Toledo, but an epilogue in the form of book IX which explored the theological virtues underpinning the Decalogue: Hope, Charity and '*pietas & religio in Deum*', which contained the knowledge of correct worship following from faith.

Azor's division of faith into content (in book VIII) and knowledge of cultic action (book IX) defined as 'religion', echoed older Augustinian and more recent humanist definitions of the term (Bossy 1982: 6; Nongbri 2013: 26–34). It aspired to reclaim the notion of 'true religion' for Catholicism against its appropriation by Protestant controversialists (Azor 1600: Lib. IX, cap. v, 1067). Azor's exploration of the sins against the theological virtue of 'religion' covered superstition, divination, sacrilege and blasphemy, but his main target was Calvinism. In a series of chapters on the correct use of images and saints, Azor denounced Calvin's positions on liturgy and Calvinist iconoclasm (Azor 1600: Lib. IX, 1071–93). Similarly, the discussion of Charity was the occasion for an attack against the excessive Augustinianism of Luther and Calvin, which, according to Azor, undermined the trust in God's charity by denying that humans were truly able to fulfil the commandments without sinning (Azor 1600: Lib. IX cap. iii, 1066). In both cases, it is evident that the problem of Lutheranism and Calvinism was not limited to their perceived doctrinal 'heresy'. The problem was more profound: the different variants of Protestantism undermined the theological virtues as pillars of the Decalogue, which is why they had to be regarded as the antithesis of God's commandments on all levels.

A third approach to the problem can be discerned in the work of fellow Jesuit Thomas Sánchez (1550–1610), who used the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as the unified structural axes to examine the sins against the First Commandment in one place. This led to a different mapping of sins on to the theological virtues: again, the discussion of heresy and its punishment took up most space under the first heading of Faith. Hope was a minor point, under which he tackled the sins of despair, temerity and the tempting of God (Sánchez 1637: cap. 33–4). Interestingly, however, he examined schism, superstition, divination and magic as sins against Charity. This followed from the understanding that the love of God obliged believers not only to maintain the community of the Church, expressing charitable communication with God and one's neighbour, but also to translate the love of God into adequate acts of reasonable religious practice and worship (Sánchez 1637: cap. 35–42). Sánchez's mapping of schism under

Charity is a reminder that the Decalogue as a moral system did not entirely obliterate the importance of social ethical norms, even if understood through the duty towards God via the theological virtues. In fact Toledo, too, had counted schism as a sin opposed to Charity (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. x, 225), the reason being that Charity as a presupposition of the First Commandment demanded the holding of peace in the community and the practice of neighbourly love understood in broad terms. It included material help, the duty to pardon one's enemies as well as spiritual assistance by stimulating, supporting as well as correcting others in their religious practice to help them achieve beatitude. The keeping of peace in the community was of highest value in this respect, and Toledo's reasoning suggested that the sacrament of penance, by establishing the conditions of penance, satisfaction and pardon, held an eminent role here (see Bossy 2004). The different structuring formulae across the manuals hence implicitly acknowledged the shortcoming of the 'raw' First Commandment – expressed with strikingly elliptic brevity in Latin ('*unum cole Deum*') – as well as the necessity to map the understanding of the relevant sins with the help of the theological virtues.

Assessing faith and examining people's beliefs

Whatever the logical structure the theologians applied, there can be no doubt that the assessment of 'faith' was the prime concern when dealing with the First Commandment. If faith required knowledge of what was to be believed as well as of its fitting expression in worship, and if it had to be confessed in the twofold meaning of the term, i.e. through the sacrament of penance and by upholding the faith, what were the respective normative standards? How did moral theologians define what it meant to 'believe' and how were confessors meant to investigate and evaluate this? How much were people expected to know, and what practices (apart from abstaining from obvious superstition) were positively expected? These were complex questions (see also Shagan 2017). One could only judge acts, not thoughts buried in the minds of people. Faith was mostly implicit and only partly explicit. On the other hand, not every error, nor every sinful action necessarily implied a deliberate rejection of faith, neither implicitly nor explicitly, as Bartolomé de Medina remarked in his handbook for confessors (Medina 1591: 67r–75v).

Faith, as Toledo had stated, was the 'assent to all things revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Church as being by the Holy Spirit' (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. I, 202). Therefore, the matter and content of faith was uncovered in the canonical sacred scriptures, the traditions of the

Church and the decrees of councils and Popes. This was of course a potentially enormous quantity of material to be known, whose understanding was beyond the grasp of most mortals. What mattered was implicit consent to the principles of faith as defined by the Church. Although it would be good, Toledo added, if all were able explicitly to state the content of the sacred scriptures, or of the decrees of the councils, this was far more than even erudite people could handle. The aim, therefore, was a 'medium faith' (*media fide*), partly implicit, partly explicit. One should believe implicitly in all the things professed by the Church and should be able to believe and profess explicitly the articles of the Faith, even if one was unable to penetrate their mystery in all detail. Toledo accordingly urged confessors to 'take the greatest care' to ensure that their flock knew that God was one in essence in a trinity of *personae* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that there was one creator, saviour and 'glorificator'; that Jesus Christ had been incarnated, been born, that he had died, been resurrected, gone to Heaven and that he would return on the Day of Judgement. This amounted to a minimum version of the Creed, and Toledo insisted that nobody – 'not even peasants' – could plead ignorance to excuse lack of knowledge thereof (Toledo 1600: Lib. IV, cap. ii, 206).

Toledo did not further specify the degrees of knowledge in his succinct and rigorous statement. Azor, however, went into considerably more detail, suggesting some perplexity in the face of the relatively limited knowledge and even more limited understanding encountered on the ground (Azor 1600: Lib. VIII, cap. vi-viii). Was it sufficient, he asked, for an unskilled and rough ('*rudis*') private person just to believe implicitly what the 'Holy Mother Church' professed, without being able explicitly to state this? Not really, he concluded (Azor 1600: Lib. VIII, cap. vi, 940); and in three extensive chapters he offered a host of questions on what could remain implicit, what had to be rendered explicitly, and how this was to be examined in confession. He too retained the articles of Faith as elemental, to which he added the immortality of the soul and knowledge of original sin, because both were so important to understanding the sacraments of baptism, penance and Eucharist. However, he did not think that laypeople should be asked to explain these in detail; simple assent was sufficient. Moreover, people who were able explicitly to state the articles of faith should be understood to hold the rest implicitly. Only the 'doctores' should be expected to explain them explicitly. The same applied to the Decalogue: although most people could not recite the precepts, he argued, by law of nature they knew them

in their hearts; explicit knowledge would therefore increase over time thanks to education and to confessors engaging with their penitents.

One cannot but wonder whether the reluctance to probe penitents more deeply was motivated by the fear of inducing unintentional heretical or unorthodox statements with potentially fatal consequences. It seemed better to contain the problem and soldier on. Ignorance, nonetheless, should not be simply accepted but had to be countered, and deliberate ignorance was certainly considered a sin. As Azor explained, to improve the situation it was important that confessors examined their penitents' knowledge of the articles of faith at the beginning of confession. If they were found to be lacking in knowledge, they should be sent away to learn and then come back. In cases where they stubbornly failed to do so, they should be refused the sacrament until they complied (Azor 1600: Lib. VIII, cap. viii, 947). But this was very much an extreme option. Education and persuasion were preferable but slow to show effects and so (Jesuit) theologians continued to worry long into the seventeenth century about excessive rigour being counter-productive, especially when it came to children (Tamburini 1659: Lib. II, cap. I, 142–3; Fagundez 1640: Lib. I, cap. ii, 8–9; see also chapter 9).

The casuistic 'Decalogue morality' deplored by Leinsle and the manuals' 'disappointing' obsession with sin bemoaned by Keenan quite obviously were not due to an intellectual incapacity of the theologians, but rather the consequence of the challenges they encountered when faced with their penitents and how to react to these, in as far as judging orthodoxy was not only difficult but also perilous. The theologians hesitated to make explicit knowledge of the Decalogue the objective marker of true belief and faith. If early modern Catholicism appeared to be more obsessed with orthopraxy than with orthodoxy, as Simon Ditchfield has rightly noted (2017: 262), this was not for want of theologians trying to instil the latter but, as the volumes of moral theology show, because of the problems faced in doing so. Understanding what people believed exactly was complicated, and although theologians repeated over and again that even doubting the faith was sinful, proving so and dealing with it in confession remained a challenge. Deciding that a penitent doubted sinfully – that is, deliberately and with the aim of rejecting faith with full knowledge, intention and purpose – was exceedingly difficult, unless they did so explicitly in terms that could be objectively proven. But at that point, it was more likely to be a matter for the inquisition.

Interestingly, as the seventeenth century proceeded and society changed, theologians re-discovered excessive 'self-love' as a new and worrying peril to faith in the context of their discussions on the First Commandment. A case in point is the manual (1659) for penitents by the otherwise unknown Carmelite Christoph Leutbrewer, which relied on a sophisticated questionnaire that in many ways resembles contemporary survey techniques (Reinhardt 2015: 422–4). The manual was supposed to be used by penitents to prepare for a general confession. To this end, it presented them with lists of questions for each precept of the Decalogue. Under the heading 'Thou shalt worship and love one God perfectly', readers found over a hundred short questions to examine themselves, offering the individual a variety of ways to identify, narrate and (ac)count (for) their sins. They were invited to consider whether they had

> loved God with all my heart and soul, and all my force; not directed my actions towards him; not considered that God rescued me from the abyss and the void so that I serve and praise him; tried to please some prince or overlord without concerning myself whether God was offended by this; spent more effort in pleasing the world than God; neglected the good works out of worldly considerations; … ; exceeded my condition or means in clothes, banquets, life-style and other similar vanities; been voluntarily distracted; been presumptuous and arrogant; been irreverent in Church, laughed, chatted etc [sic] during Mass, sermon and Eucharist; … attributed to myself the gifts of God; … been hypocritical, wanting to appear what I am not; … given alms more out of vanity than out of charity; … been vainglorious regarding my spirit, kin and family, my wealth, beauty, eloquence and habits; invented or taught new fashions; … despised my neighbour; insulted him; refused to talk to him; … doubted the articles of the Faith; … sustained heretical proposals … (Leutbrewer 1659: ch. On First Commandment, s.p.)

And so it went on. The questions in their random disorder in part undoubtedly covered what one expected to find under the heading of the First Commandment, namely superstition, heresy and correct worship; but a considerable amount of space was given to social conduct more broadly, as well as to self-love in its different manifestations. Tellingly, Leutbrewer mixed queries on orthodoxy and orthopraxy with investigations that regarded the vices, in particular avarice, pride, luxury, greed, sloth and envy. In addition, more recent social ills like modishness and ambition, libertinage, religious indifference and even suicidal depression came into focus to complement the traditional set of the seven vices.

Conclusion

As has been shown, Catholic confessional culture, shaped in and through the practice of sacramental confession throughout the Counter Reformation, never obliterated the virtues when trying to make sense of the First Commandment. Contrary to Protestant theologians who understood the first precept mainly as a prohibition of idolatry, Catholic theologians unanimously rejected this view as insufficient and misleading. They argued that the First Commandment made no sense without charity. Loving God could not be dissociated from loving one's neighbour, which in turn imposed a duty to uphold the Church as a community of believers. From this essentially social interpretation, it followed that 'true belief' could not be reduced to individualised correct interior knowledge; it required practical and necessarily interactive expression in worship and neighbourly love. Therefore heresy and schism were not understood merely as individual intellectual sins against God, but as social sins that harmed one's neighbour by disrupting the Christian community.

Yet the move to the Decalogue, which relied on the idea of a sanctioning and law-giving God, forced Catholic theologians to address questions of correct belief in confession, and their attention was undoubtedly heightened by the acute crisis of the Reformation. By the same token, however, their investigations raised intricate questions that are still at the heart of contemporary debates on the definition of religion. These allow us to follow how theologians, through the encounter with their penitents, became increasingly aware of the tensions between implicit and explicit belief, and between interior and exterior manifestations of faith. In this sense, the handbooks reveal how the notion of religion itself was created and refined over time. They give an insight into the uncertainties and problems that arise from re-defining, applying and implementing an ethical framework, revealing the debates that are part of the process of normalisation. Therefore, I would argue, it is more productive to read the handbooks as intermediate stages in a process of normative change than as evidence of a uniform normative consensus or ready-made, reified understanding of 'religion'.

The observed emphasis on practice, or the skating over unresolved questions of how much the penitents really knew, also stemmed from the continued Aristotelian understanding that practice ultimately was helpful in creating good *habitus* and virtue. Orthopraxy could create a charitable *habitus*, which eventually achieved the realisation of Charity as a virtue necessary to

fulfil the First Commandment. For this reason too, even within the new Decalogue framework, questions of virtue ethics did not disappear from the horizon. In a comment that reveals the different possible implications of such legalism, Kathleen Crowther has argued that for Protestants sin consisted mainly of 'disobeying God's commands' or 'doing what God had told one not to do', whereas Catholics understood sin mainly as a 'failure to be virtuous', i.e. as 'not doing what God had commanded one to do'(Crowther 2016: 488). Ultimately, these different emphases are tied to the divergent anthropologies and assumptions about the free will that inform Catholic and Protestant soteriology (Willis 2017: 35, 49). Therefore, and because Catholic theologians assumed that Christians could obey God's law, the increased focus on the Decalogue could not abandon the question of how one became virtuous so as to 'love God' as the Decalogue commanded. With excessive 'self-love' emerging as a new preoccupation in the seventeenth century, the understanding of vices came to deepen further and to capture how people perceived themselves and their place in the world as well as vis-à-vis God. Leutbrewer's manual was original and an outlier in a landscape dominated by more banal works that mechanically quizzed penitents on superstition or blasphemy. Yet it seems to react to the problems of privileging the law-based ethics and the focus on Church law that had led to allegedly sterile 'Decalogue morality'. The examination of conscience along the precepts of the Decalogue, whilst advantageous with view to policing religious obedience, created a new set of problems in terms of applicability and of re-framing ethical horizons more widely. If a Christian understanding of the First Commandment was supposed to instil the love of God, a dose of virtue-ethics was needed that allowed a more holistic tackling of patterns of thought and the sense of self in relation to others and to a changing social world.

Such questions returned with a vengeance after 1945 when the dialectics of modernity became blatantly apparent and the legalistic approach to ethics was criticised as excessive and inadequate (Häring 1957; Morrow 2016: ch. 3). The strong return of the pendulum after the second Vatican Council (1962–65) in favour of virtue-ethics amongst Catholic philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre (discussed in the introduction) sits in this context (Kühnlein and Lutz-Bachmann 2015). Indeed, the perceived 'vanishing' of the Decalogue from the examination of conscience in the wake of Vatican II (O'Callaghan 1975) as part of the 'aggiornamento' of the Church might have been precisely what alerted Bossy to its contingent place in the history of moral reasoning. Despite their totemic status as an archetype of a moral code then, the

theological history of the Ten Commandments shows rather how a few rules can lead to many others. As it turns out, discussions of the First Commandment gained meaning and nuance from a dialogue between the rule-based morality of the Decalogue and the virtue ethics inherent in the medieval Christian tradition.

Acknowledgements

Research for this essay has benefited from visiting fellowships at the *Kolleg für Humanwissenschaften Bad Homburg* (2017) and the *Center for Advanced Studies LMU Munich* (2018).

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