

No room for Probabilism when obligations are evident.

In by far the greater number of cases, the rights and duties of men are easily and clearly ascertainable. The natural law, the positive divine law, the human law, whether ecclesiastical or civil, impose a multitude of obligations which are evident and certain, and about which there can be no question. In these Probabilism has no place. We may, therefore, put aside the consideration of all obligations and duties which are certain, because, by its very definition, Probabilism has no operation except in cases of doubt. But on the outskirts, as it were, of all laws, there are doubts: not only doubts of ignorant persons (of such persons indeed there is no question in the present enquiry), but doubts of able and educated professional men. As eminent lawyers will differ about undetermined points of law, so do eminent theologians differ about uncertain moral obligations. And as legal doubts are sometimes insoluble except by the interpretation of the supreme juridical tribunal, so also theological doubts are sometimes insoluble except by the decision of the Church. It is with undetermined and insoluble doubts of this sort that Probabilism has to do; it is where the Church has not spoken, and where theologians are in doubt, that it is in some cases lawful to follow a probable opinion against one that is more probable. But it is necessary to explain this matter much more fully, and our readers must excuse us for entering into some technical details which are necessary for the clearness and accuracy of the proof.

Conscience the rule of our actions.

The idea of conscience is the central point of moral theology: the whole theory of morality depends upon it. The conscience is the proximate rule of morality, which, when rightly informed and illuminated by faith, puts our moral actions into harmony with the supreme rule of right, which is the eternal law of God. The conscience is an act of the intellect, by which we apply our knowledge to the things which we do, and this may take place in one of three ways:—First, when we recognise that we have done anything or omitted anything, and in this sense the conscience is said to *testify*; secondly, when we judge that anything ought to be done or ought not to be done, and in this sense the conscience is said to *oblige*; thirdly, when by our conscience we judge that what we have done was ill done or well done, and in this sense the conscience is said to *accuse* or *reproach*, or the reverse, as the case may be. (St. Thos. 1a 2æ, q. 79., a. 13. c.)

Certainty, Doubt, Opinion.

The conscience may be modified by certain qualities; for example, by certainty, doubt, or opinion. Certainty is the firm adhesion of the intellect to its judgment, without apprehension of the contrary; doubt is the suspension of the intellect between two opposite judgments; opinion is the adhesion of the intellect to one of two opposite judgments, with the fear or apprehension that the other may be true. A