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RESOURCES

THE CHURCH IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CENTER

*A Catalyst and Resource for the Renewal of the Catholic Church*

FALL 2016

# CONSCIENCE *at Work*





#### ON THE COVER

Pope Francis confesses during the penitential celebration in St. Peter's Basilica at Vatican City, on March 4, 2016.

PHOTO CREDIT: Max Rossi/AFP/Getty Images

The Church in the 21st Century Center is a catalyst and resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

*C21 Resources*, a compilation of critical analyses and essays on key challenges facing the Church today, is published by the Church in the 21st Century Center at Boston College, in partnership with featured authors and publications.

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Print and Digital production by  
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“This issue of *Resources* brings together ancient wisdom about the role of conscience together with its contemporary relevance for our everyday lives and wider world.”

— Kristin E. Heyer

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## Guest Editor C21 Resources Fall 2016

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## "IN GOOD CONSCIENCE"

THERE IS A HEALTHY tension at the heart of Catholic faith around making moral decisions. We do best when we maintain the tension rather than collapsing it into either/or.

On the one hand, we have a strong tradition of a "teaching Church." Echoing the words attributed to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, we believe that our Church holds the "keys to the kingdom of heaven," has the authority to "bind and loose on earth," and that its foundation is as solid as a "rock" (Matthew 16: 18-19). As Catholic Christians, we must be guided by the moral teachings of our Church.

On the other hand, Catholics have an equally strong and long tradition of freedom of conscience. Of course, our conscience should be reliably informed and formed; yet, people's own discernment before God in moral matters is sacrosanct. As St. Thomas Aquinas taught, we not only may but must follow our conscience, even if it be an erroneous one.

Pope Francis's encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*, the "Joy of Love," brings us back to maintaining this fruitful tension. He clearly reiterates the sacramentality and indissolubility of marriage. However, he recognizes that there can be personal or social situations that call for people's "own discernment in complex circumstances" (AL no. 17).

While this both/and approach has deep philosophical and theological roots, it also reflects the pastoral practice of Jesus. He said that he had not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Yet on a sabbath day he allowed disciples to pick grain and feed themselves. When challenged, Jesus made clear that he was not abandoning but dispensing from sabbath law because "his disciples were hungry" (Matthew 12: 1-8).

We collapse the tension if we hand our conscience over entirely to any group or agency, be this church, political party, or culture. We also collapse it when, for example, we ignore some 4,000 years of moral wisdom that is handed down through the faith community, and we become our own sole measure of right and wrong.

This issue of *C21 Resources* draws upon this rich tradition of Catholic morality, urging that our decisions be guided by our *faith community* and by the *voice of conscience* within our hearts. To be "in good conscience," we need to listen to both!

We thank Professor Kristin Heyer for serving as guest editor of this issue of *C21 Resources*. She has assembled an excellent set of essays on this timely topic. Read on!

Professor Thomas Groome  
Director, Church in the 21st Century Center



# THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE: Pursuing the Good in Our Daily Lives

KRISTIN E. HEYER



How should I respond to yet  
another incident of gun violence  
in my community?

Am I “settling”  
in aspects of my  
own life?



How radically does my  
family need to reduce its  
carbon footprint given  
the threat of climate  
change?

Demoralizing  
headlines in our  
newsfeed raise  
tough questions that  
hit close to home



**D**EMORALIZING HEADLINES IN our newsfeed raise tough questions that hit close to home: How should I respond to yet another incident of gun violence in my community? How radically does my family need to reduce its carbon footprint given the threat of climate change? Should I even bother voting when I am turned off by business as usual in Washington?

Scrolling through social media images also prompts concerns: Am I raising the kinds of kids who are more concerned with perfecting their selfies than developing their whole selves? Will they find a way to resist destructive peer pressure in high school? Or financial pressures if they find themselves trapped in unfulfilling careers? Am I “settling” in aspects of my own life where it’s easier to coast along and push aside unsettling thoughts about whom I’m called to become?

Recognizing and wrestling with questions like these falls to our conscience. Yet contemporary appeals to conscience often function as “conversation stoppers,” impeding our thoughtful engagement. Truncated notions of conscience can serve more as litmus tests for belonging—or *carte blanche* to dissent—than as invitations to grow. Retrieving the depths of the Catholic intellectual and moral tradition can help us recover a robust notion of conscience in terms of our ability to perceive and pursue the good. For conscience is not merely about being passively obedient, but rather it issues a call to be proactive, discerning, and creative in response to life’s challenges and God’s invitation. This issue of *Resources* brings together ancient wisdom about the role of conscience together with its contemporary relevance for our everyday lives and wider world.

## **CONSCIENCE IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION: HONING OUR MORAL “MUSCLE”**

Despite its portrayal in popular culture, conscience is hardly a miniature angel or devil on our shoulder, a separate voice whispering moral directions. Instead, it is an aspect of who we are as we attend to the call of God to discover and do what is right. In the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures we find conscience described as our hearts, who we are in the inner sanctum of our being. Neither is conscience an infallible moral code hardwired into our post-adolescent brains. On the contrary, most of us must struggle to develop and inform our conscience so we may better judge what is good and right in the concrete circumstances we face in our lives.

The Catholic tradition understands conscience to be sacred, frail, and social. As Thomas Aquinas emphasizes, obeying our conscience is mandated by the very dignity of the human person, such that to violate conscience is to

sin. Yet while it remains sacred, conscience may also be ill-informed or lead to harm. Hence, in its frailty, it must be developed and constantly monitored. And whereas it is the site of transcendent encounter—where we are alone with God—the very meaning of the word *con-scientia* (“knowing with”) reminds us that our discernment must take place in community. We are inescapably social, and our relationships to one another and to God are not suspended in the exercise of conscience. To the contrary, convictions of conscience are shaped within the communities that influence us.

Traditionally, the Christian community has understood conscience as having three dimensions: capacity, process, and judgment. First, conscience reflects our own ever developing capacity to discern and resolve moral challenges in daily life. We might say that it is the dynamic shape of our moral selves that we develop like a muscle through use. Its growth is not automatic, for it can stagnate or decline just as we lose muscle strength and tone without exercise. Next, conscience refers to the process of discerning what to do in a particular situation requiring practical moral judgment. Rather than yielding abstract rules alone, this process draws upon the virtue of prudence to gather relevant data, seek advice, evaluate alternatives, and prayerfully discern. Once a determination about what to do in a particular situation is reached in this manner, conscience experiences that judgment as a command. In other words, we must follow the dictates of our conscience.

Conscience helps determine the loves and loyalties that influence the everyday decisions we face in pursuit of the true and good. As Darlene Fozard Weaver’s article in this issue explains, conscience formation is a lifelong process that involves the whole person. It engages reason, emotions, imagination, and embodied experiences. Whereas the Catholic tradition understands experience as a source of moral knowledge, sometimes experience tends toward self-justification, as Pope Benedict has cautioned. Therefore, it is important to put our experience in dialogue with tradition and with community—for Christians, the community of faith, the Church. Hence, in affirming sacred, frail, and social dimensions, Catholic tradition upholds the primacy of the informed conscience.

## **CONSCIENCE AND POPE FRANCIS: RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM**

Pope Francis has drawn renewed attention to the importance of conscience. The pope insists that Jesus wants neither selfish Christians who just follow their own ego, nor “remote-controlled” Christians who are not free. He reminds us that this responsible freedom



is created in dialogue with God in our own conscience. In his recent apostolic exhortation, the pope stresses the Church's role in forming consciences for Christian freedom rather than "replacing them," inviting Church leaders "to make room for the consciences of the faithful," who are "capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex circumstances" (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 37). Hence, Pope Francis has highlighted the sacred ways in which a life lived according to conscience shapes our freedom and strengthens our ability to truly hear and respond to God's call.

The culture of encounter Francis has promoted also remains critical

calling for conversion from such mind-sets. One of his most significant contributions to conversations about conscience has been this attention to the ways in which social sin impedes moral formation, narrowing our field of vision and hindering our ability to choose authentic values over those that simply prevail in society.

This focus urges us to awaken to cultural and social influences that constrain our exercise of conscience. For one of its key tasks is not only to stand up against dehumanizing discrimination, for example, but also to become ever more aware of how dominant culture(s) can muffle the call of conscience. To that end this issue includes a section on racism in

includes a removable Ignatian examen for your own use in this vein. Tom Groome's essay offers practical tips for parents as they guide the conscience development of their children, whereas Brian Doyle's piece points out that sometimes it is our children who goad our conscience. Finally, Anne Patrick's article on creative responsibility reminds us that God offers tender mercy when we take risks or inevitably fall short.

Attending to the presence and call of God amid the world's complex moral, political—and ordinary household—dilemmas requires vigilant discernment to make good choices. Yet our faith calls us to undertake the exercise of conscience



Attending to the presence and call of God amid the world's complex moral, political—and ordinary household—dilemmas requires vigilant discernment to make good choices.

for conscientious discernment. His concerns that a Church closed in on itself fails to answer the Gospel call to engage those at various margins has implications for conscience formation, as well. As James Keenan distinguishes, unlike superego, conscience calls us "to aim more at being the one who loves than being the beloved," and so it prompts us often to reach out to ones that society often rejects.

Pope Francis has repeatedly attuned the world's focus to attitudes and structures that harm people and planet alike: from "soap bubbles of indifference" to a disposable culture to economies of exclusion. Whether on the island of Lampedusa or in *Laudato Si'*, he has underscored these pervasive worldviews that inhibit moral growth,

particular—America's "original sin"—to highlight one important example of how unconscious bias and cultural sin work often against our efforts to discover and do the right thing. Bryan Massingale and Maureen O'Connell's essays shed light on unconscious racism and how we might counter its harmful effects on our conscience.

Pope Francis warns against such forces that anesthetize and master our conscience, whether by various forms of bias or by the lure of consumerism, envy, and relativism or doctrinal rigidity. In response, he counsels us to ask for the grace of discernment and watchfulness, reflecting back on our day regularly to get in touch with what happened in our hearts in light of everything we faced. This issue

in a spirit of courage and hope rather than fear or suspicion. For the formation and exercise of conscience is, in the end, primarily a summons to pursue the good, to love. May this issue of *Resources*' insights from the riches of Scripture and tradition, moral exemplars, and companions on the journey invite you to deepen your understanding and practice of conscience, which is at once to deepen our encounter with God. ■

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# The CALL to GROW in LOVE

JAMES KEENAN, S.J.

**T**HE CALL TO be a Christian is at once a call to grow. Following in Jesus' footsteps is the response to the call of discipleship: the first traveler, the Lord himself, beckons each pilgrim to advance by following him. Jesus is on a mission, aiming without pause to attain his destiny; everything that he does, he does as he makes haste to the Holy City. The Gospels are replete with "moving" characters, seeking the Lord: the shepherds hurry to the stable as the Magi follow the star, Zacchaeus climbs a tree and Levi leaves his table, the woman with the hemorrhage pushes through the crowd and the paralytic finds the Lord by entering through a roof, the prodigal son and his father rush toward each other, and Cornelius visits Peter. The Gospels are filled with stories of people literally striding in their passage to the Lord.

All this movement would be lost on us if we did not understand it as being out of love. Out of love Jesus moves to the Father in Jerusalem; out of love Mary hastens to her cousin Elizabeth; out of love Peter and John rush to the empty tomb; out of love Mary Magdalene runs ahead to tell the disciples about the risen Lord. This call to movement, to advance, is the Christian call to grow, but to grow in love.

This call to grow in love is a summons to pursue the right way for growing. For this reason the call to growth often becomes an injunction to cultivate the virtues. By concentrating on virtues or character building, we can attend to practices that better our pilgrimage. Though virtues assist us to harness weaknesses and overcome pitfalls, their overriding function is to develop strengths. The agenda of the virtues is to promote a profoundly interpersonal and positive response to the call to grow and stands in sharp contrast to the later modern moral manuals that were so obsessed with avoiding sinful actions.

The call to grow, the call to move forward as disciples, the call to put on virtue is always a call heard in the Christian conscience. The centrality of the personal conscience as the place for hearing the call has had a long history in

the Church: whenever growth and virtue are especially promoted, the conscience is also defended and promoted. Not surprisingly, then, in light of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which called morals to be more rooted in Scripture and discipleship, the conscience again makes a vigorous appearance in contemporary moral theology.

What does Vatican II say about conscience? The definitive presentation is paragraph 16 of *Gaudium et Spes*:

In the depths of our conscience, we detect a law which does not impose, but which holds us to obedience. Always summoning us to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to our heart: do this; shun that. For we have in our heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of being human; according to it we will be judged (2 Cor. 6:10). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There we are alone with God, Whose voice echoes in our depths (John 1:3, 14). In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor (Eph. 1:10). In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of humanity in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. —*Gaudium et Spes*, no.16

John Glaser distinguished two very different voices that we hear as adults: the voices of the superego and of the conscience. The term "superego" (meaning "that-which-is-over-the-I") is how psychologists name that voice living in us, which, though a leftover from early childhood years, continues to assert itself throughout our lives.

When we were young children, those who cared for us instructed us on matters of safety and hygiene. Our parents through persistent guidance kept us from running in front of



cars, putting our fingers into electrical outlets, or turning on the oven. These instructions were given through voices of authority spoken with great concern and often, understandably, with tones of stress and frustration. Subsequently, these voices formed the voice of the superego.

Because they could not be omnipresent, parents and guardians needed to instill in us a voice that could supervise us even in their absence. Through constant warnings, we eventually felt their inhibiting presence restraining us from exploring the many dangerous appliances in the kitchen. This internalized supervising voice still lives in us today. Unfortunately, inasmuch as this voice came from people literally bigger and older than we children were, we still perceive this voice as more powerful and more authoritative than we are. The superego was not, however, a moral guide. It was simply meant to restrain us, to keep us safe, healthy, and well. Despite whatever moral lessons parents may have given us during this time, the only thing we children really heard was that if we did not heed our parent's instructions, we would get punished. The threat—not nice moral explanations—is what we remember.

Unlike the superego, which warns us to stay where we are, the conscience calls us to grow. For some of us, this call could mean a call to greater assertiveness. Given the call to grow, we may hear another voice warning us, “You better not do it or else you will feel guilty.” That shaming voice is usually the superego. Often the conscience's calls to grow are met with threats of the superego. Even if we do decide to develop in new areas, the superego still manages to make us feel guilty and, worse, terribly isolated. When the superego drives us, it usually does so by threatening or punishing us, compelling us into prepubescent cyclic forms of living and acting.

Of course, the superego is not bad. After all, because of it we do not run in front of cars or play with electrical outlets. However, during our adult lives we have to live by a higher voice (the conscience) that discerns the standards of what is right and wrong. In short, we need to be vigilant about the superego so that it does not inhibit the conscience.

Moreover, by the superego we experience a certain form of social compliance. Because we are so interested in being loved, the superego threatens us with isolation and therefore hearkens us always to conformity. Conscience, on the other hand, is suspicious of conformity, particularly when injustice is at stake. Because the conscience calls us to aim more at being the one who loves than being the beloved, it prompts us often to reach out to the one that the more conformist society rejects. Moral progress, therefore, always occurs when people heed their consciences, take steps of their own, and move forward, even at the risk of isolation and loss.

Here we should never forget that the language of conscience is the forceful language of being called, of being commanded. As *Gaudium et Spes* states, conscience “holds us in obedience”—it “summons” us. True, conscience is often used with the word “freedom,” but this is not a freedom to do whatever we want. Rather, the call for freedom of conscience is so that we are not constrained from heeding our conscience. For this reason, Christians refer to the “dictates” or the “demands” of conscience: conscience “demands” that we love God, ourselves, and our neighbors. Conscience “dictates” that we pursue justice. In fact, *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that by the conscience we will be “judged.”

When we appreciate the call of conscience, the voice to hear the demands of God, of love, and of justice, then we similarly recognize the formation of the conscience

as itself a command. We need to remember, however, that forming our conscience is a lifetime process. We form it based on the wisdom of parents, elders, and teachers, as well as friends and mentors; on the teachings and stories from the sacred Scriptures, the Church's tradition, and our local culture; and finally on the lessons learned in our own life experience.

The formation of conscience is like parenting oneself. We can think of how our parents helped us to begin forming our consciences, since parents form their children's consciences all the time. They teach their children to play fairly with others, to enjoy one another's company, to tell the truth, to care for siblings and friends, to take care of themselves by not eating too much or too quickly, to respect other people's property, and to be brave.

As we get older and become adults, we take over the job of forming the conscience. We learn more about the complexities of truth-telling, of being faithful to friends, of acknowledging our faults, of working earnestly, of caring for the stranger, and of becoming both grateful and compassionate.

On Judgment Day we will have to give an account of how we lived and that account will be based on conscience. We will not be able to claim we were following others, for even the act of following is itself a conscientious action. There will be no excuses; inevitably, we will render the account of how we lived and why. In being true to our lives, we will have no choice but to acknowledge how our consciences guided us throughout our adult lives. ■

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PHOTO CREDIT: Page 6–7: Deep Faith, ©Neeley Spotts/Stockfresh

# Understanding CONSCIENCE

DARLENE FOZARD WEAVER

THE PREVALENCE OF moral subjectivism is an important challenge today to the formation of conscience. Moral subjectivism holds that individuals determine for themselves what is good or evil, right or wrong. As my students often say, we should not “impose our beliefs” on others. In this view, conscience formation seems to consist of developing a personal moral code that is faithful to... well, what? Because there is nothing outside of the self that grounds morality, “Always let your conscience be your guide” becomes a version of “Be true to yourself.” This is not necessarily bad advice. But unless one would be so bold as to say (as the logic of subjectivism holds) that an individual can never be morally mistaken, since the individual is the source of morality, then subjectivism offers no way beyond moral confusion and heightens the unreliability of conscience. Moreover, if “always let your conscience be your guide” means “be true to yourself,” one’s own goodness is the goal of the moral life, a notion at odds with Christian faith.

An alternative may be, then, to develop conscience according to some external moral authority, like the Church. The Church is indeed an indispensable help in conscience formation. Yet, given human finitude and sin, the problems of reliability and moral confusion remain. What’s more, “always let the Church be your guide” misses the fundamentally personal character of conscience. Forming conscience rightly does not mean blind obedience to the moral teaching of any community, including the Church, for blind obedience does not include a personal appropriation of moral conviction in freedom and with understanding. In short, blind obedience cheats conscience of its dignity.

A look at the meaning of conscience in Catholic moral tradition will clarify what is at stake in objective and subjective accounts of conscience and point to requirements for forming conscience well.

Vatican II invited a correction of legalistic, act-centered approach to moral theology in favor of a more person-centered one, but the council itself offers an ambiguous

portrait of conscience. According to *Gaudium et spes*, “In the depths of our conscience, we detect a law which does not impose, but which holds us to obedience....Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There we are alone with God, Whose voice echoes in our depths.” Two things are going on here. First, conscience does not create right and wrong, but witnesses to an objective moral law that confronts and obliges the person. Second, conscience is depicted as the innermost and inviolable part of the person. It is “secret,” meaning its content and workings are not fully knowable by others. As a “sanctuary,” conscience designates the person’s moral dignity as a free and responsible agent; thus, coercing the conscience of another or acting against one’s own conscience violates the person. Yet, even as a personal core and sanctuary, conscience is not simply private. Rather, *Gaudium et spes* describes conscience in a dialogical fashion. As the innermost and inviolable part of the person, conscience is our encounter with the God who made us and wills our good. This means that conscience is accountable to God. Hence, a right conscience is one that discerns, and orients our acting in ways that are compatible with the moral order God establishes in the work of creation, salvation, and sanctification.

Thus on the one hand, conscience refers to a moral law outside of us that we must obey, and on the other hand, it refers to the voice of God echoing in the deepest part of ourselves. This leads to some tension, since the former suggests that the work of conscience is obedient submission to moral laws that are objective and hence universally binding, while the latter suggests that conscience is the activity of discerning God’s particular will for me. This second account seems to permit more creativity in the moral life. For example, you and I find ourselves in similar situations, needing to determine how to care for an aging parent whose health and memory are failing. Given our different capacities and resources, additional obligations, relationships with our parents, and their particular needs and wishes, what is morally good for you to do (say, placing





your parent in a home) may not be what is morally good for me to do.

Catholic moral theology has long addressed the problem of an erroneous conscience by distinguishing the source of conscience's error. An invincibly ignorant conscience refers to an error of which the person is unaware and for which she is not responsible. A nurse feeds a patient, and the patient dies as a consequence. The nurse has brought about the patient's death, but she acted with invincible ignorance because she had no way of knowing, or any reason to suspect, that the patient's relatives had poisoned his food to obtain an inheritance upon his demise. A culpably ignorant conscience, though, refers to an error for which the person is responsible. A nurse who feeds a patient a meal that causes his death is culpably ignorant if she failed to inform herself of his life-threatening allergies to certain foods. She ought to know what adequate care of her patient required.

Without resolving current debates about conscience, we may affirm several propositions. To begin, the proper formation of conscience is comprehensive. It is a lifelong process involving the total person—one's reason, emotions, embodied and social experience, imagination, and intuition. Conscience formation is the activity of moral self-transcendence, the conscious and critical determination of those loves and loyalties that constitute who we are and that

frame our knowledge of the world. So conscience formation is comprehensive in the sense that it engages the whole person in the pursuit of the true and the good, and in the sense that it is a critical reflection encompassing all the sources of and influences on our moral knowledge, including the cultural tendencies and structures that distort our moral perception and co-opt our wills.

Second, Christian conscience formation requires participation in the church. Forming conscience means coming to inhabit a moral world. For instance, when we try to teach our children it is good to share, we simultaneously affirm the importance of their personal boundaries, the interests of others, and the goods of kindness and mutuality. We thus locate them in a world where others matter, and where our own happiness and well-being are tied to theirs. For Christians, the proper formation of conscience crucially involves participation in those practices that shape the identity of the church and make Christian moral teaching intelligible—practices of breaking bread, forgiveness of sins, peacemaking, and doing justice. Furthermore, participation in the church offers an indispensable resource for challenging our complacency, removing our blindness, and sustaining us in the work of discipleship.

Finally, the proper formation of conscience requires a living faith, the

committed and concerted cultivation of an intimate relationship with God. By steadfastly placing ourselves before God's loving scrutiny, by accepting God's saving self-offer, we come to know ourselves and the world truthfully, that is, in God. As we share more deeply in the life of God, our experience of moral confusion elicits less fear, and more love. How so? Faith, and faith alone, answers the problem of conscience's unreliability. This is not because faith guarantees the impeccable rectitude of conscience, but because faith tells us such perfection is neither possible nor necessary. Faith keeps conscience from evading the burden of freedom through blind obedience and from abusing the gift of freedom by presuming it has no conditions. Faith may keep conscience from dissent or lead conscience to it. Whatever the case, faith keeps conscience from mistaking obedience, or freedom, or personal authenticity as its aim. That is, faith keeps us from mistaking our own goodness (however we understand it) as the direct goal of the moral life rather than an indirect outcome of it. ■

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Excerpted from the article of the original title, "Conscience: Rightly Formed & Otherwise," in *Commonweal Magazine*, September 23, 2005. Reprinted with permission.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 9: Kulicki/Getty Image

# Examining Conscience in Light of Scripture

JAMES KEENAN, S.J.

**I**N HIS FINAL address to the Synod of Bishops convening last year, Pope Francis noted that “apart from dogmatic questions clearly defined by the Church’s Magisterium... what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion.” To clear away some of this confusion, it is helpful to turn to the Bible and the tradition of the Church, which provide widely applicable insights on the topic. Here let me offer several of the major contributions to the Church’s understanding of conscience today.

First, in the Hebrew Bible, the term most analogous to conscience is “heart”—*lebab* in Hebrew, *kardia* in Greek. There are literally hundreds of references to heart in the Bible. In fact, while the Protestant editions of the Bible translate most of these instances as “conscience,” the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version insists on keeping the specific word heart.

Often enough, heart is that which God judges. In Sir 42:18, God “searches out the abyss and the human heart; he understands their innermost secrets.” In these instances, heart is not identified with conscience, because the former simply refers to one’s deep, personal interests: knowing one’s heart is like knowing where one’s true commitments are. Other times, however, Scripture suggests that God’s examination of the heart empowers it to become what today we would call a person’s conscience, as in Jer 17:10: “I the LORD search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”

Occasionally, the heart is where one recognizes one’s guilt. We call this a judicial conscience because it judges our past actions. In 1 Sm 24:5, we read that “afterward David

was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak.” Here the heart is a conscience convicting the self, the fruit of an examined conscience.

Today we distinguish between a judicial conscience that looks back and a legislative conscience that guides future courses of action; there are a few instances of the latter in the Hebrew Bible. There conscience is not the heart but a voice, a voice that accompanies us. This notion of a voice being with us captures the *con* of conscience, a word that means “knowing with.” In Is 30:21, we read: “And your ears shall hear a word behind you: ‘This is the way; walk in it,’ when you would turn to the right or the left.” This voice directs our lives. Still, heart also occasionally becomes the guiding conscience that needs to be formed, as in 2 Mc 2:3: “And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.”

In short, conscience in the Hebrew Bible is found primarily as a matter of the heart. Though many instances of heart are no more than that which God examines to reveal our preferences, still other instances of heart are identifiably related to an active conscience, through which one turns to God, judges one’s past, guides one’s future, and looks to be shaped by the law of God.

When we turn to the New Testament, St. Paul leads the way. First, he places his conscience in the light of faith and under the governance of the Holy Spirit. “I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 9:1). On trial before the Sanhedrin, Paul states, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1; see 2 Cor 1:12).



There  
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a voice that  
accompanies us.



*Paul before Herod Agrippa II flanked by his sister Berenice and Roman procurator Porcius Festus, 1875.*

There is a humility to his conscience, however. For all his reliance on following his conscience, he still acknowledges the outstanding judgment of God: “I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted; the one who judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor 4:4). God’s impending judgment does not replace one’s conscience, however; until the judgment comes, it is conscience that we have as a moral guide: “Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience” (1 Cor 13:5).

According to Paul, we are called “to hold faith in God and a good conscience” (1 Tm 1:19; 3:9). Paul is mindful of the Gentiles, too. While they might not have the law, the law is written in their hearts and they have consciences that witness to them; and, like all, on the last day they will be judged (Rom 2:14–18).

Paul believes that it is through conscience that we grow, both the weak and the strong, together. In his discussion about idol meat, he considers those with unformed

consciences who, on seeing their fellow Christians eating meat that has been offered to the idols, think that these Christians are participating in idol worship (1 Cor 8). Paul warns his fellow Christians that although they are strong in their consciences, they should be mindful of the confusion that they might be causing in others. In this bit of casuistry, Paul teaches Christians that loving one’s neighbor means helping and not scandalizing. With Paul, then, we have conscience as our moral judge and guide, with the realization that for all Christians, both the weak and the strong, there is always more to learn until we arrive at the day of judgment.

Nonetheless, as Paul teaches, even though we must follow our consciences, we might still be in error. Immediately after the question of whether we can ever reject the dictate of conscience, he asks whether the will is good when it follows an erring conscience (I-II, q. 19 a. 6). Here, Aquinas determines whether we are responsible for the erring conscience and writes that if we could have known the truth and avoided the error, then we are not excused from

the wrongdoing; if we could not have known otherwise, then we are excused.

Many Catholics today think of conscience primarily as that which gives us the right to dissent from teaching. That opinion, unfortunately, is a truncated notion of conscience. Any right to dissent derives first from the responsibilities we have to conscience—that is, to examine our own conduct, to form and inform our consciences daily, and to determine the right direction of our lives. The language of conscience is not so much the language of a right, therefore, but of a duty always to act in conscience—that is, the obligation to find and to follow what we understand to be God’s will. ■

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PHOTO CREDIT: Page 11: Trial of Apostle Paul: Wikimedia Commons



◀ Pope Francis with Syrian refugees in the Casa Santa Marta, August 11, 2016

# Pope Francis and the CULTURE of ENCOUNTER

M. CATHLEEN KAVENY

SINCE HIS ELECTION to the papacy in April 2013, Francis has manifested a willingness to interact with people in a manner that is not hemmed in by the formalities of Church protocol. He has given a wide range of interviews and extemporaneous talks that make plain his affection and concern for human beings in a wide range of situations, even those that are morally compromised according to official Church teaching. His paramount concern is not to preserve the Church's boundaries in pristine integrity, but to reach out to encounter human beings made by God in Christ's image. The importance of personal "encounter," particularly encountering those who are different and who are suffering, is a key theme of his papacy. Moreover, Francis's actions speak louder than his words. For example, he has regularly ignored the liturgical rules that say that Holy Thursday's ritual foot-washing ceremony should be performed by the pope only on Catholic men, preferably priests. Instead, the world watched as Pope Francis visited Rome's main prison on Holy Thursday, bending over in order to wash the feet of both male and female prisoners, some of whom were Muslim.

Pope Francis's more official writings leave no doubt that his actions are not merely a matter of personal taste, but rather spring from a deep vision of the purpose and promise of the Catholic Church. One image from his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), strikes me as particularly important. He imagines the contemporary Church as doing its work in the messy vitality of a cosmopolitan city (such as Buenos Aires) rather than in the serenity of a rural village. Cities are cacophonous but alive, dangerous but energizing; they create common interests by attracting very diverse persons to live in a common space. Francis writes: "What is called for is an evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us,

and inspiring essential values. It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities" (par. 74).

Francis is not, of course, advocating that the Church simply turn to the secular world for its marching orders. He is not attempting to revivify the culture of openness. He is acutely aware, for example, of the dangers of a "throwaway" culture, especially for the poor and vulnerable. So he situates his concern for the unborn in the context of a broader advocacy for those whom a globalized capitalism considers disposable. At the same time, it does seem that he is reacting against the excesses of the culture of identity that cropped up under his two predecessors. He pointedly observes: "In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 95).

Pope Francis does not think the Church must isolate itself in a defensive posture in order to maintain its integrity. The Church, after all, is the body of Christ, who did no such thing. He bluntly asserts: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (par. 49). His words amount, I think, to a papal blessing—or at least papal encouragement—for the culture of engagement. ■

M. CATHLEEN KAVENY is the Darald and Juliet Libby Professor at Boston College, which includes appointments in both the Department of Theology and the law school.

From *A Culture of Engagement: Law, Religion, and Morality* (Georgetown University Press, 2016): 9–11. Reprinted with permission.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 12: L'Osservatore Romano



If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: Give them something to eat (Mk 6:37).

—Excerpt from *Evangelii Gaudium*  
by Pope Francis

# Courage & Conscience

JOSÉ ARREOLA

WE HAD TO decide whether we were going north or south to get into California. My friend decided it would be best to go south to avoid the big snowstorm up north. But south would take us through Arizona. I really, really didn't want to go through Arizona. I got more and more nervous. I felt paralyzed. My friend kept asking me what my problem was. Finally, I told him: I'm undocumented.

I came to the United States when I was three with my family. And Arizona had just passed a law that gave police officers the authority to check people's immigration status. If we got stopped in Arizona, I could be detained and deported.

My friend is white. He comes from a really privileged, upper-class background. He attended a private high school, the Santa Clara University with me—I went on scholarship. Politically he sees things a little differently than I do. We've had our disagreements.

He was quiet for a while. Then he barraged me with questions; I answered the best I could. Silence again. Then he told me about his grandfather. How he hadn't been able to find work in Ireland, so he decided to hop on a fishing boat and get off in New York. He worked as a janitor without citizenship. Now his son, my friend's father, is a high-ranking bank executive.

The whole time through Arizona my friend drove like 50 miles an hour. He didn't even want to change lanes. He told me he wasn't going to lose his best friend. He wasn't going to let that happen.

The immigration debate became real to my friend in the car that day. The minute actual undocumented immigrants are included, the conversation always changes.

Now I'm completely open about my status. I'm still afraid. Conversations don't always go well. But as long I remain in the shadows, I will never really get to know you, and you'll never really know me. ■

JOSÉ ARREOLA is a 2010 graduate of Santa Clara University.

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# Conscience and a Church for the Poor

DAVID E. DeCOSSE

**P**OPE FRANCIS HAS said that a concern for the poor is the key mark of authenticity of the Church.<sup>1</sup> He has also often articulated principles of Catholic social doctrine in ways that re-invigorate the identity of the Church as both poor in itself and dedicated to justice and mercy for the poor.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Francis's understanding of the Church and of its principles of social doctrine will no doubt affect whether American Catholics are moved to become a Church for the poor. But the way that we understand the theology of conscience will affect the possibility of such a transformation. One way of posing the challenge is to say: Can the Catholic Church in the United States move from its use of a theology of conscience oriented to abstract truth to a theology of conscience shaped by concrete persons?

In his noted open letter in the fall of 2013 to Italian atheist and newspaperman Eugenio Scalfari, Pope Francis retrieved a Catholic tradition of the primacy of conscience disfavored during the preceding two papacies. In response to Scalfari's question about the possibility of Christian forgiveness for a person who neither believes nor seeks God, Francis said:

The question for one who doesn't believe in God lies in obeying one's conscience. Sin, also for those who don't have faith, exists when one goes against one's conscience. To listen to and to obey it means, in fact, to decide in face of what is perceived as good or evil.<sup>3</sup>

In recovering such a tradition, Francis returns to key documents of the Second Vatican Council (and, before them, to Thomas Aquinas' 13th-century writing on conscience) to signal a greater openness to the possibility of the sincere if mistaken conscience.<sup>4</sup> With Francis, the burden of proof has shifted: The judgment of conscience contrary to Catholic doctrine is less likely presumed to be culpably ignorant and more likely presumed, in the older language of moral theology, to be sincere if "invincibly ignorant."



*The Charity of St. Elizabeth of Hungary*



In itself, Francis's more welcome view of the subjective nature of conscience does not link conscience to concern for the poor. But it signals an important shift that clears the way to begin moving in that direction. First, Francis is putting forward a view of Conscience more consistent with the assumption that the Church ought to be in dialogue with the world—about the problems of poverty and about other things, too. Such a dialogical spirit is both a theological imperative of the Church and a practical necessity for political engagement in a liberal, pluralist society like the United States. Second, Francis is advancing a view of conscience that favors the inner life of persons over the outer demands of moral abstractions. Conscience formation reduced primarily to concerns about intrinsic evils fails to do justice to the complex, relational, and deeply personal nature of conscience itself.

Francis in his interview with Scalfari rejected any notion of absolute truth insofar as the “absolute is what is inconsistent, what is deprived of any relationship.” Truth, he said, is best understood as a relationship. Or, in another way of putting it, he said that truth is one with love and thus one with the way we seek, receive, and express the truth of another person—and especially the person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Francis added, we understand truth only in the context of our history and culture. We understand others' truth only by seeking out and appreciating the context of their history and culture. Here the theme of missionary discipleship that is central to Francis's papacy provides a helpful interpretive key. It is not only—to use the drier philosophical language of the previous papacies—that our conscience's grasp of truth depends on the quality of our moral character. But it is also that the bold, proactive spirit of missionary discipleship seeks out the poor and, amid the exercise of prudence in

such a context, fosters the formation of conscience in moral truth. He powerfully explained this process of conscience formation in a speech in Bolivia to community activists:

This rootedness in the *barrio*, the land, the office, the labor union, this ability to see yourselves in the faces of others, this daily proximity to their share of troubles and their little acts of heroism: this is what enables you to practice the commandment of love, not on the basis of ideas or concepts, but rather on the basis of genuine interpersonal encounter. We do not love concepts or ideas; we love people...<sup>5</sup>

With Pope Francis, conscience is oriented toward prudential possibilities for doing the good, not to obediential demands for keeping the law. In his discussion in *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Church's millennia-long concern for the poor, he says: “We should not be concerned simply about falling into doctrinal error, but about remaining faithful to this light-filled path of life and wisdom.”<sup>6</sup> Along with the drive of missionary discipleship, several additional factors in Francis's theology turn conscience toward the good and the future. One is the importance and immediacy of the connection between conscience and the *deus semper maior*, the “always greater God,” or—in a favorite phrase of Francis—the “God of surprises.”<sup>7</sup> Here Francis recalls the emphasis of St. Ignatius of Loyola on the immediacy of the relationship between the soul and God. Here Francis also recalls the transcendent dimension of conscience articulated in the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* (where a person “is alone with God”). The fundamental orientation of conscience is to God, not to the Magisterium. Moreover, Francis also allows for the creative dimension of conscience—creative not

because all by itself conscience comes up with new things, but because the God of surprises reveals new things to the conscience fired with the love of missionary discipleship.

An additional theological factor helps to link the creative potential of conscience to the poor. Key here is Francis's insistence on the Church as the whole people of God, hierarchy and laity together possessing an instinct for the truth of doctrine and practice. In a church imagined in this way, the formation of conscience is not exclusively top-down. Instead, conscience emerges more clearly as shaped by the vast, vibrant social dynamic of the people of God living in a world of prudence, ritual, service, friendship, prayer, sacrament, image, and more. And, for Francis, the poor have a crucial role to play in this horizontal process of the *sensus fidelium*. As he said: “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They [the poor] have much to teach us .... We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.”<sup>8</sup> ■

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“Conscience, Missionary Discipleship, and a Church for the Poor” was originally published in Volume 3 of *The Lane Center Series: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism in the United States*, Fall 2015. Reprinted with permission from the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought. ©DeCosse 2015

<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), no. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 198.

<sup>3</sup>“Pope Francis' Letter to the Founder of *La Repubblica* Italian Newspaper,” *Zenit* (September 11, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, Question 19, Article 5: “Whether the Will Is Evil When It Is at Variance with Erring Reason.”

<sup>5</sup>“Read Pope Francis' Speech on the Poor and Indigenous Peoples,” *Time* (July 10, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 194.

<sup>7</sup>Pope Francis in an interview with Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America* (September 30, 2013).

<sup>8</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 198.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 14: Blair Leighton Edmund/Restored Traditions

# FRANCIS'S CALL TO CONSCIENCE

## *A Bishop's Reflections*

STEPHEN E. BLAIRE

WHEN POPE FRANCIS delivered a strongly worded speech to the Mexican bishops during his recent visit, I felt both uncomfortable and challenged as a bishop in the United States. I heard clearly that we as bishops cannot just preach the Gospel and then remain on the sidelines while injustices prevail. As spiritual leaders of the Church we must be engaged in promoting the common good more than just guiding others to do so. I realized that as a bishop I also must pick up the victim of robbers, pour oil and wine over his wounds, bandage them, and bring him to the inn.

I recalled the words the Holy Father spoke in St. Matthew's Cathedral this past September when he reminded the bishops gathered that we needed to be "lucidly aware of the battle between light and darkness being fought in this world," and that we must "realize that the price of lasting victory is allowing ourselves to be wounded and consumed." In other words, we have to be in the midst of the fray.

I cannot forget sitting in Congress and hearing from Pope Francis a Magna Carta for the Church in the United States: to defend liberty as Lincoln did; to dream of full civil rights as Martin Luther King Jr. did; to strive for justice and the cause of the oppressed as Dorothy Day did; and to sow peace in the contemplative style as Thomas Merton did. The message is the same whether we hear it in Washington, D.C., in Mexico, or in California. It is only the circumstances and applications that are different. It is a message for the Church to be engaged in the great work of human development for peace and justice that respects the dignity of the human person and promotes the common good. This is a work of God. Articles 9 and 10 in the Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" propose that as human beings we "co-operate in tackling the main problems facing today's world."

The Church respects the political, social, and economic orders. It is not our mission to structure these arenas of human endeavor, nor to give them an ideology. While individual members of the Church are integral parts of these endeavors and have a civic and human responsibility to be so, as participants they maintain an autonomy that is enhanced

by their professional, educational, and experiential training. The Church respects their autonomy and their freedom to act in accord with their consciences.

However, this does not mean that the Church must sit on the sidelines and simply offer spiritual platitudes. The Church has a mission to offer the light of Christ to the world. Jesus has redeemed all creation. The Gospel speaks to every dimension of human existence and to each and every arena of human striving. The political, the social, and the economic orders of the world exist to serve the well-being of each and all. In the last 50 years the four issues identified in articles 9 and 10 of the "Pastoral Constitution" remain alive today. Developing nations still need to share in the political and economic benefits of modern civilization; the place of women still needs to advance; agricultural workers in many places still need to be set free from inhuman conditions; industrial workers being replaced by machines still need new opportunities.

The Gospel is primary in the formation of conscience. The Church speaks to the responsibility of political leaders to promote the dignity of every human person, especially the poor and most vulnerable, and to create, promote, and protect the common good. The Church calls for a social order built on solidarity among all peoples and calls for right relations that respect honesty, truth, human rights, and freedom, especially in the practice of one's religious faith. The Church speaks of the economy in terms of serving the human person and speaks against the greedy accumulation of wealth to the detriment of the poor and an unfair and inequitable distribution of the goods of the earth. The earth and its goods belong to the human family and are entrusted to our care.

Indeed, the Church's mission is to reflect the light of Christ in the world, but her mission is more than that. "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jm1:22). However, when the tire meets the road, when the Church becomes engaged in the real issues of life, this is where you begin to hear, "The pope can speak on spiritual matters but he does not have any authority to speak on economic



or political issues.” Or, “The Church certainly should give alms and feed the poor and care for those who are suffering, but stay out of the structural issues of politics, the social order, and economics.”

It is true that the Church respects the autonomy of the various arenas of life and that her members certainly should engage in the various realms of human endeavor. But it must also be said, in accord with Vatican II, that the Church’s mission is to do more. The “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” suggests ways for the Church to be engaged beyond proclaiming the Gospel in word only.

in striving to improve the human condition. We can offer a moral perspective that flows from the light of Christ. In standing against the evil of abortion we can improve how we work to address the desperate situations that people find themselves in that give occasion to such evil. Our opposition to physician-assisted suicide can engage us in strengthening palliative care and better helping people to die well. We can do our part in promoting better-paying jobs and reduction of the higher unemployment rates in places like the San Joaquin Valley, where I am a bishop, and where people are working two or three low-paying jobs to keep food on the table. We

that harsh and divisive language has no place in our society.

Dialogue requires the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit in understanding our faith, an openness of heart to the pursuit of that which is good and true, and a boldness of spirit as exemplified by the apostles in the Acts of the Apostles. It requires an ability to listen and to seek to understand.

Yes, I still feel some discomfort in applying the words of Pope Francis to myself as a bishop of the Church. I still ask myself if I have not walked close enough with the poor. But it is never too late to accept the challenge. The Year of Mercy is a good time for me to examine my conscience and to



The first way is by collaboration (“Pastoral Constitution,” nos. 9 and 10). We work together with all people of goodwill, and even with some of not so goodwill, to promote the common good. The Church can be a partner with other faith traditions, community organizations, government, and business in promoting what is just and right for society. Of course, the Church cannot cooperate in matters of evil and must observe the ethical and moral principals of cooperation. However, we do not have to be scrupulous to the point that we cannot shake hands with those opposed to us; we can work with them on matters related to the common good with means that are morally acceptable.

The Church does not have all the answers, but it can be a partner

can organize our parishes to be more active in keeping kids in school through graduation. (The dropout rate is still too high in my diocese, and dropouts too easily can find a home in a dangerous gang.) No less important is how we care for God’s creation in places like San Joaquin Valley, where so many suffer from poor air quality. Most importantly we can strengthen and promote the family as the basic unit of society.

The second way for the Church to become more engaged is through dialogue. Pope Paul VI gave us the tools. Pope Francis is witnessing to its importance in the pursuit of peace and better human relationships. Dialogue opens the doors of mercy. “Dialogue is our method,” he told the U.S. bishops. He further emphasized

undergo a new conversion of heart. The great question of our day, for us bishops and for all of us as the Church, is this: How do we as the Church in today’s very complex world witness to the light of Christ and collaborate in making our world more just, building a solidarity with all people of goodwill for peace and reconciliation? ■

**MOST REV. STEPHEN E. BLAIRE** is the bishop of Stockton, California.

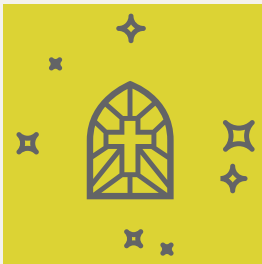
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PHOTO CREDIT: Page 17: The Columbus Dispatch. Coats were among items donated at a Jubilee Year of Mercy conference at the Holy Family Soup Kitchen in Franklinton, Ohio.

# An Ignatian Examen of Consciousness



St. Ignatius Loyola included in his *Spiritual Exercises* a prayer called “the *Examen*,” which derives from the Latin word for examination. It is a meditation with roots not only in Ignatian spirituality, but also in the spiritual practices of the ancient Stoics. There are many versions of the *Examen* today, but all have five steps. Here is a simple rendering of some key elements:



①

Place yourself in God’s presence. Give thanks for God’s great love for you.



②

Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.



③

Review your day — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time.



④

Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away?



⑤

Look toward tomorrow — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God’s plan. Be specific, and conclude with the “Our Father.”

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# C21 FALL EVENTS

## Immigration, National Identity, and Catholic Conscience

**September 8, 2016 | Episcopal Visitor**

Presenter: Archbishop José Gomez, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Location/Time: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 6:00 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

## Crucible Moments and the Role of Conscience

**September 11, 2016 | Lecture & Discussion**

Presenters: Sasha Chanoff and David Chanoff

Location/Time: Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, 2:30 p.m.

Sponsors: Voice of the Faithful and The C21 Center

## Women's Voices: Forming Conscience, Raising Consciousness

**October 11, 2016 | Discussion**

Presenters: Cathy Kaveny, Régine Jean-Charles, Kerry Cronin, Kristin Heyer

Location/Time: Brighton Campus, Cadigan Center Atrium, 6:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Women's Resource Center, STM Women's Group, Boston College Women's Council, and The C21 Center

## Where Do we Go from Here?: Priestly Ministry in the 21st Century

**October 13, 2016 | Lecture**

Presenter: Mary Gautier, Senior Research Associate at CARA

Location/Time: School of Theology & Ministry, Room 100, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

## The Catholic Voter and the Signs of Our Times

**October 19, 2016 | Lecture**

Presenter: Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., professor of theological ethics, Boston College Department of Theology

Location/Time: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: STM and The C21 Center

## Picturing Paradise

**October 24, 2016 | Discussion**

Presenters: Rebecca Berru-Davis, Nancy Pineda-Madrid

Location & Time: Theology & Ministry Library, 4:00 p.m.

Sponsors: STM, University Libraries, and The C21 Center

## Seminary Formation: Recent History, New Direction

**November 3, 2016 | Lecture**

Presenter: Katarina Schuth, O.S.F.

Location/Time: School of Theology & Ministry, Room 100, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

## The Francis Pontificate: Historical Anomaly or the Beginning of a Postmodern Papacy?

**November 10, 2016 | Lecture**

Presenter: Richard Gaillardetz, Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology, and chair, Boston College Department of Theology

Location/Time: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: STM and The C21 Center

## Our Lady of Guadalupe:

**A Woman for All Seasons**

**December 12, 2016 | Luncheon Lecture**

Presenter: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, associate professor, School of Theology & Ministry

Location/Time: Stokes 203N, noon and 2:00 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

## Save the Date

**Homeboy Industries and the Ennobling Formation of Conscience: Being Reached by the Widow, Orphan and Stranger**

**February 7, 2017**

**Gregory J. Boyle, S.J.**

**Chastity Is Everything**

**March 15, 2017**

**Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I.**

**Women's Voices**

**March 30, 2017**

**Sr. Teresa Maya**

President-elect of LCWR

Webcast videos will be available within two weeks following most event on [bc.edu/c21](http://bc.edu/c21)

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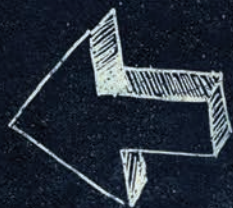
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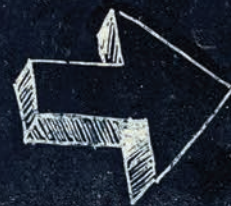
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# Crafting Conscience in Your Child

## 10 THINGS PARENTS



## CAN DO



THOMAS GROOME

While parents are readily recognized as primary in forming the superego, they can also be most effective in forming the conscience of their children (see “The Call to Grow in Love” in this issue for the distinctive functions of superego and conscience). Though abstract moral reasoning is not developmentally possible before the teenage years (Piaget, Kohlberg, etc.), yet parents can encourage concrete moral reasoning in children from an early age that can help to form their conscience. For example, the general principles of social justice are likely beyond their reach, yet they can learn how and why to be fair to siblings and friends and be encouraged to play fair. Here are 10 practical things parents can do to form their children in a Christian conscience.

### 1. Help them do moral reasoning for themselves:

While conscience has an affective component (feeling comfort or discomfort), unlike the superego it is primarily an ability to make reasoned moral decisions. So help your child to understand and practice the reasoning involved in making good decisions. This means encouraging them to consider the concrete circumstances involved, the likely consequences of a particular action, the moral teachings of Christian faith (can be as simple as “what would Jesus do?”), and then to draw upon their own innate sense of right and wrong to come to a practical decision.

**2. Affirm their innate goodness:** Children tend to live up—or down to—the self-image we project onto them. A Catholic theology of the person favors our innate goodness rather than inherent sinfulness; even

doing bad things does not make one a bad person. So, better to say to a child, “You are not a liar, so why are you lying?” or “You are not a thief, so why did you steal?” To declare them a liar or thief—as if inherently so—is likely to encourage them in such behavior.

**3. Draw out their story:** When your child faces a moral dilemma, talk it out with them. First, hear their own story about it, how they see the issue, its concrete circumstances, and potential consequences. This will entail asking them good reflective questions that draw upon their own inner moral sense; encouraging them to use this capacity will develop it. As such a conversation unfolds and as appropriate, share your own sense of what is right or wrong in this regard, the teachings of Christian faith on the issue, and the reasons for this teaching. Then,



## Synod and Conscience: Excerpts from *Amoris Laetitia*

By Pope Francis

**#264.** Parents are also responsible for shaping the will of their children, fostering good habits and a natural inclination to goodness. This entails presenting certain ways of thinking and acting as desirable and worthwhile, as part of a gradual process of growth. The desire to fit into society, or the habit of foregoing an immediate pleasure for the sake of a better and more orderly life in common, is itself a value that can then inspire openness to greater values.

**#264.** Moral formation should always take place with active methods and a dialogue that teaches through sensitivity and by using a language children can understand. It should also take place inductively, so that children can learn for themselves the importance of certain values, principles and norms, rather than by imposing these as absolute and unquestionable truths.

**#266.** Good habits need to be developed. Even childhood habits can help to translate important interiorized values into sound and steady ways of acting.

rather than a fiat or directive by you as parent, invite them to see for themselves what is the best thing to do and to make their own decision—unless they choose one harmful or unfair to themselves or others. Then have them take responsibility for the decisions they make and the consequences.

**4. Share how your own conscience works:** An invaluable source of conscience formation for your children is your own example as you put your conscience to work in the affairs of daily life. They will learn from your example. Add to its good effect by taking time—at least occasionally—to explain why you act so, your moral reasoning and faith-based rationale for the decisions you make.

**5. Try democratic family conversation:** When there are moral issues involved for the whole family, encourage all the members to speak their word of conscience and let them be heard. Try to reach consensus. Should you need to make a different decision as parent, explain your rationale.

**6. Practice compassion and justice within and outside of the family:** Doing works of compassion for those in need, both inside and outside of the family, is most likely to form this disposition in your children. The same can be said of doing acts of justice as a family together. Take teachable moments, as well, for conversations that reflect on the need to reform cultural mores and social structures that are unjust and oppressive.

**7. Let the whole ethos of the home reflect social responsibility:** This can include a myriad of practices like truth telling, showing empathy, respecting one another's person and property, avoiding language patterns that reflect bias of any kind (based on race, gender, ethnicity, economics), good listening to each

other, following the rules in family games, reducing, reusing, and recycling, energy efficiency, not wasting food or water, celebrating one another's gifts, etc.

**8. Favor restorative justice:** When there needs to be “consequences” for poor decisions, imagine ways to practice restorative justice. This means to offset the consequences of a poor decision by doing the contrary. For example, doing something mean can be corrected by a loving deed in restitution, and if possible for the person wronged.

**9. Remember mercy and forgiveness:** Remind your child that when he/she does something wrong, there is always the ready offer of forgiveness from you and from God. As Jesus said, quoting the prophet Hosea, “It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13). You might even take such a teachable moment to remind them of the rich Catholic tradition of a sacrament of reconciliation. They may not need it often, but they will likely need it sometime!

**10. When needed, apologize yourself:** When you do something wrong and contrary to your conscience which negatively affects your family, admit your fault rather than covering for it. If you do something wrong against your child, be sure to apologize directly and ask for mercy. All parents make mistakes or poor moral judgments at times; you help to form their conscience when you say to a child, in one way or another, “I did wrong, I am sorry, please forgive me.” ■

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# OUR CHILDREN'S WISDOM

BRIAN DOYLE





Whereas traditional sources of conscience formation in the Catholic tradition include Scripture, church teachings, and moral exemplars like saints, sometimes it is those whose character we are charged with helping to develop, like our own children, who alert us to the demands of conscience.

IT WAS A child who changed me forever as a man and a writer. Sure it was. This was a week after September 11, 2001. I remember that date very well indeed because three of my friends had been murdered on September 11. They were brokers in the towers and they were roasted and crushed to death by a man hiding in a cave in Afghanistan. Tommy and Farrell and Sean, men I had known as boys in our village, Tommy a terrific basketball player and the Lynch brothers burly cheerful guys who were bar bouncers before becoming brokers. Roasted by a man who cackled in his cave when he heard that thousands of men and women and children had been roasted and crushed and dismembered. Cackled. I don't forget that cackle. Sometimes I forget it for a day or two but then I remember it again and I work harder at the thing I am supposed to do in this life.

That evening a week after the murders I was standing in our kitchen and telling my wife Mary about how a magazine had called me that day and asked me to contribute to a special issue about September 11 and I said no, Mary, I said no, because what is there to say? I am not adding to the ocean of witless commentary and vengeful rant. The only thing to do is pray in whatever language and to whatever coherent mercy you pray to, ideally silently, because if ever silence was eloquent now is the time.

I said all this with a certain arrogance and fatuity. I did. I was proud of myself and I wanted everyone to know how cool I was in making such a decision.

But, Dad, said our daughter, eight years old, what are you going to do if you don't write anything?

What?

Dad, no offense, but you are always lecturing us about how if God gives you a tool, and you don't use that tool, that's a sin, and Dad, no offense, but you only have the one tool. You say this yourself all the time, you say that you stink at everything else except catching and sharing stories, so if you are not going to catch and share stories, isn't that a sin?

Actually isn't that three sins, because three of your friends were murdered? Isn't that right?

And I stood there in our kitchen, staring down at my daughter's face, her utterly open earnest face, her unfathomable green eyes, her questions piercing me down in places I did not know existed, and I was proud of her, and annoyed, and rattled, and moved, and speechless, and even though that was many years ago now I remember that my wife reached over and put her hand on my hand where my hand was clutching the handle of the battered old dishwasher.

I think sometimes now that for me there was my life before that moment, when I was a writer intent on writing well and being published and selling books and earning a little extra cash so we could almost break even as a family, and there was after that moment, when I saw that my real work was to tell bigger better stories than the thugs and liars of the world. The right story at the right time in the right ear in the right heart shivers things, bends lives and countries and maybe species in a different direction. Can we outwit violence? Can we tell stories that make violence scuttle back into the ancient darkness from which it came? Can we use humor and imagination as the most astounding weapons ever? Can I, can we, catch and share stories of defiant grace and unthinkable courage and unimaginable forgiveness, and flush away the old stories of thugs like bin Laden, the old stories of blood and fear and ash and smoke and children screaming? I think maybe so. I think maybe so. And I think maybe so because one evening in my kitchen a child looked up at me and called me out of my old self and into a new one. ■

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# CONSCIENCE and CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY: Dorothy Day

**A**S A YOUNG woman, she saw journalism as a vehicle for promoting justice for workers, immigrants, and the unemployed. In 1932, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to report on the “Hunger March” for several Catholic magazines. She was deeply moved by the seemingly endless parade of people who had been beaten down by economic hard times, but dismayed that there were no Catholic leaders in the march. The next day she went to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and prayed for guidance for “something to do in the social order besides reporting conditions. I wanted to change them, not just report them.”<sup>1</sup>

When she returned to Manhattan, Day met Peter Maurin. As soon as they met they knew they were kindred spirits. Maurin was an itinerant worker who embraced a style of Christianity based on voluntary poverty, manual labor, direct service of the poor, and community living. He became the mentor that helped Day fulfill her desire to “do something in the social order.” She gained more notoriety, but always insisted that Maurin was her most important teacher. “Without him,” she explained, “I would never have been able to find a way of working that would have satisfied my conscience.” Day and Maurin cofounded the *Catholic Worker* newspaper to inform readers about the social mission of the Church and its deep connection to the Gospel. It allowed Day to use her skills as a journalist to express Maurin’s vision. The first issue of the paper described the Catholic Church as a social program. It was published, Day wrote,

For those who are sitting on park benches in the warm spring sunlight.

For those who are huddling in shelters trying to escape the rain.

For those who are walking the streets in the all but futile search for work.

For those who think that there is no hope for the future, no recognition of their plight—this little paper is addressed.<sup>2</sup>

Day and Maurin were convinced that effective compassion requires both intelligent analysis and practical action.



Recovering the ancient practice of Christian hospitality, Day and Maurin believed in direct, interpersonal care and disdained the modern assumption that the poor ought to be bureaucratically “managed” by “experts.” The Christian sense of hospitality, moreover, can never be satisfied with giving food, drink, and shelter to nameless strangers. Each person must be cared for as a brother or sister in Christ. Indeed, we are to see Christ in the neighbor.

The *Catholic Worker* ethos of hospitality got started in a simple way. One day some homeless men who had read the *Catholic Worker* newspaper decided to see if its editors would actually live up to what their editorials professed. When they showed up at Day’s apartment, she gave them food and a place to stay, and then found an apartment to rent for them. Peter Maurin suggested they provide soup and bread for hungry guests. This first step led to the founding of the first “House of Hospitality,” a welcoming place not only for food and lodging but friendship, prayer, reflection, and conversation. The Catholic Worker house on Mott Street in Manhattan was the first step of a movement that by 1941 included 30 houses across the country. Today there are over 100 Catholic Worker communities throughout the world.

Because every person is created in the image of God and thrives in friendship, Day and Maurin wanted to build communities in which members can use their talents and recognize their own dignity. The small communities are to provide an example of a social order in which no one is shut out in the cold or left to die for lack of the basic necessities. Catholic Worker hospitality also addresses spiritual needs.

Day believed that everything she did in the social order was made possible by grace. She worked hard to live as much as possible in tune with God. She went to weekly confession, attended

daily Mass, practiced examination of conscience every day, took spiritual direction from various priests, recited the rosary, went on retreats, and at times wrote as well as prayed in the presence of the Eucharist. Day was uncompromising on this point: “Without the sacraments of the church, I certainly do not think that I could go on.”<sup>3</sup> Day’s ethic of hospitality was integrally connected to her loyalty to the community [Christ] founded.

Catholic Worker communities engage in “corporal works of mercy,” like feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless, and “spiritual works of mercy,” like counseling the doubtful, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses, and comforting the afflicted. Hospitality wants to “comfort the afflicted,” and prophets “afflict the comfortable.” Both are necessary.

Houses of Hospitality adopted the advice of St. Benedict to his monks: “All are to be received as Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Like Benedict, Day took Jesus’ words literally—“I was a stranger and you took me in” (Mt 25:35). One can be a “stranger” in many ways—by being poor, or dark-skinned, or an immigrant, or unemployed, or addicted to drugs or alcohol, or suffering serious mental illness. Day and Maurin focused on hospitality for those who were rejected because of their “strangeness” to mainstream American society. Houses of Hospitality offer a countercultural vision in which all are welcomed to sit together, break bread, and talk. It is based on a love that invites people to enter into conversation, companionship, and community. This understanding of hospitality resonates with the image of the reign of God as a banquet (e.g., Lk 13:20 and Mt 22).

Day accented the welcome implied in Jesus’ “You took me in.” We are not only to receive the stranger as Christ, she said, but even to *see* Christ in the stranger. This happens only when we approach the other with love. Christ,

she knew, often comes in the guise of one who is radically other.

A society bent on rewarding success makes it hard to understand giving hospitality to “drunkards and good-for-nothings.” Day and Maurin were sharply criticized for caring for the “undeserving” as well as the “deserving” poor. The scope of Christian hospitality is displayed in Jesus’ own willingness to eat with anyone. All are welcome to Catholic Worker soup kitchens, medical clinics, and drop-in centers. True hospitality has a generosity and warmth that treats people in a way that is dignified and caring and offers a witness to a love that is not confined to the like-minded and the familiar. Christian hospitality strikes a countercultural note in individualistic societies that encourage welcoming only those who have something to give us in return for what we do for them.

Day’s hospitality was sustainable because it was based on faith in divine providence more than on human ingenuity or modern confidence in the inevitability of progress. Her faith was sustained by her involvement in concrete communities that enabled her to act with hospitality. She was not a social worker who happened to pray and go to Mass. Her realistic yet hopeful attitude toward life was rooted in her Christ-centered faith. “If I have achieved anything in my life,” she once said, “it is because I have not been embarrassed to talk about God.”<sup>5</sup> ■

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From *A Step Along the Way: Models of Christian Service* by Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015). Reprinted with permission.

<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Day, “Peter Maurin, 1877–1977,” *Catholic Worker*, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Day, “To Our Readers,” *Catholic Worker*, May 1933.

<sup>3</sup>Day, *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), xxi.

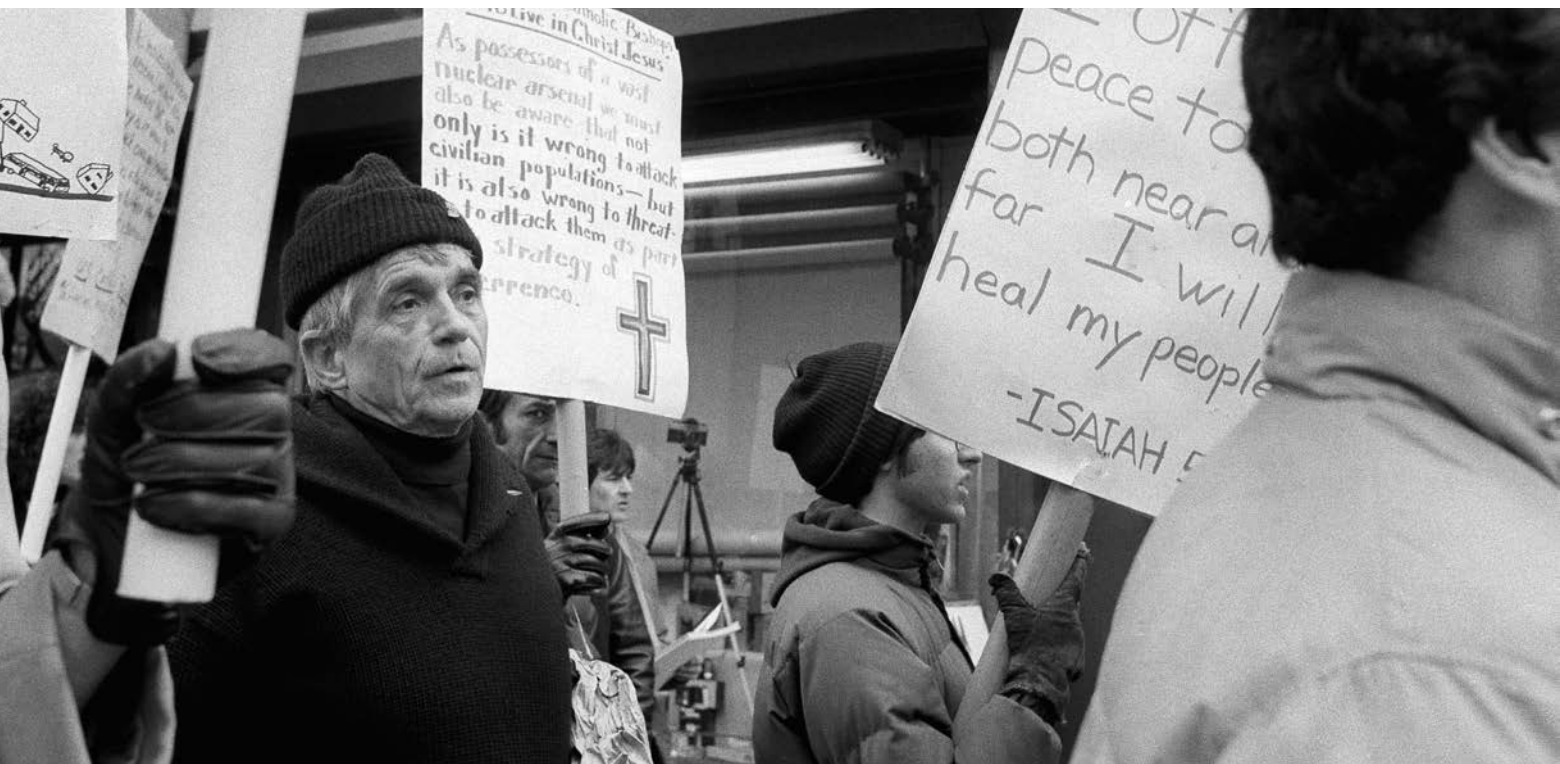
<sup>4</sup>Rule of St. Benedict, no. 53.

<sup>5</sup>Jim Forest, “Servant of God Dorothy Day,” Catholic Worker Movement website.

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# CONSCIENCE Be My GUIDE

## DANIEL BERRIGAN, S.J.



*Fr. Daniel Berrigan (1921–2016) was a Jesuit priest, peace activist and writer. Founder of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, he published over 50 books of essays and poetry on spirituality, Scripture, and war resistance. He died this past April at the Murray-Weigel Jesuit community in the Bronx, New York. Berrigan's reflections shed light upon how he understood his antiwar civil disobedience as demands of the Gospel and of his conscience alike. Here we excerpt two: the first one is taken from Berrigan's testimony at trial in September 1980 following his action protesting nuclear warheads at a General Electric nuclear plant in Pennsylvania.*

**T**HE QUESTIONS TAKE me back to those years when my conscience was being formed, back to a family that was poor, and to a father and mother who taught, quite simply, by living what they taught. In a thousand ways they showed that you do what is right because it is right, that your conscience is a matter between you and God, that nobody owns you. In the life of a young child, the first steps of conscience are as important as the first steps of one's feet, and I feel that there is a direct line between the way my parents turned our steps and this action. That is no crooked line.

Dear friends of the jury, you have been called the conscience of the community. Each of us eight comes from a community. Every one of us has brothers and sisters with whom we pray, with whom we offer the Eucharist, with whom we share income, and in some cases, the care of children. Our conscience, in other words, comes from somewhere. We have not come from outer space or from chaos or from madhouses to King of Prussia [Pennsylvania].

We have come from years of prayers, years of life together, years of testing. We would like to speak to you about our communities, because it is our conviction that



nobody in the world can form his or her conscience alone. We come as a community of conscience before your community of conscience to ask you: Are our consciences to act differently than yours in regard to the lives and deaths of children? I could not not do this. I mean that with every cowardly bone in my body I wished I hadn't had to enter the GE plant. I wish I hadn't had to do it. And that has been true of every time I have been arrested, all those years. My stomach turns over. I feel sick. I feel afraid. I don't want to go through this again. I hate jail. I don't do well there physically. But I cannot not go on, because I have learned that we must not kill if we are Christians. I have read that Christ underwent death rather than inflict it. And I am supposed to be a disciple. The push of conscience is a terrible thing.

So at some point your cowardly bones get moving, and you say, "Here it goes again," and you do it. And you have a certain peace because you did it, as I do this morning in speaking with you.

One remains honest because one has a sense, "Well, if I cheat, I'm really giving over my humanity, my conscience." Then we think of these horrible Mark 12A missiles and something in us says, "We cannot live with such crimes."

In time we drew close. We were able to say: "Yes. We can do this. We can take the consequences. We can undergo whatever is required."

I talk openly with Jesuit friends and superiors. They respected my conscience and said, "Do what you are called to do."

And what issued was a sense that, with great peacefulness, with calm of spirit, even though with a butterfly in our being, we could go ahead. And so we did.



## Catonsville Nine Statement

*On May 17th, 1968, nine people, including Fr. Daniel Berrigan and his brother Fr. Phillip Berrigan, entered a draft board and removed draft files of those who were about to be sent to Vietnam. They took these files outside and burned them with homemade napalm, a weapon commonly used on civilians by the U.S. forces. They then awaited their arrest by authorities. Here is the statement Berrigan read in court during their trial.*

Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children, the angering of the orderlies in the front parlor of the charnel house. We could not, so help us God, do otherwise.

For we are sick at heart, our hearts give us no rest for thinking of the Land of Burning Children. And for thinking of that *other* Child, of whom the poet Luke speaks: "This child is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel, a sign that is spoken against." Small consolation; a child born to make trouble, and to die for it, the First Jew (not the last) to be subject of a "definitive solution."

And so we stretch out our hands to our brothers throughout the world. We who are priests, to our fellow priests. All of us who act against the law, turn to the poor of the world, to the Vietnamese, to the victims, to the soldiers who kill and die, for the wrong reasons, for no reason at all, because they were so ordered by the authorities of that public order which is in effect a massive institutionalized *disorder*.

We say: Killing is disorder, life and gentleness and community and unselfishness is the only order we recognize. For the sake of that order, we risk our liberty, our good name.

The time is past when good men can remain silent, when obedience can segregate men from public risk, when

the poor can die without defense. How many must die before our voices are heard, how many must be tortured, dislocated, starved, maddened? How long must the world's resources be raped in the service of legalized murder? When, at what point, will you say "no" to this war?

We have chosen to say, with the gift of our liberty, if necessary our lives: The violence stops here, the death stops here, the suppression of the truth stops here, the war stops here... Redeem the times! The times are inexpressibly evil. Christians pay conscious, indeed religious tribute, to Caesar and Mars; by the approval of overkill tactics, by brinkmanship, by nuclear liturgies, by racism, by support of genocide. They embrace their society with all their heart, and abandon the cross.

And yet, and yet, the times are inexhaustibly good, solaced by the courage and hope of many. The truth rules, Christ is not forsaken. In a time of death, some men—the resisters, those who work hardily for social change, those who preach and embrace the unpalatable truth—such men overcome death, their lives are bathed in the light of the resurrection, the truth has set them free. In the jaws of death, of contumely, of good and ill report, they proclaim their love of the brethren. We think of such men, in the world, in our nation, in the churches; and the stone in our breast is dissolved; we take heart once more. ■

DANIEL BERRIGAN, S.J., was an American Jesuit priest, activist, and poet.

"Conscience Be My Guide: Daniel Berrigan, S.J." by Geoffrey Bould was excerpted from *Conscience Be My Guide: An Anthology of Prison Writings*, pgs. 75-76. Reprinted with permission from Zed Books. ©2005.

The Catonsville 9 Statement was excerpted from *Night Flight to Hanoi* ©1968 Daniel Berrigan.

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Marty Lederhandler

# CONSCIENCE AND CREATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

ANNE E. PATRICK

Pope Francis is opening up new lines of thought regarding conscience, responsibility, and creativity.

THE SECOND VATICAN Council's criterion of practical benefit to the world suggested that past emphasis in moral theology had been too preoccupied with the state of believers' souls to take sufficient notice of its effects on the well-being of persons within and beyond the Catholic community.<sup>1</sup> Fifty years after the council, Pope Francis voiced a similar desire for practical benefit to the world when he proclaimed a special Jubilee of Mercy, so that the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective. His rhetoric bypasses discussions of how to form consciences, and simply says, "Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help" (*Misericordiae Vultus* (MV no. 3, 15) . . . For Pope Francis, the Jubilee invites intense reflection on the "corporal and spiritual works of mercy," and "will be a way to reawaken

our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty" (MV no. 15).

He employs metaphors of dullness and awakening for conscience, and emphasizes the fact that God's disposition toward us is one of friendliness and mercy, which should have the effect of freeing us for significant action, indeed for carrying forward Jesus' own mission. Our focus should be on the physical and spiritual needs of our neighbors, and not on a misguided quest for innocence. God's mercy provides the context in which we can accept our sinfulness, and while striving to observe to the commandments we can be aware that "the rule of life for [Jesus'] disciples must place mercy at the center, as Jesus himself demonstrated by sharing meals with sinners" (MV no. 20). With consciences thus consoled by the assurance of God's mercy, revealed as love like "that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child" (MV no. 6), we can act



confidently and creatively to promote the well-being of others, and accept the fact that “Life means ‘getting our feet dirty’ from the dust-filled roads of life and history.”<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis spoke these last words to prisoners whom he met in Philadelphia on September 27, 2015. In the same breath, he voiced his own need of having his feet washed by Jesus, conveying a spirituality that seeks not innocence, but rather forgiveness. His words to the prisoners echoed an ideal he had expressed earlier in a homily at the canonization mass of Junípero Sera:

The Church, the holy People of God, treads the dust-laden paths of history, so often traversed by conflict, injustice and violence, in order to encounter her children, our brothers and sisters. The holy and faithful People of God are not afraid of losing their way; they are afraid of becoming self-enclosed, frozen into elites, clinging to their own security.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that creativity is required of disciples is something the pope also emphasized in Philadelphia. Reflecting on St. Katherine Drexel, a white heiress who devoted her life to serving Native and African Americans, he declared to bishops, priests, and religious gathered in the cathedral that for the faithful to fulfill their responsibility “as a leaven of the Gospel in our world” there is need for “creativity in adapting to changed situations . . . [and] above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of life.”<sup>4</sup> He also called for creativity in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*, when speaking of the conversion required by the ecological crisis: “By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm

in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God ‘as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable’ (Rom. 1:1)” (no. 211). Likewise in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the pope asked all Christians to respond to the call to be concerned for the poor and for social justice in “creative ways,” which go beyond “discussion with no practical effect,” declaring: “Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone . . . will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk” (no. 207). Without criticizing the hierarchy or his predecessors in papal office—on the contrary, his writings quote many statements of popes and episcopal conferences appreciatively—Pope Francis is opening up new lines of thought regarding conscience, responsibility, and creativity in the Church.

As Albert R. Jonsen has demonstrated, the term responsibility gained new prominence in Christian ethics following the Second World War, as may be seen in the works of H. Richard Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Bernard Häring.<sup>5</sup> In reflecting on this development I have distinguished two types of responsibility, one that is more passive and the other more creative. The former involves obeying the commandments and fulfilling the duties of one’s state in life, while the latter looks beyond the obligations of rules and social roles and seeks to accomplish good on a wider scale. To the extent that recent teaching by the hierarchy has emphasized opposition to intrinsic evils, it has encouraged the more passive type of responsibility, especially when taking an authoritarian approach. Responsibility’s passive dimension has been greatly stressed in Catholic literature, whereas there has been less

emphasis on creative responsibility, which involves the ability to think imaginatively and independently, and take risks for the sake of helping to improve things. Both types of responsibility are needed, like the black and white keys on the piano, but socialization has equipped many of us too well for the one, and very poorly for the other.<sup>6</sup>

If complex problems like poverty, racism, and environmental degradation are to be addressed effectively, moral agents must be willing to take risks and collaborate across religious and political boundaries. Pope Francis’s emphasis on the reality of God’s mercy is crucial for encouraging believers to take such risks, for it reminds us that success, indeed salvation, is God’s work, while our task is to invest our talents to the full for the sake of helping neighbors near and far, of this and future generations. ■

ANNE E. PATRICK, SNJM, was William H. Laird Professor of Religion and the Liberal Arts, emerita, at Carleton College.

As this issue went to press we learned of Sr. Anne Patrick’s death. We are honored to pay tribute here to her ongoing legacy with respect to reflection on conscience.

From “The Rhetoric of Conscience: Pope Francis, Conversion, and Catholic Health Care” in *Conscience and Catholic Health Care*, ed. David E. DeCosse, forthcoming, Orbis Books 2016. Reprinted with permission.

<sup>1</sup>Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Formation (*Optatam Totius*, #16).

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, “Jesus Saves Us from the Lie That Says No One Can Change,” in *Pope Francis Speaks to the United States and Cuba: Speeches, Homilies, and Interviews* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2015), p. 154.

<sup>3</sup>Pope Francis, “Keep Moving Forward!” in *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Pope Francis, “What about You?” in *ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>Albert R. Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968).

<sup>6</sup>I develop these points more fully in *Liberating Conscience*, pp. 183–88 and *Women, Conscience, and the Creative Process*, pp. 55–60.



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# CONSCIENCE FORMATION IN THE FACE OF CULTURAL SIN: THE CHALLENGE OF UNCONSCIOUS RACIAL BIAS

BRYAN MASSINGALE

## UNCONSCIOUS RACIAL BIAS

AS I WRITE this essay, I am haunted by a long series of tragic killings of unarmed African Americans, especially black young men, by police officers, security guards, and neighborhood vigilantes that are occurring with terrible frequency in the United States. This pervasive criminalization is what disturbs me, for it is an association that is not necessarily deliberate or conscious. One researcher, studying the propensity of police officers to use deadly force more often in situations involving black people, rejects the conclusion that such officers must be either intentional bigots or completely unbiased. Rather, she notes something much more complex at work: “Racial stereotypes operate at a subconscious level to influence a police officer’s decision to use deadly force. The police officer may not consciously decide to use deadly force because of the suspect’s race, but the suspect’s race nonetheless influences the officer, [altering] the officer’s perception of danger, threat, and resistance to authority.”<sup>2</sup>

Culture is more fundamental than social institutions, policies, and customs. Culture expresses the meaning of society and the significance of the ways in which we order our communities. The pivotal insight that I took from [Bernard] Lonergan is that “culture stands to social order as soul to body;”<sup>3</sup> that is to say, culture is the spirit that animates social institutions and customs, makes them intelligible, and expresses their meaning. This cultural “set of meanings and values” could endure despite changes in social institutions. Left unchallenged and unnoted, it simply adapts new social forms and expressions.

The specific disparities and race-based injustices change over time; the underlying symbol system, left unchallenged, assumes shifting social forms and expressions that nonetheless reflect the underlying set of meanings and values. As important as these functions are, however, “racism” does more. As a “culture,” racism is also

formative. Racism is a symbol system, a culture operating on a preconscious level, a learned and communal frame of reference that shapes identity, consciousness, and behavior—the way social groups understand their place and worth. Race, in the Western world, tells us who we are.<sup>4</sup>

The influence of culture leads us to consider the reality and power of nonconscious racial bias, what is called “unconscious racism.” Unconscious racism connotes how race can operate as a negative—yet not conscious, deliberate, or intentional—decision-making factor, due to the pervasive cultural stigma attached to dark skin color in Western culture. Its proponents argue that the U.S. population has been socialized, in tacit and hidden ways, to associate dark skin color with danger, stupidity, incompetence, immorality, promiscuity, and criminality.

## FORMING CONSCIENCE

There is a common recognition of the obligation to form one’s conscience. But little sustained attention has been given to the process by which one does so. More significantly, there is a lack of consensus about what is meant by “forming one’s conscience” or its desired goal. There appear to be at least two schools of thought. One approach views conscience formation as a process of information gathering. That is, in forming one’s conscience, one strives to develop as complete a picture as possible of the moral situation, the ethical dilemmas that are present and the decisions that must be made, the ramifications of possible courses of action, the counsel and wisdom offered by responsible authorities—including, most notably, that of the hierarchical magisterium—all toward the end of forming a responsible ethical decision and moral judgment on proposed courses of action.

The second approach views conscience formation as a process of character development. “Conscience formation” is a kind of shorthand for fostering growth in moral virtue and ethical discernment. The focus is not on the





... almost as color defines vision itself, race shapes the cultural eye—what we do and do not notice, the reach of empathy and the alignment of response.<sup>1</sup>

particular judgment or decision to be made. Rather, the emphasis is upon enhancing the agent's ability to be a more effective seeker of moral truths and values. The aim of conscience formation, then, is facilitating moral maturity and integrity. Moral catechesis thus seeks more to form a well-rounded decision maker rather than an upright moral decision.

The problem, therefore, is that neither approach in practice is adequate to the challenges raised by the reality of nonconscious racial bias. Both are dependent upon the conscious awareness and intentions of the moral agent. But as we have seen, one can be a person of upright virtue and fail to see racial offense and violation. One can be a sincere seeker after moral truth and fail to consider the insights of persons of color. One's culture, including one's moral formation, can induce one to not see such omissions, or to view such omissions as not being morally problematic.

A central challenge that a serious engagement with cultural sin—that is, culturally legitimated grave social evil—is well articulated in a haunting question posed by Lonergan: “How is a mind to become conscious of its own bias when that bias springs from a communal flight from understanding and is supported by the whole texture of a civilization?”<sup>5</sup> What, then, can free us from culturally induced blindness? If conscience is responsible to the

truth, and the culture of racism blinds the racially advantaged and privileged to a full awareness of moral wrongs/harms, what needs to happen if their consciences are to overcome such an ethical handicap? I suggest that a way forward lies in the cultivation of authentic interracial solidarity and transformative love (compassion). A major task of future Catholic reflection on conscience will be to articulate a process of conscience formation that would facilitate these realities.

What would authentic interracial solidarity entail? It would seem that the following would be among the essential requirements: an ability to hear and be present to black anger; the interior space to welcome perspectives that significantly differ from one's own; and the cultivation of genuinely affective relationships with persons of color.

These observations are more suggestive than definitive. Yet I am convinced that current Catholic reflection on conscience formation, being overly rational and abstract, lacks the appreciation of the nonrational depths needed to move people to see social reality differently and then act against their own social interests and malformed racial identities. It thus cannot reach deeply enough to confront and overcome unconscious racial biases.

Thus, conscience formation for Christians in the United States

must include the cultivation of the qualities essential for authentic interracial solidarity. Lacking these, (white) consciences will not be able to be aware of, much less overcome, their culturally induced or legitimated blindness to the suffering of racial injustice. ■

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From *Conscience and Catholicism: Rights, Responsibilities, and Institutional Responses* by David E. DeCosse and Kristin E. Heyer (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015). Reprinted with permission.

<sup>1</sup>Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America during the King Years 1954–1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), xi.

<sup>2</sup>Cynthia Ann Lee, “But I Thought He Had a Gun: Race and Police Use of Deadly Force,” *Hastings Race and Poverty Law School Journal* (2004).

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Terrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 102.

<sup>4</sup>Gary L. Chamberlain, “A Model to Confront Racism,” *Theology Today* 32 (January 1976), 355.

<sup>5</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1957), xiv.

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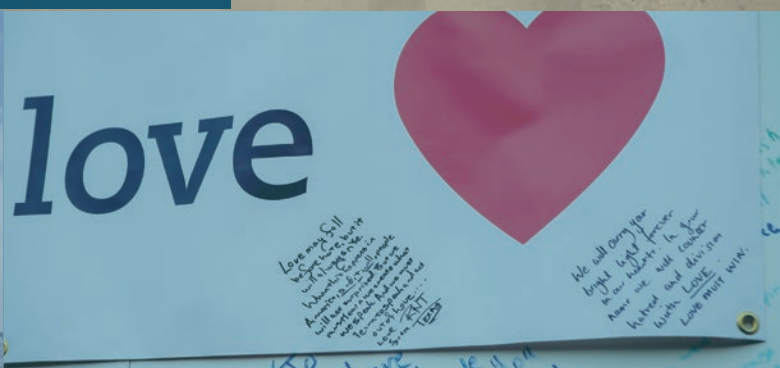
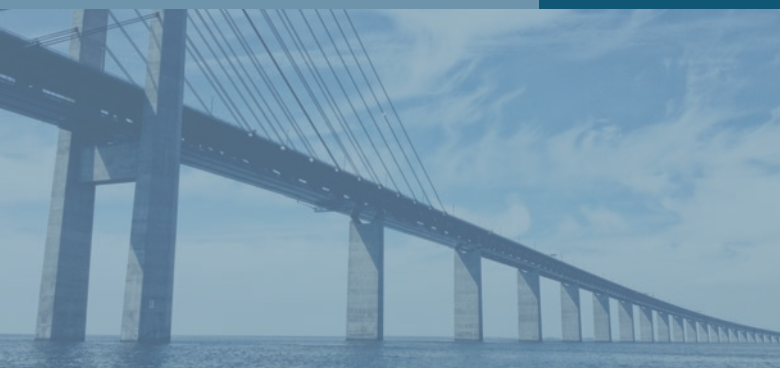
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# THE IGNATIAN FAMILY AND CULTURAL RACISM



MAUREEN O'CONNELL



*Excerpted from Maureen O'Connell's keynote address at the 2015 Ignatian Family Teach-in for Justice.*

**F**OR ABOUT 10 years now, ever since I started making pilgrimages around Philadelphia looking for God in community murals and the people who make them, I've discerned the Spirit calling me to wade into the troubled waters of racial injustice. And just about everyday I realize how much I don't know and understand about racism. The waters are deep and troubled. The temptation to stay on the shore is real, never mind the talk of bridges.

I know we need bridges, I suspect you know we need bridges, but we've got to be intentional with how we go about building them and maybe adjust our sense of where we need to start. And that's what I want to talk about: racism right here in the Ignatian family, something that creates dysfunction in any predominantly white family, even in the families taking up the call of social responsibility, taking up the call of holy boldness.

We cannot do our social justice work without talking about race. Certainly, we must start with a racial gap that is giant and in plain sight. We must accept that racism is killing too many of our brothers and sisters of color, our neighbors, *right here* in the United States. And in failing to stand in solidarity with these folks, racism is strangling the Ignatian Family, too by cutting off, in Joe Feagin's estimation, our capabilities for empathy, which is the most basic of the emotions needed for life in community.<sup>1</sup>

As Fr. Bryan Massingale has suggested, we need to turn and face a *culture* of racism in our family, to face the "soul sickness" of racism.<sup>2</sup> This culture helped to create the racial inequality gap when Europeans first arrived in the Americas more than five centuries ago, sorting people into arbitrary hierarchies of humanness based on physical attributes, assigning them worth, and then keeping them from organizing around common interests through laws, social mores, and vigilantism. This culture continues to dig a deep chasm in our collective American—and Catholic—psyche and grows the distance between those who are able to flourish and those who struggle to make ends meet.



I'm not talking here about intentional and interpersonal acts of hate or violence rooted in racial bias. Cultural racism might not explicitly endorse the acts of violence against black bodies we see on our Facebook pages and Twitter feeds on a seemingly daily basis. A culture of racism simply accepts the structural violence of poverty as normal or as given or as unavoidable, making standing by far more reasonable than standing up. "A focus on individual behaviors and attitudes does not adequately explain the existence of a racialized society, where race is a principal lens for social interpretations and understanding," Massingale says. "Racism is a cultural phenomenon, that is, a way of interpreting human color differences that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices of American life."<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Barndt likens whites' experience of a culture of racism as one of being "hermetically sealed" by four walls: a wall of separation and isolation as a result of generations of segregation in housing; a wall of illusions of our own innocence and delusions about the magnitude of racial disparities; a wall of amnesia about history and limited capacities for experiencing others' pain; and by power and privilege awarded us by our pigmentation that give rise to defensive postures.<sup>4</sup> Barndt says a culture of racism is one in which whites "lose our humanity, our authenticity, and our freedom."<sup>5</sup> Unlike folks of color who have these things taken from them by a culture of racism, whites hand them over in order to become and remain white.

Barndt's assessment strikes a chord for me when I think about growing up a white Catholic and products of Catholic schools and communities my entire life. We are like disciples "locked away in the upper room" after the crucifixion. We are caught in the repetitive loop of history to which we respond, at best, with inequality-sustaining charity. We are blinded by

our own judgments about the people on the receiving end of our charity, and hijacked by our self-righteous anger when they are not sufficiently grateful. We are choosing self-isolation in an all-white upper room of our own making rather than encountering the liberating mercy of the wounded and yet resurrected Christ in the people outside the door. Internalization of superiority naturally makes us, in words of faith-based activist John Perkins, "self-addicted;"<sup>6</sup> and self-addicted people cannot get out of our own ways; we're not bridges, we're roundabouts—going in circles with our guilt, our ignorance, with our charity.

So how do we transform the roadblock of racism into a bridge of solidarity, and perhaps into footbridges within our own communities that might lead to effective bridges to other racial justice movements now well under way in America? Five pieces of homework:

**Draw close to the pain of racism, or to use Pope Francis's word, encounter the pain of racism**—on your service team, in your high school class, in your parish, in yourself—in order to release yourself from the upper room of fearing pain. Draw close, and then just listen. Turn off the inner monologue and be present to others—and yourself—with your listening. And if you cannot draw close to the pain of racism then read three books: *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin, *Between the World and Me*, by Te-Nahesi Coates, and *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*, by Aimee Meredith Cox of Fordham University. Listen in order to learn how much you don't know and to be humble in discerning next steps.

**Get some training** on what racism is, where it comes from, and what we can do about it. This is critical for starting any kind of movement—you need a shared vocabulary, a sense of history, tools for doing an analysis

of the systems of white supremacy, and an inventory of challenges and gifts.

**Build an inclusive community** of people who are willing to wade into some of these waters; be sure to pay attention to who's not among you and also who's driving the bus.

**Do something with your bodies.** Brainstorm and prayer storm about something creative, something performative you can do with your body—individual and collective. Something that will make it difficult for people not to see the pain you're attempting to lift up, something that will make it difficult to see that pain in the same way again, something that will convert hearts to want to join you in the work to change structures in your community.

**Love the people in your community.** Recognize that your ability to love one another in and of itself is what unmasks the lie of racism that says we cannot really trust one another, that we cannot really know one another, that our destinies are not shared. Love is the thing that helps us see that building multicultural communities is often messy, but always beautiful. And celebrate that beauty. ■

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<sup>1</sup>See Joe Feagin's ideas about racism and "social alexithymia" in *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>See *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

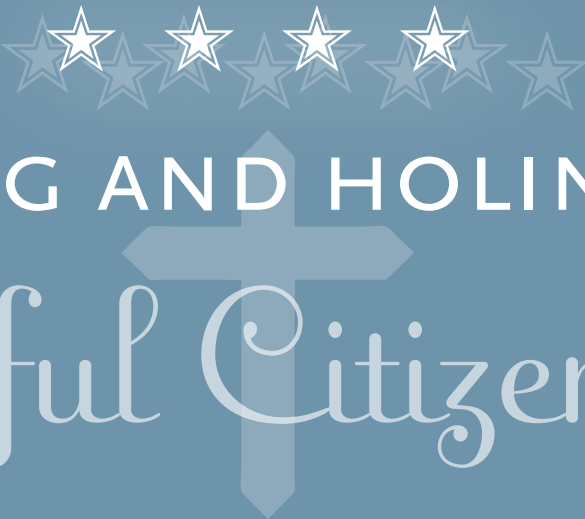
<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Barndt, *Understanding the Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Barndt, *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Journeying toward Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 110.

<sup>6</sup>Shane Claiborne and John M. Perkins, *Follow Me to Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 139.

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# VOTING AND HOLINESS: *Faithful Citizenship*

NICHOLAS P. CAFARDI

**W**HEN MOTHER TERESA won the Nobel Peace Prize, a reporter, cameras rolling, asked her if she were a holy person. She looked right at him and said, “It’s my job to be holy. It’s your job to be holy, too. Why do you think God put us on this earth?”

What does it mean to be holy? We know Jesus’ answer: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your whole soul and your whole mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus defines holiness in terms of love. How can this apply to the voting process?

To start, holiness requires us to inform our consciences. “Conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil.”<sup>1</sup> Untethered feelings are not conscience. Conscience is based on truth—Scripture, the Church’s traditions and teachings, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are obliged to apply all of these to moral choices like voting.

A first characteristic of holiness in the voting process is that it does not think that there are easy and readily apparent answers to complex political questions. This does not mean that complex issues should paralyze us or lead us to believe that every answer is equally correct. That is not the case. It does mean that we have to strive to be holy in discerning those answers.

We cannot use our Church as a political question-and-answer machine. When the scribes and the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus into a political debate about Roman power, he, knowing there was no good answer, refused to offer a specific response. Instead, he said, “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s; and to God, what is God’s.”

In holiness, when pastors speak to the morality of an issue, they should not choose political sides. The Church must leave the political answer, the “how” of solving political problems, even when those political problems have a moral component, to the informed consciences of the laity. Political strategy is not a question of holiness or even of faith.

It follows then that the Church cannot, legally or morally, tell us which candidates to vote for. In *Faithful Citizenship*, their guide to Catholic participation in the political process, the U.S. bishops write about the single-issue voter: “A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position.”

If you grant them their premise, then the bishops’ conclusion follows: The Catholic voter who votes for such a candidate has done something terribly wrong. But how likely is the prospect that a voter chooses a candidate for one reason only, and that reason is an evil one?

Normally, the basis on which we choose one candidate over another is multifaceted, just as life is multifaceted. We weigh the candidates against each other, evaluating their character as well as their stances on issues, agreeing with some of the candidate’s positions, perhaps not agreeing on others, but preferring one candidate over another after weighing complex alternatives.

Next, holiness does not let us demonize the other, those candidates we do not like, those people on the other side of a political issue. For example, I do not know anyone who belongs to the “party of death,” that is, someone who joins a political party because that party sees death as a social





good to be pursued. This does not mean that a criticism of the “culture of death” is inappropriate, but on the list of “life issues”—such as abortion, racial discrimination, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, capital punishment, care for the lives of the poor, unjust war, immigration, lack of chastity, lack of marital fidelity—no one political party has it all right or wrong.

Finally, holiness does not seek to control others. People, even if they are in error, have rights, rights that Catholics seeking to be holy in the political process cannot ignore. In doubt, we bring faith primarily by example, by our respect for those who disagree with us.

Where does that bring us? To a final proposition: This world is imperfect and imperfectable. The kingdom is here and not yet here. The transcendent interacts with the immanent, but the immanent endures. Holiness understands this and puts up with it. This is perhaps the devil’s

greatest tool: He has brought us to a place in our politics where the only choice is a Hobson’s choice—we either participate in a political process that allows wrong choices, some might even say immoral choices, or we withdraw from democracy.

Trying to control someone with a morality they do not perceive is not holiness. It certainly is not reflective of the Lord who calls but never compels, the Lord who said, “Take the log out of your eye before you tell your brother to remove the splinter from his.”

Human freedom, given us by our Creator, is the proper intermediary of holiness. In the political process holiness endures actions by political society that might be wrong, perhaps even evil, because to do otherwise requires that we violate the consciences and the God-given freedom of others.

Be wary of anyone who claims to know exactly what political choices God wants you to make. Our pastors can tell us the ethical and moral principles that should govern human

behavior; they can tell us the values that should be defended; and we must learn from them on these matters in order to inform our own consciences. We also have an obligation to look at Scripture, the teachings and traditions of the Church, the people of God, over the centuries. And we need to pray, to ask the Spirit for guidance.

None of this can be dodged. You cannot be holy in voting and fail to do these things. But once your conscience is properly formed, then—to paraphrase St. Augustine who said, “Love and do what you will”—I would say, “Love”—which means to be holy—“and vote how you will.” ■

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“Voting and Holiness: Faithful Citizenship” was originally published in *A Matter of Spirit*, Spring 2012. Excerpted from “Faithful Citizenship: Voting & Holiness.” Reprinted with permission of the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center. ©2012.

<sup>1</sup>USCCB, “Faithful Citizenship,” 7.

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Be wary of anyone who claims to know exactly what political choices God wants you to make.

# CONSCIENCE AND CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE

JOHN HARDT



CONSCIENCE IS ON the mind of bioethicists these days, religious and secular alike. This interest is spawned, in part, by reports of patient and consumer encounters in which health care professionals decline to prescribe or fill prescriptions or participate in a course of care they deem ethically inappropriate. These denials typically arise around areas of heated social debate. Stories of patients or consumers stymied in their attempt to obtain legally sanctioned medications such as emergency contraception and Viagra populate newspaper columns and professional journals, bringing to the fore the question of whether health care professionals should allow their moral commitments to restrict treatment options within their practice. State legislatures are weighing in as well, in some cases protecting, through legislative actions, a health care professional's right of conscience and, in other cases, mandating that conscience not frustrate the delivery of legally sanctioned medications and socially accepted clinical interventions.

Arguments against conscience in health care gather around two related concerns. The first concern about conscience in the clinical encounter bears upon the nature of conscience itself and whether it has a place in the practice of medicine. It is argued that the admittance of conscience into the clinical encounter offers safe harbor for physician bigotry, idiosyncrasy, and bias under the umbrella of conscience.<sup>1</sup> Conscience, it is feared, may serve as an unassailable and wholly private "moral" refuge. It is frequently cast as unreasoned in its thinking and potentially at odds with the professional duties of the physician to meet the needs of his or her patient.

Others worry that the rise of conscience signals a blurring of the line between one's personal moral commitments and one's professional obligations. Some have suggested that conscience should be prohibited from influencing

the clinical encounter based on an accepted demarcation of private morality from public and professional roles. In this framework, physicians have a professional obligation to provide all legally sanctioned medications when patients' requests align with clinical indications regardless of their own personal moral reservations.

The concept of conscience in Catholic health care is, at the very least, familiar to those of us who work in this ministry. It is, perhaps, most evident to us in our public and practiced stance against various clinical interventions like abortion and sterilization that are contrary to the Catholic vision of the human person. More broadly, we abide by the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services that guide our daily practice and inform both our institutional consciences as well as the consciences of individual health care providers who work within our facilities. But the resurgent interest in the topic of conscience in the clinical encounter offers us a chance to consider again the significance of conscience for Catholic health care as we work to understand our ministry in relation to the morally pluralistic world in which we practice.

Conscience, then, in the Catholic tradition, is yet another way of speaking about the moral life in general, one that is shaped by the natural law, lived experience, the community of which we are a part, and the deposit of faith we share as a believing community. While a person makes a moral judgment as an individual, his or her conscience is informed and nurtured by the sources of the tradition and community from which it comes. In this way, a Catholic position of conscience is neither hidden nor atomistic, but open to critique, intellectually accessible, and shaped in conversation and thinking within a larger moral tradition. Moreover, because conscience in the Catholic tradition is not a wholly subjective judgment of personal preference, but rather a moral judgment informed by and tested against



a moral community and tradition, it is not prone to harbor bigotry or personal bias. For these reasons, one of the first steps in reasonably engaging our secular colleagues and one another in this discussion of the appropriate place of conscience in health care will entail our working to understand the various definitions of conscience employed. It may be the case that different conceptions of conscience are speaking past each other in this important dialogue.

The fact that thinking about conscience in the Catholic tradition is a perspective from which to view the moral life in general indicates that one cannot be expected to abandon conscience and, therefore, act amorally

“Conscience signifies the perceptible and demanding presence of the voice of truth in the subject himself.”<sup>2</sup> One, then, cannot be expected to do that which he or she knows to be wrong despite the fact that social mores may expect otherwise.

The importance of this claim becomes clearer if we consider a component of conscience that is too often overlooked in the current discussion, namely, the formative element of conscience for the moral agent. Detractors of conscience in health care have suggested that conscience is wielded not for a higher moral purpose but as a weapon in the culture war, and thus intended to impose one’s morals on another.

dating the wishes of others or preserving a consensus that one knows to be morally detrimental. If we as a society are sincerely interested in protecting moral pluralism, then we need to protect the possibility of authentic moral disagreement not only at the level of theory but also in practice. Conscience must have freedom to function. It constitutes the moral center of the human person, whether religious or secular in orientation. This freedom of moral deliberation and judgment cannot be restricted to one’s “private” life as morality transcends social and professional boundaries. While there is little doubt that its presence will create tension, frustration, inconvenience, and



While a person makes a moral judgment as an individual, his or her conscience is informed and nurtured by the sources of the tradition and community from which it comes.

in one’s professional role. Any human decision that bears upon the goodness or badness of human action in reality is, in this sense, an act of conscience. An intellectually coherent sense of the moral life requires, then, that we, as integrated persons, maintain the fundamental moral commitments of our lives across the various roles we embody. Banning conscience from the clinical encounter is impossible if we hold to the idea that the moral life is more than mere personal preference that could be temporarily suspended to fulfill the expectations of one’s professional role, thus meeting the personal preferences of one’s patients or clients. The Catholic tradition recognizes in the human person the capacity for truth, which sets an objective standard for the moral life. As Cardinal Ratzinger wrote,

This perception of conscience does not adequately account for a Catholic conception of conscience. For us, moral judgments consist not only of a consideration of the consequences of our actions on others, but also the effect they have on us as moral agents. Our moral faculties can dull over time to the extent that we habitually choose against our moral inclinations.

There is little question that the moral commitments of Catholic health care are increasingly viewed as alien to the values of our dominant culture. We should, then, anticipate that challenges to both individual and institutional conscience will continue to arise. While adherence to conscience may, from time to time, create an uncomfortable tension in our lives and our work, the truth that we know takes priority over accommo-

ngoing disagreement, it is an absolute necessity if we are to understand ourselves as free human beings. ■

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“Conscience and Catholic Health Care” was originally published in *Health Care Ethics USA*, Winter 2008. We thank the Catholic Health Association (CHA) for making this resource available.

<sup>1</sup>See for example Julian Savulescu, “Conscientious Objection in Medicine,” *BMJ* 332 (February 4, 2006): 294–297.

<sup>2</sup>For an excellent collection of reflections on this principle, see the “Report on a Theological Dialogue on the Principle of Cooperation” sponsored by CHA ([www.chausa.org/coopdialogue](http://www.chausa.org/coopdialogue)).

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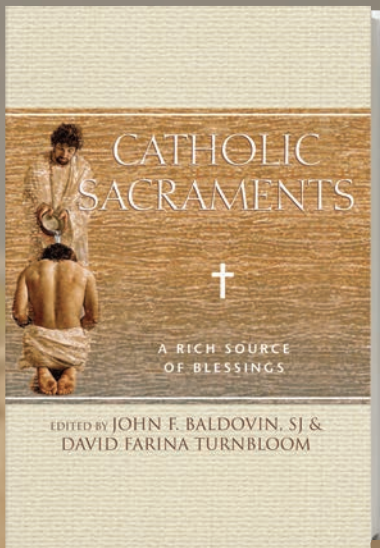
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