Research Bibliography on Conscience

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Articles/Chapters on Conscience and Moral Development


Calls for a return to the realism of Aquinas and an abandonment of so-called Kantian transcendentalism which Belmans considers Rahner to have appropriated.


The Extraordinary and Ordinary Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015 and the subsequent papal Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* have occasioned considerable discussion and debate on a wide range of issues related to marriage, divorce, admission to Communion and the connection between discipline and doctrine. Since the close of the Synod, while waiting for the promised Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, various understandings of conscience and its relation to Church teaching have been articulated by a number of hierarchs and theologians. Since the release of Pope Francis' Post Synodal Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* this debate has actually intensified and four cardinals made public five *Dubia* ("doubts" or "questions") regarding the interpretation of certain points of the Exhortation. Inasmuch as *Veritatis splendor* has been referenced in these various discussions, there has not been any sustained
treatment of that Encyclical's teaching on the proper role of conscience and conscience formation as it relates to magisterial teaching. Now may be an opportune time to flesh out a bit more this lacuna. First, I will examine in some detail the relevant section of the Encyclical, and then I will conclude by offering an interpretation of St. Ignatius Loyola's "Rules for Thinking with the Church" in the light of the papal magisterium of Pope Francis as one possible way forward to reduce some of the tensions around the perceived impasse.

Keywords: *Veritatis splendor*, Synod on the Family, conscience, Magisterium, Ignatius of Loyola Rules for Thinking with the Church, Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis, *Dubia*, discernment, obsequium religiosum, paradigms


This 2,000 word article looks carefully at how “conscience” is used in Pope Francis’ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* The Joy of Love, which was released on April 8, 2016.


Bujo is a diocesan priest from Zaire and currently the Head of Department of Moral Theology at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.


First appeared in *Second Opinion* 17/2 (1991)


Suggests an approach using the neo-scholastic tradition, and gives as an exemplar the work of Fagothy.

Conley teaches philosophy at Fordham University.


Develops a theory of conscience based on Lonergan's study of the human subject, and then presents some observations on what such a theory might imply in terms of an ethical style of creative, self-transcending subjectivity.


Coriden, James. Conscience & Communion: What’s a Remarried Catholic to Do?


Canonist who argues that under certain conditions a divorced and remarried Catholic who does not have an annulment can still in good conscience opt to return to the sacraments.


Essay written for the Canon Law Society of America's seminar on The Role of Law in the Church.


DeCosse analyzes and critiques the current stance espoused by various U.S. Bishops in their treatment of conscience and Magisterial teaching on concrete matters of the moral law which have political ramifications, especially in the areas of sexual ethics.

DeCosse has his doctorate in theological ethics from Boston College and currently is director of campus ethics programs at Santa Clara University in California.


One of several articles in this issue devoted to an analysis of Veritatis Splendor.


Demmer, Klaus, M.S.C. "L'agire morale tra norma e coscienza." In La norma della vita


From the author supplied abstract: The article discusses the relationship between morality and the marketplace. In an economic exchange, both players have it in their interest to seem to act responsibly by mutual identification or sympathy. The bloom of morality thus arises from the swamp of the marketplace as economic actors engage in the pursuit of happiness in what the author calls "take-out morality."


_____.  "Libertà fondamentale e morale."  In AA.VV. Libertà-liberazione nella vita morale, 43.64.  Brescia, 1968.


Fuchs argues that it is a fundamental theological error to conceive of God as existing “alongside” the world and us a as “commander” and as “ruler” who sends in moral commands from on high.


Discussion following Fuchs' presentation is also printed: pp. 47-56.


Traces the major developments in the understanding of conscience from classical and
biblical usage to the full range of significance it had acquired by the high Middle Ages. Originally presented to the Society of Christian Ethics in 1984.

Gaffney is Professor of Christian Ethics at Loyola University, New Orleans.


Defends and defines freedom of conscience as a right derived from an obligation which is implied in the principle of the Golden Rule. Originally presented to the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1982 and found in the 1983 CTSA Proceedings.


Describes both moral conscience and the superego, their superficial similarities, and crucial differences, and concludes with some pastoral reflections on several areas where the recognition of the difference between genuine moral conscience and the functioning of the superego can be illuminating, and where a failure to make such a distinction can result in great harm.


Gudorf, Christine E. "How will I recognize my conscience when I find it? [example of abortion]" Philosophy and Theology 1 (1986): 64-83.


Gula is Professor of Moral Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California.


Hanigan, James P. “Conscience and the Holy Spirit.” The Catholic Theological Society of

One article of a special issue devoted to the larger question of whether a Christian law-maker (including a referendum in which every voter would be a "law-maker") is obliged to insert Christian moral teaching into civil law. The specific context for this question is the abortion question in Ireland.


Translations available in many other languages as well.


Johnstone, an Australian, was professor of moral theology at the Alphonsianum in Rome and now teaches at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.


Discusses the interrelationship between solidarity and conscience, and uses four paradigms of conscience to illustrate different ways in which the role and function of conscience can be seen.  Johnstone discusses also "critical conscience" using the work of Bartolomé de Las Casas as an example to illustrate the ways in which authentic solidarity can function along with critical conscience to unmask forms of oppression and false solidarity.


Juros is a Polish theologian.


Reviews the traditional Roman Catholic teaching on conscience from the perspective of traditional concepts on the conscience as application as well as current concepts from the creative conscience to conscience as decision, as well as integrated concepts.

Kaczynski teaches at the Angelicum in Rome.


Discusses conscience in terms of subjectivity and objectivity, and asserts that these two elements are unified in the interiority and transcendence of conscience. Uses many references to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Veritatis Splendor*, the writings of Karol Wojtyla, and Thomas Aquinas. Critical of Kantian moral autonomy as being merely subjective. Stresses also the necessity of conscience formation in the light of faith.


Carefully written synopsis in the light of the realities of the American legal and political context of the Catholic doctrine on the primacy of conscience and *Lumen gentium*'s call for *obsequium religiosum* ("religious submission of the will"). Documenting this in Thomas Aquinas, *Gaudium et spes*, *Dignitatis humanae*, the USCCB’s *Faithful Citizenship* as well as commentaries from theologians such as John Courtney Murray, Joseph Ratzinger, Richard Gula and Francis Sullivan, SJ. Also included are counter-positions on the primacy of conscience, most notably from Cardinal George Pell of Sydney, Australia.

Originally published in the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 6/2 (2009). Kalscheuer is a lawyer and professor in the Boston College School of Law.


This chapter outlines the theory of probabilism, while the remainder of the book discusses infallibility, divorce and remarriage, and many of the issues connected with the proclamation of the birth control teaching of the Church.


Brief historical overview of the tradition of this issue.

At this writing Keenan was professor of moral theology at the then Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA.

Brief overview of the theology of conscience from the Bible through Vatican II, with some additional reference to Thomas Aquinas. Suitable for a review of the theme or perhaps for a non-specialist adult audience.

At this writing Keenan was the Canisius Professor at Boston College.


Part of the annual “Notes on Moral Theology” section which Keenan oversees. In this article Keenan outlines an understanding of conscience that would be more socially oriented and accountable, as distinguished from seeing it as (religious) freedom to dissent from human laws. Reference is made to European use of conscience as remorse after World War II, and proposes that this notion might be employed in the United States to aid in our repentance for our own racist history—which in turn would require greater solidarity with others and vigilance against threats posed to humanity.

At this writing Keenan is the Canisius Professor at Boston College.


Discusses some difficulties Protestant theology has with the concept of an "autonomous conscience."


Lehmann, Paul. "The Decline and Fall of Conscience." In *Conscience: Theological and


Argues that contemporary personalist accounts of conscience are open to a psychology which is problematic in relating to the reality of the objective moral order.

McCarthy is Assistant Professor of Theology at Mount Saint Mary’s College in Emmitsburg


The Congress was sponsored jointly the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the Study of Matrimony and the Family of the Lateran University (Msgr. Carlo Caffarra), and the Holy Cross (Santa Croce) Center in Rome of the University of Navarra (Opus Dei).

McInerny is the Michael P. Grace Professor Medieval Studies at the University of Notre Dame.


Melina is professor of moral theology at the John Paul II Institute for Studies of Marriage and the Family in Rome.


Melina holds that Christian conscience is a call to assume an internal, ecclesial form in conformity with a Marian disponability to the Spirit. This article does not discuss Veritatis Splendor.


Navone is professor of biblical theology in the Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical Gregorian University.


References the controversial decision in 2009-10 of Bishop Thomas Olmsted regarding the revoking the Catholic status in Phoenix of the hospital and declaration of excommunication for one of administrator that allowed the termination of a life-threatening pregnancy to save the life of the mother. O’Rourke distinguishes this as a prudential judgment and thus the response called for by the Catholic faithful differs from that which would be accorded to either an infallible doctrine or even a non-infallible statement of moral doctrine.


Overview of various elements of the traditional Christian understanding of conscience.


Robinson develops the thesis that conscience is the area where the individual experiences the Spirit of God, and that the Bible is the means by which God addresses the human person today. This address is not so much a narrative as a confrontation with conscience which results in confession, repentance, restitution and change. Uses the story of David and Nathan, plus makes some remarks about Jesus' use of parables.


A rather traditional and largely pre-Vatican II treatment.


An excellent treatment of contrasting theologies of conscience as exemplified by figures such as Archbishop Charles Chaput and Germain Grisez on one hand, and Josef Fuchs, SJ and Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R. on the other.


Offers a summary and critique of the 6 July 1991 editorial in La Civiltà Cattolica on this topic.


Spohn did his doctoral dissertation in Christian ethics under James M Gustafson at the University of Chicago on Jonathan Edwards' "religious affections." After several years of teaching moral theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Spohn moved to Santa Clara University where he taught until his death in 2005.


Stafford is former Archbishop of Denver, Colorado, and now works in the Vatican.


One of several articles in this issue devoted to an analysis of Veritatis Splendor.


From the author-supplied abstract: This article uses a chance encounter with a supermarket checkout clerk as an occasion for reframing contemporary debates about workplace accommodations and the religious politics of contraception. Scholarship on workplace religion has tended to assume a rigid distinction between the religious spaces in which conscience is formed and the secular spaces to which claims of conscience are brought. In contrast, I argue that we might productively redescribe employee claims of conscience as corporately produced, rather than emanating from the realm of the private or personal. I reimagine the workplace as an important site of ethical subject formation, as a space in and through which moral claims are constituted, rather than to which they are brought, and I explore how accommodations can produce the very differences they are meant to protect. In this way, my discussion reveals how legal mandates and corporate policies join together to produce new moral subjects.


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Books on Conscience and Moral Development


Primarily centered on Vatican II’s understanding of religious freedom as developed in Dignitatis humanae.

Saggi di Nazareno Fabbretti, Pietra Pavan, José-Maria Gonzalez-Ruiz, Edward Schillebeeckx, John Courtney Murray, e Michele Pellegrino.


Author's training and primary point of view is in jurisprudence, not moral philosophy or theology. Part I considers theories of law from Aquinas to Holmes.


Contains a number of articles treating of conscience from diverse perspectives, theological, psychological, philosophical, civil disobedience, Humanae vitae, etc.


Bretzke, James T., S.J. A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary

15 essays, mostly from the political Left, which focus on foundational issues like conscience formation, prudential judgment and a correct reading of the moral tradition of core concepts such as intrinsic evil and compromise with evil. One hearkens back to the 1986 Bishops Pastoral on the Economy, suggesting this might provide a more helpful model of political consultation and engagement, while several others highlight problems with the apparent conflation of enunciating moral principles with the call for adopting only one political policy or voting legitimacy. Finally, a couple helpful essays, such as Bryan Massingale's on the problematic equation of opposition to slavery with abortion, give good interpretive illustrations of the kind of practical moral discernment that is needed in approaching the moral task of political participation in a way that is truly promotive of Christian holiness. The collection is balanced and covers most aspects from the abstract to the concrete, though with a fair amount of repetition of basic premises and recaps of American religious and political history (due to lack of coordination presumably about the nature of the individual essays).

Reviewed by James T. Bretzke, S.J. in *Theological Studies* (forthcoming)


Discusses the role and function of conscience and emotions in the context of American society, taking into account new psychological understandings of self, emotion, reason, intuition, problem-solving and developmental change.


Psychological treatment of the obsessive-compulsive disorder and moral scruples.


Treats conscience as the drive of the personal subject towards an authentic self-transcendence realized in each instance of creative comprehension, critical judgment, responsible decision, and genuine love. Conn bases his treatment of authenticity in the personality theories of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, as well as on the philosophical transcendental method of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.


Designed for undergraduate and/or adult education use.


Looks at how daily moral decisions shape our lives and how these decisions in turn are shaped by the guidance of the Spirit, Scripture, interaction with community, and formation of conscience.


Considers conscience from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant perspectives, as well as treatment of economic and psychological aspects.


L'etica teologica è scienza per analogia. "Scienza del senso direttiva dell'azione," l'etica teologica ha per oggetto non un dato statico, ma la "soggettività aperta alla trascendenza" nella libertà. Aiuta la coscienza a chiarire a se stessa il fine (il senso) e a elaborare il contenuto della norma facendo divenire "correttezza" la "bontà." Inserita nel conflitto storica fra bene e male, a volte ripercorre soluzioni già collaudate (le norme), a volte rischia la soluzione nuova, sapendo che ogni scelta non solo accresce il bene o il male della storia, ma si pone come possibilità ermeneutica per il prossimo. Persona e natura, persona e atto, antropologia e cristologia, peccato e conversione sono il luoghi dell'analisi, condotta con linguaggio assai oscuro. [dalla recensione pubblicata da Il Regno 35 (15 aprile 1990): 229-230.]


Fucek was professor of moral theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.


O'Riordan is professor emeritus at the Alphonsianum in Rome.


García de Haro teaches at the Istituto Giovanni Paolo II in Rome.


Would be helpful and appropriate for use in adult education groups, RCIA, and as a good non-technical and quite readable introduction to conscience and moral decision-making in the Roman Catholic tradition.
Gula is Professor of Moral Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California.


Eight scholars from the U.S. and Europe reflect upon issues: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Ralph McInerny, Robert Spämann, Servais Pinckaers, Wojciech Giertych, Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, Carlo Cafarra, and John M. Haas.


Deals with the connection between faith and politics, and investigates the implications for worship and liturgy.


According to Kilpatrick, the basic problem with moral education in our schools is that
traditional character education has been abandoned in favor of a "non-judgmental" value approach, which focusses on the student's own ego and feelings to the exclusion of moral principles.
Kilpatrick is professor of education at Boston College.

Langston, Douglas C.  *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre.*


Reflection on the role of Catholic teaching for the individual conscience.  Treatment of a theological perspective of conscience, a psychological overview, as well as special themes related to conscience, such as freedom, grace, virtue, and sin, plus the teaching of Jesus and the role of the Church.

McNamara, Patrick H.  *Conscience First, Tradition Second: A Study of American Catholics.*


A revised doctoral dissertation which investigates the meaning of conscience and its relationship to responsibility.  Mount evaluates the contributions of Bonhoeffer, Ebeling, Fletcher, Gustafson, Háring, Lehmann, H. Richard Niebuhr, Thielicke, Tillich, and others.  Mount earned a Masters at Yale, where he studied under H. Richard Niebuhr and James Gustafson, and a PhD from Duke.


Reviewed by Margaret Atkins Crsa in *New Blackfriars* (6 October 2016)

From Atkins Crsa’s review: “Alexander Murray is a master of the methods of history, and loves to search out the hidden voices in places that seemed silent. One of these places is sacramental confession, hidden not least because confessors were bound by the seal. Murray’s five essays all hover around the constitution *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which required of all the faithful annual Communion, preceded by individual confession to a priest. Confession was the point at which the secret heart and mind of the ordinary person met the community and the institution it represented. Murray thus coaxes from his sources the histories of conscience from both the inside and from the outside and their interplay with each other. He also traces the
shifting relationship between sin and crime as the church responded to the changing powers of the state.”


An anthology of 13 articles by a number of noted contemporary theologians: Protestant, Catholic and Jewish.


Part One presents a basic outline of Catholic moral theology in terms of conscience and decision-making, while Part Two applies this in three main areas: sexual ethics, medical ethics, and social ethics. Book is suitable for the non-expert, parish study groups or a basic undergraduate course in theology.

Overberg is professor of theology at Xavier University.


This volume probes the meaning and ethical implications of the powerful symbol of vocation from the vantage of contemporary Catholic women, with particular attention to the experiences of religious women. Intended as a follow-up to Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology, the new book combines new research and writing with some previously published essay, which are scatted in sources that make them inaccessible to most readers today.

Sr. Patrick taught at Carleton University as the William H. Laird Professor of Religion and the Liberal Arts in Northfield MN.

Intended as a followup to Liberating Conscience this volume, containing both new research and previously published essays, looks at the meaning of vocation of contemporary Catholic women.


Feminist condemnation of patriarchy, especially as manifested in the Roman Catholic Magisterium, and often rather polemical.


Presents a personal interpretation of conscience drawing on Scripture, ethics, psychology, and the stories of women’s lives to demonstrate the virtue of creative responsibility.


Compares and contrasts the views of Germain Grisez and Bernard Häring as representatives to the “non-revisionist” and “revisionist” schools of moral theology.

Smith is Asst. Professor of Theology and Interdisciplinary Studies at St. Mary’s University of Minnesota in St. Paul.


Proceedings of the 10th Bishops' Workshop, held in Dallas, Texas from 4-8 February 1991.


Reviewed by Margaret Atkins Crsa in *New Blackfriars* (6 October 2016)  

From Atkins Crsa’s review: “Sorabji's book covers a vast sweep, from fifth century Athens to contemporary India and the United States. He gives a history of the concept of conscience, taking in some of the problems of freedom that it raised in specific contexts. He aims to identify a ‘core concept’, which he sees as more or less stable, and which he hopes can thrive without the support of religion.”


Dissertation done under Mariasusai Dhavamony, S.J.


Doctoral dissertation done under Klaus Demmer, M.S.C.


Comparing the two theologians' understanding of conscience, and relates this to the testimonies of the Word and Spirit. While Luther and Calvin have different emphases, they fundamentally agree that the foundation of the peace, assurance, and certainty of conscience lies in the grace of God, as revealed to the conscience both by the external witness of the Word of God, and the internal witness of the Spirit.

Zachman teaches reformation studies at Notre Dame.


9 papers, plus discussion, from Josef Fuchs, Lawrence Kohlberg, Paul Wiengartner, Gerhard Zecha and others on conscience in terms of various aspects: foundational, social, educational, and special topics.

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