

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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**See page 2 for exciting news!**

## There Is God

*by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR*

**R**emember the 1969 song “[Put a Little Love in Your Heart](#)”? It was performed by Jackie DeShannon, who wrote it with her brother, Randy Myers, and Jimmy Holiday. Each time I hear it, it brings back memories of a time when love seemed to be the answer to everything.

The pop songs we listen and dance to reflect our secular hopes and feelings about romantic love. Christian music reflects these same feelings, hopes, and desires with respect to our relationship with God.

But despite the vibe and ever-present hopeful lyrics of these songs, is there evidence that this kind of love is real? Is love an experience mirrored in music, or is it simply a once-upon-a-time feeling that seems further away with each passing day?

I’m constantly amazed at how much easier it is to feel disconnected rather than connected. So many opportunities bring feelings of alienation, isolation, and being out of touch. Far fewer bring feelings of inclusion, connection, and yes, even love. Does this reflect reality, or do we judge everyday experiences too harshly and maximize their consequences?

Everyone feels disconnected and unloved sometimes, but these feelings are more pronounced for people with an affliction that maximizes feelings of isolation. Continual anxiety, fear, and stirrings of guilt over decisions made or not made and actions taken or not taken encourages negative interpretation.

One perspective that the popular love songs of any day seem to miss—and which the sacred hymns hint at but do not easily proclaim—is that although God is love, and God is much more than a feeling, God’s love is present in the moment of disconnect as well as at the moment of connection. God is most present and loving when we feel the most vulnerable, isolated, and alienated. Discovering and celebrating the presence of God’s love at the most profoundly distressing moments it is an authentic experience of what it means to be a human being,

**T**his has been a long introduction to what is really a single point: To discover the presence of God and experience the profound

feeling of being connected and loved, try to see scrupulosity as a vehicle of the manifestation of God's grace and love.

This might sound impossible—a quest for completeness that seems out of reach—but it's not. We often discover truth and beauty in ways we least expect. The unpredictable always grabs our attention. Love songs speak of finding “unexpected” love, of

embracing “impossible” feelings, of arriving at the moment of truth when you know you're connected and that you're going to be fine.

If you can stop seeing your struggle as the point of disconnect in your relationship with God and try to see it as a point of connection, you will discover that in your scrupulosity, there is God.

There is God.



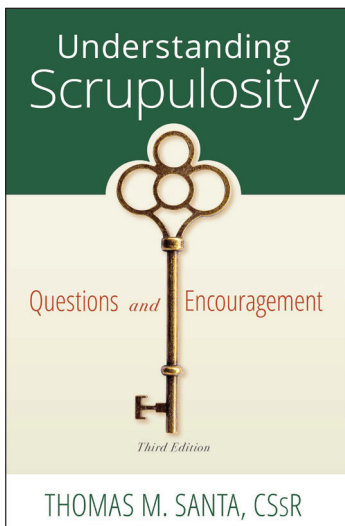
### **Fr. Tom returns to Radio Maria USA!**

Fr. Tom Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," returns to Radio Maria USA Thursday, March 2, at 11 am ET.

**To listen:** Go to [radiomaria.us](http://radiomaria.us) and click How to Listen.

**To call in:** 866-333-MARY (6279)

**To e-mail a question to Fr. Santa:** Complete the form at [radiomaria.us/scrupulosity](http://radiomaria.us/scrupulosity).



### **Hot off the Press!**

The new edition of Fr. Tom Santa's highly acclaimed book *Understanding Scrupulosity* is here!

Based on a half-century of questions and answers from the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter, *Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement* addresses sin, thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and sexuality, as well as confession, self-worth, prayer, and God's grace.

This third edition includes new information on identifying and understanding behaviors associated with scrupulosity and explains medical breakthroughs in treatment.

To order, go to [Liquori.org](http://Liquori.org).

# Thoughts That Can't Be Shaken

The following reflection is adapted from [Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement](#) by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR (Liguori Publications, © 2017. All rights reserved).

What is scrupulosity? The simplest answer, and perhaps the traditional answer, is that it's an age-old problem that was long understood as a "tender conscience." Great saints have spoken about it and have counseled their followers about it. Still others, such as St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Ignatius of Loyola, had it. Many people understand scrupulosity to be a religious problem, and others see it specifically as a Catholic problem.

For many years, mental-health professionals dismissed scrupulosity as a symptom of neurotic behavior, but scrupulosity has been long recognized by priests, rabbis, and spiritual directors. Only recently has it been understood as a possible subtype of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Recent studies suggest that approximately 3 million people in the United States have OCD; about 6% of this group (about 180,000 people) have religious scrupulosity.

People with scrupulosity describe it as "thoughts that cannot be shaken," being possessed by "a thousand frightening fantasies," or being unrelentingly "pricked by a pin."

Joseph Ciarrocchi, PhD, author of [The](#)

[Doubting Disease](#) (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), identified the core experience of scrupulosity as "an intrusive idea, often associated with a sinful impulse, which the person abhors but cannot shake." Good people from all walks of life find themselves possessed by a thought or desire that won't go away. Even when they realize they're obsessing, they can't summon the logic or rational argument that would help. The thought continues to disturb them through no fault of their own.

Since their obsessive thoughts are associated with faith and spirituality, their entire experience of faith is marked with anxiety and fear instead of peace and strength. People with scrupulosity are doing all they can to believe and be hopeful, but they just can't shake the sense of impending doom, disappointment, or eventual condemnation.

But not all is gloom. Prescription medicines and behavioral therapy have proved quite helpful. St. Alphonsus said, "Obey in all things your spiritual Father, for by the practice of obedience you will always be secure. And doubt not that if you practice it you will be saved, and will become a saint."



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

# MAILBOX

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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

**Q** *I have a very strong feeling for a coworker. When I'm around her, I feel anxious that I might say or do something wrong. Because the feeling is so strong, I'm concerned that I must be fooling around with temptation and not avoiding the near occasion of sin. I am considering transferring to another department to avoid her.*

**A** So you want to avoid feeling the sense of attraction that is a normal part of being human? Engage her in conversation, even if it's silly conversation, and see where it leads. Maybe she has the same feelings about you. We're not talking about the near occasion of sin; we're talking about the normal experience of relationship and attraction.

**Q** *We have a family wedding coming up. Many extended members of my family no longer go to church. If they try to receive Communion at the nuptial Mass, what is my responsibility? To avoid unpleasantness at the wedding, should I make a general announcement, perhaps at the rehearsal dinner, reminding everyone about the rules?*

**A** No, you should do nothing of the sort. It's not your business. You have no responsibility to take action. This isn't the time to discuss their spiritual practices. The priest is trained in these situations, so let him make the call. Avoid unpleasantness by choosing not to make the situation unpleasant, especially since you have no obligation here.

**See page 2 for exciting news!**

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