

Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

Healing the Conscience: St. John Paul II's Teaching on the Conscience Healed by Christ

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Abstract

This thesis shows John Paul II's teaching on what the conscience is, how the conscience is wounded by original sin, and how the conscience is healed by Jesus Christ. Through the many writings of Pope St. John Paul II, I show that the conscience has its origin in God and is founded in God's truth. The original gift of conscience from God was to help man enact God's truth in the concrete events and relationships of his life. The sin of our first parents wounded man's conscience and disrupted its integral relationship with truth, hindering man's ability to act in accordance with the truth. Continuous personal acts of sin further wounded conscience's relationship with truth.

God patiently worked in history to bring man's conscience back to its original integrity, forming the people of Israel and giving them the moral law. However, the conscience needed an interior remedy which would fully restore man's conscience to God's truth. God the Father sent the perfect remedy to man's conscience through the gift of His Son in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ heals the conscience by His divine charity given to man through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, freeing the conscience from the bondage and burden of sin. Jesus gives conscience a share in his charity through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and most especially in the Holy Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian conscience. The saints of Christ's Church are the perfect witness of the conscience healed by Christ.

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~ To Mary, Mother of the Christian Life ~

Introduction

One day Jesus was teaching “and the power of the Lord was with him *to heal*” (Lk 5:17 RSVCE). Some men trusted in the power of Jesus *to heal*, and they brought to him a man who was paralyzed on a stretcher. The crowd made it difficult for the men to bring the paralytic to Christ, so they exerted an extra effort to carry him on the roof and lower him down to rest at the feet of Jesus. Expecting Jesus to heal the man from his bodily infirmity, Jesus speaks a word that is rather surprising to all present: “Man, your sins are forgiven” (Lk 5:20). Jesus goes directly to the conscience of the man, that ultimate gift from God which bears witness to the truth in man’s life and action. Jesus “perceives that the man is in need of more than physical healing,”¹ seeking to relieve his conscience from the sin that paralyzes his relationship with God and hinders him from acting in accordance with the truth.

Christ was sent by the Father not primarily to heal the body, but to heal the conscience from the suffocating wounds of sin. Pope St. John Paul II shared in this mission of Christ in his preaching, teaching, and ministry. He once said to university students on a retreat prior to his becoming Pope:

In the course of a retreat *conscience* is always the central issue... So in the course of this retreat[,] we must focus our whole attention on this issue, bearing in mind that for each one of us we are dealing here with the culminating element which defines and expresses our selfhood and our human and personal dignity.²

John Paul, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, had his “whole attention” fixed on the conscience of man. He knew well that Jesus Christ came not primarily to heal the body, but to heal man’s conscience from the burden of sin and to bring him back into relationship with the Truth. One could say that “the culminating element” of Pope John Paul’s mission as Pope was, with Jesus, to go to the conscience and *heal*.

¹ Pablo T. Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 118.

² John Paul II, in *The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), 93-94; emphasis added.

Pope John Paul carries within his name *St. Paul*, the Apostle to the Gentiles. St. Paul was, like John Paul, focused on the conscience of man, speaking of it in his letters with astounding repetition.³ Paul goes to the conscience, the seat of truth, as one who preaches to those who do not yet know Christ but have the law “written on their hearts” (Rom 2:15). Thus, he reveals “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23) of their consciences to be Jesus Christ, Truth Incarnate: “by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2Cor 4:2). St. Paul preaches with untiring zeal to heal the wounded conscience of man through the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul’s mission as Pope was, like St. Paul, to lead all into a real encounter with Jesus Christ by commending himself to the consciences of believers and unbelievers alike through “the open statement of the truth.” In his encyclicals, letters, homilies, and public addresses, John Paul unremittingly appeals to the conscience, the inner sanctuary of truth. The entire teaching ministry of St. John Paul II incarnates the prophetic text of Vatican II on conscience: “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.”⁴ John Paul, with Vatican II, upheld the dignity of conscience in the highest regard.

In his encyclical *Dilecti Amici*, his address to the youth of the world, John Paul includes the story of the young man who approaches Jesus asking what he must do to go to

³ Philippe Delhaye, *The Christian Conscience*, trans. Charles U. Quinn (New York: Deslee Company, 1968), 23.: “The term *συνείδησις* in the sense of a faculty of moral judgment is found abundantly in the Pauline Epistles and in the Pauline discourse reported in the Acts of the Apostles. We have been able to note 22 different passages: Rom 2:15; 3:9; 4:2; 9:1; 1Cor 8:1-12 (3 times); 10:23,33 (5 times); 10:27; 10:29, 2Cor 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; 1Tim 1:5; 1:19; 3:9; 4:2; 2Tim 1:3; Tit 1:15; Heb 9:9; 9:14; 10:12; 10:22; 13:18, Acts 23:1; 24:16.” See also C.A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1958), 21 – 53. While conscience, “*syneidesis*” in the Greek, is only one dimension of St. Paul’s writing, it is a significant dimension which he sees as vital to the Christian life.

⁴ Vatican Council II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*. (7 December 1965), §16 in *The Documents of Vatican II: with notes and index*, trans. Vatican (Strathfield, NSW: St. Paul’s Publications 2009).

heaven (Mt 19:16-26). The young man comes with a questioning conscience about moral action, thirsting for an answer, and he sees in Jesus *an* answer. Yet, his conscience is troubled at Christ's invitation to let go of the goods of the world and to follow him.⁵ John Paul then empowers the consciences of the youth of the world to regard their consciences with the utmost dignity, placing on them the task of shaping history "from within:"

...the conscience is the most important dimension of time and history. For history is written not only by the events which in a certain sense happen 'from outside'; it is written first of all 'from within': it is the history of moral victories and defeats... In this field how much depends on each one of you!⁶

John Paul lived through the dark history of his own people in Poland who suffered from men who trampled on the delicate gift of conscience.⁷ He knew through experience that faithfulness to conscience not only leads to solidarity with neighbor, but to true solidarity with God, the source and origin of conscience. Further, John Paul knew that following Jesus Christ was the healing remedy for the wounded conscience of man, that He is *the* answer to all man's questions "about what is good and what is evil."⁸

John Paul thus exhorts the broken and wounded consciences of the world today to be healed by the person of Jesus Christ. He invites them to be healed by the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) who washes, binds, and heals the consciences of men through the blood and water poured out from His crucified side. The mysterious power of the Crucified and Risen Christ is further commended to all consciences through the gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out in all the sacraments, but most especially in Christ's Eucharistic Sacrifice. This thesis will

⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World *Dilecti Amici* (31 March 1985), §§6-8 at the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici.html.

⁶ *Dilecti Amici* §§6.

⁷ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2005), 45-50.

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical on Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teachings *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), §§8.1 at The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html. See also §§8.2 and §§117.1.

explore in three parts Pope St. John Paul II's teaching on how the human conscience is healed: "*What is Conscience?*", "*How is Conscience Wounded?*", and "*How is Conscience Healed?*" John Paul ultimately sees Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as the source and summit for the healing and restoration of conscience.

Note:

Preceding the first chapter, I acknowledge that at times it seems that I use the term "conscience" broadly, presenting it synonymously with the soul, the heart, and the whole aspect of human interiority. While conscience acts as a fulcrum to the mind and the will, and is thus an integrating dimension to the whole man, it is not the entire man. Jesus Christ came to heal the whole man: body, mind, heart, and soul, not only conscience. However, since man is united in body, mind, heart, and soul, when one part is healed in degree, the whole is healed in degree.

While the redemption of conscience is not the whole of salvation in Christ, it is an essential aspect in healing the whole man. John Paul's focus on healing the conscience of man reveals the great gift that conscience is to man, and how integral the conscience is to Christ's mission of healing, that, "he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). This work is focused on the redemption of conscience, which is not the whole of man, but integrates the whole of man.

Chapter I: What is Conscience?

John Paul II and the Definition of Conscience

Studying John Paul's writings on conscience can leave one wondering what the conscience is. One must come to admit, with John Paul, that the conscience is mysterious. Despite its transcendent mystery, however, due to its origin in God, much can be said about the meaning of the term "conscience." Indeed, *the Catechism* promulgated during John Paul's Pontificate gives a clear definition of conscience: "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed."⁹ While this definition is philosophically clear, John Paul's methodology of presenting the holistic reality and experience of conscience leads one into the mystery of conscience, and reveals a reality that is ultimately more difficult to concretely define.¹⁰

John Paul correlates the conscience to "the heart," where, "...man's freedom and God's law is most deeply lived out."¹¹ He also calls conscience "the 'secret sanctuary' in which 'God's voice echoes,'"¹² and thus calls conscience "the voice of God."¹³ Drawing from the Biblical understanding of St. Paul he calls conscience "a witness for man... of his own faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law,"¹⁴ and, "the witness of God

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1778. See also *CCC*, 1777 – 1782.

¹⁰ John Paul was both a Thomist and a Phenomenologist. While he drew much from the clearly defined terms of the scholastic tradition in St. Thomas Aquinas, he knew the importance of unveiling the lived reality of these defined terms through phenomenology, the study of human experience. Vatican II has a similar methodology to John Paul, seeking the best way to present the Gospel to modern man, by the unveiling of man's internal experience.

¹¹ John Paul II, Encyclical on Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teachings *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), §54.1 in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: 1996, 2001) 584 – 661. *Veritatis Splendor*.

¹² John Paul II, Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), §43.1 in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: 1996, 2001) 243–302.

¹³ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §43.1.

¹⁴ *Veritatis Splendor*, §57.2.

himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man's soul, calling him... to obedience."¹⁵ These varied definitions are diverse enough to leave one confused as to what the conscience is. However, they are certainly connected, rooted in the truth of God and the transcendent dignity that God bestowed on man at his creation.

John Paul draws many of these statements on conscience from the wisdom of

Gaudium et Spes 16:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.¹⁶

Gaudium et Spes provides a definition of conscience that is rooted in the natural moral law, the dignity of man, and the transcendent mystery of God.

With the help of *Gaudium et Spes* 16, which John Paul refers to frequently in his writings on conscience, one could state that the conscience is the place in man where the natural moral law is concretized to be carried out in action by a particular individual.

Whereas the speculative intellect knows abstract truths about the moral good, the conscience concretizes abstract truths into practical moral actions for an individual. The conscience is the place where the truth known in the mind and the good accomplished by the will converge, where the true becomes the good in concrete practical moral actions for a particular person in a particular circumstance. John Paul thus likens the conscience to “a kind of ‘moral sense’ which brings us to discern what is good and what is bad...”, and as, “an interior eye, a visual capacity of the spirit under conditions of guiding our steps toward

¹⁵ *VS*, §58.

¹⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §16.

the path of the Good.”¹⁷ Therefore, the purpose of conscience is the accomplishment of the good.

Moral truth has its origin in God’s goodness. God created man to not only know the truth with his mind, but to accomplish the good with his will, and become like God. The conscience, as God’s supreme help to man to do the good, echoes God’s intense desire for man to share in His image, which was present at the creation of man and the foundation of the world. The echoes of God’s voice in the sanctuary of conscience help man to accomplish the good and avoid the evil in the concrete and vast circumstances throughout his life. The echo of the voice of God in conscience has its foundation in the natural law, which is necessary to explore to unveil the mystery of conscience.

John Paul II on the Natural Law

Since conscience is rooted in the natural law, it is beneficent to first explain John Paul’s understanding of the natural law. In *Love and Responsibility* John Paul speaks of man’s total dependence on God for all that belongs to his nature: “God is the Creator, and so all beings in the universe, creatures in general and man in particular, owe their existence to Him.”¹⁸ Man thus derives his entire dignity from being a creature of God, made in His image and likeness, endowed with the gift of reason and free will: “The value of man, a reasonable being, is nowhere more obvious than in the fact that he is a *particeps Creatoris*, that he shares in God’s thoughts, and His laws.”¹⁹ Man most concretely manifests the image of God and participates in God’s creativity through relationship.

¹⁷ John Paul II, General Audience on Conscience, trans. Jesus Banuelos (17 August 1983), At The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/audiences/1983/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19830817.html.

¹⁸ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 246.

¹⁹ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 246-247.

Just as God is a communion of Persons, man is also created in a communion of persons. Adam and Eve were created together, imaging the relationality of the communion of Persons in God.²⁰ John Paul writes: “*man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons*, which man and woman form from the very beginning.”²¹ Thus, a proper response to the law written in man’s nature is a response of relationship to God and the other, made in the image of God.

Man, made with God’s image and likeness imprinted in his human nature, is thus called to participate in God’s nature through proper relationship with God and his neighbor: “Man, being a reasonable creature, is just towards the Creator by striving in all his activities to achieve this specifically human value, by behaving as *particeps Creatoris*.”²² It is right, therefore, that man act toward the other in accord with how God created him to act. When man acts in accord with the truth of his person created by God, and further, the truth of the other also made in God’s image, he acts in accord with God: “Man, by understanding the order of nature and conforming to it in his actions, participates in the thought of God, becomes *particeps Creatoris*, has a share in the law which God bestowed on the world when He created it at the beginning of time.”²³ Man is thus called to participate in “the thought of God” as manifest in His law through right relationship with himself, his neighbor, and his Creator.

John Paul II speaks extensively of God’s divine law in relation to man’s moral life in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*: “The natural moral law has God as its Author, and... man, by

²⁰ See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media 2006) §9.3. See also CCC, 704. Here I am referring to the three Persons of the Trinity. Since this part is focused on the natural law, and not yet on the full revelation of God in Christ, I do not intend to explain the mystery of the Trinity here.

²¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §9.3.

²² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 247.

²³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 246.

the use of reason, participates in the eternal law.”²⁴ God’s Law is called *natural* “by virtue of natural reason, which derives from divine wisdom.”²⁵ The divine law pervades man’s nature because of his origin and creation in God. John Paul thus writes: “Reason draws its own truth and authority from the eternal law, which is none other than divine wisdom itself.”²⁶ The divine law is thus written in man’s nature, helping him to act in justice toward himself, his neighbor, and his Creator.

John Paul draws from the wisdom of St. Paul of whom, he writes, “has helped us to grasp the essence of the natural law...”²⁷ John Paul then cites St. Paul who says of the Gentiles: “what the law requires is written on their hearts...” (Romans 2:15). The Law, written in man’s human nature, applies to all men because every person conceived is indebted to God for all that comprises his human dignity: his body, intellect, and free will. Not only does the Law require a certain gift of self to God, but to one’s neighbor. John Paul thus writes: “[the] true meaning of the natural law... refers to man’s proper and primordial nature, the ‘nature of the human person,’ which is the person himself in unity of soul and body...”²⁸ Man is called to respond freely to the good of his neighbor made in God’s image and likeness through “a sincere gift of self.”²⁹ The divine law “written in the heart,” by which man “[distinguishes] good and evil,”³⁰ helps man to sincerely give himself as a gift to the other.

²⁴ *VS*, §36.3.

²⁵ *VS*, §40.

²⁶ *VS*, §40.

²⁷ *VS*, §57.1.

²⁸ *VS*, §50.1.

²⁹ See *GS*, 24.3: “man... cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” See also John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §15.1: “...they are *free with the very freedom of the gift*... The human body... contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is, *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and – through this gift – fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” Here I am referring to “the Law of the Gift,” spoken of extensively in John Paul’s *Theology of the Body*.

³⁰ *VS*, §42.2.

Man participates in God's thought when he distinguishes good and evil through the gift of reason. John Paul hence writes: "[man is] able to distinguish good from evil... thanks to the light of natural reason, the reflection in man of the splendor of God's countenance."³¹ John Paul cites St. Thomas Aquinas to help describe the gift of reason as the imprint of God's "countenance" in man:

*There are many who say: Who will make us see good? And in reply to the question [the Psalmist] says: The light of your face, Lord is signed upon us, thereby implying that the light of natural reason whereby we discern good from evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light.*³²

The light of God's face imprinted in man's intellect helps him to "discern good from evil" in relation to his neighbor. God's goodness is written in the very fabric of man's nature, and all men are called to act in accord with this *good* made known through the gift of reason.

The natural law applies to all men because all men are endowed with reason. Every man can know good and evil through the gift of reason given by God. John Paul writes: "[precisely] because of this 'truth' the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history."³³ Good and evil are thus, at least seminally, evident to every man through the gift of reason. John Paul thus writes: "inasmuch as the natural law expresses the dignity of the human person and lays the foundation for his fundamental rights and duties, it is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all mankind."³⁴ The natural law not only helps man to know his own dignity, but to know the dignity of his neighbor derived from the dignity of God, giving man a universal foundation for moral action.

³¹ *VJ*, §42.2.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2, at New Advent, www.newadvent.org. Quoted in John Paul II, *VJ*, 42.2.

³³ *VJ*, §51.2.

³⁴ *VJ*, §51.3.

The mind distinguishes good and evil through the gifts of positive and negative precepts which are inherent to the rational mind. John Paul gives, for example, the following positive universal precept: “It is right and just, always and for everyone, to serve God, to render him the worship which is his due and to honor one’s parents as they deserve.”³⁵ John Paul describes negative universal precepts as follows: “... prohibitions which forbid a given action... without exception, because the choice of this kind of behavior is in no case compatible with the goodness of the will of the acting person, with his vocation to life with God and to communion with his neighbor.”³⁶ Some examples of such negative universal precepts are, “You shall not kill,” or “You shall not steal,” expressed clearly in the decalogue of the Old Testament (Ex 20:12-17).

Both positive and negative moral precepts are universally binding and call the individual to do good and avoid evil. The universal precepts are to be put into concrete action because they help man to fulfill “the divine calling and destiny”³⁷ which he was “created for.”³⁸ Man accomplishes his “divine calling and destiny,” John Paul says, when he “personally assimilates the truth contained in the law.”³⁹ While universal precepts are helpful in defining the natural law which is morally applicable to all men, every subject is called to assimilate universal precepts to his subjective circumstance through action. This is the primary task of conscience.

³⁵ *VS*, §52.1.

³⁶ *VS*, §52.1.

³⁷ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §29.

³⁸ *VS*, §52.1.

³⁹ *VS*, §52.1.



The task of conscience to apply the moral law in concrete actions can be likened to a person applying a soap-filled sponge to dirty dishes. The sponge has the power to wash the dishes, however, it needs a person who knows how to apply it to accomplish its end of cleaning the dishes. The mind that has received the natural law, analogous to the soap-filled sponge, needs the conscience, which instructs how to apply the natural law in concrete situations to accomplish man's end, which is to do the good.



John Paul II on the Practical End of Conscience

Man should not only participate in the truth with his mind but must also participate in the good with his will by good action. In this way, “man appropriates [the] truth of his being and makes it his own by his acts and the corresponding virtues.”⁴⁰ According to John Paul, truth is given practical application through the judgment of conscience. In *Veritatis Splendor* he states: “...universal and permanent laws correspond to things known by the practical reason and are applied to particular acts through the judgment of conscience.”⁴¹ Thus, conscience applies God's eternal law to a particular person in a particular situation pertaining to moral good and evil. John Paul thus affirms: “The directly practical role in human knowledge is performed actually by conscience....”⁴²

John Paul further explains the role of conscience as the particularization of the universal law for an individual: “...whereas the natural law discloses the objective and

⁴⁰ *VS*, §52.1.

⁴¹ *VS*, §52.1.

⁴² Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates,” in *Person and Community : selected essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Lang 1993), 281.

universal demands of the moral good, conscience is the application of the law to a particular case; this application of the law thus becomes an inner dictate for the individual, a summons to do what is good in this particular situation.”⁴³ Conscience is not concerned with “that person or situation somewhere out there;” rather, conscience is concerned with the “I”. The *I*, according to John Paul, encompasses the deepest roots of man’s whole personhood and unique identity given to him by God at his creation. The *I* of every person is awakened to the practical duty of the universal good through conscience.

The Catechism says that conscience is the faculty of the mind which “perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.”⁴⁴ The Latin etymology of “conscience” derives from the Latin “*conscientia*” meaning “with knowledge.”⁴⁵ Livio Melina further explains: “From etymological considerations regarding the supposed derivation of ‘*cumscientia*’ using ‘*cum scire*’... Aquinas characterizes the judgment of conscience as a *knowing together* with a truth that is of universal character and therefore common.”⁴⁶ This etymology is fitting because conscience is the place where God’s knowledge is shared with man. More precisely, conscience shares God’s knowledge as a practical judgment: “The judgment of conscience is a practical judgment, a judgment which makes known what man must do or not do, or which assesses an act already performed by him.”⁴⁷ The conscience as *knowledge with God* derives its power through the divine law written in human nature.

The conscience can judge acts because it shares in the knowledge of Him who is the ultimate source of the moral law. In this way, “the judgment of conscience states ‘in an

⁴³ *VS*, §59.2.

⁴⁴ *CCC*, 1778.

⁴⁵ “Conscience” in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C.T. Onions, G.W.S. Friedrichsen and R.W. Burchfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 205 – 206.

⁴⁶ Livio Melina, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of Veritatis Splendor*, trans. William E. May (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 183 – 184.

⁴⁷ *Veritatis Splendor* §59.2.

ultimate way' whether a certain particular kind of behavior is in conformity with the law."⁴⁸

The conscience, moreover, is concerned with the *I*, that is, with judging "my" acts of the will as good or evil, and not the actions of another *I*, unless their acts concern "*my I*." The conscience is the locus where the universal good is particularized and practicalized in man. The conscience awakens the *I* of each man, moving him from general theoretical knowledge to concrete practical duty through its moral judgments. How might this judgment of the conscience occur?

In his retreats to university students as a Cardinal, Wojtyla⁴⁹ relates the story of King David, who had an intimate and painful encounter with the judgment of his conscience.⁵⁰ King David commits adultery with Bathsheba, impregnates her, and then has her husband killed to hide his crime (2Sam 11). The prophet Nathan, inspired by God, questions David regarding the case of a man who steals another man's only lamb in order not to tax his own overabundant flock (2Sam 12:1-4). David rightfully condemns the action of the man in Nathan's story to which Nathan responds, "You are the man!" (2Sam 12:7). Nathan awakens the conscience of King David, demanding a concrete response from his *I*. David's awakened conscience serves as judge of his actions and spurs him to repentance. Wojtyla writes: "David's conscience suddenly awoke within him and urged him toward God, helping him to re-establish his relationship with him."⁵¹

David's experience of the judgment of his conscience led him to call upon God's mercy, expressed in *Psalms 51*: "Against thee, thee only have I sinned; and done that which is evil in thy sight." Wojtyla writes: "... these two phrases clarify the whole situation and show

⁴⁸ *Veritatis Splendor* §59.2.

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II's birth name is Karol Wojtyla. I use "Wojtyla" and "John Paul" interchangeably according to the text cited.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1984), 63.

⁵¹ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 63.

us the direction in which the workings of his conscience were moving and directing the man.”⁵² David’s conscience manifests his *I*’s judgment of his actions, while at the same time manifesting God’s judgment of his actions, for conscience “[enters] into the Thou-I I-Thou relationship.”⁵³

Conscience can thus be spoken of as God’s voice, as man enters into the “I-Thou” relationship with God through the witness of conscience. John Paul writes: “... conscience is the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man’s soul, calling him... to obedience.”⁵⁴ Servais Pinckaers writes the following: “[Conscience] is also said to be the voice of God. Thanks to this higher light, conscience becomes for man an inner imperative and a call to do what is good in concrete situations.”⁵⁵ Man thus experiences the voice of conscience as the voice of God inviting him to act according to God’s truth “in concrete situations.”

John Paul II on Conscience as Duty and Responsibility⁵⁶

Conscience does not only act as judge, but directs one’s moral actions through the experience of duty and responsibility. Wojtyla says in his spiritual exercises for university students, “...the work of conscience is not confined to knowledge or to bringing things to our attention... Our conscience urges us toward the good; and it would be a great misfortune if, despite our knowledge, it did not show us the decisions we should take.”⁵⁷

These directives which take the form of duty and responsibility are experienced in the *I* of

⁵² John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 63.

⁵³ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 63.

⁵⁴ *Veritatis Splendor* §58.

⁵⁵ Servais Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future: *Veritatis Splendor*,” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*. ed. J.A. DiNoia and Romanus Cessario (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1999), 43.

⁵⁶ See John Paul II, “Person and Act” in *Person and Act: and related essays*, trans. Ignatik, Grzegorz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 265 – 276. In these two sections John Paul makes a philosophical distinction between duty and responsibility which I will not develop in this thesis.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 62.

the subject being called to moral action. God, one can imagine, says to each man's *I*: "My truth concerns *you!* Not him, not her, not them, but *you!*" When God thus speaks to man with this particularity, a response is demanded from the *I*.⁵⁸

Wojtyla elaborates on man's feeling of duty and responsibility in the *I* in his work *Person and Act*: "This 'somebody,' to whom I am and feel responsible, is also my own 'I.'" ⁵⁹ The future Pope continues: "The responsibility 'to somebody,' integrated in the voice of conscience, place[s] my own 'I' in the position of judge over my own 'I.'" ⁶⁰ The *I* of every human experiences the value of his dignity and is called to respond to this value appropriately through good action: "Truthfulness evokes duty and generates a responsibility for the object with respect to its value, that is, to put it briefly, a responsibility for value."⁶¹ Not only is this "responsibility for value" a call to respond appropriately to the truth of my own *I*, but is also a call to respond appropriately to the value of God, other persons, and creation. Duty and responsibility are thus integral in the experience of conscience.

Wojtyla says that "[both] duty and responsibility are born in the deepest and most essential relation of the person – the relation of truth."⁶² The relation of truth fundamentally occurs in conscience, where the truth to be known, becomes the good to be sought, or, in other words, where theoretical knowledge of the mind becomes practical knowledge of the will. The relation of truth occurs in conscience when knowledge of good and evil become duty and responsibility. Deborah Savage elaborates on this point: "Conscience is not only cognitive; in its complete manifestation, its function is to relate the truth as it has been made

⁵⁸ See *CCC*, 2063: "In all God's commandments, the singular personal pronoun designates the recipient. God makes his will known to each person in particular, at the same time as he makes it know to the whole people...."

⁵⁹ John Paul II, "Person and Act," 274.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, "Person and Act," 275.

⁶¹ John Paul II, "Person and Act," 272.

⁶² John Paul II, "Person and Act," 274.

known to human actions.”⁶³ The conscience thus serves as a mediator between the spiritual and the material.⁶⁴

The experience of the convergence of truth into duty and responsibility occurs in conscience. Wojtyla states, “Through this truthfulness they acquire contact with conscience, which in a sense turns this truthfulness into concrete and real duty.”⁶⁵ The future Pope explains further how exactly this convergence happens: “Truthfulness, the statement ‘*x* is truly good,’ evokes through conscience, in a sense, an interior compulsion or mandate in the form ‘I should perform the act by which I will realize this *x*.’”⁶⁶ The truth thus places demands on the *I* through the inner dictates of conscience. However, man is only responsible to act when he experiences the duty of truth as a concrete value to respond too, that is, when an act has moral implications: “Man is responsible for *x* only when he should have performed *x* or when he should not have performed *x*.”⁶⁷

John Paul further explains the “imperative character” of truth experienced in conscience: “Like the natural law itself and all practical knowledge, the judgment of conscience also has an imperative character: man must act in accordance with it.”⁶⁸ The duty of truth experienced in conscience is a result of the natural law working in man through the dictates of conscience, which “formulates moral obligation in the light of natural law... the obligation to do what the individual... knows to be a good he is called to do here and

⁶³ Deborah Savage, “The Subjective Dimension of Human Work: The Conversion of the Acting Person in *Laborem Exercens*,” in *Karol Wojtyla’s Philosophical Legacy*, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 212.

⁶⁴ See *Sign of Contradiction*, 138 – 145. In *Sign of Contradiction* John Paul speaks of the conscience participating in the three-fold mission of Christ, in particular His kingly mission. However, here one can make the argument that conscience participates in Christ’s Priestly mission as well, as mediator between the divine and the human.

⁶⁵ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 266.

⁶⁶ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 265.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 271.

⁶⁸ *VS*, §60.

now.”⁶⁹ God’s truth is thus experienced in conscience as a moral conviction to do good and avoid evil in the “here and now.” How might one “experience” the truth as duty and responsibility in conscience?



The experience of duty and responsibility in conscience can be likened to The Parable of the Two Sons (Mt 21:28-31). A father asks his two sons to go and work in the vineyard. One replies “yes” and the other replies “no.” However, the son that replies “yes” does not accomplish the request of his father, and the son who replies “no,” repents, and accomplishes the request of his father. The son who said “no,” yet does the will of his father, is justified. Conscience, likewise, is not merely concerned with an abstract assent of the mind to the truth, but places upon man a duty and responsibility to act, which justifies.



John Paul II on the Experience of Conscience

Wojtyla often speaks of conscience through the lens of lived experience:

“Conscience is simply the lived *experience* of the principles of moral good and evil.”⁷⁰ Wojtyla further elaborates on this teaching in *Person and Act*: “... we experience... variations of emotional stirrings connected with the sphere of the good, moral good and evil in particular... [which] progress in close connection with the process of conscience.”⁷¹ Wojtyla thus defines the conscience as the lived experience of truth in which man experiences certain “emotional stirrings” in his relation with moral good and evil through his moral actions.

⁶⁹ *VS*, §59.2.

⁷⁰ Karol Wojtyla, “The Problem of the Theory of Morality,” in *Person and Community: selected essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Lang 1993), 138; emphasis added.

⁷¹ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 350.

The experience of truth in the conscience is called “veracity.”⁷² Miguel Acosta explains the “character of veracity” which is experienced in conscience: “When conscience notes the character of veracity (the subjective experience of truth), it leads to a kind of obligation or command to accomplish the act that leads to the realization of what is good....”⁷³ The experience of *veracity*, the subjective experience of truth, is experienced in the whole person. Man is an embodied soul, so the moral actions of man are experienced in both body and soul. John Paul writes: “... reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties... and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts.”⁷⁴ The conscience, integrating the mind and the will in the experience of truth, has a decisive effect on the experience of the whole person, even on “all the bodily and sense faculties.”

As said above, John Paul characterizes veracity, the experience of truth in conscience, through certain *emotional stirrings*. The conscience causes emotional stirrings as an effect of good and bad acts upon the soul. Acosta explains that “stirring emotion is different from excitement,” and that, “...stirring emotion can act far from sensitive movements; for this reason, profound and higher emotions can be experienced as emotions related to the spiritual life of man.”⁷⁵ Acosta concludes this thought by speaking of the then Wojtyła’s agreement with Max Scheler that, “...the depth of these emotions (stirring emotions) [has] special relation with the processes of moral conscience.”⁷⁶

⁷² Miguel Acosta and Adrian J. Reimers, *Karol Wojtyła’s Personalist Philosophy: Understanding Person and Act* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2016), 174.

⁷³ Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding*, 174.

⁷⁴ *VS*, §48.3.

⁷⁵ Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding*, 215.

⁷⁶ Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding*, 215

The certain “emotional responses”⁷⁷ of conscience to good or bad actions are deep spiritual emotions, rather than shallow sensory emotions, because the conscience exists at the depths of the soul, in the place of relation with truth, not on the sensual level. Wojtyla gives an example of some of these deep spiritual emotions: “Man progresses from anxiety of conscience, from at times a deep despondency due to a fault, almost from despair, to a tranquility and to a no less deep joy, to spiritual beatitude.”⁷⁸ Elsewhere he speaks of “...the reproach of conscience caused by a fault,” which has a “remarkable emotional component.”⁷⁹ Moreover, the body also experiences the emotional effects of conscience because of the body-soul unity.

Wojtyla explains a certain bodily experience of truth, effected by conscience, in *Love and Responsibility*: “... harmonious sexual intercourse is possible only where it involves no conflict of consciences, and is not troubled by fear.”⁸⁰ Wojtyla here speaks of “certain consequences of the natural laws of morality.”⁸¹ The then Cardinal writes: “...in an extra-marital relationship... the conflict of conscience may have the effect of disturbing the natural biological rhythm. Peace of mind and an untroubled conscience have a decided effect upon the organism too...”⁸² The emotional stirrings caused by good or evil action thus have objective positive or negative effects upon the body due to veracity.

Deep feelings of remorse, peace, or even bodily effects within the person are a great service which conscience gives to man for the improvement of his moral life. Wojtyla once encouraged young college students, “My dear children, this is not some sort of cruelty on the

⁷⁷ The conscience is a cognitive sense, not an affective sense. However, the conscience is deeply linked to the affective sphere of man and thus causes these emotional stirrings in the affect of man.

⁷⁸ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 351.

⁷⁹ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 351.

⁸⁰ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 276.

⁸¹ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 276.

⁸² Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 276.

part of our conscience, but springs from the instinct of survival linked with our conscience,” by which “...we can free ourselves from sin...”⁸³ The deeply felt experience of conscience is thus salutary for the moral improvement of man, spurring him to do good and avoid evil. David experienced these deep stirring emotions in his conscience which led him to a heroic change of life, as explained by Wojtyla:

David saw the magnitude of the evil of his two actions of adultery and murder, and this awareness must have overwhelmed him in his innermost depths... However, when he became aware of having committed evil before God and realized that God was in a certain way aware of this evil, he felt ashamed and humiliated; but it was also a sense of relief and a help to him.⁸⁴

The distinct experience of truth in conscience reveals the transcendence of the person created by God, calling him to rise from evil and conform his life to the Creator.

John Paul II on Transcendence and Fulfillment through Conscience

The transcendence of conscience is rooted in its dynamic relation to truth. Wojtyla writes that truth is the foundation of the person’s transcendence: “It is truth or truthfulness that is the ultimate source of the transcendence of the person”⁸⁵ The conscience is the source of this transcendence in man, calling man to live as *imago Dei*: “The transcendence of truth and good has a decisive influence on the shaping of the human ‘I,’ on its becoming in the whole reality of the personal subject, as is perfectly seen in the analysis of conscience and morality.”⁸⁶ The conscience not only manifests this spiritual transcendence of the person, but also allows man to fulfill himself by transcending himself to become like God.

Wojtyla says that the transcendence of man is manifested clearly in “the moment of conscience,” because “truth as a source of moral... duty is heard in the conscience.”⁸⁷ The

⁸³ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 63.

⁸⁴ John Paul II, *The Way to Christ*, 64.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 268.

⁸⁶ Pope John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Act: and related essays*, trans. Ignatik, Grzegorz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021). 487.

⁸⁷ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 485.

“moment of conscience” reveals to man how he ought to act in accord with God’s truth, which gives man the opportunity to, in a sense, transcend himself: “In order to ‘do good and avoid evil’... man must constantly in a sense surpass himself toward the true good in his conscience: this is the fundamental direction of the transcendence that constitutes a property of the human person.”⁸⁸ God gave man the capacity for transcendence through the gift of conscience, enabling man to fulfill himself by doing good and avoiding evil. Wojtyla writes: “the analysis of conscience shows us the close connection between transcendence and fulfillment.”⁸⁹ Through obedience to the truth revealed by conscience, man fulfills himself as a transcendent person created by God, living in accord with the image of God stamped upon him at creation.

Wojtyla explains that when man acts in accord with God’s image made known by conscience “I myself ‘become’ good and ‘am’ good as man.”⁹⁰ Yet, when man acts against God’s image made known by conscience “I ‘become’ evil and ‘am’ evil as man.”⁹¹ The conscience thus serves as the instrument for man’s fulfillment or non-fulfillment as *imago Dei*. This fulfillment or non-fulfillment is dependent on the person’s conformity or nonconformity with the truth which conscience seeks to detect in the natural law.

John Paul II on the Conformity of Conscience to Truth

How can man form his conscience according to the truth? John Paul exhorts the Church in *Veritatis Splendor*: “form [your] conscience... make it the object of continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good.”⁹² The conscience does not create truth, but

⁸⁸ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 485.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 485.

⁹⁰ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 486.

⁹¹ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 486.

⁹² *Veritatis Splendor* §64.1.

rather conforms to truth through good action.⁹³ The goal of conscience, indeed, is truth: “The proper and complete function of conscience consists in subjecting the act to truth.”⁹⁴ When conscience submits to truth, it simultaneously forms norms as prudential principles for personal moral action.

Wojtyla defines a *norm* as a “principle of moral good and evil.”⁹⁵ The conscience forms prudential norms through habitual obedience to the truth. Wojtyla writes: “Normative ethics... assists conscience and prudence... by providing suitable premises for doing what is morally good, or virtuous, and avoiding what is morally evil, or sinful.”⁹⁶ Though moral principles are already inherent in the person through natural law, conscience, “... the normative reality inside the person,”⁹⁷ forms norms for prudential action in particular circumstances. Wojtyla calls conscience’s habit of forming norms in accordance with truth: “truthfulness.”⁹⁸ *Truthfulness*, Wojtyla writes, is “the normative power of truth in conscience.”⁹⁹ Moral norms help facilitate the practical application of truth with ease: “normative power manifests itself in conscience as the linking of truthfulness with duty,”¹⁰⁰ helping man to obey truth in reality. John Paul calls the normative power of truth that forms in conscience as a result of obedience to truth: “connaturality.”¹⁰¹

Connaturality is the conformity of conscience with the good through habitual obedience to the truth. Connaturality enables man to know and act in accordance with the truth with facility. Edward R. Sunshine explains connaturality thus: “A virtuous life gives

⁹³ See John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 267.

⁹⁴ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 258.

⁹⁵ Wojtyla, “The Problem of the Theory of Morality,” 138.

⁹⁶ Karol Wojtyla, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates,” 281.

⁹⁷ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 258.

⁹⁸ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 263.

⁹⁹ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 263.

¹⁰⁰ John Paul II, “Person and Act,” 263.

¹⁰¹ *VS*, §64.1.

rise to the ‘moral sense’ expressed by the word ‘connaturality,’ which helps overcome deficiencies in knowledge of God’s law.”¹⁰² Both Sunshine and John Paul agree that the virtuous life increases one’s ability to know and accomplish the natural law with greater facility and ease. The conscience’s ability to judge rightly is decisively impacted by a will’s habitual adherence to the good.

Sunshine gives several images to explain the *connatural conscience*. First, he relates Jesus’ image of the eye with the connatural conscience: “the eye being the lamp of the body, [implies] that conscience ‘sheds light’ on truth, ‘gives witness’ to it, and is the way in which humans ‘see’ it.”¹⁰³ He next compares the connatural conscience with “magnetism, with truth being the magnet and conscience ‘connaturally’ attracted to it.”¹⁰⁴ Lastly, he compares the connatural conscience with a “radar bouncing waves off objects to detect what is what... [explaining] the way in which conscience ‘connaturally’ perceives the true and the good.”¹⁰⁵ Sunshine’s images aptly describe the connatural conscience’s habitual union with truth for the purpose of good action.

When one acts according to conscience, it not only unites a man to truth, but gradually forms a new man elevated in truth. John Paul writes in *Veritatis Splendor*, “in performing morally good acts, man strengthens, develops, and consolidates within himself his likeness to God.”¹⁰⁶ Acosta explains this “consolidation” as follows: “This surrender to truth in good forms a new reality inside the person. It is the ‘normative reality’ that we can see in the formulation of norms and its application in human actions.”¹⁰⁷ When moral norms

¹⁰² Edward R. Sunshine, “*Veritatis Splendor et Rhetorica Morum*: ‘The Splendor of Truth’ and the Rhetoric of Morality,” in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*. ed. Michael E. Allsopp and John J. O’Keefe (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 165.

¹⁰³ Sunshine, “*Veritatis Splendor et Rhetorica Morum*,” 165.

¹⁰⁴ Sunshine, “*Veritatis Splendor et Rhetorica Morum*,” 165.

¹⁰⁵ Sunshine, “*Veritatis Splendor et Rhetorica Morum*,” 166.

¹⁰⁶ *VS*, §39.1.

¹⁰⁷ Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding*, 172 – 173.

form in the conscience by habitually good actions, the conscience is formed by truth, truth abides in the conscience, and man thus “consolidates within himself his likeness to God.” The normative power of truth in conscience allows man to live according to his God-given dignity and thus attain true freedom.

John Paul II on Authentic Freedom of Conscience

Conscience is intimately related to man’s freedom, “for freedom is realized precisely through the volition and choice of the true good,”¹⁰⁸ to which conscience unhesitatingly leads. Man is truly free when he acts in accord with right conscience, formed by the normative power of truth. Servais Pinckaers explains: “The more closely a man conforms through obedience to the light of God shining in the depths of his soul, the freer he becomes interiorly.”¹⁰⁹ The conscience in conformity with truth conforms to God and makes man truly free, helping him to live as an *imago Dei*.

John Paul speaks of certain ideologies which oppose God’s law and human freedom, perceiving God’s law as constrictive to moral autonomy:

These doctrines would grant to individuals or social groups the right to determine what is good or evil. Human freedom would thus be able to ‘create values’ and would enjoy a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom.¹¹⁰

John Paul refutes this belief as contrary to God’s gift of freedom: “Man’s genuine moral autonomy in no way means the rejection but rather the acceptance of the moral law... Human freedom and God’s law meet and are called to intersect...”¹¹¹

Man is free only when he acts with the integrity of his person as *imago Dei*. Free action is obtained precisely through conscience: “The relationship between man’s freedom

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 485.

¹⁰⁹ Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future: *Veritatis Splendor*,” 43.

¹¹⁰ *VS*, §35.3.

¹¹¹ *VS*, §41.1

and God's law is most deeply lived out in the 'heart' of the person, in his moral conscience."¹¹² It is the conscience which leads man to participate in God's moral law and become *particeps Creatoris*. John Paul calls this transformation through conscience, "participated theonomy," by which "human reason and human will participate in God's wisdom and providence."¹¹³ The conscience is an integral instrument for man's free participation in God's law, however, the experience of man reveals a painful struggle to live this harmonious participation with God. Pope John Paul II speaks of this reality in his work *Theology of the Body*, in which he outlines the powerful effects of sin upon conscience. The Pope speaks of the fall of Adam and Eve as a primordial wound on human nature, integrally wounding conscience in its relation to truth. Chapter II unveils the various effects of the fall upon conscience in its primary relation to truth.

¹¹² *VS*, §54.1.

¹¹³ *VS*, §41.2.

Chapter II: How is the Conscience Wounded?

John Paul II on the Gift of Original Righteousness in Conscience

To understand the full gravity of the wound of original sin on conscience, it is necessary first to understand man's original state "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1). John Paul gives an extensive exposition of man's original state, a state of innocence, in his *Theology of the Body*. The conscience, the faculty which judges the moral good, has its origin in God and was created by Him at the beginning of Creation. Thus, the conscience has its origin in the truth, and was oriented toward the truth from the beginning. John Paul calls the state of man in the beginning "*original innocence*,"¹¹⁴ which he refers to as "man's happiness"¹¹⁵ with God before the fall. John Paul further describes this state as a gift of grace "...to the interior state of the human 'heart' [and] the human will."¹¹⁶ Adam and Eve's conscience shared in this state of original innocence with God from the beginning.

John Paul reflects upon the Genesis account as the first manifestation of conscience: "Chapter 2 of Genesis constitutes in some way the oldest description and record of man's self-understanding and, together with chapter 3, it is the first witness of human conscience."¹¹⁷ Genesis contains the Creation account of Adam and Eve, "the objective reality of man created 'in the image of God,'"¹¹⁸ followed by the fall of Adam and Eve, the first rejection of God's image within; this led to the woundedness of man's conscience. It is necessary to understand first the innocence and righteousness from which Adam and Eve fell and the grace that they lost, i.e. original innocence, in order to understand the gravity of the fall of Adam and Eve.

¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §2:1.

¹¹⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §2:1.

¹¹⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:14.

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §3:1.

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §3:1.

Before Adam and Eve committed the first sin and forfeited the grace of God, they lived in perfect harmony in the garden with God and each other. Genesis states, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). John Paul reflects on this passage of Genesis in light of conscience in the following manner: “Original *innocence* is thus that which ‘radically,’ that is, *at its very roots, excludes the shame of the body* in the relation between man and woman, that which eliminates the necessity of this shame in man, in his *heart* or his *conscience*.”¹¹⁹ The consciences of Adam and Eve existed in perfect innocence in relation to God and each other, free of all shame or guilt, with nothing to hide. John Paul further explains, “in a certain sense, one should understand [original innocence] as original righteousness... [which] includes the revelation and discovery of human moral consciousness – the revelation and discovery of the whole dimension of conscience.”¹²⁰ John Paul thus considers the original conscience of man as a full participant in the full revelation of morality which is rooted in God’s righteousness.

The Catechism further supports the reality of the conscience’s participation in original righteousness as “original justice:” “The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called ‘original justice.’”¹²¹ God endowed Adam and Eve with the gift of intellect and free will perfectly oriented toward His truth. Their minds knew and submitted to the truth, their consciences dictated to their wills the practical action to carry out, and their wills freely chose and carried out the good. Original justice thus gave Adam and Eve perfect inner harmony.

¹¹⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:4.

¹²⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:4.

¹²¹ CCC, 376.

Not only were their minds and wills perfectly oriented toward the truth before the fall, but their passions worked in perfect harmony with their minds and wills, thus orienting their whole person, in body-soul unity, toward the truth. *The Catechism* refers to the passions as, "...emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil."¹²² *The Catechism* adds that the passions "are neither good nor evil... [and] are morally qualified only to the extent that they engage reason and will."¹²³ Furthermore, "[i]t belongs to the perfection of the moral or human good that the passions be governed by reason."¹²⁴ In the state of original righteousness, Adam and Eve's passions were perfectly "governed by reason," allowing them to act in perfect accord with the dictates of their consciences.

John Paul alludes to this perfect integration of intellect, will, and passions in his *Theology of the Body*: "Thus, in the mystery of creation, the human body carried within itself an unquestionable sign of the 'image of God' and also constituted the specific source of certainty about this image, present in the whole human being."¹²⁵ Body, mind, soul, and spirit lived in perfect harmony with truth through the integrating "certainty" of conscience. *The Catechism* further elaborates on this state of man in original justice: "The first man was unimpaired and ordered in his whole being because he was free from the triple concupiscence that subjugates him to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and self-assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason."¹²⁶

The consciences of Adam and Eve existed in union with God's truth. Their consciences informed them how to act toward God, self, and each other. True knowledge

¹²² CCC, 1763.

¹²³ CCC, 1767.

¹²⁴ CCC, 1767.

¹²⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §27:3.

¹²⁶ CCC, 377.

and right action were perfectly integrated through the consciences of Adam and Eve, manifested in “a particular ‘purity of heart’ preserving interior faithfulness to the gift according to the spousal meaning of the body.”¹²⁷ Adam and Eve thus had full knowledge of the image of God within and lived faithfully to this image in relation to one another.

In the state of original innocence, the consciences of Adam and Eve were free from any guilt or shame caused by evil action, for they “were both naked, and were not ashamed.” John Paul speaks of the original state of conscience as a “tranquil witness:” “Original innocence conceived in this way manifests itself as a *tranquil witness* of conscience that (in this case) precedes any experience of good and evil; and yet this *serene witness* of conscience is something all the more beatifying.”¹²⁸ This “serene witness of conscience” was the result of God’s gift of integrity,¹²⁹ as Adam and Eve lived in perfect relation with God, each other, and God’s image within their bodies, that is, with themselves.

While Adam and Eve experienced inner harmony with the truth in their consciences before the fall, man after the fall now experiences in his conscience a discordance with the truth, a difficulty in knowing good and evil with clarity, and in carrying out the good and resisting the evil. Man experiences within himself an inner conflict, as expressed by St. Paul: “I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:14-15). St. Paul is speaking of man’s experience of original sin. John Paul identifies this contrast of original innocence and original sin when he says: “Original innocence belongs to the mystery of man’s ‘beginning,’ from which he then separated himself by committing the original sin.”¹³⁰ Man comes to a fuller

¹²⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:5.

¹²⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:5; emphasis added.

¹²⁹ See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §15:2.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:4.

understanding of the original innocence of conscience only “...by going back also to the experience of his own guilt and of his own sinfulness.”¹³¹



Man’s conscience in original righteousness can be likened to a fisherman at sea when the waters are still. The fish, the plant-life, the beauty, and the depth of the sea appear in their full reality, helping him to see the fish clearly. Man’s conscience wounded by sin can be likened to a fisherman at sea amid a storm. The winds make the waters dark, obscuring the fisherman’s vision of the fish, the plant-life, the beauty, and the depths of the sea, inhibiting his ability to fish.



John Paul II on the Wound of Original Sin in Conscience¹³²

As said above, John Paul speaks of the Creation account as “the first witness of human conscience.” Before the fall, man “finds himself, as it were, outside of the knowledge of good and evil, until the moment in which he transgresses the Creator’s prohibition and eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge.”¹³³ And after his transgression, man “finds himself in some way within the knowledge of good and evil.”¹³⁴ John Paul notes in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominus et Vivificantem*, that this transgression against God occurs within conscience: “...sin in its original reality takes place in man’s will – and conscience - first of all as ‘disobedience,’ that is, as opposition of the will of man to the will of God.”¹³⁵ This

¹³¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §16:4.

¹³² See CCC, 390: “The account of the fall uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man.” The following presentation of the story of Genesis is not intended to be a presentation of detailed historical fact, but an explanation of the “primeval event” of the fall of Adam and Eve.

¹³³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §3:3.

¹³⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §3:3.

¹³⁵ *Dominum et Vivificantem* §33.2.

leads to the question of how the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis is so intimately linked to the original experience of conscience.

John Paul's thought suggests that the original sin of Adam and Eve was not only disobedience against God, but also disobedience against conscience, which revealed to them God's law with certainty. God commands Adam and Eve, "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17). Yet the devil tempts Adam and Eve to disobedience: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). This poses for conscience the first temptation to distrust God.

The devil's temptation strikes at the very heart of conscience, the God-given faculty which helps man to put God's goodness into concrete action. The devil tempts Adam and Eve to distrust that God's goodness is the source of true freedom, promising that they can become gods by deciding for themselves what is good and evil.¹³⁶ John Paul writes, "Disobedience,' as the original dimension of sin, means the rejection of this source, through man's claim to become an independent and exclusive source for deciding about good and evil."¹³⁷ Adam and Eve act against the image of God within and deny the truth written in their consciences from the beginning: "in the image of God he created him" (Gen 1:27).

Adam and Eve's rejection of their Creator shakes the foundation of their inner life as they reject the image of God within. John Paul comments, "This original disobedience presupposes a *rejection*, or at least a *turning away from the truth contained in the Word of God*, who creates the world."¹³⁸ The rejection of their Creator is a rejection of Him who is the source of the eternal law: "He is the Word who is also the eternal law which regulates the world and

¹³⁶ See *DV*, §37.3.

¹³⁷ *DV*, §36.2.

¹³⁸ *DV*, §33.2.

especially human acts.”¹³⁹ Our First Parents not only reject the Creator, but His image imprinted in their conscience, that is, the law of God within that guides authentic moral action. John Paul thus concludes that the fall has a pervading effect on the entire anthropology of man, “...his innermost [being], knowledge, consciousness, *conscience*, choice, and decision, and all of this in a relationship with God...”¹⁴⁰ Man’s rejection of God thus has a deep effect on conscience and its relationship with the divine law.

Adam and Eve, whose consciences once were wholly guided by God’s truth, chose to determine for themselves what is good and evil by rejecting truth. John Paul notes, “‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ was to express and constantly remind man of the ‘limit’ impassable for a created being.”¹⁴¹ However, Adam and Eve trespassed this “limit” made known by conscience, pulling conscience away from its primary relationship with truth. John Paul reminds the Church,

[man’s] freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil,’ for it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic freedom precisely in the acceptance of that law.¹⁴²

Adam and Eve thus forfeited their authentic freedom by trespassing the limits of God’s truth in their consciences.

Original sin altered the dignified definition and function of conscience: *knowledge with*. Instead of knowing *with* God, man resorted to knowing *against* God, and thus to knowing *alone*. The consciences of Adam and Eve resorted to knowing in isolation, closing dialogue with God and inhibiting their freedom: “Man’s disobedience, nevertheless, always means a turning away from God, and in a certain sense the closing up of human freedom in his

¹³⁹ *DV*, §33.2.

¹⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §4:1; emphasis added.

¹⁴¹ *DV*, §36.2.

¹⁴² *VS*, §35.2.

regard.”¹⁴³ Through the rejection of conscience not only do Adam and Eve know alone, but, John Paul adds, they open themselves up to knowing with the tempter: “...it also means a certain opening up of this freedom— of the human mind and will – to the one who is the ‘father of lies.’”¹⁴⁴

The first manifestation of conscience in original sin is shown clearly in the *chilling* account of Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden *in the cool of the day*, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8; emphasis added). God calls out to Adam and Eve with strength and gentleness: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9) Adam timidly responds: “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Gen 3:10). Adam and Eve hide from God and from one another when they recognize “they [are] naked” (Gen 3:7), a perfect image of their conscientious isolation from God’s truth.

John Paul views this passage as the moment when conscience no longer exists in perfect relation with God: “The words, ‘I was afraid, because I am naked, and I hid myself’ (Gen 3:10), attest to a radical change in this relationship. Man in some way loses the original certainty of ‘the image of God’ expressed in his body.”¹⁴⁵ God asks a vital question of Adam and Eve which helps us to understand this “radical change:” “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen 3:11) Adam and Eve no longer see the truth and meaning of their body in the light of God. Rather, they believe against God’s truth who sees them as “very good” (Gen 3:31). Further, the spousal insight of Adam and Eve is darkened, and they hide from one another, in stark contrast to Adam’s proclamation of light about Eve at her creation: “This at

¹⁴³ *VS*, §37.2.

¹⁴⁴ *VS*, §37.2.

¹⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §27:4.

last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh..." (Gen 2:23). Adam and Eve no longer see each other in their totality, but on the level of sense, manifested by their shame at being naked.

Adam and Eve's rejection of conscience also manifests the first experience of guilt. Guilt is a particular gift of conscience, prompting man to return to the voice of God and make amends after sin. Adam and Eve begin their return to God by listening to His voice in their conscience, "Where are you?", bringing them back into dialogue with God's truth. *The Catechism* speaks of the salutary gift of guilt thus:

If man commits evil, the just judgment of conscience can remain within him as the witness to the universal truth of the good, at the same time as the evil of his particular choice... In attesting to the fault committed, it calls to mind the forgiveness that must be asked, the good that must still be practiced, and the virtue that must be constantly cultivated...¹⁴⁶

In this case, Adam and Eve both respond to the salutary experience of guilt as they begin to listen to the voice of God and turn back to him.

While the medicinal effect of conscience is immediately seen at work in Adam and Eve, the wound of original sin on conscience is immediately revealed in the offspring of Adam and Eve.¹⁴⁷ God speaks thus to Cain before his sin against his brother Abel: "...sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7 ESV). Genesis thus alludes to "concupiscence," which *the Catechism* defines as "the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of the human reason... It unsettles man's moral faculties and... inclines man to commit sins."¹⁴⁸ John Paul cites the first Letter of John as a further description of concupiscence: "All that is in the world, the concupiscence of the

¹⁴⁶ CCC, 1781.

¹⁴⁷ See CCC, 405: "Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in Adam and Eve's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence.'"

¹⁴⁸ CCC, 2515.

flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world passes away with its concupiscence; but the one who does the will of God will remain in eternity (1 John 2:16-17).”¹⁴⁹ Concupiscence, an effect of original sin, thus harms man’s moral faculties, wounding conscience.

John Paul II on the Effect of Concupiscence on Conscience

The wound of original sin inflicted on conscience draws conscience away from its original relationship with truth. The original sin was the rejection of God’s life in man’s soul, depriving Adam and Eve of their fullness of grace, inhibiting their ability to pass on this grace to humanity. *The Catechism* speaks of original sin’s effect on man as “...the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice.”¹⁵⁰ Adam and Eve’s inability to give original righteousness parallels with the principle: “You cannot give what you do not have.” Adam and Eve no longer had the gift of original innocence and so, their offspring would also suffer its privation.

The loss of original justice caused a deep disorder within historical man’s soul. Man’s mind and will deprived of God’s grace was disoriented from the truth and reoriented toward the passions. The habitual disorientation of the mind and will toward the passions, caused by original sin, is called concupiscence. Yet, man was not wholly corrupted, but wounded: “human nature... is wounded in the natural powers proper to it... and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called ‘concupiscence.’”¹⁵¹ John Paul draws a comparison from the book of Sirach between “concupiscence of the flesh and fire.”¹⁵² The Pope speaks of concupiscence thus: “flaring up in the man, it invades his senses, arouses his body, draws the

¹⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §26:1-3. This scripture verse is from the citation.

¹⁵⁰ CCC, 404.

¹⁵¹ CCC, 405.

¹⁵² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

feelings along with itself, and in some way takes possession of the ‘heart.’”¹⁵³ Concupiscence thus invades man in such a way that obscures his ability to know and dialogue with the truth in his conscience: “Such passion, springing from carnal concupiscence, suffocates the deepest voice of conscience in the ‘heart’; it suffocates the sense of responsibility before God...”¹⁵⁴

The conscience is bound up in the effects of concupiscence because conscience acts as an integrating axis between mind and will. The conscience, wounded by sin, receives the disintegrating effect of concupiscence as a disorientation away from *the truth* and toward *the ego*. John Paul describes the dynamic effect of concupiscence on conscience thus:

“Suffocating the voice of conscience, passion brings restlessness of the body and of the senses,” and he continues, “...Once the inner man has been reduced to silence and passion has, as it were, gained freedom of action, passion manifests itself as an insistent tendency toward satisfying the senses and the body.”¹⁵⁵ The Pope speaks of conscience here in reference to the “inner man,” in contrast to the passions as the “outer man.”¹⁵⁶ In concupiscence, man’s exteriority is opposed to his interiority.¹⁵⁷

The conscience shares in this “proclivity toward sin,”¹⁵⁸ hindering its ability to know the truth with clarity as did Adam and Eve before the fall. The truth is no longer clear to conscience but is clouded by the “consuming”¹⁵⁹ activity of the passions: “Passion aims at

¹⁵³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

¹⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

¹⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

¹⁵⁷ See CCC, 2339: “Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy.” Man must exercise self-mastery to conquer concupiscence so that his “inner man” may reign over and above his “outer man.” See also *GS*, §17.

¹⁵⁸ CCC, 418.

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

satisfaction; hence it blunts reflective activity and disregards the voice of conscience....”¹⁶⁰

The conscience struggles to have a clear dialogue with truth as Adam and Eve did in the beginning and must now fight courageously to listen to and follow the truth with a conscience influenced by the passions.



The conscience that struggles with concupiscence can be likened to one struggling to find a light switch in a semi-dark room. The one seeking the light switch might stumble over objects or feel the fear of the unknown, hindering full freedom of action. However, when the switch is found, and turned on, there is an immediate feeling of peace, and walking and decision making come with much greater facility. The conscience with concupiscence can often feel like it is in a semi-dark room amid difficult moral decisions, while the conscience which slowly conquers concupiscence moves toward the light switch of illumined moral decision making.



John Paul II on Personal Acts Against Conscience

While the first sin of Adam and Eve passed on the wound of concupiscence to man, new personal acts of sin can deepen and inflict new wounds upon conscience. As Adam and Eve wounded their relationship with God through the first sin, so too does man wound his relationship with God through every individual sin. Each sin enacted by man is not only a choice against God, but a choice against the self, created in *imago Dei*. When man sins, he rejects conscience, the place of encounter with God’s truth. Further, every act against conscience is an act against God’s truth. *The Catechism* defines sin as: “...an offense against

¹⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §39:2.

reason, truth, and right conscience [that]...wounds the nature of man.”¹⁶¹ Thus, sin is an act contrary to truth and right conscience.

While there are various kinds and degrees of sin, all personal sin has the same effect of increasing concupiscence and further clouding the conscience. *The Catechism* thus states:

Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy *the moral sense* at the root.¹⁶²

As the acts of sin increase, the conscience is further clouded by concupiscence. The conscience loses its facility to *sense* truth; however, the moral sense is never entirely abolished from man’s conscience.

St. Paul writes that personal sin defiles a man and “corrupts” (Tit 1:15 RSVCE) or “sears” (1Tim 4:2) his conscience. Each time a man sins, he closes himself to his primary relationship with God’s truth. Through every sin against conscience, man desensitizes the conscience to moral truth. Man habituates his conscience to ignore truth by continually choosing concupiscent desires above the truth. The habituation of the conscience to sin can be described by a term used by John Paul: “concupiscent knowledge.”¹⁶³ *Concupiscent knowledge*, which is a conscience inhabited by sin, has far more difficulty knowing, choosing, and carrying out God’s truth in future circumstances. The person who habitually chooses to act in accord with his concupiscent knowledge continually chooses to live and act in a dark room, refusing to seek out and turn on the light switch.

Thomas Ryba alludes to the effects of a wounded conscience caused by habitual sin in his exposition on the ethics of John Paul. He claims, “What has been said to be generally

¹⁶¹ CCC, 1849.

¹⁶² CCC, 1865; emphasis added.

¹⁶³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, §40:5.

true of disintegration in spheres outside of the moral is particularly applicable to moral disintegration. Here, the conscience is unable to act as a guide to the truth of values.”¹⁶⁴ Personal sin results in further disintegration and “suffocates” conscience’s ability to exercise its primary function as a “guide to the truth of values.” Ryba describes further devastating effects of sin upon conscience: “Such a person sees neither the convertibility of truthfulness and duty nor truthfulness and the good. Such a person is aware of no regular obligations. Such a person bears no responsibility for self or others.”¹⁶⁵ Every personal sin is a choice in accordance with concupiscence, which “suffocates” conscience’s relationship with truth. Ryba further describes moral disintegration due to sin as “discord in relation to the good.”¹⁶⁶ He reasons that conscience is thus “[susceptible] to faltering, to falsehood, to irresponsibility, to bad faith or bad conscience.”¹⁶⁷ The conscience wounded by original or personal sin is “susceptible” to error, and is called by John Paul, an “erroneous conscience.”¹⁶⁸

John Paul II on Erroneous Conscience

While conscience is endowed with knowledge of good and evil, it is not presumed that it is infallible. John Paul writes: “Conscience, as the judgment of an act, is not exempt from the possibility of an error.”¹⁶⁹ One’s conscience is in error when its judgments are either contrary to or ignorant of the true judgments of God, for “it is always from the truth

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Ryba, “Action at the Moral Core of Personhood: Transcendence, Self-Determination and Integration in the Anthropology of John Paul II,” in *Karol Wojtyła’s Philosophical Legacy*, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 256. Ryba does not, it seems, intend to say that conscience is in total depravity in respect to truth. The wounded conscience can still act as a guide for truth after habitual sin, however, its power is significantly diminished.

¹⁶⁵ Ryba, “Action at the Moral Core of Personhood,” 256.

¹⁶⁶ Ryba, “Action at the Moral Core of Personhood,” 256.

¹⁶⁷ Ryba, “Action at the Moral Core of Personhood,” 256.

¹⁶⁸ The term “erroneous conscience” does not mean that a conscience is wholly erroneous in respect to truth, but is erroneous in some aspect of truth. The conscience’s susceptibility to error, i.e. an “erroneous conscience,” is a result of the effects due to original sin, including concupiscence. The erroneous conscience is thus distinct from concupiscence in that it is an effect of concupiscence.

¹⁶⁹ *VS*, §62.1.

that the dignity of conscience derives.”¹⁷⁰ He continues, “in the case of the correct conscience, it is a question of the objective truth received by man; in the case of the erroneous conscience, it is a question of what man, mistakenly, subjectively considers to be true.”¹⁷¹ A conscience can be in error from both the effects of concupiscence and the personal sins which result from concupiscence. An erroneous conscience may also be due to a person’s ignorance of moral truth, that is, its limited knowledge of truth, often through no fault of his own. John Paul writes: “...error of conscience can be the result of an invincible ignorance, an ignorance of which the subject is not aware and which he is unable to overcome by himself.”¹⁷² Concupiscence, personal sin, and ignorance of truth each hinder the conscience’s ability to properly judge moral truth.

The person who commits an evil act in accord with the dictates of an erroneous conscience is not morally culpable if the ignorance is not willful.¹⁷³ John Paul writes:

where such invincible ignorance is not culpable, conscience does not lose its dignity, because even when it directs us to act in a way not in conformity with the objective moral order, it continues to speak in the name of that truth about the good which the subject is called to seek sincerely.¹⁷⁴

Though an action may be objectively evil, an erroneous conscience acting in accord with its subjective perception of the truth retains its dignity.¹⁷⁵ Here one can distinguish the difference between an erroneous conscience and a sinful conscience. If a man acts out of ignorance when his conscience is simply in error, his conscience remains unharmed. When

¹⁷⁰ *VS*, §63.1.

¹⁷¹ *VS*, §63.1.

¹⁷² *VS*, §62.1.

¹⁷³ See Brian V. Johnstone, “Erroneous Conscience in *Veritatis Splendor* and the Theological Tradition,” in *The Splendor of Accuracy: An Examination of the Assertions Made by Veritatis Splendor*, ed. Joseph A. Selling and Jan Jans (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 114-135.

¹⁷⁴ *VS*, §62.4.

¹⁷⁵ *CCC*, 1790.

he acts against the truth knowingly, he is said to possess a sinful conscience and it is wounded further from these acts.

John Paul posits that not only is dignity retained but that no guilt of sin is imputed to an erroneous conscience. He says, “It is possible that the evil done as a result of invincible ignorance or a non-culpable error of judgment may not be imputable to the agent.”¹⁷⁶ However, John Paul adds that every conscience has a duty to seek the truth and thus remove the ignorance that obscures the moral good: “Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known.”¹⁷⁷ John Paul adds that one’s search for truth must be *sincere*, which Brian Johnstone clarifies as: “conformity of conscience to good will.”¹⁷⁸ St. John Henry Newman is a fine example of one who sincerely sought the truth throughout his life, conforming his conscience to good will, despite finding himself in error throughout his life’s journey.¹⁷⁹

The erroneous conscience, every conscience in the state of original sin, is bound to enlighten its ignorance by sincerely seeking the truth. The person who refuses to seek the truth separates his conscience from the truth which enlightens the mind to moral action. John Paul speaks forcefully of this reality: “Conscience, as the ultimate concrete judgment, compromises its dignity when it is *culpably erroneous*, that is to say, ‘when man shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind

¹⁷⁶ *VS*, §63.1.

¹⁷⁷ *VS*, §34.1.

¹⁷⁸ Johnstone, “Erroneous Conscience in *Veritatis Splendor*,” 122.

¹⁷⁹ See John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Ian Ker (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), whole work.

Born into the Anglican Church, Newman opposed many of the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Through his sincere search for the truth, however, Newman followed the light of his conscience, and courageously chose to enter the Catholic Church, despite the rejection he received from his friends, co-workers, and countrymen.

from being accustomed to sin.”¹⁸⁰ John Paul cites Jesus’ forceful words alluding to the tragedy of a darkened conscience: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Mt 6:23-23).¹⁸¹ The darkened conscience which Jesus speaks of is evident in man’s moral blindness throughout history. The person who fails or refuses to seek the truth denies the conscience its right to the light of God’s truth, and the person accedes to an “autonomous conscience.”

John Paul II on Autonomous Conscience

The autonomous conscience claims to possess the right to subjective moral judgment about good and evil. This belief does not adhere to an objective morality which comes from the divine law but grants priority to personal judgment for moral action. John Paul speaks of this “moral autonomy” in *Love and Responsibility*: “autonomism... holds that man most fully asserts his value when he is his own legislator, when he feels himself to be the source of all law and all justice....”¹⁸² The autonomous conscience is a conscience informed, not by God's law, but by man's passions, preferences, or subjective opinions unrooted in the truth.

A contemporary term for moral autonomy is “moral relativism.” Moral relativism places the origin of truth in the subject, rather than in the objective reality of God, resulting in an individualist morality which “[exalts] freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values.”¹⁸³ Through autonomous judgment of moral truth, the Pope continues, “... the individual conscience is accorded the status of a supreme tribunal of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions

¹⁸⁰ *VS*, §63.2.

¹⁸¹ *VS*, §63.2.

¹⁸² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 247.

¹⁸³ *VS*, §32.1.

about good and evil.”¹⁸⁴ This belief is contrary to the consciences of Adam and Eve in original justice in the beginning.

An autonomous morality has grave consequences resulting in an improper view of conscience. John Paul writes, “Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes.”¹⁸⁵ Instead of seeing conscience as “...an act of a person’s intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now...”, the conscience is given “...the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly.”¹⁸⁶ John Paul adds that this understanding of conscience gives it the undue authority, “that[,] one’s moral judgment is true merely by the fact that it has its origin in conscience.”¹⁸⁷ The primary problem here is the failure to acknowledge the origin of conscience, resulting in unauthentic moral judgments.

The fundamental mistake of the autonomous conscience is the removal of the conscience from its origin in the truth. John Paul helpfully simplifies the complexity of various contemporary attacks against the truth of conscience: “Despite their variety, these tendencies are at one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth.”¹⁸⁸ These assertions have devastating effects upon the conscience, noted by John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae*: “When conscience, this bright lamp of the soul, calls ‘evil good and good evil’ (Is. 5:20), it is already on the path to the most alarming corruption and the darkest

¹⁸⁴ *VS*, §32.1.

¹⁸⁵ *VS*, §32.2.

¹⁸⁶ *VS*, §32.2.

¹⁸⁷ *VS*, §32.2.

¹⁸⁸ *VS*, §34.2.

moral blindness.”¹⁸⁹ When evil takes root in the conscience, the result is death, as said by St. Paul, “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Man, in his failure to see God’s goodness in himself and his creatures acts against this goodness.

The conscience divorced from truth results in acts contrary to nature, inhibiting the true freedom of the individual to act in accord with the truth of his God given dignity: “Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.”¹⁹⁰ Conscience is thus placed in opposition to the moral law, rather than as its interpreter: “These different notions... posit a radical opposition between moral law and conscience, and between nature and freedom.”¹⁹¹ John Paul encourages the Church to “undertake a critical discernment of these tendencies... in the light of the fundamental dependence of freedom upon truth...”¹⁹² The man who uproots his conscience from the source of truth and goodness is led to participate in the dead works rooted in Adam and Eve’s disobedience. John Paul rather encourages man to root his conscience in God’s truth and goodness to oppose the culture of death and live for the Gospel of Life.¹⁹³

Faced with the wound of original sin and repeated wounds of personal sin, the conscience loses a clear vision of truth, and is led to moral autonomy. How is the conscience to be healed? The conscience must be reunited to truth and restored to its primary relationship with God’s truth as in the beginning. John Paul sees the remedy for the wounded conscience in the person of Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6) of man’s conscience. The healing effect of Jesus Christ upon the conscience is freedom:

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995) §24.1 in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: 1996, 2001) 681-762.

¹⁹⁰ *VS*, §32.2.

¹⁹¹ *VS*, §32.3.

¹⁹² *VS*, §34.2.

¹⁹³ See *Evangelium Vitae*, §21.

“‘You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’ (Jn 8:32).”¹⁹⁴ John Paul presents the Eucharistic Christ as God’s primary remedy for healing the conscience.

¹⁹⁴ *VS*, §34.3.

Chapter III: How is the Conscience Healed?

John Paul II on the Incarnation's Healing Effect on Conscience

Jesus Christ, the Son sent by the Father to redeem man from sin, came to heal man's conscience.¹⁹⁵ Christ came to restore conscience to full morality, that is, to a life fully in accord with the truth of God's law. John Paul states: "In the 'Sermon on the Mount,' the *magna carta* of Gospel morality, Jesus says: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them' (Mt 5:17)."¹⁹⁶ The Ten Commandments and the Law given to Moses, along with the witness of the prophets of the Old Law, provided exterior assistance for conscience in original sin. The Old Law was predominantly exterior because its focus was the external observance of the written law. In other words, it focused on visible actions that one could easily determine whether or not it was carried out; however, this was only God's temporary remedy for the interior calamity of sin. God knew man's need for an interior renewal of conscience in which he would restore conscience to its original relationship with truth. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the plan for the healing and restoration of conscience: "Christ is... the recapitulation of the Old and New Testaments, of the promises of the Law and of their fulfillment in the Gospel; he is the living and eternal link between the Old and the New Covenants."¹⁹⁷

The Incarnation of God the Son *in the flesh* of the Blessed Virgin Mary manifests God's desire to fully reveal truth to man's conscience. God the Son, "[i]n whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[,]" (Col 2:3) enters into Mary, and, therefore into her conscience as truth: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...." (Jn 1:14). Man's conscience in original sin strayed from God's truth, and Jesus

¹⁹⁵ Refer to "Note" on p. 6.

¹⁹⁶ *VS*, §§15.1.

¹⁹⁷ *VS*, §§15.1.

Christ entered into man's conscience to restore him to full relationship with truth. Livio Melina describes the moral efficacy of the Incarnation thus: "The God of Law, we could say, does not remain in the transcendental and formal dimensions of intentionality, but enters into the categorical in order to save the concrete flesh of human action."¹⁹⁸ In other words, the Incarnate Christ makes the *abstract* law of God *concrete* by revealing the fulness of human action in His Flesh.

The promise of the New Law is predominantly focused on the interior life of man, on his "heart:" "And I will give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them..." (Ezek 11:19-20). Ezekiel's prophecy alludes to a new way of moral living, in which "a new spirit" will be placed within man's conscience to help him walk wholly according to God's truth. The fulfillment of this promise to Israel will achieve the effect in conscience of total adherence to God: "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek 11:20).

While the Israelites were given abundant help from God to walk in His ways, the law given to them through Moses was only a shadow of His truth, a "pillar of cloud" (Ex 13:21), in comparison with the unveiled vision of truth in Jesus Christ. Whereas Moses gave a law written in stone, Jesus Christ would write the law upon their hearts, as prophesied by Jeremiah: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts" (Jer 31:33). In the Old Law God worked mighty signs and wonders, yet he remained veiled to their eyes, for no one could dare to look upon the face of God and live: "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:20).

¹⁹⁸ Melina, 181.

Not only was God's truth veiled to them through the written law, but their consciences were veiled by the cloud of concupiscence.¹⁹⁹ Concupiscence has reigned in the flesh of man from the moment of the original sin. Though Israel received God's written law, they had not the strength to obey His voice, with consciences weakened by the wound of disobedience. Straying Israel revealed sinful conscience's need for a full manifestation of the law and a powerful interior remedy to overcome concupiscence. This "fulfilment" of conscience is accomplished through Jesus Christ: "*Jesus himself is the living 'fulfilment' of the Law* inasmuch as he fulfils its authentic meaning by the total gift of himself: *he himself becomes a living and personal Law*, who invites people to follow him."²⁰⁰

Jesus Christ came into man's conscience as the full face of the new law. He came as the visible standard of moral perfection which men could "hear, see, look upon, and touch" (1Jn 1). Through Jesus Christ, Truth Incarnate, the conscience could now "hear, see, look upon, and touch" the truth, giving man a concrete way to live the truth. Melina writes of conscience's new relation to this truth: "the principle of Christian conscience... [which] initially shines in the seal of the creaturely image [later shines] in the human face of the Son, the uncreated and perfect Image of the Father."²⁰¹ The human face of Jesus Christ thus reveals to conscience how man is to act in the *imago Dei*, becoming the new standard for conscience.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ The salvation brought about by Christ does not remove concupiscence. While Baptism forgives all sins (See CCC, 1263), the effects caused by sin remain in human nature. Also, CCC, 1264: "Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls *concupiscence*, or metaphorically, 'the tinder for sin' (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence 'is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ.' Indeed, 'an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.'"

²⁰⁰ *VS*, §§15.2.

²⁰¹ Melina, 190.

²⁰² It is important to note, however, that the assistance of the Holy Spirit is essential in conforming the conscience to the fullness of the law, which will be discussed in the next section. The Son and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, work in tandem to restore the conscience to its full glory.

Conscience invites man to concrete action, converting truth from an *is* to an *ought*. Jesus Christ addresses the conscience of man, moving man from *abstract knowledge* to *lived knowledge*. John Paul explains: “Having become Incarnate, the Word has fully entered into our day-to-day existence and finds expression in concrete human acts....”²⁰³ Christ thus invites man to new moral living by His taking on human nature. In various letters and addresses John Paul contemplates the scene of the young man’s encounter with Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: “‘Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?’”²⁰⁴ This Gospel passage is rich in its manifestation of the relation of conscience to the new law: “Jesus’ conversation with the young man helps us to grasp *the conditions for the moral growth of man, who has been called to perfection....*”²⁰⁵ John Paul later concludes:

The way and at the same time the content of this perfection consists in the following of Jesus, *sequela Christi*, once one has given up one's own wealth and very self. This is precisely the conclusion of Jesus' conversation with the young man: ‘Come, follow me’ (Mt 19:21).²⁰⁶

Following Jesus Christ, Truth Incarnate, thus becomes the new law of the moral life: “just as the people of Israel followed God who led them through the desert towards the Promised Land (cf. *Ex* 13:21), so every disciple must follow Jesus....”²⁰⁷ Incarnate Truth invites every conscience clouded by concupiscence to leave the desert of disobedience and follow him into the moral perfection of obedience to the heavenly Father.

However, just as truth was difficult for the Israelites to follow in the Old Law, the New Law of Jesus Christ remains difficult for conscience with concupiscence to follow, evidenced by the young man at Jesus’ invitation: “When the young man heard this he went

²⁰³ John Paul II, *Allocuzione ad un Convegno di Teologia Morale*, trans. by Melina, Livio (12 November 1988). Quoted in Livio Melina “Sharing in Christ’s Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of Veritatis Splendor” (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 181.

²⁰⁴ See John Paul’s commentary on Matthew 19:16-21 in *Veritatis Splendor*, §6-22 and *Dilecti Amici*, §§6-8.

²⁰⁵ *VS*, §§17.1.

²⁰⁶ *VS*, §§19.1.

²⁰⁷ *VS*, §§19.2.

away sorrowful..." (Mt 19:22). Concupiscence is a battle for conscience to face, even when Truth Incarnate lays out the way to live before man's eyes. St. Paul expresses this interior struggle: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom 7:22-23). For this reason, Christ not only gives to conscience the full revelation of the law, but the power and grace to overcome sin and carry out the law, most precisely through His Paschal Mystery.

The conscience is recreated by the grace poured out upon man through Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, merited by His sacrifice to the Father on the Cross. Melina writes, "having died for our sins, He has recreated us to our original holiness, which has to express itself in our daily activity in this world."²⁰⁸ The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross won for disobedient man a practical participation in Christ's obedience to the Father: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). The offering of Christ on the Cross not only gives man the primary example of *the New Law of Charity* for conscience, "[t]his is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12)[,] but gives conscience the grace to participate in the divine Person's self-emptying love. John Paul proclaims that Christ Crucified is the new standard of conscience: "[H]is crucified flesh fully reveals the unbreakable bond between freedom and truth."²⁰⁹ However, how can conscience practically participate in Christ Crucified?

²⁰⁸ Melina, 190.

²⁰⁹ *VS*, §§87.4.

John Paul II on the Holy Spirit's Healing Effect on Conscience

Before Jesus ascended to the right hand of His Father in heaven, he promised the Paraclete: "...if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7). The Apostles gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem at the time of Jewish Pentecost, fifty days after Jewish Passover. The feast, also known as "Shavuot,"²¹⁰ was a traditional Jewish celebration of the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. However, this time, the disciples would not celebrate the Old Law written on tablets but receive the power of the New Law of the Holy Spirit into their consciences.

The Holy Spirit is thus poured into the consciences of Mary and the Apostles in the Upper Room, "like the rush of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2), to proclaim the truth of Christ to the nations. Those who receive the Holy Spirit are impelled in their consciences to overcome their fear of the Jewish officials to preach the Gospel in response to the truth and goodness of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection for mankind (Jn 20:19). To remain locked in fear and silence, resisting the invitation of the Holy Spirit, would be, in this instance, an act against their consciences. Rather, they respond appropriately to the invitation placed on their consciences, as they courageously walk into the streets proclaiming Christ Crucified: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). The Spirit gave them both the power to preach Christ and to bear witness to the truth in action: "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2Tim 1:7). Overcoming fear to proclaim the truth of Christ with boldness is one of the manifold effects of the Holy Spirit on man's conscience after Pentecost.

²¹⁰ This celebration is also called "the Feast of Weeks," a celebration (in tandem with the giving of the Law) for the gathering of the first fruits of the harvest at the years end. See Ex 34:22: "And you shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end." See also Ex 23:16, Num 28:26, and Deut 16:10.

John Paul also writes of the role of the Holy Spirit to convict the conscience concerning sin, expounding upon Christ's words to the Apostles before His Ascension: "And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment..." (Jn 16:8). John Paul writes: "The Holy Spirit, who takes from the Son the work of the Redemption of the world, by this very fact takes the task of the salvific 'convincing of sin.'"²¹¹ The Holy Spirit enlightens conscience of its sin against God in the Crucifixion of Christ, rooted in the disobedience of Adam and Eve, while at the same time revealing the power of redemption in Christ Crucified.²¹² Upon receiving the power of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, Peter immediately addresses the consciences of the first converts in response to his own interior enlightenment: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Peter here mirrors the Holy Spirit's action upon his conscience by convincing the people of their sin and encouraging them to turn to Christ for forgiveness through the gift of the Holy Spirit.²¹³

John Paul highlights two particular gifts which the Holy Spirit imparts to conscience: "the gift of the truth of conscience and the gift of the certainty of redemption."²¹⁴ John Paul speaks of "the gift of the truth of conscience" as the Holy Spirit convincing the conscience of sin as he writes: "By becoming 'the light of hearts,' that is to say the light of consciences,

²¹¹ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986) §§28 at the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html.

²¹² *DV*, §§35.1.

²¹³ Peter knows the conviction of sin experienced conscience, preaching repentance at Pentecost from experience. Peter experienced the salvific effect of conscience at the gaze of the Lord after he denied him three times. See Lk 22:60-62: "But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are saying.' And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

²¹⁴ *DV*, §§31.2.

the Holy Spirit ‘convinces concerning sin,’ which is to say, he makes man realize his own evil and at the same time directs him toward what is good.”²¹⁵ Along with convincing conscience of sin, the Holy Spirit also directs the consciences of believers to their remedy: Christ Crucified. St. Paul’s words to the Hebrews explain this remedy in the Crucified Christ: “...the blood of Christ...[purifies] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). The Holy Spirit thus reveals the blood of Christ as Christ’s redemptive power to convince conscience of sin and also of the certainty of its’ redemption in Christ.

The Redemption offered on the Cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit are intimately linked, as John Paul notes: “But the Holy Spirit the Counselor ‘convinces concerning sin’ always in relation to the Cross of Christ.”²¹⁶ The Holy Spirit purifies the conscience from dead works only “by virtue of the Redemption accomplished by the blood of the Son of Man.”²¹⁷ In turn, Christ’s blood opens the conscience to the Holy Spirit: “[Christ’s blood]... opens to the Holy Spirit the door into man's inmost being, namely into the sanctuary of human consciences.”²¹⁸ Christ’s blood merits for the conscience a share in God’s love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The connection between Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit is certainly mysterious, but Christ’s words to the Apostles at the Last Supper help to clarify their intimate connection. Jesus prophesies of the future work of the Holy Spirit after His Paschal Mystery: “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16:14). Jesus wants to give to man His own relationship with the Father, as He says, “All that the Father has is mine” (Jn 16:15). Jesus came to restore man to relationship with the Father, who is *the*

²¹⁵ *DV*, §§42.2.

²¹⁶ *DV*, §§44.3.

²¹⁷ *DV*, §§42.3.

²¹⁸ *DV*, §§42.3.

Truth. He merited this new relationship by His bloody sacrifice on the Cross. The Holy Spirit shares the Father's truth with all men through the power of Christ's Redemption and applies the merit of the blood of Christ for the purification of every conscience.

The blood and the Holy Spirit thus operate in conscience as the power of truth to help man turn away from sin and toward righteousness in Christ, causing in conscience a conversion, or "metanoia."²¹⁹ In effect, St. Paul's words come to fruition in conscience: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"(Rom 12:2). This renewal of conscience is further explained in a beautiful way in St. Paul's letter to Titus:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life (Tit 3:3 -7).

The Holy Spirit thus shares in "the washing of regeneration" which poured out from Christ's side on the Cross.

To better understand John Paul's view of the Holy Spirit's effect upon conscience, it is helpful to examine how St. Paul understands the Holy Spirit's action upon conscience. St. Paul describes the reality of God's Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, being poured into man's heart thus: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6). Mark Ginter translates Paul's verse in this way: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our consciences."²²⁰ This translation helps describe the reality of conscience being restored to right

²¹⁹ See *DV*, §§45.

²²⁰ Mark Ginter, "The Holy Spirit and Morality: A Dynamic Alliance" *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 51 (1996), 173. Quoted in James Keating, "Evangelizing Conscience: Taking on the Mind of Christ," *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. VIII, No. 4, 176; emphasis added.

relationship with God the Father through the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit thus forms the image of Jesus Christ within conscience, who in turn restores conscience to right relationship with the Father. The Spirit of Christ restores conscience to original obedience through the merit of Christ's obedient surrender to the Father's will in His passion: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee... yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36). The Spirit of Truth's action thus effects in conscience a *metanoia* from disobedience to obedience.

The Holy Spirit returns conscience to obedience by bringing it into contact with the blood of the obedient Christ. The Spirit thus forms in the conscience of the believer the obedient Christ, who was "obedient unto death" (Phil 2:8). The believer is no longer bound to the dead works of disobedience but can now offer true worship through the living works of a purified conscience. However, God knew that man would need continuous contact with the blood which purifies the conscience to "the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), and this not only by words, or by faith, but by concrete signs that give grace and power. Christ thus instituted signs of His Redemptive Mysteries called "the sacraments," or, "mysteries," which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, would effect in conscience the mysteries which they signified until the close of the age. The Sacraments thus act as extensions of Christ's Incarnation and Paschal Mysteries in the consciences of men today.



A sailboat needs wind to inflate the sail, to push the boat forward toward its destination.

While the sail guides and directs the boat, the wind gives the boat the power to move forward. Likewise, while the conscience guides and directs man toward the truth, it needs the wind of the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments to elevate and move man toward divine charity.



John Paul II on the Sacraments' Healing Effects on Conscience

Before Christ founded His Church at Pentecost through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, He entrusted to His Apostles manifold sacraments, His Mysteries, as concrete instruments to *pour out* His Spirit into men's consciences, to bring men into righteousness with the Father.²²¹ The sign value, that is, the particular mystery of Christ which each sacrament represents, invites conscience to a new standard of living in imitation of Christ, the Perfect Man. Moreover, each sacrament gives conscience grace through the power of the Holy Spirit to live the mysteries of the life of Christ, forming Jesus Christ in the conscience of the believer. The sacraments thus act as instrumental causes of Christ's grace to transform man's moral life and action.

Each sacrament calls man to new life in Christ, inviting conscience to a new standard of living, and bestowing upon conscience strength and light through the power of the Holy Spirit to act in accord with this new standard. John Paul employs the sacrament of Baptism as an example: "Having died to sin, those who are baptized receive new life (cf. Rom 6:3-11): alive for God in Christ Jesus, they are called to walk by the Spirit and to manifest the Spirit's fruits in their lives (cf. Gal 5:16-25)."²²² Baptism thus both calls conscience to imitate the purity of Christ through the signs of washing with water, while it also spiritually configures conscience to Christ through the gift of grace.

²²¹ The expression of the Holy Spirit being "poured out" is used in the new English translation for *the Order of Penance* in the United States. See Committee on Divine Worship, "CWDS Confirms Order of Penance for the United States," *USCCB NewsLetter*, Volume LVIII, (2022), at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/newsletter-2022-04.pdf>: "God, the Father of mercies, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace. AND I ABSOLVE YOU FROM YOUR SINS, IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."

²²² *V.S.*, §§21.2.

While each sacrament is vital for the flourishing of conscience in the Christian life, *Lumen Gentium* calls the Eucharist “...the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.”²²³ Deacon James Keating thus concludes: “As it is generally in the Christian life, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the good conscience as well.”²²⁴ While in other sacraments man receives Christ’s grace, in the Eucharist man receives Christ’s *whole and entire, living and relational*, Presence, in the innermost sanctuary of his conscience. Being the source and summit of the Christian conscience, the Eucharist serves as the primary source for healing the conscience.

John Paul II on the Eucharist’s Healing Effect on Conscience

Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist as His greatest gift to man: “...the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51). Christ’s gift of His flesh in the Eucharist is an eternal offering in continuity with His sacrificial offering to the Father for the world on the Cross. St. Paul displays the connection between the Eucharist and Christ’s sacrifice: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1Cor 11:26). Furthermore, Jesus promises the possibility of actively participating in His death through the Eucharistic Supper: “...he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:54, 56).

As an extension of Christ’s Incarnation, the Eucharist is both the model to imitate and the source of grace for the Christian conscience. The Eucharist not only calls the Christian to remember and imitate Christ’s sacrifice of love on the Cross, but truly makes present His eternal sacrifice as a source of grace. Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is the source

²²³ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. (21 November 1964), §11.1 in *The Documents of Vatican II: with notes and index*, trans. Vatican Staff (Strathfield, NSW: St. Paul’s Publications 2009).

²²⁴ James Keating, “Pope John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” *The Downside Review* 126, no. 445 (2008), 250.

of salvation for the Christian conscience, and the Eucharist allows conscience to truly participate in this eternal sacrifice. John Paul aptly describes the redeeming effect of the Eucharist on the Christian's moral life: "Sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-29), is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of 'eternal life' (cf. Jn 6:51-58), the source and power of that complete gift of self...."²²⁵ Christ not only gives conscience the example to imitate; He also shares His abiding presence to carry out His act of love in our daily activity.

Christ's redemption gives man, *especially the Christian*, a new standard for judging moral good and evil: charity. The moral law of Jesus transcends the basic demands of justice which is, "to give the other what is their due." Jesus, rather, is the new standard for moral living, calling the Christian to imitate and respond to His charity, which is the complete sacrifice of oneself for the good of the other.²²⁶ Jesus restores the conscience's vision of the true dignity of every man, revealing that each man, bought at the blood of Christ, is due the love of Christ. The Eucharistic, the Sacrament of charity, most concretely presents to the Christian conscience the new standard²²⁷ for concrete judgment and action in his daily life in relation to his neighbor, as it fully gives to the soul the charity of Jesus Christ.²²⁸

Furthermore, the Eucharist gives conscience the supreme example of virtue to imitate: Christ Himself. While the Eucharist manifests all the virtues, it most especially

²²⁵ *VS*, §§21.2.

²²⁶ See Jn 15:13: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

²²⁷ Justice, however, should not be overlooked. It is precisely in justice that charity has its foundation. Charity as the "new standard" of morality does not abolish justice but fulfills it (Mt 5:17).

²²⁸ Lawrence Feingold, *The Eucharist: Mystery of Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion*, (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 503 – 505: "The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, is especially ordered to nourish charity in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions of love for God and neighbor... [T]he sacramental sign indicates this effect of charity by the fact that Christ gives himself to us whole and entire to be received directly into our bodies in a nuptial way. In the Eucharist, Christ feeds us with His own body and blood, which is the most expressive sign of the love that the Eucharist produces in the faithful who are rightly disposed.... Since we receive Christ in his act of giving Himself to the end, Communion nourishes us with that same ecstatic love by configuring us with what we have received."

manifests the highest of all virtues: Charity, the height of the moral life and the new Law of conscience.²²⁹ Charity is self-sacrificial love given for the good of the beloved. Charity forgets the self for the good of the beloved, and is succinctly identified by St. Paul:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1Cor 13:4-7).

The love described is perfectly exemplified by Christ on the Cross, but also in a uniquely marvelous way in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, as the divine Son humbles himself to become present under the appearance of bread and wine, the eye of conscience sees Christ's total gift of self for the good of the other, giving conscience the example of self-emptying love to imitate.

Like the Incarnation and the other Sacraments, the Eucharist not only gives an example to imitate, but the grace to participate in Christ's life. The sacrament of the Eucharist not only gives man a share in Christ's grace, like the other sacraments, but gives the supreme gift of the substantial presence of Christ Himself.²³⁰ Indeed, John Paul says that, in the Eucharist, *Christ Himself* visits our consciences: "Let us learn to discover with respect the truth about the inner self that becomes the dwelling place of God present in the Eucharist... Christ comes into [our] hearts... and visits [our] consciences."²³¹ While through the mysteries of Christ's life man *sees* Christ's act of salvation, the Eucharist most fully enables conscience to *participate* in Christ's act of salvation. Keating explains: "[In the Eucharist] the mystery of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection is entrusted to our consciences.

²²⁹ See CCC, 1822-1829.

²³⁰ See Feingold, 491 - 496. Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist, body, blood, soul, and divinity. In the other six sacraments, man receives a share in Christ's divine grace. In the Eucharist alone, man receives the actual Body of Christ, substantially present in heaven, as well as a share in Christ's divine grace.

²³¹ John Paul II, Letter on the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist *Dominicae Cenae* (24 February 1980) §§6.2 at the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1980/documents/hf_ip-ii_let_19800224_dominicae-cenae.html.

Here we are invited to participate in the holiest of realities so that such reality can come to define us, to orient us in our thinking, to form our minds in love of him who has condescended to effect our liberation.”²³²

The Eucharist becomes in conscience an abiding presence, gradually transforming conscience to act in union with “*the way, the truth, and the life.*” Jesus’ invitation, “Abide in me, and I in you”(Jn 15:4), is fulfilled through the indwelling of the Eucharistic Christ in conscience, conforming conscience to Christ’s own moral life. John Paul thus writes:

...the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian... each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise.²³³

Christ thus forms the new man through relational dialogue with conscience, restoring conscience to a more authentic dialogue with truth, as in the beginning, calling forth new life and action in Christ.

Authentic dialogue with the Eucharist happens most especially in the reception of the Eucharist at Mass. However, the fruitfulness of this dialogue is dependent on the disposition of the recipient. Eucharistic adoration is a concrete means to preparing oneself for authentic dialogue with Christ at the Mass. Keating writes of Eucharist adoration: “In this mystical listening to the word of God, the Liturgy of the Word is extended and one can enter more deeply into its many truths, which feed the conscience.”²³⁴ Eucharistic adoration allows the conscience time in silence to enter into dialogue with the voice of moral truth, Christ Himself, who reawakens conscience to authentic moral living.

²³² Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 248–249.

²³³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist October 2004 – October 2005 *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (7 October 2005) §§25 at the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20041008_mane-nobiscum-domine.html.

²³⁴ Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 259.

The Eucharistic Christ awakens conscience to its own sin, inspiring contrition and repentance to prepare for Christ a worthy abode. John Paul encourages "...the good quality of sensitiveness of Christian conscience, guided solely by respect for Christ, who, when He is received in the Eucharist, should find in the heart of each of us a worthy abode."²³⁵ The reception of the Eucharist thus calls for purity of conscience. John Paul writes: "Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion...."²³⁶ Not only does the Eucharist call for purity of conscience, but it purifies conscience of venial sins. Dr. Lawrence Feingold writes:

The forgiveness of venial sins through reception of Holy Communion comes through an infusion of charity that attracts the soul to further conformity with the will of God, leading it to repent (at least implicitly) for certain habits of venial sin that it sees to be contrary to God's will and to make a purpose of amendment in that regard. Venial sins will be forgiven to the degree that there is a movement of true contrition for them that includes a resolve to avoid those sins in the future.²³⁷

There is an intimate connection between the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Both the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Penance can purify the conscience of sins,²³⁸ opening the conscience to communion with the merciful Christ, leading to a new moral life in Christ.

While Christ is all merciful, one must first manifest the desire to receive Christ's mercy before approaching the merciful Christ in the Eucharist. This is done most appropriately by the voluntary acknowledgement and repentance of one's sins in Christ's sacrament of Reconciliation. Keating writes: "The Eucharist is the encounter with Him Who

²³⁵ *Dominicae Cenaе*, §§11.5.

²³⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003) §§37.1 at the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccl-de-euch.html.

²³⁷ Feingold, 506 – 507.

²³⁸ While the Eucharist can forgive venial sins, the sacrament of Penance forgives both venial and mortal sins.

does not will anything but mercy and healing.”²³⁹ However, those who do not desire mercy and healing through the sacrament of Penance ought not receive the merciful Christ in the Eucharist, particularly in the case of a person in mortal sin.²⁴⁰ Thus, St. Paul admonishes the Corinthians:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1Cor 11:27-29).

St. Paul thus proclaims the Eucharist as the standard and judge for conscience, calling man to repentance and reformation of life. Penance is Christ’s perfect gift for man to properly examine himself and be made into a worthy abode for His Eucharistic presence: “If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.”²⁴¹

The sacrament of Reconciliation, however, is necessary, but not sufficient, to prepare conscience for restorative dialogue with Christ. Keating suggests an interior disposition of silence to prepare conscience to receive the Eucharist as restorative truth: “In order to read one’s own heart or conscience, a person needs to enter *the stillness of internal dialogue* between the self and the indwelling Spirit.”²⁴² Habituating a place of silence within conscience before receiving the Eucharist silences the noise of concupiscence and opens a place for the truth

²³⁹ James Keating, “The Eucharist and the Healing of Affection for Sin,” *Emmanuel* March/April (2007):107-115.

²⁴⁰ See CCC, 1385: “Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before going to communion.” See also CCC, 1855: “Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.” Since mortal sin cuts a person off from relationship with God, it is important that the person first reconciles with God before receiving Christ in the sacrament of communion. Those who have only venial sin on their soul, however, are permitted to receive, as their relationship with God is only weakened, and not wholly cut off. See CCC, 1862 – 1863.

²⁴¹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §§37.1.

²⁴² Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 255; emphasis added.

to rest within. Keating asks: “What will our consciences become if we *rest* in vulnerability before the Heart of Jesus revealed to us in the mass?”²⁴³ Silence thus disposes man to receptivity, welcoming the Spirit of Truth who transforms conscience into an abode of truth: “The participants in worship are vulnerable to being visited by the divine, to having their conscience visited by Christ so that they may be purified.”²⁴⁴

Man’s supreme calling is made clear when the conscience is purified from sin through the conversion and purification wrought by the Eucharist in conscience. *Gaudium et Spes* declares: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”²⁴⁵ God most aptly reveals to man his supreme calling as a man through the intimate dialogue of the Eucharistic Christ with conscience. Keating writes: “Christ visits to instruct and summon to conversion....”²⁴⁶ Thus, in the Eucharist, man not only receives the truth of who he is “in the final Adam,” but also receives the call to make a reciprocal gift of himself in return to Christ. The self-gift of Christ through the Eucharist to conscience demands a response of reciprocal love. The believer is “summoned” to reciprocal love not only to God, but to neighbor.

Eucharistic relationality not only restores conscience’s relationship with God and with the self, but with one’s neighbor. John Paul writes: “The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes of itself the school of active love for neighbor.”²⁴⁷ Jesus’ new commandment to the Christian conscience is given at the Last Supper, when He gives his disciples the gift of the Eucharist: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one

²⁴³ Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 251; emphasis added.

²⁴⁴ Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 258.

²⁴⁵ *GS*, §22.

²⁴⁶ Keating, “John Paul II, Liturgy and Conscience,” 255.

²⁴⁷ *Dominicae Cenaе*, §§6.1.

another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34). Christ’s gift of love in the Eucharist thus restores both man’s vertical relationship with God as well as his horizontal relationship with his fellow man.

Jesus Christ’s self-emptying love in His Eucharistic Sacrifice is a summons to love one’s neighbor in imitation of His Eucharistic love. John Paul teaches us: “The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact, what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine.”²⁴⁸ The Eucharist thus reveals to conscience the dignity of each person, and demands the same response of love which Christ gave at the Last Supper. Every child of God is dignified and worthy of self-giving love. The conscience learns this reality in the Eucharistic Christ.

The first effect of original sin was a turning in on oneself, breaking the true communion of Adam and Eve, evidenced by their hiding from one another in the garden. To the contrary, the Eucharist calls the children of Adam of Eve back into true communion with one another. The Eucharist restores man to the bond of charity, calling the conscience “out” of concupiscible self-focus to communion with others. The Eucharist thus “calls out” and forms the “ekklesia” of the Church, healing man’s relationship with God, with himself, and with others, bringing the children of God into the unity of charity and truth in Jesus Christ, *the New Adam*.

²⁴⁸ *Dominicae Cenaе*, §§6.1.



There are many different modes of communicating with another: letters, e-mails, phone calls, text messages. However, the most powerful mode of communication is dialogue with another in their physical presence. The Eucharist is the most powerful mode of communication for conscience because, in the Eucharist, the conscience can dialogue with Christ in His physical and substantial presence.



John Paul II on the Healing of Conscience through the Witness of the Saints

The Church was established as the Mystical Body of Christ through the blood and the water that poured forth from the side of the Crucified Christ. Through the Eucharist, man is brought into communion with the Body of Christ in her mystical members through the blood of Christ which purifies all consciences. The Church born from the blood and the water has developed and unfolded through the witnesses of Mary, the Apostles, and the countless saints who have lived in conscientious obedience to the Christ of the Eucharist. As a result, their consciences have become habituated by the Eucharistic charity of Christ. John Paul writes: “In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendour of a lived reality; it becomes ‘contagious’ and, in a manner of speaking, it ‘warms our hearts.’”²⁴⁹ The witness of the saints provides for conscience “a lived reality” to imitate.

John Paul sees in the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints the source and summit of conscientious living in the Eucharistic Christ. John Paul magnifies Mary as the model of the moral life, who submitted and reoriented her whole conscience to the person of Christ:

²⁴⁹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §§62.

“Mary is the radiant sign and inviting model of the moral life.”²⁵⁰ The rejection of truth present in the conscience of Eve is restored through the obedient conscience of Mary, *the New Eve*. Mary lived this obedience to the charity of Christ perpetually from the moment of her conception, and most profoundly at the feet of her Crucified Son. Mary teaches this obedience to the Church through her words: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Mary’s obedient conscience was inhabited by the truth of Christ, and she serves as the model of the purified conscience for the Church, opening the way for countless witnesses to follow, who have in turn allowed the truth to reinhabit their consciences.

Following Mary, the first true witness of conscience in Christ was John the Baptist, who followed the Lamb who came “to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). John bore witness to the dignity of the human person and marriage, resulting in the shedding of his blood for Christ (Mt 14:1-12). John is a witness of a conscience obedient to the truth for the sake of Christ. When a conscience inhabited by the concupiscence of sin encounters a conscience inhabited by truth, it is perplexed.²⁵¹ The man who rejects the truth in his own conscience, often rejects the truth which abides in another. The death which came upon Christ Crucified, the Truth, is the same death that has and will continue to be lived out in all men who bear witness to the truth in their consciences. However, they are not alone in their witness to the truth, for Christ witnessed before them, and through His witness, the saints continue to heal and restore the wounded consciences of the world:

By their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendour of moral truth, the martyrs and, in general, all the Church's Saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense. By witnessing fully to the good, they are a living reproof to those who transgress the law (cf. Wis 2:12), and they make the words of the Prophet echo ever afresh: "Woe to those who call

²⁵⁰ *VS*, §§120.2.

²⁵¹ See Mark 6:20 “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly.” Herod’s fragile conscience chose human respect above the attraction of truth, resulting in the death of John the Baptist.

evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Is 5:20).²⁵²

The person who courageously bears witness to the truth in his conscience reveals the "*Veritatis splendor*" to the consciences of all men which, deep within, thirst for the righteousness offered by Jesus Christ.

²⁵² *VS*, §§93.1.

Conclusion

When Jesus Christ was on earth He said: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Lk 5:31). The moral blindness of the world today is evident. Man is sick and in need of a physician. Christ came not only to save man from bodily sickness, but also and more deeply from the moral and spiritual sickness resulting from the wounds caused by sin. This work has explored God’s redemptive mission to heal and restore the sick consciences of the world today.

At the beginning of creation God created everything from His goodness, giving man a particular share in His goodness. Adam and Eve lived and walked with God, knowing Him and participating in His goodness with great facility. The divine law written on their consciences was in clear sight, and they knew and chose the good according to this clear vision of God. The primordial gift of conscience shone in Adam and Eve with great clarity and precision as they lived in perfect reciprocal self-gift to God and to each other. They lived according to the natural law, and so their consciences were inhabited by truth. As a result, they lived in a state of peace and in a true bond of communion with God and with one another.

However, at the first sin of Adam and Eve, when they chose to distrust and disobey God, their consciences were infected by the wound of concupiscence. Concupiscence to their conscience was as clouds to the sun, and the light and vision of God’s truth within was dimmed. The conscience after the fall was inhabited by concupiscence, with mind dimmed and will weakened for the participation in and accomplishment of the good. This interior calamity resulted in the exterior calamity of the division of man with God, self, and others, so evident in the history of man. Man awaited a powerful medicine to heal the impaired vision of conscience and to restore his moral sight to the full. God came with the written

law, the prophets, and powerful signs, but this exterior remedy was not yet the fullness of God's potent cure for conscience in sin.

Jesus Christ came in the flesh for the inner man, to heal and restore his conscience, that man might once again walk fully in the righteousness of truth. Christ, obedient to the Father unto death, saved conscience from the death of disobedience. Through the power of the blood and the water from Christ's side, man's conscience was awakened to serve the living God "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). Christ's redemption of conscience through his blood is the fulfillment of the Father's desire for man, prophesied by Christ: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him" (Jn 4:23).

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, came as Christ's gift to lead consciences "into all truth" (Jn 16:13). The Father sent the Holy Spirit to apply the power of Christ's Paschal Mystery into the consciences of believers: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). The Holy Spirit thus opens the conscience to the redeeming power of Christ's sacrificial blood. Moreover, the Holy Spirit opens the consciences of believers to participate in Christ's gift of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity, and the New Law of conscience.

The sacrament of the Eucharist becomes the source and summit of conscience, just as it is the source and summit of the Christian life. Christ comes to abide in the conscience of the believer in the Eucharist, restoring conscience's vision of God, self, and neighbor. Countless saints and martyrs have witnessed to the transforming power of Jesus Christ's redemptive power to heal and restore the conscience by His blood poured out in the Eucharist. Christ's witness in men's conscience abides: "This is he who came by water and

blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree” (1Jn 5:6-8). Jesus Christ, the Truth, has poured out His salvation upon the conscience of man through the Eucharist. Will man receive His healing remedy?

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