

Christian Conscience and Ethical Dilemmas

DIOCESAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
DIOCESE OF ROCKFORD

Conscience...

- ▶ Where do we begin?
- ▶ Where are we going?
- ▶ What stops will we make on the way?

Conscience

- ▶ We will begin with how the Church understands conscience
- ▶ We will look a little at where this comes from
- ▶ We will mention some theologians and their viewpoints
- ▶ We will look at scripture
- ▶ We will look at some magisterial/papal writings

Conscience

- ▶ We will also be looking at conscience a little from other, non ecclesial sources.
- ▶ We will look at several related issues like, cooperation, the difference between formal and material sin, etc.
- ▶ We will look at modern issues with conscience protection.

Conscience

- ▶ We will then proceed to look at different moral and ethical dilemmas, trying to learn how to apply what we've discussed in actual situations.

Conscience

- ▶ **Your assignment...**

Conscience

- ▶ Each participant must come up with a moral or ethical dilemma (more about these later) for possible inclusion in a class discussion. The dilemma may be actual or theoretical. It is to be typed and is not to exceed one page (double spaced, 12 pt font). Each dilemma is to be followed with a brief analysis of the following:
 - ▶ The good(s) and the evil(s) involved
 - ▶ Church teaching on the different elements included
 - ▶ Your suggested course of action and reasoning

Conscience

- ▶ Conscience = con (cum) scientia
 - ▶ "With Knowledge"
 - ▶ Conscientia

Conscience

- ▶ Historically, our idea of conscience comes from the concept of "Synderesis"
- ▶ The word Synderesis is also sometimes seen written as "synteresis" – coming from the Greek words "synteresin" or "syneidesis"
- ▶ These Greek words typically mean something along the lines of "shared knowledge" or "awareness"
- ▶ "Synderesis" is defined philosophically as: "the natural capacity of practical reason to apprehend universal first principles of human action."

Conscience

- ▶ What does any of that mean???

Conscience

- ▶ It means that we have, inherent in our human nature, a capacity which allows us to recognize certain truths, and then the capacity to turn those truths into action.
- ▶ For example:
 - ▶ We recognize (apprehend) something like "do good, avoid evil" as being a good plan of action
 - ▶ We recognize the difference between the concepts of good and evil
 - ▶ We recognize something like the "principle of non contradiction"

Conscience

- ▶ This also allows for the existence of something like Natural Law.
- ▶ We are just made a certain way, to do certain things, and avoid doing other things – in keeping with how our human nature is made.

Conscience

- ▶ Where does this capacity come from?
- ▶ From being made in the image and likeness of God.
- ▶ This gives our human nature the "powers" that it has.
- ▶ This becomes, as it were, the "origin" of our conscience

Conscience

- ▶ How does the Church understand conscience in more practical terms?

Conscience and the Catechism

- ▶ The first words of Part III in the Catechism:
- ▶ 1776 "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God.... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."⁴⁷

Conscience

- ▶ In that paragraph we encounter several ideas/images for conscience that are helpful and that offer us a little bit more regarding how conscience is often thought of...
- ▶ Inner voice
- ▶ Interior law
- ▶ Heart
- ▶ God's voice
- ▶ Secret core

Conscience

- ▶ While all of these are useful, there is something else in that paragraph which gets to the heart of why conscience is so important to us.

Conscience

- ▶ It deals with good and evil
- ▶ Why does this matter? It's the only way to arrive at our reason for existing – our truest destiny...

Conscience

▶ Happiness

Conscience

- ▶ How do we understand good and evil?
- ▶ **Good** – that which is as it should be – that which is in keeping with our nature – that which advances us to our proper end
- ▶ **Evil** – that which lacks what should be there (not as it should be) – that which goes against our human nature or is not in keeping with it – that which hinders us from arriving at our proper end

Conscience

- ▶ It is already within us
- ▶ It only applies to us as human beings. Why?
- ▶ It is God's forum within

Conscience and the Catechism

- ▶ **What does it do for us?**
- ▶ 1777 Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

Conscience

▶ How is it defined?

Conscience

- ▶ 1778 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.

Conscience

- ▶ Judgment of reason
- ▶ Human person recognizes
- ▶ Moral quality
- ▶ Of an act
- ▶ Future-present-past

Conscience

- ▶ **Awareness (perception)**
- ▶ **Process (application)**
- ▶ **Judgment (decision)**

▶ (CCC 1780)

Conscience

- ▶ **What does it do for us?**

Conscience

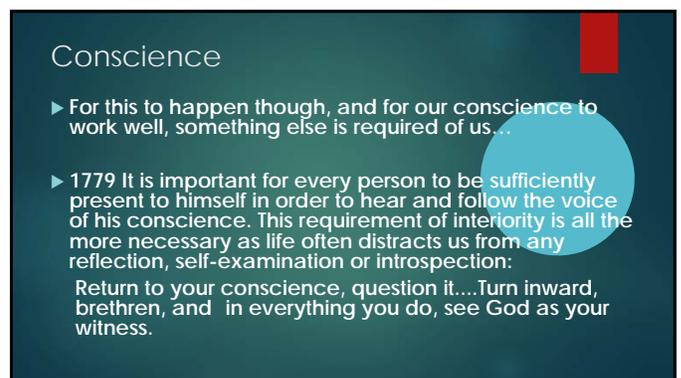
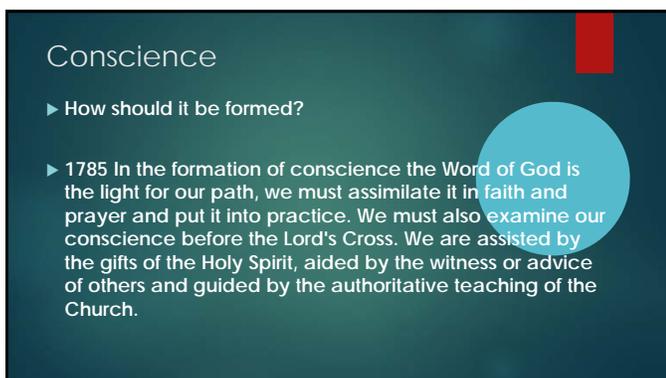
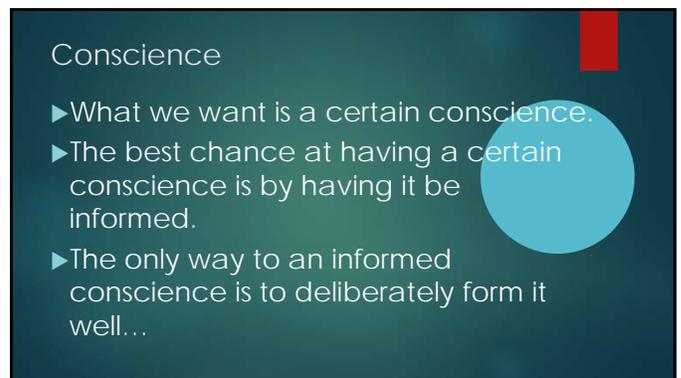
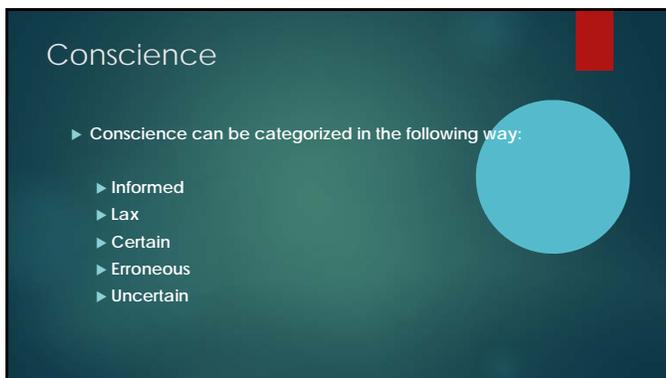
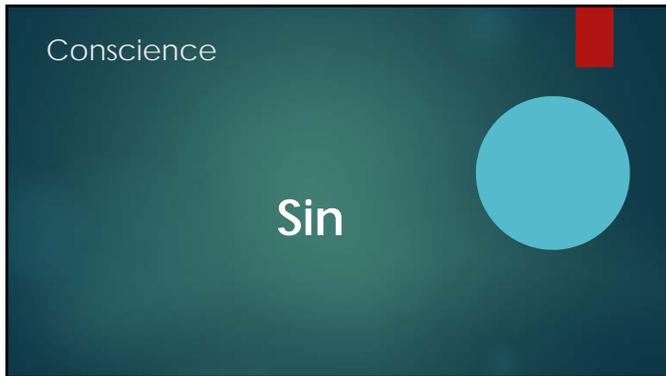
- ▶ 1. It helps us to act in accord with our dignity (1780)
- ▶ 2. It makes us responsible for the acts we choose (1781)
- ▶ 3. It enables us to be virtuous (prudent – 1780)

Conscience

- ▶ For it to do these things, it must be working well/properly

Conscience

- ▶ **But if it is already a part of our human nature, then why wouldn't it be working properly?**



Conscience

- ▶ It must be formed... and reformed... and reformed...
- ▶ The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. (1784)

Conscience

What about the mistakes we make?

1790 A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.

Conscience

- ▶ What about having an erroneous conscience?
- ▶ It can either be something we are responsible for or not...
 - ▶ Vincible or invincible ignorance

Conscience

- ▶ *Vincible Ignorance:*
- ▶ 1791 This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility. This is the case when a man "takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin." In such cases, the person is culpable for the evil he commits.