

Chapter 7

Christian Conscience



In your daily life, have you come across situations where your Christian values were challenged?

On February 12, 2015, 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were abducted by militants in Libya. On February 15, the militants released the video of beheading the victims kneeling on the sea shore. As they are beheaded, you can hear them calling out to 'Lord Jesus'. All 21 of them could have accepted Islamic faith in order to save their lives. But they were not ready to save their lives by renouncing Jesus. The Coptic Church declared them as martyrs on February 21. Matthew Ayariga, the 21st victim was a laborer from Ghana. In the end when asked about his faith, he declared, "their God is my God", and accepted martyrdom. They set shining examples by upholding their Christian faith even at the face of death.

Conscience: The Inner Voice

- When in doubt, it comes as a solution / correction.
- The corrective voice saying that some actions were not required.
- The inner voice that echoes within us to take the right decisions.

Deep within his conscience there is a voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil. Conscience is the inner call or voice that prompts us to discern between good and evil and to lean towards good motives. It is the internal strength that prevents us from making mistakes and prompts us to repent if we do so (CCC1776).



Are you familiar with the life story of St. Thomas More?

(Analyze the life of this saint, alongside the life of these 21 people.

Relate this to our current situations)

Blaise Prophet Isaiah says about this voice "And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, this is the way; walk in it" (Is 30:21).

What is conscience?

Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act (CCC 1796).

Importance of Conscience

The Second Vatican Council unambiguously teaches the significance of conscience in human life:

On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious (Religious Freedom 3)

Everyone has the responsibility to listen to their conscience. Similarly, he is bound to refuse any laws that contradict his conscience.

Is Conscience Likely to Err? Yes!

- If the conscience is not properly formed
- If the formation of conscience is wrong, the decisions can go wrong.

When Does Conscience Formation Go Wrong?

- Due to selfishness
- Due to sudden outbursts of emotions
- Due to external influences
- Due to the inability to distinguish between right and wrong...

This leads us to an important realisation: Conscience demands proper training.

Different Types of Conscience

Conscience can be categorized into different types based on its nature. Below are some important types among them.

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.
(Church in the modern world, 16)



What are the reasons for the formation of erroneous conscience?



“When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves”
(Rom 2:14).

Black

Moral Conscience: In all matters, it is the moral conscience that helps us in making decisions based on objective criteria and the implementation of those decisions.

Certain Conscience: The certainty that one's judgement is correct.

Sinful Conscience: Doing something, knowing that it is wrong.

Perplexed Conscience: Unable to discern between right and wrong, decisions are continuously changed

Scrupulous Conscience: Consider an action to be sinful when there is no sin, and interpret even in significant offences as grave offenses.

Lax Conscience: Trivialize serious offenses and consider minor mistakes as negligible.

Tender Conscience: Differentiates between right and wrong, fulfills their responsibilities diligently, and leads a morally upright life. Failures or shortcomings in one's own moral life can lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety.

Erroneous Conscience: Interpreting wrong deeds as right.

Frozen Conscience: Deliberately ignoring thoughts in the mind to do good. One thinks that it is not their concern to do good or fight against evil.

Thus, there are different types of conscience. As individuals, each of us is a blend of different types of conscience. However, Christian conscience is the moral conscience formed within an individual, based on Christian teachings and values as a Christian.

The Necessity of Formation of Moral Conscience

Though conscience is inborn, a moral conscience is something that must be formed. Training the mind to make decisions in favor of the good is crucial in the formation of moral conscience.

It is possible only if the mind is strong enough to constantly discard the selfish tendencies. Each individual should attain the mental maturity to confront the challenges encountered in their moral life and to make independent decisions



What are the different types of conscience? Explain.

Questions for Identification

Identify which of these questions are relevant to you

personally.

Even though you know it is wrong, do you still do certain things?

'Oh! these aren't even considered as mistakes.' Have you ever trivialized big mistakes?

Do you take decisions in all matters according to your Christian faith and put them into practice fully?

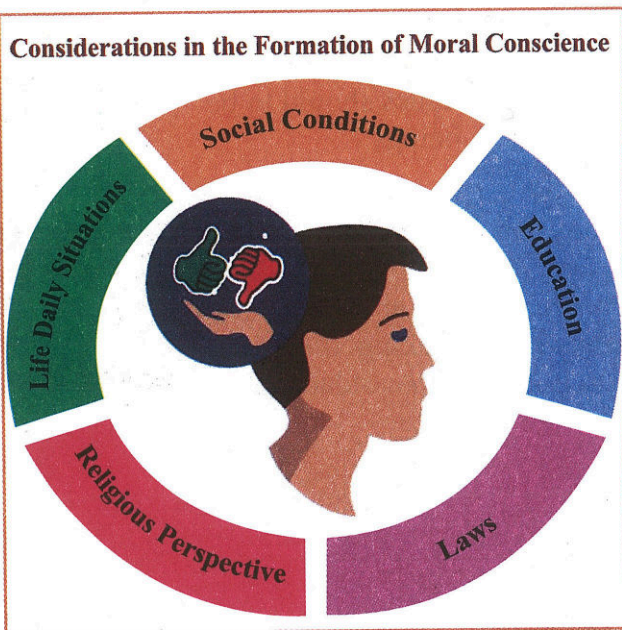
Do you carefully examine right and wrong in every task, and do only what is right?

Are you only concerned about your own matters, regardless of what happens to others?

Have you ever considered certain minor mistakes as serious offenses?

Have you considered what society deems wrong as right?

Have you ever failed to distinguish between right and wrong in certain situations?



aligned with truth, justice, and love in all aspects of life. Along with that, cultivating a zeal to do good is essential. We need to progress in the formation of conscience by consistently making righteous decisions guided by our conscience, and by consistently applying them in our lives. The conscience of one who neglects its intuitions and follows evil becomes distorted eventually. The impulses of such individuals' conscience will be driven by selfish desires. Therefore, formation of moral conscience is a continuous process of self-correction.

Considerations in the Formation of Moral Conscience

Gain knowledge about good and evil	Be open minded to truth	Take clear decisions	Uphold Freedom	Be considerate to others	Be considerate to Nature
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1. Gain Knowledge about Good and Evil

The first step in the formation of moral conscience is to gain knowledge about good and evil. Values provide a clear understanding of good and evil. The formation of a right moral conscience should be rooted in values. Values serve as

- Gain knowledge about good and evil
- Have awareness on moral values

a guide for discerning right from wrong in every circumstance.

If you feel that your conscience is different from moral conscience, seek help from priests, teachers, parents or experts.

Moral 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" (CCC 1778).

"The more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality"

(Church in The Modern World, 16).

Gaining awareness and training in values is essential for this. The doctrines of every religion have a significant influence on shaping the values. For Christians all values should to be rooted in love of God and love of fellow beings.

2. Be Open Minded to Truth

- Ascertain what truth is

Many people in the present society believe that only the discoveries of science and technology is the absolute truth. However, science is just a means for seeking the truth. Ascertaining what truth is, is essential and unavoidable duty of humans for their existence. The response of Jesus, "to testify to the truth," (Jn 18:37) to Pilate's inquiry reminds us that Christians are called to be open minded to the truth. Therefore, we need knowledge, we need truth, because without these we cannot stand firm, we cannot move forward (The Light of Faith, 24).



3. Take Clear Decisions

- Act in accordance with what is good
- Take clear decisions after understanding

Merely knowing the difference between good and evil is not enough; one must also act in accordance with what is good and make wise and clear decisions based on the truth. When doubts hinder decision making, right decisions can be made by consulting authoritative texts or seeking advice from knowledgeable people. When there is no opportunity to do so, one must carefully analyze the matter and take the best decision possible.



Is it justified to excuse a wrong doing by claiming it was done in accordance with one's conscience?
Discuss.

4. Uphold Freedom

- Decisions of conscience should be made with absolute freedom

Freedom is essential for the functioning of conscience. The decisions individuals make for themselves are the decisions of conscience. This should be done with absolute freedom. Nothing should hinder the freedom of an individual, be it through emotional influence, legal pressure, compulsion from authority or influence of wealth. Only then the moral conscience can be truly effective.

5. Be Considerate to Others

- See others as equal or superior to us.

Conscience should form in a manner that enables individuals to trust and love others, and to live in harmony with nature. We

should be respectful to our neighbors and their conscience. We become considerate to others when we see every person equal or superior to us.

6. Be Considerate to Nature

- Peace with all creation is peace with God the Creator

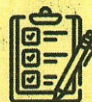
Pope Francis instructs in his encyclical "Praise to You" that every man should form his conscience with the conviction

that he is not the master of the earth, but has the call and responsibility to protect the earth's biodiversity in cooperation with God. Pope St. John Paul II states that peace with all creation is peace with God the Creator.

Why Christian Conscience?

The Christian conscience is formed according to Christian teachings to discern between good and evil, to accept goodness and to reject evil. The behavior and attitude rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ distinguish the Christian conscience from the moral conscience.

Moral Conscience	Christian Conscience
Formed upon the attitude of goodness	Formed upon the attitude of goodness
Determines goodness objectively	Determines goodness based on the teachings, behavior and attitude of Jesus
Goodness discerned-through self-assessment	Goodness rooted in love of God and love of human beings
Interprets goodness in one's own way	Interprets goodness in the way shown by Jesus



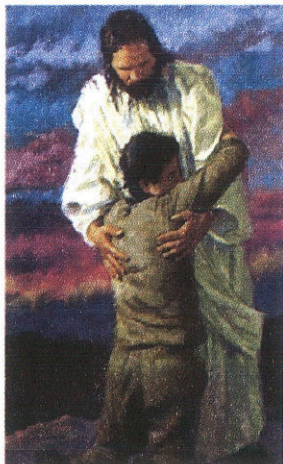
What are the points to consider in the formation of moral conscience?

The Golden Rule for the Formation of Christian Conscience

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you"
(Mt 7:12, CCC 1789).



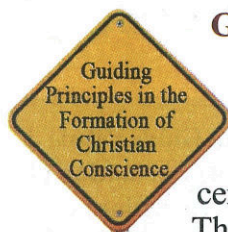
What is Christian conscience? How does it differ from moral conscience?



Christian Conscience is Based on the Style of Jesus

- Style as seen in the Good Samaritan.
- Style of giving paramount value to the widow's coins.
- Style of embracing and healing the lepers, the woman suffering from hemorrhage, the blind and the sinners.
- Style of giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.
- Style of prioritizing the Father's will above all else in any circumstance.

Guiding Principles in the Formation of Christian Conscience



1. Jesus Christ

The formation of the Christian conscience is centered around Jesus as the absolute criterion. The Christian conscience must be formed from a personal relation with Jesus and His teachings.

2. The Word of God

The Word of God provides guidance for Christian life. The commandments of God, the teachings of Jesus described in the Gospels, the instructions and interpretations given by the Apostles through the Epistles instructs how Christians should lead their daily lives.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105).

3. Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit that sustains the Christian conscience in goodness. For Christians who have received the Holy Spirit through Baptism and Chrismation, the Holy Spirit provides special help to take decisions of conscience.

Therefore, when we have to take important decisions, we should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer. At the same time, we must be careful in discerning the inspirations from the Holy Spirit from our own selfish interests.

"In the formation of conscience, the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice"
(CCC 1785).



"I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit"
(Rom 9:1).

4. The Teachings of the Church

The Church continues to interpret and explain the laws of God. The Church is always eager to reflect and preach about the divine plan that unfolds in all areas of human life. The Church has constructively responded to all the issues that have arisen at different points of time. The Church has given clear instructions on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, war, racism, drug abuse, media misuse, cloning, gender inequality, global warming and other social evils.

4. The Teachings of the Church

Role of Parents in the Formation of Christian Conscience

Children are influenced by the words, deeds, mannerisms and moral values of their parents.

Children try to imitate the words, behavior and mannerisms of their parents. The child imbibes the moral standards, values,

and behavior patterns shown by the parents. The parents' conscience influences the formation of their children's conscience. Good examples and parental interventions are extremely important in this context.

Role of the Church Community in the Formation of Christian Conscience

The parish priest, clergy, religious, catechism teachers, educators and the parish community have a duty to form the Christian conscience. We should form a Christian conscience by accepting their loving guidance.

At this stage of your life, friends are a very powerful factor influencing your decisions. The presence and companionship of righteous Christian friends are essential for the formation of a good Christian conscience. Participation in Catholic Youth Movements is highly beneficial and essential for this. We should live in harmony and brotherhood with everyone, irrespective of caste and creed.

Have righteous Christian friends. Be a member of Catholic Movements.

Role of Media in the Formation of Christian Conscience

In this century, the social media platforms are powerful

Important Teachings of the Church for the Formation of Christian Conscience

- Precepts of the Church.
- Documents of the Second Vatican Council
- Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Encyclicals issued by Popes from time to time on various subjects
- Apostolic Teachings
- Teachings of the Syro-Malabar Synod



Prepare a chart on the aspects we need to pay attention to in order to make our conscience a Christian Conscience.



What is the role of parents in the formation of moral conscience?

factors in the formation of conscience. As they are pleasing to the eyes and ears, they influence our minds, attitudes, and decisions as well. Channels, videos, and reels are intentionally presented to us with an underlying agenda to allure us. **Some of these arguments include: 'there is no sin, everything is permissible', 'science is the only truth', 'everything in your scriptures is in our scriptures.'** Therefore, we must have the wisdom of serpents along with the innocence of doves. We must realize the truth behind the news, the reality behind what is seen and the intention behind the words.

The Christian conscience helps us to attain the ultimate goal of humanity, communion with God, the Supreme Good. We have understood that the voice of a well-formed conscience is the voice of God. Therefore, by acting in accordance with the voice of conscience, we will be able to overcome the challenges of the times and succeed.

My Convictions



1. As a Christian, my whole life should be according to the rules of the Christian conscience.
2. Continuous effort is needed to form a Christian conscience.
3. Constant vigilance is required to preserve Christian conscience.



Let Us Read the Word of God

The Gospel According to
Mark Chapters 11-16



Let Us Illumine Our Hearts

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you"
(Jn 14:26).

My Resolution

In every situation I will act solely according to my Christian conscience.



Conduct group discussion to suggest changes in the SMYM activities of your parish, intended to help the formation of Christian conscience in the youth. Compile these suggestions into a document and present in class.



Frog in the Hot Water

Have you heard the story of the frog in hot water and normal water? According to the story, when the frog was put into the boiling water, it immediately sensed the danger and leaped out to save its life. However, when the frog was placed in normal water, it swam contentedly. As the water gradually heated up, the frog remained unaware of it. Finding the increasing warmth soothing, it drifted into a peaceful slumber and ultimately met its end.

Discuss the similarity of this story to the opinion polls, reels, discussions and campaigns on social media.