



CONSCIENCE

Catholic teaching on freedom of Conscience

Freedom of conscience is used to justify any belief or behavior inconsistent with Catholic doctrine and dogma




1. Definition of Conscience

- “Con”- With
- “Science”- Knowledge

Conscience is NOT...

- The little voice
- A feeling
- A hunch
- The angel or devil on the shoulder
- Following the crowd



Conscience is the inner sense of right and wrong that enables individuals to discern moral choices freely.

Vatican II Gaudium et Spes (Art.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. [Cf. Rom. 2:15-16.]*

*Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. [Cf. Pius XII, March 23, 1952: AAS (1952), p. 271] In a wonderful manner conscience reveals **that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor**.*

Comparing Catholic doctrine and secular views


Catholic View of Conscience	Secular (Humanist) View of Conscience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ God's law written into a person's very heart.➤ A law which man does not impose on himself, because it comes from God.➤ Love good, avoid evil, love God and neighbor - always.➤ To be obeyed.➤ Offers a person his/her very dignity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Moral sense or inner feeling➤ Emanates from within the person ('sense' or 'feeling')➤ No guidance as to what "goodness" means. Therefore, anything goes as long as the "conscience is clear."➤ Just another factor which affects behavior.➤ Dignity is ignored.

Church says about conscience...


- You must follow your conscience
- You must act with certain conscience
- You may not act with doubtful conscience
- You are very responsible if you act with a lax conscience
- Not wrong if you act with certain wrong or scrupulous

Should I always follow my conscience?

- Catholic Church says **YES**
- but you must make a sincere effort to *form* and *inform* your conscience rightly and honestly.
- Does your conscience talk to you?
- What does it say?
 - What you want to hear or what you need to hear?



What do you do to change a doubtful conscience to a certain one?

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- Check scripture
 - Ask what would Jesus do?
 - Ask parents what they would do
 - Ask an authority
 - Check Church teaching
 - Pray

How do you follow your conscience responsibly?

- **Form it well**
 - **A well-formed conscience means: research, dialogue, patience, listening, praying, reflecting, discipline, trust.**

Forming your conscience

- Internal sources:
 - God speaking to our heart (prayer and listening)
- External sources:
 - Moral teaching of the Church, Scripture, talking to theologians
 - Parent/family/friends' behavior and our own experience

GUILTY

Warranted and unwarranted

- Warranted Guilt
 - a sign of a healthy conscience
- Two ways to know your guilt is warranted
 - You know the act is wrong
 - You do it anyway

Guilt versus Shame

- GUILT is internal feeling
 - Focuses on action: what I did
- SHAME is external
 - focuses us on 'who you are as a person' – feeling bad about who you are

Knowledge of Right and Wrong

- Hitting is wrong
- Sharing is right
- When in those situations you remember hitting=wrong, sharing=right

Values and Principles

- Dad says, “Honesty is good...”
- Grandma says, “Family is important...”
- Life, love, honesty, trust, equality, justice, mercy, compassion, forgiveness

Ability to Freely Choose

- Free will
- Choose love
- Choose what is good and right

Desire to do Good


- Sometimes difficult to choose the real good
- However we desire what we see as good
- Must put in good information

Therefore Conscience...

- Develops from childhood until death

Nature of a Conscience

- Knowledge of Right and Wrong
- Values and Principles
- Ability to Choose Freely
- The Urge to do what is Good



**Can a person do what is
bad yet his/her conscience
sees it as a good?**



5 Types of Conscience

1. Certain Right

- Sees good as good
- Bad as bad

2. Certain Wrong

- Good as good
- Bad as bad
- Sometime bad as good

3. Doubtful


- Unsure whether good or bad

4. Lax

- Know what is good and bad
- Aren't sure what they want to do
- Lazy about making decision

5. Scrupulous


- Legalistic
- Sees good things as bad
- Mental disability
- Fear they are always wrong



How do you know if your
conscience is being well
formed?


Child's Conscience

- Performs actions for approval and acceptance
- Is mainly interested in own goodness
- Repeats actions without growing or changing

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- Responds to the order of an authority figure
 - Isolates each act from others
 - Is concerned with the past and how it fixes past mistakes

Adult Conscience

- Acts out of love for people involved and self respect
- Is mainly interested in protecting the value at stake
- Functions creatively in each situation

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- Responds to values whether or not an authority figure is around
 - Connects each act to a large pattern of living
 - Is concerned with the future and how to grow more capable of judging.
 - Determines the amount of guilt by the harm done to the value.




What does it mean to use our conscience?

- Use our head
- Trying to do the most loving and least harmful thing in a situation

Making Conscientious Judgments

- Must make moral decisions freely
- Catholic teaching tells us
 - When we act according to our conscience, we are living in good faith
 - We must form our conscience correctly, and then follow it
 - Catholics must base decisions of conscience on prayer, study, Church teaching

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- Conscientious: thorough and careful about doing what is right
 - Learn from our experiences and the experiences of others
 - Follow a well informed conscience and the truth as we see it

The Church and Individual Conscience

- Pope and other church leaders
 - Guide Catholics in understanding and applying Jesus' message
 - It is not to make decisions for us
- We have an obligation to seek what is right and true
- God has given us free will and the ability to use it by reasoning and acting according to truth