

## A properly formed and informed conscience

The Catholic Church—the guardian of truth, the Bible, and all that Christ has taught—is the best source for faith knowledge, moral knowledge, and conscience formation. We are called to seek God's wisdom and to apply it to our lives. God's judgment is based on how well we learn and live His commandments in love. "The dignity of the human person implies and requires *uprightness of moral conscience*."

Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality; their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1780)

"Conscience enables one to assume *responsibility* for the acts performed." (1781) "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." (1776) "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." (1777)

St. Augustine says: "Return to your conscience, question it. . . . Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness." (1779) "Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings." (1783) "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. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church." (1785)

The *Catechism* further reminds us of where errors can come from: "Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct." (1792) The bishops and the church continue to encourage us: "The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards of moral conduct." (1794)