

CONSCIENCE

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PART I CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSCIENCE

There are two empirical facts that belong to our experience as human beings.
The first is that we exist, and therefore we are a part of existence.
The second is that we are conscious of our existence.

Our consciousness of our existence contains within it two elements:

- 1) a consciousness of the Origin of Existence –
the Origin of our Being and
- 2) a consciousness of what is proper to being human –
a moral awareness.

Another way of saying this is that by virtue of our existence (because we exist):

- 1) we are connected to and aware (at the deepest level)
of God, and
- 2) we are connected to and aware (at the deepest level)
of what is proper to “being human.”

This is true not just of religious people, but of all people.

Human beings have always acknowledged this. Almost every-one knows the meaning of the term Voice of Conscience. Unfortunately, it is popularly spoken of as “that little voice within you that tells you when you are doing something wrong.” I say unfortunately, because this same “little voice,” if you take time to consult it, makes known to you what is good, and what is the right thing to do. People don’t much talk about this dimension of Conscience, but it is clearly stated in the Scriptures. God says:

*I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk,
give you counsel with my eye upon you. Psalm 32:8*

*And your ears shall hear a word behind you: “This is the way; walk in it,
when you would turn to the right or the left.” Isaiah 30:21*

A person can distance himself from awareness of the Origin of his Existence and from the moral awareness inscribed in his being, and many people do, but a person cannot disconnect himself from them. They are inscribed in her being. They are a dimension of consciousness: her awareness of herself as human being. These dimensions of human awareness are Conscience.

PART II
THE FIRST DIMENSION OF CONSCIENCE:
THE MORAL AWARENESS
OF WHAT IS PROPER TO BEING HUMAN

The **First Dimension** of Conscience rests on and unfolds from the awareness (consciousness) of what is proper to being Human that is inscribed in our *being*. Some of these principles are:

- It is wrong for one human being to assume absolute power over the life of another human being.
- Pausing in activity, reflecting and seeking insight from within as well as from without, are essential to being human.
- It is wrong to take the life of another human being.
- It is wrong to leave another human being with out the means of sustaining their life.
- It is wrong to lie. Telling the truth is essential for building human relationship – for collaborating with others and for the establishment of justice.
- It is wrong to be unfaithful to commitments. Faithfulness to commitments is essential in building a human world – faithfulness in personal relationship, upon which family rests; as well as faithfulness to commitments made in commerce and collaboration with others.
- Family is to be honored and protected as the place in which a human being learns and exercises the fundamentals of human relationship.
- It is wrong to violate the integrity of another human being. The integrity of every human being and their life-giving relationship with others must be learned and honored.
- It is wrong to violate the integrity of the elements of the world. The integrity of the elements of the world and their life-giving relationship with each other must be learned and honored.

When a human being violates these, something within them is aware that what they have done or failed to do is “off the mark,” out of right order, less than human. They feel that what they are doing or failing to do is wrong. This is not just a subjective emotional reaction, it is a feeling that rises from within them, a feeling that is rooted in their “knowing” of themselves as human.

Human consciousness is sensitive and highly impressionable. It is susceptible to becoming absorbed in self, activity, pleasure and the accumulation of things. Human consciousness also easily becomes obsessed with what it wants, what it expects and what it demands. When it does, a person easily falls into envy or distain of others, distrust and fear, anger, hostility and a host of other dark things. Encumbered by these things, it is easy for a man or woman’s awareness (consciousness) of God and what is proper to their “being human” to grow remote and dull. Their Conscience “goes to sleep.”

Because of this, at various points in human history, God made explicit the essential principles of this moral code inscribed in our being human. They can be found in every expression of religious striving that is not a worship of self. The most succinct and brilliant expression of these principles God gave to the Hebrews some four thousand years ago.

- *I am the Lord, your God, you shall have no other gods beside me. Exodus 20:2-3*
(It is wrong for one human being to assume absolute power over the life of another human being.)
- *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day. Exodus 20:8*
(Pausing in activity, reflecting, and seeking insight, from within as well as from without, are essential to being human.)
- *Honor your father and your mother. Exodus 20:12*
(Family is to be honored and protected as the place in which a human being learns and exercises the fundamentals of human relationship.)
- *You shall not kill. Exodus 20:13*
(It is wrong to take the life of another human being.)
- *You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Exodus 20:16*
(It is wrong to lie. Telling the truth is essential for building human relationship – for collaborating with others and for doing justice.)
- *You shall not commit adultery. Exodus 20:14*
(It is wrong to be unfaithful to commitments. Faithfulness to commitments is essential in building a human world – faithfulness in personal relationship, upon which family rests; as well as faithfulness to commitments made in commerce and collaboration with others.)
- *You shall not steal. Exodus 20:15*
(It is wrong to leave another human being without the means of sustaining their life.)
- *You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Exodus 20:17*
(It is wrong to violate the integrity of another human being. It is wrong to violate the integrity of the elements of the world. The integrity of every human being and their life-giving relationship with others must be learned, honored. The integrity of the elements of the world and their life-giving relationship with each other must be learned, honored.)
- *You shall not stand idly by while your neighbor's life is at stake. Leviticus 19:16*
(It is wrong to stand by and do nothing when you see that another human being's life is threatened or at risk.)

In the Old Testament it is clear from the beginning that these principles of Moral Law that God made *explicit* to the Hebrews were intended for all humanity:

*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...*

All the families of the earth will find a blessing in you. Genesis 12:2-3

Many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, That he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem...

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. Isaiah 2:3-4

These moral imperatives (Commandments) *make explicit* what is inscribed in being a human being. When they are read or heard they resonate as true in the fabric of your humanity. They awaken *knowledge* of things decent to being human.

The role of the Jews, and later Christians, was to strive to live these moral principles and to teach them to their fellow human beings. Because these principles are integral to human existence, their *expression*, in both word and example resonates, as true and proper to human existence in the depths of every human being's consciousness. This happens even when a man or woman is in intellectual or willful denial of them. Truth is connected to existence (reality). You cannot get rid of it unless you terminate your existence.

These moral imperatives (Commandments) frame a human world – a world in which men and women live in harmony with one another and in life-giving relationship with the elements of the world around them. They are the law of our humanity, the genetic code of human *being*. To violate them is to violate our humanity (individually and collectively). They are also essential articles in the constitution of a genuinely human society. When embraced by men and women (individually and collectively) they construct a cohesive society in which the life of each person is integrated into the life of the whole. Every human being is therefore responsible for framing their behavior according to these principles of human decency inscribed in their being human, and they are to be held accountable if they don't.

Perhaps the most striking collective acknowledgement of this took place at the end of World War II, when the atrocities of the Nazis were revealed to the world. For the first time in history, a court was convened and the perpetrators of and collaborators in these atrocities were placed on trial for crimes against humanity. Their plea that they were "only obeying orders" was resoundingly rejected. They were judged accountable to a higher code of human decency than the authority of those who gave the orders. Humanity flatly rejected the principle that truth and justice are relative or the prerogatives of power.

Many things can give a man or woman occasion to act against his conscience (to violate the moral code) and to sink into inhumanity: the accumulation of great wealth or power, deprivation and victimization, fear, lust, envy, anger, resentment and hatred. While inscribed in our nature as human beings, the

moral imperatives of human decency must be exercised. They must be engaged, embraced and striven for. They are a path to be followed with energy and attention. They form stable ground upon which a man or woman can build a life of integrity with his fellow human beings, and a society can build a culture of life for all. The path a human being walks has to be solid under his feet. It has got to be firm if progress is to be made.

Some people dismiss the idea of Conscience as a byproduct of one's rearing as a child and enculturation in society. Both the way you were raised and the expectations of your society can engender feelings of guilt if you act contrary to them. That, however, is not what we are talking about. There is something beyond rearing and enculturation, something that is a product of existing as a human being that "speaks" to both what is good and what is evil in every man and woman, and at times it moves us to act contrary to the way we were raised and the expectations of our society.

The First Dimension of Conscience rests on and unfolds from the moral awareness (consciousness) of what is proper to being human inscribed in your *being*.

Exercising your Conscience at this level means:

- 1) pausing frequently during the day to think about what you are doing,
- 2) asking yourself questions like:
Is this decent for a human being to say or do?
Is it right to be saying or doing this?
Is something wrong here?
Is what is going on here out of order?
- 3) paying attention to what you sense and feel when you ask these questions.

This is an exercise of 5 to 10 seconds. It should be happening ten to twenty times a day.

The first level of Conscience discerns the wrong to be avoided or corrected. It equips you to recognize and avoid evil.

PART III
THE SECOND DIMENSION OF CONSCIENCE:
THE AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITHIN

*Behold, You are pleased with sincerity of heart,
and in my inmost spirit You teach me wisdom. Psalm 51:6*

Second Dimension of Conscience rests on and unfolds from the awareness (consciousness) of the Origin of Our Being inscribed in our *being* human. Not only are we conscious of the Origin of our Existence (God), we are uniquely created and designed for communication and interaction with the Origin of our Existence. This requires a closer examination of how we are made and function as human beings.

*May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness.
May He preserve you whole and entire, spirit, soul and body,
irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23

The Human Person Consists of Three Parts

The **BODY** is your physical form. It is an organic form that grows and develops, and then decays and dies. It is driven to seek food, shelter, sexual union and reproduction. The **BODY** is your experience of the world through the physical senses. This sensual experience is inquisitive and playful, but unbounded and directionless. It is attracted toward those things that give it bodily pleasure and away from those that give it bodily pain.

The **SOUL** is your **INTELLECT** and **WILL**. Your **INTELLECT** can think and reason, learn and remember. It can seek the truth or weave illusion. It can recognize what is good (that which gives, nurtures, and enriches life) and what is evil (that which consumes manipulates and destroys life.) It is attracted to that which is easy and mentally stimulating and away from that which is difficult. Your **WILL** can choose. It can choose to accept and act on the truth or to live in illusion. It can choose to do good or evil. It can override the drives and attractions of the Body and act contrary to them. It can even override patterns of thinking that have become comfortable and customary. This makes you a 'person.'

The **SPIRIT** is not the body, the intellect or the will. It is the vast and *apparent* "emptiness" that you sense within yourself, at the core of your consciousness. It is a great interior "space." You might think of it analogously as a cathedral. This emptiness exists in every human being, but it has a particular form and a unique character in each one. This makes each individual human being a "person" unlike any other. This "personal" emptiness in each human being was created and is intended to be filled by God. It is God's dwelling place or sanctuary in every human being.

It is where you come into communion with God. Because this emptiness is unique in each human being, the Holy Spirit of God fills it in a unique way in each person. Each person embraces the Holy Spirit in their own unique way. God is “God in you” as He is capable of being God in no other human being. God touches, handles and loves the world through you as He is capable of touching, handling and loving the world through no other human being and in no other way. This is the unique and sacred dignity of each human being.

When the mind has not the prior experience to begin to make sense of something it perceives, it often “draws a blank” (meaning that nothing “comes together” from prior experience to help make sense of it.) There are experiences that are so totally “other” that it leaves human cognition “in the dark.” The experience of God in your SPIRIT is one such experience. This vast interior space “opens out” onto eternity. One might call it a “window” onto the timeless. The term SPIRIT expresses that there is within each persona place where she interfaces with eternity and comes into relationship with the Divine Presence that permeates eternity. This is an awesome realization. Here is the seat of the spiritual life.

The Parts are Related in a Proper Order

The BODY's senses are directionless, and its drives and attractions are unbounded. The BODY cannot give direction to itself, nor can it discipline itself. This has to come from somewhere else.

The SOUL, through the INTELLECT, gives direction to the senses of the Body. It does this by thinking and reasoning, searching for the truth and recognizing what is good. The SOUL, through the WILL, binds and disciplines the drives and attractions of the Body. It does this by choosing to accept and act on the truth and by choosing good over evil. But while the SOUL can seek the truth and act on it, it cannot decide for itself what the truth is. And while the SOUL can recognize what is good and what is evil and can choose the good over the evil, it cannot decide for itself what good and evil is. Where does it discern the truth and learn what is good?

The SPIRIT is where the truth is revealed and where we learn what is good. This is the second and deepest level of “Conscience.” Seeking and listening for the voice of God in the emptiness of the human SPIRIT is the exercise of Conscience at this level. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth to us:

...being the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth.

John 16:13

In our Interior Spirit, God is present to us in a unique and personal way. Here the Holy Spirit of God gives us clear sight of the truth, teaches us what is good and inspires us to act for the good. The BODY does not know of itself, and the SOUL cannot decide for itself what truth and goodness is. When the

BODY is left to itself or the SOUL decides for itself what truth and goodness is, all hell breaks loose. Knowledge of what is true and good is given in the stillness and emptiness of the INTERIOR SPIRIT when it is used as it was intended, as a sanctuary for listening to God who dwells there. The Bible says:

*Behold, you are pleased with sincerity of heart,
and in my inmost being you teach me wisdom."Psalm 51:8*

Preserving Right Order

The WORLD draws life from the BODY and its activity when the BODY receives direction and discipline from the SOUL.

The BODY draws life from the activity of the SOUL when the SOUL receives knowledge of truth and goodness from the SPIRIT.

The SOUL draws life from the SPIRIT when the SPIRIT is reserved as a sanctuary for listening to GOD.

In the SPIRIT, the SOUL draws life from GOD, Who has made it His dwelling place. The Bible says:

*Are you not aware that you are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple.
1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

The key to your health and happiness as a human being is what you do with your interior SPIRIT. When the SPIRIT is kept clear and used as a sanctuary for facing God and listening to His voice, then everything is given right order in the SOUL, in the BODY, and in the WORLD, all in turn. The problem with the human SPIRIT is that it appears to be empty to someone who does not know what it was created and intended for. The experience of the emptiness of the SPIRIT can be painful – sometimes so painful that it aches. But the pain has a purpose. It reminds us that we are hollow within, that we are incomplete, that something vital is needed to complete our humanity.

The irony is that what appears to be missing is actually present – in the very emptiness within us, and behind the darkness that fills it. If you are not aware of this, the pain of the emptiness within you will prove too much to bear. You will attempt to fill the emptiness. You will drag one thing after another into your SPIRIT: the gain of money, the achievement of power, the accumulation of possessions, the advancement of an idea, the pursuit of a career, even the affection of a loved one. These things become “god” for you. Conscience is now distorted to become a servant of self.

You will try frantically to make the money, the power, the possessions, the idea, the career, and even the loved one fill the vast expanse of your emptiness. It will not work! You will try to distract yourself from the pain of your emptiness with

too much food, too much sex, too much alcohol and drugs. You will dissipate the gifts and energies of your SOUL and your BODY trying to fill the emptiness of your SPIRIT – the place that only God can fill within you.

When Right Order Unravels

*Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from?
Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?
You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain;
you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask.
You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on
your passions. James 4:1-4*

Without GOD speaking in the SPIRIT, the SPIRIT to instruct the SOUL, the SOUL to direct and discipline the BODY, and the BODY to build up the life of the WORLD, everything begins to unravel. Our life as a human being is thrown into reverse.

The SPIRIT begins to feed off the SOUL: It tries to fill itself with things that belong only in the SOUL: the talents and gifts of your mind, the force and direction of your will, your love for others. You make a “god” out of your ideas, your gifts and talents, your own will, or your affection for a loved one. Sooner or later they are crushed by the pressure of having to fill the emptiness of your SPIRIT.

The SOUL then begins to feed off the BODY: The SOUL no longer directs and disciplines the drives and attractions of the BODY. Instead, it takes them as its own and yearns and longs for what the BODY is driven and attracted to. The “passions” are born in the SOUL: gluttony, lust, avarice, envy, anger, discontent, vain-glory, pride. Desire has taken hold of the SOUL and the SOUL is lost in it.

The BODY then begins to feed off the WORLD: The BODY begins to consume, manipulate and destroy life under the influence of the passions. It uses and abuses the things of the world way beyond reason or need in order to feed its unbridled drives for food, shelter, sex and pleasure.

When the SOUL (Intellect and Will) begins to decide for itself what is true and what is good, “values” are born. What is true and what is good become *my opinion* of what is true and what is good. What is true is what is true *for me*, and what is good is what is good *to me*. Everyone then has their own “values” and one person’s “values” are as true and good as another’s. What is lost is a *shared knowledge* of the truth and of what is good that will stand the test of time and experience, and upon which people can build a cohesive human community. The SOUL pushes its self-made “values” back into the SPIRIT and contends that they are god-given for all. The SOUL then seeks to coerce others into acceptance of its “values.” When they refuse to embrace them, the SOUL is filled with

anger. This gives birth to hostility toward others. This leads the SOUL to employ BODILY force. Where we should be searching in our SPIRITS, seeking the truth and learning what is good; we are now imposing our “values” on one another by force of one kind or another. Violence erupts between people and the world is burned down. Illusion has taken hold of the SOUL and the SOUL is lost in it. The Bible tells us:

...the old self...deteriorates through illusion and desire.
Ephesians 4:22

Instead of *deciding* the truth of things, the SOUL (Intellect and Will) must be in constant *search* for the truth of things (their integrity and right-relationship with one another). The SOUL brings its discoveries before God in the SPIRIT to sound out their truth. In the course of the day the SOUL constantly enters the SPIRIT to ask to see the good in each moment and situation and for the strength to do it.

The Second Dimension of Conscience rests on and unfolds from your awareness (consciousness) of the Origin of Your Being inscribed in your *being* human.

Exercising your Conscience at this level means:

- 1) entering your Interior Spirit and coming before the presence of God within,
- 2) asking for understanding of the situation you are in,
- 3) asking for clear vision of the good to be done,
- 4) asking to know what you can do to contribute to it,
- 5) and asking for the strength to do it.

This is an exercise of 10 to 15 seconds that takes place, moment to moment, before every situation you face during a day. It should be happening ten to fifteen times a day.

The second and deepest level of Conscience discerns the good to be done and equips you to do it. It is specific to the moment: you *briefly* enter your Interior Spirit to *discern the good* that needs to be done, and to be *moved to act* on the good you see needs to be done. The first level of Conscience moves you to refrain from doing evil. This second level of Conscience transforms you into an agent of the good. This level of Conscience is explicitly religious in the sense that a person who actively and adamantly rejects the existence of God bars themselves from accessing it.

Acting in Good Conscience is not doing what you think is the right thing to do. It is asking God to show you the good that needs to be done and seeking from God the strength to do it.

How does the Holy Spirit remind you and instruct you in the good to be done? The movement of God's Holy Spirit in the Interior Spirit of a person is like the rippled movement caused by a breeze moving on the surface of calm water. It is a thought that rises, a tug or nudge to speak or act. This is the Holy Spirit inspiring and urging you to do or say something that love requires.

You **inform your Conscience** by reading the Scriptures daily. People can say that they are "inspired" by God to do and say lots of things. How can you judge the authenticity of the thoughts that come to you when you enter your Interior Spirit? How do you know for sure that it is the Holy Spirit that is inspiring your mind and moving your heart, and not something else? How do you know that what you are being moved to do is truly good? You won't, unless you have committed your life to Jesus (who is the Word of God), and are reading the Bible (which is the written Word of God). What the mind and heart are moved to do is always tested against the Word of God, because the Holy Spirit moves with the Word of God and never against it. The Bible sets out what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, what gives life and what destroys it. The Bible illustrates these principles of right and wrong in the lives of real men and women like yourself. In the life of Jesus one sees a love that gives life. Reading the Bible daily for five or ten minutes is an exercise in learning the language of the Holy Spirit. Then what one senses in their mind and heart will be clearly recognized to be "of God," or not. It will "ring true" or sound false.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

It is also essential that you live your spiritual life in communion with the Church. The Church is anointed by the Holy Spirit to guide you in discerning the Voice of God among the other "voices" you may hear within you. The Bible says:

...you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth. 1 Timothy 3:15

God is an objective reality, not a subjective human construct (something you make up for yourself in your mind). God is not you, and God is not *your idea* of who God is.

PART IV
THE INTERIOR SPIRIT AS THE PLACE OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

*Truly you have formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made;
Wonderful are your works. Psalm 139:14*

The same human capacities that facilitate Conscience at its deepest level also facilitate Contemplative Prayer. Examining this will illustrate how the various elements of a religious life are integrated in a sensible whole.

In the Interior Spirit the Holy Spirit gives clear sight of the truth, teaches us what is good and inspires us to act for the good. It is also in the Interior Spirit that the Holy Spirit provides answers to the really big questions that give life sense and meaning:

Who am I?
Why am I here?
Where have I come from?
Where am I going?
What have I been given to do?

Just as the BODY does not know of itself, and the SOUL cannot decide for itself what truth and goodness is. Neither does the BODY know of itself, nor can the SOUL provide for itself answers to the really big questions that give life sense and meaning. When you look only to the BODY or the SOUL to provide answers to the questions that give your life sense and meaning, only confusion and frustration result. When you look to others for answers to these questions you find yourself standing on constantly shifting stand. You find no solid foundation upon which to build your life. The answers to the great questions of life are only given in the stillness and emptiness of the INTERIOR SPIRIT when it is used as it was intended, as a sanctuary for listening to God who dwells there.

Conscience at its deepest level and Contemplative Prayer are both an exercise of the Interior Spirit. Let's examine how Contemplative Prayer takes place.

The Steps of Contemplative Prayer
(Set aside 15 to 20 minutes or more.)

The first movement is to cleanse your Interior Spirit. Pause, become mindful and truly repent of the lack of forgiveness, bitterness and resentment you carry toward anyone. Truly want it to be dislodged and torn from you. Repent of the words you have said that divided people against each other – that mocked, humiliated or marginalized others. Want to be cleansed of the sins of bigotry and violence of any kind perpetrated toward others. All these things cloud your

Interior Spirit and take a terrible toll on your physical and mental health. They set you at enmity with God and make you an obstacle to what God's grace wants to do in you and in the world around you.

The second movement is to enter your Interior Spirit. Move Your focus of attention to the center of your consciousness – to the deepest point of your awareness. Then, pronounce the name of Jesus. Allow it to reverberate throughout your whole being. At the name of Jesus tensions within you break and the dark powers flee. You can sense yourself in the presence of God.

Pray: *“Be God for me in this moment, not as I would have you be God, but as you are God.”*

The third movement is to utter the simple words, “Father, love me!” Rest a while in the awareness that the One who is the Creator of the universe and the Author of your existence is present here with you, and that you are held by Him in love. It is in God's embrace that that you are brought back to your true self. Your soul's ability to see beauty and goodness in people and the things around you is restored. You find fresh desire to honor the beauty and serve the good in all. With this comes a sense of connection not only with God, but in God, with all things.

The fourth movement is to pray:

Pray: *“God show me the woman / the man You created me to be and who You want me to be.”*

Think about this for a while. Try to identify elements of your best self – the woman or man God created you to be.

Pray: *“God help me see more clearly the gift You have given me to give for the life of others.”*

Think about this for a while. What gift has God given you to give life to others? We do not always see our gift right away. The more we ask God, the more of our gift we will see and understand.

Pray: *“Lord, inspire me.”*

God inspires you from within to words and acts that witness to the truth: to words and acts of compassion, generosity, reconciliation, justice and heroic love. If an inspiration comes to you, write it down. Resolve to act upon it! Thoughts of things you have to do and challenges you have to face may also come to you at this time. Don't let your mind dwell on them. Simply pray as they come to you: *“Lord, when I have to face this, inspire me.”*

Pray: *“Jesus, walk next to me all day long. Help me to be true to who you made me to be and give the gift You have given me to help others.”*

You can hold the needs of others before God here in your Interior Spirit, but do not tell God what to do.

To conclude, pray *the Our Father* and a litany of praise.

In Exercising Your Conscience at the deepest level you enter your Interior Spirit *briefly* to discern the good in the moment and to seek the strength to do it.

In Contemplative Prayer you set aside *an extended period of time* to enter your Interior Spirit to immerse yourself in communion with God.

Communion with the Divine in the Exercise of Conscience consists of three elements:

Presence: Draw yourself to the conscious awareness of the presence of God (*briefly* enter your Interior Spirit in the moment).

Inspiration: Set aside whatever you have in mind to say or do and ask to be given insight into what is happening in the moment. Ask to recognize the good that wants doing, and to be inspired to the words and actions that will serve it.

Grace: Intentionally ask to be clothed with a strength greater than your own, and to move with it.

Communion with the Divine **in Contemplative Prayer** consists of the same three elements:

Presence: Draw yourself to the conscious awareness of the presence of God (enter your Interior Spirit *for in an extended period of time.*)

Inspiration: Clear your mind of thoughts and images, and ask to be given insight into yourself as God created you to be. Ask to be given insight into the gift you have been given to give life to others, to ask to know the good God is calling you to do at this time in your life.

Grace: to intentionally ask to be clothed with a strength greater than your own, and to move with it.

Our Catholic Faith tells us that we were made for communion with God. We were actually designed for it. Without it we drift into being less than human. It is amazing to realize that communion with God, in an essentially human way, already belongs to every man and woman. It is a question of whether or not we have learned to pay attention to it. Jesus came among us to awaken us to *how fearfully, wonderfully we have been made*. He is the incarnate “Voice” (Word) of God. He speaks to the minds and hearts of all men and women willing to listen. He awakens them to the presence and voice of God within them. He gives his life to break the power of fear, anger, greed, lust and addiction over their humanity. Jesus leads us deep within ourselves, before the presence of God within us. He stands with us and trains us to seek and listen for the counsels of God. He gives us the courage and strength to act upon them. When we do, the world is changed for the better.

APPENDIX

***Behold, You are pleased with sincerity of heart,
and in my inmost spirit You teach me wisdom.
Psalm 51:6***

Dear People of Saint Thomas,

We exist, therefore we are a part of existence. Our consciousness of our existence contains within it a consciousness of the Origin of All Existence – the Origin of our Being. Another way of saying this is that by virtue of our existence we are connected to and aware of God. This is true not just of religious people, but of all people. We can distance ourselves from awareness of the Origin of our Existence, and many people do; but we cannot disconnect ourselves from it. It is rooted in our being, our awareness of ourselves. The glory of being human is the ability to be conscious of ourselves and conscious of God.

Human beings have always acknowledged this. Almost everyone knows the Voice of Conscience. Unfortunately, it is popularly known as “that little voice within you that tells you when you are doing something wrong.” I say unfortunately, because this same “little voice,” if you take time to consult it, makes known to you what is good, and what is the right thing to do. People don’t much talk about this dimension of Conscience, but it is clearly stated in the Scriptures. God says:

*I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk,
give you counsel with my eye upon you. Psalm 32:8*

*And your ears shall hear a word behind you: “This is the way; walk in it,
when you would turn to the right or the left.” Isaiah 30:21*

Some people dismiss the idea of Conscience as a byproduct of one’s rearing as a child and enculturation in society. Both the way you were raised and the expectations of your society can engender feelings of guilt if you act contrary to them. That, however, is not what we are talking about. There is something beyond rearing and enculturation, something that is a byproduct of existing as a human being that “speaks” to both what is good and what is evil in every man and woman, and at times it moves us to act contrary to the way we were raised and the expectations of our society.

Our Catholic Faith tells us that we were made for communion with God, and without it we will often prove to behave less than human. It is amazing to realize that communion with God, in an essentially human way, already belongs to every man and woman. It is a question of whether or not we have learned to pay attention to it. Jesus came among us. He is the incarnate “Voice” (Word) of God. He speaks to the minds and hearts of all men and women willing to listen. He awakens them to the presence and voice of God within them. He gives his

life to break the power of fear, anger, greed, lust and addiction over their humanity.

Jesus leads us deep within ourselves, before the presence of God within us. He stands with us and trains us to seek and listen for the counsels of God. He gives us the courage and strength to act upon them. When we do, the world is changed for the better.

This Lent we invite you to explore your interior spirit, that inner place of prayer where you come before the face of God. It is the seat of the Voice of Conscience, the source of counsel and inspiration as you move through your day. It is key to your humanity. Enclosed you will find a booklet, "Spiritual Geography," that will guide you in your exploration. I will also be offering study sessions during Lent. Also enclosed is a list of other Lenten opportunities and all our liturgical services. Every Lent is an opportunity to grow in our faith and our effectiveness as believers in our world. We are ready to move forward with you.

Addendum

A CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE is a Conscience IN-FORMED by CHRIST.