CONSCIENCE
Conscience

- A judgment of the practical reason on the morality of a concrete action commanding to do what is good and to avoid what is evil.
CONSCIENCE

“It is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.” (GS 16)

Conscience summons us to love good and avoid evil...for in our heart is a law written by God. To obey this law is the very dignity of man.
Conscience, broken down into its root terms, means "with knowledge" (conscientia).

- Conscience is not a mere feeling, and still less is it a private preference.
- Conscience is a power for knowing right from wrong in particular circumstances. It works through sound rules and reasoning.
Conscience cannot come to us from the rulings of society; otherwise it would never reprove us when society approves us, nor console us when society condemns.” – Cardinal Fulton Sheen
Functions of conscience

Conscience gives us three things:

- an awareness of good and evil
- a desire for good and aversion to evil
- a feeling of joy and peace and rightness at having done good, and of unease and guilt at having done evil
These three functions of conscience work in the three parts of the soul:

- the mind, or intellect, or reason
  (an awareness of good and evil)
- the will
  (a desire for good and aversion to evil)
- the emotions, or feelings
  (a feeling of joy and peace and rightness at having done good, and of unease and guilt at having done evil)
Some common errors about conscience

1) Conscience is just a feeling.
   It is first of all a knowing, an awareness of the truth about good and evil.

2.) Conscience is not infallible.
   It can err, like anything in us. It can mistake what is evil for good, or good for evil. Therefore one of the first things conscience obligates us to do is to educate and inform our conscience.
“A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself” (C 1790).

- Ignorance resulting in errors of conscience may be either *vincible ignorance* or *invincible ignorance*.

- Conscience is *not merely negative but positive*. 
3.) Conscience is not a passive “given,” but can be trained.

An indispensable exercise is honest listening to the Word of God. “It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience” (C 1779).
“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.

The two most important keys to hearing it are these:

- We must honestly and passionately will to hear it, to know the truth.
- We must be alone with ourselves and God to hear this gentle voice.

It can easily be drowned out by external noise. “This requirement of interiority [an inner life] is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection” (C 1779), especially in our complex modern society.
DIVISIONS OF CONSCIENCE

- Right or erroneous
- Certain, doubtful or perplexed
- Lax or scrupulous
Divisions of Conscience

- **RIGHT**
  It is when conscience is in conformity with reality. It is an agreement with the objective norms of morality.
Divisions of Conscience

- **CERTAIN**
  It is when conscience passes judgment without any fear of error. For moral certainty it suffices that all reasonable fear be excluded.
**Doubtful**

If conscience is in a state of uncertainty as to the lawfulness of an action, whether it suspends its judgment or whether it inclines to one side but with the fear that the contrary might be equally true.

"See this guy? Twenty minutes ago I told him we'd either have to break his expensive, antique vase or cut his head off. He is still thinking about it!"
**Divisions of Conscience**

- **PERPLEXED**
  A type of conscience that is confronted with two alternatives and fears sin in whatever choice it takes.
Divisions of Conscience

- **ERRONEOUS**

They can either be:
- Lax conscience
- Scrupulous conscience

- **Lax conscience**

On insufficient grounds is inclined to judge a thing lawful when it is not; something light when it is grave.
Divisions of Conscience

Scrupulous conscience can be due to:

- **Temporary crises in life**
- **Obsessive-compulsive**
Scrupulous Conscience

- **Obsessive-Compulsive**
  Consists in disturbance and inhibition of psychic development, resulting from a person’s inability to integrate certain basic drives and values of life into the structure of his personality obstructed by unconscious factors built up in early childhood.
Scrupulous Conscience

Such scrupulosity are caused by the unilateral and inconsistent moral and spiritual education, the infantile past (over-perfectionistic, too-demanding, sternly rigid parents) and the rigorism of educators.
A certain conscience must always be obeyed when it commands or forbids. It may always be followed when it permits something. Conscience is that appropriate faculty of man which tells him his moral duties.
**Binding Force**

- **DOUBTFUL**

In practical doubt about the lawfulness of an action one may never act. The action must be postponed until certainty can be reached.
Doubtful

Practical certainty can be gained by:

- **Directly**
  Solving the doubt through reflection on the case in the light of general principles, through consultation with experts, books, etc.

- **Indirectly**
  Through reflex principles.
Doubtful

Reflex Principles
Rules of prudence which do not solve a doubt concerning the existence of a law, moral principle or fact by intrinsic or extrinsic evidence, but only indicate where, in cases of unsolvable doubt, the greater right is usually to be found and the lesser evil to be feared.

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Doubtful

- In doubt, the condition of the possessor is the better.
- In doubt, favor the accused.
- Crime is not presumed, it is proven.
- In doubt, presumption stands on the side of the superior.
Doubtful

- In doubt, stand for the validity of an act.
- In doubt, amplify the favorable, restrict the unfavorable.
- In doubt, presumption stands for the usual and the ordinary.
- A dubious law does not bind.

"Didn't I warn you about this? When they started making the hospital's environment more Patient Friendly, we should have drawn the line at the Operating Hammock!"
**Doubtful**

- **PERPLEXED**

  One must postpone first the action in order to obtain information and deliberate on it. But, if the decision cannot be postponed, one must choose what appears to be the lesser evil or – if this is impossible to settle – either of the alternatives.
Everyone is obliged to use serious diligence to possess in all occasions a true conscience.

The proper cultivation of the integrity of conscience includes:

- Awareness of the Spirit
DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIENCE

- Careful knowledge of the norms
- Removal of obstacles of sin
  
  In the formation of conscience the Christian ought to attend carefully to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church.

don't forget to:

"Listen for God's voice in everything you do & everywhere you go; He's the one that will keep you on track."

Proverbs 3:6
"GOD WHISPERS TO US IN OUR PLEASURES, SPEAKS IN OUR CONSCIENCES, BUT SHOUTS IN OUR PAINS. IT IS HIS MEGAPHONE TO ROUSE A DEAF WORLD."

-C.S. LEWIS
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