



*CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES*

**TO: WBC AND MICAH PARTICIPANTS**  
**FROM: MONSIGNOR RICHARD LIDDY**  
**SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF CONSCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION**  
**DATE: JANUARY 2017**

- **Welcome and Self-Introductions**
- **Woodstock Business Conference Mission Statement**
  - The Mission of the Woodstock Business Conference is to establish and lead a national and international network of business executives to explore their respective religious traditions in order to assist the individual executives:
    - To integrate faith, family and professional life,
    - To develop a corporate culture that is reflective of their religious faith and values and
    - To exercise a beneficial influence upon society at large
  - The Conference, grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition, welcomes believers who are open to and respectful of one another's religious tradition. It is committed to the conviction that ethics and values grow out of one's religious heritage.
- **Scripture Reading: Zechariah's Canticle Luke 1:67-80**
- **Then Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered this prophecy:**

**“Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel because he has visited and ransomed his people. He has raised a horn of saving strength for us in the house of David his servant, as he promised through the mouths of his holy ones, the prophets of ancient times: Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all our foes. He has dealt mercifully with our fathers and remembered the holy covenant he made, the oath he swore to Abraham our father he would grant us: that, rid of fear and delivered from the enemy, we should serve him devoutly and through all our days be holy in his sight. And you, O child shall be called prophet of the Most High; for you shall go before the Lord to prepare straight paths for him, giving his people knowledge of salvation in freedom from sins. All this is the work of the kindness of our God; he, the Dayspring, shall visit us in his mercy to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The child grew up and matured in spirit. He lived in the desert until the day when he made his public appearance in Israel.**

**Quiet Reflection 5 minutes followed by sharing insights**

- **Articles: Examining Conscience by James F. Keenan, S.J. & Called to Conscience by James F. Keenan, S.J.**

## **Examining Conscience**

*America Magazine*

April 4-11, 2016 Issue

James F. Keenan

### **Ancient wisdom on judgment, justice and the heart**

At the gathering of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, church leaders discussed a wide range of challenges facing modern families, including—though not limited to—sensitive questions around Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, contraception and same-sex marriage. In their final report, the bishops noted that in cases where a marriage has broken down, “Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person’s properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations” (No. 85). And in his final address to the synod, Pope Francis noted that “apart from dogmatic questions clearly defined by the Church’s Magisterium...what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion.”

To clear away some of this confusion, it is helpful to turn to the Bible and the tradition of the church, which provide widely applicable insights on the topic. Here let me offer four of the major contributions to the church’s understanding of conscience today.

First, in the Hebrew Bible, the term most analogous to conscience is “heart”—*lebab* in Hebrew, *kardia* in Greek. There are literally hundreds of references to heart in the Bible. In fact, while the Protestant editions of the Bible translate most of these instances as “conscience,” the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version insists on keeping the specific word *heart*.

Often enough, heart is that which God judges. In Sir 42:18, God “searches out the abyss and the human heart; he understands their innermost secrets.” In these instances, heart is not

identified with conscience, because the former simply refers to one's deep, personal interests: Knowing one's heart is like knowing where one's true commitments are. Other times, however, Scripture suggests that God's examination of the heart empowers it to become what today we would call a person's conscience, as in Jer 17:10: "I the LORD search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."

Occasionally the heart is where one recognizes one's guilt. We call this a judicial conscience because it judges our past actions. In 1 Sm 24:5, we read that "afterward David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak." Here the heart is a conscience convicting the self, the fruit of an examined conscience.

Today we distinguish between a judicial conscience that looks back and a legislative conscience that guides future courses of action; there are a few instances of the latter in the Hebrew Bible. There conscience is not the heart but a voice, a voice that accompanies us. This notion of a voice being with us captures the *con* of conscience, a word that means "knowing with." In Is 30:21, we read: "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." This voice directs our lives. Still, heart also occasionally becomes the guiding conscience that needs to be formed, as in 2 Mc 2:3: "And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts."

In short, conscience in the Hebrew Bible is found primarily as a matter of the heart. Though many instances of heart are no more than that which God examines to reveal our preferences, still other instances of heart are identifiably related to an active conscience, through which one turns to God, judges one's past, guides one's future and looks to be shaped by the law of God.

### **Listening to the Truth**

As we turn to Greek and Roman philosophy, we discover that from Democritus on, conscience has a singular feature: It is judicial. Unlike the Hebrew notion of the passive heart that can be judged, this version of conscience does the judging. In fact, most often it disturbs as it judges. Though Cicero's own conscience judged him well, in most of ancient philosophy the function of conscience is to cause us distress over our wrongdoing.

The Greek and Roman notion of conscience is found in everyone, but always as judge; like Yahweh, it judges each person. It does not dwell quietly in anyone when evil is done; it awakens the wrongdoer with pangs. Conscience forces us to recognize our own misdeeds. In that rude awakening, many encounter conscience for the first time. To have a conscience is to recognize one's own guilt.

A guilty conscience is precisely one that recognizes a lack of connection between what we thought was acceptable and the guilt we feel afterward. Its pangs not only awaken us to our misdeeds; they awaken us to conscience itself. When we are awakened, we suddenly realize that we have within us a moral sense that does not like to be disturbed. By these pangs we begin to realize that we carry within ourselves a moral beacon that troubles us when we are wrong and validates us when we are right. That is what ancient philosophy gives us: the birth of conscience, the experience, like that of Isaiah, of a voice that we can hear. Conscience becomes a new form of understanding and a new form of listening to the truth.

### **Speaking the Truth of Christ**

When we turn to the New Testament, St. Paul leads the way. First, he places his conscience in the light of faith and under the governance of the Holy Spirit. "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 9:1). On trial before the

Sanhedrin, Paul states, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1; see 2 Cor 1:12).

There is humility to his conscience, however. For all his reliance on following his conscience, he still acknowledges the outstanding judgment of God: “I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted; the one who judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor 4:4). God’s impending judgment does not replace one’s conscience, however; until the judgment comes, it is conscience that we have as a moral guide: “Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience” (1 Cor 13:5).

According to Paul, we are called “to hold faith in God and a good conscience” (1 Tm 1:19; 3:9). Paul is mindful of the Gentiles, too. While they might not have the law, the law is written in their hearts and they have consciences that witness to them; and, like all, on the last day they will be judged (Rom 2:14–18).

Finally, Paul believes that it is through conscience that we grow, both the weak and the strong, together. In his discussion about idol meat, he considers those with unformed consciences who, on seeing their fellow Christians eating meat that has been offered to the idols, think that these Christians are participating in idol worship (1 Corinthians 8). Paul warns his fellow Christians that although they are strong in their consciences, they should be mindful of the confusion that they might be causing in others. In this bit of casuistry, Paul teaches Christians that loving one’s neighbor means helping and not scandalizing. With Paul, then, we have conscience as our moral judge and guide, with the realization that for all Christians, both the weak and the strong, there is always more to learn until we arrive at the day of judgment.

Finally, Thomas Aquinas offers a further development on conscience. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether an erring conscience binds. He answers that “absolutely speaking” every variance with conscience, “whether right or erring, is always evil.” Aquinas explains that though the error is not from God, the dictate of an erring conscience “puts forward its judgment as true, and consequently as being derived from God” (I-II, q. 19 a.1); therefore, when erring conscience “proposes something as being commanded by God, then to scorn the dictate of reason is to scorn the commandment of God.” For Aquinas, conscience is what God gives us to discern the right, and therefore we must always obey it.

Nonetheless, as Paul teaches, even though we must follow our consciences, we might still be in error. Immediately after the question of whether we can ever reject the dictate of conscience, he asks whether the will is good when it follows an erring conscience (I-II, q. 19 a. 6). Here, Aquinas determines whether we are responsible for the erring conscience and writes that if we could have known the truth and avoided the error, then we are not excused from the wrongdoing; if we could not have known otherwise, then we are excused.

## **Tradition Today**

If we want to know what our tradition today holds about conscience, nothing could surpass the Second Vatican Council’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” Having seen the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Greek and Roman philosophers, St. Paul and St. Thomas Aquinas, I believe we can understand why the council used words like heart, law, voice, error, dignity etc. The text that we hold today rightly embodies the sources that produced it (No. 16). Let us read it anew:

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. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.

In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems that arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence 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. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.

Many Catholics today think of conscience primarily as that which gives us the right to dissent from teaching. That opinion, unfortunately, is a truncated notion of conscience. Any right to dissent derives first from the responsibilities we have to conscience—that is, to examine our own conduct, to form and inform our consciences daily and to determine the right direction of our lives. The language of conscience is not so much the language of a right, therefore, but of a duty always to act in conscience—that is, the obligation to find and to follow what we understand to be God’s will.

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## Called to Conscience

*America Magazine*

January 2, 2017 Issue

James F. Keenan

### **Americans must recognize their own capacity for evil**

“Calming the conscience, numbing the conscience, this is a great evil.” – Pope Francis, Oct. 9, 2015

Over the past two years I have been writing about the differences between the European and American use of conscience. These differences have led me to believe that we in the United States need to develop a much more rigorous notion of conscience.

This article is in two parts. First, I share findings that I have published elsewhere, most notably in the journal *Theological Studies*. Second, I suggest several elements that we need to retrieve so as to develop a richer understanding of conscience that is more sensitive to the demands of moral truth. In particular, I emphasize that the virtue of humility can help us appreciate why these elements are so necessary. Here I propose that a humble conscience provides us with a deeply relational and accountable source of moral agency.

After World War II, European theologians, having witnessed Catholic participation in unimaginably heinous conduct during the war, developed a robust promotion of the call of conscience for all Catholics. These theologians were developing a moral argument that would replace the moral manuals of the 18th through the 20th centuries that they believed had helped lead the way to an obediential passivity in the laity that left them unprepared for the dictatorial rule of the Nazis and their Fascist allies.

Later, they further developed a theology of conscience that was at once deeply embedded in the person yet highly relational and always mindful of the responsibility to hear the call of Christ. Their writings were taught throughout European seminaries and universities, where priests and bishops accepted and embraced these insights, which they in turn as council fathers validated in the celebrated paragraph on conscience in the Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (No. 16).

We need to appreciate that their ethics was built in a spirit of humility on a deep conviction of their own wartime guilt. One might make the generalization that the European conscience awoke in a new way when it acknowledged the truth and confronted the consequences of its own actions and inactions in the barbaric rubble of the Holocaust.

After World War II, through a variety of ways, Europeans began a process of understanding their capacity for evil by examining the history of their own actions. That understanding continues to be visible today when one visits Germany, for instance, and sees public, social reminders of the nation's own atrocities. From the Concentration Camp Memorial in Dachau to the Berlin Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, we can literally enter and see the pangs of the European conscience evident in its enduring testimonials.

In contrast, the contemporary American rejection of the manualist tradition and turn to conscience was not at all through any experience of remorse, either individually or collectively. The war, in fact, prompted no crisis of conscience, because Americans, including their theologians, believed they were on the right side. From the end of the war to Vatican II, most American moral theologians ignored the Europeans' promotion of Catholic conscience. In the "Notes on Moral Theology" published regularly in *Theological Studies*, for instance, American Jesuit moralists routinely dismissed the claims of the European moralists and their appeals to conscience.

Appeals to conscience emerged later in the United States both during the Vietnam War and in response to "Humanae Vitae" in the personal appeals by young men drafted into an undeclared war and in the claims of married couples hoping for a change in church teaching on contraception. These moments of conscience were not begun, as they were in Europe, with the collective social acknowledgement of profound human violations of the moral law. When the Americans turned to conscience, they were pleading *individually* against the very law-and-order mentality that American Catholic culture had so strongly supported even as the Europeans turned in a different direction.

Unfortunately the American use of conscience never really settled into, nor emerged from the place it did in Europe, that is, as the source of responsible personal and social moral agency. When we consider the U.S. bishops' recent protest using a conscience clause against the Affordable Care Act, they appear to be doing what Americans normally do when they turn to conscience: They seem to invoke it to opt out of an existing law or command, whether that be the military draft, "Humanae Vitae" or, as in this case, the Affordable Care Act.

I do not think that the arrested development of the American conscience is simply the result of the rejection by U.S. moralists of the European initiative; it is also rooted in the longstanding American incapacity to recognize its own wrongdoing. Indeed, historians comment on the practice of American exceptionalism, in which we excuse many of our actions by presuming that our nation has a manifest destiny that exempts us from the standards that others must follow.

Consider slavery, for example, the quintessential American sin. Despite the nation's own history of enslaving millions of people and of enjoying the benefit of slavery even without owning slaves, America has never collectively faced itself in conscience. As M. Shawn Copeland reminds us, the American conscience is haunted, profoundly damaged by the complex history of slavery in

the United States and by its national willfulness to accommodate to and profit from racism.

Still, slavery did not arrive here innocently. The blindness evident in the collective consciousness of many Americans was rooted in the nation's claim of manifest destiny, a claim that concomitantly animated the extinction of Native American populations as well as the enslavement of Africans.

The silence in the United States about slavery has further promoted an American understanding of itself as "innocent" that has played out time and again as the country sees itself as blameless and virtuous in the world. Americans, including American Catholics, never engaged in collective repentance for our own moral abominations in World War II, including intentionally killing innocent civilians in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden. The silent, presumptive innocence claimed by the United States is palpable when we listen to the American perspective on its relationships with Latin America, its understanding of the global ecological crisis or its de facto policy of unparalleled mass incarceration, yet another symbol of the racial entitlement tied to our manifest destiny. Until we can recognize the evidence of our own capacity for evil in the personal and national history of our own actions, we cannot claim to have a conscience, let alone to be exercising one.

### **Awakening the American Conscience**

An examination of conscience belongs not only to persons but also to societies, an insight that all Catholics can appreciate as they begin the liturgy of the penitential rite at Mass, confessing in common their sinfulness. In fact, at the United Nations, Pope Francis, echoing a language that reminds us of phrases like the "conscience of the nation," summoned the assembly to an examination of conscience. Referring to military and political interventions that are not based on international agreement, he argued, "These realities should serve as a grave summons to an examination of conscience on the part of those charged with the conduct of international affairs." With this in mind, I offer five different theological claims that might help us appreciate the conscience as the personal and social seat of moral responsibility and accountability.

First, the judgment of conscience should prompt us to confront our sinfulness. Commonly, conscience is divided into two significant functions. It looks backward at one's own deeds, judging its own conduct and behavior, as one does when one examines one's conscience. The second function of conscience is to discern or to direct agents to moral action. Thus the judicial conscience looks back, while discerning looks forward. These are fairly sequential; our capacity to discern well depends on whether we have judged well. The fundamental ethical mandate to know oneself is evident in this connection, but so too is the liberating work of judicial conscience. By knowing our sinful history we can in grace respond to it, ask for forgiveness, overcome it and try not to repeat it.

Certainly, a judicial conscience can discover not only moral failure but also moral satisfaction; but if it does not discover sin anywhere, then it does not discover the truth of itself. The discovery of one's own sinfulness is an essential step in self-understanding and moral maturity.

While reaching its full flowering in the Catholic understanding of the sacrament of penance, the birth of conscience through remorse is a common theme throughout history. Any reading of Roman philosophy, for instance, teaches us that conscience was first recognized by its pangs, convictions and stains. Cicero, Julius Caesar and Quintilian refer us to the ways conscience awakens us to recognize our own misdeeds. In that awakening, many of us encounter conscience for the first time. In his book *Conscience: A Very Short Introduction*, Paul Strom remarks that this

idea of conscience was so evident that in the very popular rhetorical work from the first century B.C.E., *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, prosecutors were advised to say that his adversary's client shows "signs of conscience": "blushed, grown pale, stammered, spoken inconsistently, displayed uncertainty, compromised himself." To have a conscience is to recognize one's own guilt.

Why? Because conscience helps us understand the objective moral truth. A guilty conscience is precisely one that recognizes a lack of connection between what we thought was a good to pursue and the realization that, as a matter of fact, it was not a good to pursue. Truth in conscience lets us see that we were wrong. When we first recognize that truth, we begin to realize that not everything we pursue is good; therein is the awakening of conscience: the humble willingness to submit our choices to the truth.

Second, when we discover our sinfulness, we discover our freedom. Some theologians have noted that the confession of sin is itself effective and illuminative. It is effective inasmuch as we do not know the scope of our sinfulness until we begin to acknowledge that we are sinners. Only when we utter "mea culpa" do we begin to see our history of sinful harm, which has not only hurt others unjustly, but has also impeded our own flourishing. Until we make this admission, we remain behind artificial blinders that keep us from recognizing the trajectory of effects that have occurred because of our sinfulness.

In that effective acknowledgement of our culpability, we are gifted with an illumination by which we understand first, what we did, but second, what we could have done. That is, the confession of our sinfulness lets us recognize that we could have acted otherwise. Until we have that illumination, we are trapped by an understanding of ourselves as weak and constrained, a convenient stance that literally keeps us from believing that we need to confess.

Thus, when we confess, we often realize that we sinned not out of weakness of will but out of a misapplied strength. Much of the manualist theology of sin, lacking a theology of conscience, made sin look inevitable and our own selves look weak, living in a world without virtue and grace. In that context we confessed sins that we could not have avoided, pleading that other conditions made us do what we did. We need to learn to confess our sins in the light of Christ, realizing in grace that the chance to act otherwise was there and that the excuses we proffer are merely, well, excuses. The honest and full confession of sin makes us realize that the disordered and prideful trajectory of our personal and social history can be changed.

Moreover, in the illumination of our sinfulness, we see just how sinful we are. We might do well to remember the insight of Dorothy Day, who realized as she matured that her own sinfulness was greater than she had realized. That insight brings with it a redemptive humility, a humility burdened not with self-deprecation but rather with an unabashed self-understanding of what it really means for one to act in conscience—that is, to do good and avoid evil in accordance with God's will.

Conscience grows out of the humble self-understanding we have when the pangs of conscience move us to the confession of our sins. In that confession, we see who we have been called to become as authentic human beings; we recognize not primarily our failings but pre-eminently our calling to repent and move beyond them in God's forgiveness.

### **Conscience Is the Key**

Third, though deeply interior, the conscience is the key to our relationships with others, our world, ourselves and our God. As the Bible teaches us, through our consciences we examine our past histories and set the course of our future, always with others in mind. The word conscience, *suneidēsis* in Greek, appears in the New Testament 31 times, mostly in Paul, and almost always in



terms of our relationship with others, for it is about our awareness of them. A key example of this is the question about meat dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8:1-13; Rom 14), where Paul asks us whether our decisions in freedom are mindful of the needs of our fellow Christians growing in faith (see also 2 Cor 1:12; 5:11).

*Suneidēsis* does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but the word most routinely associated with conscience is *kardia*, “heart.” In fact, *kardia* is used over 800 times in the Bible, though not ever as a specific bodily organ; rather it always points to the source of all of our affective desires. Curiously, we Catholics might not realize this because the Catholic version of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible insists on keeping *kardia* as heart, though most Protestant translations refer to it as conscience. In 1 Sm 24:5, for instance, we see “Afterward David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak.” In 2 Mc 2:3 we read, “And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.” In Sir 42:18 we read, “He searches out the abyss and the human heart; he understands their innermost secrets.”

In the New Testament, *kardia* appears four times in 1 Jn 3:19-21: “And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him, whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God.”

I believe that it is precisely a humble conscience/heart that helps us to appreciate our relationship to others. If we define humility as knowing our place in God’s world, then we should see the Magnificat as a quintessential expression of humility, where the church sings the song of Mary who proclaims the greatness of God’s ordering of the world and her place in it. We, too, in humility, can see in the Scriptures, whether in Samuel, the Wisdom literature, John or Paul, that conscience brings with it a new freedom that allows us to see our place among the people of God.

When we discover our place in God’s world and our relationships therein, we begin to see how much we can learn for the formation of our conscience with “the word of God” as “the light for our path,” “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” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1785). Learning to take advantage of the insights of our family and the community of believers, including its magisterium, we form our consciences by entering into a journey that only strengthens our capacity to hear the word of God and keep it.

Fourth, humility keeps us grounded. Inasmuch as the word *humility* derives from *humus*, meaning soil or dirt, humility keeps us close to the moral terrain in which we find ourselves. A humble conscience keeps us alert to our environment, our neighbor in need, our own responsibilities and the need to take account of the future and its challenges. Here we realize that the humble conscience engages—and sometimes interrupts—our agenda for our lives, which can so easily proceed automatically.

When we study the American civil rights movement, we can see conscience at work. While from one perspective one could see the entire civil rights movement as no more than a rejection of the racist laws in the United States, from another, we could see that the civil rights movement was at once an argument for the articulation of an objectively true law of justice, fairness and equality to replace the old false one. The movement’s leaders worked not only against unjust laws but, more important, in solidarity for the right realization of a dream. In conscience the leaders understood the harmful practices of redlining schools and neighborhoods, of demarcating space in restaurants and buses and of imprisoning and hanging innocent friends and family members. Their feet and eyes were on the American terrain, and they knew their place in God’s world, a knowledge

that prompted them to sing the spirituals and the blues, their own Magnificat. In conscience, they made the laws right. From them we learn that the humble conscience is mindful of what one is called to do. From their witness we learn to form our consciences.

Finally, conscience brings with it a humility that affects not only how we understand our place in God's world but also how we think, learn and understand. This insight into a humble way of thinking that rejects the imperial ego becomes a relational way of thinking and is complemented by what other theologians call the grace of self-doubt. In humility we discover that there can be a real grace in doubting ourselves and our opinions. This grace animates and informs our humility and helps us to see that the work of realizing ourselves as disciples of Christ is a formidable lifelong task fraught with misperceptions and yet possible precisely because of that humility.

Make no mistake about it: Conscience is not infallible. Quite the contrary. As Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" reminds us, we frequently err. But we can get to the truth only through conscience. Humility, then, is constitutive of the Christian quest for moral truth, because in truth we are always learning and opening ourselves to correction. For Catholic Christians, this process is assisted by prayerful participation in the life of the church, particularly by attention to the preaching of God's word and the reception of the sacraments.

This final insight takes us to the beginning of this section of the article. In conscience we understand that we are bound by the truth as it really is. Truth stands in judgment of our own misdeeds, a judgment that we recognize in the pangs of conscience. When we confess, we effectively acknowledge objective truth and therein allow the judgment of conscience to rule that we have sinned. In that confession, we recognize truth not as something that we made up, but rather something that compels us. This phenomenon of "obeying our consciences," "heeding the dictates of conscience" and "recognizing the demands of our conscience" captures the sense that conscience allows us to hear the truth as it is. In conscience we experience the claims of truth. This is why, for many, it is precisely a guilty conscience that allows us to have the experience that what we ought to pursue is only the right. We cannot in conscience make what is wrong right. A well-formed conscience, where we learn truth, teaches us in humility to allow truth to have its say. As St. John Paul II's encyclical "The Splendor of Truth" (1993) reminds us, "freedom of conscience is never freedom 'from' the truth but always and only freedom 'in' the truth" (No. 64).

In the United States we need in humility to engage the conscience, to allow ourselves to be judged by the truth. In that experience of humbly submitting our personal and collective history to the truth we will discover both our sinfulness and our redemption together, because it is only as redeemed that we can know the true scope of our sinfulness. I suggest that looking in humble conscience at our histories on race and on the environment, we might begin to find the sources of our error and therein the possibility of acknowledging the truth, not only of our past, but of the course for our future. And then we might discover that our consciences should always be operative—and not only when we want to opt out.

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**Be Attentive:** As we begin a new year let us look back and consider how our consciences have been formed. How was your conscience formed? What role has the "little voice" played in your life?

**Be Intelligent:** What implications does James Keenan's understanding of conscience have on your thought process? What insights did you glean from both articles? What did you think of "the five different theological claims that might help us appreciate the conscience as the personal and social seat of moral responsibility and accountability" in the Called to conscience article?

**Be Reasonable:** What applications do you see for conscience formation and its role in decision making at work? At home?

**Be Responsible:** I recall the early Disney character Jiminy Cricket singing "Let your conscience be your guide" How has your conscience been your guide? How has your conscience been dulled through the years? How will this conversation impact your thoughts and actions this week, this month?

### **Closing Prayer: St. Francis Peace Prayer**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
Where there is hatred let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And, where there is sadness, joy;  
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand,  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And that it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen