

The Confessor's Tongue for November 28, A. D. 2021

23rd Sunday After Pentecost: Martyr Stephen the New

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

On the Human Conscience

The human conscience, like the rest of the human being, is a gift from God. It is a part of the soul which indicates to man what is right and what is wrong before God. It is man's moral guide in which God has written his law. It guards the moral law in man. It legislates to him. It moves him to carry out the law. It judges him. At the final judgment when the books are opened, it is the book of the conscience of each man that will reveal his true nature. Each man will be judged—justified or condemned—based on what is written there, as its contents are seen in the light of Christ's glory which allows for everything to be seen as it truly is. St. Andrew of Crete describes this in his Great Canon of Repentance: "Therefore I am condemned, wretch that I am, therefore I am doomed by my own conscience, than which there is nothing in the world more rigorous." In Christ's light, there will be no means to soothe the conscience by making excuses or blaming others. Everything will be seen clearly for what it truly is.

In this life, conscience is a guide and a voice of the Holy Spirit within us. This guide can be weak or strong. It can be cultivated, or it can be suppressed, seared, or even murdered. We cultivate and strengthen the conscience when we do not act against it, when we do not do what it forbids us and when we are quick to do what it enjoins. We suppress our conscience when we come up with reasons to justify not following it. We sear it when we deliberately act contrary to it. Repeated violations of it render it dull and insensitive. In the Great Canon, we accuse ourselves of having murdered our conscience: "Of mine own free will have I incurred Cain's guilt of murder; for I have murdered my own conscience by cultivating my flesh and making war upon my soul's awareness by my wicked actions" (Ode 1). In violating conscience, we sully, defile, and burden it. The conscience can be cleansed, healed, reactivated and resensitized by God's grace. Indeed, a good, clean, pure conscience is what we desire, for having a good conscience gives us boldness before God.

That a Christian should never violate his conscience and should never be forced to violate his conscience is a fundamental principle of Christian life. This principle forms the basis for the terms "conscientious objector" and "prisoners of conscience".

The Greek word for "conscience" is *syneidesis*, which combines the prefix *syn* "with, together", and the verb *eidon* "to know" to give us a term that indicates a man's moral consciousness. The word is used thirty-two times in the New Testament.

To help us think about the role of conscience in our lives, here are some passages from Scripture and two saints for further reflection and study.

St. Maximus 400 Chapters on Love 3.80 Do not treat your conscience with contempt, for it always advises you to do what is best. It sets before you the will of God and the angels; it frees you from the secret defilements of the heart; and when you depart this life it grants you the gift of intimacy with God.

St. Theophan the Recluse The conscience. Acknowledging itself to be obliged to please God, the soul would not know how to satisfy this obligation, if the conscience did not rule it in this area. After imparting to the soul a particle of His omniscience in the natural credo He established, God inscribed in it the requirements of His holiness, truths, and benevolence, having entrusted the soul itself to observe the implementation of them and to be its own judge as to right and wrong. This aspect of the soul is the conscience, which indicates what is right and wrong, what is pleasing to God and what is not pleasing, what should be done and what should not be. Once it has indicated these things, it must authoritatively carry them out, and then reward implementation with comforting, and punish non-implementation with remorse. The conscience is the legislator, the guardian of the law, the judge, and the executor. It is the natural codex of God's commandments, which are incumbent on all people. And we see the action of the conscience along with the fear of God in all people. *Spiritual Life, p. 62-3*

St. Theophan Do not do anything that your conscience prohibits, and do not omit anything that it says to do, whether great or small. The conscience is always our moral guide. The cherished thoughts, emotions, and desire that are within us give us over to improper whims; this is caused, incidentally, by the fact that our conscience has lost its force. Restore it force, and express full obedience to it. You have not educated by finding out all that you must and must not do. Follow it undeviatingly, and with such perseverance that you would not allow yourself to do anything against it, even if you were to die. The more decisively you act, then, the more powerful your conscience will become. The more powerful your conscience becomes, the more completely and forcefully it will inspire you with what is necessary and steer you away from what is unnecessary in words, deeds and thoughts, and the more quickly your inner being will be put in order. A conscience with reverential remembrance of God is the wellspring of true spiritual life. *Spiritual Life, p. 192-3*

St. Theophan If you have some [sin on your conscience], remove it from yourself through repentance and a promise of correction. If your conscience is not satisfied, add deeds of self-denial and love. Standing in church, prepare for how you will be outside of church for the rest of the time, prepare yourself to never step away from the Lord in thought, but always to see Him before you, so that your steps

would not stray from the right path to the wrong one."

John 8:9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own **conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

Acts 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good **conscience** before God until

Acts 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a **conscience** void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Romans 2:15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their **conscience** also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another:)

Romans 9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my **conscience** also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

Romans 13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for **conscience** sake.

I Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with **conscience** of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their **conscience** being weak is defiled.

For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the **conscience** of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak **conscience**, ye sin against Christ.

I Corinthians 10: 25-29 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for **conscience** sake: If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for **conscience** sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for **conscience** sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: **Conscience**, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's **conscience**?

II Corinthians 1:12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our **conscience**, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

II Corinthians 4:2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's **conscience** in the sight of God.

II Corinthians 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your **consciences**.

I Timothy 1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good **conscience**, and of faith unfeigned:

I Timothy 1:19 Holding faith, and a good **conscience**; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

I Timothy 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure **conscience**.

I Timothy 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their **conscience** seared with a hot iron;

II Timothy 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure **conscience**, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;

Titus 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and **conscience** is defiled.

Hebrews 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the **conscience**;

Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your **conscience** from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more **conscience** of sins.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil **conscience**, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 13:18 Pray for us: for we trust we have a good **conscience**, in all things willing to live honestly.

I Peter 2:19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for **conscience** toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

I Peter 3:16 Having a good **conscience**; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

I Peter 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good **conscience** toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Octoechos, Tuesday Matins, tone 2 sessional hymn

Searching my conscience, and finding it condemned, I am afraid of Thine awful Hall of Judgement, O Lord, for in my works is no salvation. But as Thou hast a wealth of compassion, O Christ our God, have pity on me and save me.

Upcoming Events 2021

14 December, Tuesday: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!