



1 - Conscience & Truth

VIDEO	AUDIO
<p>Voris and Rafe on cabin set planning a trip</p>	<p>MIKE: In August of 1993, Pope Saint John Paul II came to the United States for the eighth World Youth Day. Speaking at the welcome ceremony at the Denver airport, he addressed the American people with these words, "To all Americans, without exception, I present this invitation: Let us pause and reason together." He then spoke of, quote, "the moral truths which sustain the life of the nation." Among these, he included "respect for the dignity and worth of every person, integrity and responsibility, ... understanding, compassion and solidarity towards others," and "the right to life." Most importantly, perhaps, he warned Americans that no nation can endure that does not educate their youth in, quote, "a value system based on truth."</p> <p>SIMON: In our new show, Moral Compass, as in so much of our programming, we're seeking to help educate viewers, and their family and friends, in that value system based on truth. And as John Paul II observed at the beginning of his Encyclical letter Fides et Ratio, truth is contemplated by means of both reason and faith, just as two wings are needed to rise to the heights. So we'll be using faith and reason, with a particular emphasis in most episodes on reason, to make our arguments more credible to those who aren't fully convinced that God speaks with authority in the Scripture and Tradition of the Catholic Church.</p>
<p>Cabin set</p>	<p>MIKE: This first episode of Moral Compass will address the topic of the moral conscience, because a false understanding and use of the idea is a great stumbling block to living a moral life. The conscience exists so that we can do what is right freely and intelligently. But for many people, even in the Church, quote-unquote "conscience" has become little more than a way to legitimize their mere wants and desires. Such "conscience" is not really "conscience," but ultimately self-assertion.</p>



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Cabin set	SIMON: What, then, is the moral conscience? As we'll see, conscience has no real meaning without a continual reference to truth. If John Paul II called Americans to embrace "a value system based on truth," he was calling them also to the mature exercise of the conscience. So in his words, then, "Let us pause and reason together."
OPENING	OPENING THEME
"Their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when ... God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." (Rom 2:14-16)	Their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.



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Mike in cabin set	<p>MIKE: It is a well-known teaching of the Catholic Church, that you must follow your conscience. In a sense, everyone will be judged according to how well they followed their conscience. A commonly cited (and true) reason for this, is that God wishes us to serve him freely, intelligently, and responsibly, and so he implanted the moral law within our hearts, so that we can discern what is right and wrong. And so the moral law is found not only in commandments and moral precepts in the bible and in Church teaching, which are exterior to us, but in the light of conscience, interior to us.</p> <p>In response to this, some ask themselves, “what need, then, do we have for the external commandments? What need do we have to be told, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” if ultimately we will be judged according to the law inside us, and not the law outside us? We are told by the Church, that even if one’s conscience is in error about what is actually, objectively right and wrong, it still must be followed; and so what do we ultimately need the external commandments for?”</p> <p>Of course, the answer is quickly given - “We need to seek to inform our consciences of the truth; and if we fail to try to do that, it’s no use to claim that we act in good conscience.”</p>
Mike in cabin set	<p>Some form of this line of reasoning is often taught in Catholic education and catechesis on the topic of moral conscience. And it’s true, as far as it goes. But in fact, it’s incomplete, and depending on how its presented, this approach can be extremely misleading; its results are often disastrous for souls, who are given just enough information to confirm them in sinful desires.</p>
[“Man on the street” interviews:] What is “conscience”? Do you have to try to seek to inform your conscience?	



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<p>Simon hiking outdoors</p> <p>Cartoon illustrative images</p>	<p>SIMON: Think about it this way. In this common catechetical treatment of “conscience,” we have two things: the person with his conscience, and the Church with its moral commandments from God.</p>
<p>Simon hiking outdoors</p> <p>Cartoon illustrative images to the right of Simon’s head</p> <p>Richard McBrien, Hans Kung, etc.</p>	<p>SIMON: What will we be judged by? [ding!] One’s conscience. Who makes the judgment? [ding!] The person in his conscience. What should inform the conscience so it can make a judgement? [ding!] The commandments and the Church’s teaching, but did we mention that there are other sources one should use to inform one’s conscience like the teachings of really smart “expert” theologians and “lived experience”?</p> <p>So it looks like the individual and his conscience beat the Church and her teachings two to one, but even the one point in favor of Church teaching is shared with the “experts” and “lived experience” by which the individual can interpret the teachings.</p> <p>What do we end up with? An account of conscience that focuses heavily on the individual. He is the ultimately decisive factor. He is the one, seemingly, who examines, interprets, and judges the moral law, and then is himself judged only by the standard that he has created!</p>
<p>Mike in cabin set</p> <p>IMAGE: adulterous man</p>	<p>MIKE: Notice that in appearance, (though this is not necessarily said explicitly in the catechesis), conscience in itself seems nothing more than the subjective certainty of the individual with a conscience. A man is certain that he is right, for example, that in his circumstances, what might technically be deemed “adultery” is actually a new act of love, a new beginning, after his previous marriage broke down. No matter that Christ condemns divorce and remarriage, calling man to radical fidelity to the marriage covenant, as an image of Christ’s radical fidelity to his bride the Church. His “lived experience” and a few “expert theologians” have convinced him that he need not interpret this as absolute for every circumstance.</p>



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<p>SUBJECTIVE CERTAINTY, OR GUILT LEADING TO REPENTANCE?</p> <p>Mike in cabin set</p>	<p>MIKE: This is the problem: the impression is given that conscience is simply the subjective certainty that we come to, based on how we construe different moral sources, like God’s commandments, theologians, and our own experience. But in certain respects, this is radically different than a fuller, more traditional, biblical, and humane view of conscience. Consider Christ’s parable: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector...”</p>
<p>Video depicting the bible scene</p>	<p>The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.</p>



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<i>Simon hiking outdoors</i>	<p>SIMON: The Pharisee, in this parable, is subjectively certain that he is in the right. In that sense, he has a “good conscience.” But the tax collector is experiencing guilt. He is aware that he is a sinner who stands condemned by God’s law, and so does the only thing that he can do: he asks for mercy. And he is the one who goes home justified, not the Pharisee. A “good conscience” is not found, then, in mere subjective certainty. It is not found in the man who simply judges himself right in the eyes of God, perhaps after, quote-unquote, “informing his conscience.” A good conscience proceeds more from that guilt, that interior sorrow, based on the word of God and the moral law, that upsets our complacent, self-satisfied existence, opening us up to the mercy of God, and to repentance.</p> <p>In other words, conscience is not the means by which we judge ourselves and our desires righteous. Nor is it used to judge between ourselves and the moral law. In a sense, conscience is the means by which the moral law judges us! Through the conscience, God judges us justly according to the moral law, according to the truth. And this little fact must transform how we look at ourselves and our consciences.</p>
<p>CONSCIENCE AND TRUTH</p> <p>“A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part of prevailing opinion at the expense of truth.” Joseph Ratzinger</p>	<p>A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part of prevailing opinion at the expense of truth.</p>
Mike in cabin set	<p>MIKE: The real error of this false view is that in it, conscience has only a weak, flimsy connection to truth. But as John Paul II argued in Denver, our value system must always be based on truth.</p>



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<p>Mike in cabin set</p> <p>IMAGE: the adulterous man</p> <p>IMAGE: St. Thomas More</p> <p>IMAGE: Biden or Pelosi, etc.</p> <p>IMAGE: St. Thomas More</p>	<p>Whatever lip-service our adulterous, subjectively certain man may give to “truth,” it is not the man who justifies his desires without any qualms that people recognize as the proverbial “man of conscience,” but the man who stands strong in his moral conviction despite the damage it threatens to do to his wellbeing and social standing, and who holds it sacred however contrary it is even to his own desire and inclination. The proverbial man of conscience is not the Catholic politician who sides with his party, his culture, and his constituents rather than his faith, but the one who would go to prison and death rather than sign a statement he believes is false. He bears witness by his life that for him, truth remains supreme.</p>
<p>THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH “Who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults.” Ps 19:12-13</p>	<p>Who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults.</p>



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Simon hiking outdoors	<p>SIMON: To put all this in other words, just because you're personally certain that you are in the right does not in itself mean that you have a good conscience about it. The Pharisee in Christ's parable was blind to his sin, and was not thereby justified. One might ask, "Then what's the alternative? If you don't know that you're guilty, how can you be held accountable for it?"</p> <p>Here, again, truth is the key. While you can't be held accountable for what you don't know, you can be held accountable for not loving the truth for its own sake. A person who does not love the truth and seek it, has nothing else to form his certainties except the the views of society around him, and his own shallow desires.</p> <p>He may give lip-service to "informing his conscience," but he does not have that humble reverence towards the truth, and the willingness, if need be, to condemn himself and the viewpoints that come most naturally to him.</p>
Simon hiking outdoors	<p>But a person who loves and seeks the truth knows that he is a sinner, and so is humbly open to what transcends himself and his inclinations, and hence also is open to God.</p>
	<p>SIMON: In the words of Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, "Whoever equates conscience with superficial conviction identifies conscience with a pseudo-rational certainty, a certainty that in fact has been woven from self-righteousness, conformity, and lethargy. Conscience is degraded to a mechanism for rationalization, while it should represent ... transparency [to] the divine."</p>



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<p>THE PURSUIT OF GOD "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." Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes 16</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Mike in cabin set</p>	<p>MIKE: The voice of truth is the voice of God. The conscience of subjective certainty, of self-satisfied conformity to what you already want, is the hardened heart closed off to God. The peace that such a conscience has is the peace of self-deception, the false peace where sometimes great amounts of mental and spiritual energy are used to ignore, suppress, and deny ones own guilt. But the conscience of the person who loves and seeks the truth is sensitive to the beauty of goodness, and to the sting of a guilty conscience, and so can hear the voice of God calling to repentance and to life in communion with Him.</p>
<p>"When [people] do by nature what the law requires ... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when ... God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." (Rom 2:14-16)</p>	<p>When people do by nature what the law requires they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.</p>



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<p>Mike in cabin set</p> <p>Simon arrives back at the cabin</p>	<p>MIKE: Everyone must follow their conscience. But authentic conscience is one’s reasoned judgment on what the moral truth is, what God wills, and so you can’t have a sincere conscience unless you sincerely seek the truth, carefully distinguishing truth from what you just want to be true.</p> <p>SIMON: Furthermore, those who profess to be Catholic have thus committed themselves to the divine authority of the Scriptures, the Tradition, and the bishops as the representatives of Christ. What kind of concern can they have for truth if they profess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but ignore the authorities Christ has given for their instruction in the truth? Where is their faith? And if they persevere in abusing their consciences in this way, deceiving themselves, how will they stand at the judgment throne of the Lord?</p>
<p>Cabin set</p>	<p>MIKE: Conscience is a matter of reasoning and making judgments about moral truth on the authority of reason and faith. And so the rest of the episodes of Moral Compass are attempts to educate and inform consciences about the truth, so that they can make mature judgments of conscience for which they will be held responsible, and by which they will be judged.</p> <p>I am Michael Voris, and this has been, Moral Compass.</p>
<p>“Conscience is a law of the mind, but [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise ... [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.” Blessed John Henry Newman, “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk”</p>	



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