

Catechetical Aim: Conscience Formation

Anyone discussing conscience formation, like a good philosopher, ought to make a distinction between conscience and forming conscience.

Conscience is the intellect passing judgment on the goodness or badness of an action here and now to be done. If the action is good, conscience prompts one to choose it; if bad, it prods one not to choose it. These proddings and promptings are called the "dictates" or "voice" of conscience. Conscience, therefore, involves two acts: judgment and choice. Since it does, conscience formation must address itself to both the mind and the will. The ever-present danger in conscience formation is to see it as the development of either the mind or the will without any reference to each other.

A catechist who sees conscience formation only as informing the mind would reduce religious education to indoctrination. Indoctrination means informing the student about right and wrong, packing his head with knowledge, requiring no judgment on his part. Religious education in this concept would be a process of simply learning questions and the appropriate answers. Catechetics becomes only an answering service with no need for judgment or reflection. The errors in this approach lie in the fact that the ability to judge is not being developed and the will is being totally neglected.

On the other hand, a catechist who sees conscience formation only as the programming of behavior would reduce religious education to behaviorism. The success of the program depends on the students' behavior. The catechist believes, if he "makes" the student act according to set standards, all will be well. Bernard Haring labeled this method as forming conscience through imperatives: "Do this." "Don't do that." The flaw with the behavioral approach is that it does not touch the will, for it does not involve choice. Prisoners in a prison behave well; but mere con-

formity to rules is no guarantee of rehabilitation.

For the same reason, the commercial approach, that of offering rewards, does not form conscience. A rewards-only approach, like a bribe, can adulterate motivation. The Pharisee in our Lord's parable prayed, fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed. Yet he was not good. Virtue is much more than mere behavior!

Insofar as conscience is a reasoned judgment, it needs to be informed. Insofar as it is a choice, it must be free. Unless it is both of these, conscience becomes nothing more than a feeling: something followed much as a man follows a wheelbarrow.

One phase of conscience formation, therefore, is to develop the mind to conform to the mind of Christ: to teach what is the right thing to do and to teach what is the right motive for doing it. This task is relatively easy, since it consists in the presentation of the truths of Faith. What is difficult here is the manner of presentation: the teachings of the Church must be presented persuasively enough to move one to evaluate his own judgments in the light of those teachings. The presentation must encourage one to think about motives and values! Yet at the same time it must preserve his freedom of choice.

This freedom of choice, the second and more difficult phase of conscience formation, is the heart of it. For the object here is to strengthen the will not only to choose what it has learned to be the right thing, but to choose it consistently and to act from the right motive.

How can one be taught to do this? By developing the habit of making good choices. Habit is a consistent way of acting acquired through repetition. We speak of a good golfer, a good bowler, a good tennis player. Do we mean a person who makes a good shot now and then or bowls a good game now and then? No. We mean somebody who consistently makes good shots. He can make bad ones,

too. But his eyes, nerves, muscles have been so trained by constant practice that he can now be relied upon. He has developed a certain habit, a tone or quality, and it is there even when he is not playing.

So, forming conscience means fostering the habit of making good choices, so that one can be relied upon to choose good most of the time.

A choice, by its nature, must be free. Freedom requires that there be alternatives of equal value, any one of which may be freely selected. To offer a child a choice between two alternatives — one of which is a serious sin — allows no choice, because no one is free to choose an evil like sin. Therefore, when choice is not given and action is forced, far from developing conscience, a rebel or a hypocrite is created. That is why the "Gospel spirit of freedom and charity" must pervade religious education.

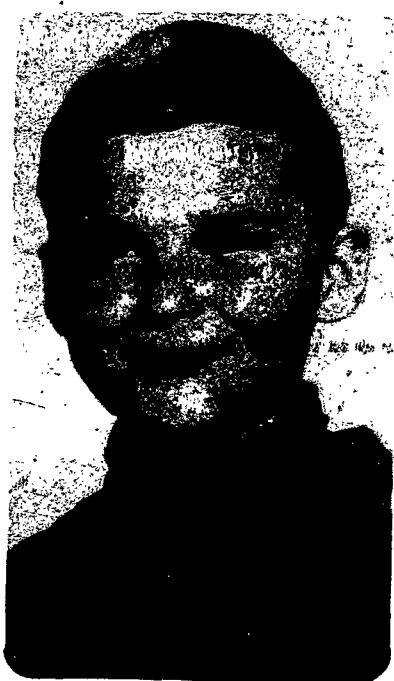
In summary, conscience formation demands: (1) informing conscience, and (2) forming it.

We inform conscience by presenting what is the right thing to do, and by showing what is the right motive for doing it. This entails imparting the contents of revelation as taught by the Church.

We form conscience by disposing one to choose the right thing consistently, and to act for the right reason.

"... The forming of the Christian conscience of children or youth consists, first and foremost, in illuminating their minds concerning Christ's desires, His law and His way, and in addition in influencing their souls insofar as this can be done from the outside, in order that they may execute the divine Will freely and constantly. This is the highest duty of education" (Pius XII, 3/23/52).

Next week: In practice, how do we form conscience?



ALAN BELLIS

Award Winner

Victor — Alan Bellis, son of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bellis, Trillium Trail, has received the Parvuli Dei Roman Catholic Religious Emblem for Cub Scouts. The award was made by Father Paul Murley during a recent Scout Sunday Mass at St. Patrick's Church. Alan is a Webelos in Pack 52.

To receive the emblem, a Cub Scout must complete 12 requirements dealing with knowledge of the parish, the diocese, doctrine, scripture, Christian living, and even religious handicraft. He must first satisfy his parents and then be reviewed by his pastor.

Alan was the first Cub to receive the Parvuli Dei in St. Patrick's parish and one of a very few to receive it in the entire four county Finger Lakes Council, according to Duane Pancoast, cubmaster.

Courier-Journal

State CCD Directors Consider New Document

The New York State Conference of Diocesan Directors of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine met here last week for a day long "brain storming session."

Father Daniel F. Holland, Rochester's CCD director, said the meeting of representatives from the eight dioceses of the state was one of many state level meetings going on throughout the country on the practical application of the General Catechetical Directory for the American Church.

The directory, he explained, is a Vatican document concerned with religion as it is taught to the American people.

"It is a positive document," Father Holland continued, "one of the healthiest documents to come to America from Rome, leaves a lot of room for implementing and spells out that how we teach religion is directly related to everything that goes on in the parish."

The CCD directors' conference meets five times a year to work out problems of religious education. It has a direct im-

pact on the Bishops of the state, Father Holland said.

The goal is a thorough overhaul of the process of teaching religion to children and adults, maintaining continuity but changing the means.

Father Charles McDonald, executive secretary of the national conference, attended the meeting from Washington, D.C. He said that he would take the results of the state brain storming session to the national meeting in Minneapolis, April 24-27, "in order to facilitate further deliberation on a practical means of implementing the principles in the General Catechetical Directory for the American Church."

Got Some News?

The Courier-Journal wants to print news of your organization, club or association. Please remember that the deadline is Thursday noon for the following week's paper.

CYO Hoops

The 84 team CYO Basketball League finished the season with a record number 28 ties in the 8 High School, Grammar School, parish regional leagues of Monroe County.

Games are being played through this week to determine the positions for the upcoming CYO Diocesan Bishops' Tournament, March 11 and 12.

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