



E-Read



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The Making of Conscience

Revd David Gaffney writes:

Where does conscience come from? This is a central question in New Christian thought, and in fact, it is important in all religions.

Remains or Remnants To understand conscience, we need to start at the very beginning—our earliest childhood. “Remains” (also called “remnants”) are states of goodness and truth that the Lord plants in us, especially when we are young. These are given through loving experiences, learning from the Word,

and simple acts of kindness. The Lord, through His angels, gives these remains—feelings of love, peace, and innocence—to every child, even, somehow, those living in the hardest of conditions (Arcana Coelestia 561).

These spiritual seeds stay deep within us, even if we don't remember them. They are called "remains" because they always "remain" inside us (Arcana Coelestia 561). They form a hidden foundation for our spiritual growth and ability to change for the better. Through remains, the Lord can move us toward wanting to do good and show kindness. Remains help balance out selfish tendencies and keep us free to choose what is good. Without these remains, it would be impossible to turn away from evil and become better people (Arcana Coelestia 530). The more remains a person has, the more receptive and enlightened they can become (Arcana Coelestia 561). This is why one of the greatest gifts for children is to give them experiences of the Lord and His truth. Remains are essential for our connection with heaven and our hope for eternal happiness (Arcana Coelestia 530, Arcana Coelestia 561).

Sadly, if people continually and intentionally do evil, they can close themselves off from the influence of their remains, cutting themselves off from the good that could lead them to heaven (Arcana Coelestia 661).

What Is Conscience? Conscience is the inner sense of right and wrong. In the New Christian perspective, conscience is not something we are born with, but something that develops as we learn spiritual truths and try to live by them. As the Writings teach, "A conscience forms in us on the basis of whatever religious tradition we follow, depending on how deeply we internalise that tradition" (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 130).

For Christians, conscience is shaped by truths from the Word or by what we learn from others, as long as these truths become part of our heart and the way we live (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 131). The remains the Lord stores in us provide the ground for conscience to grow, making it possible to hear and follow what is right (Arcana Coelestia 661).

Doctrine and Teachings—What's the Difference? Doctrine is an organised framework of spiritual truths and principles. It's like a map that helps us understand spiritual matters and guides our choices. Teachings, on the other hand, are the individual truths or lessons found in the Word—like "love your neighbour" or "do not steal." Doctrine gathers, interprets, and connects these teachings into a whole system that helps us see the deeper meaning and purpose of the Word (Arcana Coelestia 2761; The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Regarding the Sacred Scripture 50).

We first learn truths by being taught or reading the Word—these are "teachings." Through thought and reflection, we begin to organise and connect them; this is how doctrine is formed in us (The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Regarding the Sacred Scripture 50). A clear doctrine helps us understand and apply these truths in life (Heaven and Hell 516).

Which Comes First: Doctrine or Conscience? Doctrine comes before conscience. Conscience does not arise by itself—it needs knowledge of what is right and good, which comes from doctrine, study of the Word, and instruction (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 130). As we learn truths and make them part of our lives, conscience begins to form. As our doctrine becomes more aligned with Divine truth—and we put it into practice—our conscience grows clearer and stronger (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 131).

Summary

- We learn truths (teachings) from the Word and instruction.
- Doctrine is formed as we gather and connect these truths into a conceptual framework (The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Regarding the Sacred Scripture 50).
- Doctrine guides us, and as we live from it, our conscience takes shape (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 131).
- Thus, doctrine comes first, and conscience grows as its fruit. The remains the Lord gives us from childhood are what make both doctrine and conscience possible (Arcana Coelestia 530, Arcana Coelestia 561).

(References: The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teaching 130–131; Arcana Coelestia 530, 561, 661, 2761; The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Regarding the Sacred Scripture 50; Heaven and Hell 516)

Note: All the references may be accessed here:

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