

IMPORTANCE OF CONSCIENCE

The man slowly walked up to the driver of the car and fired six bullets into him. Then, he coolly put his gun back into his pocket and calmly walked away. All the time, his facial expression never changed. It was as if he was delivering a piece of mail instead of death.

The killer was a sociopath. A man without a conscience. A man who can kill without feeling any kind of guilt. Who can look straight into the eyes of his victim and then fire a shot into his head and feel absolutely no emotion at all.

Conscience is not something we are born with. It is something that is acquired over the years. Usually from parents, from teachers and the peer group. Conscience is not static. It is almost always in the state of evolution, in a state of change.

There are some people who have little conscience. They can steal, cheat and wheel and deal and not have any sense of guilt at all.

On the other hand, there are those who are overly burdened with guilt. They are so scrupulous with their dealings that they carry with them the heavy chains of a conscience that is too rigid.

Neither extreme is healthy. Too much or too little of anything is not good. The Latin phrase “*In medio stat virtus*” (virtue lies in the middle) says it best.

Conscience is formed by the people who surround us and influence our thinking. We come to think that this is right and that is wrong because of the intensity of belief of those who can influence us. Parents play an enormous role in the formation of the conscience of their young. The children do not know right from wrong. They learn conscience from their elders.

This is translated into a set of values that they try to live by. It is this code of behavior that is dictated by the conscience. This explains many seeming contradictions in our culture. We call ourselves Christians, and that we are. However, we show the world that our idea of conscience is rather strange. We flock to Church on Good Friday and we refuse to work on that Holy Day. It is a matter of conscience. However, on the issue of honesty, we do not hesitate to indulge in petty thievery. Doors must remain locked tightly. We build walls around our homes as protection. It seems that conscience is rather lax when it comes to other people’s property.

The examples are innumerable. What is important to remember is that we usually behave in ways that are reflective of the conscience that we have. Oh, there are times when circumstance forces us to do otherwise. However, when we stand alone and nobody is looking and the pressures are not on us to conform, conscience takes over swiftly and goes the way it was educated.