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## “With Clean Hearts and Pure Conscience” CONSCIENCE IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY

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### Abstract

“Clean heart and pure conscience,” is a recurring theme in the celebration of the Syro Malabar Qurbana of the Saint Thomas Christians of India. Liturgy, the school of Christian life and formation, illustrates the significance of the formation of conscience and character. The explicit usage of the term “conscience” at different important moments of the Qurbana helps persons in the process of the formation of conscience, namely, to *examine* one’s conscience in order to enter the sanctuary, to *establish* reconciliation with the community, and to receive the Mysteries and to *enjoy* the mystical union with the Lord. This structure and nature provide a meaningful and fruitful pattern to form our conscience in following Christ, the essence of Christian ethics and morality.

**Keywords:** Christian Ethics, Conscience, Formation of Conscience, Liturgy, Pure Hearts, Syro Malabar Qurbana

The parable of Jesus of two men praying in the temple (Lk 18:10-14) may be a fitting starting point for our reflection on conscience in the celebration of the liturgy, for the temple is the setting of prayer just as the Church is the setting for the liturgical celebration.

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The insight – “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” – of the parable is of great significance from the point of the formation of conscience and its judgment. John Paul II in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* interprets the implication of this parable in connection with conscience.

Here we encounter two different attitudes of the moral conscience of man in every age. The tax collector represents a “repentant” conscience, fully aware of the frailty of its own nature and seeing in its own failings, whatever their subjective justifications, a confirmation of its need for redemption. The Pharisee represents a “self-satisfied” conscience, under the illusion that it is able to observe the law without the help of grace and convinced that it does not need mercy.<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting on the parable, Joseph Ratzinger makes the following insightful and invaluable observations:

Not without reason does the self-righteous man in the encounter with Jesus appear as the one who is really lost... The Pharisee no longer knows that he too has guilt. He has a completely clear conscience. But this silence of conscience makes him impenetrable to God and men, while the cry of conscience which plagues the tax collector makes him capable of truth and love. Jesus can move sinners.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Conscience and the Celebration of the Liturgy

Prayer transforms the person and one’s conscience. Spirituality “clarifies the life-shaping role of liturgy and other rituals. It names in a new way the central Christian project of discipleship.”<sup>3</sup> Prayer is a friendly conversation with God, through which a person is enlightened in the law and sanctified by the truth so as to be faithful to the will of God and obey the divine commandment. The prayer preceding the proclamation of the Gospel in the Qurbana illustrates the disposition of the assembly: “Christ Our Lord! Enlighten us in Your laws, inflame our minds with Your knowledge, and sanctify our souls with Your truth so that we may be faithful to Your words and obedient to Your commandments. The Lord of all, forever. Amen.”<sup>4</sup>

In prayer, a person is entering into a personal conversation with, communion in, and commitment to the will of the Lord in the world of our times. Prayer is an invitation to encounter the Lord in the

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, Vatican City: Libreria Edirice Vaticana, 1993, § 104.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Cardinal Razinger, “Conscience and Truth,” in *Crisis of Conscience*, ed. John M. Haas, New York: A Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, 6.

<sup>3</sup>Timothy E. O’Connell, “Conscience,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995, 201-202.

<sup>4</sup>Syro-Malabar Bishops’ Synod, *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, Kochi: Commission for Liturgy, 2005, 33.

context of one's everyday life and its blessings and challenges. It is a friendly, faithful, and fruitful dialogue with the Lord in discerning the will of God and submitting to the loving divine providence. This reveals the inner core of prayer and simultaneously, it echoes the nature of conscience. Dialogue is the soul of conscience; so also the soul of prayer. Prayer is listening to the Lord in silence in the cave of one's heart and it is also a talking from the heart. Vatican II teaches that conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary:

In the depths of his conscience man detects a law which he does not impose on himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: 'do this, shun that.' For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary.<sup>5</sup>

Conscience speaks to the heart to do something or to avoid something else. Conversation is the nature of conscience. John Paul II underscores the importance of this: "Interior dialogue of man with himself can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a dialogue of man with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of man."<sup>6</sup> Conscience is an eternal dialogue to discover the law written by God in one's heart. Conscience is the core of the human person, where one is in a one-to-one relationship with God; it is a *darshan*, or *sparshan*, or *anubhava* of God in the process of understanding the will of God and acting accordingly. This is something we notice in the Pharisee and tax collector of the parable. Conversation is the heart of the parable: The Pharisee boasts about his own achievements, whereas the tax collector connects with God, seeking mercy. Such tendencies of self-justification – a pharisaic juridical mentality – may be found among the Christians who claim to follow the rituals of the liturgy rigidly while far away from the very heart of the liturgy. Admission of one's sinfulness in humility leads people to the truth and to make genuine and objective judgments. *Veritatis Splendor* cautions about the contemporary tendency of our times and asks people to seek the truth in humility:

All people must take great care not to allow themselves to be tainted by the attitude of the Pharisee, which would seek to eliminate awareness of one's own limits and of one's own sin. In our own day this attitude is expressed particularly in the attempt to adapt the moral norm to one's

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<sup>5</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, General Editor, Austin Flannery, Bombay: St Pauls, 1965, § 16.

<sup>6</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 58.

own capacities and personal interests, and even in the rejection of the very idea of a norm.<sup>7</sup>

The warning of John Paul II, therefore, is to be taken seriously, including the reference to the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist which does not transform the celebrants to translate the mind of Christ in everyday context. Conscience, in this case, is “the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man’s soul.”<sup>8</sup> It is in the recognition of and response to the divine voice within the hearts of human persons that conscience operates. In its attentiveness and openness to the divine voice “lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience, in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man.”<sup>9</sup> Maybe this is what was praised by Jesus in the conversation of the tax collector with God in the temple.

The celebration of the Liturgy may be seen as a school of Christian character formation and a context of conscience formation. The Paschal Mystery requires and enables the celebrants to continue the journey of Passover – passage from darkness to light, from death to life, from evil to goodness. In other words, the celebration of the Liturgy helps the assembly in “following Christ,” which “is the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality.”<sup>10</sup> The life and teachings of Jesus become alive in the celebration of the Liturgy and they are attractively transmitted in such a way that the liturgical gathering appreciates and assimilates them spontaneously and gradually. Regarding the following of Christ, which demands a conformation to Him, the Pope teaches, “Sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of eternal life.”<sup>11</sup>

The promise of Jesus, “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20), becomes manifest in the liturgical celebration of the Church. Vatican II emphasizes the importance of liturgical celebration in the Church: “It is liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, ‘the work of our redemption is accomplished,’ and it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature

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<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 105.

<sup>8</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 58.

<sup>9</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 58.

<sup>10</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 19.

<sup>11</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 21.

of the Church.”<sup>12</sup> Varghese Pathikulangara describes liturgy as “a celebration, a celebration of what we are, a celebration of our own Christian existence.”<sup>13</sup> Liturgy is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.”<sup>14</sup> In essence, the liturgical celebration presents a concise and comprehensive blueprint of Christian life. George Lobo observes that “the common participation in worship is a call to service in daily life, especially of the poor.”<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt, liturgy is for life; and, therefore, liturgy and life should be held together. Critiquing the contemporary trend of watertight compartmentalization of teaching and celebration, Harmon L. Smith contends that “separation of liturgy from ethics, of moral theology from worship, is artificial and contrived and mistaken – and recent.”<sup>16</sup> *As you celebrate, so you live.* Jesus, in his *Sermon on the Mount*, has instructed us to have the proper disposition and has drawn the roadmap for genuine celebration, that is, reconciliation. He exhorts, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first to be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24). The link between life and liturgy becomes clear from the teaching of Jesus.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches regarding the interrelationship between morality and liturgy as follows:

The moral life is spiritual worship. We “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,” with the Body of Christ that we form, and in communion with the offering of his Eucharist. In the Liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments, prayer and teaching are conjoined with the grace of Christ to enlighten and nourish Christian activity. As does the whole of the Christian life, the moral life finds its source and summit in the Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>17</sup>

The celebration of the liturgy enlightens and nourishes Christian life and activity, for whatever we celebrate in the sacraments is the faith of the Church, which gives the faithful the right path for following Christ in our times. Christian life commences with and continues through the celebration of the Mysteries of Christ in the

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<sup>12</sup>Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, General Editor, Austin Flannery, 1963, § 2.

<sup>13</sup>Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana: The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church, Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy 2*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2007, 5.

<sup>14</sup>Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, § 10.

<sup>15</sup>George V. Lobo, *Christian Living According to Vatican II. Moral Theology Today*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1999, 20.

<sup>16</sup>H.L. Smith, *Where Two or Three are Gathered*, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1995, x.

<sup>17</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, § 2031.

liturgy of the Church, the replica of the past, present, and future of Christian celebration.

## 2. Conscience in the Syro Malabar Qurbana

Apart from the numerous implicit references to the importance of having a clean and pure conscience for Christian celebration and life, it is interesting to note the explicit usage of the word “conscience” on three occasions in the celebration of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana. The texts illustrate the necessary disposition worthy of a Christian and the need for the formation of conscience. The celebration of the liturgy, being a school of ethical horizon and formation, gives the guidelines to form one’s conscience in order to be holy and acceptable to the Lord our God.

The first occurrence of the word “conscience” is found in the liturgy of the Qurbana before the great procession of the priest to the sanctuary. Bowing down, the celebrant makes the following prayer:

2.1. “Lord, our God! Grant that we may enter the Holy of Holies *with clean hearts and pure conscience* (emphasis added.) May we stand before Your altar with devotion, diligence and purity. Make us worthy to offer You sacrifices, both rational and spiritual in true faith.”<sup>18</sup>

We have a meaningful reference to “clean hearts and pure conscience” in the prayer, a suitable moment to evoke the necessary disposition to enter the Holy of Holies. It reminds us of the teaching of Jesus on worship in Mt 5:23-24. Conversion of heart – forming a clean heart and pure conscience – is a requirement for an acceptable offering to the Lord. The sincere prayer for “clean hearts and pure conscience” in the Liturgy echoes the heart of the gospel.

A clean heart or pure conscience is considered as the prerequisite to enter into the sanctuary and to offer acceptable sacrifice in true faith. The formation of a clean heart and pure conscience is the zenith of moral development of a person, which is facilitated in the presence of the Lord through the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, for it is the representation of the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Seeing things from the perspective of God will purify the heart of a genuine celebrant of the Liturgy and cleanse the conscience. Celebration of the mystery of Christ – the celebration of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana – offers a key to understanding the mystery, the reality, and the dignity of the human person and enables the celebrant to address the moral obligations of contemporary times.

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<sup>18</sup>*Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 44.

The operations or functions of conscience are attributed to the heart, namely, seeing, knowing and judging. The Book of Proverbs illustrates the dynamics of conscience which is similar to the operations of the heart, "Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; prudence will watch over you; and understanding will guard you" (Prov 2:9-11). The Psalmist reiterates the importance of the heart and the law of God, "The law of their God is in their hearts; their steps do not slip" (Ps 37:31). The Book of Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). Is this law of God not the conscience? It is; therefore, everyone needs to discover the law written by God on one's heart. Another lively narrative of the heart and the law of God is in the Book of Ezekiel, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezek 36:26-27). All these passages demonstrate the understanding of conscience under the imagery of heart. There is no surprise in seeing the phrase "clean hearts and pure conscience" in the liturgy of the Qurbana, which represents the biblical horizon.

Conscience is the voice of God that echoes in the heart of a person and it is the law of God written on the heart. Vatican II attests this truth, "For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged."<sup>19</sup> Saint Paul teaches: "They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness" (Rom 2:15). While emphasizing the importance of the heart, the Council teaches, "His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."<sup>20</sup> The phrase "clean heart and pure conscience" used and celebrated in the Qurbana is typically biblical, theological, and pastoral in essence.

The use of the phrase, "clean heart and pure conscience," seems to emphasize the point of our discussion through similar yet different words. A simple observation will help us to capture this phenomenon. In fact, "clean heart" means "pure conscience." Moreover, a synonym for 'clean' is supplied by 'pure.' So also a synonym for 'heart' is offered by 'conscience.' It might have been a

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<sup>19</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 16.

<sup>20</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 16.

stylish expression to elicit the required change in the heart or conscience of people. In addition, it may be right in stating that a clean heart and pure conscience are of paramount importance for Christian ethics and life. And the liturgy of the Qurbana stipulates the basic perspective for Christian ethics to form a clean heart or pure conscience.

The celebrative phrase, “Clean heart and pure conscience,” acquires special significance, when it is read in light of the Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). The pure heart guarantees the beatific vision of God. And the vision of God – the experience of the presence of the Lord – and the formation of a pure conscience go hand in hand. As we have already stated above, conscience discovers the law of God written on the heart by tuning in to the voice of God echoing in the depth of a person. An ethical person listens to the Lord in the heart or conscience. It is through a process of dialogue with God that the human person is capable of discerning the law of the Lord for our times. Purity of heart, a requirement for the vision of God as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, is the bedrock for forming a clean heart and pure conscience. A heart which sees the Lord is cleansed and made pure. In the presence of the Lord – in the cave of the heart – people encounter the law written by God on the heart. The vision of the Lord purifies the heart of the believer and influences one’s imaginations, decisions and practical judgments of everyday life. In other words, “the pure in heart” are privileged to have the vision of God, which, in turn, helps shape a “pure conscience,” reassuring the ethical development of a person. Thus, the *darshan* (vision) of the Lord makes people *dhārmik* (ethical), for the Lord is the foundation of Christian ethics and the vision of the Lord helps people form their conscience in accordance with the real and ideal image in which they were created. As the *darshan* of the Lord, so the *dhārmikta* (ethics) of people.

## 2.2. “Let us purge our conscience of dissensions and contentions.”<sup>21</sup>

This prayer for cleansing our hearts from dissensions and conflicts is found in the Rite of Reconciliation before the Rite of Communion. If the first instance of the term in the Qurbana was at the time of solemn entry into the sanctuary of the church in order to celebrate the Mystery of Christ, the second instance is at the time of reconciliation.

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<sup>21</sup> *Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 50. “Let us cleanse our hearts, turning away from dissensions and conflicts,” *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 64.



The preparation of the congregation for reconciliation is elaborate and eloquent. In fact the rite of Reconciliation begins with the Psalm, "Have mercy on me, O God, in Your loving kindness. In Your great compassion, wipe away my sins. Wash away my iniquities and cleanse me from my sins. For, I am aware of my sins and those are always in front of my eyes."<sup>22</sup> Being in the presence of the Lord and becoming aware of one's sinfulness and sins, the congregation raises its hearts to God in supplication for his mercy and compassion. As a result of the encounter of the Lord in the Eucharistic celebration, we gather a clear indication of our conscience in need of purification and cleansing. We notice a proper compunction of the soul. Responding to the experience of sinfulness, the celebration of the Qurbana focuses on the process of purification through a litany of prayers. The Deacon invites the congregation to wash away their iniquities:

D. Let us approach the mysteries of the precious Body and Blood of our Saviour with reverence and respect... With hope arising from repentance, let us turn away from wrong-doing, repent of our sins, and forgive the trespasses of our brother and sisters. Let us pray to God, the Lord of all, for mercy and forgiveness.

A. Lord, forgive the sins and offences of Your servants.

D. Let us cleanse our hearts, turning away from dissensions and conflicts

A. Lord, forgive the sins and offences of Your servants.

D. Let us free our souls from enmity and hatred

A. Lord, forgive the sins and offences of Your servants

D. Let us receive the Holy Qurbana and be sanctified by the Holy Spirit

A. Lord, forgive the sins and offences of Your servants

D. Let us receive these sacred mysteries in peace and unity with one another.

D. O Lord! May these sacred mysteries be for the resurrection of our bodies and the salvation of our souls.

A. May they be the source of everlasting life. Amen.<sup>23</sup>

Through this litany of prayers, the liturgical celebration prepares the assembly to examine its conscience and to reconcile with the Lord and the people, a meaningful exercise to realize the significance of the Sacred Mysteries and the worthiness required of the people to receive them. A preparation of this nature points to the need of a continued and consistent formation of conscience. In order to be conversant with the evolving consciousness of our world and people and their accompanying changes and challenges, we might need to expand and

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<sup>22</sup>Syro-Malabar Qurbana, 58.

<sup>23</sup>Syro-Malabar Qurbana, 64-65.

include different dimensions and relationships to the litany for a thorough examination of conscience for our times. Nevertheless, the event and the moment in the liturgical celebration of the Qurbana for the rite of reconciliation send a clear signal for a wake-up call to cleanse one's heart and purify one's conscience to have an informed and transformed Christian conscience for the following of Christ as envisaged by the Church.

The second instance of the prayer for a pure conscience is a step closer to the union with the Lord and the world. If the first instance was one of entering the Holy of Holies, the second instance is to establish and enjoy a holy relationship with the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. This is a clear reference to the covenantal and communitarian aspect of Christian existence and flourishing. Entering the sanctuary is a blessing, and at the same time this encounter of the Holy One obliges us to examine our relationships in humility and sincerity as servants and to be reconciled with our neighbour. This is a path of self-discovery in the presence of the Lord. Whatever comes from the heart, speaks to the heart. Benedict XVI, during the canonization of Cardinal John Henry Newman, emphasized the phenomenon beautifully, "Cardinal Newman's motto, *Cor ad cor loquitur*, or "Heart speaks unto heart," gives us an insight into his understanding of the Christian life as a call to holiness experienced as the profound desire of the human heart to enter into intimate communion with the Heart of God."<sup>24</sup>

Rooted in and connected with the Lord, the liturgical assembly is endowed with a disposition to comprehend the heart of the Lord for the world and to act accordingly. Moving from the heart of the Lord and from the altar of the Lord, the prayer takes the assembly to the heart of the people and to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. There is no dispute that the formation of conscience has to take place in the context of the community and its varied relationships. Conscience is dialogical in character<sup>25</sup> and it discovers the law of God in communion<sup>26</sup> with the persons, place and time. As we have seen, the liturgy attests great importance to forming a clean heart and pure conscience in reference to and in relationship with one's fellow beings. The Qurbana enables and ennoble the assembly to have a

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<sup>24</sup>Benedict XVI, "Homily of Pope Benedict XV, Beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman," <http://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=38333>

<sup>25</sup>Paulachan Kochappilly, "Conscience: The Dialogical Character of Christian Ethics," *Vidyajyoti* 66 (September 2002) 739-753.

<sup>26</sup>Paulachan Kochappilly, "Conscience in Communion," *Jeevadhara* (November 2004) 493-506.

conscience formed and transformed as it goes up to the sanctuary and as the Mystery of Christ is celebrated for a personal and communal experience, which engenders joy in the members of the ecclesial community.

A clean heart or pure conscience is a disposition required to reach and receive the Mysteries of the Eucharist. The elaborate rite of reconciliation in the Qurbana is a fitting moment for the examination of conscience, which takes the assembly closer to the community consciousness and effects reconciliation. This rite informs and invites us to be educated in the school of liturgy for the formation of conscience. It also points to the responsible and demanding task of the assembly in the formation of conscience of the faithful.

2.3. "O Christ! Hope of the human race and the Lord of all things! Sanctify our bodies with Your Sacred Body. Forgive our debts with your precious Blood. *Purify our conscience with the abundance of Your grace.*"<sup>27</sup>

This third instance of the use of conscience in the celebration of the Qurbana is just before the Communion of the Holy Mysteries. In the immediate preparation for Holy Communion, the priest prays for the whole Eucharistic community, "Purify our conscience with the abundance of Your grace." At this instance it is revealed that it is the grace or mercy of God that purifies our conscience. This means that the purification of conscience or cleansing of the heart happens not on our effort and merit; we are in need of divine mercy to purify our conscience. That is to say, the divine grace helps us to have a clear vision of the image of God in which we are created and we are assisted to regain the pristine image. As a result, the conscience is purified and we start to see, know, and judge our actions in light of the divine perspective. Prior to the prayer for the purification of conscience, the supplication for the sanctification of bodies by the Sacred Body and forgiveness of our debts with the Precious Blood is made. Does it imply that the purification of conscience depends on the sanctification of oneself and forgiveness from all debts? It seems so. Though all these things are correlated, we may be able to say that the purification of conscience is the innermost and sacred reality of the image of God in us.

The purification — formation — of conscience is the need of our daily life, which is effected through the grace of God, which illumines the darkness of our minds with the light of the Gospel, enlightens us in the laws, inflames our minds with the knowledge, and sanctify our

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<sup>27</sup>Syro-Malabar Qurbana, 68.

souls with the truth. Purification of one's conscience is holistic and integral, since conscience is the sanctuary of human being, where person encounters God and speaks from the heart to the heart.

### 3. The Process of Conscience Formation in the Qurbana

The movement of the celebrant to the altar in the sanctuary – the access to the presence of the Lord – touches the heart of the celebrant to examine his conscience and purify it in front of the sepulchre, the symbol of death and resurrection of our Lord. Turning to Christ we see ourselves better. *Veritatis Splendor* exhorts, "People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil."<sup>28</sup> Before the Lord, there is nothing hidden; all things are open. Vatican II underlines this truth, "There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one's neighbour."<sup>29</sup> The Lord illumines, purifies, and transforms a moral agent through concrete acts corresponding to the way of light and life. Naturally, the law of the Lord is known to us in our encounter with God in the sanctuary, and it leads us on our way. "What man is and what he must do becomes clear as soon as God reveals himself."<sup>30</sup> The Law of Christ is made known to the celebrants as they devotedly stand before the throne of the Lord, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105). This reiterates the fact that a person is enlightened to discern the will of God and is encouraged to decide for the way of the Lord.

Having examined oneself before the Lord, the second step in the formation of conscience is the examination of one's life and activities in the context of community. The relatedness with the members of the Mystical Body of Christ is a corollary of the first step, that is, the encounter with the Lord. The Lord and the law of the Lord reveal to the congregation the moral obligations towards their sisters, brothers, and the earth, our common home. A person blessed with the divine *darshan* and *sparshan* will be directed to maintain and promote rhythm and harmony among the members of the community and the world at large. A person who contemplates the icon of Christ and the symbol of the Cross of Christ will become humble and docile, assimilating the mind of Christ as stated in the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians. To be open to learn new things is the kind of

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<sup>28</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 8.

<sup>29</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 16.

<sup>30</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 10.

permanent disposition people need to have to form a right conscience. Timothy E. O'Connell observes the importance of experience in the community in shaping one's conscience:

As one's conscience is formed by past experiences with those around one, so further interactions will shape and develop the conscience. Hence the Church can be viewed not only as a teacher of moral values and a source for moral support (which it is) but also as a community of moral education, a place where conscience-shaping experiences take place and where individuals consequently grow in insight into moral value.<sup>31</sup>

The liturgical assembly is a community of moral education, where conscience-shaping experience takes place, and the congregation gains an insight into moral values. While the congregation is before the sanctuary, it becomes conscious of its unworthiness and, as in the case of the tax collector of the parable, all its iniquities are washed away. According to John Paul II, the particular norms spring from the core experience of God. "Acknowledging the Lord as God is the very core, the heart of the Law, from which the particular precepts flow and towards which they are ordered."<sup>32</sup> From this divine perspective, the followers of Christ reach out and relate with others and the world in truth and justice. A pure conscience before "the Lord of all"<sup>33</sup> will nurture a pure conscience before the world. The grace of God flows from the sanctuary down the aisle through the assembly to the marginalized in the world in order to establish peace on earth and to extend hope to human beings.

Once the question of dignity, solidarity, and equality of people is addressed, it is right to receive the Eucharist – the purifying fire and the healing medicament – into the heart of the believer, praying, "Purify our conscience with the hyssop of your compassion." Conscience, purified by the mercy of God, bears witness to the law written by God on the human heart. The prayer in the Qurbana admits that the people are sinful, therefore, they are in need of forgiveness and purification. Having obtained the absolution of their sins, the celebrant prays, "Lord, our God, make us worthy to be in Your presence with the confidence You have mercifully bestowed on us. Enable us to stand in Your presence with cheerful face and pure hearts."<sup>34</sup> Having purified their conscience, the celebrants of the Liturgy radiate cheerful faces and pure hearts. Trusting in the grace of God, the assembly makes progress to have communion with the Lord and the world.

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<sup>31</sup>O'Connell, "Conscience," 201.

<sup>32</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 11

<sup>33</sup>An oft used concluding prayer formula in the Qurbana.

<sup>34</sup>*Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 66.

The process of the purification of conscience is noticeable in the prayer of the celebrant, “Purify our conscience with the abundance of your grace.” After this prayer, with confidence, the celebrant receives the Holy Mysteries with a purified conscience. *Veritatis Splendor* explains the significance of Holy Communion and of a holy life:

Sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-29), is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of “eternal life” (cf. Jn 6:51-58), the source and power of that complete gift of self, which Jesus – according to the testimony handed on by Paul – commands us to commemorate in liturgy and life: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>35</sup>

The awesome mystery of the Eucharist is revealed in the prayer of the celebrant, “Reveal in me the great power of these awe-inspiring mysteries that I receive as gifts of Your mercy.”<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, there is a real confession of one’s unworthiness and on the other there is a complete trust in the mercy of the Lord. The prayer of the celebrant at the reception of the chalice reveals it: “You allowed me, sinful as I am, to partake of that cup. Glory be to You forever, for Your ineffable love.”<sup>37</sup> This prayer admits the sinfulness of the community and on the other hand, ensures the saintliness of the assembly, which reiterates the importance of continued formation of conscience.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the phrase “clean heart and pure conscience” is used at different important moments of the Qurbana in order to prepare the congregation – *to examine one’s conscience in order to enter the sanctuary, to restore reconciliation with the community, and to receive the Mysteries and to enjoy the mystical union with the Lord* – that is, to celebrate the Mysteries of the Eucharist in a just and fitting manner. This structure and nature provide a meaningful pattern to form our conscience as the followers of Christ. Joseph Ratzinger points out the dynamics involved in the formation of conscience in reference to *anamnesis*, “Conscience consists in the fact that something like an original memory of the good and true (both are identical) has been implanted in us, that there is an inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the likeness of God, towards the divine.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 21.

<sup>36</sup>*Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 68.

<sup>37</sup>*Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 68.

<sup>38</sup>Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 13.

The Eucharistic celebration is an *anamnesis* of the mysteries of Christ and the history of salvation. As the celebration of the Qurbana unfolds, the original memory of human beings and their goodness and truth come alive and active, assisting the assembly to examine their conscience before the splendour of truth, Jesus Christ, who reveals the mystery of human vocation and mission. Ratzinger acknowledges the function of the external assistance in the formation of right conscience, but he reiterates that it is not in opposition with the internal truth.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen, the liturgy of the Qurbana inspires and assists the assembly to be aware of the goodness, truth, and beauty of the image of God in which everyone is created and for which everyone is destined. The law, the wisdom, and the truth of God become clear to the congregation as it celebrates the Eucharist. Accordingly, the community shapes its value-system and acquires necessary virtues to celebrate life in Christ for our times.

Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes the role of Christian memory bequeathed to us through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist in forming Christian conscience:

The original encounter with Jesus gave the disciples what all generations thereafter receive in their foundational encounter with the Lord in Baptism and the Eucharist, namely, the new *anamnesis* of faith which unfolds, similarly to the *anamnesis* of creation, in constant dialogue between within and without.<sup>40</sup>

The celebration of the Qurbana, in general, and in our examination of the three occurrences of the celebration of conscience in the Qurbana, in particular, have given us a clear idea of how a “clean heart and pure conscience” is attempted and actualized in the context of the Eucharist. There is no doubt that “one’s conscience is formed by experience. It is life-events that shape one’s moral sensibilities as well as hone one’s skills of moral discernment.”<sup>41</sup> The context and the content of one’s existential experience necessarily influence and shape one’s conscience. The liturgical celebration offers a concise and comprehensive experiential knowledge to the assembly for its genuine imagination and purification of one’s conscience. Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes the importance of sacramental celebration in providing the right horizon for Christian imagination and corresponding action. “The Christian memory, to be sure, is always learning, but proceeding from its sacramental identity, it also

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<sup>39</sup>Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 14.

<sup>40</sup>Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 14-15.

<sup>41</sup>Timothy E. O’Connell, “Conscience,” 201.

distinguishes from within between what is a genuine unfolding of its recollection and what is its destruction or falsification."<sup>42</sup>

The celebration of the Qurbana sets the foundation and the focus of Christian life straight. The memory of the community is faithfully and joyfully transmitted for the transformation of the assembly, where the balance between the subjective and objective is maintained and celebrated. Calling our attention to the formation of conscience, the author rightly cautions: "We would dissolve Christianity into moralism if no message which surpasses our own actions became discernible."<sup>43</sup> The *anamnesis*, celebrated in the mystery of the Eucharist, becomes the canvas on which we need to paint the picture of Christian life and cleanse one's heart and purify one's conscience. Pope Francis teaches that we "have been called to form conscience, not to replace them."<sup>44</sup> Liturgical celebration in the Church provides a conducive and congenial ambience for the person to cleanse one's heart and treasure truth, goodness, and beauty in abundance.

In this manner, the celebration of the Qurbana offers the community a wonderful opportunity to pay attention to one's conscience enlightened by the law, wisdom, and truth of the Lord so that she may obey the commandment of the Lord – a desired alignment between the subjective and the objective norm of morality; the conscience and moral law; the immediate and the ultimate norm of morality in Christian life.

*Celebration of the Qurbana, the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation – an anamnesis with a sense of eucharistia – is a school of holistic education requiring and enabling the members for a genuine transformation, which presupposes the formation of a clean heart and pure conscience. In and through the celebration of the Eucharist the memory and the mystery of Christ is re-enacted within the multilayered context of the congregation for a free, faithful, and fruitful following of Christ for our times, the hallmark of Christian morality.*

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<sup>42</sup>Razinger, "Conscience and Truth," 15.

<sup>43</sup>Razinger, "Conscience and Truth," 17.

<sup>44</sup>Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016, § 37.