

## CONSCIENCE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the opening verses of the nineteenth chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, the first visit of the Apostle Paul to Ephesus is recounted. It would seem that Paul, on his arrival in Ephesus, encountered a group of twelve people who regarded themselves as disciples of Jesus. When asked if they had received the Holy Spirit when they became believers, these disciples replied, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2).<sup>1</sup> It is not beyond the realm of imagination to suggest that, had these same twelve believers spent the last four hundred years reading moral theology texts and we were to ask them the same question today, they would have to give the very same answer to us that they gave to Paul.

The present essay on the relationship of conscience to the Holy Spirit began with both an assumption and a thesis. The assumption, illustrated in the brief story above, has proven, upon investigation, to be, by and large, warranted. It is quite simply that the Roman Catholic theological tradition for the past four hundred years has for the most part ignored the Holy Spirit in its treatment of moral theology in general and of conscience in particular.<sup>2</sup> After perusing<sup>3</sup> both a number of representative texts from the manualist tradition<sup>4</sup> and books by con-

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical citations are from the *Catholic Study Bible* (New American Bible), Donald Senior, gen. ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>Richard M. Gula, S.S., *What Are They Saying about Moral Norms?* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1982) 111, noted this omission in general in relation to moral theology's failure to wrestle with the implications of Christology for the moral life: "The Spirit has been even more neglected than Christ." Charles E. Curran, *The Living Tradition of Catholic Moral Theology* (Notre Dame IN/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) 183, has pointed out a similar omission in regard to discussions of Divine Providence in Catholic moral theology.

<sup>3</sup>In doing this work I was greatly aided by my graduate assistant, Mrs. Judith Quesnelle. I wish to acknowledge her work here and express my gratitude to her in this public fashion.

<sup>4</sup>The works consulted were: Francis J. Connell, C.Ss.R., *Outlines of Moral Theology* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publ. Co., 1953); Henry Davis, S.J., *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Sheed & Ward 1938); John A. McHugh, O.P. and Charles J. Callan, O.P., *Moral Theology: A Complete Course Based on St. Thomas Aquinas and the Best Modern Authorities*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1929; rev. 1958); Dominic M. Prummer, O.P., *Handbook of Moral Theology*, trans. Gerald W. Shelton, ed. for American Usage by John Gavin Nolan (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1949); Thomas Slater, S.J., *A Manual of Moral Theology for English-Speaking Countries*, 2 vols. (New York/Cincinnati/Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1918); Adolphe

temporary authors that dealt with the moral life of the Christian and included some discussion of conscience,<sup>5</sup> the evidence was striking. With some few notable exceptions,<sup>6</sup> simple references to the Holy Spirit, to say nothing of

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Tanquerey, *Theologia Moralis Fundamentalis* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1927). Also, John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: A Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York/New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>The following works were examined. David Bohr, *The Catholic Moral Tradition: In Christ, A New Creation* (Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990); Carlo Caffara, *Living in Christ: Fundamental Principles of Catholic Moral Teaching*, trans. Christopher Ruff (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); Sidney Callahan, *In Good Conscience: The Role of Reason, Emotion, and Intuition in Personal Morality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991); Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame IN/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame IN: Fides Publishers, 1972); idem, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); idem, *Tensions in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); idem, ed., *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future: Essays in Honor of Richard A. McCormick, S.J.* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990); Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Transcendence* (Birmingham AL: Religious Education Press, 1981); Michael K. Duffey, *Be Blessed in What You Do: The Unity of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988); Josef Fuchs, S.J., *Christian Morality: The Word Becomes Flesh*, trans. Brian McNeil (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987); idem, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970); and idem, *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993); Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1: *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983); Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Bernard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 1: *General Moral Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978); Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions in Moral Theology: The Challenge of Being Human* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992); Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Enda McDonagh, *Invitation and Response: Essays in Christian Moral Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972); Richard A. McCormick, S.J. *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 through 1980* (Latham MD: University Press of America, 1981); and *The Critical Calling: Reflections on Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989); Antonio Moser and Bernardino Leers, *Moral Theology: Dead Ends and Alternatives*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1990); Timothy E. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1990); Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B., *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup>The exceptions were Caffara, *Living in Christ*, who devotes a whole chapter (pp. 25-36), to the role of the Spirit and several pages (pp. 115-25), to the role of the Spirit in conscience formation and judgment; Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality*, 76-91, which insists on the grace of the Spirit of Christ as the primary law of Christian life; Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 98-100, who, in addition to numerous references throughout his volume, has a most pertinent discussion of the Spirit in relation to the judgment of conscience; Bernard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, who has extensive comments to make about the Holy Spirit. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mah-

lengthy or substantive discussions of the activity of the Spirit, were noteworthy by their absence. Aside from occasional brief discussions by some authors about the discernment of spirits,<sup>7</sup> and passing references to the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit,<sup>8</sup> it would appear that moral theologians have little of a specific or concrete nature to say about the place of the Holy Spirit in the moral life and particularly in the deliberations of conscience.

The major exception to this evidence in our contemporary situation, of course, is the ongoing discussion about the relationship of the magisterium and its teaching to the individual conscience, and more particularly to the freedom and responsibility of theologians.<sup>9</sup> But even in these discussions little that is substantive is said about the activity of the Spirit. What one finds for the most part is the important and often repeated claim that the teaching of the official magisterium of the Church is guided by the light of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> This assertion, while not denied, is met by the counter claim that the Spirit is poured out on all the baptized.<sup>11</sup> Little more is said that would help resolve the tension created by these counter claims.

The thesis with which the paper originated, and which I intend to advance here with some qualifications, is that these authors, given the theological anthropology of the Roman Catholic tradition out of which they worked, their concern for a certain objectivity in morality, and the practical interest of their inquiries, were quite correct to omit any appeals or references to the Holy Spirit in their moral discussions. Such appeals would not have illuminated the subject matter they struggled to understand in any way and would have run the grave risk of the mystification of moral knowledge. As Yves Congar has admonished us,<sup>12</sup> it is all too easy to equate the so-called voice of conscience with the Holy Spirit. This has happened often enough in history, most consciously in certain varieties of Protestant theology and piety. While such a simplistic identification

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wah NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), in part 3, pp. 421ff., could also be counted an exception.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 314-28; O'Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy*, 125-44.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Bohr, *The Catholic Moral Tradition*, 106, 125, 141; Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 52.

<sup>9</sup>McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 3-170; Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 871-98.

<sup>10</sup>See *Lumen gentium* 25; "By the light of the Holy Spirit, they [the bishops] make that faith clear, . . . making faith bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors which threaten their flock." Cited from *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 47.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 34, 60: "Since the supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, wills to continue His witness and serve through the laity too, He vivifies them in His Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work." See also Kelly, *New Directions in Moral Theology*, 145-48.

<sup>12</sup>Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1: *The Experience of the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1983) 141.

of conscience and the Holy Spirit does not always have immediate and terrible consequences, it is an extremely problematic practice, both theoretically and practically. For one thing, it invites a reading of Scripture that is not ecclesial, but idiosyncratic. For a second, it assumes a radically unmediated human experience of the Holy Spirit. As a result, it strongly encourages a morality that is both highly subjectivistic and individualistic. The observation of St. Basil the Great might serve us well here. "It is characteristic of the pious man to say nothing about the Holy Spirit when the Scriptures are silent about him; this is because we are convinced that our experience and understanding of the subject are reserved for the world to come."<sup>13</sup>

This thesis that I am proposing to defend is, on the face of it, a somewhat implausible one. For both the Sacred Scriptures and our theological tradition are eloquent in affirming all kinds of important things about the Holy Spirit, things that would assign to the Spirit a crucial, indeed an indispensable place at the very center of the Christian moral life. I will, therefore, devote the first part of this paper to highlighting and commenting upon some of these important claims.

The thesis would seem even more implausible if one were to embrace the description of conscience proposed by the Second Vatican Council in its document, *Gaudium et spes*, and taken up and developed by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter on the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> The Council document described conscience as "the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths."<sup>15</sup> What else can one say about the voice of God echoing in the very depths of the human person than that here is the Holy Spirit of God indwelling the heart, at work in the conscience, of every Christian believer. The second part of the paper, therefore, will attend directly to conscience, especially to those aspects of our experience of conscience which might account for it being called the voice of God. Finally, in the third section of the paper I will attempt to defend and qualify my thesis in light of what I think is the most plausible understanding of the relationship of conscience to the Holy Spirit.

While there are more than a few significant adumbrations of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,<sup>16</sup> I will, in the interests of space, restrict my attention here to the New Testament. In the synoptic gospels there are, by my count, twenty-nine references to the Holy Spirit,<sup>17</sup> nine in Matthew, five in Mark,

<sup>13</sup>Cited from Congar, vol. 2: *Lord and Giver of Life*, 72n.4.

<sup>14</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem* (The Holy Spirit in the Church and the World) 43, in *Origins* 16/4 (June 12, 1986): 90.

<sup>15</sup>*Gaudium et spes*, 16; cited from Abbott, 213.

<sup>16</sup>Congar, 1:3-14.

<sup>17</sup>These are Mt 1:18-20; 3:11; 3:16; 4:1; 10:20; 12:28; 12:31-32; 22:43; 28:19; Mk 1:8-10; 1:12; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11; Lk 1:15ff; 1:35; 1:41; 1:67; 2:26; 2:27; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1; 4:14; 4:18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10; 12:12.

fifteen in Luke, six of which are found in his infancy narratives. Not counting the discourse at the last supper which is a rich source of teaching about the Holy Spirit, there are seven references in the gospel of John.<sup>18</sup> In these various gospel references, the Holy Spirit is consistently portrayed as the one who gives life, as the baptizer who anoints the Messiah for mission, as the one who leads, inspires, and speaks through, human persons. The Spirit is spoken of as the source of joy, of authentic worship, of revelation, of the forgiveness of sins, and as one who drives out demons. Jesus, of course, is the one in the gospels who does all these things in the power of the Spirit. Jesus is the one to whom the Spirit gives life, and wisdom, and the power to live the life he does live in obedience to the Father. In time, the followers of Jesus, in virtue of receiving this same Holy Spirit, will receive the life, the wisdom, the power, to live and to do what Jesus has done. The Holy Spirit is also spoken of in the synoptic gospels as a gift given by the Father to those who ask in prayer. Finally, the synoptic gospels also mention that mysterious, unique, and unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit.

In short, what we find in the gospels in regard to the Holy Spirit is not revelation in the objective sense of insight into or understanding of the person of the Holy Spirit so that the Spirit might be known to us in Himself and for Himself.<sup>19</sup> What we find is knowledge of the work of the Spirit, first through what the Spirit brings about in Jesus, and then in the community of believers, in us. This is confirmed in the discourse at the last supper where the Spirit is promised to the disciples as another advocate to be with them in the absence of the earthly Jesus. The Spirit to be sent will be a revealer and teacher, not of himself but of Jesus and all that Jesus taught. This same Spirit-Advocate will likewise convict the world of sin and righteousness and condemnation, all of which have to do with the world's relationship, not to the Spirit, but to Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

Space does not permit a detailed examination of the multitudinous references to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the Pauline letters<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, it can be fairly said that these many references indicate in a richer and often more concrete way the same focus and direction of revelation in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit, specifically the work of the Spirit in the

<sup>18</sup>John 1:32-33; 3:5,8; 3:34; 4:23-24; 7:39; 9:31; 20:22-23.

<sup>19</sup>Congar, 1:vii-viii.

<sup>20</sup>*The Catholic Study Bible*, in its footnote comment on John 16:8-11, p. NT175, explains these verses as follows: "These verses illustrate the forensic character of the Paraclete's role: in the forum of the disciples' conscience he prosecutes the world. He leads believers to see (a) that the basic sin was and is refusal to believe in Jesus; (b) that, although Jesus was found guilty and apparently died in disgrace, in reality righteousness has triumphed, for Jesus has returned to his Father; (c) finally, that it is the ruler of this world, Satan, who has been condemned through Jesus' death (12:32)."

<sup>21</sup>Congar, 1:29-49.

life of the Church and in the lives of individual followers of Jesus such as Stephen and Paul among many others. The Spirit is the giver of new life, the source of the power and energy to live the new way of Christian discipleship. It is the Spirit who strengthens the followers of Jesus to proclaim the good news, as well as being the enabler of the signs performed by his disciples. It is the Holy Spirit who is the inspirer of mission, the source of the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy and the other charisms in the Christian community, the one who urges disciples to go to this place and keeps them from going to that place, the one who brings about unity and mutual love in the community of believers and sustains and builds up the community. This is, however, a community that is focused on and centered around not the Holy Spirit but the person of the Risen Lord Jesus who is Christ and Savior.

The four passing references to the Holy Spirit in the pastoral epistles,<sup>22</sup> the five references in the letter to the Hebrews,<sup>23</sup> and the ten references in the Catholic epistles<sup>24</sup> are, with two exceptions, little more than affirmations that the Spirit speaks through the scriptures and through individual believers. The exceptions are to be found in the first letter of John where the author explicitly admonishes his readers to test the spirits because of the experience of false prophets. The first test the author proposes confirms the truth that the Holy Spirit bears witness in the heart of the believer to Christ. "This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God." (1 Jn 4:2-3) A few verses further on the author proposes an ethical test. "Beloved, if God has so loved us, we must also love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit." (1 Jn 4:11-13) Finally, the book of Revelation has nine references to the Holy Spirit,<sup>25</sup> all referring to the Spirit speaking to the churches through the seer and witnessing to the Lamb.

From the testimony of Scripture, then, it would appear that the lived experience of the Holy Spirit's activity among the early followers of Jesus made several things both possible and necessary for the Christian community. It was possible to develop a description of the effects of the Spirit's activity in the life of the community and in the lives of individual believers, to indicate the kinds of experiences, dispositions, desires, goals, properly attributed to the Spirit. It also proved necessary to establish some criteria for distinguishing what was from the Spirit of Truth and what was from false spirits. And it was thought possible

<sup>22</sup>1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1:14; Titus 3:5.

<sup>23</sup>Hebrews 2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15

<sup>24</sup>James 4:5; Jude 1:19, 20; 1 Peter 1:2; 1:11-12; 4:14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 3:24; 4:2; 4:13; 5:6.

<sup>25</sup>Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:25; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22; 14:13; 22:17.

to say of certain human dispositions and particular kinds of human behaviors, at least, that they were not of the Spirit.

Central to this enterprise of identifying the Spirit's activity was the recognition that one could never speak of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit apart from the Father and the Son. From an early date, it was clear that, to use more modern categories, one's understanding of creation and theological anthropology and Christology had an intrinsic link to pneumatology. A correct understanding of these areas was essential to the task of discerning the presence and activity of the Spirit.

Likewise, it was clear that one could not make sense of the Spirit's activity, recognize it and cooperate with it, apart from life in the Church, without sharing in the life of the community to which the Spirit gives life, holiness, peace and unity. Hence there was also an inseparable connection between ecclesiology and pneumatology which provided an additional criterion for discernment of the Spirit. Furthermore, to describe the effects of the Holy Spirit's activity as the work which gives life to the Church and to the members of the Church was, in effect, to describe the Christian way of life, to specify, as it were, the very essence of Christian morality. Hence, in the words of a contemporary author, the "originality of Christian ethics, . . . its essential nucleus . . . is constituted by an event that takes place within the heart of the believer: the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>26</sup> Surely all of this is of the greatest consequence for anything we might wish to say about conscience.

This new way of life, from its initial profession of faith that Jesus is Lord to the eschatological hope embodied in the prayer, come, Lord Jesus; from incorporation into the one body of Christ through baptism to the mandate to proclaim the gospel to all nations; from the charismatic gifts of tongues and prophecy to the more lasting and perfect way of love; all was made possible and brought to perfection in the followers of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. Over time, spiritual experience and theological reflection have enabled theologians to give some order to the experience of the Spirit's activity in the lives of the followers of Jesus, to highlight the centrality of the theological virtues in this way of life,<sup>27</sup> to recognize the connection between those virtues and the moral virtues,<sup>28</sup> to understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit as essential to the perfection of love, and to see in the fruits of the Spirit in human lives signs of the Spirit's presence and activity both within and without the ecclesial community.<sup>29</sup> And in our own day we have grown more acutely aware of the freedom of the Spirit to blow where he will and have come to expect, as it were, the unexpected; to

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<sup>26</sup>Caffara, 35.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 168-72.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 172-74.

<sup>29</sup>*Unitatis redintegratio*, 3, in Abbott, 345-46; Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:185-89.

anticipate, to pray for and long for an ongoing reform and renewal in the Church and newness of life in the world. We know that there is need to deal with the unforeseen and unforeseeable things God has in store for us as Church through the Spirit's work in the life of the Church and the world.

In addition to the intellectual work of theologians, the saints and the mystics have exemplified for us in their lives what a life more fully open to and generously lived in the Spirit might look like.<sup>30</sup> Most vividly, I would suggest, the saints and mystics bring home to us what such a life lived in docility to the Spirit will cost us in terms of taking up the cross of Christ and dying to self. These exemplary figures of the Christian life also demonstrate that the followers of Jesus are gifted in his Spirit with an inspiration, a knowledge that goes beyond our rational conceptualizations and calculations,<sup>31</sup> a knowledge which frequently leads to a way of life bearing stark witness to the folly that is the cross and to a responsibility that transcends, without negating, considerations of social utility and personal fulfillment. In the lives of the saints and mystics the Christian conscience can often seem bizarre, inhumane, even socially irresponsible, to those who do not share its core beliefs or fathom its spiritual experiences. Finally, the mystics and saints also teach us the perilous nature of a life open to the Spirit of God. They warn us of the mistakes, the aberrations and the pitfalls that can occur in such a venture. In this way they also remind us of the indispensable need for the guidance of the community in the task of discernment and of the profound docility of spirit required for the disciples of Jesus. The saints and mystics recall for us in concrete ways the inseparable link between the work of the Spirit and the way we live our Christology, our ecclesiology and the theological and moral virtues.

About this way of life, there are several points I would note before we turn directly to a consideration of conscience. I merely note them here, for while I believe they are important, they do not seem to be particularly problematic or controversial from the perspective of Catholic theology.

First, this way of life, Christian discipleship, is a following of Jesus as Lord, Christ, Savior, the One who is the way, the truth and the life. It is most emphatically not a following of the Holy Spirit as if the Spirit represented some new and different manifestation or revelation of God, some different way to God other than Christ, or was a giver of a life other than the life of Christ, or bore witness to some truth other than the truth that is Christ.

Second, this way of life is life in the body of Christ, in the Church. It is not an individualistic, do your own thing way of life, but a life in solidarity with all those God has called, saints and sinners alike, indeed, with all the sheep, lost and

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<sup>30</sup>William M. Thompson, *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987).

<sup>31</sup>William Johnson, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995) 300-25.

found, of the one flock of Christ, the good Shepherd. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Church is, theologically, a moral community, not a voluntary association of like-minded people, in which membership has merely an optional status or utilitarian meaning.

Third, the signs, the manifestations of the activity of the Spirit, the gifts, the fruits, the virtues bestowed by the Spirit, are dispositions, attitudes, habits of soul, characteristics of the human person as subject. They are not readily observable or accessible to external scrutiny, with the possible exception of the gift of speaking in tongues. All these signs are susceptible to being counterfeited, and so require that we bring both careful attention and sound criteria of judgment to their evaluation.

Fourth, it is possible for the community of the faithful to observe the effects of human dispositions, intentions, motivations and actions in the lives of Christian believers, and so to say with confidence about some kinds of human dispositions and behaviors, that they are not of the Holy Spirit. The Christian acceptance of the ten commandments and the monastic tradition of the seven deadly sins bear witness to this possibility.

The testimony of Scripture, the lives of the saints and the theological tradition, therefore, all speak to the absolutely central and indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. The newness of life which is the Christian life is the life given by the Holy Spirit. The new law of this life in Christ is nothing other than the Holy Spirit poured out in our hearts. The freedom won by Christ for his followers is the freedom of life in the Holy Spirit. The Christian conscience, therefore, is a mind and heart animated, formed, inspired, guided by and submissive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So we must turn now to a more direct reflection upon conscience.

To raise the troublesome question of conscience is to enter upon a whole host of difficult and disputed questions and considerations that are clearly beyond the scope of a single paper. There is the matter of the identity of conscience,<sup>32</sup> what it is, its nature, if you like. Is it some sort of innate human capacity, a psychological mechanism, perhaps, or a genetically inherited trait of some use for human survival, or a socially learned process of thinking and feeling in accord with the way one is socialized? There is the question of its universality and particularity; do all persons have a conscience and is it the same or different in all persons?<sup>33</sup> There is the question of its formation, its development, and so its relation to our psychological and intellectual maturation, as well as to our biological and gendered identities.<sup>34</sup> And today we can not help but be aware of the

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<sup>32</sup>Conn, *Conscience: Development and Transcendence*, 9-31; Haring, *Free and Faithful*, 229-42.

<sup>33</sup>Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup>Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press,

many social deformations and ideological rationalizations that assail all our consciences in societies marked by racism, classism, sexism, and a host of other isms.<sup>35</sup> We cannot help but wonder if conscience is and can be nothing more than the reflection and expression of a person's social location and social interests.

Obviously I cannot attempt to take on all these questions here. I propose to limit myself to one aspect of conscience, the aspect I consider to be the most basic and most practical aspect, that is, the actual judgment of practical reason that a particular act is to be done or avoided that is finally, in practice, conscience as a norm of morality. For after all is said and done, whatever account one gives of the nature, formation and development of conscience, conscience fully manifests itself and is effective in human life as a particular judgment that always has the linguistic form, or can be given the form, prescriptively or antecedently, "I should do X" or "I should not do Y," or, retrospectively, "I should have done X," or "I should not have done Y."<sup>36</sup>

At the outset of the discussion to follow, let me acknowledge that I understand conscience to be both an innate, dynamic human capacity and a human, socially influenced and culturally learned process.<sup>37</sup> It is also a profoundly personal and private reality to which no one but the subject himself or herself has access. And I affirm in faith that the Holy Spirit is present to and active in the entire process that is conscience.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the process terminates in a normative judgement and I am interested here specifically in the relationship of the Holy Spirit to this judgment that is conscience, the ultimate, subjective norm of morality.

There are four observations I wish to make about conscience understood as the judgment of practical reason on an action as good and so to be done or as evil and so to be avoided. These observations will provide the basis for indicating the relationship of conscience to the Holy Spirit in the concluding section of the paper.

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1982); Barbara Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer, eds., *Women's Conscientiousness, Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985).

<sup>35</sup>Guyton B. Hammond, *Conscience and Its Recovery: From the Frankfurt School to Feminism* (Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

<sup>36</sup>By "do" I refer not only to external actions, but also to thought, to speech, even to judgments about the moral status of one's feelings.

<sup>37</sup>James P. Hanigan, *As I Have Loved You: The Challenge of Christian Ethics* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986) 119-44, is the fullest account of conscience I have published. That account follows closely the account of O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, 103-18.

<sup>38</sup>The Holy Spirit is present to the person, indwells the person. The Spirit is not an aspect or a dimension of the experience of conscience, another factor, as it were, to be considered along with other elements of a decision.

The first observation is that conscience is human; it is a human capacity, a human process, and the judgment that is conscience is a human judgment. However moved, inspired, instructed or guided by the Holy Spirit, the so-called voice of conscience which I hear is my voice, my judgment, for which I must take full and final responsibility.<sup>39</sup> There is simply no basis in faith or in reason to think or to assert otherwise.<sup>40</sup> For the judgment is always *I should do X* and only I can make such a judgment.

This is the case even if the judgment that is conscience is expressed, as it may well be and very often is, in ways that would suggest to oneself and others that the responsibility for it lies elsewhere. Judgments of conscience may well be couched in language such as "God has told me to do X," or "God has called me to do X," or "the Church has taught me I should do X," or "it is the Christian thing to do," or "it is only common sense," or "my parents would want me to do X and would be hurt if I did not," or "the teacher, the pastor, the boss told me to do X," or "society urges us to do X," or "everybody thinks X is the thing to do," or "our survival requires that we do X." However expressed, all these affirmations point to the source, the basis, the reasons, as it were, for why I think I should do X. Such ways of expressing the judgment of conscience might also reveal that I am a utilitarian, or a fideist, or a pragmatist, or an exponent of some version of natural law theory, or an emotivist, or even a nihilist in my mode of moral reasoning. But the judgment that I should act, am right to act on the basis of this reputed authority or mode of reasoning is still my judgment. Only I can make such a self-disposing, self-committing judgment about myself and for myself.

The Second Vatican Council's way of expressing this uniquely personal dimension of conscience was to say that it is "the most secret core and sanctuary of the person where he is alone with God." Whether or not the presence of God in the secret sanctuary that is conscience is recognized or acknowledged by the person, the inaccessibility of conscience to all others but oneself remains. Nothing is more private or profoundly of the person than conscience. But if the judgment of conscience is human, and has the private and personal nature here described, why does it have the kind of authority in the moral life we habitually ascribe to it? Why should my judgment have supreme authority in the moral life,

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<sup>39</sup>*Gaudium et spes* 16, in Abbott, 213; "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."

<sup>40</sup>*Dignitatis humanae*, 11, in Abbott, 690; "God calls man to serve him in spirit and in truth. Hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion. God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created; man is to be guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom." That the judgment may also be the judgment of the Holy Spirit is precisely the mystery of God's grace and human freedom. The judgment of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 seems to me exactly right: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us . . ." (Acts 15:28).

even for myself? Hence the human and private character of this judgment raises important questions about the authority of conscience to which we must return.

The second thing to be said about conscience as a human judgment is that it is always and inescapably a judgment about oneself, about who and what one understands oneself to be, about what one's integrity, wholeness, growth as this particular person requires here and now and what it eschews.<sup>41</sup> To say that I should do X or not do Y is to make a judgment precisely albeit implicitly about the truth of my own being in the world as I understand that truth. To judge, for example, that I ought not to commit adultery, is to proclaim what I understand my being a husband, married to this particular woman, requires of me in this time and place. To judge that my survival or the survival of my people requires that I dissemble, steal, lie or kill here and now in this situation is to proclaim what I understand the meaning and truth of my life to be and to require of me at this particular moment.

Considered in this light it is clear why conscience, as a norm of morality, can be said to be the deepest, most authentic level of one's own self-awareness and self-understanding.<sup>42</sup> It is also clear why narrative accounts of morality have so much to offer to our reflections upon conscience and moral judgment.<sup>43</sup> For the judgment that is conscience becomes intelligible both to oneself and to others only in the narrative context of the people to whom I belong and with whom I identify and the story I tell of myself as part of that people. Even if I happen to be at odds with that community at the moment about this or that particular course of action, it is only the narrative context that can either make sense of the disagreement precisely as a disagreement within the community, or reveal that some foreign element with no relation to our life as a people has entered the discussion and challenges the very foundations of our life as this particular people.<sup>44</sup>

The community of which I am a member, then, inevitably makes a moral claim upon both my attention and my loyalty. But this claim of the community upon personal conscience cannot in conscience be other than a claim of truth about who I am and am called to become. Otherwise the community's claim would inevitably be at odds with the personal, private character of the judgment

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<sup>41</sup>Conn, *Conscience*, 202-208.

<sup>42</sup>George M. Regan, *New Trends in Moral Theology* (New York: Newman Press, 1971) 167-73.

<sup>43</sup>James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986); Paul Nelson, *Narrative Morality: A Theological Inquiry* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987).

<sup>44</sup>This, of course, is the problem of inculturation of new ideas and values within one's world view in relation to more radical forms of conversion which require abandonment of one's world view for another, competing view. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 266-78.

of conscience. It is precisely when such a thing happens or seems to happen that a severe struggle in conscience takes place and the grounds of possibility for both conversion and moral growth are realized.<sup>45</sup>

This is not, for the Christian community, an insignificant nor casual aspect of conscience in relation to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son. For it is the Holy Spirit who gives life to the community of disciples and moves them toward the fullness of truth in mutual love and unity. If I identify myself with this Spirit-born and Spirit-led community, then I cannot with integrity ignore nor make light of what the community says of itself or of the claims it places upon me. But because the Spirit of Truth is also at work in the individual members of the community, the community, particularly those in authority in the community, has the moral responsibility to listen to and learn from its members. What becomes especially crucial for such a community is to allow room for the prophetic voice witnessing to, calling the community to reform and for a deeper faithfulness to its own identity. Hence, dissenting voices within this Spirit-led community can never be a matter of simple freedom of opinion or the right of individuals to speak their own mind. To speak a word of dissent and challenge to the community called Church is always a prophetic task, a matter of a serious obligation of conscience that calls for a conscientious discernment of the Spirit on the part of both the individual and the community.<sup>46</sup>

The third thing to be said about the judgment that is conscience is that it is also and always a judgment about the world in which I live, in which I propose to act and to which I react. To judge that I should do X is not only a judgment about the demands of my own integrity; it is also a judgment about the meaning and worth of the particular action I judge myself obliged here and now to do, in relation to these particular people, in the context of these particular social circumstances and structures. In the face of a patient's painful and crippling disability and that patient's expressed wish to die and plea to help him do so, what is the conscientious doctor to do here and now? What does the good of the patient require of the doctor? No human being with the least bit of common sense and an awareness of human limitation and human sinfulness will ever be absolutely certain that the meaning and worth of the action proposed by his or her judgment in this regard is beyond question or challenge from other human

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<sup>45</sup>In Kohlberg's theory of moral development, among others, development is initiated by an experience of cognitive disequilibrium. In Lonergan's theory of conversion, conversion means a dialectical horizon shift, while growth entails either a complementary or genetic horizon shift. See Conn, *Conscience*, 34-112; Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) 235-44.

<sup>46</sup>James P. Hanigan, "A Right to Dissent: American or Catholic?" in *Issues in Academic Freedom*, ed. George S. Worgul, Jr. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1992) 1-23; see also Archbishop John Quinn, "The Relation of Moral Life and Moral Laws," *Origins* 26/2 (30 May 1996): 27.

persons. Nor is it at all clear how invoking the Holy Spirit in such a case changes anything about the objective merit of one's judgment.

Because the judgment of conscience involves an affirmation of practical reason about a course of action in a complex world as good and so to be done, or evil and to be avoided, it is rarely the case that we have unwavering objective certitude about such judgments. Too many factors come into play in such judgments to allow us to embrace our judgments as beyond question, though in the heat of argument we often are wont to do so. Even our negative judgments about certain kinds of actions which never ought to be done are in daily reality not as clear as our general moral teaching might sometimes suggest. Granted, for example, that I have clarity and certitude about the act of adultery being wrong, but is a warm, affective and caring friendship with a person who is not my spouse, which relationship exceeds the kind of emotional intimacy I share with my spouse, already a kind of adultery, or perhaps a step toward adultery, a danger, a temptation to be avoided here and now by me? Or is it perfectly healthy and wise? Granted a clarity and certitude that we ought not deliberately intend the death of those who are suffering or have a terminal illness, but is the refusal of artificial hydration and nutrition to a patient thought to be in a permanent vegetative state such a deliberate, intentional act of killing? Granted that racial prejudice and unequal treatment of others on the basis of color are always grave injustices, is opposition to affirmative action programs in our schools and businesses necessarily and always a manifestation of such injustice? We may very well have strong convictions about some or all of these matters, but who would venture to say that his or her opinion is beyond question and ought to be binding on all clear thinking persons? When we embrace those opinions as a personal judgment of conscience about a particular act to be done here and now, the possibility of questioning the judgment does not cease nor does the possibility that the judgment is in error disappear. And we know in conscience that that is the case.

In the long history of our moral tradition with its attention to specific actions to determine their possible sinfulness and the gravity of that sinfulness, it is little wonder that no significant place was accorded to the Holy Spirit. The all too human quality of such complex judgments seemed more than evident, and appeals to the guidance or inspiration of the Holy Spirit settled nothing whatsoever. Indeed, such appeals are not only unhelpful and misguided, they are positively harmful, for they too easily turn our attention away from the reality to which we need to attend; namely what is really going on and what is really being done or proposed in a particular situation. Such appeals also preempt further discussion, and cast unwarranted suspicion on the virtue and good will of those who do not share our views.

The activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives may rightly be expected to move us to seek the truth, to long for the truth, to have the courage to face the truth and so help us to see more truthfully what is there to be seen. But there is no

reason to believe the Spirit either instructs us without our attending to the world or enables us to see what we otherwise refuse to look at. This is not to say that there is no place for theological appeals or theologically based arguments in our moral deliberations. But these appeals and arguments are not to or about the Holy Spirit, but to the truth of Christ toward which the Spirit would lead us.

The fourth and last feature of the judgment that is conscience to which I wish to point is the absolute quality of the judgment, a quality closely related to the first feature we discussed, the authoritative status of the judgment of conscience. Our present pontiff, Pope John Paul II, has been deeply concerned in a number of his encyclical letters to insist that conscience does not create the truth of the good it embraces but rather discovers it and is bound to that truth.<sup>47</sup> Conscience, let me repeat, is not a decision about what one wants to do or be, but a judgment about what one ought to do and so about the truth of who one is in the world. And truth, once we discover it, or believe we have discovered it, brooks no hesitation, no conditions; it simply calls for our assent and we find in the face of truth that we can, in fact, do nothing else with integrity but assent.

This is the absoluteness of the judgment that is conscience to which I would point. It is the quality reflected in the classic affirmation attributed to Luther: Here I stand; I can do no other. It is, perhaps, a curious feature of conscience as a human judgment, and hence as a human, finite, sin-affected process, that it has this absolute quality, that there is no arguing with conscience once the judgment has been made, and that there is no deeper violation of the human person than to urge the person to act contrary to conscience. Nonetheless, curious or not, this absoluteness is a familiar feature of the human experience of conscience, one with which we must contend.

I do not suggest that it is easy to come to this point of absoluteness or that we do so very often. We often, in fact, do not know what conscience would have us do in a particular case; we often are tossed about by conflicting reasons, feelings, advice, and past experiences. The Catholic moral tradition has developed a whole casuistry about what it means to act conscientiously in such doubt-filled situations when judgment and action cannot be delayed. And after we have acted with such doubts, the retrospective dimension of conscience will sometimes manifest itself to us by urging that we really did know, or could have known, or even, perhaps, should have known, what we should have done in that particular situation but hid that knowledge from ourselves for various unworthy reasons. And so the conscientious person must at times wrestle with the temptations of scrupulosity.

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<sup>47</sup>John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*; *Veritatis Splendor* in *Origins* 23/18 (14 October 1993); see James P. Hanigan, "Veritatis Splendor and Sexual Ethics," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael E. Allsopp and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995) 220n.5.

While the absolute quality of the judgment that is conscience is even more elusive, more problematic than the above account indicates, there is no gain-saying its existence in human experience. In light of that absolute quality, I want to suggest that there is a kind of arrogance about the judgment that is conscience to which we do not always attend, except when the judgment is rendered by one with whom we strongly disagree. This arrogance is, of course, the prophet's burden and explains, at least in good part, the hostility which is commonly the prophet's lot in life. For who are you, we ask, to claim that you see more and know better than the rest of us? In our present age when the hermeneutic of suspicion seems to have become lodged in almost everyone's consciousness, we are strongly prone to greet all such prophetic claims that jolt our moral sensibilities with accusations of political self-interest and ideological self-deception. Moral judgments of all kinds today are no longer being discussed as right or wrong, true or false; they are rather labeled as liberal or conservative, reactionary or radical, and considered as seeking self-aggrandizement or the domination of others in order to protect or enhance one's social power and status.

But all judgments of conscience bear this trait of arrogance, of self-righteousness, an imperviousness, as it were, to the views and arguments of others. Here I stand, I can do no other, is not, on the face of it, a humble proclamation. The arrogance is not particularly noted when the action to be done or avoided harmonizes well with one's own or one's community's views of proper conduct. If we were to be challenged in such situations, it is far more likely we would be accused of conformity or cowardice, of political correctness or political elitism, than of arrogance by those who would challenge the prevailing community view. But I suggest that all these reactions are either our personal failure to respect the conscience of others, or our conviction on good or bad grounds that the judgment is not a judgment of conscience, or the affirmation that we do not find in these judgments of conscience the presence of the Holy Spirit, but the presence of a spirit alien to the Christ. And so we turn at last to the relationship of conscience to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life, and it is the claim of Christian faith that all who have been baptized in Christ have been made alive with the very life of Christ through the indwelling gift of the Spirit. This life includes that dimension of life we call the moral life and so it includes conscience. In looking at conscience as a particular judgment, we have attended to four features of that judgment: its authoritative, private, personal character; its absolute character; its community character; its objective character. I want to suggest here that the relationship of conscience to the Holy Spirit can be indicated through these four characteristics.

It has long been a standard teaching of ethicists and moral theologians that one ought to follow one's conscience. Indeed, by definition, to be moral is to be conscientious, is to act in accord with the judgment of conscience, even if that judgment is objectively in error. Yet, if the so-called voice of conscience, the

judgment that I should do X, is simply and only a human judgment, whence does it draw that kind of authority? The moral claim that one's conscience makes upon oneself cannot have its basis in the self; the judgment that is conscience cannot be morally authoritative, even for me, simply because it is my judgment. If it is authoritative simply because it is my judgment, then the emotivists are right; judgments of conscience are no more than expressions of personal willfulness.

Furthermore, the judgment of conscience has an absolute quality; it is an unconditional demand. But in encountering my own human judgments I hardly encounter the absolute, the unconditioned. If the self is indeed the sole basis and source of the absolute authority of conscience, it is no surprise that all judgments of conscience appear to be nothing but arrogant self-righteousness. It is only if such judgments, which still are and remain human judgments, are also the voice of the Holy Spirit, that we can find both the authentic authority for them and the humility appropriate to them. It is, then, I would argue, precisely in the absolute and authoritative character of these judgments, or in the quest of conscience for this absolute authority, that we meet the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in us.<sup>48</sup>

This is a very serious and significant claim, some of whose implications are worth a brief mention here. For one thing it means that moral experience is also and always religious experience, that even nonbelievers who encounter the absolute authority of conscience encounter the Holy Spirit of the living God summoning them to the fullness of life. In like vein, it means that the unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit, is the denial of or repudiation of the absolute authority of one's own conscience.<sup>49</sup> A third implication is that fidelity to conscience and authentic judgments of conscience are not possible without what the Christian tradition calls conversion, a death to sin, to one's own selfish egoism that would advance the claims of one's sinful self against the Spirit, or to one's fear of self that would accept as more authoritative the claims and rewards of society in preference to the claims of God manifest in conscience; in brief, the repudiation of personal responsibility for one's judgments and deeds. Finally, the claim that we encounter the Holy Spirit in the absolute authority of personal conscience means that no human being can ever judge another human person's standing before God and we should stop trying to do so or speaking as if we can.

The life-giving Spirit gives life to the community called church, the people of God, and distributes among the members of the Church a variety of gifts and callings, all for building up the body of Christ in unity and love to effect the sanctification of all the members. To discover in conscience the moral claim of

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<sup>48</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 43.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

the community for our attention and our loyalty, for what we have called obedience to authority, and, when appropriate *obsequium religiosum*, and *assensus fidei*, is to encounter in conscience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. For the claim to attention and loyalty by the community of faith has no other warrant, no other foundation than that its life is generated, sustained and guided through history by the Holy Spirit.

To simply refuse outright this claim to attention and loyalty is to repudiate our membership in the community, and to turn away from the Spirit at work in our lives. What is more common, however, is the experience of finding that we are unable here and now to give the kind of assent called for in regard to a particular matter of doctrine, or moral teaching, or discipline. What ensues, if we are faithful to the Spirit, is a struggle in conscience, a struggle that is a basic aspect of the death to self that life in Christ requires of us, and a struggle that is itself a manifestation of the Spirit at work within us. It is also the experience which makes the discernment of spirits an inescapable task for the Christian community. Again, the implications of this claim are significant and in our day particularly difficult.

The various spiritual traditions of discernment of spirits in the Catholic community have been largely carried through history in religious orders and congregations, in the experiences of saints and mystics, for all of whom a docility of the human spirit, and so of obedience to authority, was of major importance.<sup>50</sup> The tradition of Ignatian discernment may express the matter most bluntly but it is not alone in its insistence on thinking with the Church and on practicing a form of blind obedience to ecclesial and spiritual authority.<sup>51</sup> What I find especially noteworthy, however, in the lives of the giants in our spiritual traditions is that the obedience they recommended and practiced was never in the interests of social conformity or the avoidance of conflict. Nor did they ever in their own lives deny what the Holy Spirit had taught them personally, or so much as hint that anyone else should do so. The obedience they urged was in the interests of freedom in the Spirit whose only law was the inner law of love written on the heart by the Spirit.

It seems likely that we can no longer think easily or speak readily in terms of blind obedience or of conforming without question our minds and hearts to the official teaching of Church authorities in all its aspects. For reasons of both practical experience and theoretical insight, that road is now closed to many of us. Few theologians today would wish to describe their calling or practice their vocation as nothing more than being apologists for every aspect of official Church teaching. Few of us would find doing theology a significant task if it meant merely looking for plausible reasons why official teaching is true and

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<sup>50</sup>Johnson, *Mystical Theology*, 312.

<sup>51</sup>Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951) 157-61.

finding suitable rhetoric in which to express that teaching. Many Catholics are no longer willing to accept without some explanation what their pastors and spiritual directors say. But the claim of our faith, the moral demand made upon conscience for attention and loyalty by the community of the Church, and the docility of spirit required of the followers of Jesus are not something we can abandon without turning our backs on the Holy Spirit. We have, unfortunately, too often expressed this basic experience of disagreement or dis-ease with official teaching as a conflict between two authorities, the authority of conscience and the authority of the Church hierarchy. But if the argument of this paper is correct, there is only one authority, the authority of the Holy Spirit, the author of life in the Church and in the members of the Church, to which we owe allegiance.

One final observation, then, about the about the objective character of the judgment of conscience may point a way forward for us in this matter. The life-giving Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of Truth, and as the Spirit of Truth it is the Holy Spirit that sets us free by teaching us the truth. The loyalty of our individual consciences, and the loyalty of the Church as a whole, is a loyalty to the truth, a truth which neither conscience nor the community creates, but a truth given to us as gift and responsibility, discovered by us, calling for our assent. The Spirit that gives life is the Spirit that urges us in the search for truth, who deepens and confirms in us our awareness and appreciation of the absolute and authoritative claim truth makes upon us, and reminds us that truth is to be sought in community. The gifts of the Spirit enable us to seek that truth in faith, hope and love, with fortitude, prudence, justice and temperance. The fruits of the Spirit confirm us both in the search for truth and in the modest achievements we realize in that search. But there is nothing in the Scriptures, in our theological tradition, or in the experience of the saints that would even intimate that the Holy Spirit does anything else than point us to Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. As Germain Grisez expressed the matter very well, "The work of the Spirit is not the communication of the content of the faith, but evidence of God revealing, so that one can accept on divine testimony the content one receives by hearing. Because morality is not extrinsic to faith, the same is true of basic moral principles."<sup>52</sup> Which is why I advance the thesis of this paper, that moral theologians have been right to resist appeals to the Holy Spirit in their quest for an objective morality, in their search for the truth of the content of morality.

Let me conclude with an example and a suggestion. It is likely that for the foreseeable future we are going to be involved in bitter, possibly intractable arguments about the moral status of assisted suicide and active euthanasia. Many of us will be involved in more than arguments. In relation to ourselves or our loved ones we may well have to make serious and painful judgments of

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<sup>52</sup>Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 99.

conscience about our own dispositions, thoughts and feelings, the words we say and the deeds we do. The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer in this struggle is not to make a judgment of truth, not to reveal in some hidden, mystic, intuitive way what one ought to do in this particular situation. One cannot invoke the Holy Spirit or the work of the Spirit to say that the Kervorkian solution to terminal illness or unbearable pain is either right or wrong, to be done or avoided.

What, then, does the Spirit do in conscience? It is the work of the Spirit in us when we are willing to face the particular situation in all its difficulty and complexity. It is the work of the Spirit in us when we are moved to seek the truth, the good rather than the convenient, when we are willing in this search to listen to the Spirit as the Spirit speaks through the Church, our fellow believers, and through the natural abilities and talents of our fellow human beings. The Spirit, in short, teaches us how in conscience to search for the truth. In the end, however, the judgment of conscience, with its absolute, authoritative claim on my behavior, is mine and can only be offered to God through Christ in the Spirit as a prayer.<sup>53</sup> The judgment of conscience is my yes to God at work in me, and if it is anything less than that, it has no claim to moral authority in the Christian life. After all, it is not myself I seek to live at peace with, but my God. And that peace is the peace of Christ which is the gift of the Spirit that confirms and sustains the judgment of conscience. Those who seek to be faithful to Christ can never invoke the Spirit or their experience of the Spirit as evidence that the judgments of their consciences are objectively right; they can only appeal to the Spirit for evidence that those judgments have been conscientious.

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<sup>53</sup>O'Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy*, 150-51; James Keating, "Conscience, Prayer and the Voice of God: The Role of Prayer in Christian Moral Deliberation" (unpubl. diss., Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, 1995).