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Moral Conscience in Eastern Patristic Theology

Abstract

Eastern Patristic tradition has raised conscience to the status of it being an important component of moral life. The teachings of the Fathers with regard to conscience are based on Scripture, especially on Saint Paul, the Apostle's thinking as well as on their own spiritual experience; it is a product of their saintly life, in accordance with the reason and the word of God. Biblical conscience is a Theo-centric experience who gives man faith in order to achieve throughout history His salvation plan and who calls him to a personal response is to be heard. For the Eastern Fathers, the approach of the theme of moral conscience has a



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rather theological and practical character than a psychological one. The Fathers have been involved in this analysis of conscience having an essentially pastoral role, trying foremost to guide Christians to the practice of Christian life. Gradually, moral conscience within Patristic is personalized in such a manner that it becomes a proper attribute of the person.

Keywords

moral life, Church Fathers, moral responsibility, spirituality, anthropology

1 Nature and contents of moral conscience

a. The ontological nature of moral conscience

In its proper, most profound sense, conscience is the actual function of moral, personal decisions. As is commonly understood, conscience is a sort of innate "advisor" of moral actions - an interiorized law. Moreover, conscience is the place where the objective good, which is God - in His energies, with the subjective reality of human existence.

Conscience was never seen or described uniformly. The evolution of the term is so ample that one cannot speak of a homogenous or unitary¹ concept. The irrational concepts of conscience tend to put it forth and describe it as a mysterious, invisible power, watching over as an inexorable force over what is just and condemning bad thoughts and deeds.

With a more increased frequency, Christians refer to conscience as the "voice of God" that is heard in each person's soul and

¹ Cf. J. Dupont, „Aux origines de la notion chrétienne de la conscience morale”, in *Studia Hellenistica*, fasc. 5, (1948) p. 119-193.

which works good therein. For Augustine, conscience is, before all, the voice of God.² This voice echoes in the depths of man³. Origen explains what is this voice that so profoundly resounds in man. Conscience, he says, is the "thought" that leads the soul on the straight path, exactly like a tutor⁴.

The opinion that refers to conscience and all moral capabilities of the souls as being completely thought and made conditional by society⁵ is considered to be false by Orthodox theology and

² S. Aurelii Augustini, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, in : J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1877), p. 1283 C.

³ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Tractatus in Iohannem*, in : J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1877), p. 1382 D.

⁴ Origenis, *Commentaria in Evangelium Ioannis*, in : J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 803 A-D.

⁵ Christian moral takes into consideration the biblical and Patristic conception on conscience. The biblical understanding of conscience appears to have too few connections with today's psychological and sociological interpretations such as those pertaining to Freudian psychoanalysis, intuitionism and behaviourism. The term of conscience bears today religious and ethical interpretations. Empirical conscience theories, based above all on psychological studies explains analytically that conscience is a acquired knowledge, also presenting acquired attitudes. In Freudian psychoanalysis conscience represents the functioning of the super-ego (*Über Ich*) through which society imposes its will upon the individual. Intuitionism sees conscience as a "internal faculty of moral judgment" which benefits from the capacity to determine what is right and just in every instance. Intuitionist theories underline the seriousness with which conscience must be regarded in which the coordination and guidance of actions and their reflection are concerned. Empirical theories arguably sustain the truth according to which conscience is and may be formed (educated), it not being a mechanical psychological function. Behaviorism sees conscience as a result of a conditioning process in the shape of punishment-and-reward, in which the person learns to avoid certain prohibited deeds and unhesitantly fulfill actions to which it is encouraged, identifying the punishment for the first situation and the reward for the second. Finally, rationalist theories try to underline the

is contradicted by Orthodox anthropology which understands man as having been created in resemblance to the image of God. A part of this image made up by the capacity of distinguishing good from evil. It pertains to that *donatum humanae* through which we think, judge or act in moral categories.⁶ „When God made man - says Avva Dorotheus - He planted in him a godly seed in the liking of a thought (*osper loghismon*), more vivid and more luminous than a spark, in order for it to enlighten the mind and make it distinguish between good and evil, It is what is called conscience, which is the natural law”⁷. From an ontological perspective, we all possess a *donatum* having determining dimensions for our thinking and decision-making capacities⁸. The ontological and dynamical character of Orthodox anthropology is present both in the case of the general assessment of humane capabilities, as well as in the case of the individual assessment of conscience.

„The unique character of our senses and conceptions”, as writes Vasileios Antoniadis, „has as cause the unique nature of the

imperative character of the experience of conscience, they affirming that this acquired conscience implies more than the consideration of the individual. The Scholastic-Thomist and rational-intellectualist opinion had underlined that this conscience seems more powerful when it deals with concrete facts and decisions, specific to immediate existence. The Greek ethicist Demetropoulos provides a definition of conscience that is close to the intuitionist one. Conscience is called "innate ability of the practical reason, capable of expressing correct judgments in respect of the morality of the persons in what the harmony or disharmony of their intentions and deeds towards the moral laws are concerned": Παναγιώτη Δημητρόπουλου, *Ορθόδοξος Χριστιανική Ηθική* (Αθήνα: Ίκρος, 1970), p. 58.

⁶ Cf. Stanley Samuel Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life* (Minnesota: Light and Life Publishing, 1983), p. 108.

⁷ St. Dorothee de Gaza, *Instructions*, in: Jacques de Preville (ed.), *Sources Chrétiennes* 92, (Picardy, 1963), p. 209.

⁸ Human capabilities are understood neither minimal - as if they had no practical importance, nor maximal, as if they had an exclusive power of determination. From this perspective, the Roman-Catholic tradition is maximalist, while the Protestant one is essentially minimalist.

soul, which in its turn possesses as ability and essential capacity to respond with an internal, individual condition, similar to external factors, when the latter stimulate our senses.”⁹

The moral dimension of the image of God in man is seen more clear in three expressions of this *donatum humanae* of moral existence: liberty, moral rules and conscience itself. The original liaison of man therewith, with moral potential capabilities, is evidenced in many patristic quotes. „In the beginning”, as written by ST. Gregory of Nyssa, „God made man with the capacity of reason, of choosing the truth and of fulfilling justice, so as all men be without word of self-righteousness before God for they have been created as rational and contemplative beings”¹⁰.

Patristic tradition has raised conscience to the status of important component of moral life. The teachings of the Fathers on conscience are founded on Scripture, especially on the conception of St. Paul the Apostle¹¹, as well as on their spiritual

⁹ Vasileios Antoniadis, *Encheiridion Kata Christon Etikes*, (Constantinopol: Fazilet Press, 1934, vol. I), p. 16.

¹⁰ S.P.N. Gregorii, *Episcopi nyseni, Opera dogmatica minora, Oratio catechetica magna*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 31.

¹¹ In the universe of the Greek-Roman reflection is where moral conscience appears as a scientific notion. The Greek-Roman reflection has contributed to the "identification of the voice of God in man" (A. Malraux, speaking of ancient peoples wrote about the "individualization" of the destiny; cf. *Psychologie de l'art*, Paris, 1961, p. 144.). The Stoics were the first to thematize conscience in a philosophical manner. Due to Stoicism people learnt to say "I" in a conscious manner (cf. L. Brunschvicg, *Le progres de la conscience dans la philosopie occidentale*, vol. 1, Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1952, p. 6-12). Conscience was a "fragment of God" (cf. Cicero, *De legibus*, 1, 24 S, 59), a divine spark in the depths of man. Ovid and Seneca allude to a „deus in nobis”. But to the majority of Stoics the voice of this divinity that resounds consciously is not that of a living and personal God, but that of an eternal law, the force of the coherence of the world, a sort of impersonal cosmic harmony. One may get to speak even of a divinization of conscience (cf. Apulee, *De Deo Socratis*,

ed. P. Thomas, 1909, p. 25-26). Certain philosophers, says Theophilus of Alexandria, did not want to admire another divinity than the one of their own conscience (undoubtedly, this is an allusion to Cicero, *De Officiis*, 3, 44 and Seneca, *Epistola 41*, 2; cf. H. Boehling, „Das Gewissen bei Seneca“, in *Th. St. Kr.*, 87, 1914, p. 1-14). We also notice the resurgence of a technical and specific word for expressing this phenomenon of moral attire: *syneidisis*, used by the first time by Democritus in the sense of "moral conscience" (Cicero has translated this expression into Latin as „*conscientia*“; cf. G. Rudberg, „Cicero und das Gewissen“ – in *Simbole Osloens*, 31, 1955, p. 96-104; R. Lindenmann, „Der Begriff der Gewissen in Französischen Denken“, in *Berliner Beiträge Z. Romanischen Philologie*, VIII, 2, 1938, p. 3-15). In Stoicism the word "daimon" corresponds precisely to the word "conscience". One of its functions is the conscience of good and evil in the context of moral order and the teaching to follow righteousness; thus it has been conceived as a defender and guider (cf. Epictetus, I, 1, 14). But this role must be understood in relation with the metaphysics of the school where "daimon" or individual reason derive from cosmic order and represents the participation of God within man. As all moral notions, which represent a common good to all peoples, the reality of conscience is orally transmitted without the needs to indicate its general significance being felt. In the oldest literary texts it does not represent but conscience in itself, to which a personal approval or disapproval are associated and is represented under the mythological forms of Erynies and later of Eumenides. In Homer, Erynies are divinities of remorse attached to sanctions inflicted upon the guilty ones as punishment for the infringement of the primordial rules of the physical and moral worlds. For Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles etc. they bring terror, delirium, a sort of madness, remorse and fear into the soul of the man. These terms are personifications of moral laws and sacred sanctions. It is nevertheless noticeable that the writers have not at all insisted with regard to the functions of favorable and good-willing divinities but, in the Hellenistic era, it is currently acknowledged that a moral-personal norm resides in the should of the man guiding the conduct of each person towards an ideal of good. Cicero's text serves as witness: "As the [peripatetic] understood to make for every man [his] wisdom as tutor and guardian – *naturae comes et adiutrix* – charged with accompanying nature and helping it, behold the task now attributed to wisdom: to discern the principles of good and the primitive inclinations of nature and make man attentive to its deeds and all of its words for that nothing originating from him be deprived of beauty and nobility. These

experience. It is a product of their holy life, in accordance with the reason and the word of God.

Biblical conscience is a Theo-centric experience; in it, the voice of a Personal God who gives man faith in order to achieve throughout history His salvation plan and who calls him to a personal response is to be heard.

The stoic idea of conscience, considered as a participation in the impersonal harmony of the cosmos, remains distant and contrasts with the biblical Revelation. The cold Hellenistic theories, although apparently very harmonious, are totally lacking the Theo-centric dynamism of Jewish prophecy, thing

principles, these sources given by nature have allowed sobriety, righteousness, morality in general to reach plenary of perfection" (cf. *De Fin.* IV, 17-18). The function of this reasoning is less of dictating the fulfillment of the deed that needs to be accomplished, but has as object the testimony of the fulfilled deed. Nevertheless, it still is very surprising that this notion that holds such a great importance for Philo and Seneca, is never defined. All these ascertainments authorize us to believe that the term "conscience" is of popular origin and was little elaborated by the moral assessments of philosophers. Thus, the opinion of H. Osborne („Syneidisis", in: *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 1951, p. 167-169) is right, him having demonstrated that the Apostle Paul found this term to be frequently used in the region in which he was born, having a very wide significance specific to a word pertaining to a popular language: the emotion of remorse, the faculty of ascertaining the quality of a good or evil deed, that of perceiving the principles of right and wrong, the impulse of following what we think is right and the avoidance of evil. It must be added that this term of the Pauline lexicon does not derive from a literary or a philosophical, but the Apostle Paul himself enriched it in a singular manner and indicated it in parallel with the contemporary development of the concept of conscience. The merit of St. Paul the Apostle is not that of bringing forth a new word, but that of consecrating its literary use and elaborating the notion of Christian conscience purified from the intellectualism of Stoicism and pantheism, placing an accent on the autonomy of its judgment and on the moral force of the imperative. In reality, due to the Pauline genius, it is more dependent on the moral conceptions of Israel than on the teachings of the philosophers (cf. C. Spicq, „Le Conscience dans le Nouveau Testament", in: *Revue Biblique*, 47, 1938, 50, note 1).

enthusiastically underlined by Bergson¹². The fundamental religious notion of moral biblical conscience highlights the extrinsic character of initial morals. Nothing is more foreign to Old Testament mentalities than "Know thyself". Let us recall that the founding principle of Jewish morals is the adherence to the will of God. In the midst of this religious vision, the psychological analysis of humane faculties and corresponding acts has a relative importance¹³. For this reason, Judaism constantly assumes the risk of falling in extrinsic legalism. From the very first books of the Bible we see this extrinsic moral to appear; but conscience is the theme in the drama of Paradise and it is surely a personal conscience. It is not the interior voice of Adam and Eve that resounds in our ears, but the voice of God. It is not Adam who accuses himself, but God is who accuses him externally (Gen. 3, 8-13).

The consequence of the externalization of moral conscience, as presented in the book of Genesis, is its inclination of becoming collective (Gen. 6, 1-5; 11, 3-4). The tendency of depersonalizing morals will inevitably make room for external legalism which persists in the history of Judaism. It appears that in this external legalism the complex case-law of rabbis was developed, as it has the law as sole value and for which humane values such as personal reflection or goodwill or bad faith play no importance. Inrrespective of the foregoing, from the

¹² H. Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), p. 257. For a comparative study on the Greek-Roman moral conscience and that of the Bible, please see Drubbe, „Le conflict entre sagesee religieuse et la sagesse profane”, in : *Biblica*, 17 (1936), p. 85 and 402; Ph. Delhaye, „Les bases bibliques du traité de la conscience”, in : *Studia Montis Regis* 4 (1961), p. 229-252.

¹³ This explains the imprecise forms of the psychological vocabulary of the Old Testament. C. Spicq has shown that the notion of moral conscience was almost never used in the Old Testament because there existend no word to express it (*op. cit.*, p. 50, note 1). As regards the Greek word *syneidesis* this does not appear until late in the Book of Wisdom (17, 10), in the sense of conscience.

beginning we identify a reaction that pleads for moral interiorization. The phenomenon of progressive internalization allows the voice of conscience to gradually approach God. Thanks to the prophets, morals gain a dimension of opening the humane fora: they place morals on the side of righteous intention and let it reach again to the roots of conscience. Michas underlines the novel prophetic intention. More than exterior deeds, this is what God wants: justice, says Amos; love says Hosea; faith says Isaiah; conversion of the heart says Jeremiah.

The prophets strongly condemn sin and, undoubtedly, the picture is blackened when they describe the moral situation of their contemporaries. Jeremiah says (24, 7; 32, 29) that God will grant the Hebrews a new heart (Ezekiel, 36, 26). Moreover, it is not sufficient to honor God with our lips, but we must do so, honor Him, with the depths of our soul¹⁴.

The progressive internalization of moral conscience begun in the Old Testament grows to being plenary in the New Testament. In order to have a precise idea of the importance that the internalization of conscience acquires through the Savior's message, we must understand this message as an powerful reaction to Pharisaism and against the formal concept of law¹⁵. A. Marc¹⁶ has correctly remarked that Christianity has revealed the interior value of deed in itself, which precedes the exterior deed and grants upon it its entire moral value. In

¹⁴ Cf. A. Robert and A. Feuillet, *Introduction a la Bible* (Paris : Deslee& Cie, vol. I, 1957) p. 22-98; Th. Maertens, „L'Education du sens morale dans l'Ancient Testament”, in: *Lumiere et Vie*, 1953. Certain words like "heart", "soul", "wisdom", entail in the course of the Old Testament several elements that today comprise the idea of moral conscience (cf. Ph. Delaye, *La conscience morale du chrétienne*, Paris-Tournai: Desclée, 1964, p. 33-50).

¹⁵ Cf. J. Mouroux, *L'expérience chrétienne. Introduction à une théologie* (Paris: Cerf), 1949, p. 97-101.

¹⁶ A. Marc, *Dialectique de l'agir* (Paris: Vitte), 1949; see R. Schnackenburg, *Le Mesaje moral du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Editions Xavier Mappus), 1964.

Christianity, justice - which is accomplished in the material abiding by a law - is not inconceivable, because the true founding of morals is in the root planted in the heart of man. Thus, conscience is formed in the depths of man, is polarized near an internal and immanent law, which keeps in the same time a strong connection with the personal God. The essence of Christianity is not its morals and its social teachings, but the very person of Christ which breaks ground for a new ontology. The ontological ground of Christian morals resides in the Embodiment and is revealed in the Resurrection.

Christian morals and spirituality and in last resort applied ontology¹⁷. The Pauline moral conscience is in fact a live and stable force, a sort of interior power dependant on God, which controls human behavior in man's relationship with God. For pagans, conscience formulates the basics of a natural law, which is considered compulsory and guiding (I Cor. 10, 28-29; II Cor. 4, 2; Rom. 2, 15). For Christians, conscience acts in the same manner, only not originating from natural law as in the case of pagans, but in the Law of the Spirit (II Cor. 1, 12; Acts 23, 1; 24, 16). The Holy Spirit introduces a supplementary testimony of truth to Christian conscience. The great Apostle speaks of a testimony of the Holy Spirit in conscience (Rom. 9, 1).

The true rule of conscience is Christ. Moral conscience is the inner resounding of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit. All our consciences are, in a manner, contained by Christ's conscience. Only in Christ and with Christ do they get to be their selves. In Christ and in the Holy Spirit they reach the plenitude of maturity and only in Christ do they get to be accomplished, in accordance with Providence and the Father's immortal life.

The more a Christian is united with Christ in the Holy Spirit, the more his conscience gets to be identified with Christ's conscience. Christian conscience is nothing but the

¹⁷ Γεώργιος Μαντζαρίδης, *Χριστιανική Ηθική* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναράς, 2004, vol. I), p. 133, 137.

internalization of this voice of Christ through the Church, namely the Holy Spirit. It is essentially ecclesiastical. Depending on the ecclesial degree reached by conscience, one can talk about a warranty that Christ truly speaks in the depths of our hearts: „the ecclesial person, the man of Orthodoxy resists only in relation with God, the Fountain of life”.¹⁸

The authenticity of a moral conscience is attested on in relation, in the interior of unity, of communion and of the inspiration created by the grace of the Holy Spirit. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, man's authenticity and axiology are certified only in his communion with the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

„Essentially”, says H. Stamoulis, „the position of St. Cyril reveals the ontological dimension of Orthodox theology, where by the loss of the good one does not understand the loss of a certain moral life of the rational being, namely the parting from the "working of goodness" and "righteousness", but, foremost, the loss of communion with the Holy Spirit, the impossibility of communion with the mystic God”²⁰.

Thus, the working of goodness and righteousness do not constitute premises for the communion with God and, implicitly, for a good moral conscience, but consequences, revelations of the personal and existential relationship with God. In patristic conscience, Christ is not the creator ad interpreter of a systematic moral behavior, but the Personification of Holiness and the Site of Holiness.

¹⁸ Χρυσόστομος Σταμούλης, *Κάλλος το άγιον*, (Αθήνα: Εκδ. Ακρίτας, 2004), p. 160.

¹⁹ Cf. S. P. N. Cyrili Alexandriae Archiepiscopi, *Comentarium in Psalmos 50*, 13, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXIX, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), 110 B.

²⁰ Χρυσόστομος Σταμούλης, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

b. The dynamic dimension of the contents of moral conscience

Man is a unity, an entirety. His moral life, as a personal-communitarian dimension, is the consequence of the godly life and the participation therein. It is not a "spiritualization of matter, nor an abandonment thereof by the spirit in an innate monism"²¹. It is a unit that advances and remains stable in relation with the fountain of life. Thus, all humane capabilities do not function and are not accomplished autonomously, isolated or separated from the divine Grace.

Christian morals does not have as purpose the acknowledgement or promotion of objective principles or moral rules, but the relationship or the communion of man with the fountain of goodness and of life, with God. An objectified moral or which abides by or depends on objectifications is not only incompatible with the Spirit of Christianity, but is also totally opposed thereto.

Christian moral is one of Grace or of a renewed life in Jesus Christ. That is why it is not limited and does not have as purpose that of being delimited and is not and cannot be delimited from rules and cannons, but extends in the liberty of the Spirit of life and sainthood. This prolongation occurs alongside the fulfillment of the life-giving commandments of God and via the change or adherence to His perennial will. Thus, the purpose of Christian life is not psychological or social, but spiritual and ontological.

However, in the absence of divine Grace, humane moral capabilities (self-knowledge) cannot fulfill only by themselves this ontological or spiritual purpose of man in Christ. "In order to attain perfection and immortality, as well as likeness of God and the godliness of man" - says Ioannis Karmiris - "in patristic understanding, generally, and in the conception of the Greek

²¹ Νίκος Ματσούκας, *Το πρόβλημα του κακού* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναράς, 1992), p. 212.

Father, especially, the importance of human liberty was underlined, this being connected harmoniously with the Grace of God. Without the synergy of the aforementioned, moral perfection and the salvation of man become impossible... without the conjointness and help of God we are incapable of doing good"²².

Human capabilities and the Grace of God remain in a vivid and absolutely necessary connection. Vladimir Lossky has evidenced this truth with remarkable precision: "Godliness or the Theosis of the being will be plenary achieved only in the afterlife following the resurrection of the dead. Nevertheless, the union by godliness must be achieved from this life by communion with the eternal life that will transform radically our corruptible nature. If God granted us within the Church all objective conditions, all the means we need in order to reach this end, we, on the other side, must produce all the necessary subjective conditions, because only via this synergy, via this cooperation between man and God, is this union achieved"²³.

Morals has a dynamic character because the godly likelihood is a free movement, a free answer. The negation of the dynamic character coincides with the deformation and the rejection of our very existence. Freedom is the manner of existence, an absolutely personal manner, the most humane manner of existence, the manner of sacrificing and loving existence, our authentic and truthful ethos, the movement of our authentic likelihood that finds its purpose in God and via our communion with him.

Christian spirituality equals morals in grace and freedom, and freedom is not to be understood as psychological appeal or instinct, but as a mystical liturgy within the relationship of dynamic communion with God, because God is the infinite and

²² Ιωάννης Καρμυρή, *Τα δογματικά και συμβολικά μνημεία της Ορθοδόξου Καθολικής Εκκλησίας* (Αθήνα, 1957), p. 30.

²³ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of Eastern Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1997), p. 196-199.

absolute freedom of man. That is why, in moral life, freedom, the sole freedom that exalts and saves man, is the freedom of Grace. Thus, Grace is the true freedom. In Christianity, every tragical opposition, every antinomy between freedom and grace have been overcome - here grace is invoked and becomes accepted not as authority or constraint, but as a calling and love, as vocation and salvation. In Orthodoxy, according to St. Maximus the Confessor, "we accept the Grace or God-given freedom as the source of power of human liberty, so that the freedom of a spiritual man reinforces that of another man in his freedom"²⁴.

The dynamic dimension is also connected with its eschatological character. In present life, our moral conscience is nothing but a sketch or an anticipation of what is to come at the end of ages, as is slowly and painfully oriented towards its actualization. The historical evolution of conscience is a pedagogical step towards the land of promise that is the Kingdom of God.

Moral conscience is the *Kerygma* of Christ proclaimed to each and every one of us in person: a conscience that calls the name of Christ and resounds in the depths of our hearts like a trumpet of Judgment. Conscience will plenary become the conscience of Christ only upon His coming and final judgment. According to St. Paul the Apostle, our soul holds a mysterious, mystical gist: this is the very heart, the conscience. God alone can render true and decisive judgment with regard to the moral value of our own deeds and those of others.

In this sense, we may say that our moral conscience is "under pressure", awaiting the arrival of Christ, which will fulfil and update the moral conscience of the entire humanity (cf. I. Cor. 4, 5; Mat. 25, 31-46). Our conscience is not the conscience of Christ, but is only on the path of becoming such; it is an itinerant conscience. The dynamic, eschatological dimension of

²⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia* (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonias tis Ekklesias Publishing House, 1973), p. 57.

Christian conscience represents a first motivation of our confidence and, at the same time, of our humility. From this eschatological perspective, the Fathers see bad conscience as an anticipation of the final judgment and condemnation, and good conscience as an anticipation of perennial joy.

This understanding of conscience - by taking into account both its innate (onthological) and its dynamic characters - is in full harmony with the Orthodox teachings on man. Conscience - indicating the practical discernment of right and wrong, as well as the sense of responsibility in the experience of moral guilt or interior peace - is an integral part of the human nature, it is a constituent thereof. According to St. Mark the Hermit "conscience is a natural book, and he who reads it and puts it into practice acquires the experience of comprehending godliness"²⁵.

2 The function of moral conscience

Taking a starting point the biblical revelation²⁶ and especially the testimony of St. Paul the Apostle, the Holy Fathers try to permanently fathom the concept of moral conscience. In this sense, they often get to use philosophic categories, the majority

²⁵ St Mark the Hermit, *Φιλοκαλία* (μεταφ. Αντωνίας Γαλίτης, εκδ., Θεσσαλονίκη: Το περιβόλι της Παναγίας, 1986), p. 62.

²⁶ Biblical moral conscience reflects, on one part, the importance of personal communion between man and God as ground of moral responsibility and, on the other side, the dynamic demands that result from the communion with God. These two factors were decisive in the historical evolution of moral conscience. Nevertheless, we must notice with due reverence that in the Old Testament the danger of moral legalism, a notion much outside moral conscience, which ignores good will or bad fith and which see moral value as an external fulfillment of the law. Later on, this exterior legality will resurface: after its first appearance in Judaism, it will give up its place to the scholastic decadence and will reach its height of theoretical expression along Kant's categorical imperative.

of which are taken from stoicism (the concept of *logos*) or from Neo-Platonism. Generally speaking, their search has a rather practical than psychological theological character. The Fathers were involved in this analysis of conscience with an essentially pastoral purpose, trying before anything else to guide the faithful into practicing the Christian life.

Gradually, moral conscience within Patristics is so personalized that at one point it becomes an intrinsic characteristic of the person. In fact, conscience is a tutor: it warns, censors, punishes and reprimands constantly. It expresses itself like a real person: achieves a personal dialogue with the individual at stake, or plays, at the same time, the role of "me" and that of "you".

This evolution towards a personalization of moral patristic conscience determines us to undergo a new stage of reasoning - from this moment, conscience is not being considered as a distinct person, imposed upon the subject, but being identified with the person itself. Thus, conscience fully undertakes the responsibility for the behavior of the individual, who acts right or wrong, which suffers and is troubled or lives tranquilly, which, who, at a given moment, must make a final decision.

In this sense, conscience is the most intimate part of man - *tameion*, according to St. Basil the Great²⁷, or *penetrable*, according to Augustine²⁸. This explains the resurgence of "existential harassment" in the moment in which moral conscience does not coincide with the profound individual. No one has made a more thorough analysis of this existential in-tranquillity than Augustine. The self-criticism he makes in his Confessions shows the psychological maturity of his existential analysis²⁹.

²⁷ S.P.N. Basili, *Homiliae XIX*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857), 492 A.

²⁸ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Sermo XIII*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1877), p. 110 B.

²⁹ S. Aurelii Augustini, *Sermo XLVII*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1877), p. 1694.

Moral conscience appears in the writings of the Holy Fathers in the form of a precedent or anterior conscience (*proegoumene syneidesis*) and in the form of an ulterior or consecutive conscience (*epomene syneidesis*). Ulterior, consecutive, conscience seems to identify itself, especially in the case of the Latin Fathers, with a character pleading in a court-of-law. This analogy may be explained by the legal interests of the Roman world, especially in the West³⁰.

As regards precedent, anterior, conscience, it is not explicitly described by the Latin Fathers, fact owing undoubtedly to the importance placed by the West on the psycho-legal aspects, which is also the primacy, rarely and spontaneously attributed to criticism or analysis of our previous behavior. On the contrary, the Greek Fathers insist upon the theological and moral aspects of conscience. Before all, they see in it the "reason" of God who calls us to authentically practice a Christian life. That is why they speak aloud of previous conscience, which is inserted in this perspective easier and more profoundly. In the course of history, the Greek Fathers have been, most certainly, the first to have treated previous moral conscience in an explicit and systematic manner.

a. Conscience as Guidance of Spiritual Life

In Patristic thought, conscience plays a crucial role in the practice of moral life. Thus, St. Clement of Alexandria affirms that: "conscience is a means for the precise choice of good and the avoidance of evil, for a correct life"³¹. St. John Chrysostom awards a great deal of attention to conscience. Having much faith in the sufficiency of conscience he writes: „It is in

³⁰ Also in the East it is presented like a witness sometimes, or as an accuser, and sometimes as a judge.

³¹ Clementis Alexandrini, *Stromata*, I, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (VIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857), p. 1.

conscience that we have a true teacher and the help deriving therefrom must not be ignored."³².

Origen considers conscience as an internal tutor that guides us on the right way³³, while St. John Chrysostom offers an ample and systematic exposure of conscience as a moral guide³⁴.

Conscience as a moral guide has both positive and negative aspects. It tells us what is right, what is to be done, but also what is wrong, what must be avoided. The importance of conscience as a moral guide is emphasized by St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John Climacus and others. St. Maximus urges: "do not dishonor your conscience, who always provides good advice, for it is your angelic and godly advisor"³⁵. Similarly, St. John Climacus advises: "After God, let us have our conscience as a rule and goal in everything."³⁶

b. Conscience as a Moral Judge and as Ground for Moral Responsibility

The activity of conscience as a moral judge is intimately related to its activity as guide or tutor for the moral life. The Fathers of the Church have underlined the character of judgment and of decision-making incorporated by conscience: Open the doors of your conscience and regard the judgment that takes place in your mind.

³² S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliarum in Genesium*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 1.

³³ Origenis, *Commentaria in Evangelium Ioannis*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 893 C.

³⁴ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliarum in Genesium*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), pp. 471; 636; 461-463.

³⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Φιλοκαλία*, p. 223.

³⁶ St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, (trans. Norman Russel, ed. Paulist Press, Mahawa NJ, 1982), p. 124.

Conscience judges our right and wrongful deeds. When we act correctly, it remains silent, and when we proceed wrongfully, on the contrary, it prosecutes. The function of conscience of developing our sense of moral responsibility is also underlines in the Patristic writings: "The Lord... created man by putting in his being an impartial prosecutor - the conscience"³⁷. Playing this role of incorruptible judge, conscience is impartial. The Fathers have affirmed its objectiveness.

Thus, St. John Chrysostom insists upon the role that conscience is called upon to play: "Is there something more burdensome than sin? No matter how stuporous we are, desiring not to sense it, no matter how much we try in hiding it from the world, conscience is provoked by the sin against ourselves.

Conscience is like an incorruptible judge which, being constantly educated, it inflicts a vivid and continuous pain, is like an executioner that tears up apart and chokes us, displaying the enormity of the sin"³⁸. That is why, according to St. John "within conscience there are no scratching, no greed in order to corrupt judgment".

³⁷ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliarum in Genesium*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 135.

³⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *First Baptismal Catechesis*, 28, Wenger (ed.) in: *Sources Chrétienne*s 50, 1957, p. 122-123; S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliarum in Genesium*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 135: „That who perpetrated the sin or an indecent deed (*atopos praxis*), even should he manage to conceal it from men cannot conceal it from this accuser that restlessly surrounds us, which is inside, which torments him, slaps him without ceasing, which appears before him in the market place, at the table, in his sleep demanding explanations for his maneuvers, putting before him the indecency of his sins and the punishment to follow". See other fragments referring to the activity of conscience: S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Conciones VII de Lazaro* (Homily 4, 4), in : J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 101 C, D; Homily 1, 11, p. 979 BC.

According to these texts, it would appear that conscience functions in an almost automatic fashion.

In reality, St. John does not ignore the mechanisms of self-defense that appear in front the sentiment of guilt³⁹, but he urges to an effort of lucidity and clear thought which, in his own terms, would be called the courage to launch a process of conscience which, in fact, is a process of self-conscience: "There is a reasoning which, far from giving way to shame, is the source of a great benefit. Alongside your conscience, make room for your reason, as judge, then compare your faults, make the inventory of the sins of your soul and determine it to make a rigorous confession".⁴⁰

This fidelity⁴¹ of conscience is particularly hard to suffer: "You will tell me: how shall we make justice against ourselves? Weep, sigh with sadness, humble yourself, torment your body, remember your sins as per their liking. This trial of your soul is not a small thing. That who had repentance knows of the grief that it inflicts (...). No, it is not a small thing for our change to gather all of our sins, to twist and turn them as per their liking.

³⁹ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XII in Epistolam ad Colossenses*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), 318 A: „Sinners notice the fact that sin is a wrong thing. But they are daily rejoicing their passions, do not want to acknowledge them, although their conscience acknowledges such”.

⁴⁰ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 454 D. „Let us rule against ourselves with the greatest of righteousness. S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliarum in Genesium*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 524 CD: Let us be party, without hesitation, to the tribunal of conscience and therein let us examine profoundly our thoughts and pass a righteous judgment”.

⁴¹ Impartiality or objectiveness of conscience is the result of the *involuntary* character of its activity: its independence from will.

By doing so, we will be penetrated by such a great repentance, that we will consider ourselves unworthy of living"⁴².

Under such circumstances, it is not at all a wonder that man tries to escape this trial by "contracting" the habit of putting forth an erroneous judgment ("self-deceiving judgment by shameful judgments" - the compromise by self-delusion) over realities, with the purpose of diminishing such mistakes or even that of pretending that they "do not exist". In the end, the question of becoming blind is at stake⁴³, that of creating an illusion: "the ill eye confounds things among each other; this is how it is for the soul tormented by wrong desires"⁴⁴.

Saint John Chrysostom condemns this blinding that determines Christians, via the lack of sincerity, to lose any possibility to appreciate their spiritual reality to its real value. He so describes a man of compromise: "You bear in yourselves the vice of pompous names. To be perseverant in hippodromes or theatres is what you mean by civilization; being rich - freedom; being in love with glory - generosity; arrogance is sincerity; lust - love of man; unjustness - courage> lastly, as if such fraud would not suffice, you give virtue names that are contrary

⁴² S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 450 AB.

⁴³ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XLIV in Epistolam primam ad Corinthios*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 92 B: „When thieves and criminals decide to steal a treasure they commence by turning off the lights. It is the same what corrupt reason does when we are on the verge of perpetrating a sin. And the light of reason always sins, but s soon as the spirit of lust is impetuously present, it makes the flame disappear and immediately thereafter the soul is thrown into darkness. It is then when the enemy empowers itself over it and dispossess it of everything it has. Abiding by an evil desire is for the soul what the night is for the eye: intelligence loses is ability to see.”

⁴⁴ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Comentarius in Epistola ad Galatas*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 622 B.

thereto: you call prudence rusticity; finesse cowardice; justice cowardice; contempt of luxury diminishment; bearing of wrongfulness weakness"⁴⁵.

A person that through its moral life has acquired an un-accusing conscience is known to be a saint. But there are situations in which the absence of a remorse is the result of immorality and of evil. St. John Climacus notes: "Let us carefully observe whether or not our conscience has ceased from accusing us not as a result of our cleanliness, but due to the fact that we are immersed in evilness."⁴⁶ In this way, an un-accusing conscience is the sign that either a person is a great saint or that he is a great sinner. Avva Talasios underlines this in the following manner: "Those that are not accused by their conscience are those who have reached the peaks of achievement or have descended into the depths of sin"⁴⁷.

Saint John Chrysostom draws attention onto the origin of good conscience: "Good conscience derives from life and deeds that are good"⁴⁸, "we rejoice nothing more in our internal forum than a good conscience", he says. A clear conscience, tranquil, is accompanied by interior peace, hope, courage and moral strength, desire for the truth and virtue, the absence of the fear of dying, spiritual love and joy. Such joy originating from a clear conscience is described by St. John Chrysostom: "for the good spirits, joy is not the supreme power, nor uncorrupted health, nor the grace of authority, nor the power of the body, nor the abundance of meals, nor in the luxury of clothing, none of the things of the rich, which it claims, but spiritual fulfillment and a good conscience".

⁴⁵ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Adversus eos qui apud se babent Subintroductas virgines*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p 359 D – 360 A.

⁴⁶ St. John Climacus, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁴⁷ *Φιλοκαλία*, p. 330.

⁴⁸ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homilia I in Epistolam secundam ad Corinthios*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 13.

Making clear the teaching of the Church in this matter, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite adds: "To have an un-accusing conscience is indeed the pleasure of pleasures and the joy of joys"⁴⁹.

"The greatest feast is a good conscience... For the man that lives and acts in a right manner, even ordinary days are a celebration" says, in such beautiful words, St. John Chrysostom. In the case of extreme evil, the tranquility of conscience is the tranquility of a dead capability - at the level of moral conscience.

Conscience is understood in the most categorical fashion of self-consciousness. Both the Latin *conscientia* and the Greek *syneidesis* signify proper "awareness". The basic function of conscience is that of revealing ourselves. This revelation of the self, in its specific manner, makes known the distance between our actual self and the image that we already have of ourselves in virtue of our "natural inclination". Such a deceiving tranquillity, as aforementioned, is lastly the result of a weakened self-consciousness, the weakening of which is due not only to certain sins repeated throughout a prolonged period of time, but also to the self-deceiving "rationalization". Hesychius of Sinai warns that: "If a person deceives its conscience through shameful arguments, it will fall in a tormenting death of oblivion"⁵⁰. Since conscience censors our sins (as well as our thoughts and desires), it acts as prosecutor (*antidikos*). Thus, for Avva Dorotheus, "conscience is our prosecutor, for it always is opposed to our desires and censors them, in order for us to do what is right and not what is wrong, an accuses us"⁵¹.

⁴⁹ St. Nicodemus The Hagiorite, *Symbouleutikon Encheiridion* (Viena: Handbook of Counsel , 1801), p. 186.

⁵⁰ Hesychius of Sinai, *Φιλοκαλία*, p. 94.

⁵¹ S. Dorotheus, Archimandrita, *Expositione et Doctrinae diverse*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXXXVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), p.1653.

Dorotheus discovers the prosecutorial function of conscience in the affirmation of Christ the Saviour as written down by Matthew (5, 25): "As long as you are him on the way", which means, in Dorotheus's view "as long as you are in this world" - as was said also by St. Basil the Great.

Conscience is our "plaintiff" with whom we need to make peace from this very life, as long as one is in this world. St. John Chrysostom says that "even in this life the sinner encounters punishment for his sins... Regard into his conscience: there you will find the tumultuous unrest of his sins, you will see him surrounded by fear, torment, discord. As in a sort of tribunal, the mind sits as a judge on the royal throne of the conscience, using memory for what it did, interrupting the course of thoughts and ruthlessly stirring the sins committed, which await forgiveness. It is impossible to find peace in front of the prosecuting voice, even when tormented by deeds known only by God"⁵².

Conscience does not judge only our deeds, but also our dispositions. St. Macarius says: "Conscience censures those thoughts that consent to the sin"⁵³. But the prosecutorial activity of conscience is a painful experience. St. John Chrysostom says that "the one that lives in evilness experiences the torments of hell, before hell, being tormented by his conscience". That is why "nothing is more burdensome on man and nothing depresses his soul that the consciousness of sin".

Many such affirmations are to be found in the Holy Fathers, including in their hymns. "Behold, I have been judged: behold, I, the wretched, have been condemned by my conscience and nothing in the world is more painful"⁵⁴. In the Great Oktoih we find the following verse: "I am trembling when thinking of your

⁵² Cf. Delhaye, *op. cit.*, p. 72-73.

⁵³ S. Dorotheus, Archimandrita, *Expositione et Doctrinae diverse*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXXXVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), p. 1653.

⁵⁴ *Grand Oktoih*, (Venice edition, 1876), p. 263.

arrival, oh, Lord, for I have my judgment before the judgment; in the interior of my conscience, I accuse myself before the flames of the inferno"⁵⁵.

c. Conscience as a Factor of Moral Renewal

Alongside the functioning of conscience as a moral guide and judge, we also encounter it as an enlightener. Avva Thalasius says that "a clear conscience revives the soul". Other Fathers specify the manners in which conscience awakes oneself. Thus, according to St. Macarius, "conscience awakes natural thoughts which fill the heart"⁵⁶. He identifies "natural thoughts" with "pure thoughts", which were created by God. Conscience evokes humbleness: "conscience returns the soul to itself, determining it to be humble"⁵⁷.

It is not enough to have a well formed conscience, capable of reasoning correctly the realities of the self, for this first stage needs to go further. In a word, after acknowledgement, the sin must be "burnt" by means of the memory, to which St. John Chrysostom attributes an important role⁵⁸. In respect of the benefit of this, he says: "It is good for us to admit to our sins and remember them continuously. There is nothing better for healing the mistake than this continuous remembrance, nothing

⁵⁵ *Grand Oktoih*, (Venice edition, 1851) p. 119.

⁵⁶ St. Macarius the Egyptian, *Spiritual Homilies*, (LeClue, 2008), p. 23.

⁵⁷ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XXXIV in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 81.

⁵⁸ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 410 A: „To vest oneself in a cloak, to lock oneself in a cell, to remain down in darkness, it is not only in such that remorse is to be demonstrated. You still need to go back and come back unceasingly to the remembrance of your own passions, to examine your conscience as to your thoughts to continuously measure the length of the road that separates you from the Kingdom of God“.

better to keep awake the fear from evil; conscience is opposed and cannot stand to be disturbed by the remembrance of passions (...). Nevertheless, how many good things are born from the remembrance of sins! Thus we imprint them in our thoughts. I know that the soul cannot stand a memory so bitter, but we will constrict it with perseverance."⁵⁹ Having remorse for a personal sin is to admit it. Not for considering us as sinners, but in order to acknowledge the status of our own sins and our false impressions with respect to us. This remorse is an act of self-conscience, of clear reason, without declarative reasoning, which in fact are untrue: "Assuredly, anyone who has sinned is pitiful and worthy of philanthropy, but you, who are convince that you have not sinned, how can you pretend to be pitiful, when you have no shame for your downsides? Let us be convinced that we have sinned, let us not say that only with our mouths, but with our reason, let us not declare ourselves guilty all of the sudden, but let us recap our remorse and put them in order according them to their likelihood"⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XXXIV in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 261 B and 217 A; S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* (Homily 3), in: *Sources Chrétiennes* 28, p. 311: „Let us remember the ardor of our conscience, let us hurt our soul by remembering our sins but not for saddening it or unsettling it, but to make it accomplished, to make it abstinent and attentive and thus make it rise to heavens. There is nothing more appropriate to kill indifference than the pain and remorse that gathers the soul from its paths and determine it to find itself.“

⁶⁰ S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XXXIV in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 216 C. For St. John, this admittance (remorse) is not simply public, because such a confession may serve for exhibitionism (please see: *To Theodoros*, 21, in: *Sources Chrétiennes* 117, p. 208-210). He condemns such a declarative pharisaic theatre of appearances. for him remorse is an ontological and personal act that encompasses both the soul of the man and the confession as a mystery of the Church. In fact, the entire thinking of St. John on repentance is

Remembering your sins and admitting them means ensuring the victory of light over darkness⁶¹, but this victory is not only intellectual, reasonable, but it is also a victory at the level of reflection, a sensed acknowledgement of the sin and of the sinful status: "Not feeling any pain, you do not take into consideration your sins. Behold what you should do in order to mourn: not to feel any pain for your sins! The hat you do not weep, there is the sin. For not weeping does not come from the absence of sin, but from the souls that sins is insensate. Think of those that are sensate to their sins: how they weep more painfully than those who are burnt or hurt, think to all that they do and accept (...) with the purpose of setting them free of the guilty conscience. Assuredly they would not react as such should they not feel vivid pains in their souls"⁶².

marked by the Christological or, better said, Eucharistic character of repentance.

⁶¹ The ascertainment and acknowledgement of sin is the ascertainment of the own disease which hidden within the body spreads as an infection throughout the limbs. Similarly, sin committed in darkness, in the stoned and unfeeling conscience, remains hidden and continues to be perpetrated as in a darkness of all-knowing and of the illuminating reason. But when self-consciousness remarks the disease that is unfeelingly spreading and reason sheds light into the soul, then sin is evidenced and killed through the holy remorse of conscience. S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XXIV in Epistolam ad Ephesios* (Homily 18, 1), in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 122 BC: „As a wound remains concealed within the body, spreading deep, as long as it is not attended, the same is the sin: as long as it remain hidden, we perpetrate it in darkness, without repentance, but if exposed, then there is light”.

⁶² S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 212 B; idem, *Homiliae LXXXVIII in Joannem*, Homily 5, 4, in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LIX, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 59 B: „The attentive man, should he fall into sin, will immediately react, but that who is tender and sleepy does not sense him being caught by evil”; idem, *De Sacerdotio libri VI* (6, 13), in: J-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLVIII, Paris:

St. John Climacus also mentions the holy remorse as an effect of active conscience. He characterizes remorse as a "redemptory sadness", because joy and sadness come together, as honey in the honeycomb. Remorse (as atonement) leads to the love of God and of our neighbor. St. Nicetas Stethatos observes that nothing raises the soul to the love of God and the love of man such as humility, remorse and clear prayer.

Garnier Frates, 1862), p. 691 AB: „Not feeling pain following the wounds caused by the devil is a grave thing especially because lack of sense. In fact, he who is hurt for the first time and lack to react would be more vulnerable for the second and then the third time.”