

## Conscience: its role and great importance

A sermon by Rev Ian Arnold

1 Samuel Chapter 3, verse 21 and Chapter 4: verse 1: "Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel."

Years ago, and when I was working as a Pastor in one of our churches in Sydney, Australia, there was a well qualified dietitian in my congregation who, one day, shared a dilemma she was facing at her work. This person worked in a very large public Hospital where there were several dietitians, as many as ten. Her dilemma arose from the fact that whilst she always arrived on time to begin her work for the day, several of the other dietitians would arrive five, maybe ten, minutes late. Additionally, while she was very strict with herself to only take the allotted 40 minutes for her lunch break, some of her dietitian colleagues frequently took an hour, sometimes more, for their lunch break. Worse, and though said in a friendly way, the dietitians who arrived late for work or who had no qualms about taking a longer lunch break than they were authorized to, gently mocked her integrity and tried to persuade her to be as they were and to take the same liberties they took. But she refused to do so.

So, my question is, What was stopping her - this dietitian in my congregation, and who was obeying the rules - from doing the same as those other dietitians who broke the rules?

My memory of this person's dilemma, and the decision she made, not to do as some of her colleagues were doing, came back to me as an appropriate introduction to this sermon on Conscience.

We talk about Conscience; we are often troubled and challenged by it ; and we tend to demand even higher standards of others when it comes to acting according to Conscience. We also, especially when we are younger, wish we could wriggle free of the restraints it imposes on us. But for all this we know, when we stop and think about it, how pivotal and necessary conscience is; and how unruly and chaotic life would be without it.

The reality is that we rely on conscience, both other people's and our own, more than we realise.

We rely on people's conscience to cause them to do the right thing. For example, to wait their turn in a queue or to be orderly and respectful of others about getting on and off public transport.

Indeed, we are outraged when people seem to be oblivious to conscience and unrestrained by it. I remember the outrage over the looting of a newly overturned truck on the Motorway near where I live, **even as the driver lay fatally injured in the destroyed cabin of the vehicle.**

## 良知：其作用与重大意义

伊恩·阿诺德牧师的讲道

耶和華又在示羅顯現；因為耶和華將自己的話默示撒母耳，撒母耳就把這耶和華的話向撒母耳顯現。撒母耳的話傳遍了以色列全地。（撒下 3:21, 4:1）

多年前，我在澳大利亞悉尼的一座教堂里擔任牧師。那時，教會的信徒中有一位極具資歷的營養師。她曾向我透露了自己在工作中遭遇的困境。她就職於一所大型公立醫院，同崗位的營養師多達十名。她的困擾源於此：儘管她始終準時上班，但其他同事卻常常遲到五分鐘甚至十分鐘。而當她嚴格遵循規定，僅休息 40 分鐘的午餐時間時，其他的同事們卻常常長時間地享用午餐，有時甚至超過一個小時。更令她失望的是，那些無視工作時間規定，遲到早退的同事們，甚至還以輕鬆的態度嘲笑她的誠信，並試圖引誘她同流合污。但她始終堅守自己的原則，拒絕附和他們。

於是，一個問題浮現出來：是什麼讓我教會里的這位營養師，堅守自己的原則，不去模仿那些不遵守規定的同事呢？

在我腦海中，她所處的困境和她的決定，突然浮現出來。我覺得，這恰好是我向你們引入良知這一篇講道的最好例證。

良知是我們常常被忽視，卻又無時無刻不在挑戰我們的一個概念。當談論良知的指引時，我們常常對他人有更高的期待。尤其是在年輕的時候，我們常常希望能逃脫良知的束縛。然而，當我們靜下心來深思時，我們會發現，良知的存在是多麼的關鍵和必要。沒有良知，生活將陷入混亂和無序。

實際上，我們比我們自認為的更加依賴良知，無論是他人的還是我們自己的。

我們依賴他人的良知來讓他們做出正確的選擇，比如，在排隊時遵守秩序，或者在乘坐公共交通工具時尊重他人。

誠然，當人們對良知視若無睹，不受其約束時，我們會感到極度的憤慨。我記得在我家附近的一條高速公路上，一輛剛翻車的貨車遭到洗劫，**那時駕駛員還在被毀的車廂中奄奄一息**，人們對此也感到憤慨。

We live with assumptions about the impact and influence of conscience on people's behaviour. And this is usefully noted: it is only when conscience weakens as a restraining influence in community life, and so far as people's behaviour is concerned, that laws have to be enacted and penalties imposed. **External restraints begin to be needed when internal restraints are no longer effective.** We might once have hoped that people's social conscience would restrain them from throwing rubbish out of their cars but - and the evidence being that conscience is not sufficiently strong in that area - laws and penalties have had to be imposed.

Conscience is pivotal, too, where our relationship with the Lord is concerned.

The Lord leads, guides, restrains, nudges and awakens us to right attitudes and behaviour via our conscience.

And so it is not surprising it is mentioned in the Bible, or in the Word here. Do you remember the story of the woman taken in adultery, in John's Gospel, Chapter 8? The Scribes and Pharisees had brought to Jesus, we read there, "*a woman caught in adultery*". And these Scribes and Pharisees reminded Jesus what Moses in the law, had commanded in such situations, that she should be stoned. "*What do you say?*" they pointedly asked Him. Remarkably He stayed silent, for we read, "*But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up, and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'* And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground." Do you remember what happened next?? "*Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one...*"

But in the Old Testament, and strange at first as it seems, there is no mention of conscience, *as such*, and the word is not to be found! (There is a memorable story about conscience, without the word being mentioned, as when Nathan the prophet went into king David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his authorizing the death of her husband, Uriah. (see 2 Samuel 12: verses 1 to 14). Psalm 51, believed to have been written by David after this encounter with Nathan, is an outpouring of a very troubled conscience.)

Notwithstanding the fact that the word 'conscience' doesn't appear in the Old Testament, its role, its relevance, and its importance is, however, highlighted and identified in the stories of the prophets, especially in the story of Samuel, the first of the prophets.

What is without doubt is that Samuel was the conscience of his people. It was Samuel who lifted his people's thinking onto a higher level; who reminded them of a higher purpose in life; who urged on them God-fearing standards of behaviour.

**And the story of Samuel, as we have it here in the Word of God, in its deeper, internal or spiritual meaning, is all about the role of conscience in our lives, yours and mine.**

Let me just run through with you some of the highlights of

我们都认为良知会对人们的行为产生影响和作用。这一点非常重要：只有当良知在社区生活中作为一种约束力量削弱，以至于人们的行为出现问题时，我们才会看到需要制定法律和施加惩罚。**当内在的约束失去效力时，外在的约束就开始发挥作用。**我们曾经希望人们的社会良知会制止他们在车上随意扔垃圾，然而，事实证明良知在这方面的约束力不够，因此不得不制定法律和处罚规定。

良知对我们与主建立关系也具有重要的作用。主通过我们的良知来引导我们、约束我们、唤醒我们，帮助我们形成正确的态度和行为。因此，良知在圣经或者这里所提及的话语中被提及，并不令人惊讶。你是否还记得约翰福音第 8 章中，那个行淫时被拿妇人的故事吗？文士和法利赛人将这名女子带给耶稣，并向耶稣提醒，摩西在律法中对这种情况的规定，就是应该用石头砸死她。“你说该把她怎么样呢？”他们向耶稣尖锐地提问。耶稣却保持沉默，我们在经文中读到，“耶稣却弯着腰，用指头在地上画字。”装作没有听见。“他们还是不住地问他，耶稣就直起腰来，对他们说：‘你们中间谁没有罪的，谁就可以先拿石头打她。’于是又弯着腰，用指头在地上画字。”你还记得接下来发生了什么吗？“他们听见这话，就从老到少，一个一个都出去了……。”

然而，在旧约中，可能会让人觉得奇怪的是，没有良知这个说法，甚至这个词都没有出现过！（尽管没有提到这个词，但有一则关于良知的值得记住的故事——大卫王与拔示巴通奸并且指使人杀死她的丈夫乌利亚后，先知拿单进入他的宫殿（撒下 12:1-14）；诗篇第 51 篇，据信是大卫在与拿单的这次相遇后写的，表达了他内心深处良心的痛苦。）

尽管“良知”这个词在旧约中并未出现，但其功能、意义以及重要性在众先知的故事中得到了强调和认可，尤其是在第一个先知撒母耳的故事中。

撒母耳无疑是众百姓的良知。他提升了人民的思想水平，提醒他们生活的更高目标，敦促他们恪守敬畏上帝的行为准则。

**在这里，也就是在神的话语中，撒母耳的故事在其深层的、内在的或者说属灵的意义，全部都是关于良知在我们（包括你我）生活中的作用。**

让我和你一起回顾一下撒母耳生平和事工的一些重要时刻，看看这些如何与我们生活中良知的作用和

Samuel's life and ministry and see these in relation to the role and influence of conscience in our lives.

**For one thing**, life for and amongst Samuel's people was unruly and indeed chaotic before he came on the scene. If I can take you back into the book of Judges and to the period immediately before his birth, it is said there that *"In those days there was no king in Israel; and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* This was a 'directionless' people this is describing; competing voices; different ways to success and happiness being urged. Samuel brought cohesion and unity and focus. His was a voice that came to prevail over all. He spoke up for and identified higher goals and aspirations, something which conscience is all about.

**The next thing**, usefully noted, is that even as a child he learned to be fearless in saying what had to be said and in exposing waywardness. At times he came across as inflexible and demanding – just as conscience does.

What is particularly significant and – when we understand its significance – quite beautiful, is that it was Samuel's role to open up the doors of the Tabernacle; "to open the doors of the house of the Lord", it says. And this is **the third thing** and it takes us right to the heart of what conscience does. The role of conscience is – and very much so – to open up our lives to higher and more interior levels. It is its role to open up the way so that the spiritual can flow down into the natural. Its role, in a very real sense, is to bring us closer to and, indeed, into the presence of, the Lord.

**And remember this:** the story of Samuel begins with him as a fragile baby and vulnerable child. He needed care and protection. His mother made him a little coat each year. (See 1 Samuel 2: verse 19). And this highlights two truths about Conscience we need to know:

Firstly, Conscience is at first, with us, fragile and vulnerable. It needs protecting and nurturing. It can easily be lost to us. It needs our care and attention if it is to survive and thrive.

Secondly, Conscience grows and develops. It is not static. It is not the same as when we are children as it becomes when we are adults.

Since it is so crucial and plays such a crucial, pivotal role, how is conscience formed?

Conscience is informed, and grows, from the truths we learn and take to heart, simple at first when we are children, and more profound and seen to be so much more life related, as we grow older.

As well, what feeds into Conscience are good and inspiring examples we see in others and positive experiences (as when we have felt heaven close) that have left a deep impression on us. Just let's recall from the Reading set aside in connection with this sermon: *"Conscience in a person is formed from the beliefs that his religion has given him, depending on how deeply he accepts them."* (Arcana Coelestia 9112) And as new spiritual values are learned and taken on board by us our conscience is strengthened.

It is and has been urged that conscience is the voice of God and therefore infallible, unchangeable and unchallengeable.

影响力联系起来。

**首先**, 在撒母耳出现之前, 他的人民生活在无秩序甚至混乱的状态中。如果我可以带你回到《士师记》中, 也就是他出生前的那个时期, 那里说 "那些日子以色列中没有王, 各人都凭着自己所看为对的去行 (和合本: 各人任意而行)。" 这里描述的是一个 "没有方向" 的民族; 各种相互竞争的声音; 各种不同的成功和幸福之路被强烈推荐。撒母耳带来了凝聚力、统一和专注。他的声音最终胜过了所有人。他代表并寻求更高的目标和抱负, 这就是良知的全部含义。

**接下来**让我们注意到的一点是, 尽管撒母耳还只是一个孩子, 他却学会了无所畏惧地说出必须说的话, 并揭露了那些背离正道的行为。他有时候给人的感觉是坚定不移、严格要求——这正如我们的良知所做的。

尤其重要且美妙的是, 撒母耳的角色是开启圣殿之门; 正如圣经所述, 他 "开了耶和华的殿门"。**这是第三个要点**, 直指良知的核心功能。良知的角色——确实是这样——就是为我们的生活打开通往更高、更深层次的大门。良知的作用就是为属灵流入属世铺平道路。就本质意义而言, 良知的作用就是让我们更接近主, 事实上, 为了进入与主的同在。

**请记住这一点:** 撒母耳的故事始于他作为一个脆弱的婴儿和易受伤的孩子。他需要呵护和保护。他的母亲每年为他做一件小外套 (撒母耳 2:19)。这揭示了两个我们需要了解的关于良知的真理:

首先, 良知最初在我们身上是脆弱且易受伤害的。它需要保护和培养。它极易被我们遗失。如果要让它生存并繁荣, 我们必须关心并照顾它。

其次, 良知会成长和发展。它并非一成不变。当我们成年后, 它并不同于我们童年时的样子。

既然良知如此关键, 并且发挥着这样一个至关重要的中心角色, 那么良知是如何形成的呢?

良知是通过我们所学习和接受的真理来获得启发并成长的, 当我们还是孩子的时候, 这些真理最初很简单, 随着我们的成长, 这些真理变得更深远, 与我们的生活联系也更紧密。

同样, 我们在他人身上看到的好的、激励人心的榜样, 以及深深影响我们的积极体验 (例如, 我们感到天堂近在眼前的时候), 也会滋养我们的良知。就让我们回想一下与这篇讲道相关的阅读: "一个人的良知是由他的宗教所赋予他的信念塑造的, 这取决于他对它们的接受程度。" (《属天的奥秘》9112 节) 当我们学习并接受新的属灵价值时, 我们的良知会得到加强。

In connection with times of war we hear and read about “conscientious objectors”. Associated with this is the belief is that such a conscience is not, therefore, to be challenged; that it is inviolable. But the greater truth is that Conscience **can** be explored with us or with another; modified and revised, in the light of greater understanding or a shift in our loves.

Arising out of this, too, is the fact that conscience is going to vary with people; from different backgrounds; in different cultures and religions; according to what people have been brought up to believe is good and true, right and proper. What one person, therefore, can happily do, you or I would, from conscience, be in turmoil about. But not them. And what we might do, untroubled by conscience, others from another upbringing and on the basis of *their* understanding of right and wrong, could recoil from.

There is a fascinating teaching in the Writings about overburdening conscience, as can happen. If we are not careful we can make certain things matters of conscience, which are not appropriately ascribed to it. For instance, social conventions, other externals and diet. If someone chooses to be a vegetarian this is not so much a matter of conscience, but a choice. It is not life or death, heaven or hell. But a genuine conscience, formed from the truths of the Word of God, is.

As was touched on earlier, there is often part of us that wants to quarrel with our conscience. And it is what we sometimes do. At our most exasperated or tested moments we wish we didn't know or remember one or other of the Commandments God gave through Moses or the values Jesus taught. Other people, we tell ourselves, don't seem to care, so why should we? But conscience is not our enemy. We need to embrace it as our friend; and as a life saving friend at that!

Let me just refer you here to Arcana Caelestia paragraph 8002, sub-section 2, where it reads, “*Conscience is the plane into which the angels flow and through which we have consort with them.*” This is amazing! Conscience is where we meet with the angels and they with us. To feel conscience is to know the angels active with us, having drawn closer to us than at other times.

And here is something to really hold on to: that however weak, relatively, the voice or pangs of conscience may be, it is nevertheless a sign that the angels have a foothold (tiny though it be) in our lives which, if not in this world, then in the next they would expand and develop.

Swedenborg wrote: “*If any one, by fighting against evils because they are sins, acquires for himself in the world something of spiritual life, even though very little, he is saved, and his uses afterwards increase, like mustard seed growing into a tree, according to the Lord's words in Matthew 13:32, etc.*”(From the book, “The Divine Love”, Section 17, paragraph 5)

有些人坚信良知是神的声音，它是准确无误的，不可改变，不可质疑。我们在战争的历史中，常常听说和阅读关于那些因良知拒绝服兵役的人。人们相信，这种良知是神圣的，不应受到质疑。然而，更深的真理是，我们的良知可以在深化理解或改变态度的过程中得到调整和修正。

这就引出了一个令人深思的事实：良知因人而异。我们的背景、文化和宗教信仰各不相同，我们所认为的善与真的、正当和适宜的事也因人而异。因此，一个人可能心安理得地做某件事，而你或我可能因为良知的指责而无法行动。同样，我们无愧疚地做的事情，对另一些人来说可能会引起内心的不安。

在著作中有一段有趣的教导，是关于良知的过度负担，这是可能发生的。如果我们不注意，可能会把不应属于良知的东西当作良知的负担，如社交习俗、外在事物以及饮食。如果有人选择素食，这并非是良知的问题，而更多是一种选择，它并不是生死、天堂或地狱的问题。然而，一个真正的良知，是根据神的圣言真理而形成的。

正如我们前面所谈到的，我们常常有一部分人希望与我们的良知争执；有时我们会这么做的。在我们最恼火或最受考验的时刻，我们希望自己不知道或不记得神通过摩西给我们的诫命或耶稣教导的价值。我们告诉自己，其他人似乎并不在乎，所以我们为什么要在乎呢？但是，良知并不是我们的敌人。我们需要把它当作朋友，而且是救命的朋友！

在此，我想引用《属天的奥秘》的一段话：“良知是天使流入的平台，通过它我们与他们有所交往。”这实在令人震惊！良知就是我们与天使相遇，他们与我们相遇的地方。感受良知就是感知到天使在我们身边起作用，他们比其他时候更加接近我们。

在这里，我想给大家留下一个值得深思的观点：无论良知的声音或良知的责备有多弱，它都是天使在我们生活中找到立足点（尽管这个立足点可能很小）的标志，如果不是在这个世界上，那么在来世，他们将扩大并发展这个立足点。

瑞登堡曾经写道：“如果有人，因为诸恶是罪而与恶斗争，在此世为自己获得了属灵生命的某些东西，即使非常少，他也能得救，他的功用随后会增加，就像芥菜种子生长成一棵树，正如主在马太福音 13:32 等地方所说的。”（来自书籍《圣爱》，第 17 节第 5 段）

We fight against evils because our conscience alerts us to the presence of some disorderly, sinful, thought that has come to us or feeling that is stirring us.

With regard to parental responsibility in the forming of conscience in their children this, too, needs to be noted:

Every parent, indeed all of us who have contact with children and the young, yearn for them to enjoy the happiest and most fulfilled life possible.

We seek to provide for them materially, understandable so. Grandparents will pay for School fees. We want the best education possible for them. Again, understandably!

We want our children to grow up, be fulfilled, well liked, happy and well-adjusted adults.

**In fact, though, it is those who have, and live from, a robust and healthy conscience who stand the best chance of living with integrity and self-respect, in peace and mind and serenity of spirit.**

*“Conscience” we read “regarded in itself is not any distress, but is a spiritual willingness to do what religion and faith dictate. Thus it is that with those who enjoy a conscience live in tranquil peace and inward blessedness.”* (True Christian Religion 666) Tranquil peace and inward blessedness. It’s actually what the name ‘Shiloh’ means, in Hebrew. Calmness and tranquility. It’s where the Lord revealed – and reveals! – Himself. Conscience, calmness, tranquility and the presence of the Lord are all linked beautifully together.

What - beyond this – could you really wish for, for a child? And so here is where our focus with them needs to be. It is the greatest gift we can work with the Lord to leave them with,

“Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

Amen

See  
1 Samuel Chapter 3  
Arcana Caelestia 9112, 9113, 9114 & 9120

我们抵抗邪恶，因为我们的良知时刻提醒着我们：有混乱的、有罪的思绪在我们心中生根，或者有某种情感在我们内心深处涌动。

对于父母在孩子心中培养良知方面的责任，同样需要被重视：

每位父母，实际上，任何一个与孩子和年轻人有接触的人，都深深期望他们能过上最快乐、最充实的生活。我们竭尽所能地在物质上满足他们，这是无可厚非的。祖父母会乐意承担学费，我们希望他们能接受最优质的教育，这也是出于人之常情。我们盼望孩子们能成长为拥有丰富人生、受人喜爱、内心快乐、成熟稳健的人。

**事实上，那些拥有并以坚定健康的良知为生活准则的人，才最有可能以诚实和自尊的态度生活，他们的内心平静，灵里安宁。**

我们读到，“良知”并非任何烦扰，而是一种愿意遵循宗教信仰指引的属灵愿望。因此，那些拥有良知，并依此生活的人才能在内心的平静和喜悦中生活。（《真实的基督教》666）平静和内心的喜悦，这就是希伯来语中“细罗”的含义，象征着平静安宁，这是主显现自己的地方——并且仍在显现！良知、平静、安宁和主的同在，这一切都以最美妙的方式交织在一起。

除此之外，你真的还能为孩子希望得到什么呢？因此，这就是我们与他们关注和聚焦的地方。这是我们可以与主合作，为他们留下的最大的礼物。

耶和華又在示羅显现；因为耶和華将自己的话默示撒母耳，撒母耳就把这耶和華的话向撒母耳显现。撒母耳的话传遍了以色列全地。

阿们！

参阅：撒母耳记上第三章

《属天的奥秘》第 9112, 9113, 9114 和 9120 节。