April 2, 2020 – Acquired and Real Conscience
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I've always loved our prayer said after the offering, "We dedicate these tithes and offerings to the victory of consciously chosen love in our lives and across our planet over the lie of separation and our useless acting out from fear."

**What is the lie of separation?**

* The lie of separation is the illusion that one is alone in the cosmos, cut off from God, other people, creation and one's true Self.
* When we feel cut off from *any* of these, we are cut off from *all* of these. And in truth, there is no separation *between* God, humanity, creation and one's true Self*.* All is One.

Tonight, we'll Work with that illusion of separateness within the body of Christ that:

* cuts humanity up into different pieces.
* Plays out in all the "-isms" – all the divisions that have plagued our human family for millennia: racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, able-ism, ageism and on and on.

Personally, I have been longing for our community to begin the important Work with these divisions – for my own sake (1st line Work), for the sake of my friends in the Work (2nd line Work) and for the sake of All (3rd line Work.) And then Peter courageously led us into Lent with the theme of "the lie of separation." He wisely reminded us that there is nothing outside of the Work and there is nothing that the Work can't handle.

And as Jeanne de Salzmann says about Fourth Way school, in her book *The Reality of Being,* "A basic principle of this school is always to do more than what ordinarily we can do. Only this will lead to change. If we do merely what is possible, we stay as we are. It is necessary to do the impossible."

We often remember the Work aphorism, "Man cannot do – woman cannot do," but we forget the rest of it: *as he is – as she is*. *As we are*, we cannot do, but for God, nothing is impossible. (Luke 1:37)

**If we consent to the higher influences of Centering Prayer and the Work, nothing is impossible.**

The Work ideas of Real Conscience and acquired conscience are perhaps the most appropriate doorways for us to begin to Work on the lie of separation as it manifests in the ways we *seem* to be cut off from one another. Today's email gives a pretty thorough explanation of Real Conscience and acquired conscience, but for those who haven't had a chance to read it, here is a thumbnail of the ideas.

**Real Conscience**

In the Work, when the word, "Real" is used, it signifies something higher that is possible for us as humans on the journey. It points to the truth of what we really are. Some other ones are: real aim, real imagination, Real Wish, Real Will and Real 'I.'

* It's inherent in us but is also called *buried conscience*, because it's submerged under all that is acquired.
* The Work will awaken Real Conscience eventually and once Real Conscience is awakened in us, Real Conscience serves the Work. (Third line Work)
* Once it is awakened, it is the same in everyone – no matter their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, social circle, political party, age, education, etc. So, if we had Real Conscience, the whole world could unite; we would all understand one another.
* Real Conscience leads to contact with higher centers.
* When we do anything from Real Conscience, from consciousness of ourselves – all parts of us – and what we are like, its action develops essence.
* *This is a really important point:* **Real Conscience doesn't have to do with perfection; it has to do with wholeness** – knowing all parts of ourselves and feeling all parts of ourselves (all the 'I's at all levels in the scale of consciousness.)
* Once awakened in us, we have a new orientation to everything and everyone, a new house, a new inner architecture. Our lives have different meaning. Nicoll gets very poetic, when speaking about it:

"When you raise yourself up through the influences of the Work you learn to touch the Earth differently. In fact, you come to the edge of the Earth where it meets the sea, and then, so to speak, you begin to live in a different medium, to sail above the Earth, to be in some vessel that is not of the Earth, a vessel that is real so that you suffer if you step out of it. This journey, this voyage, has been often represented in esoteric myths, and this is the best way of understanding what the form of second body means."

- Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries,* "Commentary on Inner Freedom," Mar. 3, 1945, Vol. 2, p. 636

**Acquired Conscience**

To make ourselves available to Real Conscience, we must learn about **acquired conscience** so that we can:

* observe it at work in us,
* non-identify with all of its manifestations
* and Self-remember.

This is known in the Work as purification of the emotional center.

**What is Acquired conscience?**

Acquired conscience is a vast collection of beliefs, judgments, biases and cultural associations, which, as is implied in the name, is not inherent in us, but is formed in each of us in early life. Everyone has an acquired conscience, though it is different in each of us, according to our upbringing, the time and place we were born and many other factors.

It's important to note that there are many, many parts of acquired conscience that are useful and worthy in our first education. (Ex. The idea that it is good to learn to read.) What the Work is concerned with are those inherited programs that are no longer useful and cause us suffering. To recognize these, here are some signposts that point to acquired conscience:

* Acquired conscience is concerned with morality and dualism. It makes us divide things and people into right and wrong, less than and greater than.
* It often concerns itself with what we want thought about us. It always self-justifies if we are found lacking in our own estimation or we are seen not living up to our façade, so it's related tofalse personality, pride and vanity.
* It can be based on fear – fear of consequences, loss of prestige, criticism, not living up to group expectations.
* The **programs for happiness**, as described by Fr. Keating – survival/security, affection/esteem and power/control – are a manifestation of acquired conscience. Fear is always present in the programs for happiness, for example:
	+ survival/security –"Something bad is going to happen to me; I'm going to die."
	+ power/control – "This is dangerous; I've got to control the situation."
	+ affection/esteem –"I'm all alone. Nobody loves me. I've got to be better, so they will."
* It thinks things and people should be different from what they are.
* Due to the action of **buffers** and **multiplicity**, one part of acquired conscience can be in direct opposition to another. Different 'I's can have different, contradictory wills. Ex:
	+ A young 'I', programmed by TV, may think all black people are criminals, so is afraid and self-protective when encountering black people.
	+ Another 'I', probably older, is enculturated with the belief that racism is a moral failing; it's bad and all racists are bad. This 'I' makes it difficult for us to us to acknowledge – or even become aware of – the earlier 'I.'
	+ Both 'I's are part of acquired conscience and we would want to observe, non-identify and Self-remember around both.
	+ We remember that the Work accuses us of nothing except for sleep.
* It is loud (the loudest "voice" in our head), based on crowd-mentality, inflexible and mechanical. (Real Conscience is quite different. It is quiet, individual, and new and fresh in each moment. It sees everything in its true light and so judges it differently in each case. It is relative, not absolute.)
* Acquired conscience evokes a chorus of "shoulds" for ourselves and others:
	+ Thinks things and people should be differentfrom what they are.
	+ Thinks *we* should be different from what we are. Wants to *fix* us – make us better.
	+ It objectifies people; sees others, not as whole human beings, but as means to get our own needs met.
* **All negative emotions are acquired.** The term **negative emotions** has a *very specific meaning* in the Work. I encourage you to read about them in the *Commentaries* or the Glossary.

"I have a right not to be negative."

- Work aphorism

"We always think our negative emotions are produced by the fault of other people or by the fault of circumstances. We always think that. Our negative emotions are in ourselves and are produced by ourselves. There is absolutely not a single unavoidable reason why somebody else's action or some circumstance should produce a negative emotion in me. It is only my weakness. No negative emotion can be produced by external causes if we do not want it. We have negative emotions because we permit them, justify them, explain them by external causes, and in this way we do not struggle with them. …"
- P.D. Ouspensky, [*The Fourth Way*](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/575306)

**A Scientific Understanding of Acquired Conscience**

We can look to the work of Bruce Lipton, author of *The Biology of Belief,* to get a scientific view of acquired conscience. Lipton isa stem cell biologist, who quit teaching at Harvard because what he was discovering in the lab went against what he was teaching.

* What he was discovering was that our genetic code is not fixed. And that our subconscious beliefs and attitudes recorded in our thoughts, our emotions and our moving center affect our very cells, indeed our very DNA.
* During the first six years of life the brain is in a state of a hypnagogic trance at the level of the EEG (the brain activity) and records experiences of the world, just like a tape recorder, with no faculty of verifying or discerning the truth nuance of the information that is being recorded. Work students can recognize the overlap between this idea and Nicoll's description of impressions being recorded on gramophone records.
* This is a very important part of nature’s plan for a new participant coming into the world because it allows the dominant program – language, behavior etc. – to be downloaded. **Like personality, acquired conscience is not a bad thing.** It can be integral to the first education. As we traverse the spiritual journey however, we realize the limitations and suffering caused by many aspects of acquired conscience.
* The mind runs the biology but the important thing to recognize is that there are two parts to the mind, the conscious and the subconscious. (A Work student would say what is conscious and what is obscured to us – in the darkness.)
* Neuroscientists have revealed that the conscious mind only operates at best about five percent of the day. Ninety five percent or more of the time (for most people ninety nine percent) we run our lives from the automatic processor, the subconscious mind. The Work would say, 95 to 99% of the day, we're asleep, mechanical, running from the dominant program.

How do we Work with *the lie of separation* as it's manifested in our unconscious? How do we begin to release the frozen patterns of racism, sexism – all othering – in service to being more whole, more free?

**The Light and the Truth**

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."*

John 3: 19-21 New International Version

***\*\*\*This is a very important point:* Real Conscience doesn't have to do with perfection; it has to do with wholeness** – with consciousness of all parts of ourselves – and what we are like.

* This is **consciousness and conscience**, knowing all together and feeling altogether.
* We're not trying to *change* ourselves; we wish to *know* ourselves *fully*. As we become aware of beliefs and/or negative emotions around the beliefs (believing the -isms and/or judging them), we:
	+ Non-critically self-observe in all three centers.
	+ Non-identify. Remember, we can feel the feeling and sensation, while at the same time non-identifying.
	+ Self-remember – "I am a child of God." "I am loved unconditionally."

**\*It's important to remember that the operating system of the dominant paradigm (acquired conscience) is downloaded into all of us from the very beginning. So, without question, patterns of racism and sexism can play out in people of color and women, manifesting in unacknowledged beliefs of unworthiness and accompanying negative emotions, as well as *reactions* to the oppressive paradigm and accompanying negative emotions. We can Work.**

* "[If] you cannot **tell the truth to yourself** you cannot get beyond the sphere of the Imaginary 'I' and the false personality which cannot give you any inner development. **So it is not a moral question but a practical one.** **If we begin to see more now the falsities in our past lives we begin to alter them in the past. We can see lies in the past, but we only see them through work on ourselves in the present**. If our observation of ourselves has become increased now in the present and we begin to see all sorts of false attitudes, false intonations, false ways of conceiving of our own value, false blaming, etc., we are mercifully able to see the same things having operated in the past. That is, we change the past from the present moment of work, because life is a compact thing lying coiled up in ourselves."

- Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries,* "The Doctrine of 'I's," Feb. 3, 1945, Vol. 2, p. 609

* We can ask for help from God and **Work with memory** to change the past. With incidents in our past, with ourselves, with our parents and grandparents who said things, did things that we witnessed, etc. EXAMPLE: You remember bullying or treating someone badly when you were younger and you see that it was due to fear or an -ism:
	+ You can go back to yourself (or the loved one who perpetrated the hurt) in that moment and be for them a member of the Conscious Circle of Humanity. Embrace them, tell them they are loved and that they have a basic core of goodness. That everything turned out alright and that all is well.
	+ To the person that you (or another) hurt due to unconsciousness, you can do the same. Embrace them, tell them they are loved and that they have a basic core of goodness. Say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you."
	+ Or use the Forgiveness Prayer with the people involved.
	+ These are just examples of how we can Work with memory. Your wish and the Holy Spirit will show you the way. The Work would call this *real imagination* or *right use of imagination.*

**Homework:**

* Begin to observe acquired conscience as it manifests the lie of separation in both the -isms and the demonization of the -isms. In the light of the Work, we can ask ourselves, "Instead of pointing the finger at others, how can I **externally consider** and see the same pattern as it has played out in myself?" This **understanding** can initiate a process of whole-making and Self-remembering.
* Using real imagination, Work with memory to heal the past.

**Work with De-Light**

"Perhaps this is the original human story of tragedy: that we are granted divine life and we are still flawed. But this is what being human entails – we are beings who stand at the juncture of Heaven and Earth, wisdom and ignorance, love and despair. We have to honor both, by having compassion for our foibles and by our willingness to be transformed.

"More than anything, the monastic personality needs to experience mercy and compassion for one's self. Because of a native sensitivity, this type of personality can be excessively self-critical, viewing one's sins with a magnifying glass. It is thus necessary that we experience humor and gentleness, and grant to ourselves the love that the divine has for us."

Beverly Lanzetta, *The Monk Within*

**Prayer for our Work –** Adapted from a quotation from Thomas Keating's *Invitation to Love*

*God – help us to non-identify from our preconceived ideas by enlightening us from within by the contemplative gifts of the Spirit. Through the infusion of … light and the assurance of … love, [let] us in on our weaknesses and deficiencies – not to overwhelm us with discouragement, but to encourage us to entrust ourselves completely to [Your] infinite mercy.*

*Amen.*

**Closing Reading from Mary Anne:**

“One unit of positiveness reflects one hundredfold, but one unit of negativeness reflects a thousandfold. When reflected, each is magnified. That is why, when we turn negativeness into positiveness, the result is two thousandfold.” …

“We are connected with everyone whom we have met, or talked to, or felt, because we have given them part of ourselves – our irradiations. It is not performance but irradiations that matter. Our reactions are physical.

- Rodney Collin, *The Mirror of Light*, p. 3

*Now I give you a new commandment: love one another.*

*As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.*

*This is how all will know that you are my disciples, you have love for one another.*

- John 13:34-35