



Where Justice and Truth Meet

September 2022

"Free our heart to recognize and attend to Christ in hidden and unexpected places." – A Prayer for the Life of the World

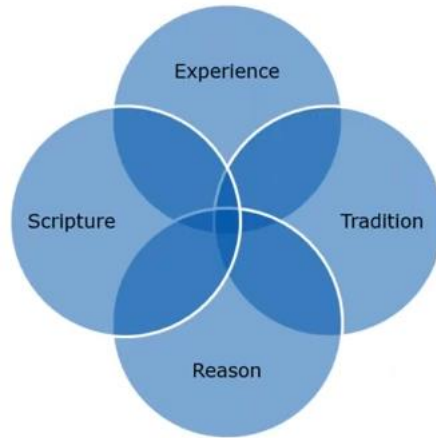
The Formation of Conscience

occurs in the intersection or relationship of these four elements: experience, tradition, scripture and reason.

In our last issue we explained the importance of forming relationships and of being aware of the context for the formation of our conscience. Relationships and context belong to the area of our daily life **Experience**. Listening to the experience of LGBTQ+ persons sharing about their own identity is crucial. When we listen to peoples' stories, we go beyond what is written or already stated. Thus, we broaden our understanding.

During our conversations for the Synod on Synodality, many of us agreed on the experience level. Why are LGBTQ+ persons singled out in the church? We know that many married couples have decided in their consciences about using birth control in some form. Why are they not singled out? Because we KNOW them. Church leaders say they know that couples are struggling with their consciences on this issue in the complexity of their lives. We don't afford LGBTQ folks the same consideration. Here we offer some powerful stories, the experience of [Sister Mary Kay](#); [Anne and Mary](#); [Christine Z.](#) (first 15 mins.)

What to say about **Scripture**? The Bible is undeniably subject to historicity. Not recognizing the historical and cultural context can lead to misinterpretation of a text such as "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an



abomination" in the Holiness Code of the book of Leviticus. This text and others must be understood within a context that considered this behavior a waste of the "seed" that only the males provided, since the female simply provided the ground. Also, such action carried dishonor for the passivity of the one male who was penetrated like a female. In addition, the Hebrew term translated as "abomination" (*to-ebah*) is closer in meaning to "chaos" (*tohu-bohu*) found in the book of Genesis 1.¹

In the gospels we read stories that the apostles handed over to a third generation of Christians about Jesus' life, teaching and outreach. In these stories we find Jesus in conversation with people who are at the margins, such as a Roman centurion, the Samaritan woman at the well, and Zacchaeus. To go deeper into these stories, watch [Conscience Formation Series: James Martin, S.J. on Discernment and the LGBTQ Community](#) starting at 20:00 to 32:00

When we address **Tradition**, it is important to remember that Church teaching is not just a book but a person. We hear the

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comment that teaching about LGBTQ is against Church teaching. We must go to a deeper level of church teaching, beyond the catechism. In *Dei Verbum* # 8 we find:

"This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down."

¹ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person. Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, 217-226.

Reason includes what we have learned and lived and discerned. Discernment for the formation of our conscience is closely linked to what happens in prayer. The Holy Spirit is at work in each person. God the creator can deal directly with us.

We find very liberating paragraphs in Gaudium et Spes #16:

In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of [people] in the search for truth...

In the depths of ... conscience, *humankind* detects a law which it does not impose upon itself, but which holds it to obedience.

Always summoning [a person] to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to [the] heart: do this, shun that...

For [humankind] has in [its] heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of [humankind]; according to it will [a person] be judged. (Cf. Rom. 2:15-16) Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a [person.] There [the person] is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in [the] depths. (Cf. Pius XII, radio address on the correct formation of a Christian conscience in the young, March 23, 1952: AAS (1952), p. 271.)

Land Acknowledgement

Maybe some of you have been at a meeting recently that started with acknowledging the native inhabitants who cared for the land that the group or speaker was now on.

This practice is what we've come to know as Land Acknowledgement—a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

It is important to note that this kind of acknowledgement is not a new practice developed by colonial institutions. It is a traditional custom dating back centuries for many Native communities and nations. For non-Indigenous communities, land acknowledgment is a powerful way of showing respect and of resisting Indigenous histories being erased.

At its heart, land acknowledgment is about relationship, right relationship with our past, right relationship with the peoples who have been so grievously wronged, right relationship with the land we currently occupy. To recognize the land **is** an expression of appreciation to those on whose territory we reside and honoring the Indigenous people who lived and worked on the land from time immemorial.

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Between 1776 and 1890, the United States seized over 1.5 billion acres from America's Indigenous people by treaty and executive order. Viewing this video helps one see the progression and extent of this land transfer.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJxrtZfG2bo>

There was often intimidation, bribery and misrepresentation. People were forcibly removed or killed as part of government policy. In desperate times, Indians signed away their homes in order to feed themselves and their families.

In 1855, Suquamish Chief Seattle signed a treaty that transferred the Indian lands to the federal government in exchange for a reservation in the Northwest. The alternative, he believed, was the extinction of his people.

Tragically, any of the Indian nations with land today were forced into less-valuable areas, which often excluded them from key sectors of the U.S. economy. Present-day tribal lands are often more at risk from climate change than the tribes' historical areas.

We are aware of the need for study, research, and reflection to make any acknowledgement meaningful. Here are two resources to guide us.
<https://native-land.ca/>
<https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>