

# CONSCIENCE & CONFIRMATION

## Guardini's Theology & Implications for Sacramental Preparation

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*Prompt: In Conscience, Guardini describes Confirmation as the sacrament of conscience.*

*What implications might this have for preparing people for confirmation?*

### **Introduction: Confirmation, Conscience, and the Christian Vocation**

Guardini sees a profound connection between conscience and the Sacrament of Confirmation. He writes: “And let us not forget that there is a Sacrament of the Christian Conscience—Confirmation.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout his work, Guardini plays so beautifully with the push and pull of the human experience within which the human person is both called to action and called to introspection. The thoughtful Christian realizes these must go hand-in-hand. Much of Guardini's work *Conscience* focuses on conscience as the medium between the physiological human experience and the metaphysical realities of the creator God. In order to see how Confirmation could be this (singular) sacrament of conscience, as Guardini claims, this paper examines Guardini's swirling and provocative musings on the matter in his 1932 work *Conscience*, bolstering them with the Church's 'official' perspectives on Conscience and Confirmation from the Catechism.

“In Confirmation we are declared of age in the Kingdom of God—the blow on the cheek is after all the old legal symbol of the emancipation of the adult from tutelage. And the gifts of the Holy Ghost are given to us in order that in the world we may have and may practice responsibility for the Kingdom of God.”<sup>2</sup> We see already a connection between interior metaphysical realities and the call to action:

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<sup>1</sup> Guardini, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the Holy Ghost is that interior reality that Confirmation ‘makes real,’ and the responsibility we have and practice is that action that each of us is called to in our own particular ways.<sup>3</sup> Guardini is careful to note that each individual has distinct responsibilities based on their personalities and areas of giftedness. He does, however, strongly suggest that each thoughtful Christian is called to an interior life that sustains and supports his or her Christian activity in the world. We will continue to see this as we work through Guardini’s work.

The ultimate goal of this endeavor is to see what implications Guardini’s thought on Conscience might have for sacramental preparation as young people or new Catholics approach their Confirmation. Essentially, we will see that an entering into Guardinian thought can lead every thoughtful human being to a more integrated, metaphysically aware, life-giving, and enchanted ‘way of life’ and ‘vision of reality.’

## **The Good**

Guardini roots his understanding of conscience in the notion of the Good. “We must allow the innermost element within us to speak. And that element knows that *the Good exists*.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of the Good is something that Guardini will return to again and again, and its power for re-enchanting the modern world is rather obvious. The modern society is not coerced into practicing religion. There is an incredible anti-religious momentum in many subsets of modern society, and a suspicion of organized religion that is becoming more and more engrained in the general socio-cultural sense of reality and truth. In the midst of this, the realization that each human being with a well-formed sense of reason, being attentive to the desire to be good and take care of others, can appreciate the natural human call to goodness. Despite variations in what people understand as “the Good” and differences in ability regarding actualizing the Good, the point stands from a rational perspective: each human being has a propensity to pursue and a calling to realize the Good. Most modern people can get on board with this, even if they do not subscribe to organized religion.

Conscience is not something that we choose to have. “Now this Good does not hover vaguely somewhere in remote and inaccessible space. It is in contact with me; it touches me. There exists in

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<sup>3</sup> “Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of the truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.” (Catechism ¶1777)

<sup>4</sup> Guardini, 23.

me something which responds to the Good, as the eye responds to light—*Conscience*.”<sup>5</sup> Guardini suggests that this conscience is something that we cannot escape. It is within us whether we want it to be or not. *It* contacts *us* of its own accord, despite our hardness of heart and obstinacy. It communicates with us in a way that transcends language and rhetoric, that exists in this space somewhere near the core of our being. It is so integral to our humanity that the thoughtful human being, arguably, is proud and happy to possess one. By it we are gratefully enabled to participate in society in ways that can be life-giving for ourselves and for others. By it we realize higher desirable habits and abilities, like empathy, love, care, and selflessness.

We are already seeing the lines begin to blur between the thoughtful Christian and the thoughtful human being. “Again, it is imperative to force a way through a maze of social, psychological, and historical inaccuracies, to the elementary fact that *conscience exists*.”<sup>6</sup> The modern world is able to see at once the rich perspectives from across disciplines and epistemologies. Yet, despite these various lenses and hermeneutical approaches, there is something that every discipline seems to be able to agree on, which is that we possess a conscience that is malleable, educatable, and good.

*“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God... His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.”*<sup>7</sup>

Not every discipline may articulate conscience’s relationship to the Good in the same way as the theologian. Guardini outlines it very carefully, perhaps rather vaguely, in this way: “What is [the Good]?... The living Good touches my conscience.”<sup>8</sup> It does not force itself upon the conscience. It is not always perfectly lucid. However, there is a ‘touching’ that occurs, as though the two are adjacent in this realm of things unseen. Humans have an intuition, an urging, a gut-feeling, and these ways of sensing ought not be ignored or dismissed. However, it can be hard to pin down or clearly articulate.

Part of the complexity of understanding the Good is that it has a dual nature, which Guardini puts into words for us. It is, at once, infinitely simple yet comprised of infinite content. “Infinity of content is part of the very nature of the Good. Yet at the same time the Good is wholly simple... Our glance

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<sup>5</sup> Guardini, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Guardini, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Catechism ¶1776 (quoting *Gaudium et Spes*).

<sup>8</sup> Guardini, 28.

is lost amid the fullness of its content, and its simplicity causes the content to escape the eye.”<sup>9</sup> It is complex. It is simple. This situation is straightforward on the surface, yet complex as one gathers a more in-depth picture. The body of the duck glides smoothly along the surface of the water, while the feet paddle furiously below. The whole activity and being of the duck are organized, unambiguous, and straightforward, but trying to imagine and interpret each breath, movement, thought, and plan of the duck from this moment forward is daunting and impossible. The Good is like this, constantly under observation by the conscience, and the conscience is constantly perceiving it and using these continual perceptions to shape and imagine a more accurate, more nuanced picture of the Good.

### **The Good & Action | The Moral Landscape | Conscience as ‘A Sacramental’ | The Situation**

Knowledge of the Good ought not to be divorced from action.<sup>10</sup> “*The Good which requires to be realized, develops clearly from what on each occasion has to be done.*”<sup>11</sup> Guardini continues this line of thinking throughout his work. He is fairly vague and theoretical about what these actions are. This lack of concrete recommendations is actually a service to the reader. The thoughtful Christian is invited to think more about a ‘way of being’ as opposed to a ‘list of rules’ to memorize and abide by with rote execution. The true Christian approach is not one of miserably following the strictest interpretation of the letter of the law, but of living thoughtfully and intentionally in the world that God has created with eyes wide open to the needs of the communities and societies we find ourselves in.

Guardini discusses the modern, disenchanting moral landscape in terms of a disintegration and a sort of poverty. “The moral disintegration of our age is largely due to the fact not that the moral task is felt to be too arduous, but that it is viewed as too paltry, with a bored and unspiritual eye.”<sup>12</sup> Again, the way to think of our Christian obligation is not as a list of rules, but as the pursuit of thoughtful imitation of Christ in every relationship and community we find ourselves in. This is not a lackadaisical, subjectively derived vocation. Rather, it is exciting, challenging, thought-provoking, deeply life-giving, and the most integrated approach a human being can find and undertake. “The fulfilment of the Good, therefore, means real creation; not a mere carrying out of a rule, but the creative realization of

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<sup>9</sup> Guardini, 28.

<sup>10</sup> C.f. “In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord’s Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.” —Catechism ¶1785.

<sup>11</sup> Guardini, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Guardini, 31.

something which does not as yet exist. Our moral life is becoming impoverished because it is becoming a mere matter of routine.”<sup>13</sup> The thoughtful Christian must not routinize their existence and activity. At each moment, he ought to allow his conscience to sense the Good, and let this conscience have full imaginative agency. He is ready and prepared to creatively respond to the demands of the situation that God places him in.

When the thoughtful Christian takes action based on the recommendations of his conscience, heaven and earth are brought together in some way. “Moral action is concerned, therefore, with making humanly real that which is not yet thus real; with giving an earthly form to the Eternal and Infinite.”<sup>14</sup> Guardini’s language indicates something about the nature of executing the conscientious imperative: that when the conscience touches the Good and informs the actions of the thoughtful, introspective human being, a sacrament occurs. The seven Sacraments are these efficacious signs to mankind of God’s presence, love, and realness to us. They are a marriage of divine and human realities; divine phenomena occur veiled in tangible, humble ‘fruits of earth.’ In some fascinating way, adherence to the mandates of the well-formed conscience achieve something similar. “Conscience, therefore, is the point where the Eternal enters time. It is the birthplace of history. ‘History,’ which means something very different from a natural process, is kindled in the conscience. History means that through a free act on the part of a human being, the Eternal comes to pass in time.”<sup>15</sup> There is a collision of the temporal and the eternal that fascinates and fulfills the human. We have a desire for our eternal home, and catching these glimpses of it sustains us in the middle of our sojourn through a world that is no doubt full of beauty and goodness, but which we ultimately hope to leave for the joy of being one with God who is Love and who has loved us into being in the first place. The further we follow this Guardian vein of thought, the more of a distinction we begin to see between what the thoughtful human being desires and what the disenchanting world is able to give. The conscience that guides us toward goodness cannot reconcile all that our hearts desire with the severe limits of a world whose goods are not open to sacramental interpretation or use.

The thoughtful human, recognizing this incongruity, begins searching for a way forward through the position he finds himself in. Throughout his work, Guardini describes the shifting position that man finds himself in. Moment to moment—the thoughtful Christian finds himself in ‘a situation’ that

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<sup>13</sup> Guardini, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Guardini, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Guardini, 39.

makes distinct demands of the human conscience and activity. The situation is the context within which the conscience peers longingly to find the Good and make proper moral maneuvers accordingly. “The world is always incomplete. It is always meeting us in the shape of the situation, in order that we may fill up those things that are wanting in it by moral action, by moulding the Good out of it.”<sup>16</sup> There is something truly lacking the world, and the thoughtful Christian begins to see this and search for an explicitly divine solution. And suddenly, the profound truth begins to present itself: it is a loving and good God who has placed the conscience within each of us, and when we utilize this amazing gift, we not only perceive the Good, but we also perceive Him who created and loves us. “The positive law of God, and the instruction of the authority appointed by God, guide us.”<sup>17</sup> It is God who situates all of these things, and it is his law that comprises the Good and tugs at our consciences to undertake necessary action.

### **Continual Conscientious Development**

*“The dignity of the human person implies and requires uprightness and moral conscience.”<sup>18</sup>*

Our understanding of conscience ought not be too narrow, too close-minded, too feeble. Guardini makes bold claims about the scope of conscience and the extent to which it must build bridges between the thoughtful human being and all other men and communities.

[Conscience’s] sight must be open to embrace the situation in all its fullness, to see people as they are, to attend to pertinent circumstances, and those demands which call for consideration. It must rid itself of obscurities, obstructions, and all straying afield. More and more deeply must that candour penetrate, which is capable of seeing, because it genuinely desires to see. The situation, in all its objective multiplicity, must be grasped and interpreted in the light of its ultimate significance.<sup>19</sup>

The conscience never stops ‘learning.’<sup>20</sup> The conscience is not a machine that memorizes and catalogues every possibility and instantly retrieves the proper data and observations for all future

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<sup>16</sup> Guardini, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Guardini, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Catechism ¶1780.

<sup>19</sup> Guardini, 43.

<sup>20</sup> C.f. “The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults.” —Catechism ¶1784.

situations at the flip of a switch. Rather, conscience abides by a more organic, human series of processes. “Conscience is the organ by which I look out upon the Good from the ceaselessly shifting situation.”<sup>21</sup> The image of ‘organ’ is so deeply and intrinsically tied to the human body. We are not automatons who behave always according to prescribed principles with machine-like exactitude. Such an existence would seriously frustrate the notion of free will and freedom to behave as one pleases.<sup>22</sup> Rather, we are mortal beings sealed with the divine image of God and possessing a soul that exists on a distinct plane from the physical realm. We are not coerced or forced to make this or that decision. Rather, we are given complete agency to do what we want to do, to be who we want to be.

It is remarkable that we choose the Good at all, but this is part of the mysterious working of God in and through us via the gift of the conscience. Through our conscience-informed actions, we bring God into the world. We bring eternity into temporality. “It means a fashioning of the eternally Good amid the flux of time; a bringing forth of infinite simplicity in the circumscribed form of action.”<sup>23</sup> Human beings, in a fascinating and enchanting way, are capable of bringing the metaphysical into the physical, bringing God into the world. In each human, God dwells and reveals himself to us and those around us. This is the first and foremost form of our ‘breaking in’. The second is the Sacraments, through which God communicates tangible signs of his grace to his people.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Sacraments’ Guidance**

The Sacraments guide us when conscience falters. Amidst the ambiguities of the ‘situations’ we find ourselves in, the Sacraments remain consistent, practical, and ritual. “Modern psychology has shown how deeply the apprehension of an object is influenced by unconscious desires. The valuation of standards, the grasping of distinctions, the sense of what is imperative and what is less imperative, of what is primarily important and what is less so—all this is subject to similar influences.”<sup>25</sup> There are currents within each of us, shaped by our socio-psychological experiences. The conscience develops within this context, and (as we have said before) never stops learning from its environment.<sup>26</sup> There

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<sup>21</sup> Guardini, 47.

<sup>22</sup> “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions.” —Catechism ¶1782.

<sup>23</sup> Guardini, 48.

<sup>24</sup> “The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.” —Catechism ¶1288 (quoting Paul VI’s *Divinae Consortium Naturae*).

<sup>25</sup> Guardini, 51.

<sup>26</sup> C.f. “The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.” —Catechism ¶1783.

must, however, exist outside of the self some sign or symbol to the thoughtful human that he is ‘on the right track,’ and these signs are the Sacraments.

The Sacraments keep us from drawing too far inward, ignoring the true voice and calling of God for us. Guardini concerns himself with the dangerous scenario of a hyper-internal focus. “If we look more closely, we shall see that obviously we are falling into a circle—into the *circle of Self*, which entangles itself in itself.”<sup>27</sup> The urges of the mind and the desires of the heart can, in fact, mislead the thoughtful human being. Guardini does note that the conscience—this sacramental within us through which God points us toward the Good, introducing Himself into our temporality—does in fact help us parse through our erroneous or misguided thoughts and desires. “By my conscience I am to grasp what is right, even when the right goes contrary to my own wish.”<sup>28</sup> There is a distinction between the longings of the heart, the musings of the mind, and the urgings of the conscience, and it is essential that the thoughtful human abide by the lattermost. The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist are these ongoing encounters with Jesus that each of us are afforded. They are integral to the authentic shaping of the conscience according to his divine will.<sup>29</sup> The thoughtful Christian, after years of regular Eucharistic reception, cannot help but desire that the promises of God be sealed within him. He wishes that the conscience be sealed within him, lodged in his breast. He wishes that the God he loves and receives and confesses to might be ever present in every action, at every moment. He wishes for a specific sacrament: Confirmation.

Confirmation seals the conscience, the voice of God, within the Christian. At this point, it is now impossible to divorce the Good from the Divine. Guardianian thought no longer makes a distinction between ‘good things’ and ‘divine things.’ He exclaims: “*The Good is the holiness of the living God!*”<sup>30</sup> The thoughtful human who has not been brought up in a religious household may take years, decades, or a lifetime to finally see this, but this is available to every human being by virtue of their intellect and sense of reason. It is the earnest hope and prayer of each Christian that every un-professed human on earth might come to this realization, which then leads to a sincere and earnest desire for full initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Each of us wishes for a sealed, well-guided conscience. “God is

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<sup>27</sup> Guardini, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Guardini, 52.

<sup>29</sup> “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.” —Catechism ¶1778.

<sup>30</sup> Guardini, 53.



real, the unconditionally Real, and He will not leave Himself without witness in the conscience of the man who approaches Him honestly.”<sup>31</sup> As thoughtful Christians and non-Christians open themselves to the work of their consciences, God speaks. God speaks to each his or her vocation.<sup>32</sup>

In an enchanting way, we realize God is truly speaking to us within the quiet of our hearts. “This, however, means that God embraces us, surrounds us, penetrates us. He stands within our inmost being where our being inwardly borders on nothingness, is God’s Hand, upholding us. Then He speaks to us.”<sup>33</sup> This speaking occurs within the silence of our hearts but cannot be fully realized outside the context of the Christian community, outside the Church. Guardini speaks directly to the need for us to participate in the Body of Christ: “The collective relation, however, is maintained by the living God, out of His eternal knowledge and eternal love.”<sup>34</sup> The ‘collective relation’ of mankind to God ought not be dismissed. It is in the context of this community that we begin to see so many things: not just an imagining of the communion of saints here on earth, but also the working of the consciences of other sealed Christians at work in their various situations. Each Christian is like a mirror from which the light of Christ emanates; when mirrors stand in the same space, they reflect the light from one to another to another, until the room is filled. Education of the mind works in the same way: the thoughtful student learns and imitates the thoughtful teacher. The cultivating of the heart works in this way: the child learns from his parents how to give and receive authentic love.

Guardini says the voice of God speaks to us in both internal (i.e. conscience) and external modes (i.e. Christian community, the situation). “God speaks in both—from within, in the urging of conscience; from without, in the arrangement of things.”<sup>35</sup> The task of the thoughtful human is to find for himself the way to respond to his conscience and respond to the situation in such a way that he ‘agrees’ with God. “If a man grasps this and wills it; if he aims at it; if he takes it into himself as the unquestionable determinant of his life, then out of this will develop something wonderful: no other than the mystery of conscience—*Agreement with God*.”<sup>36</sup> At the Confirmation Liturgy, the candidates stand and orate their assent to the creed of the Church before the whole community. In this moment they do not fully

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<sup>31</sup> Guardini, 57.

<sup>32</sup> “Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notions of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise... [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.” —Catechism ¶1778 (quoting Newman’s “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk”).

<sup>33</sup> Guardini, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Guardini, 59.

<sup>35</sup> Guardini, 60.

<sup>36</sup> Guardini, 61.

know what this means or what it will look like. They cannot anticipate the situations that will befall them going forward. Nevertheless, they commit to the striving. Each Confirmed Christian strives to agree with God. They have nodded their assent; their consciences are sealed within them, and God speaks to them therein.

### **The Interior Life | Grace**

Only once Confirmed can the thoughtful human being be truly and most fundamentally himself. When we are being who God calls us to be, we are good. Only once Confirmed can we truly sense the Good with our conscience and begin to execute it in our world. At this point, each of us enters into an intimately personal relationship with Jesus. Guardini notes that each of us have a unique relationship with and calling from God. “Ultimately one man cannot be replaced by another, because he is a personality.”<sup>37</sup> We are each a member of the Body of Christ, and now a fully initiated one. The Holy Spirit fills us with grace and gifts to undertake the work that God calls us to. “Man’s appearance before the face of God leads to interior sincerity.”<sup>38</sup> Our interior has become sincere; we are enabled to enter into harmonious dialogue with God through the mediation of our ever-developing consciences. Herein, he speaks to us, calls to us, comforts us, and instructs us.

The gifts that we receive from the Holy Spirit are suited to the particular ‘avenue of holiness’ that God calls someone to.<sup>39</sup> “And the situation, by which the Good partitions itself, is an ordinance of this same God, Who urges upon the heart His demand that it shall accept and fulfil within itself the Good that is His holiness.”<sup>40</sup> It is no longer our own goodness that we draw from in our human activity of love. Rather it is God’s goodness. *His* holiness is what our conscience touches.<sup>41</sup> The interior life of the Christian is enriched by a deep and profound knowledge of God that stems from our relationship with Him and attentiveness to our conscience.<sup>42</sup> “This knowledge of God, this knowledge of what lies between Him and myself alone, this process by which I become intelligible to myself before Him, is

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<sup>37</sup> Guardini, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Guardini, 70.

<sup>39</sup> “Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.”  
—Catechism ¶1287.

<sup>40</sup> Guardini, 73.

<sup>41</sup> “By Confirmation Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off ‘the aroma of Christ’.”  
—Catechism ¶1294.

<sup>42</sup> “It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience.” —Catechism ¶1779.

conscience in its supreme religious depth.”<sup>43</sup> We ‘become intelligible’ to *ourselves* only once we attend to this interior life with God. This is an enchanting and inspiring realization for the thoughtful human.

The individual knows himself and his vocation in the situation because of the conscience sealed within him. “I, as he whom God has named, have my own task to perform in His world. And I shall only become that particular individual by doing God’s Will in my regard. I am however constantly meeting this Will afresh in the situation.”<sup>44</sup> It is God’s Will that we strive to execute. “Holiness”, “God’s Will”, “the Good” are all conceptually similar according to Guardini (if not one in the same). The thoughtful human knows this. The Christian knows it consciously from his Christian commitment. The non-Christian knows it subconsciously from his intuition: he senses that there must be a deeper reality, an enchanted world, metaphysical agents at play. The non-Christian has not yet been sealed. He is not yet fully integrated. He has not connected the will of his conscience to the Will of God in the fully authentic way that Christ ordained through the ministers of His Church. Of course, grace can still act in and through the conscientious actions of any human: “Real perfection of conscience, viewed from the natural standpoint, is *a matter of growth and of experience*; viewed from the standpoint of faith, it is *the work of grace*.”<sup>45</sup> Grace comes to us through sacramentals and Sacraments, and (as Guardini has so thoughtfully articulated throughout) the conscience within is a sort of sacramental. Even the unbaptized can experience and exude grace, but the thoughtful human wonders “Am I not called to more than this? Is there not a more enchanted world than the one I am able to see right now?”

## **Confirmation | Talents**

Here we arrive squarely at Confirmation as the Sacrament that tugs continually at the human conscience.<sup>46</sup> “And let us not forget that there is a Sacrament of the Christian Conscience—Confirmation. In Confirmation we are declared of age in the Kingdom of God—the blow on the cheek is after all the old legal symbol of the emancipation of the adult from tutelage. And the gifts of the Holy Ghost are given to us in order that in the world we may have and may practice responsibility for the Kingdom of God.”<sup>47</sup> Guardini explicitly connects all that he has discussed so far—the Good, the conscience touching this Good, the Will of God, the call to action, the gifts of the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>43</sup> Guardini, 75.

<sup>44</sup> Guardini, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Guardini, 76.

<sup>46</sup> “By the Sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” —Catechism ¶1285 (quoting *Lumen Gentium*).

<sup>47</sup> Guardini, 78.

participation in the Body of Christ—under the umbrella of Confirmation. This Sacrament solidifies who we are called to be, the direction we are called to go. We are sealed in such a way that we can now sense the voice of God properly. We acquiesce to God’s calling out to us through conscience. The demand that Confirmation makes on the Christian is to connect the interior life to the external vocation. “We must do our duty, come to an understanding with the situation, and satisfy it to the best of our ability. We must keep ourselves open to experience, and live our life honestly and well.”<sup>48</sup> Confirmation really and tangibly prepares us to undertake our vocation in and to the world.

*“Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with this sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.”<sup>49</sup>*

The Holy Spirit is the agent that moves through us in action. The Triune God is that which touches our conscience: “the whole multiplicity of man’s powers are rallied around a single inward centre; that all actions proceeds from a starting-point, and later returns to it by ways which are often devious.”<sup>50</sup> The Spirit is that which responds to that encounter with God in some form of concrete action. The Spirit enables us to carry out the work that God is calling each of us to:<sup>51</sup> “The Spirit—that which differs from material things, differs from the purely physical, differs from the mere life of emotion, that which stands in special relation to the Good, to what must be, to truth, to love, to purity, to God—grows in strength within us. Upon the growth of all this in man our value as human beings depends.”<sup>52</sup> God gives to some five talents, to some two talents, to some one talent. Our value as human beings is not dependent on how many talents we have, but how many more we garner from what we have been given. (*Recall that in the Scriptures it is the fellow who buries his talent that is indicted.*) The talents we have are from God; the Spirit moves within us to produce more, each in accord with capability.

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<sup>48</sup> Guardini, 78.

<sup>49</sup> Catechism ¶1303 (quoting Ambrose’s *De Myst*).

<sup>50</sup> Guardini, 83.

<sup>51</sup> “Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit—his actions, his gifts, and his biddings—in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community.” —Catechism ¶1309.

<sup>52</sup> Guardini, 84.

## Recollection | Solitude & Silence | Action

The final segments of Guardini's *Conscience* are focused on tidying up the relationship between recollection and action. "Much more might be said on the subject. But we have now to go further and deeper—there are *solitude* and *silence*."<sup>53</sup> The thoughtful human ought not busy himself so much that he cannot hear his conscience. He ought to find a balance between the activity of Mary and that of Martha. He must live in the present moment, and properly perceive it in an activity known as recollection. "We create a present; we pause and become present—present in ourselves. Realization of the 'Now' (so far as this is granted at all to our transitoriness), at least in accordance with the purpose and trend of significance of our attitude; living the peaceful present—that is recollection."<sup>54</sup>

Recollection must be married to action. "We must not, however, allow ourselves to be discouraged. Let us be quite concrete. *How are we to affect all this?*"<sup>55</sup> Guardini's vision is this: setting aside time each day to recollect the situation and allow the conscience to speak God's Will to us *enables* us to take appropriate action at each turn. We have to be a Mary if we are to be a Martha. He writes:

Recollection of this nature is therefore the fitting abode for God's word, which must be heard amid silence and adoration, and accepted in the stillness and depth of the heart. For the word of God is not only a bestowal of information, but the power which engenders personal sanctity. Recollection is the abode of God Himself. This method may be followed at night and in the morning as well. Even ten minutes will affect a great deal. Our entire daily activity and conduct acquires a wholly fresh clearness and confidence when it proceeds from recollection of this kind.<sup>56</sup>

This encapsulates Guardinian thought on conscience, the Good, God's Will, recollection, vocation, action, relationship with God, the urgings of the Spirit, the Sacrament of Confirmation. He weaves these concepts together into a tapestry within which we are re-enchanted. The thoughtful human being who internalizes and understands this framework for understanding our metaphysical place in the Divine Economy cannot help but be enchanted. The disenchanting world loses all serious appeal. The light of Christ, of grace, breaks into our lives and we cannot be the same after this experience, after this encounter.

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<sup>53</sup> Guardini, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Guardini, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Guardini, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Guardini, 101.

## Conclusion: Implications for Sacramental Preparation

This re-enchantment can be introduced during sacramental preparation for Confirmation. The thoughtful Confirmation or RCIA Director can present this vision of things to the *confirmandi*. Much of it is derivative from the Catechism standing alone. “The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.”<sup>57</sup> Bringing the thoughtful candidate into the catechism’s and Guardini’s vision can properly enchant them again. Such an enchanted worldview prepares candidates to truly understand what they are agreeing to and what they receive when they are confirmed.

*“[Confirmation] gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.”<sup>58</sup>*

Entering into Guardianian thought leads the thoughtful human being to a more integrated, metaphysically aware, life-giving, and enchanted ‘way of life’ and ‘vision of reality.’ The task of the Confirmation Director is to bring catechists, keynote speakers, volunteers, parents, sponsors, and students along with this vision of what is happening.

*Prayer: May the Holy Spirit guide and inspire catechetical leaders to understand and effectively share the truths of the Catholic Faith with the people they minister to. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>57</sup> Catechism ¶1783.

<sup>58</sup> Catechism ¶1303.

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