



The Conscience

Eberhard  
**ARNOLD**



INNER  
LAND  
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# The Conscience

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# Inner Land

## A Guide into the Heart of the Gospel

- □ □ □ □ **The Inner Life**  
*The Inner Life*  
*The Heart*  
*Soul and Spirit*
  
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*The Conscience and Its Witness*  
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*Light and Fire*  
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Volume 2

# **The Conscience**

Eberhard Arnold



PLOUGH PUBLISHING HOUSE

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*Dedicated to my faithful wife,  
Emmy Arnold*

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## Preface

Born to an academic family in the Prussian city of Königsberg, Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935) received a doctorate in philosophy and became a sought-after writer and speaker in Germany. Yet like thousands of other young Europeans in the turbulent years following World War I, he and his wife, Emmy, were disillusioned by the failure of the establishment – especially the churches – to provide answers to the problems facing society.

In 1920, out of a desire to put into practice the teachings of Jesus, the Arnolds turned their backs on the privileges of middle-class life in Berlin and moved to the village of Sannerz with their five young children. There, with a handful of others, they started an intentional community on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, drawing inspiration from the early Christians and the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The community, which supported itself by agriculture and publishing, attracted thousands of visitors and eventually grew into the international movement known as the Bruderhof.

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Eberhard Arnold's magnum opus, *Inner Land* absorbed his energies off and on for most of his adult life. Begun in the months before World War I, the first version of the book was published in 1914 as a patriotic pamphlet for German soldiers titled *War: A Call to Inwardness*. The first version to carry the title *Inner Land* appeared after the war in 1918; Arnold had extensively revised the text in light of his embrace of Christian pacifism. In 1932 Arnold began a new edit, reflecting the influence of religious socialism and his immersion in the writings of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation, as well as his experiences living in the Sannerz community. Arnold continued to rework the book during the following three years, as he and the community became targets of increasing harassment as opponents of Nazism. The final text, on which this translation is based, was published in 1936. Arnold had died one year earlier as the result of a failed surgery.

This final version of *Inner Land* was not explicitly critical of the Nazi regime. Instead, it attacked the spirits that fed German society's support for Nazism: racism and bigotry, nationalistic fervor, hatred of political enemies, a desire for vengeance, and greed. At the same time, Arnold was not afraid to critique the evils of Bolshevism.

The chapter "Light and Fire," in particular, was a deliberate public statement at a decisive moment in Germany's history. Eberhard Arnold sent Hitler a copy on November 9, 1933. A week later the Gestapo raided the community and ransacked the author's study. After the raid, Eberhard Arnold had two Bruderhof members pack the already printed signatures

of *Inner Land* in watertight metal boxes and bury them at night on the hill behind the community for safekeeping. They later dug up *Inner Land* and smuggled it out of the country, publishing it in Lichtenstein after Eberhard Arnold's death. Emmy Arnold later fulfilled her husband's wish and added marginal Bible references. (Footnotes are added by the editors.)

At first glance, the focus of *Inner Land* seems to be the cultivation of the spiritual life. This would be misleading. Eberhard Arnold writes:

These are times of distress; they do not allow us to retreat just because we are willfully blind to the overwhelming urgency of the tasks that press upon human society. We cannot look for inner detachment in an inner and outer isolation. . . . The only thing that could justify withdrawing into the inner self to escape today's confusing, hectic whirl would be that fruitfulness is enriched by it. It is a question of gaining within, through unity with the eternal powers, that strength of character which is ready to be tested in the stream of the world.

*Inner Land*, then, calls us not to passivity, but to action. It invites us to discover the abundance of a life lived for God. It opens our eyes to the possibilities of that "inner land of the invisible" where "our spirit can find the roots of its strength." Only there, says Eberhard Arnold, will we find the clarity of vision we need to win the daily battle that is life.

*The Editors*

# The Conscience and Its Witness

## **The conscience is an instinct to protect life**

Life resists everything that would destroy it or kill it. Life tries to build up its strength. It protects itself instinctively against all the influences of death and everything that is hostile and harmful. It is only in a life that is going to rack and ruin – in one that has already come under the power of death – that the instincts fail and allow poisons to come in and destroy life. Every organism endowed with a soul tries as a united whole to ward off what is harmful to body and soul.

The innermost part of the soul – the spirit – also has an instinct for life. This is the conscience, which as a first sign of inner life has become a watchman at the threshold. It is the quiet, impersonal confidant of the human spirit. “For no one knows what is in a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him.” The conscience is one of the most primeval stirrings of life in the spirit. The spirit, as the profoundest part of our being, has to represent our innermost calling.

1 Cor. 2:11

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The most necessary tool for this is the conscience, an instrument that warns, rouses, and commands.

The conscience is the spirit's sensitive organ of response. It has the task of warning the character against degeneration and destruction, because the character is meant to preserve moral order. The conscience has to show the character where it can find healing, strengthening, and the direction in life that it is meant to take. Every time the soul is deeply wounded, the conscience makes us painfully aware of it. It is a warning bell that sounds every time the spiritual life falls sick. Above all, it gives warning of the deadly misery of isolation, when the soul has separated itself from the core of life, from the destiny of its being – when it has separated itself from God. Therefore with all the urgency of love, it demands reconciliation with God and, with that, a uniting with all people. For unity is the hallmark of life. Unity finds fulfillment in God and his kingdom.

2 Cor. 5:18–21

### **The conscience leads to community**

The conscience arouses in the individual consciousness a longing to come out of all constraint and isolation and to have community with the highest consciousness, the all-embracing consciousness of God. The result will be a unanimous accord and unity of life with all people who believe in God. This urge toward God and his community of life and faith accords with the nature of the human spirit as it was originally. Leibnitz describes God as the only object directly perceived by the soul that can be distinguished from the soul itself.<sup>1</sup> God is in direct

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<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibnitz, 1646–1716, *Théodicée*.

contact with the soul and demands absolute love and community.

The conscience is the awakening of a direct consciousness of good and evil – a knowledge of what promotes life and what destroys it. As such, it can never be separated from the spirit’s direct consciousness of God. It plays a part whenever the certainty of an absolute “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not” penetrates the consciousness. In the absoluteness of “thou shalt,” God works directly on us. The urge of the conscience is to stand by our consciousness of God by demanding obedience to God. With every warning it gives, the conscience tries to help our consciousness of God on toward the free and willing obedience of faith.

Gen. 3:22

God wants to determine our life and lay obligations upon it through the conscience. Our consciences have been compared to mountains among which God’s thunder echoes a millionfold. The further away the receiving heart is from the one who calls, the weaker will be the echo. The nearer we are when we receive the call of God, the more powerfully will our conscience be struck and impressed. There is always, however, a necessary distance between God’s truth and our response. The conscience drives the anxious, hesitating heart nearer and nearer to the thunderous judgment over evil and to the revelation of good, lit up by the lightning. And yet it keeps us at a respectful distance. There will be no echo if there is no distance at all from the mountain wall.

“No one is good,” Jesus tells us, “save God alone!” Whoever blasphemously identifies himself with God cannot hear the voice of God. If in our souls there is something of the breath of this one and only, who

Luke 18:19

Gen. 3:22–24

alone is good, then even in depraved and irreverent souls there will be a live witness. This witness will demand a distance and yet press closer because it judges evil and urges toward the good. It is the conscience of the human spirit. When we do evil, it warns and insists; it smites and punishes. It makes clear to us how far we are from God. But it does still more. Even though there is nothing good about us, this witness lives in our souls to make it possible for us to recognize good as good, to assure us that God is the only source of good, and to urge us on toward this source.

Even where consciousness of guilt seems to have died out, people cannot feel at home in their selfish existence. They are well aware that they lack inner unity and the community that takes shape as a result of it. Even the hardest heart yearns for this. We were created for community. Our conscience fights against things being turned so upside down that life is destroyed by selfish isolation. The conscience protests against every attempt to sever the living cohesion of things. Whenever a thread of life is broken, the conscience shows that it is wounded. Every time a person's inner being is divided and, just as much, every time the community that must come to outward expression is disrupted, the conscience gives a warning that life is being threatened by destruction. The conscience feels any disharmony as something terrifying and deadly because the very nature of the soul demands unity of life.

Any separation from God inevitably leads the human spirit to a deadly division within itself and to cold estrangement from others. When the conscience makes us aware of the urge toward God that is hidden

within us, a conflict arises between the true calling of the ego and its actual condition. Every time we resist this urge and act against it, our conscience blames no one but us.

Julius Müller calls the conscience, even when it is utterly ruined, the divine bond that ties the created spirit to its origin.<sup>2</sup> That we belong to the people of God, although we are degenerate and depraved members, becomes clear in the conscience. It is the longing for God that rouses opposition to evil. This longing is for community in his kingdom of active love, brought about by him alone. It opposes the divisive power of the kingdom of mammon with its lies, murder, and impurity. The conscience makes us think about ourselves and our depraved condition and, at the same time, about the revelation of the higher truth of our original nature, our true nature. It shows at the same time both our wretchedness and our greatness.

The conscience is an inextinguishable part of human consciousness. As such, it gives the strongest witness that the origin of the human spirit is noble and divine. The conscience never lets us quite forget that this noble race has been called to be an image of God however weather-beaten its coat of arms, however deeply cracked, however overgrown with moss. Even in the most erring offspring of the human race, the memory of this image is never so irretrievably lost that it cannot, through God's intervention, be brought back to the light once more.

Eph. 2:10

Gen. 1:27

For this reason Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, testifies expressly that even peoples estranged from

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<sup>2</sup> Julius Müller, 1801–1878, *Die christliche Lehre von der Sünde*.

Rom. 2:15 God have a conscience. Paul is so deeply convinced of the divine origin of all living souls that he sees the works of the Law written in the hearts of the heathen. In everything they experience and undertake, their consciences also give witness through the conflicting thoughts that accuse and excuse them.

Wisd. of Sol. 13:5, 7 After all, the living book of God's creation lies open for all to see; it points constantly to the divine calling for which man was placed in nature. Nature is a continual admonition to humankind, for nowhere has God's creation departed so far from its origin and primeval purpose as in humanity. This is proved by the history of the human conscience.

Rom. 1:20

### **Without God, the law dictates the conscience**

Rom. 3:10–12 Human beings were called to God's love. But when they so soon became murderous and would not let themselves be judged and ruled by God's Spirit, the pure, free Spirit gave up pleading with them. It no longer wanted to plead with them. Violence goes together with a lack of freedom. Therefore God sent them the law and conceded them the death penalty, at first in the form of the appointed blood-for-blood revenge: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!

Gen. 6:3–13 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man again shall his blood be shed."

Exod. 21:24

Gen. 9:6

1 Sam. 8 Again, the servile spirit of the people who were meant to be God's people wanted a human king instead of God's rulership, instead of his dominion. God in his wrath had to give them a completely human authority to enforce severe punishment for murder and all wickedness. People today have long since forgotten what they have lost through these historical facts. Yet these measures to check still



worse forces of evil must be recognized as necessary as long as people do not want to let God's spirit judge and rule.

The inner acquiescence given by the conscience can be seen in people's attitude to legal authority. For the sake of the conscience, it is still necessary for everyone to be subject to legal authority as the appointed servant of God. For this authority judges and punishes evil as the conscience demands. Yet as soon as the conscience is roused through God's spirit, it demands – even in the face of authority – that we should obey God rather than men, for God's kingdom demands recognition over and above all the kingdoms of this world. However, the prerequisite for this all-inclusive demand of God and his Spirit is fulfilled only when this Spirit who rules in God's kingdom really and truly rules over us, when he can actually plead with us and determine our whole life in an objective way according to God's kingdom.

Rom. 13:1-7

Acts 5:29-32

Through the judgment and power of governmental authority, the conscience is punished and sharpened. Through God's kingdom and his Spirit, it is set free and fulfilled. It seeks everywhere the source of the guilt that separates us from the rulership of God. In everything, the conscience wants to become clear in its judgment over the boundary between good and evil, because evil has separated us from God. Evil is its enemy. The conscience sees this enemy everywhere – waiting to the right and to the left, besetting us behind and before. Its most dangerous outpost of all is in our heart. The evil that surrounds and pervades our life is more than *our* enemy. It is *God's* enemy.

Rom. 8:2

Murder, lying, impurity, and property – this is the nature of evil. Jesus called the evil spirit “the murderer from the beginning” and “the father of lies,” and called its subordinates impure spirits. Finally, he has confronted us with a decision: “You cannot serve God and mammon.” God’s rule is incompatible with killing, lying, sexual immorality, and, most of all, with the rule of property. Therefore God’s kingdom is diametrically opposed to the evil powers of death and sin. This is true not only for the personal life of each individual but also for all powers of human authority, which want to fight evil and yet are rooted in the mammon of property: they cannot cut themselves loose from lying and impurity – they are driven even to mass murder.

Detecting the enemy, however, achieves nothing more than reconnaissance before a battle. Even progress in the battle, even the annihilation of the enemy, does not signify that the victory is consummated. Only positive reconstruction gives triumph its value. Therefore the conscience longs for vigorous work at what is truly good in order to be able to celebrate the victory over evil.

### **When God rules, the conscience brings joy**

The life of Jesus had nothing to do with killing and harming others, it had nothing to do with untruthfulness and impurity, and it had nothing to do with any influence of mammon or property. Jesus went even further: he smote this hostile power in its home territory. His death shattered every weapon of the enemy. But he did still more. He brought the kingdom of God down to the earth, he roused body and soul

John 8:44  
Mark 1:23  
Matt. 6:24  
Luke 12:32–34  
Heb. 2:14–15  
Mark 1:15

from death, he himself rose as the Living One, and through his Spirit he laid the foundation for the final kingdom – a kingdom of complete unity for everything in heaven and on earth. He broke down the barriers between nations, and he created the unity of the body of his church as his second incarnation. This new unity and bodily reality of Jesus lives here on the earth in the human race.

Eph. 2:14–22

We are called to this way as soon as we accept Christ's call. When through Christ and the Spirit we believe in the unity of God as the one and only good, when we live in faith through his strength, we lay aside everything that is opposed to perfect love. We fight it to the death on every front. We live as believers in the church of full community and are ambassadors of God's kingdom, representing Jesus Christ and commissioned by him. In this fight for the recognition of God's kingdom, in representing the final kingdom in opposition to all governmental authorities and powers of the kingdoms of this age, the conscience is the quiet ally of the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 4:15–32

Rom. 9:1

The conscience is that faculty of sensitivity in our inner being which responds with pleasure to every good deed and with displeasure to every evil deed. It exposes evil as alien and hostile to our nature as it originally was and as it is finally meant to be. Therefore, no supposedly superior point of view and no knowledge that sets itself up as progressive can ever reconcile the conscience to evil. As soon as God's Spirit takes possession of the human spirit to make a common witness, the conscience develops a most resolute firmness. It revolts with a revulsion that becomes almost unbearable every time love is

Rom. 8:16

wounded, every time love's obligations are neglected, every time love's justice is clouded, every time love's truth is betrayed, and every time God's kingdom is misrepresented.

Eph. 6:10-17 Whenever human self-preservation seeks an advantage, a pleasure, or an influence that is contrary to the pure, absolute, and all-embracing love of Jesus Christ, the conscience – being now an instrument of the Holy Spirit – raises its voice in sharp protest in the name of the sovereign God and his absolute rule. With just as much intensity, it joyfully furthers every fulfillment of justice and social obligation, every unselfish act of devoted love, and every brotherly uniting in full community.

The impulse of joyful agreement and inner satisfaction in our conscience when we have acted rightly in the works of love (at least as far as motive and aim are concerned) implies an assessment of values. In the same way, when evil and godlessness gain the upper hand in our life, the conscience experiences terrifying qualms of shame, disquiet, and silent self-accusation. These challenge us to evaluate our own actions. The conscience is constantly at work evaluating and passing judgment. It evaluates by feeling. It feels joy in what is good, for what is good is also just. It has joy in love, for love is also pure and genuine unity and community. It feels pain and revulsion against evil, for evil is also injustice. It feels pain about everything that is against love: that is, everything that destroys community, everything that is selfish, impure, hypocritical, and false.

The conscience wants to be the divine voice within us. It strives to show us what we are like (although we

should be different), what we are not like (although we ought to know how we should be), what human society is like without community, and what the nations are like without the unity of the kingdom of God. The more the heart is touched by God's nature and his holiness, the more clearly does the conscience that is bound to Christ say what the church of God is, and the more clearly does it also show how, from the basis of the church, the believer should represent absolute love in a unity that brings peace and in a justice that results in community.

When we examine ourselves in the light of the destiny that God ordained for us, we become aware of the sharp contrast between what we should be and what we are. The conscience belongs to human consciousness and yet represents a "thou shalt" that is quite different from what humans are. The conscience is a decidedly subjective feeling, but it is based on and aims at an absolutely objective "thou shalt." Only when the demands of the conscience agree with the objective "thou shalt" do subjective impressions gain weight and meaning.

### **The unredeemed conscience torments**

The conscience must represent an objective power that wants to take possession of us from within. It needs the Holy Spirit because within itself it does not have the power to rise above all that we are subjectively capable of. Without God's Spirit it is unable to represent clearly the cause it wants to serve. Yet even in remotest paganism, the conscience is active – although, without the Spirit of the cause, its accusations and demands are distinguished more by

unbridled ferocity than by shining clarity. Like the Furies in paganism, it pursues those who flee and seizes those who resist, so that even such masters of evil as the emperor Nero must undergo tortures of conscience.<sup>3</sup>

The comparison of the conscience with the Furies, those relentless spirits of doom and vengeance in ancient mythology, is all the more apt because the Furies serve just as much to protect the good and pure as to avenge crime. They cannot point anywhere to God's rulership because they know nothing of his Holy Spirit. They represent the conscience that is not yet illuminated by Christ, that does indeed know of good and evil but misses the way to the goal. They are handmaids of the holy order of natural life. They strive to represent that order of creation without which the life that lives and moves in a person's blood goes to its own destruction.

As might be expected, the Furies appear as daughters of night and death. They were brought into existence by the first crime that shed blood and destroyed a human life. Now, as pitiless goddesses who bring curses and wrath upon men to all eternity, they pursue to death everyone who commits a crime against the blood of life. Thus they chase the man who killed his mother. They are a dreadful picture of the bad conscience of the old nature with their horrible, gloomy figures, demonic snake hair, and torches brandished aloft.

The Furies are keen-sighted huntresses armed with whips and spears or bows and arrows. Shrouded in

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to the Erinyes of Greek mythology, called the Furies by the Romans. In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, they chase Orestes, who has killed his mother to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon.

mist, they lie in wait for the evildoer, ready to distract his senses, derange his spirit, and suck his blood. For they too represent the old order: “blood for blood.” Thus they correspond to the merciless authority of the criminal court, about which God spoke his awful word after the flood, when his Spirit no longer wanted to plead with perverse men: “I will demand your lifeblood. . . . Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.”

Gen. 9:5–6

Throughout all ages, sin against the blood of a soul endowed with the breath of God has struck the human conscience as the gravest crime, the capital offense against God and his order. Therefore, avenging it is seen as the first duty of human authority. The avenging authority (representing human order) and also the wild raging of the Furies (representing the unredeemed conscience) are far removed from the Spirit of the heart of God, and nothing can be found in them that reveals anything of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet hidden within them lies a corrective justice, a justice of wrath. It is the wrath of God, which through his judgment wants to make us ready for the perfect justice of love.

In this way the old Furies, as handmaids of punitive justice and as executioners of necessary law, are the strictest avengers of evil. But they are more. Like the authority of the state, they are intended to uphold and protect upright and repentant hearts. They hold their threatening snakebites in readiness for evildoers, but those who are good they greet with friendly eyes, bestowing their blessings as goddesses of the earth.

The Furies are more tormenting than any judicial authorities can ever be. For they are an objective

personification of the conscience that has not yet been gripped by the gospel of perfect love. They symbolize the same punishment of conscience that Pestalozzi described so vividly centuries later.<sup>4</sup> When his character Hans Wüst rolls on the floor in torment over his perjury, howling like a dog whose entrails are torn, and when he tears his hair out and draws his own blood with his fists, the cry is wrung out of him: “Satan, cursed Satan, has me in his clutches!” Abuse, shame, and imprisonment are nothing to him compared with the horror, the despair, and the fear that God might never be merciful to him again. Here, in the eyes of the modern world, we see the Furies come to life again as agony of conscience.

### **The conscience calls to repentance**

The same agony of conscience made Martin Luther cry out, “Oh, my sins, my sins, my sins!” He said about this indescribable torture:

I know a man who declares he has often suffered this punishment. True, it did not last long, but it was so severe and so hellish that no tongue can tell of its severity, no pen can describe it, nor can anyone believe it who has not experienced it. It was such that if it had reached its peak or continued for half an hour longer – even a few minutes longer – he would have been utterly destroyed and all his bones burned to ashes. Here God appears, mighty in his wrath, and all creation too, so that a man knows not where to turn. There is no comfort, either from within or from without, and everything is full of accusations.<sup>5</sup>

4 Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, 1746–1827, *Lienhard und Gertrud*.

5 Martin Luther, 1483–1546, *Erklärung und Beweis der Thesen*, 1518.



Luther's conscience at that time still stood in the midst of this deadly fear of wrath and punishment, outside the gate and outside the grace of God, and yet it pursued the positive goal of divine justice. The conscience is more than a protection for what is good, which has to be guarded from evil. It is more than the terrifying discovery that there is nothing really good in us. It is more than the punishment of evil through the justice of God. Rather, through devastating judgment of evil, the conscience must prepare the inner vision for the restoration of what is good. When the conscience is gripped and illuminated by the Spirit of God, it must prepare the way for faith and rebirth through deep repentance and a complete change of heart. The darkened inner eye must become like the sun so that it can see the kingdom of God. The conscience that is breaking down under wrath must be led to justice – to that justice which makes it possible for a new life of active love to arise out of faith.

Matt. 6:22

1 Tim. 1:5

The conscience, as a stirring of the human spirit, can never of its own accord reveal the kingdom of God. It can only strengthen the echo when the call to repentance reaches the heart – a call from God that pierces the heart and directs it to the kingdom of God. The call to life can only come from the origin of life, from God's heart. God's heart revealed itself in the voices of his prophets. In Jesus Christ it reached humankind as fullness of deity, as grace, and as truth. God created the conscience to be part of the life of the human soul, but it can do no more than answer his call as a call from the Holy Spirit. What it can do from its seat in the human spirit is to accept, affirm, and represent the demands made by God, that is, by the divine life of Jesus.

Col. 2:9

John 1:14–17

