

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

February 2015

Vol. 52, No. 2



Scrupulous Anonymous
One Liguori Drive
Liguori, MO 63057-9999
ScrupulousAnonymous.org

Boogeyman

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Sometimes when people with scrupulosity talk about sin—especially mortal sin—I feel uneasy. It's as though these men and women have personified mortal sin, perceiving it as a boogeyman (a mythical scary creature people use to threaten young children into behaving) lurking around every corner, waiting to pounce and snare us into a state of serious sinfulness. Every thought, word, and action, no matter how innocent or normal, has the potential to rouse this spiritual boogeyman. The utmost care and caution is required at all times lest we unwittingly fall into his trap.

This constant diligence and focus leaves little room for peace, fulfillment, and happiness.

People with scrupulosity believe we can be unwitting recipients of the spiritual boogeyman's one-way ticket to hell. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

Mortal sin is a descriptive and theological understanding used in the formation of conscience.

Mortal sin *is not* a person, a devil, a boogeyman. Mortal sin *is not* lurking behind every bush and in every nook and cranny of the human experience. And feeling very strong emotion *is not* a signal that

the boogeyman has appeared or that mortal sin is imminent.

The vast majority of human experience is intended to be enjoyed and engaged in, sometimes even with intense emotion that is in no way sinful: justified anger, loss and disappointment that lead to tears and sobbing, sexuality—including the strong manifestations of feeling and emotion that surge through us, and even deliberate sexual expression or a secondary sexual experience that produces very strong feelings and emotions.

Despite the intensity of the feelings they inspire, these experiences don't necessarily involve sin.

The list of strong and intense human experiences is almost endless. In many instances, these emotions are the intended and most appropriate expression and feeling we're capable of experiencing. To say otherwise is to contradict—and ultimately hold in disrespect—the act of creation as it is intended by the Creator.

Human choices, decisions, and experiences are not intended to be constantly categorized into good or bad, sinful or not sinful, mortal or venial. Human

life is not a test, and human living is not filled with traps, mazes, and other illusions intended to obscure the “face of God” for the person who seeks a relationship with God. There *was* a time when life was perceived that way, but that is no longer the case. The teachings and spirit of the Second Vatican Council invite the people of God to change their perceptions and viewpoints and to perceive a completely different dynamic and relationship with God.

If you’re unconvinced by the teachings of Vatican II, go to an even more original source for inspiration and clarification: The Word of God as it has been preserved for us in the sacred Scriptures invites us to widen our perception and change our attitudes. I can state this with the clearest sense of conviction possible. These words of Jesus are applicable: “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

People with scrupulosity often perceive others as walking the same path with little or no difficulty, anxiety, and guilt over the smallest possible things.

But what kind of cruel parent dangles his love and affection before his son—and then snatches it away at the last moment? What kind of cruel parent promises to set her daughter on a path that leads to something important and necessary—and then fills that path with obstacles? What parent gives one child an extremely difficult path to follow but gives his other child an easy path?

I understand that people find comfort in believing in the personification of moral choices and decisions. Personification makes our choices into something that is “out there affecting me” rather “within me affecting me.”

But the way to freedom is not to view life as something that happens to us, but rather as something we fully and completely, to the best of our ability, participate in.

There is no boogeyman—something or someone hiding in the shadows intent on trapping you or confusing you. Our God is a God of relationship who wants to be with us on the journey.

That is the Good News of the kingdom of God.

[ScrupulousAnonymous.org](https://www.ScrupulousAnonymous.org)



Reflection

Adapted from *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*
by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2011).

The habit of fear takes a lot of energy and becomes an ingrained, unhealthy, meaningless way of life. We fear not having any friends. We fear unemployment. We fear our boss. We fear being rejected. We fear failure. We fear success. We fear going hungry. We fear not having the right clothes. We fear strangers. We fear our identities may be stolen. We fear the next generation will stop going to church. We fear illness. We fear growing old. We fear death. We fear we are unlovable.

We have the illusion of being in control when we worry and fret and focus on what might go wrong. We think we are preparing ourselves for any eventuality, but we are really wearing down our inner resources and becoming spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically depleted.

Fear is the problem. Seeking God is the solution. With God we find faith that gives us the strength to face every problem that surfaces. With God we find hope that leads us to see goodness and beauty wherever we look. With God we find unconditional love that helps us to let go of fear and live in joy.

Ponder: What fears do I need to release to God?

Prayer: Lord, you are the source of love and life. Help me to seek you when I am afraid. Remove my fears that I may live in peace with my neighbors.

Practice: Today I will pray for faith in God's love and care; I will fast from fear; I will pray the "Our Father."

Be sure to listen to Fr. Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," on Radio Maria USA. The show airs Wednesdays at 2 pm Eastern Time.

To listen: Go to radiomaria.us/scrupulosity to access podcasts or listen live

To call in: 866-333-MARY (6279)

To e-mail a question to Fr. Santa: Go to radiomaria.us/scrupulosity and complete the form.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE • LIGUORI, MO 63057-9999
NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q *I came to the conclusion, after reading an old catechism, that there is plenty of room for error without committing mortal sin when it comes to all of the other commandments, but zero room for error with the sixth (you shall not commit adultery) or the ninth (you shall not covet your neighbor's wife) commandments.*

A I have repeatedly counseled our readers not to read old catechisms or look for advice in outdated material. Why is it that people understand that they shouldn't use a manual for an old car to try to fix a new model but don't understand that the same principle applies to moral manuals, catechisms, etc.?

The spiritual life reflects the human experience, good and bad, complex and simple. Life is constantly changing and developing. At the time these commandments were written, the perception was that there is zero room for

error. That perception is no longer considered to be a credible and moral help in the formation of conscience (and we are not talking about moral relativism).

Stop reading dated and unhelpful material and find something that speaks to the human experience in this century.

Q *I have trouble with swimming pools. I fear associated temptations at seeing near-naked, well-shaped human bodies. Is this a near occasion of sin I should avoid?*

A Absolutely not! Enjoying the human body is not a sin. Human bodies are God's creation, and we should be pleased with the beauty of God's creation. In appreciating beauty, there's no fundamental difference between a human body and any of God's other creations. Appreciation of the body isn't sinful and needn't be avoided, so there's no reason to avoid swimming pools.

Please help us continue Scrupulous Anonymous and other Liguori Publications ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is Redemptorist Fathers dba Liguori Publications, Federal ID 43-0653409. To make a donation, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

© 2015 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. **Policy on Copying or Distributing:** *Individuals* may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous* provided 1) you don't remove this copying/distributing policy and 2) you don't seek or accept payment for the copies. **Nonprofit organizations** may quote SA in publications offered at no cost as long as you identify *Scrupulous Anonymous* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (Liguori Publications, ScrupulousAnonymous.org). **For commercial or other purposes**, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists (redemptorists.com). Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. All Rights Reserved.