

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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*Scrupulous Anonymous*  
One Liguori Drive  
Liguori, MO 63057-9999

## EXPANDING HORIZONS

*Fr. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.*

Recently I attended a class on cosmology, the inner workings of the universe. We learned about forms of energy and matter. We discussed recent scientific discoveries about black holes and supernovas. We marveled about new and current theories of relativity. We discussed the importance of mathematics, an essential tool for the study of the universe. We looked at wonderful pictures of galaxies and star clusters, all courtesy of the Hubble telescope. It was a day well spent, and I was enriched by the experience.

As I left the class, I reflected on the impact this new experience was having on me. I had two feelings. One, the class was fascinating because it introduced me to ideas I'd never considered. Second, I recognized that beyond basic introductory material, the content of the class was beyond my ability to understand or comprehend. Math skills are necessary for full comprehension of the discussions, and mine are limited to balancing my religious community's checkbook. Beyond that, I'm at a loss. But even though I could only



understand so much, I was pleased with the experience.

Soon after taking the cosmology class, I saw a wonderful program on the Discovery channel about biology and genetics, worlds that can be observed only with the world's most powerful and sensitive microscopes. The microscopic world is just as wonderful—just as full of life and mystery—as the world opened up for me in the cosmology class. There is actually very little difference between the universe the Hubble telescope presents and the universe the microscope presents. And like the class on cosmology, the Discovery-channel program was fascinating, introducing me to a reality that is also beyond my ability to understand or comprehend.

### BIG versus LITTLE

Just a few days later, someone asked what I'd learned from these experiences. I thought for a moment, then gave an answer that was neither mathematical nor technical. I said I'd learned that to see reality, we must look at the big picture.

If we resist the invitation to step back and take as much as we can from the richness our senses and our intellects offer, we do so at our peril.

At the same time, I learned that a type of arrogance is anchored in the big picture if we believe that the meaning of all things is somehow revealed to us in the vastness of something, the universe of something.

The reality is that sometimes it's in the smallest component of the vastness that we discover what we seek. If we're too small in our perceptions we risk being misinformed, and we cultivate more disappointment and pain than is necessary. But if we're captivated by the big picture and don't see the smallest, most minute component of the vastness, we also risk the same kind of disappointment and pain.

People with scrupulosity have a great ability to concentrate most of their energy and attention on the smallest component of something. Intense concentration often renders them unable to see the complete problem, challenge, or experience. This leads to distortion and dramatically underlines one component of the scrupulous condition: The narrowness of a person's vision intensifies the feelings of fear and anxiety that can be part of what we're experiencing, especially if it's new to us or if we've had some uncomfortable experience.

## Embrace both pictures

It's quite possible to arrive at a point in life when we operate out of a mindset that reflects our personal fear of the big picture, the fullness of the question, the vastness of the universe. By clinging to the smallest component of something, we can become extremely vulnerable to fears, anxieties,

imaginings, and fantasies. The result is intense emotional pain that is seemingly always present and inescapable.

It's extremely difficult for people of every stripe to change their perceptions; for people with scrupulosity to change their pattern of thinking and acting is perhaps even more difficult.

We all know and understand that the world is a fearful place. People are often hurt and ignored. More than enough weakness and failure is seen in the actions of others. Sin is seemingly everywhere, and easily observed in the attitudes and behaviors common to the human family.

## Balance the familiar with the unfamiliar

Despite the harshness of the perceived reality, we must take the risk and change our perception to make progress. If we don't see the big picture, we need to develop the skills to begin our discovery.

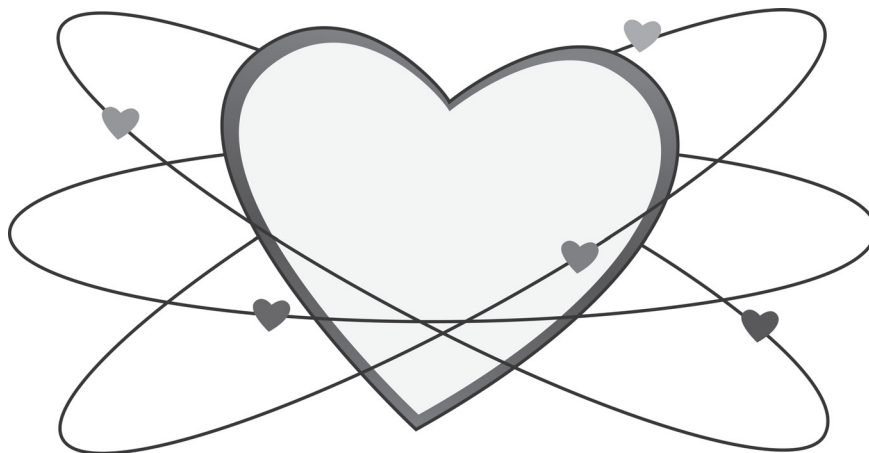
On the other hand, we must not give in to the arrogance of the big picture; we must also maintain a balance and respect for the smallest component. Balance, it seems, is the key to a fully healthy and integrated life.

When all is said and done, we must be willing to be stretched away from our comfort zones and become conversant with the unfamiliar. Perhaps the familiarity of the experiences we most commonly engage in act as a dulling force within us. The "same old, same old" doesn't encourage the unexpected, the unknown, the mystery and sacredness of life. It doesn't make such experiences impossible, but it does make them unlikely.

We could all use a little more life experience that brings us to a different vision of reality, the expansion of our personal horizons.

# SIMPLICITY OF THE HEART

The following is adapted from *The Gift of Simplicity: Heart, Mind, Body, Soul* by Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette (Liguori Publications, 2009).



Today we see the heart as the seat of all human emotions. However, the prophets and the entire biblical tradition—including Jesus—considered the heart to be the center of the human person, its very source of life.

The heart is invited to love God above all things. The heart is inclined to obey or disobey God's commandments, for it is in the depths of the human heart that God inscribes his law and commandments. The heart is the center of each human being; thus we learn that in each human heart, God wishes to establish his most intimate dwelling.

The desert monks emphasized among their disciples the uniqueness and special role of the heart in their spiritual lives. The heart is the place where God reveals himself to us, where he relates and converses with each of us intimately. It is in the depths of our hearts that this relationship with God is established, grows, and achieves its purpose. As we welcome God's presence into

the depths of our hearts, we give ourselves to him wholly in love. With true simplicity of heart, we look at him and also sense his gaze upon us. We embrace and are embraced by him. The human heart, created by God, will recognize and accept that it is made for him alone.

It is our daily task as Christians to aim and seek this humble simplicity of heart. The Lord extends us his grace, and Christ is there to purify us of our sins and forgive our daily shortcomings. Through constant prayer and good works, we also make recourse to the Holy Spirit, begging him to descend into our hearts and make his permanent dwelling there.

It is through the Holy Spirit, the author of all gifts, that the humble gift of simplicity shall be bestowed and implanted in our hearts. It is he, in his wisdom, who shall seal the gift deeply within us, creating in the depths of our hearts the living sign of his eternal presence.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS  
**MAILBOX**

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**Q** I worry about fasting and abstinence all the time, but even more during Lent. My anxiety begins building before Lent even starts and intensifies on Ash Wednesday. I'm seldom able to go to Communion on Easter Sunday, and then that gets me all concerned about performing my Easter Duty.

**A** Boy, you've got yourself tied up in all sorts of knots. It must be an absolute hell for you. I suggest that, instead of trying to unravel these feelings, you let it all go. I suggest you just admit there's no way to unravel all of this and keep it in proper order. Then forget it.

The law of the Church is intended to be a *support* for your spiritual life, not a barrier to grace. Seek dispensation from your confessor for reasons of your emotional and spiritual health. I'm sure he'll quickly provide it, and you will no longer carry this burden. God bless.

**Q** Am I guilty of serious sin when something bad happens to someone I don't like? A person at work is difficult to work with. I imagined something bad happening to him, and it did. Now I feel like I'm guilty of something.

**A** No, you're not guilty of serious sin, and you're not responsible for whatever happened to this person. Your thoughts, one way or the other, didn't cause his misfortune. You don't have this kind of power. Your imaginings, good or bad, do not affect the outcome of the world. You do not control the rising or setting of the sun. These things happen without your participation, permission, or attention. That your coworker's misfortune occurred when you imagined something bad was a coincidence, nothing more.



**2010 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreat**

Friday, May 14, 2010 – Sunday, May 16, 2010

***Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.***

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, Arizona

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