

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

JULY 2013
Vol. 50, No. 7



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

PART 1 OF 5

Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous (2013)

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

In 1968, Fr. Don Miller, CSsR, founder of Liguori Publications and Scrupulous Anonymous, issued "Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous." It was an immediate hit. My 1996 revision was also well received. Seventeen years later, it's time for another revision. In this issue I begin my 2013 update, which will reflect current theological teaching and practice, the best pastoral practices, and advances in psychology and the social sciences.

Preamble

We've slowly arrived at an understanding of scrupulosity that suggests a change in how often people with scrupulosity should go to reconciliation.

When Fr. Don wrote the original commandments, he understood scrupulosity in the traditional manner: as a "manifestation of the tender conscience." Based on that understanding, he believed good catechetical advice and direction from a skilled confessor was the best treatment.

Today, however, we know that scrupulosity is a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) with a religious manifestation and that catechetical formation will have little or no impact on a person with OCD-based scrupulosity. You cannot think or study

your way out of OCD. People with scrupulosity think and study about sin repeatedly, to little or no avail.

What is required at *minimum* is behavior modification that severely limits reception of the sacrament of reconciliation. *Daily or weekly reception of the sacrament is not advised.* It's pastorally beneficial to limit reception of the sacrament to once a month at most; ideally, people with scrupulosity should receive the sacrament only during Advent and Lent, the traditional penitential liturgical seasons. The guidance and pastoral direction of a wise and understanding confessor and/or spiritual director is also essential.

When people receive the sacrament of reconciliation, the following commandments are very useful and pastorally sensitive.



Without exception, you shall not confess sins you have already confessed.

Perhaps the most persistent experience of the scrupulous condition is doubt accompanied by never-ending anxiety: "Have I thoroughly and completely confessed my sins?" That's why scrupulosity is often called the "doubting disease." Doubt-generated

anxiety deprives us of the peace of Christ, our birthright through grace.

When doubt and/or anxiety are removed from the equation, the scrupulous condition—although not healed—is significantly reduced.

Resisting the urge to confess doubtful sin or sins you've already confessed is a pastoral remedy that will bring peace. When you refuse to engage the feeling of doubt and thereby resist the urge to animate and energize your scrupulosity, the wave of anxiety passes over you—and you can enjoy the peace that inevitably occurs. Yes, it is difficult. Yes, it is fearsome. Yes, it takes practice.

But it can be achieved, and the result is gratifying.



You shall confess only sins that are clear and certain.

This commandment gets to the heart of the scrupulosity struggle by directing the scrupulous conscience to accept that doubtful sins don't count. You needn't confess something that does not clearly and certainly exist. In fact, it's harmful to confess that which is doubtful. Such a practice is not at all helpful and must be resisted.

I can almost hear some of you saying, "I'm not sure whether I doubt that I sinned or that I'm trying to fool myself into believing that I'm doubting I sinned." Simply having that thought demonstrates your doubt. That's where this commandment comes into play: You shall confess only sins that are clear and certain.

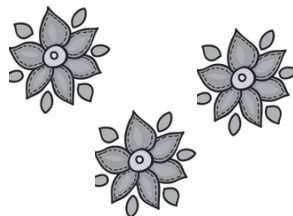
Many people with scrupulosity think that people who don't have scrupulosity are somehow completely free of doubt. But it's a myth that a healthy state of mind exists in which everything is clear, black and white, and knowable without any sense of struggle. Some people do live in such a state, but they have a condition that's just as problematic as OCD.

Doubt is natural and normal. It's not an indication of sinfulness—it's an indication of humanness.

This second commandment also encourages clear and certain confession. The penitent states his or her sinfulness clearly and without hesitation, excuse, or innumerable details.

If the confessor is unsure of what you're clearly confessing, it's his responsibility to ask for clarification. *If he doesn't ask for clarification, have every confidence that you have been clearly and certainly understood.*

Next Month: Commandments 3 and 4



Of Bags and Baggage

The following is an excerpt from *Goulash, Garage Sales, & God*
by Bernadette McCarver Snyder (Liguori Publications, © 2013).



Dear Lord, I've noticed that, with or without a purse, most of us carry excess baggage—and it's the kind of baggage we should leave in the will-call and then lose the claim ticket. The Latin word for baggage is *impedimenta*, and that's just what baggage does—it impedes our progress. When a purse gets so full it weighs as much as a barbell, its owner can't just snatch it up and run. She has to drag it along behind her. And the same thing happens when we get so full of fear or guilt or doubt or worry. We're no longer free. Everywhere we go, we drag along all that baggage.

Well, Lord, I'm starting right now to clean out my purse—but I know it won't be as easy to clean out all that other stuff. Help me, Lord, to get rid of fears rooted in the past. Help me give up guilt and trust in your forgiveness. Help me pitch doubt and worry. And Lord, please help me loosen the gumdrop stuck to the lining of my purse.



Dear Lord, every day I hit the highways and byways, list in hand, confident that I know where I'm going and how to get there. But when I hit a detour or have a breakdown, I realize I'm not really in control. Remind me, Lord, not to be too dependent on things or routines. I should only be dependent on you. Ride with me and help me remember that I am the traveler, but you are in the driver's seat.



Dear Lord, I've seen turtles up close. They must be anxious and insecure, because they're always pulling their heads back inside their shells. And they must be overburdened carrying those heavy houses around all the time.

Dear Lord, I've also noticed that all this "carrying" I do has made my neck muscles tense and my shoulders sag, and I communicate often but not always well. Help me, Lord, to stop hurrying and scurrying, to come out of my shell and look up and out instead of always in. Help me change from a turtle to a turtledove. And the next time I decide to get away from it all, remind me to leave my house at home.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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

Q *How should I dispose of religious papers and magazines that contain pictures of our Lord, the Eucharist, and the saints? I try to shred them into unrecognizable pieces, but I don't know how much effort is required, and I have quite a few piles of magazines that I haven't been able to shred.*

A There is no need to shred them. Throw them away or bundle and deliver them to a recycling center, which would be better for the environment. You're showing no disrespect, and superhuman effort isn't required.

Q *I was in a car accident. I vowed after the accident that I would never get in a car again. That made no sense, because I really need to use my car. Am I bound to the vow?*

A Not in any way, shape, or form. Your pronouncement was a sign of your stress from the accident and probably your relief that you weren't seriously injured. It wasn't a true vow. People say all sorts of things in times of stress, and we're not required to fulfill such "vows" or "pledges." That's a good thing; if we were, we'd all be in a fix!



OCD RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Massachusetts General Hospital and Nova Southeastern University are studying scrupulous OCD. For more information, visit our website: mission.liguori.org/newsletters/scrupanon.htm

liguori.org



Please help us continue Scrupulous Anonymus 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.

© 2013 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. www.liguori.org **Policy on Copying or Distributing:** *Individuals* may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymus* 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 Anonymus* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (Liguori Publications, liguori.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.