

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

AUGUST 2012
Vol. 49, No. 8



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

Detraction

by Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

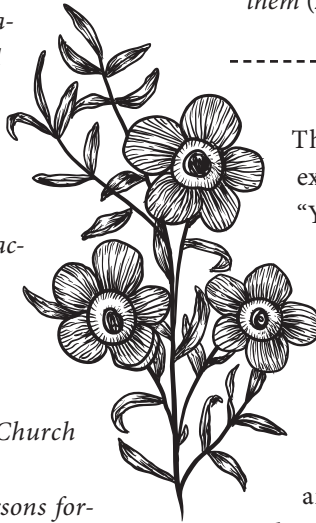
Recently I received two letters about detraction. Here is an excerpt from one:

I always learned that the gravity of the sin of detraction depends on a combination of the stature or credibility of the speaker, the material being revealed, and the importance of the recipient of the information. But recently priests have told me that every act of detraction is a grave sin. This has raised my level of scrupulosity and resultant panic to new levels. Did Martha commit a grave sin of detraction in Luke 10:38–42 when she told Jesus that Mary was slacking off from her household duties?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that

Respect for the reputation of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury. He becomes guilty: of rash judgment who, even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral

fault of a neighbor; of detraction who, without objectively valid reason, discloses another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them; of calumny who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them (2477).



The eighth commandment

The *Catechism's* teaching is a material expression of the eighth commandment—“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Individual components of this teaching are revelatory. The key concepts include *respect*, *reputation*, *attitude*, and *unjust injury*.

Respect. All people—every age, gender, physical or psychological condition, or any other distinction—deserve a certain level of respect in their relationships. This reflects the strongly held Judeo-Christian held belief that all people reflect God's image. When we extend basic respect to others, we acknowledge this truth

and accept this teaching as essential and necessary in all of our relationships.

Reputation. The Judeo-Christian tradition expands this basic understanding of respect to include honoring each person's reputation. I extend to others the benefit of the doubt and/or the expectation of goodness unless I experience otherwise. However, even in such a circumstance where I might perceive weakness, failure, or some demonstrable fault, I don't communicate this perceived failure to others. Some may need to know it, but not everyone.

Attitude. Mature people understand that each person has the right to an unsullied, uncompromised reputation. Mature people are compassionate, recognizing first in themselves and then in others that all men and women are capable of failure and weakness. Mature, compassionate people reflect this understanding in their choices and actions.

Unjust injury. This concept involves the cumulative results of respect, reputation, and attitude. Despite our best efforts, some injury is often unavoidable—like when a misunderstanding strains a friendship. In detraction, a person is injured not as a result of his or her choices or actions but rather as a result of another's. In that case, the injury is unjust.

The *Catechism* categorizes three distinct manifestations of bearing false witness including, in descending order of seriousness, rash judgment, detraction, and the most serious, calumny. In each instance the interplay between respect, reputation, attitude, and unjust injury come clearly into focus.

For example, in Luke's story of Martha and Mary,

how might we categorize Martha's "sin"? Was she guilty of rash judgment, detraction, or calumny?

Or was she guilty of nothing more than frustration with her sister, who seemed not to want to be hospitable?

None of the above

Herein lies the rub for people with highly developed and active scrupulous consciences. The *Catechism's* teaching about the eighth commandment doesn't have a "none of the above" exclusion for behavior that is *simply an expression of frustration*. Not every behavior is sinful, and not every behavior can be recognized and categorized in a specific list.

The scrupulous mind, ever on the alert for sin, dismisses without reflection the possibility of normal human reaction. Instead, it immediately tries to name the perceived sin.

Because the scrupulous person *feels* guilty, he or she must actually *be* guilty, and there must be sin. The definition then becomes a measure of the feeling and not of the objective act: If he feels not "so guilty" but "guilty enough," he thinks he's committed the sin of rash judgment. If she feels a little guiltier but isn't filled with a sense of impending dread, she thinks she's committed the sin of detraction. If he imagines the worst scenario, he thinks he's committed the sin of calumny.

Nowhere in this process fueled by feeling, anxiety, and perceived guilt does the scrupulous person recognize the very real possibility that the action may best be categorized as "none of the above."

So did Martha commit a grave sin of detraction? What do you think?





SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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

Q *My 84-year-old husband has vascular dementia. He can't remember prayers, and he doesn't seem to be able to make an examination of conscience. Does God still expect him to go to confession?*

A Your husband has no obligation to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. His illness prevents him, through no fault of his own, from fully participating in the sacrament.

I suggest you join with him in regularly receiving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, which is a sacrament of reconciliation as well as healing. It's the most appropriate way for your husband to practice his faith at this time of his life.

Q *My grandchildren's swimsuits are very immodest, leaving little to the imagination. Am I guilty of a sin of omission if I don't say anything to them and their parents?*

A Perception of what is immodest varies from culture to culture and from generation to generation. Therefore, I'm not surprised a grandmother is uncomfortable with her grandchildren's swimwear.

However, the primary formators of your grandchildren are their parents; your role is merely supportive and encouraging. Therefore, if you say nothing you're not committing a sin. But if you feel you must say something, say it to your grandchildren's parents and leave any corrective action to them.

2012 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreats Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

Friday, Oct. 26 – Sunday, Oct. 28

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ
For information, call 520-744-3400 or visit
desertrenewal.org and click on RRC Calendar



Friday, Dec. 7 – Sunday, Dec. 9

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI
For information, call 262-567-6900

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.