

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Liguori, MO 63057-9999
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Just One More Question

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

In 1273 St. Thomas Aquinas, the great scholastic and systematic theologian and Doctor of the Church, stopped writing. When asked why, he said, “I cannot, because all I have written seems like straw to me.” He died three months later, leaving his great work *Summa Theologica* unfinished.

Scholars have theorized that he stopped writing because of a mystical revelation so intense that, in comparison, all of his effort seemed common and ordinary—like a bale of straw.

I’d like to suggest another perspective. The promise of systematic and scholastic theology is that if a person asks the correct questions and gets the answers to those questions, eventually everything will be explained and understood. This systematic process is based on an assumption that there are a limited number of questions and answers.

St. Thomas asked big questions about God and the meaning of the universe. No matter how many questions he asked, he never reached the end. His questions weren’t answerable. Once he understood his efforts were fruitless, he decided to leave the questions and answers behind and simply embrace the mystery and wonder of the universe.

Some theologians might aggressively challenge

my insight, but I hold fast to it. I’m not dismissing or marginalizing St. Thomas’s efforts; I’m simply seeing a parallel between his quest and that of people with scrupulosity, who are regularly lured into a dogged belief that all of their questions can be answered if they apply enough effort.

Unfortunately, there are simply not enough answers to the multitude of questions scrupulosity generates. No matter what your efforts, no matter how dedicated your pursuit, the result will be the same: You’ll never run out of questions, and you’ll never find all the answers.

A much better approach is to do as St. Thomas eventually did: Give up the search for the ultimate answer, and learn to embrace life’s mystery, wonder, and awe.

When your scrupulosity manifests, assume the position of observer instead of combatant. Instead of struggling against the symptoms, observe the power of the obsessive thoughts and compulsions, and try to feel rather than deny the feeling. Embrace the wonder and the mystery of how the disorder shows itself.

This doesn't mean you're being controlled by or cooperating with the scrupulous thoughts; it means you're experiencing the disorder so you can learn from it.

As you learn about your obsessions and compulsions, you'll begin to recognize the feelings that signal them, brace yourself for the intensity of what follows, and lessen its severity. You won't be caught off-guard, feeling helpless and hopeless. You'll be confident that you can get through it again.

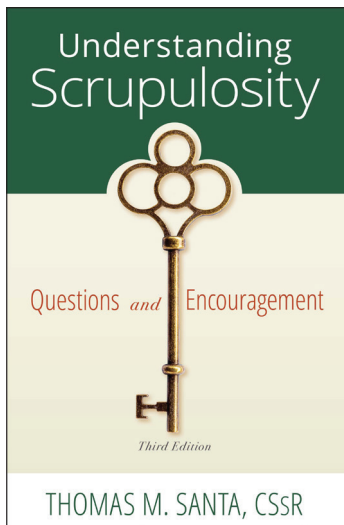
It's in learning, rather than in denying, that you'll learn the skills to manage the disorder.

Scrupulosity isn't managed by seeking answers to each doubt. It's managed by focusing on the emotional response—the feeling—rather than the intellectual response. If

scrupulosity could be managed by answers, everyone would be cured with the first answer. You'll discover much more peace and comfort if, instead of seeking answers to questions, you seek ways to manage and temper your scrupulous feelings.

To the best of my knowledge, St. Thomas Aquinas didn't have scrupulosity, but he did suffer the frustration of too many questions and not enough answers. The following prayer to St. Thomas is one of my favorites, and you may also find it comforting:

Grant me, O Lord my God,
a mind to know you,
a heart to seek you,
wisdom to find you,
conduct pleasing to you,
faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen.



Have you ordered yours?

The new edition of Fr. Tom Santa's highly acclaimed book *Understanding Scrupulosity* is here!

Based on 50 years of questions and answers from the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter, *Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement* addresses sin, thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and sexuality, as well as confession, self-worth, prayer, and God's grace.

This third edition includes new information on identifying and understanding behaviors associated with scrupulosity and explains medical breakthroughs in treatment.

To order, go to Liquori.org.

Overwhelmed and Overburdened

The following reflection is adapted from [Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time \(Weeks 11–22\)](#) by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2013. All rights reserved).

We find no peace in situations that cause overwhelming stress. We feel abused in the workplace when coworkers expect us to carry the entire load. We get frustrated with colleagues and friends who burden us with their problems. We become paralyzed from carrying around personal baggage and secrets. We panic when we don't have the resources to meet our financial obligations.

When life's burdens become too difficult to bear, we risk having a mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical breakdown.

Society adds to our stress and anxiety every day with a steady flow of messages promoting unhealthy behavior. We're conditioned to keep busy, to stay connected to our friends on the Internet, to seek comfort at the mall, to go to fast-food restaurants, to spend hours driving from one event to the next, and to find satisfaction outside the home. We're always burned out because we don't know how to rest.

People of faith honor the Sabbath and keep the Lord's day holy. We need sacred space

and time to be with God. We need time to rest with God, to reflect on God's Word, to pray, to renew the mind, heart, soul, and body. We need Sabbath time each week to remind us that we're made in God's image and likeness, that we are very good.

We have nothing to fear from coming to meet a kind and loving God. We can feel free to bring all of our demons—our errors, our misdeeds, our failures, our defects of character—to God and know that God will treat us tenderly and kindly. God never abandons us. God loves us just as we are, with all our imperfections, talents, and gifts.

All that we are is a gift from God. Yet all too often we're ashamed of our imperfections. We see our mistakes and feel we're flawed beyond repair. Sometimes we're possessed by negative thinking. When we become aware of our mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual limitations, we trust that God's Spirit is moving to transform us and help us embrace a new way of being.

Ponder: What am I afraid to bring to God? What burdens do I carry?

Prayer: Lord, help me create space in my life to rest in your presence.

Practice: Today I will be faithful by making time to be alone with God.



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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q *Summer travel makes me anxious. What if we're far from a church on Sunday or travel reservations conflict with the Mass schedule? Every summer I find myself worrying about mortal sin instead of enjoying the time with my family.*

A You won't commit mortal sin. You want above all to follow God's commandments and the precepts of the Church, but superhuman effort isn't required. Unavoidable conflicts are a fact of modern life. You are not responsible for what you are sincerely unable to choose because of the circumstances. Be at peace, and enjoy your vacation.

Q *Missionaries from another church came to my door. I let them in, but their conversation made me uncomfortable and I asked them to go. They gave me a lot of literature. I don't want to read it or see them again. Is this sinful?*

A You're not required to open your home or converse with someone trying to evangelize or proselytize. I think you made the correct choice. Simply dispose of the material they left. If they come to your door again, politely tell them you're not interested in a second conversation.



Listen to Fr. Tom on Radio Maria USA

Fr. Tom Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," is back on Radio Maria USA Thursdays at 11 am ET.

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