

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Integrative Spirituality

PART 2 OF 2

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Last month we identified three essential realities of spirituality: experience, relationships, and practice. This month we emphasize the Roman Catholic perspective and understanding of integrative spirituality, but these realities are essential to any form of religious expression. Not all Scrupulous Anonymous members are in the Roman Catholic tradition.

In addition to the essential realities of experience, relationships, and practice, three distinct components must also be understood with respect to scrupulosity: capacity, style/type, and discipline.

Capacity

Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, asserted that all human beings are spiritual beings. All human beings have some minimum ability and capacity to be aware of and appreciate the sacred, the mysterious, and the awe-inspiring. This is because we are, to the best of our knowledge, the only creatures on earth who live in the present, are aware of

the past, and anticipate the future. We're not primarily instinctive creatures; we have a level of self-consciousness and the ability to self-reflect.

Style/Type

Just as a garden has many varieties of flower, spiritual expression has many varieties, styles, and types. God seems to be pleased with a variety of flowers singing his praises in the garden, and God seems also to be pleased with a variety of expressions of spiritual awareness. We needn't get bogged down by emphasizing different religious expressions

such as Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist to appreciate this point. Rather, we can look to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behavior: in their prayers,



sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a *religious being* (28).

Discipline

The ability to focus our spiritual capacity within the specific parameters of a particular style/type of religious expression requires sustained practice. “Practice makes perfect”; if not perfect, at least practice improves performance in a measurable manner. The first time a person hits a golf ball, the ball often goes only a few feet. However, after disciplined and focused practice, many people can drive the golf ball very impressive distances and repeat that feat again and again, seemingly effortlessly.

Are any of these components (capacity, style/type, discipline) lacking in people with scrupulosity, the religious manifestation of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)?

Most people with scrupulosity are disciplined; they’re dedicated and practiced in their scrupulosity and devote countless hours to it, so lack of discipline isn’t the issue.

With respect to style/type, although it’s true that many more Catholics struggle with scrupulosity than, for example, Jews or Muslims, this isn’t because scrupulosity is a Catholic problem. It’s because the Catholic sacramental system, particularly our emphasis on sin and confession, brings the struggle into focus much more clearly and regularly.

That leaves capacity. Does a person with scrupulosity have the capacity to participate in the specific manifestations of the Roman Catholic style/type of religious expression in the same way as a person who doesn’t have scrupulosity? Or do people with scrupulosity have a *diminished* capacity—through no fault of their own—that makes it difficult or impossible to participate fully in the religious disciplines and practices of Roman Catholicism? With respect to the sacrament of reconciliation and examination of conscience, is diminished capacity an essential component of this particular spiritual discipline?

If so, what acceptable, orthodox, and moral choice can a person with scrupulosity engage in to live a more integrative and sustainable spirituality?

We’ll reflect more on this topic in our next issues.

Next month: Diminished Capacity

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The Glasses of Faith

The following is adapted from *Deciding to be Christian: A Daily Commitment* by Mark O'Keefe, OSB (Liguori Publications, © 2012).

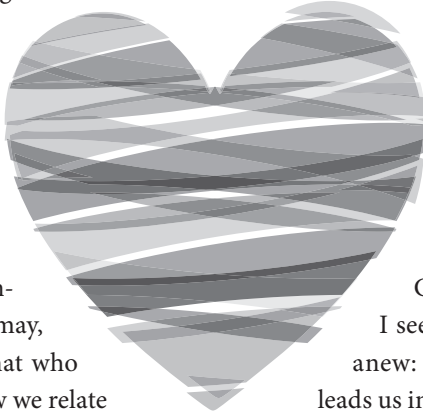
Christian faith gives us a way of viewing ourselves in relation to others and to the world. We can speak of the “eyes of faith,” a Christian “vision,” or a Christian “lens” for viewing the world. Christian faith is meant to enable and require us to see the world and other people and what is important in life in a particular way. The Christian vision, for example, reveals that the poor are blessed by God, that we should love our enemies, that we should forgive those who have harmed us, that we should reach out to the stranger, that suffering can be redemptive, that dying is a gateway to real life...and so many other realities that a worldly vision views as naïve or simply as silliness. Be that as it may, to be a Christian means that who we are, how we act, and how we relate to the people around us are formed and guided by this Christian vision and no other.

The problem is that we want to be able to wear glasses with two different lenses not adapted to one another. We understand ourselves to be followers of Jesus, and we believe that he tells us and shows us the truth about human living. But at the same time, we want to go on viewing life as getting ahead, having more, being liked

and valued, having our way, and the rest. But we can't really see if we have two different lenses that aren't adapted to one another.

Maybe we'd like to be able to wear one set of glasses sometimes and the other set at another time. But one of the lenses reveals the truth of reality and the other simply does not, at least not fully or reliably. And, sadly, there are Christians who really have just one set of glasses—their “worldly” glasses—who assess the Church and their participation in it according to the reality that “the world” reveals to them.

Christian conversion involves seeing the world anew. As we sing in the Christian hymn *Amazing Grace*: “I was blind but now I see.” In faith, we see ourselves anew: We are reborn. When God leads us into a real adult acceptance of our faith—the decision to be Christian—it is like putting on new glasses that enable us finally to see the world as it really is. We realize that how we saw before—to the degree that we could really see at all—was incomplete, blurred, or simply wrong. To the Christian, so much of the worldly vision is either false or blindness—just as Christian truth appears unreal to the vision of the world.





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MAILBOX

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Q *I'm bothered by the story of the poor widow's contribution (Luke 21:1–4). She "offered her whole livelihood" instead of giving only from her surplus. Is this a realistic expectation? If so, are we expected to fulfill it?*

A Yes, it's a realistic expectation, but it's not a general rule for all people in all circumstances, nor was it intended to be.

Each of us has moments in which we give all we have as the poor widow did. Those are graced moments—special invitations, if you will, to respond generously to the gift of the Spirit of God. The idea is for such moments to become more and more common.

Q *I have blasphemous thoughts all the time, but they seem to be most intense right before Communion. When this happens, I just stay in my pew and pray harder. Any advice?*

A Every person, without exception, has occasional thoughts that might be generally classified as blasphemous. People with scrupulosity immediately identify such thoughts as mortal sin; people without scrupulosity wonder where the thoughts came from.

My best advice is to get out of your pew and receive Communion. No sin is intended—and no sin is committed—with such random thoughts.

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