

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous
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WE NEED YOUR HELP

We urgently need your prayers and financial support to maintain our website and to continue offering this newsletter in print for our many members who don't have Internet access. To send a check, please follow the instructions on page 4. To donate with a credit card, go to ScrupulousAnonymous.org and click on the Donate button. Thank you for your past and continued support of this important ministry!

A Unique Brand

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Recently I spoke with a priest about scrupulosity. He asked, “What component of scrupulosity do people who don’t have it find hardest to understand?”

Three possibilities came immediately to mind: People find it hard to understand the intensity of the never-ending questioning and anxiety scrupulosity fuels. Many priests don’t understand that they’re not simply dealing with a “tender conscience.” People don’t understand that scrupulosity is a specific manifestation of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Each of these answers is insightful and valuable, but I chose another one that surprised me: “Each scrupulous person experiences his or her own

manifestation of scrupulosity and is the only one who knows and understands all the rules.”

In other words, each person with scrupulosity has his or her own brand of the disease. They do share certain components—fear, anxiety, constant questioning, specific rituals—but when all is said and done, each manifestation is complex and unique to that person. With scrupulosity, there is no such thing as “one size fits all.”

I spent many years in this very specialized ministry before I understood this reality.

The first step in defining an individual’s brand of scrupulosity is to narrowly define when it is operative and when it is not. A person, for example,

who is routinely paralyzed when confronted with moral decisions is able to effortlessly make nonmoral decisions. The scrupulosity doesn't affect his or her general decision-making abilities; instead, it's narrowly focused around the singular issue of morality.

Another person with scrupulosity may be free of anxiety and guilt when making routine moral decisions but experience paralyzing fear when faced with decisions about relationships.

Still another may worry and fret over sexuality, or perhaps finances, all the while never experiencing the same emotion in other areas of life.

This means that there are many times every day when people with scrupulosity don't engage the obsession and compulsion.

If there were a way to help people with scrupulosity realize that they already regularly experience some sense of the freedom they long for, perhaps real progress could be made.

Unfortunately, this is where the unique branding becomes more operative. When you unravel the main source of the area in which scrupulosity is most apparent, you find it's even more refined and focused. For example, a person who struggles with moral decisions doesn't struggle in the general area of morality; the struggle is actually parsed to the point that only certain dilemmas provoke fear and anxiety. These tightly focused areas of concern are further delineated down to the most minute components, each of which is capable of igniting the OCD ritual and fueling an emotional response.

It may sound as though patient and prolonged therapy that slowly identifies the primary area of concern is the key to progress and potential healing,

but that's not the case. As soon as people exhaust one issue, they quickly replace it with a new concern closely related to the original concern—but just different enough to provide a new and untested series of questions.

This is one of the many components of scrupulosity that make it so insidious and painful: Just when some progress is made, some hope seems possible, some grace becomes apparent, the subject matter shifts. It's almost like they sense relief on the horizon and then unconsciously make adjustments to maintain their level of scrupulosity. It's almost like they claim their brand and seize their unique experience, fearing that if their long-familiar but unwelcome “houseguest” departs, what might happen next?

When people with scrupulosity spend enormous personal energy on unsuccessful rituals that falsely promise relief and potential avoidance of fear and anxiety, scrupulosity is victorious.

When people devote enormous care and concern to sustain their brand of scrupulosity, the affliction is dominant.

Are we talking about sin, moral guilt, and responsibility? Absolutely not! What we *are* speaking about is a pathological affliction, an illness that wreaks havoc and routinely deprives people of the joy and laughter in life.

The insights in this issue of *Scrupulous Anonymous* solve nothing, but they're valuable. Each time we discover more about scrupulosity, we take one small step toward the day we learn to manage—if not cure—this terrible affliction.

That's something we all hope and pray for on a daily basis.

Introducing
Understanding Scrupulosity

a live radio call-in show with **Fr. Tom Santa**, author of *Understanding Scrupulosity* and the free monthly *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter. We encourage anyone with questions about scrupulosity to listen and call in.

The show airs Wednesdays at **2 pm Eastern Time** on Radio Maria USA.

To listen: Go to radiomaria.us/scrupulosity to access podcasts or listen to the program live

To call in: 866-333-MARY (6279)

Fr. Santa was recently interviewed by Wichita's KNS News. To see this in-depth interview, go to ScrupulousAnonymous.org.



2014 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreat
Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Friday, Dec. 12 – Sunday, Dec. 14

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI
For information, call 262-567-6900 or visit
RedemptoristRetreat.org and click on "Calendar"



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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Q *Can you recommend someone in my part of the country to be my confessor and spiritual director? I am very frustrated looking for a person who might guide me.*

A Unfortunately, I'm unable to provide any recommendations—such a list is nonexistent to the best of my knowledge.

Ask your pastor or your associate pastor for a recommendation. Your local priest knows the priests of the (arch)diocese as well as anyone. If you're uncomfortable asking your pastor, call your local Catholic Charities and ask for a recommendation.

Q *I've recently remembered a grievous sin from my youth. I confessed it, but not with all of the details I now recall. Must I confess the sin again, or should I just trust that it has been forgiven?*

A You are to trust that it has been forgiven, because that is exactly what has happened. It's the priest-confessor's responsibility to ask you for the details of a sin if he doesn't understand what you're confessing. As long as you're not deliberately trying to mislead the confessor—and, really, what would be the point in that?—your sin has been forgiven completely.

It's only natural that we remember other details later when we think about what happened. But there is no requirement to seek additional forgiveness as each new detail is remembered.

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