



Stepping from the Shadows

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

We begin almost every spiritual-direction meeting on our ministerial website, *ManagingScrupulosity.com*, with a compliment. It acknowledges that every person who has joined the group has made an important statement: everyone at the meeting is no longer willing to struggle with scrupulosity in isolation. No more lurking in the shadows of human relationships, or standing at the back of the crowd, or choosing not to interact with others because of scrupulosity. Group participants make the brave, freeing choice to acknowledge their disorder and take steps to become more healthy, more engaged, and more thankful for their lives.

Scrupulosity isolates, and in the isolation it thrives. When you have only your own thoughts and experiences as your guide, it is easy to believe the falsehood that you are hopeless and helpless. When you emerge from your isolation and hear the stories of others, you begin to come to a healthy awareness. When you end your isolation, you grow to accept how the disorder affects you and how it challenges others, too. You do *not* struggle alone. You *can* be understood. You *can* learn to manage the disorder and live a healthy and a holy life.

But if you continue to live in your head and only experience your own interpretations of the events of your life, the disorder takes over. Anxiety wins. Fears become more terrifying. Hopelessness is deeper. And it is easier to believe in the bad and give up most hope for the good. While not a sinful

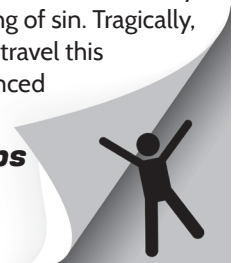
choice, the unnecessary decision to isolate with the scrupulous disorder enables you to accept what you may think is “natural” for you.

The scrupulous disorder offers many false choices, preserving your isolation by inviting you to believe you can remain alone but still find the help you need. This disastrous choice leads you away from health and wholeness and deeper into the fear and anxiety of the disorder. The sinless but harmful choice to remain isolated leads to other choices that also fail to promote your spiritual and mental health. Such harmful choices are abundant.

One such choice is the belief that you can find relief and a sense of fulfillment if only you discover clarity in your choices and decisions. You think, *I will find relief if only I can come to a firm conviction that I understand the difference between a mortal sin and a venial sin.* This is a false promise and a useless path. No person always feels clear about every choice. Doubt is normal, confusion is natural. Life has more questions than answers.

Perhaps the worst part about this distraction over clarity, which masquerades as a “cure,” may be found in your understanding of sin. Tragically, people with scrupulosity who travel this false path often end up convinced

Ending isolation helps you manage life and scrupulosity.



they are in a constant state of mortal sin or at least on the cusp of serious sin.

A second distractive choice and false path is the belief that people can research their way into a sense of peace. They think, *If only I gather more information, learn how to quote the saints, understand the Catechism, then everything will be wonderful.* This false path can lead you on a never-ending search.

There will always be one more article to read, one more saint who needs to be quoted, another *Catechism* lesson. The list is endless.

A third distractive choice is to find a single Bible verse, writing of a saint, *Catechism* quotation, or Church law, and focus your thoughts on that citation. The biggest problem with this strategy is that it reinforces isolation. Plus, you may often fail to consider the full context and meaning of the citation. The result? You may apply the passage incorrectly or interpret it too strictly, thus failing to meet the narrow circumstances you require to make the passage effective.

A fourth distractive choice is to turn to a helper who is no help at all. Unfortunately, there are professional “helpers,” including priests and spiritual directors, whose guidance lies on the fringe of sound medical practice, spiritual advice, and pastoral counseling. If what they preach or teach sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Also, if they sound too harsh, too unbending, and offer “one size fits all,” walk away. The internet is full of charlatans who pretend to offer help. We need to

recognize this unfortunate reality and be ever more vigilant in our choices.

These four distractions perpetuate the isolation that is the shared experience of most people who struggle with scrupulosity, but isolation does not have to be the norm.

There are a number of healthy choices that you can make. Determining that you will share

your real struggle with the disorder with a trusted friend, spouse, or significant person in your life is a good place to start. Discerning to join a group

of people who suffer with the disorder, such as the ManagingScrupulosity.com spiritual-direction group that I referenced, is also a wise choice. I encourage you to resist the urge to “disappear” in any relational situation or in a public setting. Avoid fading into the background. Be a participant in life, not an observer.

These healthier choices effectively resist the scrupulous voice of distraction that is always present. Each determined choice for health and engagement is a decision to resist the scrupulous voice that tells you that you are unworthy, or that there is something significantly wrong with you, or that you are not genuinely loved and forgiven. Whatever feeling it is that seems to make the choice to isolate seem logical and satisfying is a lie. Avoid isolation and make a determined plan of action that recognizes the points of distraction. Those are helpful steps in the right direction. ✨

Each determined choice for health and engagement with others is a decision to resist the negative scrupulous voice.



Mary, Pray for Us

JUNE 27 IS THE FEAST DAY OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Of Mary, St. Alphonsus Liguori writes in *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament*:
“Those who make her known and loved by others are well on their way to heaven.”

Since 1866, the Redemptorists have been making Our Blessed Mother known, singing her praises under the title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Please feel free to offer your prayer intentions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help on the enclosed form and return them in the envelope provided.

Complain!

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

God does not frown on your complaint.
Did not His Mother in the Temple ask:
“Son! Why hast thou done so to us?”
And did not Christ on the Cross complain:
“My God! Why hast Thou abandoned Me?”
If the Son asked the Father
And the Mother the Son—“Why?”
Why should not you?

But let your wails be to God,
And not to man,
Asking not, “Why does God do this to me?”
But: “Why, O God, dost Thou treat me so?”
Talk not about God, as Satan did to Eve:
“Why did God command you?”
But talk to God as Christ to His Father.

And at the end of your sweet complaining
prayer
You will say: “Father, into Thy Hands
I commend my spirit.”
You will not so much be taken down
As the thief on the left,
But be taken up as the thief
Who heard: “This day, Paradise.”

They who complain to others never see
God’s purposes.
They who complain to God find that
Their Passion, like Christ’s, turns into
compassion.

Only He who made your wound can heal it.
The Love that tightened your bow strings
Did so not in hurt, but in love of music.

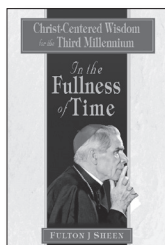
Do not all lovers ask in doubt: “Do you love me?”
Ask that of the Tremendous Lover
And each scar will seem a kiss!

God is not “way up there.”
He is taking another body—your own—
To carry on the world’s redemption.

Too few offer Him a human nature
Like Mary at the angel’s call,
So He conscripts you, drafts you,
Inducts you into His Army.

Complain that your shoulders
Ache beneath your pack,
But see His own smarting
Under a cross beam.

Complaint to God is dialogue,
And dialogue is prayer.
Not the ready-made, packaged, memorized
Lip-service of the book and candle,
But the encounter and the union
That only lovers know! ✨



Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895–1979) was one of the best-known and best-loved Catholic prelates of all time. He was a distinguished philosopher, orator, preacher, teacher, missionary, radio and television personality, and author. His oral and written legacy is substantial and enduring.

“Complain!” is included in *Christ-Centered Wisdom for the Third Millennium: In the Fullness of Time*, copyright 1999 Liguori Publications (805097). Other Fulton Sheen books from Liguori Publications include *Peace of Soul*; *Lift Up Your Heart*; *Jesus, Son of Mary*; *Characters of the Passion*; *From the Angel’s Blackboard*; and *Simple Truths*. To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

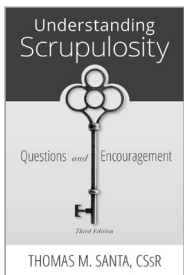
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Q. *Is it a serious sin to admire the beauty of women and men at the beach? I enjoy the beach, but I spend a lot of time just watching people.*

A. No, it is not a sin. It is perfectly natural. The human body can be extremely attractive, and at other times it can also be a source of wonderment! Enjoying people enjoying themselves and having a good time is a healthy thing to do. Just remember to use plenty of sunscreen.

Q. *I was watching a video about the holy Eucharist, and the presenter insisted that it was irreverent, bordering on serious sin, to receive Communion in the hand. If this is true, why do so many people receive Communion in the hand?*

A. Your answer is within your question. If the reception of holy Communion in the hand is an acceptable practice, that is the reason you observe so many people engaging in this practice. If it were not permitted and was sinful, it would not occur in the Church community. It is as simple as that. The presenter was arguing for a spiritual practice that was representative of another time and place.



Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement, Third Edition
By Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Based on a half-century of questions and answers published in the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter, *Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement* addresses concerns related to sin, thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and sexuality, as well as confession, self-worth, prayer, and God's grace.

This third edition of *Understanding Scrupulosity* includes new chapters on identifying and understanding behaviors associated with scrupulosity. And the book explains the medical breakthroughs of the past decade on how to treat it.

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