



A New Image of God

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A scriptural truth referenced often by saints and theologians is that humanity is created in the image of God. It also is true that people often make God in *their* own image. Attempts are found in some images of the incarnate Word of God. In the ongoing, 2,000-year quest for the historical Jesus, Scripture scholars have discovered again and again that researchers typically “create” the Jesus they “find.”

Some people with the scrupulous disorder build images of a fearsome God that—sadly—is the God they try to serve. Their God actually is the mirror-reflection of themselves and is not close to the biblical or theological consensus of the image of God, as inadequate as it may well be. The scrupulous most often have a vision of God that is quite unsatisfactory.

In constructing their personal view of God, scrupulous people tend to choose concepts and themes from the King James Bible’s 783,137 words and the hundreds of thousands of words in the 2,865 paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Most often they

select judgmental, anxiety-triggering concepts that are rife with punishment and impossible goals. Somewhere their image will feature the ultimate condemnation, the ultimate summary of their own fears and anxieties, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The result is a ruthless, unbending image of a divine being that, not surprisingly, resembles a person who is suffering from a moral disorder like scrupulosity. It is impossible to faithfully serve such a “God,” for the image conveys no compassion, understanding, or forgiveness. This imaginary being sets traps for the weak, exploits a person’s foibles, and triumphs in condemning souls to hell for eternity.

It targets ordinary human actions that are not in the least sinful. For example, random thoughts about sex fill the scrupulous person with fear and anxiety, providing a cascading stream of distress and distraction. Fear of every wrong turn, every postponed decision, every undisciplined urge fills in the blanks and successfully blocks any hope of comfort and peace.



What makes this horrific image of the divine believable to scrupulous people is the isolation that scrupulosity often encourages. People with the disorder believe they cannot engage in helpful conversation with others who understand them. Scrupulous people think if they find an understanding person, that individual will become horrified by their sins and go away.

Sometimes they also think that even if they make every effort to explain their reality, they will be unable to do so. They fear they will deliberately conceal an essential component or purposely “mislead” anyone who tries to help them. At the least, they feel they risk omitting something in the telling that is essential for understanding. Once they remember their omission, they will judge the whole experience as incomplete, dishonest, or unsatisfactory. Worse, if they think an omission has taken place within the sacrament of reconciliation, they will feel—mistakenly—that they are sacrilegious.

This scrupulous-generated image of divinity that I have described is often confirmed by others. The saints who seem to witness to the horrors of hell are often misrepresented as supporting such an image. The so-called “experts” who crowd the social media platforms—often victims of their own poorly formed images of God—seem to confirm their own fears and perceptions. People who speak an encouraging word or offer a path to integrated wholeness or holiness are labeled as heretical, liberal, untraditional, or unorthodox.

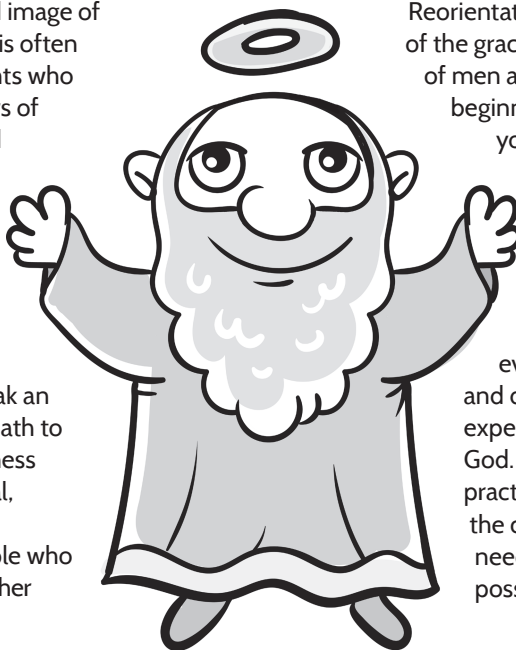
The hard truth is that people who offer an image of the divine other

than an unfortunate and disordered image of God that is a driver of scrupulosity are in fact heretical. They are heretical to the scrupulous person’s erroneous image of God and understanding of the Church. They are not, however, heretical to the truth.



My friends, there is a path forward away from a harmful, image of God caused by scrupulosity. The path is not easy. Going forward requires the scrupulous person to replace the negative image of God with one that is more positive. For those of you with scrupulosity, a new image of God will not, by necessity, be of your making and choosing. In the beginning stages of the reorientation of your image, you will be dependent on others. Gradually, as your experience changes and your spiritual understanding is more positive, you will begin to feel the healing that is essential.

Reorientation is possible only because of the grace of God and the help of men and women of faith. The beginning steps depend totally on you. You have to determine and choose that you wish to change your image of God to an experience of God that is healthier and more hopeful. You have to choose to engage every day in spiritual practices and disciplines that will help you experience a loving and forgiving God. A consistent spiritual practice and discipline will enable the change that you seek and need. It will be difficult, but it is possible. ✨



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Missionary of Good Example, Good Words, Good Action

Through the struggles of his youth, St. Dominic Savio (1842–57) gained a firm belief in the restorative power of confession. He approached his confessor as “the doctor of the soul,” and sought his advice—and the medicine of God’s grace—often.

“I have full confidence in my confessor, who is so kind and helpful to me,” Dominic said, “and I don’t think I have any trouble that he cannot cure.” Dominic was right—his confessor does seem to have guided the young man’s spirit toward Christ. Dominic tried to go to confession as often as three times a week, but his spiritual director wisely said this was unhealthy. He rightly believed the young man dealt with the spiritual struggle of scruples.

Instead, he admirably advised him to deal with the little difficulties of life, rather than seeking out the more outwardly impressive penance of fasting, by offering to Jesus his daily struggles. Dominic diligently followed his confessor’s advice to take up little everyday crosses.

Realizing that the tongue can do serious damage, he strove to not cut people off when they were speaking or to take over conversations. He likewise did his best not to waste food, believing “everything we have is God’s precious gift.” He also cheerfully did the most menial of tasks for the greater glory of God. In all of these seemingly small acts, Dominic continued his path to holiness.

Prayer played an important part in Dominic’s life. He tried to spend quiet time

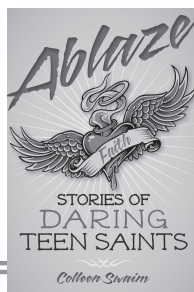


with spiritual readings or talk to God, and he had a special love for Mary. In 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined, and on the feast’s vigil, Dominic prayed with conviction, “Mary, I give you my heart, please keep it always as your own. Jesus and Mary, always be my friends.” In honor of Mary, he prayed at the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and he performed a special action in her recognition every day.

He and his friends founded a Sodality of Mary Immaculate and together promised to receive Communion regularly, follow the school’s rules, and help each other in their pursuits of holiness.

Especially in light of his devotion to Mary, Dominic tried to be conscious of how he looked at girls. Dominic saw that his struggle to look at others purely was part of growing up, but he did not make excuses when it was difficult.

“The eyes are two windows,” he said. “Through these windows, what you let pass, passes. You can let an angel in or you can let the devil in, and whichever you let in can get possession of your heart.” ✨



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Q. *I am burdened with the need to engage in some serious restitution. I have made a list of all the people that I have cheated, and it is extensive. I do not know where to start.*

A. Unless you engaged in a deliberate and sustained process of defrauding people of tangible property, fully aware of the choices you were making, restitution is not required. You are not required to make restitution for normal, imperfect, and human misuse of time (the concern most expressed by the scrupulous) or anything else. Restitution is not your issue. I surmise that you are having difficulty with remorse and the inability to forgive yourself for being human.

Q. *When does a venial sin become a mortal sin?*

A. Never. Venial sins do not add up to a certain number and then morph into a mortal sin. A venial sin is not a serious matter; a mortal sin is serious. One hundred sins that are not serious, for example, do not add up to one mortal sin. There is no accumulating value to a venial sin.

A venial sin stays a venial sin, nothing more.



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