

Recordkeeping

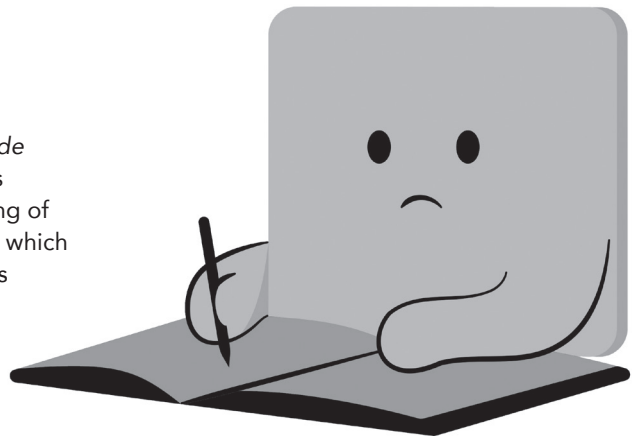
FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

One of the most useless practices that a scrupulous person might, unfortunately, engage in is presuming that God keeps a record of every one of each person's thoughts, words, and actions, both good and bad. This is at best a childlike concern, something like Santa Claus keeping a "nice list" and a "naughty list" to keep track of who is good and who is bad. It is harmless enough for a young child, but as a person slowly grows into maturity, he or she should replace these childlike myths and beliefs along the way. Santa Claus might keep records, but God does not. Thinking otherwise is a ridiculous understanding of divinity, and it contradicts everything about our heavenly Father that Jesus revealed to us.

This unhelpful image of God is likely the indirect result of poor catechesis about the confession of sins. The traditional emphasis on "kind and number" of sins, based on a rigid understanding of canon 988 in the *Code of Canon Law*, is probably at the root of this misunderstanding. The *Code* intends a listing of "grave sins," not a listing of *all* sins, most of which are venial in nature. However, for scrupulous people, who, because of the ravages of the disorder, tend to judge all sins as grave, accounting for their sins becomes crippling—not "freeing" as envisioned by the *Code* and the traditional grace of the sacrament of reconciliation.

A more helpful understanding of "kind and number" is that the confession of sins requires enough information and detail to help the confessor understand what is being confessed. This understanding is beneficial not for the Lord, who has no need of details, but rather to help the confessor apply the appropriate pastoral care intended by the sacrament. As the penitent, you must operate from the assumption that if the confessor does not request additional details, then he understands what you are confessing, and nothing more is required of you—not only is it not required, but it is not even helpful in practice.

The accounting of a "number" assigned to sins is not intended to be detailed and precise.



ADITYA SAHU / UNSPLASH

Instead, it indicates to the confessor how pervasive the behavior might be with you. There is a huge difference in the pastoral remedy applied to someone who confesses something as “one and done” in contrast with someone who has integrated the behavior into daily life and has done it “a hundred times or more,” for example. Regardless, it is not the number that is important; it is what the number may symbolize.

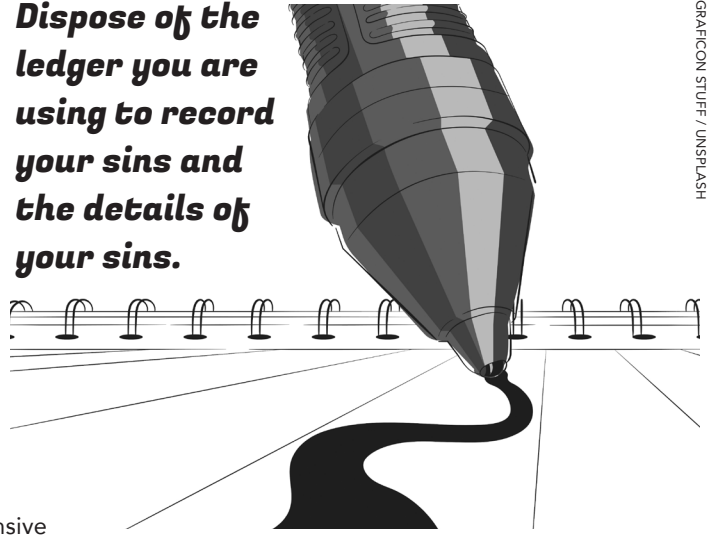
The same is understood in categorizing the “kind” of sin. This description is not intended to be exhaustive, recounting every possible detail and emotion associated with the experience—“I really felt like this was offensive to God.” Such details are not necessary and do not in any way impact your confession. You are not withholding pertinent information if you describe a situation in a general way and then later remember—or think you remember—some detail that is more precise.

Yes, as the penitent, you are responsible for confessing your sins; that is not disputed. But the confessor is responsible for asking for clarification or more details if he does not understand what you are confessing. Again, if the confessor does not ask, then nothing more is required of you, and everything is OK. This is true even if you walk out of the confessional and then remember something else you think is necessary to share. This is scrupulosity at work. It is not the grace of the sacrament. It is anything but the activity of grace.

The same energy of scrupulosity that led you, the penitent, to believe you are in mortal sin—or, at the very least, grave sin—before you confess is also at work after your confession. Scrupulosity will do everything it can to convince you that your confession was inadequate, insincere, or even invalid. It was not. It is not. It is, rather, the manifestation of your scrupulosity trying to take away the peace that you may have experienced in confession.

The obsession and compulsion that scrupulous

Dispose of the ledger you are using to record your sins and the details of your sins.

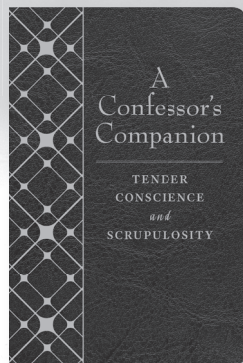


people often experience in confession is the need to repeat the confession to “get it right.” If you act on the compulsion and repeat confession, all you are doing is increasing the anxiety generated by the disorder; you are not in any way changing or improving your celebration of the sacrament. In fact, instead of celebrating the sacrament—which is the intent of confession—you are using the sacrament to seek the reassurance that your scrupulosity claims you need. It is a lie. You do not need to repeat your confession. It is not helpful. It will not make you feel better. It will only prolong and increase your agony and your suffering.

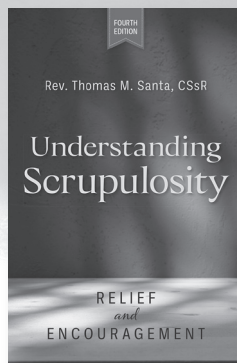
Dispose of the ledger you are using to record your sins and the details of your sins. Better yet, resist the urge to write anything down or compile any kind of list, even if you believe it is helpful. It is a lie. It is not helpful. It is an even bigger lie to believe that accurate recordkeeping will make you feel better. None of this will benefit you in even the slightest way. It is a trap. The Lord does not keep a ledger, and neither should you.⚙️

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR, is the president and publisher of Liguori Publications, his second assignment as the company’s leader. Professed as a Redemptorist in 1973, his ministries have included retreat work and writing reflections for the Scrupulous Anonymous newsletter.

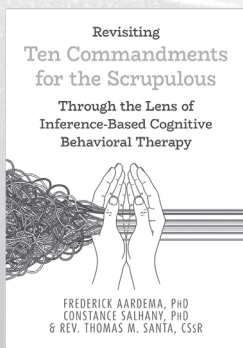
Resources for *Managing Scrupulosity*



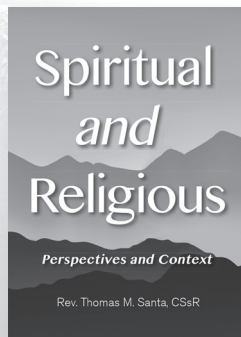
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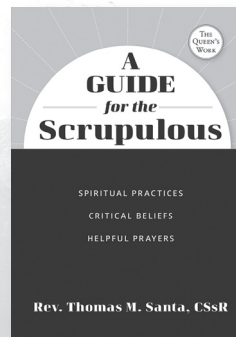
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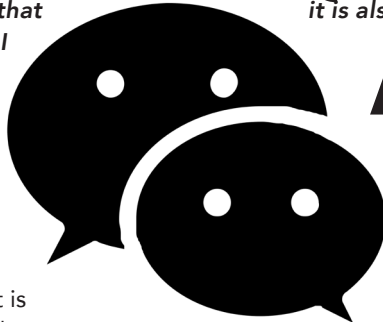


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Q. Some coworkers and I were talking about another employee who was having a difficult day. I feel that this is the sin of gossip, but I am not sure if it is a mortal sin or not.

A. Why does it have to be a sin? Why can't it just be a conversation? Not everything is a sin. You are too sensitive about this. It is too much of a burden to be always on guard, looking for sin; that is just not necessary. You also have to live.



ROUND ICONS / UNSPLASH

Q. It is very difficult to find a confessor to help with scrupulosity. I know it is important, but it is also very frustrating.

A. I do not usually use this space to suggest resources, but my new book is intended to aid the confessor in understanding scrupulosity and providing the appropriate pastoral help that will be beneficial for you. This book, *A Confessor's Companion*, would be a good place to start. Information on this book may be found on the previous page of this newsletter and at Liguori.org.

Additional Resources Online for Those Seeking Help

Liguori Publications offers resources online that people with scrupulosity have found very helpful:

For helpful videos, please visit [YouTube/Catholic OCD](#).

For pastoral care and spiritual direction opportunities, please visit managingscrupulosity.com.

For direct support and to access new helpful videos, please visit Patreon.com/CatholicOCD. (Patreon offers a direct mail feature that can be used to answer your personal questions and concerns.)

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