

An Examination of Conscience

According to the 7 Deadly Sins

“In what I have done, and in what I have failed to do” -sins of omission may be more serious than sins of commission In thought, word, and deed -even if I did not gossip in word, did I judge someone in thought? Each area of my life should be considered: my study, my work, my family, my friends, my roommate, my prayer, my apostolate etc.

Anagram: Pride, Lust, Anger, Covetousness, Envy, Sloth, Gluttony. We can usually assume that each of these capital sins is at work in us in some manner and degree, an examination of conscience should help us see how.

Note: The following examination of conscience groups sins according to the capital sins, the seven deadly sins from which other sins typically flow. However, the same material act may be sinful for different reasons, therefore each person needs to apply this examination to himself carefully.

E.g. An act of lying is wrong, but it might be motivated by the capital sin of vanity (to make you look good), or from the capital sin of sloth/laziness (to avoid work), or from envy (to damage the reputation of another), or from a mixture of all three.

E.g. The material act of giving to the poor can be motivated by charity (virtue) or by vanity (vice). Hence this examination uses the vices to specify our sins.

Pride

- Pride (ST II-II q162) Pride is the mother of all sin (St. Gregory the Great, c.f. St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica II-II q162 a8). It is a craving for excellence beyond what is reasonable, an inordinate desire for one's own superiority (ST II-II q162 a2). Reason requires that a man reach up for what is proportionate to him, and proportionate to his abilities. In pride a man seeks to be more than he should be. It makes a man hate being equal to men, and hate being less than God.

Have I refused to admit my own weaknesses?

Have I sought things beyond me?

Have I dwelt on the failings of others?
Have I judged others?
Ranked myself better than others?
In thought, word, or deed? Have I hated others?
Have I refused to learn from others?
Have I been stubborn?
Refused to admit I was wrong?
Refused to accept that another person had a better idea?
Have I abused my power by imposing my will/preferences/opinions on those in my care, or on friends?
Have I been insensitive in how I have proclaimed Christ's truths?
Have I been arrogant?
Have I held others in contempt?
Have I failed to show respect to those in authority? To my professor, chaplain, parents etc?
Have I failed to do my duties to my family/parents? E.g. return phone calls, visit, stay in touch?
Have I been self-seeking in my time with family at home?
Do I consider what I owe them? Have I spent time with them?
How have I manifested my concern for them? Have I been forgiving and tolerant of them?
Have I scandalized them by bad example?

Pusillanimity –the opposite of pride. False-humility fails to use our gifts. Have I neglected to use the talents that God has given me? Have I avoided difficult situation and difficult people? Have I failed to witness to the harder teachings of Christ? In morals?

Vanity

- Vanity (ST II-II q132) Concerns external glory. 'Glory' –the good of a person manifested to others. The proper end of glory is: God's glory, and, our neighbour's salvation - these two criteria can test whether our desire for glory is virtuous. Vanity flows from pride and looks like pride. Glory can be vain/empty in three ways (a1): The honour/thing sought is itself unworthy; The person from whom you seek it is unworthy; The glory sought is not referred to God. The 7 daughters of vainglory: Boasting, deceit (when we do not deserve the praise), a passion for innovation (so that something 'new' makes us look good), stubbornness of opinion, quarreling, contention, disobedience.

Have I studied/acted/joked/talked more to impress others than to do God's will or to help others?
Has my humour and conversation been self-seeking?
Have I listened to others? Have my jokes been unkind?
Have I lied or exaggerated to make myself look good?
Have I wasted undue time and money on clothes and make-up?
Is my physical exercise motivated by vanity or by health?

Ambition –have I sought recognition and advancement for my own glory, rather than to do God’s will?
Have I been content with my lowly position, or have I resented the role that Christ is asking me to fulfil?

Lust

- Lust (ST II-II q.153; CCC 2351) “Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”(CCC 2351). It is a sin of excess. “Lust is about the greatest of pleasures, and these absorb the mind more than others” (St. Thomas), so when this goes wrong much goes wrong! But Lust is not the most serious sin –pride is. The 8 daughters of lust (II-II q.153 a5): Blindness of the mind (the passions cloud thinking), rashness, thoughtlessness, inconstancy, self-love, hatred of God for forbidding lust, love of the pleasures of this world, despair of the future world. Custody of the Eyes: “Whoever looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28)

Have I looked at others impurely? With what frequency? Has this led to impure thoughts? What frequency and duration?

Have I viewed other people as mere sexual objects rather than as persons to be loved?

Pornography: Have I used the internet, or TV?

Have I flirted/danced impurely/toyed with the feelings of another?

Have I guarded my heart against affections for those I am not free to date?

Have I behaved in a way that might tempt romantic affections from those whose are not free to date?

Impure Thoughts: Have I entertained impure thoughts? Briefly, or at length? With what frequency?

On what occasions? (e.g. at night when half asleep and less culpable, or when fully awake?)

Impure acts: Alone, or with another? Impure touches with boy/girlfriend? Impurity in hugs with others? Words: Have my jokes, conversation, and flattery been pure?

Have I listened to or told impure jokes, tolerated foul conversation?

Have I encouraged/approved/aided the unchaste acts of others?

Have I failed to witness to Christ’s teachings about holy purity?

Have I received Holy Communion while in a state of serious sin?

Have I neglected to seek Confession before Holy Communion?

Modesty –has my dress been an occasion of sin for others?

Have I sought to dress so as to help others avoid sin?

Have I sought to flatter myself by drawing improper attention to certain aspects of my beauty?

Play –Have I been guilty of an excess or deficiency in resting myself in play? The soul’s rest is in pleasure (ST II-II q168 a2).

Have I refused to express mirth at another’s humour? (A man who has no humour is an unreasonable burden to his fellow man. ST II-II q168 a

Thoughtlessness: Have I been thoughtless in my actions?

Have I applied the standards of Christ to them?

Intemperance: Have I driven recklessly, broken the speed limit (excessively)?

Have I respected the traffic laws enacted by the legitimate authority? ('Fear God and honour the emperor' 1 Pet 2:17)

Have I driven while under the influence of alcohol?

Anger/Wrath

- Anger/Wrath (ST II-II q158) Is undue desire for vengeance –undue in cause or in amount. Anger can be just or unjust: punishment can be too much or too little, it can even not be deserved at all, it can be measured out by someone who does not have the authority to give it. Anger through zeal can be dangerous, and cloud later judgments. The 6 daughters of wrath: Indignation (we deem the one we are angry with to be unworthy), Swelling of the mind (as it fills with plots of revenge), Injurious words against our neighbour, Excessive manner of words against someone, Blasphemy, Quarreling. Lack of due anger: "unreasonable patience is the hotbed of many vices, it fosters negligence, and incites not only the wicked but even the good to do wrong" (II-II q158 a8). Note the just anger of Christ cleansing the Temple: 'Zeal for thy house will consume me.' (Ps. 68:10): "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:15-16)

Have I tolerated abuses against others or against God? (lack of anger)

Have I harboured resentment and hatred in my thoughts?

Have I imagined bad conversations to nurture my anger?

Have I judged rashly? Have I plotted revenge?

Have I sought to be a peace-maker?

Have I been physically violent?

Have I refused or been slow or ungracious in forgiving?

Have I insulted people?

Quarreled with people?

Lost my temper?

Impatience: How have I carried my cross? Have I been impatient with people, events, sufferings, sicknesses?

Covetousness/Avarice

- Covetousness/Avarice (ST II-II q118) Avarice is the excessive love of possessing things (a1). It is contrary to reason and due measure. Material goods are only useful in helping us towards an end; to desire them in themselves is an evil. 'The love of money is the root of all evil' (1 Tim 6:10) –i.e. it is a capital sin. The 7 daughters of avarice: Hard-heartedness to the poor, insensitivity to mercy, dissatisfaction in thoughts, restlessness in deeds, violence (to acquire things), falsehood (in words, including perjury), fraud (in transactions), treachery (as in the case of Judas).

Have I desired or lived a lifestyle beyond my means?
 Have I been resentful of my lack of money?
 Have I trusted that God will provide for me?
 Have I cheated, stolen, or failed to pay my bills on time?
 Have I borrowed without permission?
 Have I been honest in my dealings with others?
 Have I used people for my own ends and advantage?
 Have I wasted money on unnecessary expenses or gambling?
 Have I spent money on the less fortunate and the poor?
 Have I given with a cheerful heart? Have I paid my taxes honestly?
 Various other sins against justice: Have I failed to keep secrets? Murder, Theft, Cheating, Contempt for others, Backbiting, Tale-bearing, Derision, Cursing, Boasting, Flattery, Quarreling.

Envy

- Envy (ST II-II q36) Envy –is sadness at the happiness or good of another Jealousy –is coveting that which belongs to another The 5 Daughters of envy: Hatred (love desires the good of another), Tale-bearing (to lower a man's reputation), Detraction, Joy at our neighbour's misfortunes, Grief at our neighbour's prosperity. Gossip and Sins of Speech: Every man has a right to a good name. A man's good name is his most precious social possession. Without it he cannot function in society: people will not trust him, will not talk to him, will despise him etc. Every man thus has a right to a good name and we do not have a right to take this away from someone. Even when we are accurately describing someone's bad characteristics we are still depriving him of the good name that he has a right to. Slander –telling an untruth about someone Calumny –telling an untruth about someone in a legal context Detraction –telling a truth about someone that lessens his reputation/good name.

Have I envied or been jealous of the abilities, talents, ideas, plans, good looks, intelligence, clothes, car, possessions, friends etc of another person?

Detraction: Have I damaged the reputation of another?

By deeds/looks/words have I caused others to have lower opinion of someone else?

Slander: Have I exaggerated/lied about the faults of others?

Have I repeated accusations that might not be true?

Gossip: Have I led others to gossip?

Have I neglected to change the conversation/avoid conversation with others who are gossiping?

Have I failed to defend the reputation of others?

Thoughts: Have I mentally judged others? I.e. internal detraction/slander/gossip of the mind.

Have I borne hatred for another?

Have I been guilty of deception?

Do I despise others of different race, class or culture?

Lies: Have I told lies out of envy (to damage another's reputation), laziness (to avoid work), or vanity (to make me look good)?

Sloth/Apathy

- Sloth/Apathy (ST II-II q35) Sloth is spiritual sorrow in the face of spiritual good, it is an oppressive sorrow that weighs on a man's mind and makes him want to do nothing (a1). To not take joy in a good is a bad thing! It is laziness in the things of God. The 6 Daughters of sloth: Despair (by avoiding our ultimate end of God), Faintheartedness (in the quest for sanctity), Sluggishness about the commandments, Spite (as in indignation –against other men who do seek sanctity), Malice (as a consequence of spite), Wandering after unlawful things (“Those who find no joy in spiritual pleasures have recourse to pleasures of the body” (a4)). Isidore adds: Idleness, drowsiness, uneasiness of mind, restlessness of body, instability, loquaciousness (talking too much), curiosity.

Have I sought God above all else, or have I put other priorities (e.g. friendships) ahead of him?

Have I got so caught up in the things of this world that I have forgotten God?

Have I risked losing my faith by bad company, bad reading, cowardice, pride?

Have I trusted God, especially in times of difficulty?

Have I kept the Lord's Day holy? Have I worked needlessly on Sunday?

Have I needlessly omitted some part of my spiritual plan of life: daily Mass, daily Holy Hour, mental prayer, Rosary, spiritual reading etc?

Have I received Holy Communion reverently?

Have I made a due preparation before Mass begins?

Have I made an appropriate thanksgiving after Mass?

Have I entertained distractions in prayer, or failed to give God due concentration in prayer, or rushed my Rosary? (Note: Not giving God the effort he deserves in prayer is not the same thing as involuntary weakness in mental distractions.)

Have I fallen asleep in prayer due to lack of effort and discipline in getting to sleep on time?

Have I gone to sleep on time?

Have I sinned against God by taking his name in vain?

Have I caused scandal to others by using foul language?

Have I given scandal by setting a bad example to others by my sloth?

Has my behaviour or words led others to sin?

Have I set the good example Christ expects?

Have I witnessed to Christ and his teachings?

Laziness: Have I neglected my duties as student?

Have I been negligent/sloppy/half-hearted in my work?

Have I procrastinated (e.g. with email), avoiding more serious priorities?

Have I wasted time watching useless TV, or in pointless internet surfing?

Have I, due to lack of effort and discipline, lacked the sleep I need to study, or do my other work?
Am I just, hardworking and honest in my work?
Have I sought to help my roommate clean/wash etc? Have I been attentive to his/her needs?
Have I prayed for others, or only for myself?
Words: Has my conversation been focussed on my own pleasure, or on others?
Has my humour been insensitive/offensive to others?
Punctuality: Have I sinned against my neighbour by being late?
Have I wasted other people's time by being late or unprepared?
Have I sinned against God by being late for Mass?

Gluttony

- Gluttony (ST II-II q148) Gluttony is the inordinate desire for food, unregulated by reason, knowingly exceeding need, for the sake of pleasure. Gluttony tempts us in 5 ways: To seek food that is too much, too fancy, too expensive, to eat at improper/excessive times, or in hasty manner, or in a manner lacking manners & social consideration. The 5 daughters of gluttony: Dullness of mind (whereas abstinence sharpens wits), Unseemly joy (the appetites get disordered), Idle talk, scurrilous behaviour (because reason is dulled and bad behaviour follows), Bodily uncleanness.

Have I eaten more than I need? To how serious an extent?
Have I sought food with undue concentration?
Have I eaten with undue haste and lack of consideration of others?
Have I neglected the food needs of others at the table, or of my roommate? (e.g. do I always take the last cookie)
Have I spent undue amounts of money on food?
Have I practiced fasting and self-denial, especially on Fridays and other fast days?
Have I fasted before receiving Holy Communion at Mass?
Is my heart set on pleasure and amusement?
Drunkenness: Drunkenness impairs our use of reason. Reason is a gift of God, and is thus rejected in drunkenness. Drunkenness lowers us to the level of the animals, it makes us incapable of virtuous acts, incapable of charity to others, it makes us incapable of knowing right from wrong.
Have I drunk alcohol to excess? Repeatedly?
Have I used prudence to plan the quantity of my drinking?

The Ten Commandments:

1. I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honour your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.