

## On Scrupulosity, IV

Ultimately, God will give the graces to heal, but the scrupulous man must cooperate with these graces by reforming his conscience and habits of thinking (like any one else).

The first task he must accomplish is to allow God help him find a spiritual director who will help him reshape his conscience and transform his image of God. This is not an easy task. St. Francis de Sales once said that only one in a hundred priests can be the director of a particular man. Likely in our day the ratio is higher. This is the case not only because of the lack of orthodoxy among many priests, but because of a great ignorance of the interior life due to bad seminaries, and also because there are fewer priests and the ones that are active are often very, very busy.

For this reason, it is essential that he pray that God choose this priest for him. This will be an act of humility, and it will go against the pride of scrupulosity. Once he chooses a director, it is critical that he follow the advice of the director absolutely. St. Alphonsus de Ligouri said this: "It is wise to choose a good confessor and to follow his direction in all spiritual matters, and even in temporal matters of importance. The relationship should not be ended without good reason. St. Philip Neri teaches: 'Let those who desire to advance in the way of God put themselves under the direction of an enlightened confessor, and let them obey their director as they would the voice of God. Whoever does this may feel assured that they will never have to render an account to God of what they choose. This teaching conforms to the words of Jesus Christ, 'Whoever listens to you, listens to me.'"

The saints are unanimous in their teaching that obedience is a strong weapon against the devil in spiritual combat. To exercise good obedience, it will be necessary for the scrupulous man to avoid looking for character flaws in his spiritual father, or he will end up following "human obedience" instead of "divine obedience."

St. Ignatius once wrote the following to a young Jesuit who was suffering from scrupulosity: "Humble yourself and trust that Divine Providence will rule and guide you by means of your superior. And believe me, if you have true humility and submissiveness, your scruples will not cause you so much trouble. Pride is the fuel they feed on, and it is pride that places more reliance on one's own judgment and less on judgment of others whom we trust."

The famous Fr. Jordan Aumann, O.P. states the following: "Souls that are moved by the spirit of God accept cheerfully the advice and counsel of their directors or others who have authority over them. This spirit of obedience, docility, and submission is one of the clearest signs that a particular inspiration or movement is from God. This is especially true in the case of the educated, who have a greater tendency to be attached to their own opinions."

The spiritual father, who accepts the burden of being the director, must insist that he is the only confessor of the one to be healed, lest the scrupulous one jump from one confessor to another, and become confused with different counsels. He will have to gain the trust of the scrupulous person, which can be established over a period of time, but is rarely present at the beginning, due to the pride of the scrupulous in focusing on the faults (real or exaggerated) of the father.

The father must also insist on absolute obedience of the son. This obedience is necessary to be delivered from scrupulosity. This is not easy work. The scrupulous have a tendency to repeat the same questions, and to question advice. The confessor must try to stop this, since the repeated questions and the questioning of advice only exacerbate the problem.

The father must also establish certain rules; that the son cannot examine his conscience more than (say) one minute a day; that he may go to Confession no more than once a week, etc. These and similar rules eliminate many of the hyper-negative thoughts and doubts which cause so much anxiety. There are many other things the confessor must do, but we need not discuss these at this point.

Expert directors encourage written logs or diaries to keep track of an obsessions or compulsions, and there is much agreement that those who do keep a log and share it with the confessor, make great progress; more than those who do not.

The son needs in particular insights into God's love and mercy. Focusing on the mercy of God is of paramount importance in combating the false tendencies of scrupulosity. It is also important to use Sacred Scripture in this regard, since many, many passages of Scripture can be very difficult to meditate upon. Here is an example of the kind of scripture which can liberate the soul to experience the freedom of the children of God:

1. "Fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth is not perfected in charity. Let us therefore love God: because God hath first loved us. (1 Jn 4.18-19)
2. "Be nothing solicitous: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4.6-7)
3. "Fear not, for I am with thee: turn not aside, for I am thy God. I have strengthened thee and have helped thee: and the right hand of my just one hath upheld thee." (Is 41.10)

Next, we must go into some more detail about how to turn to God, especially using Sacred Scripture, and prayer.