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ERNEST F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

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EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR TEEN-AGERS

ERNEST F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.



Teen-agers, like everybody else, must examine their conscience before they go to confession, if they want to be sure of making a good confession. They must know what they are going to say to the priest when they kneel down in the confessional in order to tell their sins.

But they will not know what to say when they go to confession unless they examine their conscience, that is, unless they sit down or kneel down or lie down (if the supine position helps them) and dig around in their memory in order to discover what they did that was wrong and how often it happened since their last confession.

It has to be admitted (with sadness) that some teen-agers are a bit light headed in this matter. Perhaps they have not been to confession in three or four months. In spite of that fact they will dash into the church at the last moment, kneel down for about one minute or at most two and then leap into the confessional as though someone were after them and jabber off a lineup of meaningless generalizations that do not come within a mile of a truly good confession.

These same teen-agers in the classroom may not be able to remember the names of the Great Lakes or the location of the state of New York or even the date of their own birthday from one week to another. Their memory may be as limping and as limited as a legless man. Still, with almost no thought or preparation at all they are capable of remembering the sins they committed over a three or four month period of time and of giving a clear account of those sins. Most surprising!

Is it any surprise if the priest rises up on his side of the screen in the confes-

sional when so ragged and vague a confession is made, lets out a groan and literally holds onto the chair on which he is sitting lest he be led gently to pitch the youthful generalizer back into the pew for further preparation and examination?

The examination of conscience should line up in the mind all the mortal sins that were committed since the last good confession, as well as the number of times each mortal sin was committed. The specific name of the mortal sin must be brought to mind. It is not sufficient merely to confess in general what one did that was wrong, as for example, to say, "I committed a sin against justice;" or, "I committed a sin against purity." The *particular* sin against justice or against purity must be confessed. If the name of the sin is not known, then whatever was done must be told in a few words so that the priest has a clear understanding of the guilt of the penitent before him. So it is with the number of times. It is not enough to say, "I missed Mass on Sunday *several* times." The word *several* should *never* be used in confession. The number of

times, as exactly as it can be remembered, must be given.

To prepare the mind in this way may take a long time or a short time, depending on how much or how little time has elapsed since the last good confession.

If a confession is made every week or two, very little examination of conscience is required. The oftener one goes to confession, the more tender one's conscience becomes. Even a small venial sin, if it is deliberate, sticks out on the conscience and pricks it like a sandburr. An hour's peering into the memory is not necessary to find out what that venial sin is. It pops into the mind the moment the work of the examination begins.

Furthermore, when one goes to confession frequently, one is protected from mortal sin. That is the miracle of regular confession—mortal sin is very seldom, if ever, committed. And if there are no mortal sins on the soul, much of the burden of the examination of conscience is removed. One need not be quite so thorough if one is morally certain that there are no mor-

tal sins lurking in the dark corners of the soul.

If it was six or seven or more months since the last confession, and if the life that was led during those months tended to carelessness, the frequenting of occasions of sin and the committing of numerous serious sins, the examination of conscience should last at least fifteen minutes, and in some cases more than that.

The reason for this is obvious. The conscience is made callous and hard by the neglect of the sacraments. In fact, it might be a good idea for a boy or a girl who has been leading an extremely worldly life and who has not been to confession in quite some time to use the examination of conscience found in a prayer book under the heading of "confession." Or, if it so suits the sorrowing sinner, the following examination of conscience may not be lacking in merit for the ferreting out of sins that otherwise might escape detection.

There are two areas of examination — the area of the ten commandments and the area of the six precepts of the Church.

The area of the ten commandments will be looked into first.

The first commandment: I AM THE LORD THY GOD. THOU SHALT NOT HAVE STRANGE GODS BEFORE ME.

This commandment refers in part to the crime of setting up a statue, as did the ancient Jews and the pagan Greeks and Romans, and adoring that statue as though it were God. This, of course, is a mortal sin. However, there are few teen-agers who go around adoring statues. Still, teen-agers can fail seriously against the first commandment. How?

By taking part in non-Catholic religious services.

This is done by teen-agers sometimes on the campuses of secular universities. The Protestants have religious centers on the campuses where religious services and social activities are united. The tea must be drunk to the tones of the organ. The Catholic boy has a Protestant girl friend. She invites him to a social activity at the

Baptist religious center. He accepts, and lo and behold, in a nonce he has a hymn book in his hands and he is singing "The Old Rugged Cross" and participating in a prayer meeting as though he were a child of the reformation: after that, the dance.

To take part in a non-Catholic religious service (singing, praying, etc.) is a mortal sin.

It would *not* be a mortal sin to attend the funeral of a non-Catholic friend in a Protestant church, or to go to the wedding of two non-Catholic friends in a Protestant church provided the Catholic does not actually participate in the service. Such attendance is generally looked upon as merely the fulfillment of a social obligation.

Other violations of the first commandment are the following.

It is a mortal sin to deny the Catholic Faith, to make fun of its teachings, to join another religion whether because of a boy friend or a girl friend or for any other reason no matter how grave.

It is a mortal sin to despair of God's mercy, that is, to give up and say that there is no use in trying — it is impossible to go to heaven.

It is a mortal sin to read literature (magazines, books, etc., such as are very often found on drugstore newsracks) that defends false religion or attacks the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Books defending divorce, impurity, the proposition that one religion is as good as another are included in this condemnation.

It is a mortal sin to hate one's neighbor.

It is a mortal sin to lead a person into a serious sin. This is done by the wearing of immodest dress, by direct suggestion and invitation (the boy "talking" the girl into impurities), by bad example, such as public attendance at a forbidden moving picture, steady company-keeping at an age when steady company-keeping is forbidden (this can very easily be a mortal sin of bad example), enrollment in a public school, grade or high, when there is no

serious reason for the enrollment and when the permission of the bishop has not been obtained.

It is a mortal sin knowingly to receive the sacraments of Communion, confirmation, marriage or ordination in the state of mortal sin.

The following are venial sins against the first commandment.

To be wilfully distracted while praying; to show disrespect in church by talking, laughing, making unnecessary noise; to be slightly irreverent when talking of the saints and holy things; not to keep promises. It is *not* a sin to miss morning, meal and night prayers. This need not be confessed. However, the saying of these prayers is strongly advised and urged.

The second commandment: THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN.

It is a mortal sin to blaspheme, that is, to use speech that contains contempt for God, as for example, to say that God does

not exist, that He is not just and merciful, that He is cruel; or to make fun of God and crack scurrilous jokes about Him.

It is a mortal sin to ask God to damn one's neighbor, and really to mean the words. The expression "God damn" in America is more a misuse of God's holy name than a petition that God damn the one to whom the words are directed. The use of this expression very often is no more than a venial sin.

It is a mortal sin to break an oath or a vow without the proper dispensation.

It is a mortal sin to take a false oath, as the teen-ager would do who might go to court and swear to the truth of a statement that was not true at all.

The following are venial sins against the second commandment.

To use Our Lord's name in vain. Many believe that this is a mortal sin. It is not. But it is a venial sin of such proportions that it will bring down upon the soul of the one who is guilty a long and terrible purgatory. And if the sin is committed oft-

en enough, it will lead into mortal sin. Real men never find it necessary to prove their strength and their virility by using God's name in the wrong way.

In confession the words "I used bad language" should never be used. They are too vague. Neither should the words "I cursed," or "I swore" be used if the sin that was committed was the misuse of God's name. The way to confess the misuse of God's name is merely, "I misused God's name a dozen times a day since my last confession." Neither should the use of such words as "damn," "hell," and so on be confessed. In themselves they are only slang and therefore not sins.

The third commandment: **REMEMBER TO KEEP HOLY THE SABBATH.**

It is a mortal sin for a Catholic teenager to miss Mass on Sunday except for a serious reason. Being tired is not a serious reason. Ordinarily being on vacation is not a serious reason.

It is a mortal sin to do manual labor on Sunday, such as cutting the grass, wash-

ing the car, painting the house, except for a serious reason. Riding, rowing, driving a car is not manual labor in the sense of the prohibition. Neither is artistic work, such as painting pictures, embroidering, typewriting, photographing. Three hours of unnecessary manual labor constitute a mortal sin.

The fourth commandment: HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER.

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager to disobey parents *in a serious matter*. If a mother commands her daughter to stay away from certain companions for grave reasons, or to be home at a certain hour of the night because of dangerous characters in the neighborhood, the girl commits a mortal sin in disobeying. If a father commands his son seriously not to join a gang because the gang is vicious and irreligious, the boy commits a mortal sin in disobeying.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to show deep contempt and scorn for authority, to talk against it bitterly and to do every-

thing possible to render it futile in the commands it gives.

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager to cause very heavy grief to mother and father by harsh and cruel conduct.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to strike mother or father, to strike the sister or brother teaching in the school as a gesture of independence and defiance.

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager seriously to impair the discipline of the school by evil conduct and example.

The following are venial sins against the fourth commandment.

Disobedience to parents in small matters; irreverence for superiors; back-talk; pouting, shouting and yelling whenever a command is given.

The same obedience is owed teachers in a school as is owed parents at home.



The fifth commandment: THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

It is a mortal sin to take one's own life or the life of another.

It is a mortal sin seriously to impair one's own health or the health of another.

Drunkenness to the point of unconsciousness or serious sickness is a mortal sin. The taking of dope is a mortal sin, whether it be by marijuana or by any other form.

It is a mortal sin to drive a car so recklessly that the lives of the occupants of the car and of people on the street are in serious danger. Car-racing, car-bumping, drag-racing on public streets can very easily be a mortal sin.

The following are venial sins against the fifth commandment.

To eat too much (to the point of discomfort) ; to drink too much (to the point of dizziness) ; to injure the neighbor slight-

ly (through a fight) ; to be careless in the taking care of one's health.

It is not a mortal or a venial sin to kill one's enemy in a just war. Neither is it a sin if an unjust aggressor is killed or seriously injured while one is defending oneself from assault or robbery.

The sixth commandment: THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

Adultery here is used in the broad sense of the word. It means impurity. "Thou shalt not be impure." Impurity is the misuse of anything that can lead up to the misuse of the sex faculty.

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager wilfully to arouse sex pleasure through the unnecessary touching and playing with the private and sacred parts of the body. This sin is called self-abuse.

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager to cause or to take a chance on causing sexual pleasure through the unnecessary reading of obscene literature, the looking at

obscene pictures, attendance at highly suggestive plays and movies.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to tell or to listen to stories that are intimately connected with sex and that are calculated to cause serious temptation.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to give themselves over to passionate and prolonged kissing, petting and the touching of each others' bodies.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to perform the marriage act.

The following are venial sins against the sixth commandment.

It is a venial sin to dilly-dally for a moment, without giving full consent, with a temptation before dismissing it.

It is a venial sin to follow the urge of curiosity to the point of reading and talking about sex matters beyond the point of necessity but not to the point where consent is given to any temptation that might arise as a result of the curiosity.

It is *not* a sin to learn about sex from parents and other reliable authorities, or to read about such things in approved books provided, provision has been made against the giving of consent to any temptation that may arise in consequence.

Sex feeling that may arise spontaneously in the body is not a sin in itself. It becomes a sin only when it is deliberately and unnecessarily caused, or when it is deliberately consented to.

The seventh commandment: THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

It is a mortal sin to steal an amount of money (or property) from an ordinary working man that is the equivalent of a day's wage.

It is a mortal sin to steal an amount of money (or property) from a corporation or from the very wealthy that amounts to thirty five dollars.

It is a mortal sin maliciously to destroy property (school property, city property, the neighbor's property) if the damage

done amounts to the sums mentioned above.

It is a mortal sin not to return property that is found if the owner of the property is known and if the property is worth a considerable amount of money.

It is a mortal sin to refuse to pay just bills if the bills amount to a considerable sum of money.

It is a mortal sin to refuse to make any effort to make restitution for that which is stolen if the stolen goods amounted to a considerable sum of money.

The following are venial sins against the seventh commandment.

All the above mortal sins are venial sins if the amount concerned is small.

It is a venial sin for a teen-ager to put out a minimum of effort on the books in school, thereby wasting the money the parents are spending for the education.

It is a venial sin for teen-agers to be so careless with their clothes that they add unnecessarily to the money that their parents must spend for their support.

It is a venial sin to deface text books, desks, etc. in school even in a small way.

It is *not* a sin against the seventh commandment to damage property accidentally (breaking windows, etc.), when no fault of any kind can be attributed to the one responsible for the accident.

The eighth commandment: **THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOR.**

It is a mortal sin to tell a true story about a person if the true story is seriously damaging to character and if the story is entirely unknown. For example: to tell the sin that a girl committed in the past which she has confessed and has made every effort to repair, and which almost nobody knows anything about.

It is a mortal sin to tell a lie about a person if that lie would seriously damage the person's reputation.

It is a mortal sin to judge a person rashly in a serious matter, such as, the virtue of justice or the virtue of purity.

It is a mortal sin to violate a secret if thereby the neighbor is seriously injured or grievously offended.

Venial sins against the eighth commandment are the following.

It is a venial sin to tell a lie.

It is a venial sin to cheat in school.

It is a venial sin to gossip about the neighbor (provided no grave harm is done).

If one has a doubt as to whether or not the evil deed of a friend or a neighbor should be revealed to the proper authority for the friend's or neighbor's own good, nothing should be said until first the confessor is consulted. His advice should be followed.



The ninth commandment: THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOR'S WIFE.

The ninth commandment forbids not only the coveting of the neighbor's wife but also *all* impure desires and thoughts.

Thoughts and desires are sins only when they are deliberately caused or wilfully consented to. The most disgusting and graphic thoughts are not sins, even though they are violent in the force of their attack, if they are not wanted and if an effort is put out to destroy them. Avoiding bad pictures, books and conversations; saying, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph help me;" and turning the mind to something else—these are the best defense against the sins of evil thoughts and desires.

It is a mortal sin wilfully to desire illicit sexual pleasure.

It is a mortal sin to think about sexual matters if, 1. such thinking causes sexual excitement; 2. if such thinking causes a certain complacency or satisfaction in the mind, or a willingness to consent to the

sin thought about if giving into the sin were feasible at the moment. Wilful bad thoughts are the same kind of sin as the action one thinks about with pleasure and complacency.

For an adequate reason (necessary study, etc.) it is not sinful to think about sex matters provided provision has been made for the removal of the danger of consenting to temptations that may arise.

The tenth commandment: THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOR'S GOODS.

If it is a mortal sin against the seventh commandment to steal a large sum of money, it is a sin against the tenth commandment *to desire* to steal a large sum of money.

The *mind* sins of the tenth commandment against justice are the *deed* sins of the seventh commandment.

This holds for both mortal and venial sins. For the examination of conscience on the tenth commandment, consult the ex-

amination of conscience on the seventh commandment.

The second area of sins to be examined is the area of the six precepts of the Church.

The first precept: MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION.

Missing Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation without a serious reason was listed as a mortal sin under the third commandment.

To miss even a small part of the Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation without necessity is a venial sin.

To hear Mass with numerous wilful distractions is a venial sin.

To hear Mass with *total* wilful distraction is a mortal sin.

To miss one of the principle parts of the Mass through one's own fault (Offering, Consecration, Communion) is a mortal sin.

To miss all of the Mass up to the Offertory and all of the Mass after the Communion through one's own fault is a mortal sin.

The second precept: ABSTINENCE FROM MEAT ON FRIDAY.

It is a mortal sin to eat meat on Friday unless one has a serious reason for so doing.

A serious reason is sickness, the command of the doctor, etc. If there is a doubt in the mind as to the seriousness of the reason for eating meat, the pastor or confessor should be consulted. This may be done over the telephone. Dining with non-Catholics on Friday when meat is served is not ordinarily a sufficient reason for eating the meat. Neither is it a sufficient reason to eat meat if one orders a hamburger and remembers only after the sandwich has been served that the day is Friday.

The law of Friday abstinence holds from the age of seven until death.

The third precept: **HOLY COMMUNION DURING THE EASTER SEASON — AT LEAST ONCE BETWEEN THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT AND TRINITY SUNDAY.**

There need be no examination of conscience on this precept. Teen-agers with the faith in their hearts try to receive Holy Communion every Sunday.

The fourth precept: **CONFESSION AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR.**

There need be no examination about this precept either.

The fifth precept: **SUPPORT THE CHURCH MORALLY AND FINANCIALLY.**

It is a mortal sin for a teen-ager never to give *anything*, not even one penny, for the support of the Church, if though the teen-ager has money for other purposes.

It is a mortal sin to tear down the authority of the priest by fighting him, by

turning people against him, by refusing ever in anyway to help him when help is really needed for the salvation of souls.

It is a venial sin to show disrespect for the priest by calling him by his last name, cracking jokes about him, being ashamed of him and therefore refusing to salute him in public.



The sixth precept: THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAWS OF THE CHURCH CONCERNING MARRIAGE.

It is a mortal sin for a Catholic to attempt marriage before a minister or a justice of the peace. Before God the attempted marriage is no marriage at all. A Catholic can *validly* marry only before a priest and two witnesses.

It is a mortal sin for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic except for a serious reason and with the permission of the bishop. The feeling of love is not a serious reason.

It is a mortal sin to keep steady company with one whom one cannot marry, that is, a divorced person whose partner is still living, a non-Catholic whom one may not marry because there is not a serious reason for the marriage, a close relative, that is, a first or second cousin.

It is a mortal sin for teen-agers to keep steady company long before they are in a position to marry — a boy and a girl keeping *exclusive* company, going out together (no other couples) once or twice a week, and not going out with any other boys or girls.

It is a mortal sin to attend the attempted marriage of a Catholic before a minister or a justice of the peace.

It is a mortal sin to attend showers or to send gifts to Catholics who are attempting marriage before a minister or a justice of the peace. A gift is a token of congratulations. Would one send a gift to a man because he intended to rob a bank on the following day? The mortal sin of entering an invalid marriage is just as grave a sin as the robbing of a bank. If one may not congratulate the bank-robber, one may not congratulate the boy or girl entering an adulterous marriage.

This ends the teen-ager's examination of conscience.

Any boy or girl in doubt about the state of his or her conscience — whether or not all the debris of wilful sin has been removed — may well take up this list and stand it alongside the thoughts and words and deeds of the past. Things may be seen that were never seen before. And perhaps for the first time in a long time a good confession will be made. May it be so.

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