

Introduction

Self-examination has always been considered a necessary means of progress in virtue. All Religious Orders and congregations have provision in their rules for at least one daily examination of conscience. While the practice is also necessary for lay people, there have been few booklets offered to them whereby a systematic examination of conscience might be made at definite times. Lists of sins may be found in prayer books and pamphlets, but frequently they lack completeness, or they make no clear-cut distinctions between mortal and venial sin, or they make no reference to the helps and counsels that might build up virtue and prevent sin.

The object of this booklet is to initiate lay people into the practice of concentrating their efforts at self-perfection on one virtue a month. It provides a fairly complete list of mortal sins to be avoided, of venial sins to be corrected, and of helps and counsels that may be practiced. For each month a short explanation of the virtue to be practiced is given, an aspiration is suggested for frequent use, and a prayer is added containing sorrow for the past and resolve for the future.

The division of the obligations of the Christian life into twelve virtues is not one that can be made without some degree of arbitrary arrangement of material. There will be overlapping, some repetition, and not always a strictly logical inclusion of questions under a given head. The practical purpose has been kept in mind, rather than the theoretical; an effort has been made to bring into each month reminders of some of the fundamental obligations every Christian has, as these can be related to given virtues.

A warning should be given to souls who are inclined to scrupulosity. Such souls are frequently disturbed by reading lists of sins, because they erroneously think themselves guilty, where they are not guilty at all. They should have permission of their confessor before they undertake to make a minute examination of conscience, and in every doubt must obey their confessor blindly. Aside from the scrupulous, some persons may find doubts arising from certain questions because

circumstances not mentioned may confuse particular issues. It is to be remembered at all times that a mortal sin is not committed unless three conditions are present, viz., sufficient reflection, full consent of the will, and a violation of God's law in a serious matter. The mortal sins listed represent only objectively serious matter; if one or both of the other conditions necessary for the commission of a mortal sin be lacking in a particular case, the guilt would not be incurred. In prudent doubt, a confessor should be asked for a solution.

It is recommended that once a week during each month, the examen for that month be read carefully and thoughtfully. On some occasions this would be best done before confession.