
When Are Bad Thoughts Sinful?

Is pleasure derived from a bad thought always a sure sign of sin? No, it is not.

By way of example, suppose you had resolved never to enjoy wine, and suppose someone forced a bit of rare wine into your mouth. While wine was present in your mouth you would experience a pleasant sensation of taste. But since you didn't want to enjoy the wine, since you refused to swallow it and, at the first opportunity, spat it out, the pleasure would be involuntary.

Similarly, in the matter of bad thoughts: involuntary pleasure on the part of the senses or of the imagination or memory, is often unavoidable and spontaneous when a certain image is present in consciousness. If the image comes to consciousness, through no fault of your own, if you refuse to enjoy it, and try, on the contrary, to get rid of it, the pleasure that accompanies it is not voluntary and therefore is not sinful.

Are frequency and violence of temptations a sure sign of sin? No, because frequency and violence of temptations often depend upon temperament and character, sometimes upon education and past and present environment, sometimes even upon the providential designs of God. There is culpability if we cause the temptations--if we go to suggestive shows, or take part in evil conversations, or read bad books. But frequency and violence of temptations are by no means always sure signs of sin.

Keep this in mind: mortal sin happens only when the intellect fully recognizes the presence of the evil image and when, after recognition by the intellect, there is full consent of the will. Venial sin occurs when, in a semi-conscious state let us say, there is only partial recognition by the intellect and only partial consent of the will.

In the matter of bad thoughts, here are some points to remember:

1. There is no consent, hence no sin, if a feeling of disgust with the temptation has been present, or if you turn to prayer, or to any other legitimate and attractive thought (such as a football game) to distract the intellect and will.
2. There is some consent, hence venial sin:
 - a. If, before repelling the temptation, you momentarily hesitate, not wanting to offend God, yet wishing to relish the forbidden pleasure;
 - b. If resistance is real but feeble, indolent. Half resistance is half consent and venial sin.
3. Consent is full and gravely sinful when, despite the protests of conscience, which recognizes the gravity of the evil, the will acquiesces in the pleasure presented to it in the temptation.

If, in spite of this knowledge of the distinction between sin and temptation, you still have difficulty in a particular case, consult your confessor. If your conscience is lax the presumption is against you; if you have a delicate conscience, not in the habit of yielding consent, you are most probably free, at least from serious sin.

CORRECTION in yesterday's Bulletin: last sentence in fourth paragraph should read, "Is conversation with 'cosmic activity' far different?"

DEYERS: (deceased) friend of Robert Voelker (Fresh.); friend of Jim Burke (Walsh). Ill, Frederick Snite, '33, seriously ill with infantile paralysis; cousin of Hugh Wilcy (Brownson); father of Wells Albade (Carr.); mother of Miller Mallett (Walsh); friend of Bob Benavides (Alum.); uncle of Charlie Morrison (Lyons). Four spec. ints.