

## Sin

Sin is any cruelty that you inflict. It is not necessarily malicious or consciously intended. Sin always has a living victim, and it hurts or harms your victim. God qualifies as a living victim. So, potentially, do you.

You are not born sinful: Only with the capacity to sin.

In this discussion of sin I shall say little of evil people who act with malice, or people who commit serious statute crimes. They need pastoral support for sure, and some would benefit from confessional penance. But they have complex needs and require the care of medical and penal specialists.

You are a good person and your needs differ.

Over and above human conceptions of sin are the imperative Commandments of God that were handed down to Moses as he wandered through the desert. They are listed in Chapter Twenty of Exodus and again in Deuteronomy 5:1-21. Adapting the Commandments of God for the rich young man ( Matthew 19:16-22 ) Our Holy Savior said: “Do not kill”, “Do not steal”, “Do not commit adultery”, “Do not bear false witness”, “Love thy neighbor”, and “Honor your Father and Mother”.

Using modern language these Ten Commandments of God are in order:-

- 1 Have No Other Gods
- 2 Make No Idols
- 3 Do Not Take God’s Name in Vain
- 4 Keep the Sabbath Holy
- 5 Honor Your Father and Mother
- 6 Do Not Kill
- 7 Do Not Commit Adultery
- 8 Do Not Steal
- 9 Do Not Lie to Get Someone into Trouble
- 10 Do Not Be Jealous

If these articles are obeyed men live like angels. To our lasting cost many disobey each by habit and all break some on occasion.

To disobey the Injunctions of Christ or any Commandment of God is a Mortal Sin. It is a very serious matter that is always hurtful. You have noticed something else about Mortal Sins: They usually involve concealment or some other act of cowardice.

In an attempt to be helpful, Pope Gregory I compiled a list of Seven Deadly Sins which are also confessable.

Here is a list of Pope Gregory’s sins or vices with their corresponding virtues:-

<i>Sin</i>	<i>Virtue</i>
Lust	Chastity
Gluttony	Temperance
Greed	Charity
Sloth	Diligence
Wrath	Patience
Envy	Kindness

## Pride

## Humility

Gregory's list is only a guide. You will know if you have sinned, and if you need a technical diagnosis a little meditation may yield it. Gregory's sins tend to divide into sins of the mind ( Pride, Envy and Wrath ) and sins of the flesh ( Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust ). But of course these evils overlap and interpenetrate. A problem with the Deadly Sins is that they are not actions but thoughts that promote action, and thoughts are not sinful of themselves. On the other hand they are a useful list of tendencies to be suppressed.

Sins are formulated in your mind, or arise from a culpable absence of care. Carelessness and indolence are sins of Sloth. You cannot blame Satan or anyone else for your own shortcomings. Satan, too, is a helpless bystander, utterly reliant upon your exercise of Free Will.

It is possible to sin against God though the normal layman can only do so in the one way. God's Third Commandment says you should not take His name in vain. This means you do not call his name unless you truly want him to listen and to help you become the person He wants you to be, or to help some creature you find it hard to help yourself. You do not call him as a matter of ceremony, to progress some kind of administrative procedure, or to impress your friends. You certainly do not do so by stupid habit. Swearing on the Bible in a court of law is blasphemy. The court is the court of your king, not of God. Render unto God the things that are of God, and unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's ( Matthew 22:21 ).

If you call out the Name of God without expecting him to respond you are as much a coward as if you unwarrantably called out for your king or president, whilst being safely out of earshot. Real men and real women do not swear.

The antithesis of swearing is prayer. When you pray you sincerely want God to hear and to act. You are ready to face him. You know that if you abuse the call you could be punished most grievously, unless He is merciful, though He has proven himself to be so. Prayer is for real men and women.

When I was an atheist swearing had no effect on me. Probably I did not notice most of it. If I swore I thought nothing of it. When I swear now, and I just did, I know I am a disgusting coward and hypocrite. Every time I hear the words it is like a whiplash upon my soul.

Blasphemy defiles a man, as prayer sounds sweet upon the lips of a woman and a curse of complaint unfruitful.

Minced oaths are just extra craven ones, as they imply that whilst we have dismissed the appearance of God as too improbable to fear, yet we live in terror of the censure of men. These include the British swearword bl\*\*dy, the one that crossed my lips, and the vocative expression for f\*\*k's sake, that traduces not only the Divine itself but also a sacred act appointed of it.

Please do not swear.

It is possible to sin against yourself, but whilst the sin may cause you pain, it is your loved ones who suffer. Lust, Gluttony and Sloth are sins against the self. Who pays when you indulge yourself? Think about it.

Pride is the source of many of the sins and real crimes committed by men and women who try to do good.

Three weeks ago my new neighbor moved in. His new house had been unoccupied for nearly a year and a summer's growth luxuriated his garden and the Leylandii hedge that bounded it. Proudly and industriously he trimmed these high untidy hedges and he made a very good job of so doing. He and his were very happy

to enter their new home. I wonder if he spared a thought for the tiny creatures who lost theirs. Disconsolate little birds spent the day fluttering through my shrubbery, distressing themselves and their neighbors. Would you like your home destroyed? Pride had led to cruelty.

A few days later I passed an angler beside a canal. He was torturing small fish. He was about forty years old and if you are foreign you possibly wonder that a grown man would, but I digress. He accosted me to ask that I take pictures of him and then revealed a magnificent dying pike from a keep net. I asked him if he was going to eat it but he said he would place it back in the canal. He posed with the fish but was dissatisfied with my captures. Cruelty had led to Pride and then to Wrath.

The gentle snails *Helix Aspersa* love my garden ( or is it their garden? ), and when it rains come out to graze. When I open gates or pace the tarmac I often forget to look out for them. Proudly I prefer my thoughts. I crush the life from them, violating the Sixth Commandment of God. This is a Mortal Sin arising from Pride and nothing less avuncular than my Deadly Sin of Sloth.

Real men do not kill. Real men pass their Sacred Seed of Life to a woman. Real women bear the new life of which they were Entrusted, and nurture it.

Please do not kill.

Almost everyone named in the following narrative was a Christian man or woman who attended Confession regularly according to his rite. Most of them were highly principled. There is one exception. And that exception was a man of the highest judgment and probity.

One day, not so long ago, but in a fairytale country, thirty-year-old Rudolf and his seventeen-year-old mistress Marie were having dinner in their remote hunting lodge. Rudolf's father told him to leave Marie, but Rudolf broke the Fifth Commandment. It was a bleak and snowy January night outside. The furniture was Spartan but the food lavish and Rudolf ordered another bottle of his favorite champagne. Perhaps it is harsh to judge Marie, but Rudolf had also broken the Seventh Commandment, and knew it. Very surprisingly, for the roads were almost snowbound, a deputation arrived. No one knows what happened next but when Rudolf and his lover were found their corpses betrayed signs of extreme violence and at least Rudolf had taken a bullet. Someone had suffered Wrath and broken the Sixth Commandment.

Rudolf's inheritance passed to his fifty-six year old uncle Karl who quickly demurred and passed the poisoned chalice to his twenty-five-year old son, Franz Ferdinand.

Ten years passed.

Franz Ferdinand went to see his aging uncle, Franz Josef. Ferdinand, now in his late thirties, had some very good news. He had proposed marriage to the love of his life, Sophie, and she had accepted. Ferdinand asked his uncle Josef for permission to marry, for although he was of age, custom demanded such.

Franz Josef filled with wrath. He told his nephew that permission was refused on the grounds that Sophie was a Czech and a mere aristocrat. Racism and snobbery are evils borne of Pride, and have very strange and unlooked-for results, as we shall discover. Josef had forgotten that his sacred duty to love his country and his class must not be adulterated with hate for any. Secondly, Josef told Ferdinand that if he married Sophie he and his heirs would be disinherited. Thirdly, and perhaps most cruelly, Josef specified that henceforth Ferdinand and Sophie should never be seen together in public, except on military business.

Ferdinand exercised his human right freely to chose and marry his life partner, and beget her children. Ferdinand and Sophie wed.

On 28<sup>th</sup> June 1900, Franz Ferdinand swore a morganatic oath that deprived he and his heirs of the throne of Austria forever. Ferdinand broke the Third Commandment. He also disobeyed Christ's Injunction about hair color.

Franz Ferdinand decided to spend the fourteenth anniversary of his oath inspecting his uncle's army in Bosnia. He appeared to regard the day as a kind of commemoration, perhaps of his liberation to married bliss and fatherhood. It meant he could be far from Vienna and with his beloved, out and around the sunlit streets of Sarajevo. Old photographs show the couple beaming nervously but delightedly to well-wishers and shaking hands, she with her bouquet of red roses, he in his army uniform.

June 28<sup>th</sup>, St Vitus Day, dawned hot and dusty. On that day five hundred and twenty-five years previously a Serb had killed the Sultan of Turkey. It was a national holiday. Gavrilo loved his country and his woman above life itself. Gavrilo was nineteen. Gavrilo slipped his FN1910 9mm semi-automatic into his pocket. He went out to meet his friends.

Ferdinand and Sophie went to Mass. They took the brief train ride to the Bosnian capital and alighted. They climbed into their green Gräf und Stift Rois de Blougnie open tourer to be driven about their duties.

The Appel Quay is a leafy lungotevere beside the River Miljacka. At ten that morning, the couple left the barracks and drove along the Appel Quay to The Town Hall, where Ferdinand would recite his prepared speech. In the garden of the Mostar Cafe Mehmed waited to kill them. He chickened-out. Further on, Vaso, too, had a bomb and a gun. He too chickened-out.

At 1010 the royal car approached Nedeljko. He threw a grenade. The driver put his foot down, and the bomb bounced from Ferdinand's car, and did not explode until a following aides' car was above it. Twenty were injured. Nedeljko chewed his cyanide pill, but it failed to kill him. So he jumped into the Miljacka which proved to be four inches deep. He was arrested. Ferdinand and Sophie continued to the Town Hall. Their car sped quickly and Gavrilo and his group failed to act.

At the Town Hall, Mayor Curcic made a speech of welcome. Ferdinand succumbed to anger and protested his violent reception to his luckless host. Sophie told her husband to be quiet. Presently, Franz Ferdinand's bloodstained script arrived and he recited its ironic thanks.

After this reception Sophie and Ferdinand abandoned their schedules. At 1045 they climbed back into the Gräf und Stift to drive to visit the injured in hospital.

Meanwhile a disappointed Gavrilo had consoled himself with a sandwich and possibly a stiff drink in Schiller's Cafe on a corner at the Quay. In the confusion the Franz Ferdinand motorcade separated. Ferdinand's driver, Leopold, reversed to rejoin the convoy. The backing car paused before Schiller's.

For a suspended moment all that could be heard in the shimmering morning heat was the soft susurrations of the gathering foehn in the overhead wires, the clatter of the tappets and the gentle muffled phut of the exhaust.

In this interval, Gavrilo was astounded to recognise his intended victims. Gavrilo stepped from the shadows. He draw his FN1910 and shot Ferdinand through the jugular. Firing again, he punctured Sophie's abdomen. The woman turned and fell on her knees before her bleeding husband with a prayer on her lips.

Gavrilo had forgotten his sacred duty to love without hate and to reverence the world and its creatures.

Franz Ferdinand died saying “Sophie, Sophie, don’t die. Live for our children. My pain, it is nothing”. Anton, a Jesuit priest, gave him his Last Rites. Sophie died ten minutes later.

The conspirators were arrested. The Austrian Police confiscated Gavrilo’s weapon. The Belgian maker’s mark disclosed that it was the property of Serbian Military Intelligence. But in any case, the conspirators had readily divulged their complicity with The Serbian Government.

Gavrilo was tried for high treason, but the Austrians did not hang him, for he was adjudged too young. He got twenty years.

So did Nedeljko. He apologised for the grenade attack at the Quay. Ferdinand and Sophie’s three young orphans, Sophie, Maximilian and Ernst, decided to exercise their sacred duty to love without hate. They wrote Nedeljko a letter of forgiveness for his attempt on their parents’ lives. All three of Ferdinand and Sophie’s children would spend World War Two in Dachau concentration camp.

Austria sent Serbia an ultimatum. If satisfied in full, Serbian independence would effectively extinguish. Serbia quibbled.

Austria mobilised its army as if to occupy the proud little Balkan state. Russia guaranteed Serbian independence and mobilised against Austria. Germany was obliged by treaty to defend Austria from any threat. Germany mobilised. Furthermore, Russia and France had secretly guaranteed Serbia at the inception of the statelet some forty years before. And France in turn guaranteed Russia, as was reciprocated.

When governments start guaranteeing things you know you are in trouble.

Now Germany’s priority, as always, was to knock France out of a war and fight, if at all, on a single front. But the hills of the Vosges separate the two countries, and are a tough terrain. You do not want your troops beleaguered. The coastal plains of Flanders are a much softer and faster route to France.

Britain had guaranteed Belgian independence at the inception of the Belgian state in 1830. The Germans crossed Belgium. The British declared war.

Soon a continent was in flames and a civilisation tottered. A fifty-year hemoclysm had commenced. In this first phase of it ten million died and 7.6 million disappeared without trace. Europe’s race of horses was virtually exterminated and replaced with petrol engines. The Russians could not stand their losses. They called 47-year-old lawyer Vladimir from exile and he tried to take charge.

Russian emperor Nicholas asked his cousin George for shelter. He begged that at least his wife and children might have sanctuary. George promised rescue.

George was next in trouble. His country was resourceful but ill-led. Socialists were restive, feminists were burning property, and the Irish rose in open revolt. George felt his crown slipping. George reneged.

The Russians arrested their emperor Nicholas and his wife Alix, and, together with their five young children, and their loyal staff, murdered them. The Russians continued to fight each other. Five million died.

Germany was defeated and humiliated. In wrath a whole nation sought vengeance, and another fifty-five million died across a planet, thirteen million murdered in cold blood.

In the pages of his *Inferno* the poet Dante Alighieri had Satan take a man’s love and turn it into a travesty of itself.

Franz Josef was a damaged man who loved.

All of the men we named were good men. They loved and lost. They loved the people around them and sought their happiness.

But they forgot The Will of God. They thought their ideas were best, and that honor, loyalty and intellect would suffice. They forgot their enemies were men, and also sought love. They forgot that their children must breed, and that the father is not the child. We shall remember them.