

For Christians who, by the grace of God, never commit mortal sins, evidently there can be no danger of forgetting them in confession. Nor does such danger exist for such as rarely commit them, and who confess them at once, or soon after their fall. Such Christians are, then, even by the rigor of theology, dispensed from examining their conscience, either because they commit no grave faults, or because, if it should happen that they commit one, it would be impossible for them to forget it even without the least examination.

It is very different with those that ordinarily commit a great number of mortal sins, and that confess but rarely. By making no examination of conscience, they expose themselves to the actual danger of omitting some such sins; they are, in consequence, bound to examine their conscience before confession. These are truths that no theologian has ever questioned.

Our intention is not to induce the timid to neglect examination of conscience. We merely wish to enlighten them upon their real obligation, and to calm the exaggerated fears of many. It is a fact attested by experience, that they who have no need of examining themselves, are precisely they who give themselves most trouble on this point. The anxiety with which they apply themselves thereto greatly retards their spiritual advancement.

We, therefore, exhort all Christians, even the most timorous, always to make their examination of conscience before confession, for it is a thing eminently proper. If for many such an examination is not necessary, yet it will be of great advantage to them. It will help them better to confess their light faults and to correct them. They should, however, be very careful not to become disquieted on the subject. The examination of conscience ought to be a subject of disquietude for no one, not even, as we shall presently explain, for the greatest sinners; surely, then, not for souls who habitually live in the holy fear of God.

This examination ought to turn upon what constitutes the obligatory matter of confession, namely, upon the species of sins, their number, and the circumstances that change their species. There is no necessity to examine