



A historical, theological, and pastoral journey through the "forgotten sins" that can illuminate your life today

Introduction: When sin takes unexpected forms

Throughout history, the Church has discerned and taught about morality with a richness of nuance that sometimes surprises modern Catholics. Many are astonished to learn that practices now considered common or even insignificant were, in certain historical contexts, the subject of ecclesiastical condemnation or at least serious moral warnings. One of the most curious examples is that of coffee, which in the 17th century was called by some "the devil's drink." But behind these apparent oddities lie profound lessons about sin, virtue, prudence, and spiritual discernment.

This article offers you an educational and pastoral journey through some of those historical condemnations now considered "strange sins," to discover their true meaning and how they can help us live our faith today with more awareness and depth in the contemporary world.

Coffee and the Pope: Was it banned by the Church?

The legend of Clement VIII

According to a popular tradition (whose historical accuracy is debated but illustrative), when coffee arrived in Europe from the Islamic world, many Christians viewed it with suspicion, even as something demonic. Some claimed it was the drink of infidels, a trap from Satan to tempt Christians with a false energy that would distract them from spiritual recollection.

It is said that some prelates wanted Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605) to ban it. But after trying it, the Pope—displaying fine humor—is said to have exclaimed:

"This devil's drink is so delicious that we should cheat the devil by baptizing it."

Instead of banning it, he blessed it. Coffee was thus "baptized" and accepted by Christians, especially in monastic settings, where it helped monks stay awake during vigils.

Even if this story is not entirely verifiable, it illustrates the Church's discernment: what matters is not the object itself, but the moral use made of it.



Why has the Church spoken out about things that seem “insignificant” today?

Sin and culture

The Church, in her maternal and pastoral role, not only condemns grave mortal sin but also cares about the dispositions of the heart, the small disorders that, if accumulated, distance us from the love of God. Some behaviors or customs that today seem trivial were, in their original context, laden with moral, cultural, or spiritual meaning.

Example: In the Middle Ages, excessive use of perfume or flamboyant makeup was warned against—not because of the items themselves, but because they were often tied to vanity or illicit seduction. Today, the criterion is not so different: why do I get dressed up? For whom? With what intention?

Other “strange sins” the Church condemned (and what they really mean)

1. Sleeping too much

A sin? Yes, in excess.

Why: Sloth (*acedia*) is one of the seven deadly sins. Saint Thomas Aquinas describes it as a sorrow for spiritual good, which leads to neglect in the things of God.

Today: Oversleeping can be a sign of inner flight, unconsolated sadness, or evasion of responsibilities.

| *“Do not love sleep lest you become poor” (Proverbs 20:13).*

2. Laughing during Mass

A sin? Not always, but in earlier times it was considered irreverent.

Why: Mass is the sacrifice of Christ, not a show. Disorderly laughter was seen as a sign of irreverence or distraction.

Today: With what attitude do we participate in the liturgy? Do we understand Mass as a sacred mystery or a social gathering?



3. Gambling and dice

A sin? Yes, if it involves addiction, deceit, or financial harm to oneself or others.

Why: The Catechism explains it clearly: "Games of chance or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for their needs and those of others" (CCC 2413).

Today: Gambling addiction is a real affliction that destroys families. The Church warned about this centuries before modern psychology.

4. Idle curiosity

A sin? Surprisingly, yes.

Why: Saint Augustine calls it "concupiscence of the eyes": the disordered desire to know what does not edify.

Today: Digital voyeurism, obsession with gossip, compulsive use of social media all fall into this same disorder.

"Woe to you who love the chief seats... you are like unseen graves"
(Luke 11:43-44).

Behind curiosity, sometimes there is pride, judgment, and an unhealthy thirst for control.

Spiritual lessons behind these "strange sins"

Christian morality is not a list of arbitrary prohibitions. Every norm has a logic that seeks to lead us to true freedom, to full life in Christ. What the Church identifies as sin, she does not do to repress, but out of love for the soul, which is made for God.

The key lies in the **order of love**: when something, no matter how small, disorders our priorities, it can become an obstacle to grace.

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All



things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Theological and pastoral guide: How to discern today what may seem "insignificant"

1. **Examine your intention**

It's not what you do, but **why** you do it. Are you acting out of love, necessity, vanity, or escapism?

2. **Look for the fruit**

Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16). If an apparently innocent action draws you away from prayer, family, or responsibilities, reconsider it.

3. **Consult the Church**

Don't rely solely on your subjective judgment. Tradition and the Magisterium help us see beyond our blindness.

4. **Avoid both rigorism... and laxity**

Not everything is forbidden, but not everything is permitted. Holiness is balance, wisdom, and discernment.

5. **Go to confession with honesty**

Don't wait for major sins to go to confession. Learn to bring God your "minor disorders," because often they are the start of bigger problems.

Practical applications for your life

- **Do a daily examen of conscience**, including areas you tend to overlook: wasted



time, trivial conversations, phone use.

- **Live with intention:** even a cup of coffee can become a prayer if shared with someone in need.
- **Be vigilant** about “sins of omission”: it’s not just what you do, but what you fail to do out of comfort or distraction.
- **Recover the sense of the sacred:** when entering Mass, dressing, speaking... do you honor God’s presence?

Conclusion: Small things matter too

In a world that glorifies permissiveness and despises self-examination, rediscovering these “strange sins” is a way to return to the Gospel with more depth. Nothing in our life is foreign to God—not coffee, not the way we sleep, nor how we use our social media.

The Christian life does not consist of occasional grand gestures, but of daily faithfulness through small things. Because as Jesus said:

“*Whoever is faithful in small matters is also faithful in great ones*” (Luke 16:10).

May this journey help you not only to smile at the curious but also to honestly examine your heart and open yourself to the Holy Spirit, who wants to sanctify every corner of your day.