



A theological and pastoral guide to rediscovering the Christian responsibility of "doing good"

Introduction

When people speak of sin, most tend to think of negative actions: lying, stealing, committing adultery, missing Mass, and so on. But the Church teaches that there is another type of sin, just as serious and often much more silent: **the sin of omission**. This consists of **failing to do the good one is obligated to do**. In other words, sin is not only the evil we commit, but also the good we fail to do.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, in article 1853, clearly states:

*"The root of sin is in the heart of man [...]. Sin is also a word, an act, or a **desire contrary to the eternal law**. It is also **sin to omit** what the eternal law requires."*

In a world marked by indifference, moral passivity, and comfort, rediscovering the gravity of the sin of omission is an urgent call to **awaken the Christian conscience**. This article aims to help you understand its meaning, its theological history, its relevance to our time, and how to live an active, responsible, and transformative faith.

I. What is the sin of omission?

The sin of omission consists in **not performing a morally good and obligatory action** when one has the duty to do so. It is not mere negligence, but a **serious fault** when three conditions are met:

1. **One knows that good must be done** (knowledge).
2. **One is able to do that good** (freedom and possibility).
3. **One willingly decides not to do it** (will).

For example:



- A father who does not educate his children in the faith.
- A Christian who witnesses an injustice and remains silent when they could intervene.
- Someone who passes by a starving poor person without helping, even though they can.

The **parable of the Last Judgment** in Matthew 25 is the most forceful example. Jesus does not rebuke the condemned for the evil they did, but for **the good they failed to do**:

"For I was hungry, and you gave me no food; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me"
(Mt 25:42-43).

Thus, Jesus shows that **the path to condemnation is not always paved with active evils, but with guilty silences, comfortable indifference, and passive hearts.**

II. History and theological development of the concept

From the earliest centuries, the Church understood that sin is not limited to a bad act, but also to the **omission of a good act**. The Church Fathers, such as St. Augustine, taught:

"It is not enough to do no evil; one must also do good." (Sermon 43,4).

This principle is based on **natural and divine law**, which demands not only the avoidance of evil but also action in favor of good, justice, and charity. St. Thomas Aquinas explains it in the *Summa Theologiae* (I-II, q. 79, a. 3), stating that the sin of omission occurs when **an act that reason deems necessary is omitted**.

The Council of Trent, when speaking of mortal sin, also acknowledges that it can be committed "in thought, word, deed, or omission." The Catholic tradition has consistently maintained this view, reminding us that **holiness is not achieved simply by "doing no wrong," but by actively loving**.



III. The sin of omission in today's context

We live in a culture dominated by **individualism**, the "me first" mindset, and comfort as a life ideal. This generates a lukewarm and spectator-like Christianity that prefers not to get involved. In the face of injustice, poverty, abortion, loneliness, many choose **not to get involved, not to speak out, not to act**.

This mentality is profoundly contrary to the Gospel. Jesus was not a mere "observer of good," but one who **went about doing good** (cf. Acts 10:38), and He called us to do the same: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Today, the sin of omission can have serious consequences:

- **Silence in the face of evil**, on social media or in real life.
- **Lack of Christian witness** out of fear or comfort.
- **Disregard for the suffering of others**, even within one's own family or community.
- **Indifference toward the truth**, allowing lies to flourish.

IV. Theological and pastoral criteria for discernment

1. Am I morally obligated to act?

Not every omitted good is a sin. There must be a **real, morally binding duty**. For example, not giving alms because one truly cannot is not the same as ignoring a confused elderly person out of pure apathy.

2. Did I know the good I was supposed to do?

The sin of omission requires awareness. If one is invincibly ignorant (not at fault for not knowing), there is no sin. But in most cases, **we know what we should do** and we avoid it.

3. Was I truly able to act?

If someone is physically or psychologically prevented, there is no culpable omission. Sin arises when **we can do the good and choose not to**.



V. Practical applications for Christian life

1. **Examine your daily life**

Do an examination of conscience not only about what you did wrong, but about **the good you failed to do**. Whom did you not help? What Christian duty did you turn your back on?

2. **Act with concrete charity**

It's not enough to "think good thoughts." Christian love is **active and effective**. Visit the sick, comfort the sorrowful, feed the hungry, defend the voiceless.

3. **Do not be complicit in evil by your silence**

Silence in the face of injustice or sin can be complicity. It's not about judging anyone, but about **defending truth and goodness with courage and charity**.

4. **Form your conscience**

A well-formed conscience prevents many omissions. Study the Gospel, the Catechism, and the Church's teachings. Know what God expects of you so you can respond generously.

5. **Live the liturgy as a school of goodness**

The Mass and sacraments are not just rituals: they form us for active love. The final "Go in peace" at the end of Mass is a **mission command**: "Go and do good in the world!"

6. **Confess your omissions as well**

Don't forget to include in your confession the acts of charity, justice, or truth that you omitted. Acknowledging omissions helps the soul grow in humility and responsibility.

VI. A spirituality of "doing good"

Christians are not called to simply "avoid doing wrong," but to **be light, salt, and leaven** (cf. Mt 5:13-16). This implies action, dedication, and decision. St. Paul said:



"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

Each day, we have opportunities to do good. Not wasting them is already an act of faithfulness to Christ. Holiness is not a utopia for the few, but a concrete, active, daily vocation: **to love with deeds**.

Conclusion

The sin of omission is one of the most subtle evils of our time. It doesn't shock, it isn't visible, it makes no noise... but it **slowly kills charity, cools faith, and extinguishes hope**. Living an authentic Christian life means being alert to the occasions when the Lord calls us to do good, to commit ourselves, to serve, to love.

It is not enough to say "I'm a good person"; the final judgment, according to Jesus, will not be based on what we avoided doing, but on **what we did for the least of His brethren** (cf. Mt 25).

Final Prayer

*Lord, forgive me for the good I failed to do.
For the times I could have consoled and did not,
for the words I did not speak,
for the times I saw pain and looked away.
Give me a courageous heart, an active faith,
a generous charity that never tires of doing good.
Let me not settle into indifference or hide in laziness.
Make me a true instrument of Your goodness, every day.
Amen.*