

THE
SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

BY

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Priest of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd

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FOREWORD

THESE notes are intended to provide an outline of the theology of Penance and a guide to procedure in the confessional. An attempt has been made to describe some of the common problems that may be met in the confessional, and some of the less usual, and suggestions made for possible solutions.

No one will, or ought to, be satisfied with this outline alone, but readers should study at least some of the books mentioned in the text and in the bibliography. Our especial object has been to try to give some guidance for the priest who is about to hear confessions for the first time. It may be, however, that priests who have not had much acquaintance with the sacrament, or are having to hear confessions after a period of disuse, will find these notes useful.

The growing use of the Sacrament of Penance in the Church of England makes it of the utmost importance that our confessors should be well read in Moral Theology, Ascetics, and the particular requirements of the confessional. The special circumstances of freedom of thought in the Anglican Communion call for a well-defined directive and a scholarly appreciation of the subject of penance. Many confessors would be glad to have more definition and discipline; but all need a continual revision and up-to-date knowledge of the principles of Christian morals and ascetics applied to the present day. A further need is more frequent discussion among priests, especially with experienced confessors, of the problems of the confessional.

CHAPTER I

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

"If I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ." (2 Cor. 2¹⁰.)

Holy Baptism removes the burden of Original Sin from the soul, and of Actual Sin committed before baptism. It imparts anew to the soul the supernatural life which, from the beginning of his history, man has forfeited through his first disobedience. Baptism also effects incorporation into the Body of Christ, His Church, and is the gate to all other sacraments and means of grace. But although in baptism the new-born soul is enabled to start his life with a clean spirit, he still has the power of self-determination, free will. So sin can be committed after baptism.¹

The commission of sins and the omission of the performance of duties will, unless recovery is gained by periodical restoration, separate the soul from God and finally cause the death of the soul. He who commits Mortal Sin² after baptism is not at once cut off from membership of the Body of Christ, but is in danger of being so: such sin is truly "mortal," that is, in danger of spiritual death. In effecting membership of the Body of Christ, baptism makes it possible for a soul to continue in a state of grace by providing him in the Church of God with means by which he

¹ *Vide* p. 57, "Confessions of the unbaptized."

² *Vide* p. 26, definition of Mortal Sin.

may be restored and strengthened. The soul may still be relieved from the burden of sin committed after baptism by the Sacrament of Penance. The Virtue of Penance is part of the Virtue of Justice, as it admits the need of the soul both to confess his sins in justice towards God whom he has offended, and to make reparation, for this is his duty towards God to whom he belongs; and so to be brought back to that purpose of God for him which God justly expects him to fulfil as the due of his creation. The Sacrament of Penance provides the means of satisfying the demands of justice.

Restoration of the soul to grace is effected by God's forgiveness given, in the sacrament, by the priest who exercises the power to absolve which God has given him. This power the priest has, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the members of the Church. To ordained priests of the Church Catholic has been committed the power of binding and loosing, and of forgiving the sins of the truly penitent by the pronouncement of Absolution: another name given to the sacrament of penance is the Sacrament of Absolution. "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained."³

It is important to add that, by sinning against God, a soul also sins against the Body of the Church, and against humanity, and needs restoration to the Body, which is effected by restoration to God. This is not only a personal and independent matter between God and the soul, but also between the soul and the Church. The restoration by penance needs to be

³ *Vide* The Ordering of Priests, Book of Common Prayer.

effected through an accredited minister of the Church and by means of the Church's sacrament. It is a corporate restoration as well as an individual one that is needed and effected.

The advantages of the sacrament of penance are, the attainment of self-knowledge; the exercise of humility and contrition; the gift of restoration to God and His Church through forgiveness; the reception of counsel for the avoidance of further sin and the advancement of the spiritual life; and the conferring of grace to "go and sin no more." It is therefore a powerful aid, and, in most cases, a necessary aid, to combating the enemies of the christian soul. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."⁴

As to the general necessity of Confession,⁵ probably all that may be said is that, where adequate repentance, reparation and purpose of amendment, are impossible or unlikely (either to evoke or achieve) without confession, then salvation is endangered by neglecting it.⁶

⁴ 1 John 1⁸, 9.

⁵ By "confession," here and hereafter, is meant sacramental confession in the sacrament of penance.

⁶ But *vide* Chapter on "Sacramental Confession."

CHAPTER II

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A GOOD
CONFESSOR

1. **APPRECIATION.** The good confessor's qualifications will include a clear acceptance of the value of the sacrament of penance and of his own duty in that respect. It is not a thing he may administer and use or not as he pleases: it is a duty he has to perform, a talent he must not bury in the ground, a power he must exercise: and he must himself be a regular penitent. He will look upon the hearing of confessions as one of the greatest acts of human charity he can perform by virtue of his office, and the performance of it will give him great joy through love of duty, love of souls, and helping souls to a life fulfilled on earth and to final bliss in heaven.

2. **MORAL AND ASCETIC THEOLOGY.** The good confessor will be aware of the necessity of the study of Morals and Ascetics for the ministry of reconciliation. There are good confessors who have not been trained or trained themselves particularly in these sciences and yet exercise their ministry with profit and honour in the confessional: this is because they possess a rare and inspired perception. It is very easy for an untrained confessor to make bad mistakes and involve the penitent in difficulties and error.

3. **PSYCHOLOGY.** A knowledge of psychology and psychological practice is valuable for the confessor who would give balanced and wise counsel and deal,

as all may have to do from time to time, with difficult cases. But it is important that no priest should think that, because he has studied pastoral psychology or even more advanced psychiatry, he is thereby qualified to give psychiatric treatment. No unqualified person should meddle in psychiatric practice.

4. **HUMAN NEEDS.** The good confessor will have a deep and sympathetic knowledge of human needs. He will always be observant of these needs in all his pastoral work and will try, by study and thought and consultation, to find out how best they may be supplied. His own experience of moral and spiritual ways will help him, but he must remember that his experience is not everybody's, and what may help himself or another may not be of use to a third. He will discover that every soul is different from another and has a different way towards moral and spiritual perfection. He will be careful of his own moral and spiritual development: he will exercise himself in spiritual ways and study to conquer his own failings and to cultivate all the virtues. He will himself be disciplined in his life, with a suitable Rule of Life composed in consultation with his Director. It is much to be desired that all confessors should be "Regulars"—that is, living by an approved rule, if possible under discipline. If they are not already members of a Religious Society, they may, for this purpose, attach themselves to a Third Order of a religious society, or put themselves in the spiritual charge of a wise director.

5. **DISPOSITIONS.** The priest who is hearing confessions will continually remind himself of the gravity of his office, but without nervousness or tension.

While he must watch over his administration of the sacrament at all times, so that he does not become careless, formal, bored, or treat it with unbecoming levity, he should on the other hand remember that it is by virtue of his office and not his personality that he performs his duty. All the personal qualifications that are here required are aids to the performance of the priest's office with an efficiency that overrides and sublimates personality. So the priest who is about to hear confessions will consecrate his personality afresh to God, committing himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and handing himself over to our Lord for him to work through. He will at first, until he is very experienced, proceed with slow care. When a young priest is hearing confessions for the first time he will forget himself and take great care to attend to what he hears; he will give only the simplest counsel. If matters occur on which he feels doubtful, or cannot think what to say, he will either say nothing or ask the penitent's permission to consider the matter further and if need be take counsel. Should he require to submit the matter to an experienced priest, he must of course exercise the utmost care in preserving the seal of the confessional, putting the case as an anonymous and hypothetical one. He may on no account reveal the penitent's identity unless he has received express permission to do so.¹

We must remember that the main object of the sacrament of penance is restoration—therefore, the receiving of absolution and making reparation. A well-prepared and experienced penitent will not

¹ *Vide* p. 63f.

always want counsel,² and some penitents may have directors who are not their regular confessors. A young and inexperienced priest who has to hear the confession of another priest should be careful to enquire whether the penitent has a director or a regular confessor, and will probably not give counsel.³

A young priest or ordinand faced with the expectation of hearing confessions may well be alarmed at the prospect of such responsibility. He should remember that it is a rule of Divine Providence never to call a person to the exercise of any spiritual responsibility without giving him the "graces of state" which will enable him to discharge his vocation and exercise that responsibility. If therefore he studies to prepare himself for his duties as a confessor, he can rely with confidence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is not, however, to say that he will be infallible!

NOTE. In some dioceses there are local rules about hearing confessions which the priest will do well to find out and discuss with his director. In the absence of any system of faculties for hearing confessions in the Anglican Communion, and the wide interpretation that is given, at least in practice, to principles of jurisdiction, it is all the more important that a young confessor should fit himself for this ministry in the best way possible.

If he has been fortunate he will have been a penitent from his youth: he will have received at his Theological College at least an introduction to morals and ascetics; but too much is left to chance

² *Vide* Chapter on "Counsel," p. 43.

³ *Vide* p. 39.

and common sense. Mistakes or ineptitude grievously mislead and embarrass the penitent. Two valuable aids to the better use and understanding of the sacrament of penance would be (a) that all priests be invited to pass a short examination in christian ethics, morals and ascetics before hearing confessions; (b) that there should be in each diocese one or more experienced and learned confessor to whom a priest would be able to go for instruction or advice; such a director or counsellor would preferably be a member of a religious society or Order, and, in any case, would be well qualified in moral and ascetic theology.

CHAPTER III

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION. I

“Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” (*John 20^{22, 23}*.)

THIS is the audible confession of sins, personally and individually, to an ordained priest of the Church Catholic.¹ “Forms” of confession will be found in Chapter XV.

Confession is of two kinds: General and Ordinary. General Confession covers a considerable period of time. In the case of a First Confession, it will cover the whole life since baptism; or, for those who are unbaptized, the whole life preceding baptism.²

A general confession may be made at special times or crises in life: as, for example, before Confirma-

¹ Confession, to be a valid sacrament, has to be made in the presence of a priest. Confession by telephone or by letter or by any other means which do not necessitate the visible presence of the penitent with the confessor is not valid. In the case of a deaf or dumb person, confession may be made by writing, but the written confession must be presented to the confessor by the penitent in person at a time and place at which, if he could speak, the penitent would make his vocal confession: in such a case, the confessor may write down his questions or his counsel, and may show the penitent the words of absolution printed or written, while he says them audibly. Great care must be taken with these written documents that they are immediately destroyed after the confession has been heard. *Vide Moral and Pastoral Theology*, H. J. Davis, S.J., Vol. III, xiii, Chap. VI, secs. 6, 7, and 8.

² *Vide* note on the confessions of the unbaptized, p. 57.

tion, First Communion, Ordination, undertaking any new and important work or office, or before a serious surgical operation. Any new work or new state of life which may involve a radical change or addition to the past career provides a lawful occasion for a general confession. It would be made before Profession in a religious society.

Normally a period of years would elapse between one general confession and another; general confession should never be habitual. But while a confessor will guard, for the sake of the avoidance of scrupulosity, against a penitent's appearing too often for the purpose of general confession, there will be the rare occasions when he will recommend it.

A general confession may be recommended if a penitent's contrition appears to become defective, or if he says he finds difficulty in being sorry for his sins or is beginning to find self-examination formal and unreal. If he has obviously got into the habit of making formal confessions it may be wise to refresh his appreciation of the sacrament by suggesting that he make a general confession. If a persistent Invincible Error³ of many years' duration has at length been corrected, a general confession may be made in order to fill up the material integrity⁴ of

³ *Vide* Chapter on "Invincible Error," p. 72.

⁴ Material Integrity: i.e. the inclusion of all mortal sins that have been committed and not submitted for absolution. Sins omitted through honest forgetfulness, or ignorance that they were sins obviously cannot be confessed and so do not affect the Formal Integrity of the confession, although they may technically affect its Material Integrity. For absolution to be valid only formal integrity is necessary, and the sins omitted for physical or moral reasons or because they have honestly been forgotten are included in the Absolution, *vide* p. 25f.

previous confessions: but a confessor will advise this only when a penitent becomes anxious through realizing that what he honestly did not think at the time to be sin, is now revealed to be so. A general confession should be advised or permitted only on condition that the matter causing anxiety is not reverted to except in the case of falling again into the same temptation. In any case only experienced confessors will advise a general confession for the regular penitent.

Ordinary confession is the normal, regular confession made with such frequency as the confessor advises. All penitents should make their confession at least before Christmass and Easter.

It would usually also be made before other great festivals, as Whitsunday and the Feast of All Saints. The beginning of Advent is another suitable time, and Shrove Tuesday is a long-established occasion for the sacrament of penance. The parish priest or regular confessor should be able to discern between the scrupulous penitent who returns over and over again, and the slack or nervous penitent who is irregular or disinclined.

A priest preparing a penitent for his first confession should assist him in making a rule. If he receives a penitent into his charge for the first time he should ask him if he has a rule, what it is, and perhaps help him to improve it. A regular rule is important whether for only four times a year or more frequently.⁵

⁵ *Vide Some Difficulties in the Practice of Frequent Confession and Communion*, W. H. Longridge, S.S.J.E., Faith Press.

The anglican priest must guard against imposing any disciplinary requirements that are not within the teaching of the Anglican Communion to impose. The implications of definitions of mortal and venial sin may vary with individuals, according to age, sex, state of life, the effect of habit on volition and so on; so that it is impossible to lay down a rule about the necessity of confession which will be an infallible guide without exception for every soul. It has to be left to the individual penitent and the individual confessor, who are properly instructed, to decide when a sin is of such mortality, or circumstances so grave, as to make confession a necessary condition of saving a soul or resolving conflict.

There are two courses open when there is doubt: if there is reasonable doubt⁶ as to the gravity of a sin,⁷ then it need not be confessed; or else, when in doubt, make sure and go to confession and be guided by the counsel of the confessor. It seems that anglican penitents are left to choose between the two courses; but, in view of the vagueness that characterizes so much thought about sin the present writer inclines to favour the second.

Finally, throughout preparation for confession it will be borne in mind that the cleansing from sin and the avoidance of sin are not the only obligations imposed on the christian soul. He must have the more positive aim of perfection of soul as the final goal appointed for him, which he is under obligation to try by God's grace to attain. The goal of the

⁶ *Vide* H. J. Davis, S.J., op. cit., Vol. III, Chap. XIII, secs. 2, 7.

⁷ *Vide* p. 21.

christian soul is to increase in virtue and in communion with God.⁸

⁸ A priest should not (except in grave emergency) hear the confessions of any who are in a close family or official relationship to him: e.g. an ordained headmaster should not hear the confessions of his pupils or staff; an incumbent of a parish should not hear the confessions of his assistant curates; a bishop should not hear the confessions of clergy of his diocese; and probably the Superior of a Religious Community should not hear the confessions of members of it—though this would not apply to external oblates, associates, etc.

• CHAPTER IV

LAW AND CONSCIENCE

BEFORE proceeding further to discuss preparation for confession it is well to make clear the nature of the laws by which conscience is bound.¹

There are several planes of law on which human behaviour may be judged. They are interactive and each cuts across the others. Natural law is fundamental: it is the law which bids all creation cooperate with the Creator in His purpose for them. It is the law of the entirely innocent man, subject to the limitations of his physical being and to the power of free choice, yet so united in spirit to God that he perfectly fulfils the purpose of his creation. It is the law of unfallen man. On this plane is found the standard of conduct God expects from all men. The proper control of all the natural appetites and urges and the ordering of them, is obedience to natural law. Even among men in their present state of sin there still remain shreds of obedience to this law. From the control of appetites and urges enjoined by it emerge certain universally agreed laws of conduct: the mutual duties of parents and children, the prohibition of marriage within certain degrees of consanguinity, the keeping of a promise, the general respect one has for the property of another, ordinary gratitude, and the acknowledgment of just debt. Out of natural law grows the ordering of the life of a

¹ Chapter XII, "Invincible Error and Invincible Ignorance."

community, the ordering of the public lives of each member of it, and the ordering of the life of one community in respect of another—the *jus gentium* or law of nations. Similarly universally agreed obligations like the observance of a promise and respect for property govern the law of nations. For every community is needed an authority which will apply and extend natural law to the complications of its internal society. That which governs the rightness of this human law is that it must be for the good of all, that it must not exceed the power of its authorization, and that it must be fair and just. Human law that attempts to bind upon the people burdens which are contrary to the universally accepted principles of justice or to christian conscience (e.g., a law that commands the worship of idols) is not of moral obligation.

It is not difficult to see that natural law, the law of nations and human law are, by reason of the Fall, not now entirely perfect in their interpretation of the mind and will of God, which it is the duty of the Church to make clear to the world. So there has to be added to these the divine law of revelation and the whole christian catholic system, which will modify or enlarge the other kinds of law to show what are the whole duties of man, in his present state, to his Creator and to his neighbour. Natural law, the *jus gentium*, and human law do not, for example, impose any regulations which have to do with worship, the cultivation of the virtues, the deeper duty of man towards his neighbour as illustrated by our Lord in so many of His parables,² the obligation to

² E.g. the Good Samaritan, the Friend at Midnight, the Prodigal Son, the Two Debtors.

press on to moral and spiritual perfection, the use of the means of grace given by God to these ends, and the whole "better way" of the christian gospel. Finally, as positive divine law needs a certain amount of organization and machinery to teach its precepts and, within limits, to enforce them, there has to be ecclesiastical law to govern the affairs of the Church.

On all these planes of law the conscience is active, and invincible error may occur on all; but it will vary in degree according to the plane on which it is found. For example, a man who honestly thinks it right to rob his neighbour (like Robin Hood), or to evade the paying of certain taxes, shows a different attitude of conscience from that of a parish priest who, after proper consideration of everything relevant, thinks it right in conscience to act in a way that would appear to be inconsistent with his vows of canonical obedience.³ The implications of an "invincible conscience" have to be studied in relation to the planes of law we have described. "Robin Hood" above may be invincible in his error because of an abnormal obsession with the wrongs of the poor and a conviction that he is born to set the world right—it may be either psychological abnormality or pride. But the parish priest who ignores some diocesan regulation about a form of worship or the reception of divorced persons at the altar; or the man who thinks that he is right to refuse to fight for his country, are concerned with matters where ecclesiastical and civil law impinge on divine law. An

³ The subject of loyalty and public duty should be carefully studied. *Vide* Mortimer, *op. cit.*, Chap. II, and Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems*, Part I, Chap. II.

interesting historical example is that of Joan of Arc who, condemned by the Church and the enemies of France for believing in her "Voices," was in invincible error, yet suffered the penalties of the laws of both Church and State. Posterity has since proclaimed her moral blamelessness by canonizing her. So posterity, as we have suggested before, has at times confirmed the conscience of one who has in his generation been "against the world."⁴ An invincible conscience is not only right but praiseworthy in resisting efforts to force it to act contrarily to its convictions, and posterity will judge it right or wrong and may adjust the law accordingly: yet, at the same time, it must suffer the penalties of disobedience to whatever law has been involved.

"The conclusion of the whole matter" is that a man who has been fully enlightened on the teaching of lawful authorities and has given full and sincere consideration to all the moral claim upon him is right to obey his conscience. But he is blameworthy if he has the least shadow of doubt.⁵

⁴ Cf. S. Athanasius.

⁵ *Vide* remarks on loyalty on p. 79.

CHAPTER V

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION. II

EVERY penitent will be taught to approach the confessional naturally and humbly, recognizing his recurrent need of absolution. It is without doubt an important part of the duty of all who have the cure of souls to impress upon their charges the gravity of sin, and to raise their moral standard above the morality of the world. The penitent who has been taught a right valuation of sin and virtue and of the spiritual life, will come knowing the needs of his soul as he knows the needs of his body, and will take at least the same care of it as he takes of his physical cleanliness and health. He will recognize confession as a duty to God, his neighbour, and himself, with the intention that he should glorify God by attaining that perfection of virtue and charity for which God created him: and so reach eternal life and the final vision of God.

The difficulties some penitents find in clearly discovering matter for confession would be removed by a proper teaching about sin and virtue. New penitents—and often experienced penitents—need to be taught the simple truths about sin, the purpose of God for the human soul, and the elementary principles of salvation through Jesus Christ and His Church. They will be told what are the common obligations of a churchman.

For all classes of penitents, a clear, unemotional

and thorough instruction is necessary which will aim at all that has been suggested above, will impress the importance and necessity of the sacrament of penance, and will teach its true character and object: but they will be warned to avoid scrupulosity.

Even penitents who have been making their confessions for years need periodically to take themselves in hand and examine themselves to ensure that they are still properly appreciative of all that is involved and have not become slipshod in their preparation or confessions.

The best plan for the regular penitent is for him to examine himself each evening, casting his glance retrospectively over the day to discover sins of both commission and omission. At the end of each week, perhaps in preparation for his Sunday communion, he will make a more thorough examination of conscience and of his observance of his rule of life, having resort to sacramental confession if he feels the need. He will find that self-examination has been aided by this continual stocktaking of progress when he comes to prepare for his regular confession. He will then use some form of self-examination he has found useful through experiment or has adopted in consultation with his confessor. He will first invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit that he may honestly recognize and acknowledge all his sinful commissions and omissions. He will be mindful that he has to confess only what he can remember and what he knows to be sin, and will proceed to the confessional with good will, penitence, purpose of amendment, and faith.

First Confessions. Young People. The preparation for confession will vary at different ages only in

stood, since an adult penitent will normally be expected to form his own judgments. This greater detail will extend to the whole understanding of the implications and practice of penance. The penitent will be told that preparation must comprise Enlightenment, Self-examination, Contrition, Purpose of Amendment, Desire for Reparation, and these terms carefully defined. These requirements will have been included in the preparation of young people but only by implication and in the simplest words. Enlightenment will be given by careful instruction about the whole question of sin, the different kinds of temptation, the obligations of a christian, the enemies of the christian soul, and the temptations incident to the penitent's particular state and age. Whereas adult penitents will more easily understand from their experience what are common errors of conscience, custom may have set such errors more deeply in their subconsciousness. It will be remembered that a married penitent will have some different temptations and obligations from an unmarried one; that one in high public office will be tempted differently from one who is not so much in the public eye; that the temptations of men differ in some respects from those of women; and that priests and Religious have their own spiritual difficulties and obligations. So again, all the circumstances of age, position, education, and previous experience must be taken into account. It may be that a penitent has, for one reason or another, had in the past unchristian ideas about some of the social and family obligations, as well as of the obligations of personal virtue. Thus, a husband or wife may discover in his instruction a better aspect of the marriage ties; an employee may find his obligations

to his employer enlightened: enlightenment upon personal temptations may bring great relief and ideas as to how better to deal with them; and, finally, all may be brought to a more dutiful attitude towards their obligations in matters of worship, duty towards other christians, and the interdependence of all members of the Body. Above all, the penitent will be told that penance aims to restore, through Jesus Christ, a broken union between God and the soul, and that he must depend entirely upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit and upon prayer, together with the doctrine of the Church for his observance of the requirements of christian worship and conduct.

Contrition and purpose of amendment are necessary to the validity of a confession. Contrition is not the same as Attrition or Remorse. Contrition is supernatural; it is sorrow for sin and a desire to amend because the soul has disobeyed God, has contributed to the causes of the Passion of Christ, has weakened the Body Corporate, and has in greater or less measure separated itself from God. The motives of attrition are purely natural—a fear of hell or of other consequences of sin; an uneasy conscience which offends the ideal built up of the Self; and a natural desire for moral and spiritual security. Both contrition and attrition spring from a hatred of sin, but for different reasons: the former because the soul has offended God whom he loves and to whom he is grateful; the latter because he is afraid for himself. Hatred of sin is always a good thing, but no sincere christian will be satisfied with attrition alone.¹

¹ *Vide* Hall and Hallock, *Moral Theology*, Chap. VIII, par. 2 (a).

Purpose of amendment is so much a part of contrition that little more need be said about it. Besides trying to be firm in forming a resolution to resist temptation, to renounce sin even when temptation is not present, and to avoid occasions of sin, the penitent will, since he will probably distrust his resolutions, earnestly pray to want to amend and to have the help of the Holy Spirit to strengthen his will to that end. It is useful to point out at this period of the instruction that the cause of habitual sin may be an unrecognized weakness in the will to amend. It is important that it be made very clear at the beginning that a desire and purpose to amend are not only one of the requirements of a valid confession, that is, a confession of formal integrity² (*vide* p. 10, footnote), but are a powerful aid to the strengthening of the will. Of course, the penitent will in any case understand that his contrition and purpose of amendment, though they are the best he can do, still fall short of what is required by divine justice. He will pray that what is lacking in himself may be made up by the perfect and all-sufficient merits of the Cross of Jesus, and that his amendment may always improve.

If the penitent is truly contrite and wants to amend his life, he will desire to make some kind of reparation for sin, both to satisfy justice and to remove as far as he can any harm done to others or to himself by his sin, especially in causing others to stumble. He will be prepared to receive a penance from his confessor, which is usually symbolical or may take the form of some act to be performed or

² Formal integrity is truly known only to God; but, if we are honest, we may be reasonably sure of our intentions.

devotion to be made which will help to repair the damage done (*vide* "Penance," p. 51). Penitents are not told enough about the importance of reparation, and more care should be taken over instruction on this important part of the sacrament. It should be pointed out that when the penitent is performing his penance he should try to link it up with the desire to amend and the contrition he exercised before and during his confession, and to his wish to make good what he has done wrong or omitted.

The reason why penances are normally symbolical, i.e. in the form of prayer etc., is because it is generally impossible to make full and satisfactory reparation for sin. Only Christ did that.

The kind of instruction mentioned may be used for preparation for a first confession at any age; it is only necessary, as has been said, to take care how much actual definition is given and how far it is better to explain by example rather than precept.

In all his instructions the confessor will never forget to emphasize that grace is received through absolution after a good confession. "Go, and sin no more." He will also at some suitable time link up the use of confession with the Holy Communion; but this is a separate subject and there are a variety of opinions upon it. Normally, a penitent who knows himself to be in mortal sin should not present himself at the altar without having made his confession first.

Self-examination. Before proceeding to self-examination, some general principles must be mentioned. The question of integrity has already been introduced (*vide* p. 10, footnote). It now needs to be said that for the requirement of formal integrity,

at once, and both must forget the matter. Similarly, he must be checked if, when he asks a question about what he shall or shall not do in a certain circumstance, he quotes as his excuse for doing wrong the bad example of one who is in a position over him. The confessor must take care not to offer any criticism of the penitent's superior, but must simply say that the matter is wrong. Thus, a clerk may ask if it is wrong to use office writing-paper for his private correspondence, and offer as a plea for his doing so the fact that his immediate superior does the same. Difficulties like this are overcome by so wording the confession that it accuses the penitent only; if it is necessary to say that a sin has been shared or temptation is due to a certain personal association, the other person is simply called "a certain person" or "another." It is better to avoid using the name even of another person against whom one has sinned, although in some cases the position or authority of an accomplice or a person sinned against may govern the gravity of a sin. The penitent may have been forced to act wrongly by pressure or example difficult to resist, or to have acted wrongly towards some person to whom he owed more than usual christian charity. In such case a more definite, but still vague, mention may be made of this person—enough only to enable the confessor to judge as to gravity. Thus, obedience to a parent or to one in lawful authority, provided the obedience demanded is not against the informed conscience, is a graver duty than obedience to a chance acquaintance or a friend. A schoolboy must obey his parents or his schoolmaster in all things lawful and right, but need not obey another boy who

has no authority over him. Persistent impatience towards a member of one's household may be of graver importance than impatience towards a chance fellow-traveller in a railway carriage whom one will not meet again. The latter case would sometimes involve considerations of scandal, as, for example, it would be graver for a priest to lose his temper even with an unknown traveller whom he will not meet again than it would be for a layman. A difficult case is that of the husband or wife who is performing the conjugal duties and observing the conjugal rights duly and with devotion and sincerity, and whose partner differs strongly in religious matters. The one may be forced to use some secrecy or indulge in some concealment if religious duties (e.g. Holy Communion, confession, the eucharistic fast) are to be performed without serious domestic unpleasantness. In such a case the penitent would be permitted to mention the husband or wife in so many words, but with proper regard to charity, as it would not be easy for the confessor to give counsel and to judge gravity without this specific knowledge. The same would apply to any situation involving a serious conflict of rights or loyalties: but, as we have said, all must be done in charity.

Preparation for first confession will give the confessor a useful opportunity for trying to make clear to adult penitents this important question of gravity, and for suitable teaching about conscience and loyalty. Penitents should be taught to consult their confessors on all doubtful points, and any errors made in confession can be rectified at the time. But, as is pointed out elsewhere, the confessional is not the

place for discussion, argument, or lengthy conversation or even instruction; the better care taken over the preparation of a penitent for his first confession, the more easily will such misuse be avoided.

Sometimes a penitent mistakes temptation for sin. This is particularly the case with temptations of thought, where the sin consists not in the entry of bad thoughts (provided the occasion for their entry has not been consciously sought), or in the suggestions of them, but in entertaining them and dwelling on them with full volition, understanding and pleasure. Part of the penance of a penitent who has sinned gravely in the past may be to be exposed to the memories of old sins and to have to be on his guard to expel them quickly; but, as long as he does expel them quickly and does not dwell on them with delight, he does not sin. These considerations may well in many cases have to be mentioned in the preparation for first confession, but only when there is obvious need.

Helping elderly penitents to prepare for self-examination before first confession has its own difficulties. Matters to be taken into consideration will be: a possible failing of memory, prejudice (which makes it not easy to convince that this or that is a sin), and probably a great deal of shame and conflict owing to the revelation of a lifetime of sins and omissions. It must be remembered that it requires great courage in an elderly person to make his first confession, and much patience will have to be exercised. However, in the case of an elderly person brought genuinely to seek the sacrament there will be no doubt as to sincerity. The self-examination of an elderly person for the first time will present two

features which are not common to other ages; there will be the difficulty of being convinced that certain misconceptions have to be corrected; and there will be the valuable enlightenment that experience of life will have provided.

In preparing a penitent for self-examination the confessor will call to mind other distinctions which will concern gravity as, for example, the difference between "ordinary theft" and "sacrilegious theft," "adultery" and "unchastity," "occult sin" and "public sin": these distinctions are needful mainly for the purpose of classification. Finally, the penitent will be reminded again that only those sins he remembers at the time of confession, after careful and honest self-examination, need to be confessed: if he remembers something else after he has made his confession, he may dismiss it from his mind as it will have been included in the absolution—" . . . for these and all my other sins which I cannot now remember or know not of . . ."

The self-examination itself should be on lines advised by the priest who prepares for first confession; but the penitent will be told that he will, according to his age and experience, need to revise his method as he grows older. It is sad to have to deal with a penitent who has been ill-instructed, or not instructed at all, in the way of self-examination and about matter for confession, and who has perhaps gone on making confessions for years without any proper understanding and appreciation of everything involved.

Devotional books provide lists of sins and omissions which have their uses. A form of self-examination

will be suggested to the penitent which will suit his circumstances of age, position, occupation and so on. Thus an errand-boy or a cinema-attendant will need a somewhat different form of self-examination from a solicitor, a priest or a Religious. The confessor will be acquainted with most of the methods of self-examination contained in books; he may sometimes devise his own which will be suitable for his confirmation candidates and others. The penitent should be warned that, as time goes on, he may find these lists difficult to use, or even productive of error or formality. He should never hesitate to ask guidance of his confessor when he is in doubt. It cannot be too emphatically stated that new penitents should be given every possible help in making their self-examination, and that the "list of sins" used should be first carefully scrutinized by the confessor. It is quite possible for a young penitent in making his first confession to include a sin of omission just because it is "in the list," when he has in fact had no opportunity of performing the duty enjoined.⁶

The rough division of sins and omission into (a) sins against God; (b) sins against my neighbour; (c) sins against myself, should always be kept in mind. All sins are sins against God, but there are those which directly affect the communication and duty of the soul towards divine power. Such would be omissions of the proper devotional exercises both public and

⁶ The following devotional books contain useful forms of self-examination; but every priest will find he wants to make adjustments: *S. Christopher's Prayer-book*; *S. Swithun's Prayer-book*; *Before the Throne*; *Priest's Book of Private Devotion*; and Book IV, Chap. VII of *The Imitation of Christ*.

private; weaknesses in prayer due to lack of effort or will; failure to prepare for the sacraments and to give thanks; irreverence; the interior sins of pride and self-importance; blasphemy; not exercising the virtue of faith; despondency; scrupulosity; accepting the world's lower standards of morality, and all sins and omissions which set up the self in competition with God. Sins against my neighbour would include the social sins like dishonesty; unrighteous anger persisted in; omissions of proper social and public duties; carelessness about family obligations; offences against common justice and loyalty; leading others into sin by example or persuasion; and omitting, ignoring or refusing the christian duties towards "my neighbour." Sins against myself are the occult sins of greed, sloth and secret impurity; neglecting to give sufficient care to the needs of the soul and the body.

As preparation for first confession will often be part of preparation for confirmation, the ethical instruction given in this will be linked up with confession. Discussion of forms of self-examination will refer to instruction given on the Ten Commandments; on the Two Commandments of our Lord; on the temptations of the World, the Flesh and the Devil; on the Seven Deadly Sins; on the Theological and Cardinal Virtues; and on the common obligations of a churchman. It is important to teach that the cultivation of virtue is the purpose of the christian life and not the mere avoidance of sin, though of course this is a fundamental duty. In the positive efforts to be humble, patient, truthful, there is more strength to conquer pride, anger and dishonesty than in just the negative avoidance of these vices.

When the penitent has made his self-examination he should try to remember by heart the omissions of duties and the sins he has discovered rather than make notes to carry with him to the confessional. But he should not be forbidden to make such notes if he strongly desires to do so and if not doing so would make him nervous or scrupulous. He must be told carefully to destroy such notes immediately after his confession, and to take great care that they are never seen by any one else. He must still be told that he should aim at making his confession entirely from memory; this is not only safer, but will assist self-knowledge by the effort to remember.

Probably once a year, perhaps on Shrove Tuesday, it is profitable to examine the conscience by some more exhaustive form of self-examination than that used normally. The time of the Annual Retreat is another suitable time for such a general stock-taking of progress and failure. There will follow the salutary result of revealing any growing carelessness, revising and supplementing knowledge of spiritual obligations, and correcting errors of judgment. It may show a slackening-off of contrition, a hardening of heart, an unconscious neglect of some religious obligation which has been forgotten or not previously recognized. It is not unknown that, in such an annual review, it is found that the whole spiritual orientation of the soul has changed and that a new rule of life or new mode of living or new direction of studies and meditation is expedient. This yearly and more thorough self-examination will, of course, be adapted to the penitent's state of life, but for all it will include a revision of baptismal and confirmation

promises; for a priest, a review of his ordination vows and his life and position as a minister of the gospel and the Church; for a Religious, a review of his fidelity to his vows and his profession.

There are cases of penitents who, after honest self-examination, can find little or no matter for confession.⁷ If the confessor knows the penitent he will be able to assess the true extent of this inability. But, if the penitent is unknown to him (unless it be a priest or Religious of obviously holy life) he ought to put such short and discreet questions as will satisfy him of material integrity. He will be aware of the possibility of invincible error;⁸ or of knowledge on the part of the penitent which relieves of guilt or the need to confess.⁹ Questions must not be pressed, and when the confessor is satisfied that there is nothing to confess, he will give the penitent counsel of a very short precise nature about the need for positive progress in union with God and will dismiss him with a blessing; absolution is, of course, not applicable. If, however, the penitent is distressed by the omission of absolution, even though there has been nothing to absolve, he may be absolved, perhaps in response to a general acknowledgment of past sins. The confessor will rarely advise in such a case that a general confession should be made.

⁷ Vide pp. 38, 39.

⁸ Vide Chapter on this subject, p. 72.

⁹ Vide p. 28.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONFESSION

"I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." (*Ps. 32⁵.*)

"Confess your faults one to another." (*James 5¹⁶.*)

THE penitent will say some prayers while waiting to go to the place where confessions are heard, and will remember his purpose. He will remind himself that a confession is not integral if it does not include all mortal sins and omissions of which he is conscious, and which have not before been submitted for absolution. He will renew his contrition, his purpose of amendment, and his faith in the efficacy of the sacrament both for forgiveness and restoration to God and His Church, and for grace. He will call to mind anything particular upon which he may want to ask advice; and he will remember that confession is not for the purpose of just "being helped," or even of only reciting a list of sins, but is a positive aid to eternal life and to fulfilling his duty to God.

A confession is made of facts, not feelings. A failure to "realize" or be conscious of the presence of God when saying prayers may be due to a wilful lack of effort, and is then matter for confession; but a failure to be conscious of the presence of God when saying prayers devoutly and attentively is not: there may be something radically wrong with the penitent's whole attitude to prayer and this may be due to a fundamental vice, like pride and self-

sufficiency and self-will, but "feelings" must not be confused with will or taken as a barometer of spiritual progress. A penitent will sometimes make his feelings the main subject of his confession, so it cannot be too often insisted that a confession is to be of facts of sin and omission of duty, and not of vague, mystical emotions or the lack of them.

Care should be taken over the position of the confessional. It should not be possible for any one else in the church to overhear any word that is said by either confessor or penitent speaking in a low voice.

The confessor and the penitent should be so placed that each cannot directly see the face of the other.

If a penitent speaks too softly or too loud, he must be gently checked; so also if he is incoherent or not clear in his statements. It is permissible for a confessor to ask to have something repeated if he has not rightly heard or understood: but no comment should be made until the time comes for counsel.

If it is necessary to make arrangements to hear a confession in, say, the sacristy (e.g., of a deaf person, or one who is otherwise physically disabled), then the door of the room should be left partly open and a notice put outside the door to warn no one to approach. This is particularly important with female penitents and children.

The confessor will be very patient with a nervous or emotional penitent. It is best to say a quiet word of reassurance or else simply to wait until the penitent has recovered his self-control. If a penitent seems unable to start, or becomes flustered or suddenly silent and seems unable to continue, the confessor should first wait awhile; then, if the penitent is still

silent or confused, ask if he would like to be questioned or whether there is anything that worries him especially. It is important that the confessor should be perfectly natural and calm on such an occasion: he must remember that he is not only judge and has to elicit facts that perhaps the penitent does not want to acknowledge, but is also physician of the soul and has to try to reassure and correct.

The penitent who becomes personally confidential and lacking in proper reticence in speaking of feelings must be given as little encouragement as possible, and told gently to get on with the facts of the confession. Penitents who are inclined to treat the confessor as if he were their own especial monopoly, or as if there were some sort of particular personal understanding between them, must be rebuked.

The penitent who keeps saying that he is not sure whether this or that is a sin or not, whether a sin is grave or not, must be told to dismiss his doubts and get on to the next item. His sincere doubt is sufficient, he need not confess what he is sincerely doubtful about, and, in any case, by mentioning the matter, he has fulfilled every requirement. Such scrupulous persons may need to be interviewed outside the confessional for the purpose of better instruction.¹

The confessor will beware of the penitent who is formal,² careless, rattles off at great speed his list of sins, or says he is in a hurry: this is more dangerous than scrupulosity, and is probably sacrilegious. True formality² is not always easy to recognize: it may

¹ Vide note on Scrupulosity on p. 48.

² "Formal" and "formality" are here used in the colloquial, and not the theological, sense.

be marked by haste, some frivolity, or an attitude of bravado. Such cases will be rare, and when there is doubt about the formality of the penitent, he must probably be given the benefit of the doubt. But the confessor, besides being the minister of the sacrament, is also its guardian.

If a strange penitent, especially a priest, comes to the confessor for the first time (particularly if it is at an unusual hour) the latter will ask if the penitent has a regular confessor, why he does not go to him now, and will act as regards counsel, absolution and so on, according to the answer he receives. He cannot refuse to hear a confession, except perhaps in the case of a Religious not in emergency who has not received permission from his Community to make confession to any priest he likes; but the sanctity of the sacrament must be preserved. There are, of course, rare cases of a penitent who is so upset by a sin that he must seek absolution at once; and there are the rare sudden conversions.

The penitent who never confesses anything but venial sins needs careful consideration. He may indeed have nothing else to confess, yet feels he must come to the sacrament and not miss his regular use of it; this is indeed edifying and may apply especially to a priest or Religious. On the other hand, the penitent may be unconscious or ignorant of the gravity of some sins³; this may be because he is, through some psychological abnormality, unable to judge between right and wrong in certain respects, or between graver and less grave sins; or he may have been badly taught. For example, many children

³ Vide Chapter on "Invincible Error."

are in these days not truly conscious of the sinfulness of stealing—only of the danger of being caught! Expert advice must be sought in order to deal with psychological abnormality; the other kind of ignorance is easier to deal with by giving proper teaching on the moral question involved.⁴ Where either of these kinds of ignorance, or just carelessness, are suspected, the confessor will ask a carefully framed question.

A penitent may, if he has always little to confess, be at such an advanced stage of spiritual growth and such holy life that it is necessary for him, in his progress towards perfection, to confess even the smallest venial sins.⁵ Avoidance of sin is not the only goal of the christian soul, and those who approach saintliness are most conscious of the least sin.

If dishonesty is suspected, the confessor will ask a discreet question, taking care not to put sin into the penitent's mind (especially in the case of a young person), or in any way to offend. If the penitent, after questioning, expresses offence at the question out of all proportion to the event, it is a suspicious circumstance. If there are good reasons (say, knowledge outside the confessional) for suspecting dishonesty, the causes must be sought by a very general reference to the sin suspected, but not so as to reveal the confessor's outside knowledge or even to make his suspicion plain. He may, for example, ask a general question about self-examination. He can suggest several common temptations, including that of which he suspects the penitent to be suffering, and

⁴ Vide Chapter on "Counsel."

⁵ Vide p. 35.

say that these are sins which are not to be ignored. The confessor will be discreet enough not to press his questions or in any way to cause embarrassment to the penitent who may, after all, not be guilty. The reason for any concealment may be an overwhelming sense of shame, which has to be given the credit of at least attrition: or the penitent may be shielding another and is therefore not gravely dishonest and his integrity is formally acceptable. Only in very rare cases would questions be pressed, since the penitent's own valuation of his sins has generally to be accepted.

The confessor will need expert advice on the rare psychological cases; for example, of a penitent who persistently confesses sins which he could not possibly have committed, or of one who is obsessed with the idea that he is damned. The penitent who, after a good confession, feels that absolution does not bring forgiveness, also needs specialist attention.

The confessor will train himself never to be shocked, or to show that he is in any way perturbed by what he hears in confessions. He may be stern, or he may be kind and sympathetic in an impersonal way, but he must preserve a calm, collected, unemotional exterior and demeanour, and never make any kind of gesture, except that which is used at the pronouncement of absolution (the Sign of the Cross etc.). He will remain quietly seated all the time, since he is judge as well as physician of the soul. He will avoid any feeling of strain, and be relaxed and natural, in the knowledge that he is obeying our Lord's command and has His powerful authority and aid. He will learn—and will be helped by the grace of Holy

Orders—immediately to put out of his mind all matter heard in confession, and not allow himself to be worried by any fear or anxiety about a penitent's condition. Only when he has permission to consult another authority or if he has to defer absolution, is he to remember what he has heard.⁶

CHAPTER VII

COUNSEL

“What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”
(*Mark 10¹⁷.*)

THE confessor will develop a habit of memorizing certain points which stand out in the confessions as he hears them; for example, sins especially grave, matters of which the penitent is doubtful, any evidence of mistaken thinking in regard to a temptation, or those matters that seem to be a source of great anxiety. No attempt should be made to give counsel on every detail of the confession, and the confessor who tries to do so, or engages in long speeches of advice and admonition, can be both annoying and confusing to the penitent and may do harm. Counsel should always be short and precise, as far as possible positive, and indicate some means that may be taken to avoid occasions of sin and to increase in virtue. It is better to give no counsel at all than to give lengthy and confusing talks.

Counsel does not always have to be given. It is sometimes better not to do so—as with one who is obviously trying in a fully-informed way to conquer temptations, and is making progress: it is better in such a case to say simply, “Go on doing as you are.” When a confessor hears the confession of a priest or Religious for the first time, he should ask if he has a director or regular confessor and if he wants counsel. He must at all times be guided by the reply he

⁶ But *vide* especially the Chapters on “Absolution” and “Matter Heard in Confession” (The Seal).

receives : but it may be that, in the case of a penitent whom the confessor has not heard before, there is need to pass some comment, before giving absolution, as to contrition and purpose of amendment. Generally speaking, the confessor will have to deal only with cases where his procedure as to counsel will be clear if he has taken the safeguards suggested.

Two matters already mentioned need some further comment : the Habitual Sinner and Cases of Doubt.¹ The best counsel to give an habitual sinner who, sorely tempted, is yet contrite and hates his sin and desires to amend, is, after enquiring what steps he takes to avoid occasions of sin, to give suggestions about other or further steps to take. Penitents who are especially tempted to sins of occult impurity or evil imaginings may be helped to distract their minds from temptation by being advised to concentrate their efforts on conquering some other temptation which can be fought. Often the frequency of such sins is due to worry about them and the unwilling attention given to them through anxiety. Above all, the penitent who is an habitual sinner, though repeatedly repentant, will be given every sort of advice that will help him to repair any defect of will, and to attach the acquisition of the opposite and positive virtue to his prayers and to every reception of the Holy Communion. Advice to make acts of renunciation at times when the temptation is not present can be helpful, but should be given reservedly lest they cause temptation by reviving memories. The habitual sinner whose contrition and purpose of amendment are very weak is a different case : he must be taught

¹ *Vide* Chapter on "Recidivism and Habitual Sin."

afresh, given a new outlook on himself and his temptation, and every effort made to help him sincerely to understand and hate the gravity of his offence.

Cases of doubt and difficult points of gravity or probability demand a question from the confessor before he gives counsel. He must try to make clear how far full volition, grave circumstances and consciousness were present at the time. Each man must judge his conscience by his own subjective norm of morality, after he has been fully instructed in divine law. If the penitent sincerely believes that in certain circumstances he committed no sin even though the Church would condemn him, he must be credited with integrity. If he has not deliberately and voluntarily refrained from learning better, or is still convinced he is right after all that is relevant has been considered,² he is right to obey his conscience.

Doubt may be due to an uncertain conscience. For example, repeating an uncharitable remark made to one about another may be considered of less gravity because what has been said is common knowledge, even though harm may have been done or increased by the repetition. But it is by no means certain that even so the penitent has not gravely disobeyed the divine injunction not to do his neighbour harm, and it would be safest to regard it as a sin, both against charity and against justice.³

Questions of doubt can usually be resolved, if there be any reasonable probability of the lessening of

² But *vide* Chapters on "Invincible Error" and "Law and Conscience."

³ Cf. Matthew 5²¹⁻⁶.

gravity, by telling the penitent that he has indeed committed a sin, but that the circumstances make it a sin of less gravity—even perhaps turning a normally mortal sin into a venial one.⁴

It has been said that the confessional is not the place for long discussions or “sermonizing”: this is not always easy to avoid when problems about prayer, meditation, public worship and so on, come up for consideration from the matter of confession, as when the penitent is in some trouble about them, especially if his difficulties have led to disuse or neglect. Distraction of thought during prayer may or may not be due to wilful sin; it may be due to lack of effort to concentrate, lack of the proper attitude towards prayer (e.g. wanting “feelings” and not attending enough to the will), or even to a physical weakness or to an unavoidable exterior distraction. A question would be asked to make clear how far distraction has been avoidable, and advice given accordingly. But no long instruction on prayer should be attempted; the penitent must be given very short advice which he can easily remember—perhaps a book suggested for him to study, or an interview requested with a view to a more detailed discussion of the devotional difficulty. It must be remembered that, even in an interview about a subject not directly connected with morals, the confessor will first ask permission of the penitent to refer to the matter, so that he may be released from the seal of secrecy.

If the confessor has given wrong advice and discovers it afterwards, he may refer to it the next time

⁴ For a full discussion of questions of doubt *vide* R. C. Mortimer, *Elements of Moral Theology*, Chap. V.

the penitent presents himself in the confessional, first asking permission to do so. Care must be taken not simply to elaborate, or revert to, advice given at the first time, but just to point out the error. If the wrong advice might result in serious consequences, the confessor is permitted to seek out the penitent outside the confessional as soon as he may and try to correct his error; again first asking permission to speak about it and telling him his reason for wanting to do so. Normally, however, it is usually inadvisable to refer to a previous confession in the next, even when wrong counsel has been given or when the penitent has been given a task to be done to conquer an habitual sin.

The penitent may use the time for counsel to ask a simple question about some course of action he proposes, even if it does not directly concern the matter of his confession. The confessor will first find out if the question involves a moral choice, and then give his counsel. If the matter requires much discussion, he must ask the penitent to seek an interview outside the confessional. Any wrong use of the provision for receiving counsel must be rebuked, and opportunity taken better to enlighten the penitent on the proper uses of the sacrament and on the purposes of counsel. It may even be necessary to tell the penitent that the confessional is not the place to talk about, say, financial troubles, or removing to a new house, unless, of course, some moral choice is clearly included. If any such matter is mentioned the confessor will tell the penitent to go to the proper authority for advice. Similarly, the use of the confessional for the discussion of family matters is wrong, again unless some moral choice is involved.

After giving what counsel he thinks fit, the confessor will generally ask, "Is there anything further upon which you would like advice?"—but not so as to give room for such improper discussion as we have mentioned.

The confessor will beware of letting a penitent depend upon him. It is natural and may be proper for one to go to his own spiritual doctor when his soul is ill, and confessors differ in ability. But the ideal is that, at least for penance and absolution, the penitent should in the end be able to go to any confessor and for the rest to stand on his own feet. This is not, however, to be construed into condoning the practice of going from one confessor to another, and penitents should normally keep to one, and not go from confessor to confessor until they have found one who will do as they want, or whom they like as a man. If all confessors make themselves as fit as they can to perform their important task, both the abuse of having a "favourite confessor" and the need to use a confessor of ability and not go from one to another will be properly cared for.

NOTE ON SCRUPULOSITY

The scrupulous penitent will need careful patience and much firmness. There may be psychological causes for his scrupulosity, so that an expert must be consulted. He may have been badly taught, or be in some sin unrevealed which he tries to expiate by being scrupulous about others he does not mind mentioning. Scrupulosity may be a kind of self-deceit. It can be a sin of pride of the most subtle kind: the penitent must be told this, and that he shows a lack

of faith and humility. He will be reminded that confession is of fact, and any reasonable doubt removes the need to confess: but this is not to be taken as an excuse not to confess, or to invent a doubt. Sometimes a penitent is scrupulous because he has built up an ideal of himself, and unconsciously tries to prove it by a false appearance of conscientiousness without facing the true self. Teaching and gentle discipline will generally correct ordinary scrupulosity, but it is not an easy task to do. The scrupulous will sometimes be among those who go from confessor to confessor, so that it is all the more necessary that a confessor should ask a strange penitent if he has a regular confessor and why he does not go to him. A new confessor can, however, sometimes help the scrupulous, as he may be better informed about this error than the penitent's regular confessor; but the penitent should always be led back to his regular confessor unless there is grave reason to the contrary. Some scrupulous souls may well be seeking not penitence and absolution so much as an esoteric satisfaction of their vanity.

Nevertheless the confessor will exercise great care not to be over-severe with scrupulous penitents unless he is sure there is real need for sternness. He must guard, too, against labelling as scrupulous the penitent whose conscience may in fact be more delicate and accurate than even his own. The confessor is indeed judge, but he must be a wise and loving judge.

NOTE ON COUNSEL ABOUT MATTER NOT DIRECTLY CONNECTED WITH THE CONFESSION

There are some matters on which a penitent, particularly perhaps a priest penitent, finds it next to

impossible to ask counsel outside the confessional. These may have no direct bearing on the matter of the confession, but may have to do with a grave decision to be made in respect of some official relationship, or may simply be concerning some recurrent temptation which never quite reaches the outcome of sin. Very sensitive souls, or those who wish to be as sure as the seal of penance can make them that the matter of counsel is not only secret but afterwards forgotten by the confessor, are provided in the confessional with a unique opportunity for seeking advice. Such a situation would only occur when the absolute and impersonal secrecy of the confessional is urgently needed. For such needy or hypersensitive souls, the confessor will be ready to give counsel at the time of confession, provided that there is also matter for absolution or, if there is not, provided that the penitent is satisfied with advice and a blessing. It need not be emphasized that such a use of the time for counsel will be guarded against frivolous or worldly abuse.

CHAPTER VIII

PENANCE

"I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." (*Luke 15¹⁹*.)

THE "penance" is usually just a symbol of contrition and of desire to amend and make reparation; it is performed as an acknowledgment of moral debt and as a tribute to justice. It is a discipline. It generally takes the form of a prayer, a psalm, a hymn, a canticle or other devotion, to be said by the penitent after he has left the confessional. It should be chosen to suit the matter, or the gravest matter, of the confession. Thus, for pride may be set Psalm 131; for lack of faith and despondency, a creed; for omission of thanksgiving and general ingratitude, Psalm 150.¹

On the other hand, the penance may sometimes take a form as near as may be to actual material or moral reparation for sin. A penitent who confesses to great uncharitableness towards someone may be told to spend some minutes in special prayer for him, or to go out of his way to do him a favour. One who has insulted, misjudged or defrauded another would be told to make reparation by apology or, if he can do so without public defamation, make actual restitution of that of which he has defrauded his

¹ A useful book of suggested penances is *Prayer Book Counsel and Penances for the use of Confessors*, by R. H. Le Messurier (Faith Press). *Vide also Manual for Confessors*, Belton, Part II, Chap. VI.

neighbour.² An habitual sinner may be helped by doing as his penance some set act of avoidance, or else by performing some special act each day for a period which will help cultivate the opposite virtue: he may be told to report on his performance of such a penance at his next confession.³

The penitent should know that, at his next confession, he should always state whether he has performed a penance set as well as whether he received absolution.⁴ If he omits to do this the confessor may ask if the penance was done. Generally, the penitent must be taken to have accepted and performed his penance in good faith; he should indicate his acceptance of a penance at the time it is set. A new penitent, when he is being prepared for his first confession, should be told that the penance is to be said at his place in church after he has been dismissed by the confessor, and not at the confessional.

It is much to be desired that more careful study be given to the subject of penance and restitution than is done by many confessors.

² But *vide* Chapter on "Matter Heard in Confession": "a penitent may not be required to defame himself . . ."

³ *Vide* Chapter on "Recidivism and Habitual Sin."

⁴ *Vide* Form of Confession, p. 94f.

CHAPTER IX

ABSOLUTION

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."
(*Heb. 10*¹⁷.)

THE confessor is judge,¹ as well as counsellor and physician of the soul. He must guard the sanctity of the sacrament and be mindful of the important responsibility of administering absolution. He will not hesitate to withhold absolution for very grave cause, and will at all times give it with due solemnity.

If the confessor has no strong doubts as to the proper dispositions of the penitent he must absolve; the presumption being always in favour of the penitent. On the other hand, to come to confession for wrong reasons² with improper or insufficient dispositions (e.g. an unbalanced idea about "getting absolution on the cheap" from a confessor who does not know the penitent), or without being willing to do anything in the nature of restitution, is a bar to absolution. The confessor is bound under pain of mortal sin not to absolve a penitent who is obviously ill-disposed.³ He must, however, do all he can to arouse the right dispositions: only when he has found this to be impossible, must he refuse absolution, remembering that absolution withheld is tantamount to the lesser excommunication.⁴

¹ As such he is "hearing a case."

² *Vide* p. 94f.

³ *Vide* Chapter on "Matter Heard in Confession."

⁴ I.e. exclusion from the altar.

The right dispositions for valid absolution are, as we have said : that the penitent should be humble, honest, pure in his intentions, having faith in the sacrament, a sincere contrition and purpose of amendment, willing to try his best to put his contrition into effect. He must be ready to take seriously to heart the counsel he has been given, to avoid occasions of sin, to perform his penance and make such restitution as he can. The fact that a penitent expresses a fear that he may fall into the same sin or sins again, does not, if he is repentant and not recidivist,⁵ constitute a bar to absolution : he must be told to depend much on the grace of the sacrament, the frequent use of it and of the Holy Communion, and be encouraged in every way.

A penitent who is obviously ill-disposed may be told to return again at some stated time to see if he has improved, and this may be made a condition of absolution or absolution may be deferred until he has done so : it must be reasonably evident that it is possible for the penitent to improve of his own efforts aided by grace and that he is not psychologically abnormal. Absolution is given conditionally only in the rare cases where the confessor has strong and reasonable doubt as to the dispositions of the penitent, but can do nothing to reassure himself or make certain that his doubts are well-founded. This may be so in the case of a dying penitent, or one on the verge of unconsciousness, or one whose intelligence is so weak that it is difficult to judge the moral dispositions but good faith may be present as far as is possible. Conditional absolution will also be given

⁵ *Vide* Chapter XII.

when there is grave doubt as to the baptismal status of a penitent.

Apparent contrition may turn out, on enquiry, to be only a temporary emotion and partaking rather of the nature of attrition : the confessor must satisfy himself that the attrition is all that can be expected at the time, or he must give only conditional absolution. Reparation for grievous crime, which would be possible in full health, may be doubtfully possible if the penitent is seriously ill : but the confessor may be satisfied that the penitent's dispositions are as complete as they can be in the circumstances. A very ignorant penitent, who comes to confession with little knowledge of what it is all about, yet has a very sincere desire, as far as he can, to be forgiven and to do better, may be given full absolution, but on condition that he agrees to come for better instruction. Some confessors may feel that in such a case only conditional absolution should be given. But it is arguable that the penitent exhibits full material integrity as far as he knows, and that his formal integrity (known truly only to God) is without fault.

A penitent who makes a frivolous confession, or one who insists on conversation and discussion may be checked by being told that, unless he confines himself to facts of sinful commission and omission honestly remembered, he cannot be absolved. An interview will be asked in which to try to bring the penitent to a better frame of mind.

A penitent who has been used to making his confession regularly, so that it has become a devout habit may, in later life, become senile and weak-minded : he must be taken to be in good faith, the merits of his

previous confessions applied to the present, and he must be absolved. Such a penitent may get into great distress by forgetting, when he comes to the confessional, all that he has found out in self-examination: he must be quietly questioned, and, if he can still remember nothing, be given conditional absolution. A form of conditional absolution could be: "If thou be rightly disposed, I absolve thee . . ."

NOTE ONE. The "Absolutions" in Morning and Evening Prayer and the Holy Communion are statements of conditional absolution made to many people at the same time. They are not in parity with full absolution in the sacrament of penance, where the conditional element is reduced to a minimum, and, humanly speaking, probably does not exist at all—the penitent is taken to have the right dispositions which cannot necessarily be assumed in the corporate confession made before the statements of absolution under present consideration. Yet the efficacy of such "statements of absolution" is to be taken as valid for such individuals who express formal integrity in their hearts, as far as venial sin is concerned. Some would argue that mortal sin may be forgiven through this general confession and statement of absolution, if an individual is as properly disposed as he would be for the reception of sacramental absolution. But this is not a safe doctrine.⁶

⁶ For absolution in the case of those who cannot find matter for confession *vide* also p. 35. For a useful discussion of Withheld, Conditional and Deferred Absolution *vide Manual for Confessors*, Belton, Part IV, Chap. VII; *vide* also Chapter on "Matter Heard in Confession."

NOTE TWO. *The Confessions of the Unbaptized.* A person making his first confession as part of his preparation for Holy Baptism, obviously an adult or one who has reached "years of discretion," will be given counsel and penance as usual, but no absolution. Only the baptized may be given sacramental absolution. The baptism, which will normally follow soon after the confession, will comprise absolution in this case.

NOTE THREE. Every discussion of forgiveness and sacramental absolution will bear in mind that it must be possible for the penitent to find the sacrament available. God is not bound.

CHAPTER X

MATTER HEARD IN CONFESSION

“And shut him up, and set a seal upon him.” (*Rev.* 20³.)

THE seal of confession is absolute. The confessional is concerned only with the relation of the individual soul to God. It operates on a different plane from, let us say, the law of the land,¹ attributing gravity to matters of which the police take no notice (like pride, hypocrisy, uncharitableness), and having no jurisdiction over matters where the police would have to take action (like having an accidentally defective rear-light on a motor-car). There are, of course, many sins regarded as mortal by the Church which are also civil crimes, like murder, theft, arson, and some sexual offences.

Nothing which the confessor has learnt from the confessions he hears may ever be revealed to any one either directly or indirectly, unless the penitent himself freely and without pressure of any kind has authorized the confessor to reveal it. Every confessor, by his behaviour and conversation outside the confessional as well as in, must show the weight and importance he attaches to the sanctity of the seal. Even if, with the penitent's permission, a third person should consult the confessor about the penitent's sins and temptations (e.g. a parent about a child), the confessor must still not reveal anything unless he has

¹ *Vide* Chapter V.

first received the specific and unforced permission of the penitent to do so. There is no condition or exception to this, either of age or circumstance.²

The confessor must suppress in his own mind all that he hears in confession. It is permissible, in the confessional only, to remember the penitent's past confessions, for the purpose of checking progress, enquiring (if there is serious doubt) about the performance of penance, and testing sincerity of amendment. It is probable, however, that even in the confessional, no mention should be made of a penitent's past confession without his express and free permission.

The strict and unconditional observance of the seal applies similarly to cases where absolution has been withheld, deferred or conditional. Nothing in the confessor's dealings with the penitent outside the confessional, or with any one else, may be allowed to reveal the position, except with the penitent's free concurrence.

None may be obliged by the denial of absolution or by counsel, to defame himself or to embark on any course of action which will involve hardship to another person. A certain course may be suggested which should be taken before proceeding with any action or continuing in any work or position; a promise may be exacted that a certain means of reparation or act of avoidance be undertaken which will remove an obstacle to absolution, and absolution given only on condition that the promise is made there and then. But, if such a promise or course of

² *Vide* *The Seal of the Confessional and the Law of Evidence*, Winckworth, S.P.C.K.

action involve defamation, or grave hardship to others, (e.g. to husband, wife, parents or children or even a close friend), then, the proper dispositions being otherwise present, absolution may not be withheld. For example, a man who confesses to having appropriated to his own use some of the money belonging to the firm for whom he works, may be required to restore the money and even own up to his employers; but absolution may not be withheld solely because he refuses to do so on the grounds that such a course would mean his public disgrace and consequent serious hardship to those dependant on him. The avoidance of a guilty personal intimacy or friendship may be made a condition of absolution, but it may be demanded only in so far as no public defamation is involved. Thus, a wife who has contracted a guilty relationship with another man not her husband must be required to promise that this relationship cease immediately, and the promise made a condition of absolution; but she may not be required to tell her husband about it. A young man may be told to cease forthwith his association with certain other young men that he may avoid temptation, but he may not be required to give his reasons for doing so to a third person.

Great care and discretion must be exercised by the confessor in exacting any promise as a condition of absolution: the penitent may make objections which are not valid; on the other hand, the honest penitent will know his own circumstances better than the confessor. Before asking for a promise the confessor will enquire what steps have been taken so far to avoid and combat temptation.

It is sometimes asserted that a penitent may be required to defame himself, as a condition to absolution, by publicly acknowledging an offence, *if the offence is causing continuing harm to another person who is innocent, or is likely to cause harm to an innocent person.* This contention is of doubtful authority; public acknowledgment, in relieving the second person from hurt or danger of hurt, may involve a third person, to whom the penitent has an especial duty, in worse harm or defamation. Thus a man may have been told to own up to his employer about an offence on the grounds that it is causing hardship to other employees of the same firm: even though the confessor knows that to own up means dismissal from his work, and unemployment. But the objection could be raised that, through dismissal for such a cause, lasting harm would be done to the man's wife and children, or to a sick and dependant relative, so that graver hardship is effected.

While it must be urged that the penitent must sincerely and prayerfully consult his own conscience in the matter, and every possible reparation be made, yet very careful enquiry should be made before such a difficult promise is exacted as a condition of absolution: there can be grave doubt in such a procedure. In all these cases it must be repeated, absolution may not be withheld if the sole objection to a promise demanded is the probability of defamation; if the promise is shown definitely to be unreasonable in view of this; and if all other right dispositions are present.

Not only is explicit betrayal of anything heard in confession strictly forbidden, but every line of action or conversation which would lead to an enquiry or

But this might be suggested in confessor.

suspicion in the mind of a third person must be unexceptionally avoided. The confessor must train himself not to appear upset or in any way unusually serious if he has heard abnormally grave matter in a confession. He must always preserve the same unruffled exterior whatever confession he hears—he must not, for example, sigh with relief after he has heard a confession of a notoriously difficult penitent, or ever give any sign that he has been tried.

The confessor must never mention any one by name as one of his penitents, without the penitent's permission. There can be far too much loose talk about this or that person being a "regular penitent" or being irregular: in this way an opportunity may be given for suspicion or enquiry. Great care should be taken in using matter heard in confession in, let us say, instruction to a new penitent or in illustrating any difficult situation of penance. If examples that have occurred in the confessor's experience must be used, e.g. in a lecture to priests on confession, then the cases must be stated as if they were purely hypothetical, and can be so far altered as to ensure that no clue is left as to identity. A confessor must not say, "A man once came to me and confessed . . . and I said . . ." If he must use the example, he should rather say, "If a man came to me and confessed . . . it would be proper to say . . ."

A confessor should avoid mentioning who does or who does not, among those committed to his charge, go to confession—even to another priest. An incumbent should never question his assistant curate about the confessions he hears, or the assistant curate his vicar.

The penitent ought never to make mention of anything said or done by either himself or the confessor in the confessional. If there be an interview on the matter of the confession, the penitent must first give permission for it to be spoken about, or the confessor must ask if he may mention it. If the penitent begins to speak about the matter, this may be taken as permission to refer to it. Both should also understand that even a conversation of this nature outside the confessional is strictly confidential. On the other hand, the penitent is at liberty at any time to set the confessor free from the obligation of the seal: whether the confessor makes use of this liberty or not is another matter.

The question of "Cases Reserved to the Ordinary," that is, where absolution may be given only when representations have first been made and instructions received by way of the bishop or other person appointed by him for the purpose, is a subject for moral theology, canon law, and diocesan regulation. It has never been generally or satisfactorily settled in the Anglican Communion, and is doubtful procedure even in Communions where the use of the sacrament of penance is unexceptionally maintained. It would seem that our current practice by which all priests are held capable of hearing confessions in places where they have any sort of jurisdiction and of giving absolution, is more suitable to our anglican circumstances.

It is permissible for any confessor, especially for one who has not had much experience or training, to seek out a wise and experienced counsellor who has full knowledge and appreciation of the implications

of the seal, for the purpose of getting advice on difficult matters of the confessional. If any matter is in question on which consultation with the counsellor would entail mention of the penitent or give any clue to his identity, the confessor will ask permission of the penitent first. It is better for a confessor to seek a counsellor who lives at some distance from the place where he normally hears confessions, so that there be less danger of any fraction of the seal, even implicit. In any case, conversations between confessor and counsellor of such a kind, must also be regarded as *sub sigillo*.

NOTE ON DIFFICULT CASES OF DEFAMATION AND HARDSHIP

The following are two hypothetical illustrations:

1. "A," a married man and a regular churchgoer, divorces his wife. "B," a married woman and also a regular churchgoer, divorces her husband: each is the so-called innocent party. "A" and "B" are then "married" in a Registrar's Office, and there are children by the second "marriage." After a period of happy family life, "A" and "B" become better enlightened as to the gravity of the marriage vows; they become uneasy about their present state and miss the privilege of full Church membership, since they are excommunicate. They go to their parish priest and tell him their problems, asking him to hear their confessions and receive them back into the Church. The priest tells them that he could not give absolution if they continue to maintain their present guilty relationship. They point out that to cease to live together as man and wife and parents would

mean revealing the situation to the children, and thus involve defamation and grave hardship. They say also that probably such a course would involve public defamation as well. (In the present deplorable state of public morals this is doubtful.) Here is a choice of gravity and probability, or of conflict of evils.³ A probable solution would be for "A" and "B" to be told that, to show true repentance and perform proper penance, they must make their confessions and agree to the following conditions of absolution: they must cease to cohabit, but may continue to live in the same home; they must resolve strictly to observe this condition, but need not reveal anything to their children; if at any time through the frailty of human nature they indulge in intercourse, they will at once go to confession and abide by the confessor's judgment, remembering that such a defection may result in entire separation. They will be warned not to presume on any of these provisions, and that failure to observe them will bring a moral accusation of adultery. If they agree to these conditions, and the confessor is reasonably satisfied as to their dispositions, he may absolve them and admit them to communion. Then there come the considerations of loyalty and scandal: loyalty in so far as the confessor is bound, as well as the penitents, to respect the law of the Church in these matters—as far as neither is conscientiously invincible about them: and scandal in so far as the admission to communion may cause devout and virtuous members of the congregation to be distressed and result in

³ *Vide* K. E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems*, Part II, Chap. VII, 2.

Penance of such hardness may not give you the

dissension within the fold. Probably the confessor would do well to consult the proper authority both as to possible scandal and the question of loyalty, and be bound by the ruling of his own conscience. The confessor may tell "A" and "B" that, if any member of the congregation makes any protest or comes with a hurt conscience to question the situation, he must be allowed to take such steps as he thinks fit and proper, within the limits of the seal, to reassure the questioner that such procedure has been followed as would satisfy him if he knew what it was.

It is recognized that such a solution may expose "A" and "B" to great strain of temptation; this, however, should be enduring and, in the end, removed by their mutual devotion to the children and the sincerity of their penitence. Had there been no issue the solution would have had to be entire separation. There is of course the practical difficulty of housing: where the home is in a small house with perhaps only two or three bedrooms it is not easy to see how the family can be so arranged as to lessen temptation to cohabit. We cannot, however, disregard the powerful grace given by true and deep repentance and the result of the enlightening of a hitherto invincible conscience. If, of course, it is clear that the first marriage was ecclesiastically null and void, then the whole matter is simplified, and the second marriage is a true one, and may even be blessed in church. This point might, in such a case, be worthy of enquiry.

According to some authorities, "A" and "B" may be told that they would be at liberty to be married in church if and when their former two partners died.

*But then they might
wish the death of one or*

Since their "marriage" by the Registrar has been accepted by the civil authority, the religious ceremony may be "secret" provided it is performed by the parish priest with the proper witnesses and advice taken as to entries in Marriage Registers: all would have to be in confidence.

2. A married Sunday School teacher divorces her husband who is the "guilty" party. She expresses her intention never to "marry" again, though there is no way of telling that this means she regards herself as still married in the eyes of God and His Church. She wishes to continue her work for the Church and to worship publicly as usual, and to receive Holy Communion. The present position in the Anglican Communion is that only "re-marriage" after divorce excommunicates, but there are a number of considerations which should modify general acceptance of this conclusion.

In the case of this teacher, it is at least probably true that her divorce signifies a public denial of her marriage vows, and so she is guilty of grave sin. Her continuance of church work might cause scandal and hardship. Parents may have to answer awkward and distressing questions from their children attending the Sunday School; faithful and virtuous communicants may feel injustice, and so on. Probably the solution would be for her to be told that she must make her confession and be willing to accept as a condition to absolution the following penance. She will submit to a period of probation, during which she will not teach in Sunday School and will not receive Holy Communion; but she will present herself in church at the times for public worship to which

Well

she has been used and will assist at the Holy Eucharist at all the times she has been used to when she has previously received the sacrament. If it is considered expedient, the confessor may defer absolution until the penance has been satisfactorily performed, when he will absolve and admit to communion. The penitent will be told that she need not, if she does not wish, reveal to any one the state of affairs during her period of probation except for two reasons—that it would be an edifying act if she were to tell any one who enquired the true position, and that, if her final reception back causes scandal, she must be willing to reveal the facts in some way.⁴

A confessor who feels himself able and bound in conscience to accept local, provincial or diocesan provision for "reserved cases" would tell penitents in cases like the preceding that he must withhold absolution until he has referred the matter to the proper authority, and he is not prohibited by the seal from doing so, nor need he ask the penitent's permission.⁵ But it would be desirable that the existence of such reservations be made known to all the faithful as well as to confessors.

⁴ Cf. Introduction of "A Communion" in the Book of Common Prayer: ". . . until the said" (public) "discipline may be restored again (which is much to be wished)"

⁵ In referring the matter, the confessor will not reveal the penitent's identity.

CHAPTER XI

RECIDIVISM AND HABITUAL SIN

"There is a sin unto death." (1 John 5¹⁶.)

"How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." (Matthew 18^{21, 22}.)

(This and the following chapter deal with cases which are rarer in the Anglican Communion than in other Societies where confession is universally practised, but the Anglican priest may occasionally meet with them.)

A **RECIDIVIST** is one who periodically commits the same sin and shows no sure signs of true contrition or sincere purpose of amendment. An **habitual sinner** is one who commits the same sin with some frequency, but may be sincerely contrite afterwards and come frequently to confession with a real desire and purpose to amend. It follows that an habitual sinner may or may not be a recidivist. One who falls into the same sin, let us say, two or three times a year is hardly habitual in this respect; he may not either be recidivist, for his long periods of abstinence may be a sign of repentance. But one who voluntarily and purposely commits the same sin at specific periods is probably a recidivist. A man may intentionally commit fornication twice a year on the plea that he cannot otherwise keep himself from open scandal: such a man is obviously in grave error and may not be given absolution until he has amended his ways and been convinced that his is not the way

to combat concupiscence. On the other hand, one who commits the same sin or makes the same omission of duty with some frequency, say once a month, is an habitual sinner; his habit may be due to lack of proper contrition and depth of purpose to amend, in which case he is recidivist and must be refused absolution until he improves in these respects. But a penitent may be sincerely repentant and truly desirous of doing better, yet, if he be very sorely tempted, continually falls into the same sin: he is not recidivist and must be absolved.

The confessor will take care to distinguish between the recidivist, and the habitual sinner who is doing his best to amend. This is not always easy. What appears as recidivism may in reality be due to psychological abnormality, and the penitent may be so far incapable of what another would understand as true amendment. It probably comes under the heading of invincible error. In such a case some treatment by a christian psychiatrist will be recommended.

Recidivism is rarely met in the Anglican Communion in the confessional, because the very act of coming to confession may be taken in most cases as being evidence of repentance. Room must be left for the human limitations of both confessor and penitent. The confessor, though he has the grace of Holy Orders and should be able, through experience and study, to judge most cases, is not infallible. If, for example, he has refused absolution to a penitent on the grounds of recidivism, and yet the penitent is in fact truly repentant, the latter may seek another confessor. On the other hand, as contrition and purpose of amendment are necessary dispositions for the

sacrament of penance and conditions for the reception of forgiveness, if a confessor has given absolution to a penitent whom he thought contrite and yet who in fact is not so, the absolution is null. It is true with penance as with all other sacraments: where the right conditions and dispositions are present then the gifts of the sacrament are sure. It is only needful to be able to depend as much as may be upon the sincerity of the individual, and to leave doubtful cases to the infinite wisdom of God. The confessor should be able to resolve all normal cases, and the mistakes to which we have referred are of abnormal and infrequent occurrence.¹

¹ *Vide* Chapter on "Absolution."

confession and cannot, perhaps by reason of old age, now be convinced of its necessity, may be said to be in invincible error in this respect. A divorced man may, in these days, be conscientiously convinced that it is right for him to "marry" again: until he has been enlightened, and has accepted the divine teaching in the matter, he must be held to be in invincible error and morally blameless. But if any doubt enters his mind after discussion, his error is vincible and he must be judged morally guilty.³ If, after proper effort to accept the law of the Church, he is still convinced that he is right, he is not morally culpable. The Church, however, bound to uphold her own law, must excommunicate him. This kind of invincible conscience is, among civilized people as well as among the backward races, no doubt due in part to the force of general public opinion and to the demands of divine law giving place to the lower demands of common amenity. Dr. Mortimer calls attention to the important consideration that "modern propaganda probably induces invincible ignorance of this kind among masses of the population."⁴ Newspaper reports, the example of unhappy marriages contracted by non-Christians, the ease in many parts of the world of getting a divorce, and the accepted break-up of family life, all create a common lowering of morality which no doubt results in invincible error of many kinds among the majority who accept the lower morality of the world. The

³ It is important to remember that it must be certain that it is the conscience that is being obeyed, and not just convenience, taste, expediency, or public opinion, and that "invincibility" is not just obstinacy.

⁴ *Elements of Moral Theology*, Chap. III, p. 41.

influence of many cinematograph films, of certain kinds of literature, and of the trend towards undisciplined "self-expression," tend to create a moral atmosphere in which it is not easy for a soul not brought up strictly in the Christian faith to be aware of the gravity of many sins.

The confessor should have worked out for himself what he will be able to do when called upon to give absolution to one who is in any kind of invincible error. A man who is able to confess sins of dishonesty, uncharitableness, omission of public worship and so on, may be unable, through invincible error, to confess that he is wrong in living with a woman who is not his wife and whom he looks upon as his wife in all respects. This is not an easy situation to imagine, and though it serves to show that this cruder form of invincible error may not be other than very rare among penitents, yet it can exist. As long as he is truly invincible in the matter, this penitent will be judged morally guiltless according to divine law or to the human law of justice, but he will be guilty in ecclesiastical law, and civil law would show its disapproval by pronouncing his children illegitimate. His confession would not be materially integral, even though he is convinced that it is. Formal integrity, known only to God, is probably present. No solution is offered here as to whether the confessor should absolve, for his knowledge of that which the penitent does not confess is external to the confessional; he may feel inclined to absolve of that which is materially confessed, but must remember that he cannot absolve partially—that is, from that which is acknowledged and not from that which is not con-

fessed. He would probably have to be bound by his loyalty to his knowledge of revealed law and refuse to absolve, giving his reasons why. It is to be strongly assumed that all penitents who come for absolution accept the teaching of the Church on all these matters, but there may come cases when it is necessary to weigh considerations of loyalty, acceptance of authority, and ecclesiastical discipline against the whole question of invincible error. The confessor will sometimes find himself involved in situations where considerations of scandal and defamation and the fallibility of human law are present.⁵

A further fairly frequent matter is the moral gravity of certain deceptions: some may hold that any who, in certain circumstances, cannot think that they are morally culpable in telling a lie or living a deception, may be held to have an invincible conscience on the matter. A mother and illegitimate child may be living together as aunt and niece, and cannot be persuaded that the deception is wrong.⁶ Further examples of invincible error would be those of children who have been trained in criminal ways, brought up by criminals, without any chance of christian teaching: they would be said to be in invincible error until they had received proper instruction and in such cases the state of error may last longer, as the effects of wrong teaching are harder to root out than the effects of no teaching at all. In all

⁵ *Vide* H. J. Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, I, II, iv. and I, III, vi. ff.; Mortimer, *Elements of Moral Theology*, chaps. II and V; and Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems*, pp. 229-240; 337-374.

⁶ *Vide*, on this case, F. L. Cross, *Darwell Stone; Churchman and Counsellor*, Letter 6.

these cases sin would have been committed, but technical blame cannot be attached or the sin said to be as grave as it would have been with full knowledge and acceptance of christian standards of morals. The Church would have to act, however, according to her law, and it is noteworthy that civil law operates according to proven facts and would attach blame and administer punishment where, in the confessional, the penitent might not, for reasons of invincible error, be held to have been blameworthy. It is interesting to note, too, that civil law seems to allow invincible error, not in judging as guilty or not guilty, but in assessing the degree of punishment that is suitable to the case.⁷

Invincible error caused by mental abnormality had best have specialist treatment and be referred to a christian psychiatrist to find out exactly how far the error is not vincible. A certified lunatic is generally incapable of voluntary sin, though he may be culpable of civil crime. A man may be perfectly sane in all respects but one, and in this his abnormality leads him into sin, but he would, by reason of invincible error, not sin gravely.

One who, after being in invincible error, is enlightened yet still commits the same sins as in his previous state is generally to be regarded as sinning gravely. A kleptomaniac cannot be judged as gravely immoral when he steals, but, if he is cured of the disease of kleptomania, and then steals, he commits grave sin. We now know more about the effect of psychological disease on volition, knowledge and con-

⁷ Cf. the treatment given to insane murderers or to those under a certain age.

sciousness, and can, with expert advice, usually decide when a soul is in invincible error because of it. But we must beware of the common and successful error of the psychologists who ascribe all sin to some predetermining factor which appears to rob the soul of his free will. Sin is sin: it always needs forgiving, and we are concerned here only with questions of gravity and when to absolve.⁸

It must be repeated that, if a penitent has any suspicion whatever that an act is blameworthy, then he cannot be said to be in invincible error. It is just possible that a penitent, though honestly convinced that a certain action is not sinful, may yet, because the Church says it is blameworthy, mention it in his confession without believing that he has really done wrong, but only because he feels he must obey the Church. He feels doubt, not about his own culpability, but about his position and duty as a member of the Church. He would probably say something like this: "I have done this and that, which I cannot believe to be wrong in the sight of God; yet the Church says it is a sin. What am I to do?" This would be an occasion for an attempt (a) to remove the error; (b) to give some teaching about the implications of loyalty. But an interview is the place for it and not the confessional.

It may happen that a penitent, after enlightenment, clings to his former sins through long habit and loss of will, but confesses them. The confessor should generally remain silent on the subject provided no scandal is caused thereby, or injury done to another. If the penitent shows that he is struggling very hard

⁸ Cf. J. R. Oliver, *Pastoral Psychiatry and Mental Health*.

to get himself into a better frame of mind in spite of the undiminished desire and attraction of his old sins, he must, of course, be absolved, and be given every kind of encouragement, told to frequent the Holy Communion and Penance, to say the proper prayers, and occupy himself in the right therapeutic activities: above all, he must not lose heart, or hanker consciously after his old state of error, but trust implicitly in the wisdom and love of God.

In some cases of invincible error enlightenment by instruction may be thought unlikely to be useful, as with the very old and the very sick: the confessor had better say nothing and deal with the penitent as best he can on other matters. He will absolve, for the confession is taken to be formally integral, and as long as there is truly invincible error the penitent is morally blameless.

In dealing with invincible error, there must always be the aim to save the soul—if instruction is possible, it must be given; if the conscience remains invincible, it is doubtful if absolution can be refused, as there is formal integrity; if there is a clash of loyalties, then the claims of the greater good and the lesser evil must be asserted. The relevance of invincible error to law has been discussed: here we may make a few remarks about loyalty. It is important to remember that loyalty demands obedience to just laws even though obedience may be inconvenient, harrassing or seem unreasonable to the individual. To disobey the dictates of loyalty would at least imply a conviction that there is an inherent evil in a law, and that conscience must force the individual to refuse the law's demands. Although conscience does not demand

obedience to an unjust law, it does not always enjoin disobedience.⁹

The inexperienced confessor will do well to try to seek expert advice whenever he suspects invincible error.

⁹ Dr. William Temple (*Readings in S. John's Gospel*, second series, p. 274) has pointed out that, whereas "formal sin" . . . involves defiance of conscience . . . there is a sin which may not be in that sense 'formal sin' and yet involves guilt as only 'formal sin' is generally supposed to do. The deeper sin is the sin of the darkened conscience, which prevents men from seeing goodness when it is before their eyes." Invincible error exists only when conscience is *not* defied; yet one whose conscience is wilfully darkened cannot be said to defy it when he acts sinfully. This, however, is a far cry from invincible error. There must have been a time when the conscience was not so darkened, for the "darkening" of conscience implies a previous existence of "light." The error is now "invincible" not by reason of the judgment of a sincere conscience or lack of enlightenment, but through a wilful refusal of enlightenment up to the point where enlightenment has become impossible. Such voluntary choice of error *ab initio* is the "sin against the Holy Ghost" and puts "him who had sunk to it outside the reach of divine forgiveness" (*ibid.*); cf. Matthew 6²³; John 1⁵, and John 3¹⁹.

CHAPTER XIII

DETERRENTS FROM THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (*Matthew 23*³⁷.)

CHRISTIANS are deterred from using the sacrament of penance by

(a) *Ignorance.* Ignorance of the mind may be intended, i.e., the mind may have refused conviction. In any case, it is a kind of smoke-screen thrown out by fear or pride. Either of these may seem to hide any need for sacramental confession: fear, because of the possible overturning of temporal values, of having cherished illusions shattered, of unwillingness to face the true self as God sees him, and of having to disturb satisfaction with the lower morality of the world. A man may say, "It is not the 'real I' who does this or that": the mind puts up a resistance to having grave sins uncovered in the confessional, and rationalizes this resistance by finding all sorts of arguments for not going to confession. A defective conception of the gravity and nature of sin, and little desire for divine perfection, comprise an ignorance which deters from confession. An imperfect grasp of the nature of the seal of confession may cause the mind to shy from such self-revelation.

Ignorance of the heart is a second kind of smoke-screen thrown out by guilt to hide God. It is

engendered by an unwillingness to forsake sin and to fix the affections upon those things which seem, in this state of error, to be fantastic and spectral ideas of perfection as compared with the full-blooded attractions of the world, the flesh and the devil.

The confessor will try to penetrate the screens of ignorance by teaching much about the gravity of sin and the nature of it; by exploding fallacies like the opinion that to avoid the cruder vices—*theft, murder, adultery*—is the height of morality; by persuading that respectability is not enough; and by correcting all false spiritual and moral values that take little account of such grave sins as *self-importance*, and make much of good works that are seen of men. Since the time of S. John Baptist conviction of sin has led many to seek the sacraments: “. . . and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”¹

(b) *Pride*. As humility and obedience are difficult virtues, a reluctance to reveal the true self audibly to God's representative is a potent deterrent from confession. The soul must be convinced that one of the effects of confession is to evoke and nourish humility and so to act as a powerful aid in conquering pride. True contrition can be attained only by those who humble themselves.

(c) *Shame*. The obverse side of pride: a humble person may feel shame at certain sins so deeply that he cannot bring himself to confess them to a priest. Sound teaching about the priesthood and the nature of the seal of confession and the whole mechanics of “making a confession,” should remove

¹ Matthew 3⁶.

some of the scruples of shame. If a priest wants sinners to come to him he will show respect for the seal, nor, by unwise intimacies with people, will he strengthen too far the personal side of his relations with them. As the sacrament of penance is not as yet universally accepted among anglicans, and in parts deplorably deprecated, the confessor will be more careful to manifest always his priestly character, without self-consciousness or artificiality, and without being unapproachable or unfriendly. The people will be so instructed in right doctrine as to be able, when necessary, to lose the man in the priest, and to regard him in the confessional without any personal feeling.² They will be able, of course, to remember that the confessor is human like themselves, and a sinner, but should have learnt that he has the power to retain and remit sins, has been trained suitably in the spiritual life, practises according to the grace that is in him the ways of progress, is in possession of the grace of Holy Order, and sits in the confessional with an impersonal authority. Shame in the penitent will be increased by any emotion shown by the confessor: he will exhibit none in the confessional at any time or on any occasion.³ A confessor who does not cultivate the right dispositions and show them cannot expect his spiritual charges to come to him, and may even discourage them from going to any one else.

Finally, it may be pointed out that the confessional is a place where a good remedy to prevent shame may be found by helping to avoid the ill psychological effects of repression.

² *Vide* p. 38.

³ *Vide* p. 5.

(d) *Sloth*. This may be engendered by shame or an unrepentant heart, causing a sort of paralysis of the will. To add sloth to shame or pride is to add yet another subtle temptation to those which deter from penance. Sloth may be just a matter of indiscipline—the fundamental sin of “accidie.”⁴ A penitent who puts off his confession should be asked why, and taken to task if his reply is not reasonable: he must confess his procrastination as a sin.

The position of the confessional in church, if too prominent, may be another deterrent for shy people.⁵ Some penitents are deterred if they have to make a special appointment for their confession, or if difficulties are put in their way. The confessor should make it known that he is ready at all convenient times to make appointments for penitents, but there should be set times⁶ when he is “in church” to hear confessions and give counsel—so arranged to suit as far as possible all classes of penitents. Some penitents will come only when there are others; others will prefer the anonymity of a special appointment: it

⁴ The dangers of accidie are much more subtle than those of ordinary laziness. One of the enemies of the christian soul is the stagnation of the moral sense which breeds corruption. A valuable aid with which the soul dispenses at his peril is the aid given by regular confession in keeping the moral sense alert and the conscience in a state of enlightenment. For the conscience has to be continually informed and guided by knowledge through the Holy Spirit.

⁵ *Vide* p. 37: the position of the confessional.

⁶ The confessor will be in his place a little before the time set: if no penitent is present, he will not go away at once, but wait at least ten minutes in case any have been unavoidably detained. He will also pause awhile after the last confession, in case a late penitent arrives.

appears that the former are the more common. In any case, penitents should be trained to come at times when others do, so that there may be a greater naturalness in the use of the sacrament. The scrupulous should rarely be given a special appointment. Penitents must not forget that penance is a discipline as well as a remedy. Care must be taken when and to whom a special appointment is given, and when to insist on the penitent's coming at a set time. Rare instances of sudden conversion or the immediate need of sick-bed confessions require special consideration; and a special appointment will often have to be made for priests, who have to suit the time of their confessions to their parochial duties. The following do not, of course, come within these limitations of time and place: sick-bed confessions; confessions in hospitals (it can usually be arranged for screens to be put round the penitent's bed if he is in a public ward); any who may be suddenly “moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter”⁷; confessions on the field of battle, or in the case of sudden and mortal accident.

⁷ *Vide* Book of Common Prayer, Visitation of the Sick. A useful practice, when visiting the very sick, is to carry a small purple stole in the pocket, in case the sick person is thus moved. It is not necessary without exception for a surplice to be worn.

CHAPTER XIV

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

“When for a time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the world of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (*Heb. 5¹², 13, 14.*)

THE peace which consists in simply willing what God wills is the state to which every confessor will aim to bring his charges. For most souls the well-instructed and experienced confessor will be able to give the necessary guidance to help them attain that peace. His aim will, however, be constantly before him, and he cannot fail, if it is, to be properly conscious of the serious importance of his task. He will be ready to apply all needful discipline; to be severe when it is necessary, to be gentle and loving, to remember that he is a father, director, physician and judge of souls: and never to allow one function to override the others. Although he will be careful not to judge as mortal that which is only venial, he will also take to heart the complaint made by S. Teresa, who said that much harm had been done to her soul by too lenient confessors.

Although for most souls, then, the confessor will be sufficient director, for those who have a vocation either in the world or in the Religious State to a life

more abstracted, and are aspirants to a better state of perfection on earth, an external guide in addition to their confessors will be needed. Such would be pious people of both sexes whose position in the world and circumstances allow them to attend more to the positive ways of perfection: such would be all the clergy, deaconesses, and Religious. These will need a guide at the beginning who will put them on the right road, will help them to keep to it until they come to be able to seek their light from God alone.

There are certain advantages attached to being both the confessor and director of such dedicated souls, but opinions vary on the subject, and it is probably best for the penitent to choose for himself, or for any confessor who feels himself unable to do more than give ordinary counsel, and absolution, to advise his penitents to seek an experienced director as well.

Those penitents who are under the spiritual direction of one priest but normally make their confessions to another would probably do well at certain times (e.g. an anniversary, Shrovetide, Easter) to make confession to their director. If they are Religious this counsel would depend upon what their Rule and Superior allow.

An occasion when a lay-penitent would have a director who is not his regular confessor would be when he lives in a district where it is possible to make confession, but where adequate spiritual direction is not easy to obtain: for example, where a young and inexperienced priest is available to hear confessions but is not yet qualified to direct souls. If a penitent has been under the spiritual care of a confessor for a

long time, it may be better that he should continue to go to him for direction periodically if he removes from the confessor's district. But the tendency of some penitents never to make confession unless they go to their "favourite" priest is not to be encouraged. Temptations or other circumstances of the penitent may be of such unusual difficulty that it is better for him not to change his spiritual physician, even if he removes to another place, but the confessor will be the judge in every case and will not allow a penitent to take advantage, or presume on these provisions.¹

It is normally best for lay-penitents to make use of the means at hand, their parish priests: the latter will probably be qualified to give direction, and most penitents should be satisfied with this arrangement. They will always tell their confessor if they have a director as well.

Priests should probably have a spiritual director who is not their regular confessor, unless a "specialist" lives nearby, to whom they may go for both confession and other direction. By reason of their mobility, parish clergymen may not always be able to go to the same confessor. They should, of course, tell the confessor that they are under the direction of another priest; the confessor may enquire who it is, but only if he thinks it really necessary, to make sure of bona fides; and the penitent is not obliged to tell him. The reasons for such an enquiry would operate when a strange and obviously hurried

¹ It is a good principle of direction that no one has the right to make himself indispensable to another, nor has another the right to depend indispensably on him: this, of course, outside natural relationships.

or even furtive penitent presented himself, which would be rarely. A confessor will always ask a priest-penitent who comes to him for the first time, or any penitent in Holy Orders or a Religious, if he wants counsel or if he has a director. A priest who has no director implies by coming to confession that he wants counsel; but every priest has the right to tell a confessor that he wants only penance and absolution; the safeguards mentioned elsewhere will be applied, if expedient, and the confessor will be guided by the result as to whether he absolves, and will give reasons for any enquiry.²

It is very desirable that a deacon should have a spiritual director who will guide him through his diaconate, as it is often a time of testing. Incumbents of deacons' first parishes would do well to press their deacons to attach themselves at least for their first year to a wise director; it is not always easy or even desirable for an incumbent to direct any of his staff, and there are many ways in which a good director will be able to help a young deacon in the right way (even about preaching, conducting a service, behaviour in the parish) which are not easily open to the incumbent, apart from the spiritual life and moral progress. A deacon will need guidance in using this period to prepare himself for the high office of the priesthood. He will need to be shown the way of prayer applicable to him; to be helped towards further study of morals and ascetics; and to be advised on the moral and spiritual implications of his life and work in his first parish. This is very specialized work for a director, so that the ordinary confessor

² *Vide* p. 39.

will not be expected to do it unless he has an especial bent this way, and has attained some degree of proficiency in the spiritual sciences.

✕ It may also be as well for persons doing certain work for the Church in a lay or semi-lay capacity to have a director who is not their confessor. Their confessor would presumably be their parish priest and it would not be desirable for him to direct them also. Such would be Moral Welfare workers, Superintendents of Retreat Houses, lay-readers, licensed lay-workers. They would go to their director for the particular guidance they need in the spiritual and moral aspects of their work, that they may the more fittingly perform duties which should lay upon them high spiritual obligations.

Religious will normally have an ordinary confessor and a confessor extraordinary; the former will visit them for their ordinary fortnightly or monthly confessions and the latter perhaps quarterly for both confession and direction. The ordinary confessor will remember that he is concerned only with the personal and individual holiness of each penitent, and not with any of the affairs of the Community; if the latter should be in question during the confession, he will counsel application to the director in the first place and then suggest application to the Superior. A priest who undertakes to be ordinary confessor to a religious community should make sure whether he is required to give counsel or not. Similarly, a priest conducting a retreat for Religious should probably enquire if, when hearing a confession, he is expected to give counsel; but it is generally to be assumed that Religious in retreat will have been instructed by their

Superiors whether they shall seek counsel or accept it from the conductor. Religious who are on rest will have been told whether they may go to a certain confessor while they are away from their community house, and whether they are to have counsel.

Not every one needs a director, therefore, nor is every priest capable of giving direction. For many the counsel received in confession is enough, and for the scrupulous it should be so always. Direction is an expert's business: all priests have not the time or the opportunity to become expert.

A good director will have all the qualifications of a good confessor.³ Direction is not the same as counsel: it includes many relations outside the confessional which are closed to the confessor. The director who has agreed to look after the soul of another will be prepared to give christian counsel on many matters which will not directly appear to affect morals. He will try to keep the progress of the soul under constant review, and will be entitled to expect a certain amount of loyalty from him. A person under direction will consult his director not only on questions of morals, the life of prayer, general spiritual progress, but will also seek guidance from him on family matters of importance, on any change of work, on his relations with his employer or employees, on his performance of the duties appertaining to his station in life, and so on. It should not be necessary to say that the director is not expected to give advice on purely material matters, like the choice of two

³ *Vide* p. 4. He will add to these much thought and reading in ascetics and mystical theology, and in the spiritual writings of the masters.

houses to live in, or the way to invest money, unless these involve a definite moral principle of particular application in the case—as, for example, if the moral aspect of gambling is in question. A director who is consulted for frivolous reasons will at once chide the person who comes to him: and he will not hesitate to hand over to the right expert one who is in obviously serious psychological difficulty.

No soul should come to depend upon his director entirely; the aim of direction is for him to stand on his own feet—to be able to go to God for his direction, in such a way that his judgment, trained by past direction, will be guided by the Holy Spirit. After a period, let us say of years, the soul and his director should be able to meet less and less, except perhaps for spiritual consolation and if there should come a time of particular trial. The length of time for which any soul would need direction varies according to age, circumstances, education, temperament, experience. Some, for example, especially priests, will feel that though they are honestly and humbly able to say that they do not need regular spiritual direction at frequent intervals, they do yet need at certain times, say before Lent, or on the anniversary of their ordination to the priesthood, to go to their director for a general stocktaking.

The laity may need longer direction, and Religious will in any case be under continual direction. For priests in the ordinary ministry probably the safest suggestion to make would be that they should go regularly to their director for the first five or six years of their ministry and then less frequently. Every good director will be able to tell when a soul

in his charge should be gently discouraged from coming to him more than occasionally.

It will be seen that spiritual direction is not to be undertaken lightly or unadvisedly. None who is not himself experienced in spiritual ways and has not long been a confessor should, unless he has special gifts, engage himself in it.⁴

NOTE. The following may be a guide to the kind of plan on which spiritual and moral direction may be based:—

1. General character; temperament; psychological aspects.
2. Implications of employment of office; e.g., for a priest, advice on reading and rule of life especially applicable to the priestly vocation; for a bank manager, advice on reading and the christian view of money and kindred subjects, and the christian aspect of business.
3. Any particular vocation; e.g., for a priest, missionary work, preaching, organizing, writing, and how these may be used to the glory of God and the advancement of the soul.
4. Moral problems; the besetting sin and problems attached to the situation in life.
5. The Rule of Life as to prayer, meditation, the Holy Communion, Confession, and the reading and study of Holy Scripture.

⁴ For Bibliography, *vide* p. 98.

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