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THE PRACTICE
OF CONFESSION

Why, What, and How

BY SIBYL HARTON

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
IN SEARCH OF QUIET

THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

WHY : WHAT : HOW

BY
SIBYL HARTON



LONDON
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co. LIMITED
NEW YORK: MOREHOUSE-GORHAM CO

FIVE PAGES
OF CONFESSIO
AND WHY

First published in 1937
Eighth impression, 1956

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
A. R. MOWBRAY & CO. LIMITED IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
6229

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WHY WE CONFESS

I SEEM to have been just as good without Confession as I was with it, I think I am as near to God as I used to be, so I do not see any necessity for using the Sacrament of Penance again.' This statement, often advanced by those who have given up making Confession, merits investigation because it is sometimes true that the Christian who has abandoned the use of this Sacrament does not feel himself to be lacking any essential means of grace. There are several plain reasons why the soul which is in earnest about its religion, about its life with God, cannot afford to jettison or ignore the practice of sacramental Confession.

The primary reason of our religion is the glory of God. The soul does not come to God only to take, to receive from Him, but to give, to give glory to its Creator, its Father, and its Saviour. 'God made me,' and what is the immediate response of the Christian? 'I must worship Him.' 'God is my Father,' and all that that means constrains the soul to love Him. 'God is my Saviour,' and I bless Him. I must give Him glory, and every

time I approach Him in the Sacraments and in the services of the Church, in my prayers and in my pursuit of virtue, I must come in the spirit of giving. 'All for Thee, nothing for me,' although it is as true to say, 'All for me, nothing for Thee.' Think of the majesty of God, that He is what He is, Life, Love, Goodness, Beauty; and the soul is so overwhelmed that words are insufficient to express its attitude, and it can only sum up its adoration and love in the ascription perpetually on the lips of the Church: 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.' God Himself is His Glory.

But how do we glorify God in our use of Confession?

God is glorified when His perfection is diffused throughout all creation, when His creatures fulfil the purpose of their creation by serving Him in love and happiness. He is glorified in the beauty of nature, of earth and of beast and of bird, in the beauty of the angels and in the beauty of man when he receives and uses the power to become a son of God. He is disgrorified (if for the moment a word may be coined) when man falls from beauty, that is, from goodness, from the perfection which should be his. Those separate falls from his true state of fulfilling God's will, from his condition of happiness, are called sins; and sins obscure the image of God in the soul and limit His perfection, preventing it from diffusing itself through the soul, even as dust settled on

a mirror prevents a true reflection, as dust on a window prevents the transmission of light. But by Confession, with its accompanying contrition followed by Absolution, the effects of sin are removed from the soul and the image of God has again the chance to shine forth through the Christian character; again the channels are free for the functioning of the grace of God which is the very life of Christ within the soul: and so God is glorified. Therefore, when we decide not to make use of Confession, we are rejecting a means of giving glory to God.

Again, God is glorified in showing His abundant mercy to sinners, glorified in His attitude of mercy. In the very act of coming to the tribunal of penance where we are given in the priest's words of Absolution the token, the assurance, of that mercy, we are bearing witness to that particular divine attribute. In Confession God the Son is magnified as His saving power is acknowledged: we not only believe in Jesus as Saviour, we manifest our belief, we prove it to the world, when we come to receive His Absolution.

From its beginning the Bible deals with the fact of sin, and through all its Old Testament story of the education of the Jews as the chosen people of God, sin is shown to be something terrible, to be followed by judgement, but always able to be wiped out by repentance, by atonement; and Confession, which is a normal instinct of the human heart, was recognized and taught by the

Mosaic Law as a necessary part of the process of atonement and reconciliation. The continual message of the Jewish prophets was one of repentance, of exhortation to turn away from sin to serve God in righteousness, and that greatest of all prophets, John the Baptist, in his direct preparation for Christ's advent, was speaking in language familiar and understandable to the Jews when he cried to them to repent; and in going to him for his baptism of repentance they confessed their sins. Their Confession was an indication of their sincere repentance. So the Church of the old covenant prepared the way and dug the ground for the foundations of the Church of Christ. And our Lord from the beginning of His public life claimed power to forgive sins; one of His first clashes with the religious authorities of His day occurred when He gave a man absolution from his sins. The apostolic Epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation are full of the forgiveness of sins, and there is complete unanimity between all the writers that forgiveness comes only through the Blood of Jesus shed for us upon the Cross. 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' That in Jesus Christ alone we have the forgiveness of our sins is their testimony, and that our reconciliation to God through His death was the purpose of the Incarnation is their consistent teaching. And what the Saviour did for us in His incarnate Body He clearly expected to be

continued in His mystical Body, the Church. On the first day of His Resurrection He appeared to the company of His Apostles, gathered together in fear, bewilderment, and unhappiness, and said the momentous words to them: 'As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them: whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.' Immediately after His victory over sin and death He comes to assure His Apostles that His power was henceforth transmitted to them for their use in the world; and in the Catholic Church that power has been passed on from the Apostles' successors to every priest who has been ordained. In laying hands upon the deacon the bishop says, 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest . . . whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.' The mind of the Church is very simple and clear concerning the work of a priest.

So when we come to Confession to ask for the remission of our sins, it is to receive the merits of the Cross that we come, to receive on our souls the touch of the Precious Blood, and it is thus an occasion for glorifying and glorying in that life-giving Blood of Christ our God. Bishop Frank Weston spoke of the unforgettable impression made upon him in his youth at a revivalist meeting by the repeated singing: 'I am washed in the Blood of the Crucified One.' Such an

impression should be ours at each Confession, when we experience that washing.

The Passion of Christ has ever been a most fruitful and beloved devotion of all lovers of God, for they know that in it is shown forth the completeness of God's love for them, in it is all their hope of salvation. Love of Christ crucified is central to all Christians; and the Sacrament of Penance brings us into a unique relation with Calvary, for we can never be closer to the power of the Cross than during our Absolution. The hatred of sin, the renunciation of sin, which Christ revealed to the world in His sufferings on the Cross passes, if we will, and in some measure, into our souls and there destroys sin and the ground of sin. On the Cross our Lord conquered sin: He re-effects that in the individual soul which comes to Him in penitence. What He once in time did universally, He applies individually at times of our own choosing.

And in acknowledging the divine power of Christ as our Saviour in our use of the Sacrament of Penance we are doing Him homage in a special way, glorifying the Son, which is well-pleasing to the Father Who has given to Him all judgement. The Sacrament is full of God: does it not help us to worship the Holy Trinity when we consider the parts played in it by the Persons thereof? The Father gives to the Son the power of judgement and accepts from Him His gift of all whom He has saved, whilst the priest, the

transmitter of God's judgement to the soul, himself receives his power through the Holy Spirit. It is as if all the sufferings, merits, blood, love, offered by Jesus for us on the Cross were presented to the Father and applied to our souls by the Holy Spirit in that one moment of Absolution which is a timeless extension of the Cross.

So, the Sacrament of Penance is part of the economy of God, within His plan for the redemption and sanctification of men, that, though I by sin may quench the life of Christ given to me in my Baptism, God has provided for its restoration. This Sacrament is no invention of man, not even a wise spiritual practice discovered by man's inductive powers, but it is the plan of God revealed by the Incarnate Son to His disciples and by the Holy Spirit guiding their successors into all truth. It is here, this Sacrament of Penance, for our use, and it is an awful responsibility to refuse it: is it not a meeting-place, a tryst between God and the soul, a time of exchange of love and glory? If you do not wish to take this opportunity of meeting your Saviour, perhaps it is because you are still far from the commandment to love Him wholly. For Confession is an assured moment of meeting between God and the soul, a single point in time of communion when, if the penitent is in good faith, Christ infuses His divine life; whether there be sensible feeling or not, realization of blessing or not, there is God's minister to give the assurance of the work of God in the

soul. There is a blessed certainty in the words: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins.' Our Lord would not have left His power to His Church to be kept unused like some one's hoard of money hidden in a stocking beneath the mattress; He left it for use, a mighty treasury of invested power to be drawn upon by His needy children. Yet He does not order, 'You must, as My child, come to Confession,' for that is never His way: He leaves that for our own choosing.

But that choice of ours should perhaps be prompted by a greater measure of compulsion than we commonly allow to be right. Membership of any corporate body for any purpose whatsoever implies an agreement with the ideals, aims, and objects of that body and the keeping of certain rules, which may be reduced to a minimum but which are surely necessary to the society's life. This is true of organizations so varied and on such different levels of value as a tennis-club, a library, a Freemason's lodge, a medical society; and if a member's conduct becomes manifestly and flagrantly contrary to the stated purpose or ideal of his society, he is asked either to reform or to leave it. A man's membership in any society carries with it the responsibility of shaping his life in certain directions in accord-

ance with its laws; as soon as we combine we cease to be able to act solely as individuals, for we become governed by certain external rules to which we must conform or pay the penalties for disobedience. It is of course possible sometimes to become a sleeping member of a society so long as, usually, the annual subscription is paid; but this shows sloth or mental inertia, and is a waste of money.

Now, at our Baptism we became members of the greatest of all societies, the Catholic Church of God, which having its Head in heaven has its Body on earth, so that although existing to dispense to us the means of supernatural life, it is organized along lines which are familiar to us in natural life; that is to say, as an organization, albeit of divine origin, it has officers, constitution, laws, and customs to which, by the very fact of membership, we are obliged to conform. As members of this society we do not live our religious lives as individuals, but as sharers of the corporate life; and if a member disobeys the laws, disregards the customs, or ignores the purpose of this society, he is failing in his responsibility to it, he is guilty not simply of private misdemeanours which concern himself and God, but of damages to a corporate body. Therefore to that corporate body he owes apology and amendment.

In these days of many loyalties we are sadly deficient in a strong corporate sense (at least in

England where we have not to live in a totalitarian state); and in these days of complicated life and diffused Christianity we have not now the vivid consciousness of the corporate character of the Church which was clearly the possession of the Christians of the first centuries. Then it was fully realized that sin was not a private matter between the soul and God, but that it affected the life of the whole body of Christians, for Confession in the early Church was public, made before the congregation. Some religious revivalists have felt strongly the corporate responsibility concerning sin and have instituted some form of public Confession, as Wesley did in his class meetings, and as the followers of Dr. Buchman practise to-day. But as the Catholic Church grew such practice of public Confession was found to be not only unpractical but inexpedient, for it was liable to abuse and scandal and did not minister to the growth of spirituality; so in place of it she, by the guiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit, gave to her members the practice of Confession not to the whole congregation but to its representative, its priest. And this aspect of the priest as the representative of the whole society of Christians must not be overlooked or lost beside the concept of him as minister of Christ. In our confession to him we make our apology to our heavenly society for our lowering of its standard and for our breaking of its rules, and as its representative he gives us its penalty, the penance, and assures us

that we are worthy to try again to make our lives more conformable to its standards.

In the order for the Visitation of the Sick in the Book of Common Prayer the priest is told to examine the sick person as to his sins and to *move* him to make Confession of them if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. Perhaps a reply to the plea for Confession will be: 'That is suitable and necessary for a person with grave sin upon his conscience, but I am not conscious of anything more than the ordinary and trifling defects common to all of us: there is no need for me to go to Confession.' Is there really no need, is there really no grave sin, or is that assumption indicative of blindness, of a hard conscience, or of spiritual insensitiveness? For sin, surely, is in one sense relative, as well as being absolute. Some people on account of their upbringing, their circumstances, or their temperaments never know the temptations to or falls into grave moral sins, such as dishonesty, impurity, fierce anger, which are followed by serious effects; but the very factors which prevent these glaring, weighty sins demand from such people a high standard of Christian life and conduct and of intimate relationship with God. It may well be that small defects, little sins, and faults of omission in the lives of the sheltered are as weighty, as hindering, and as dangerous in God's sight as are grave sins of commission in the lives of those who live in troubled and tempest-

tuous ways: lack of charity, lack of humility may keep one from God as much as theft and drunkenness may keep another, and may need just as deep a contrition for cleansing.

For what is sin but that which hinders the soul from seeing God and from being made one with Christ in love? And so-called little sins, pettinesses, small selfishnesses, dullness, heaviness, and a general feeling of out-of-jointness can do this—the states which are so difficult to cast aside. Every Christian knows those times of sadness when the soul is so weighed down that it has no interest in life, when there is no joy anywhere although neither is there any specific or removable grievance or pain; and the saints know how greatly destructive of the love of and union with God is this condition. The use of Confession is the surest remedy for this unhappy state which is known to us all at some time or other. The opportunity to state the plain fact of our condition, to relate plainly and simply just how we are behaving and how hopeless life seems to be, is exactly what we need on the natural plane and itself provides a partial remedy and brings a certain release, apart from the help of the counsel from the priest; but the healing is completed on the supernatural level by the grace of Absolution which not only removes the guilt but gives positive strength and renewal.

No one can surely ever forget the wonder of the first Confession—or its surprise. We made

it expecting to receive peace and comfort, or perhaps we came as a duty, knowing as if by an instinct that 'it had to be done,' and so without any expectations. But as Absolution was given the unexpected happened and the indescribable occurred; for far more than a removal of distress and discomfort is the positive glory of joy and strength and life that is given. It is a great experience of the soul, as real and as true as any particular experience of joy in friendship or in nature or in art, and far, far deeper, for it is the direct touch of God upon the soul in supernatural ways. That abounding certainty that all is now well, and better than ever before, can be known at every succeeding Absolution, although it will not, as the soul is led onwards in spiritual ways, always be felt; for the two great and fundamental states that contributed to the depth of that first experience of Confession are present each time we come to the Sacrament, namely, contrition and thanksgiving.

The New Testament begins with S. John the Baptist's call to repentance, and upon that foundation the kingdom of heaven was laid, which foundation is the true one for every soul which desires that kingdom to be within it. Repentance is a turning-away from sin, a loathing of it and a deep sorrow for it, and to that sorrow we are all called. 'For these and all my sins I am very sorry' is an absolutely necessary declaration for each one of us to make, and until such

is made our Lord can do no mighty work within us. And the resultant glory of the soul who is very sorry, who repents, is shown to us by our Lord Himself when He said that the penitent by his penitence gives joy to the angels in heaven. Imagine the tremendous wonder of being able to occasion joy to angels; and then realize that the soul does this each time it comes contrite to the feet of God in the Sacrament of Penance.

It is not our business to dwell on the beauty of our souls when they are cleansed by contrition, for we are primarily concerned with the glory of God and the doing of His blessed will, to the advancement of His kingdom; but when once we have had a sight of that beauty we have a powerful drawing to Confession. For contrition is a beautifier: penitence is the great cleanser, the restorer, and penitence must become a habit of the soul. A single outburst of penitence for some sin, for some suddenly revealed and recognized failure in conduct and character, will restore the soul to that measure of union with the life of Christ which by its sin it had lost; but unless the sorrow is maintained the roots of the sin will not be destroyed, and its ugly head may appear again and again with startling frequency.

Continual penitence, the habit of penitence, does not mean that contrition is the dominant state of soul to the exclusion of all else, far from it; it means that underlying our praise and worship and love is an abiding attitude of deep

regret for ever offending our Lord God, and a great desire to prove that regret by becoming His more worthy children; and from such an habitual attitude and from it alone springs an ever-deepening, selfless love. When one looks at a delicate piece of illuminated manuscript one may be conscious only of the glory of a particular spot of blue colour and may take pleasure in it without having any idea that its peculiar richness is due to the blue paint being laid over green; the blue alone is seen, but the artist knows that the green is there causing its brilliance. Similarly, the world may see only the love and joy and mercifulness of a good Christian without seeing the underlying attitude of penitence which is the very ground of his soul, known only to God and the angels. And Confession, regular and careful Confession, is not only a guarantee of contrition but also one of the great means for ensuring the growth of this absolutely vital habit of penitence, of this constant state of soul as against merely sporadic acts, and therefore it is one of the foremost means of sanctity. If once we have chosen to follow Christ with devotion, and if once we have been privileged to receive the full teaching of the Catholic Faith, can we refuse to use any aids to holiness appointed by Him Who calls, 'Be ye perfect'?

It may be objected by some one that even after or at a Confession he has no feeling of sorrow, no sensibility of penitence. But contrition is not a

matter of tears and sighs but of a 'humble, sweet, and loving conversion to God, true but moderate and unanxious.' Not any feelings but the turning to God away from sin is the essence of contrition, destroying the attachment to sin, grave or small; and as that turning to God becomes a sure and lasting attachment to Him, so a sorrow for having offended Him and obscured His glory grows in the soul, becoming ever deeper and more settled. And as all our penitence must be in union with our Lord's sorrow for the sin of the world His interior grief will supply the defects in ours, and only in His perfect penitence can ours come to completion.

It must be stressed that Confession is not for us an end but a means, a means to our personal holiness; when it is regarded as a matter of feelings and, as it sometimes is by the pious, as an end interesting to the ego because it provides an occasion for a soul to talk about itself, it is of no use for conveying grace. And not only is it a means to our holiness, it is an expression of devotion. We love our Lord so much, we are so very sorry that we have grieved Him and caused offence to His Body the Church, that we must say so not only in the depths of our souls but publicly, so that we may be quite sure that we are not deceiving ourselves, either by lack or by superabundance of feelings, sure that we do not merely think we love Him and think that we are sorry.

Then penitence, this very foundation of

Christian life which receives such assistance in the habit of Confession, is always followed by thanksgiving. This is a virtue which is often neglected, and any state which prompts it must be encouraged. To give thanks and to feel truly grateful is, on the natural level, a most expansive and gracious work, enlarging and refining the character. You have only to think of the difference between a reserved, grumbling, and suspicious nature and a warm-hearted, responsive one, and of the reactions of each to life in general, to realize how important thankfulness is in character: how much more is this so on the spiritual level! The penitent on receiving his gifts of forgiveness and restoration to the fullness of life in Christ and His family must needs think somewhat on the mercy of God, the pity of the Father, the Sacrifice of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, all for him, for his small self; and his immediate response must be thanksgiving, humble, wondering, and adoring gratitude. There are times in life when the penitent can feel nothing of this, but in his will he offers it, for he knows it. Each confession is one more definite moment in the soul's life which ensures that its whole energy shall be directed to thanking and blessing Jesus as its Saviour: and that act and attitude of thanksgiving is what Father de Osuna calls a spacious place, wherein the soul receives the liberty of the sons of God, and a very great grace and spiritual perception.

Spiritual perception : that is exactly what the practice of Confession brings, and knowing this the devil will do what he can to prevent the Christian from making use of such a firm and effective means of grace. The powers of evil are always at work and the general disinclination of a will to use the Sacrament of Penance, even when there exists no personal disbelief in its authority or efficacy, may come from the clogging, dirty influence of the devil who knows that his power diminishes at every renewed application of God's Blood to a soul, knows that there will be less opportunity for him to insert his temptations to pride and self-love as the soul makes use of the sacramental life of Christ. 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil' ; and this is what Confession does, giving us a victory over our sins and our enfeebled selves, renewing our strength in the pursuit of goodness, increasing our interior light, bestowing upon us peace and happiness, and promising our perseverance.

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

PART II
WHAT WE CONFESS

WHAT WE CONFESS

‘**B**UT it is so difficult to know what to say in confession, for I can only see one or two things. It can do me no good to force myself to think and think in what way I have sinned, for surely that encourages unhealthy introspection; besides, the results are so trivial, and I hate being niggly.’ Well, there is some truth in that objection, but it is an objection which can be met very simply.

That which must concern us most in the practice of Confession is our contrition; and if we have any measure of love for God and any desire for His glory we shall be as grieved for one sin as for five, for that one is enough to check the divine life within us, to blur the image of God within, to ‘crucify the Son of God afresh.’

I saw the Son of God go by
Crowned with the Crown of Thorn.
‘Was it not finished, Lord?’ I said,
‘And all the anguish borne?’

He turned on me His awful eyes:
‘Hast thou not understood?’

Lo, every soul is Calvary
And every sin a Rood.¹

¹ *The Question*, by Rachel A. Taylor.

If we have the horror and hatred of sin that accompanies any degree of spiritual insight, any degree of life in Christ, we shall find adequate matter for definite sorrow in one sin that rises up to hide the face of God. We may perhaps experience further shame that the shortness of our spiritual sight prevents us from seeing all the selfishness that we know must surely be in us; but the brevity of our list of sins will never lessen our contrition, and therefore should never hold us back from Confession. Never must Confession 'degenerate into a sort of flea-hunt,' to use the words of the great Baron von Hügel. Provided that there is sincerity of purpose and effort and that the dispositions of faith, contrition, and confidence are present, a short Confession may give as much glory to God, satisfaction to the Church, and grace to the penitent as a long one.

We must not lose the essential in the accidental. Each fault is like an iceberg of which only one quarter shows whilst threequarters is under the sea; we must be concerned most with that part under the sea, that cause which underlies our fault, for then we may get rid of it. To change metaphors, we must apply the axe to the root and not to the stem alone. How can the confessor give us helpful counsel if he is presented only with a list of unrelated, small, perhaps trifling defects instead of being shown the root selfishness which is their cause? It is of no use to say, 'I have neglected prayer and worship.'

I must say, 'I have neglected prayer because I have been so much engrossed in my daily work, or my hobbies, or my friends, that I have not had sufficient energy, or time, to think seriously of the things of God.' And so on. Then, perhaps, the priest, able to see the root, can by his counsel help us to apply the axe; and indeed the very shock of having to say plainly and without gloss that we prefer temporalities to eternities may itself awaken us to better things.

PRAYERS BEFORE SELF-EXAMINATION

O MY most gracious Lord, grant me the perfect knowledge of my sinful life and to come to perfect contrition and hate of my sins.

DEAR Saviour and loving Lord Jesus, open the inner eye of my soul to see clearly my naughtiness and the great unkindness I have showed unto Thee.

O LORD God, pour the grace of Thy Holy Spirit into my heart that I may see clearly my sins, wash away their stains by my sorrow and mourning, and through Thy mercy obtain the pardon which I desire.

O LORD God, Who lightenest every man that cometh into the world, let the light of Thy grace shine into my heart, that I may fully know my shortcomings and sins, and may confess them with that true sorrow and contrition of heart which befits me before Thee and Thy priest. Amen.

A FORM OF SELF-EXAMINATION

I. SINS AGAINST GOD

God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world. Do I make every effort to fulfil this His purpose

(a) that I should know Him

by (1) my right use of creation; by not using people, nature, art, for my own satisfaction alone?

by (2) my right use of time, so that a due proportion of it is reserved for God Himself?

by (3) seeking instruction about the Being and Nature of God through sermons, in the services of the Church and through books? Do I flirt lightly with odd religions now so fashionable?

by (4) using the Sacraments? Am I regular and as frequent and devout as I ought to be in coming to Holy Communion and in making Confession?

(b) that I should love Him

by (1) being careful, methodical, and diligent in my prayers whether they seem easy or difficult, and by giving as much of my time to prayer as duty and the Holy Spirit direct?

by (2) training myself, as a Catholic, to hear the Holy Spirit, Whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees nor knows Him, and to live under His guidance?

by (3) using religion only for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and not as a self-satisfaction, self-interest, or sop to conscience?

by (4) putting the interests of God before those of men, and keeping His commandments even in loneliness, isolation, and in the face of ridicule?

(c) that I should serve Him

by (1) doing all my actions with the intention of His glory and not to my own satisfaction and gratification?

by (2) serving my neighbour, since 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me,' and desiring his conversion?

by (3) thanksgiving for the glory of God Himself, and for my life and all that fills it?

by (4) humility of soul; or am I proud and vainglorious, claiming my achievements and powers as my own instead of realizing my dependence upon God for His gifts?

II. SINS AGAINST MYSELF

God gave me, in common with all men, certain powers—the senses, memory, imagination, intellect, affections, will. All these are to be used in the creation of my personality and character, which it is my duty to make as perfect as God permits. Do I use and develop these powers

honourably,
restrainedly,

in just proportion, so that I preserve a righteous balance?

Am I self-indulgent or slothful in my use of them? or

Am I aiming at self-discipline in order to be free to be good?

What efforts do I make to conquer my faults?
to grow in grace?

Am I steadfast and persevering in penitence?
and in seeking after that perfection which is shown in the will of God for me?

If I am erratic and unstable, why is it?

What is the chief interest of my life?

Do I give away overmuch to the demands of others, being too pliable?

Man is a supernatural creature. Do I live mostly on the natural levels, or does grace, the life of Christ, infuse my life? Am I anxious, distrustful, sullen, bitter, fussy, through my impatience, through my little faith?

Do I keep away from people, places, books, and

sights which to me are temptations and occasions of sin?

Do I speak simply and purely, or do I lightly use holy words and names, thoughtlessly using the language of my 'set'?

Do I think too much (or not enough) of my appearance and my adornments?

Do I wish to attract to myself the notice and attention of others; to be thought cleverer than I am?

III. SINS AGAINST MY NEIGHBOUR

Do I do all I can to alleviate suffering of body, mind, and spirit in those amongst whom I live?

Am I touched by and sorry for all the sorrow in the world which I am powerless to help?

What are my works of mercy, of intercession?

Am I needlessly the cause, through business, investments, as an employer, or owner, of the poverty, whether material, mental, or spiritual, of my neighbour? Do I pay my debts?

Do I thoughtlessly accept the *status quo* in matters economical, political, ecclesiastical, because I prefer security and comfort to the uncertainties of those right and just changes which would improve the lot of others?

Do I take up my friends' time by my useless, idle, or egotistic conversation, by complainings? Or do I serve them in charity by giving myself to them in all the fullness of my personality, holding nothing back for myself?

- Am I generous in my estimation of other people, hoping for and prepared for their best? Will I spend and be spent in the giving of myself to those with whom I am in contact, or do I work for them for what I get back, in honour, applause, or self-satisfaction?
- Do I, either carelessly, maliciously, or from a sense of superiority, make uncharitable remarks about my neighbours, that is, about *any one*? Do I spread scandal or speak detraction?
- Do I rejoice, or grieve, at the success of (i) my friends, (ii) my enemies?
- Am I one who helps to preserve the barriers set up by race, money, education, birth, or do I do what I can to realize and make effective the truth of the equality of all souls before God?
- Do I ever deliberately or impulsively seek to humiliate, hurt, ignore, or despise any one, or influence others to do the same?
- Am I courteous, or aggressive?
- Am I patient with my family, friends, strangers? patient in both trifling delays and big events? in private and in public life?
- What is my reaction to people who are dissimilar from me? Do I feel *and* show dislike to those who are uncongenial to me, who dislike me? Am I by charity trying to spiritualize the reactions of my natural man, the 'old Adam'?
- Do I seek to impose my will, my opinions, my inclinations on other people, or am I prepared to

- consider their ideas and desires equally with my own?
- Do I enjoy myself in my friends, or do I enjoy them, their goodness and their gifts?
- Do I accept God's will, as shown in the circumstances of my life, not only with resignation but with cheerfulness?
- Am I a burden to other people when I am in bodily or mental difficulties?

A first Confession is usually simpler to prepare and easier to make if it is divided up into obvious periods of time, which must vary with the age and circumstances of the penitent, such as school-days, college, pre-marriage, parenthood, etc.; but this arrangement is simply a matter for the individual's choice.

Names of persons are never mentioned in any Confession. If it is necessary to indicate some one he must be referred to simply as a 'person,' 'friend,' 'relative,' 'employee,' 'employer,' etc. If the gravity of a sin against some one is increased by that person's particular status or relationship to the penitent, that relationship may be mentioned if no sin is thereby imputed to the other person. The penitent must only confess his own sins, never those, even by implication, of any one else.

PRAYERS AFTER SELF-EXAMINATION

O LOVING Jesus, be merciful to me to forgive me through the merits of Thy human nature,

through the merits of Thy most blessed Mother and of all Thine elect. Wash me with Thy Precious Blood; cleanse me perfectly; heal me and make me holy.

O HEAVENLY Father! for my own salvation and for the salvation of all men, for the perfect cleansing away of our sins and for the expiation of them, I offer to Thee the most holy Incarnation, Life, and Passion of Thy well-beloved Son. O most merciful Father, through the same only-begotten Son, give to the living pardon and grace, and to the faithful departed grant everlasting rest and light. Amen.

ANOTHER FORM OF SELF-EXAMINATION

Self-examination is never easy, although temperament may make it a more facile business for some souls than for others. There is always on one side the Scylla of overmuch concern with small trifling faults (which are grave not in themselves but only on account of their underlying causes) and on the other the Charybdis of neglect of the little sins which gradually get a hold on the Christian as bad habits. Perhaps the wisest system of self-examination is not a series of questions concerning thought and conduct but the presentation of some ideal of perfection against which I can measure myself, first as a whole and then in parts; and the foremost ideal is that of

our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If I do not know Him well enough to see by an inward glance the beauty and goodness of His own supreme character and then by comparison to see my failure, I can take His own description of the Christian and meditate upon it, and it will convict me.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' those who are perfectly humble. Humility is the foundation of the Christian character, for by it the soul turns away from self and self-sufficiency to live in complete dependence upon God, by it the claimful, assertive, greedy ego is gradually reduced until the soul can say with the saints: 'Not I, but Christ.' The humble man does not esteem or praise himself and has no self-complacency, and he is worried by hearing himself admired and praised, for he knows his own true worth, and he is honest. He may have powers and capacities above others, but he knows them to be gifts of God and does not claim them for himself. He does not talk about himself, or his family, to his own advantage, he has no thoughts or airs of superiority, nor does he despise those who are inferior to him either spiritually, intellectually, or socially. He cannot condescend, nor does he desire to have any ascendancy over any except his own Adam. The humble man receives scorn, correction, neglect, or humiliation without bitterness or thoughts of revenge, rather with thankfulness that he is considered worthy to share

the lot of his Jesus. He has learnt how to forgive divinely. He forgets himself for love of God, for he has begun to live in heaven here.

'Blessed are they that mourn.' If we are humble it follows that we shall know something of our true state and so, far from being self-satisfied, we shall mourn for our deficiencies, and there will grow in our souls a state of permanent contrition which will keep us in deep peace; and this will not be for ourselves alone. Sorrow must be an integral part of the Christian's character, if only because our Lord was the Man of Sorrows. He Himself had no deficiencies, but He saw the crushing weight of pain borne by the crowds around Him, and He mourned for them. A Christian is a man of compassion, unable to ignore and escape from the sorrows of his neighbours, from the tragedies of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, inadequate education, unequal opportunities; from the burdens of illness and death; from the effects of cruelty, injustice, and thoughtlessness. These enter as iron into his soul, and the more thoroughly he is Christian the more deeply a man feels and shares these sorrows of the world; and his mourning leads to activity. In prayer and by acts and deeds of reparation, the mourner expresses to God his sorrow for sin, for evil, and unhappiness, for the insult to the Majesty of God; and he does what he can amongst his neighbours to remedy these things. Does reparation play a part in my life

and does compassion compel me to courtesy and to service?

'Blessed are the meek.' At a certain period of our development the concept 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' may not appeal to us, but perhaps that is because we do not realize that behind gentleness lies discipline and self-control, achieved through the deliberate mortification of our natural desires as opposed to our supernatural needs. The meek man is the gentleman. That is not to say that stern, even fierce, action is not in his composition (for see our Lord cleansing the Temple), but it is never impetuous, impulsive action springing simply from an undisciplined though zealous nature, but, rather, refined supernatural energy, which is only possible to the God-directed soul. The Christian who is recollected, who knows always the finger of God upon his soul, is meek even in his righteous anger, for he is not possessed by it. He will not lose himself in passion, for he has achieved by his patience, his humility, and meekness an inward harmony; he is unified in all his parts. Because of his freedom from irritability, from irrationality, from childishness, the gentle Christian has always a calming influence, a clarifying vision, and a true judgement. The meek man is submissive to the will of God as it is declared in the circumstances of life, in the happenings of each moment, and in the commandments of the Church. All sorts of things try us: the weather, our infirmities, misunder-

standings, our friends' moods, our enemies' insinuations, our relations and their lack of real kinship. Christ suffered all these, and it is certain that He never once complained or showed distaste and boredom. If the Christian does not seek his own will, he enters peacefully into the true possession of all that God gives to him in nature and supernature.

'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.' 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God' is written all over the life of Christ, and it cannot be doubted that this was His dominating desire. As a Christian I am bound to be Christ-like, to have the highest ideals, to aim at perfection, and this with all the energy that nature aided by grace can command. I must be prepared to suffer privation in worldly things in order to obtain plenty in the kingdom of God; and desire for God and love of Him, and therefore of my neighbour, must be the decisive and controlling element in my life. The true Christian is moved by supernatural zeal.

'Blessed are the merciful.' Our Lord must have been so tried by the people who filled His daily life, by their stupidity, their dullness, their cruelty, their refusal to respond to what was so obvious to Him, His Father's love; yet never did He withdraw Himself from them (except to pray), never did He refuse them help and sympathy. The Gospel pictures are of three years of ceaseless giving-out, of continual contact with men, of

utter self-sacrificing service, yet all the time 'He knew what was in man.' Here is mercy. It is so easy to be critical of people, of their standards, their productions, their attainments, of their pleasures, and of their pursuits; so easy to judge our neighbours for their faults and their mistakes. But a heart compassionate, a heart truly touched by charity and pity, is generous, generous to excess; so our Lord could forgive His murderers, excusing them for their deed because He understood them so completely. Because of His mercy God became the Servant of man, and so underlying mercy is charity. To test ourselves against a picture of charity we have only to meditate on S. Paul's hymn in 1 Corinthians xiii; that in itself is an adequate form of self-examination which no honest soul can use without self-reproach.

'Blessed are the pure in heart.' Christ speaks of the single eye; and the man of pure heart is one with a single eye, an eye fixed only upon God, seeing all things in God, or at least God in all things. That does not mean that he is a cloistered, contemplative monk, he may well be a busy and capable man of affairs. But being in the world, he is not of it, and while using the things of the world he seeks in them not primarily his own enjoyment but a ladder towards God and a means of glorifying Him. The Christian through a stern and perhaps long practice of ordered, humble mortification is truly detached from all

worldliness in order to be able to see God. Purity of heart depends upon our right use of creatures and of time, upon detachment. Purity is consuming; it is the Beauty which a multitude of painters of all ages have tried to see and show in their representations of the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Child. Christ tells us that we must die in order to live, that we must deny ourselves in order to be His followers. Instead of the hours being passed, opportunities made and seized, and actions done, for the satisfaction of ourselves, all is done for the glory of God; and that is where death comes in, the death of the old Adam, so that a new man, a pure man, may result. When our thoughts, words, and deeds are informed with the love of God we are pure enough to hide our life in Christ. In every act the Christian must have the honest intention of glorifying God; and so to set the intention means persistent effort, continual use of all the means of grace given in prayer and Sacraments. The Christian's only hope of seeing God is to make full use of all the light vouchsafed to him, to take every possible opportunity of receiving grace in the covenanted channels. Then, however hard and dark the way, he has sufficient strength to pursue it.

'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Canon Mackay says,¹ 'The peacemaker is a man who possesses God's own power of government and shows it so plainly that men speak quite naturally of him as

¹ *Some Studies in the New Testament.*

the child of God. As a man purifies his motive and becomes single-minded he gains peace and power.' I am at peace with myself when I am perfectly temperate, in body, mind, and spirit, with my desire set towards God and my will obeying His will and one with it; and from this follows peace with my neighbour, and I am a peacemaker. The characteristic of 'peacemaking' is the result of virtue; well, why do I lack it?

'Blessed are those who are persecuted.' This is a reversal of the world's opinion: is my outlook a conventional one, or one tried against Christ's standards? Our Lord says that suffering is a blessed condition, and counted it all joy that He came to earth for the very purpose of suffering, of bearing His Cross: and 'His sufferings are so great as to exceed all the powers of our love to conceive of or be grateful for as we ought.' It is a marvellous mercy of God that by uniting in love our troubles, our pains, and sorrows, whether of body or of soul, with the sufferings of Christ we may transform them into occasions of merit and means of salvation for ourselves and for others. Is my heart so hard and ignorant that I do not understand the plea of one saint after another to be allowed to suffer? Christ's Passion and Crucifixion are in themselves a mirror for self-examination. To be persecuted means that I in my turn cannot persecute. Was Christ a 'pacifist'?

Attacked upon positive lines such as these self-

scrutiny is never merely introspection and self-absorption which is in danger of ending in a blind alley, for the soul is all the time relating itself to the character of Christ; and, following such examination, Confession will not leave the penitent merely detailing the number of times he has been angry with his brother or used bad language but will force him to realize how far he has yet to go before a glowing, glorious virtue becomes a habit, and in what particulars he must strive for the possession of such a virtue. The most important thing is first to set up over against ourselves a picture of godliness, and then to see how far we fall short of it. 'Know Me, know thyself' means that only as we are able to look at God can we see ourselves as we really are; and it follows that as the soul grows in goodness and in union with Jesus it will more plainly and more truly see itself. S. Paul gives a picture of Christian character in Colossians iii, and again in Philippians iv. 8 and in Galatians v. 22, all of which can be used as such pictures. Litanies, such as that of the Holy Name, can also be used as reminders to conscience.

For some it is a wise plan gradually to make their own personal self-examination questions. In reading the lives of saints and heroes, spiritual books, and above all the Gospels and the Epistles, we may be struck by some virtue, some aspect of godliness, some practice of self-surrender and of service to which we have hitherto been blind, and

in which we are sadly deficient. If we note that down it will prove valuable in our efforts towards perfection and give us a fresh aim, the failure to achieve which is matter for confession. This practice prevents examination from becoming stereotyped and it helps to ensure reality; and to keep a spiritual notebook is a witness to determination and to serious effort.

If daily self-examination is a habit the preparation for confession takes but little time, and then there is all the longer for prayers of penitence, The best hour for this for most ordinary people is at night-prayers (which do not necessarily come just before going to bed when we are most tired), After a brief thanksgiving for the mercies of the day we let our mental eye run over its happenings, pausing to accuse ourselves of sins and shortcomings as they show their ugly marks at different points. The Holy Spirit will not fail to give the light necessary to our souls to see our faults if we ask Him. Out of this regular daily self-examination, a matter of moments only, may come the practice, at times, of the particular *examen*; that is, I may notice that in one day I have several times spoken impatiently, and I realize that impatience is one of my major faults, so I resolve to conquer this sin, and learn the virtue of patience; and at my next self-examination I shall take particular notice if I have fallen as many times, or if I have made some progress in the virtue,

concentrating on the particular point of patience for some days, or longer.

Obviously, our self-examination must be expansive. It is never an end in itself, only a means towards our growth in union with God, in Christlikeness; and as we learn first this virtue and then that we cease to see ourselves different in those respects from the ideal which we have set before us, and we turn then to fresh points of comparison between ourselves and our idea of perfection. That very ideal, that picture, itself grows as our inward eyes are purified. Perhaps our Confessions get shorter, get simpler, perhaps they seem to us to be even more inadequate than they used to be to express that failure of charity which is ours; but they will be ever more and more full of grace, for the dispositions which we bring to them, our penitence, our faith in our Redeemer and in His saving merits, will be enlarged as we become purer. Dom Marmion says that 'the degree of grace given in the Sacrament of Penance is measured to the dispositions of the soul,' not, be it noticed, to the length of the Confession; and is not grace one of our primary concerns in confessing at all? 'Your faith has made you whole.' We shall not be troubled by scruples about the completeness of our Confessions if we keep this in mind.

PART III

HOW WE CONFESS

III

HOW WE CONFESS

IF possible, hear Mass on the day on which you are to make your confession, having as your intention a petition that God will give you true contrition. This custom is most salutary.

Having made sure at what hour the priest is in church to hear Confessions, the penitent must be careful to have sufficient time beforehand for his prayer of penitence and for offering his contrition to God. The value of the Sacrament of Penance will vary for us according to the dispositions which we bring to it, and it must be stressed that it is our duty to see that those dispositions are not shrunken and narrowed by our hastiness and neglect: reverent and careful prayer will deepen and enlarge them. Kneel somewhere near the confessional, though far enough away not to overhear conversation there. If there are several people waiting to confess, be sure not to go to the confessional out of your turn, nor, on the other hand, to keep the priest waiting. Little courtesies make the business of Confession easier for every one concerned.

1. Pray to the Holy Spirit that He will move within your soul, enlightening your conscience and giving you humility and strength to make a good Confession.

2. Think of God, Creator and Father, and of His glorious attributes, and then see what an offence all sin is against Him.

3. Put the Cross and Passion of Jesus before the eye of your soul, and see there the effect of sin and the cost of sin. 'Is it nothing to you?'

4. Make acts of faith in the power of our Saviour Jesus Christ to redeem all who are His by faith and adoption. Believe utterly in His grace conveyed in this Sacrament. Make an act of charity to all your family, friends, and the Church in general, so that your heart is enlarged for the reception of that grace, in which the Church will participate with you.

5. Tell our Blessed Lord simply of your shame and bitter sorrow that you have added to the world's weight of sin. Unite your penitence with the penitence which He offered to the Father for the sins of the world, offering yourself with Him for the Father's acceptance as son. 'Father, I have sinned against Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.'

Confession means a closeness with the Crucified, and the more inward the prayer, the more this will be realized. Sometimes aspirations repeated slowly, several times, will keep the soul steady in penitence, or sometimes set prayers will help most.

PRAYERS BEFORE CONFESSION

O JESUS most kind, because Thou dost wish it, and because it is right and just, that I should sorrow for my sins, do Thou, I beseech Thee, look upon me with thy merciful eyes and, visiting my soul, give me true and deep contrition, that for Thy sake, through Thee and in union with Thy prayers I may make a good confession, to Thy glory and for the honour of Thy Church.

O FATHER of Jesus, I confess that I have sinned against Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child. By my sins I have—

Offended Thy Majesty,
Dishonoured Thy divine presence,
Scorned Thy divine goodness,
Despised Thy charity,
Renewed the Passion of Thy Beloved Son,
Slighted Thy zeal for my salvation,
Been ungrateful for Thy kindness,
Been unfaithful to Thy patience,

and yet Thou lovest me. I repent with my whole heart because Thou lovest me, and I beg Thy pardon for Jesus' sake, and the grace of entire amendment through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

O MILD and merciful Saviour, crucified Lord, I adore Thy Sacred Heart, which during the three-and-thirty years of Thy life was wounded through and through, in unfathomable bitterness, and at

last on the Cross suffered the bitterest of all, Thy bitter death.

O MERCIFUL Lord Jesus Christ, I place in Thy Heart with sincere trust all the load of my sins : I plunge them in the deep abyss of Thy love and mercy.

I pray Thee, dear Lord, cleanse me through Thy divine love and Thy merits from all my sins, so that I may appear all clean before Thine eyes. Amen.

PARDON me, divine Jesus ; pardon me, patient Lord.

Meek Lamb of God, pardon all my sins, all that offends Thee in me.

Break my heart with sorrow at the multitude of my sins.

I cast them all, yes, myself with them,
Into that fire which consumed Thee.

Heal me,

purify me,

transform me into Thyself.

Let Thy merciful designs be fulfilled in me.

I renounce all things for love of Thee

So that Thy love alone may possess me.

Do with me what Thou wilt.

Make me suffer what Thou pleasest.

The roughest Cross will be sweet to me when
Thou dost fasten me to it.

Pierce my hands with Thy own nails,

Crown my head with Thy thorns,

Open my heart with Thy lance,
My Saviour,
My Love,
My most loving Jesus.

Aspirations of Penitence

1. Lord, for love of Thee I would grieve that I ever offended Thee.

2. Too late have I loved Thee, Infinite Goodness, too little have I loved Thee ! Would that I had ever loved Thee !

3. O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

4. O Saviour of the world, Who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed me, save me and help me, O Lord.

5. Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, mercy.

6. O my dear Lord, when shall it please Thee to give me the spirit of true contrition ?

7. O Father of Jesus, I offer Thee the contrition and the penitence which Thy Beloved Son had for my sins.

O MOST merciful, pitiful, and loving Lord Jesu, I most humbly beseech Thee, by Thy most holy conception and nativity, by Thy blessed conversation and holy life, Thy hard and sore labour, Thy bitter Passion and shameful death, grant me mercy and forgiveness of all my unkindness and sin ; mortify in me all that offendeth Thee ; and work in me such virtues as most may please Thy

blessed will in me, to Thy honour and my salvation ; and seeing that my sorrow is very little and imperfect I entreat Thee, by all Thy sufferings and interior sorrows, by the compassion of Thy Mother, and by the contrition and tears of blessed Peter, of Magdalen, and of all who have ever truly repented, that Thou wouldst mercifully and fully supply what is lacking in my contrition Amen.

Psalm li.

Veni, Creator.

When the priest is ready for you, think as you walk to the confessional only that you are coming as a child to kneel before God to tell Him how you have wronged Him ; ask the aid of your guardian angel and of those saints who are your special friends in heaven and you will not then feel so immensely alone. Do not consider the priest ; he is not sitting there as a man but as the ears and eyes of the Church, and personalities do not come into the confessional. As much as you are able now humble your soul as you kneel before your judge. Say—

‘I confess to God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, all the saints, and to you, father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault : (since my last confession so long ago) I have’ . . . here tell your sins.

‘For these and all my other sins which I cannot now remember, I am very sorry, firmly purpose amendment and beg forgiveness of God, and of you, father, penance, counsel, and absolution : and I pray Blessed Mary, all the saints, and you, father, to pray for me’

Listen carefully to the priest’s counsel, if he gives any, accepting it as from God Whose minister he is. If he says something to you that you do not understand, do not be afraid to ask for further explanation. If you wish to ask him to help you with some special sin or difficulty mentioned in your Confession he will gladly listen ; or if you wish to have his guidance in planning your rule of prayer and life, ask him, and he may give it to you then and there or arrange to see you in the church when he has finished hearing Confessions. Remember that the confessional is the place for speaking of sins and moral difficulties, not of doctrine, dogma, and extraneous spiritual matters, which should be discussed outside it. Accept very humbly the penance which is given to you, and then bow your soul before God to receive His Absolution, the essence of the Sacrament, to be received in great stillness.

When you have returned to your place—

1. Fill your soul with thanksgiving to God for His overflowing mercy that has restored you to your full measure of sonship and to unchecked communion with Jesus. ‘Abide in Me’
2. Praise Him and worship Him and give the

Holy Trinity all the love that you can. Bless Him, thank Him, and call upon the saints and angels to do likewise with you and for you. Offer the praises of all creation.

3. Say the penance given to you by the priest, offering it to God as a sign of your contrition and desire to amend. It is a punishment so entirely out of all proportion to your deserts, but you can enlarge it by saying it with an intention of accepting all the trials and pains of the forthcoming days as due punishments, as being no more than you deserve. How small our penance is beside the Passion of Christ, beside the Crucifix!

4. In the strength of the new power conveyed to you by the grace of Absolution make some resolution which will help you to conquer a besetting fault, to acquire a virtue, or to offer better worship and service to God. Perhaps here you can include an intercession arising out of your Confession.

5. Pray for the priest who has ministered to you and for his work. (Do not omit to leave a thank-offering for the Sacrament in the alms-box as you leave the church.)

Never look back over your Confession and wonder if it were complete, or be worried if you think you have omitted something. Any omission (other, of course, than a deliberate one, which would be very grave sin) is covered by the words of the formula, 'sins which I cannot now remember.'

You will find that all the life of your soul is invigorated, so that for the rest of the day and perhaps for much longer you are able to keep closer to God and to live more in charity with others; in fact, everything seems now to have a new radiance. Use this spacious and enlightened state of mind as a preparation for your next Communion, which you will receive as soon after Confession as you can. Do not let the new-born desires for God and goodness evaporate and die away in mere feeling, but make certain that they are settled into resolutions, framed in a steady rule about prayer, the Sacraments, charity, and service. If you are at the beginning of an earnest Christian life of devotion you can ask the priest's guidance about a rule; and he will help you to decide how often to make your Confessions. Frequency varies from once a year to once a week, and help and permission is needed in individual decisions.

All that has been said by you and to you in the confessional is said under the seal of absolute secrecy. Do not repeat to any one anything that the priest has said to you; that is not honourable to him. On his part not only could he never, by Canon Law of the Church, divulge one word of what you have spoken in your Confession, but he will not, as a man, know anything of that which he heard as a priest. That is a comforting truth.

PRAYERS AFTER CONFESSION

Psalm ciii.

The *Benedicite*.

I THANK Thee, I praise Thee, and I glorify Thee, O Jesus my Saviour, because Thou hast, with Thy Father and the Holy Ghost, poured out upon me the riches of Thy mercy and long-suffering, Thy goodness and charity. Truly Thou art a God of pity and mercy, long-suffering and of great goodness. Truly Thou art good to all men, and Thy mercies are over all Thy works. O let Thy works sing praise unto Thee; and let all Thy saints who have known Thy loving-kindnesses bless Thee and sing of Thy mercies for ever.

In union with the love of all Thy saints, and with all the possible love of all created things, I give Thee thanks, and will for ever, for that unspeakable super-abundance of divine love which caused Thee to work for our salvation and to show me Thy mercy and Thy pardon this day. O God, blessed be Thou for ever: O Jesus, I love Thee.

JESUS, God of my heart, grant me grace to amend all my sins, especially . . . , to advance in virtue, especially . . . , and to persevere in my holy Christian calling. May I live in Thee, die in Thee, and abide eternally in Thee. May I be wholly Thine, and Thou wholly mine, O Jesu, for ever, through Thy merits. Amen.

Before saying the enjoined penance

O LORD God, for Thy sake and according to Thy will, I offer Thee this act of penance, and I offer it to Thee in union with the sufferings of Jesus, begging that it may be accepted as a sign of my entire willingness to conform myself wholly to Thy will. Amen.

For the Confessor

O LORD, I beseech Thee, pour upon him who has ministered to me the blessings of the Holy Ghost for his work as a priest that, being strengthened by Thy sevenfold gifts of grace, he may make full proof of his ministry. Amen.

DIVINE Jesus, true Father of my soul,
I offer Thee my rebellious will,
The enemy of its own good.
Transform it into Thine own.

Let Thy will be done by me at all times,
at all places,
in all things.

With all my heart I sacrifice to-day my will to
Thine.

Keep Thy hand on me lest I stray,
Call me back when I fly from Thee,
Embrace me when I seek Thee.
Treat me, Lord, according to Thine own will,
Ever merciful, upright, and holy.

Judge me not according to my own will so feeble
and inconstant.

Thou seest me so liberal in promising, so faithless
in performing.

Let Thy love supply what is wanting in me.
Keep me in the hollow of Thy hand. Amen.

DEAREST JESUS, teach me to be generous, teach
me to serve Thee as Thou deservest: to give and
not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the
wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour
and not to seek for reward, save that of knowing
that I do Thy will. Amen.

TAKE, O LORD, and receive my entire liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and my whole
will. All that I am, all that I have, is Thine,
and I give it back to Thee to be disposed of
according to Thy good pleasure. Give me only
Thy love and Thy grace, with these I am rich
enough.

JESU, Jesu, Jesu, grant me grace to love Thee.

APPENDIX

SOME BOOKS TO READ ON THE SACRAMENT
OF PENANCE

- PASSMORE, T. H. *The Spirit of Confession*. Faith
Press.
Box, H. (Edited by). *The Theory and Practice of
Penance*. S.P.C.K.
STUART, C. J. S. *The Sacrament of Absolution*. Faith
Press.

PRAYERS OF PENITENCE ARE FOUND IN—

- Ascensiones in Corde*. Ch. I.
*Carthusian Spiritual Exercises of Dom Michael de
Coutances*.
HORST. *The Paradise for the Christian Soul*.
Prayers of Fra Thomas of Jesus.
The Exercises at the end of *Holy Wisdom*, by AUGUSTINE
BAKER.
Medieval Devotions to the Sacred Heart.

HELP FOR SELF-EXAMINATION IS FOUND IN—

- SAMPSON, FATHER GERARD, C.R. *Daily Catholic
Devotions*.
Before the Throne.
WILKINSON, BISHOP. *Break up your Fallow Ground*
HULME, ARCHDEACON. *The Hand Outstretched*.
Self-Examination for Interior Souls.

BULL, FATHER PAUL, C.R. *The Threefold Way.*

LONGRIDGE, FATHER, S.S.J.E. *The Spiritual Exercises
of St. Ignatius of Loyola.*

BLOSIUS. *A Brief Rule and Daily Exercise.
The Rule of St. Benedict.*

ST. PETER OF ALCANTARA. *A Golden Treatise of
Mental Prayer.* (Meditation I.)

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES. *The Devout Life.*