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❧ A GOOD ❧
CONSCIENCE
AND A BETTER
CONFESSION

C. P. HANKEY



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SIXPENCE

A GOOD CONSCIENCE
AND A BETTER
CONFESSION

by

C. P. HANKEY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
§ SELF-EXAMINATION	
WHY IT IS NECESSARY - - - - -	1
THE CONSCIENCE - - - - -	3
SIN - - - - -	8
§ EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE	
HOW IT IS MADE - - - - -	16

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A GOOD CONSCIENCE AND A BETTER CONFESSION

SELF-EXAMINATION

¶ WHY IT IS NECESSARY

THE use of the phrase "Examination of Conscience" suggests at once that we are aware that our sins are not immediately present to our minds. There would be no need to examine our consciences if they were, for we should know what we had done wrong without looking to see. And, of course, there is often no such necessity; certain sins may weigh so heavily upon us that they are hardly ever out of our minds.

There are those who say that we should not concern ourselves seriously with any sins but these; that the sacrament of penance, for instance, should be used only in cases where the conscience is more or less permanently disquieted; that sins which have not been so flagrant that they press without ceasing on our consciences are not worth worrying about. The practice of examining the conscience, they say, is not only unnecessary but may actually do us harm by inducing a condition of scrupulosity about details. Even if we admit the possibility of this last danger, we should still hold that it is a risk we should run, for the following reasons:—

(a) Examination of conscience is necessary just because some particular sins become such a burden on man's conscience that everything else he has done wrong is forgotten, just as some terribly stabbing pain may make us forget every other ache in our bodies. This is very likely to happen if some sin has been committed which is specially detested by the society in which we live. The sinner then becomes so painfully conscious of the antagonism of his fellows that he can think of nothing else. But such a state, in which self-examination appears to be unnecessary, arises usually when it is the pressure of public opinion which disturbs him, rather than the image of God's holiness and love and the smashed reflection of that image which he has become. He cannot be sure, unless he examines his conscience, that the pain of this particular sin is not making him forgetful of other grave sins or sinful habits of which he is guilty, but against which the voice of society is not raised so loudly.

(b) It is necessary because human beings, in their attempts to avoid pain, sometimes succeed in burying out of sight even very grave sins. By refusing to look at them and to acknowledge their badness, and by concentrating their attention on the present or on more creditable incidents in their lives, they contrive to keep those unpleasant objects out of their immediate consciousness. Unless it is our habit to conduct this examination from time to time, we may become a cemetery where lie buried all sorts of acts of deceit, selfishness, self-indulgence, etc.

(c) It is necessary because we obtain by this

means that knowledge of ourselves the lack of which makes progress impossible. Deep down in us there are ungodly and beast-like instincts and impulses. These break through and appear in our lives as evil thoughts, words and deeds. As our sins are, in this sense, symptoms, we can no more neglect to pay attention both to those we consider light and those we consider grave than a doctor does, when he has to diagnose our physical ills. A habit of thought or act to which we have attached little importance may be found on examination to have a direct bearing on the gravest difficulties of our lives.

(d) It is difficult to see how we are going to discover the many things we have not done which we ought to have done without the practice of self-examination.

¶ THE CONSCIENCE

There are many learned terms and definitions and there is a large quantity of disputatious writing on the subject of the conscience, but it is possible for us to discover certain things for ourselves, and these are a sufficient guide for ordinary purposes. The conscience appears to us first of all to be a sensation, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant. If, as the result of some action in the past, we experience a feeling of relief and peace, we call that a good conscience. If, on the other hand, we have a feeling of uneasiness and pain, we speak of a bad conscience or the prickings of conscience.

But we soon find that it is a mistake to suppose that conscience is only a sensation. The mind comes into this and there is the exercise of judgment. For when the sensation is pleasant we are saying "I was quite right to do that"; and when the sensation is unpleasant we are saying "I ought not to have done that."

Now why do our minds pass that judgment on our actions? Is it because, having sinned against charity, let us say, we are feeling "I wish I had not done that because it has made my conscience hurt me"? Not a bit. The sensation and the thought work together. We wish we had not done it because we have broken the law of charity and that is wrong, and the uncomfortable sensation arises because we know we are bad. We have, in fact, a standard of right and wrong, a conception of good and bad conduct in our heads, and this sensation of pleasure or pain arises because we have this standard. It is important to bear this in mind because it concerns a question which has very likely troubled us, and that is, whether our conscience is an infallible guide, whether it is always right or whether it sometimes gives us that prick when we have not done something wrong. We have all been told so often that we must obey our consciences at all costs on every occasion that it is natural for us to assume that they are always right. Surely, we say, we should not be told to do that unless their voice is as the voice of God speaking the truth to our hearts. But we shall have had enough experience of its ways by now to keep us from thinking this a meaningless paradox when we are told

"Certainly you must obey your conscience at all costs and on every occasion and yet it is not always right." For that sensation of comfort or discomfort is produced by the belief that we know what is right and what is wrong. And that is just what we do not always know.

Here then is a matter in which we must desire and pray for spiritual growth, namely the development of our sense of right and wrong. As long as we suppose that our consciences are infallible we shall make very little moral progress. We must always obey our consciences even though they may be wrong, but we are bound in conscience to take every possible means to ensure that they learn to discern correctly between good and evil. If we strongly desire that it may be so, our consciences will become more sensitive and discern more accurately between them.

This growth is more likely to occur if we keep in mind the forces which prevent the magnetic needle of conscience from pointing in the right direction. First, there is prejudice. Some prejudices are so deeply rooted in us that they affect the operation of our judgment very seriously indeed. It is always so much easier to perceive other people's prejudices than our own. Secondly, there is the tremendous force of the instinct for our own self-interest. We may easily teach our consciences to say "Nothing which affects adversely my well-being can be right." Thirdly, we may be blinded by convention, those alarmingly powerful influences. Finally, we should remember the possibility of ignorance. We may simply not know

that something is wrong. We may, for instance, have been brought up among people who do not think it wrong to tell a lie or pay inadequate wages. Or we may, through ignorance, make a mistake about the application of a rule of conduct. We might hold that the truth must be told to everybody on every occasion, and so offend against the law of charity by telling the truth about some one, when there was no need to do so. Such ignorance may itself be sinful or it may not. It all depends on the opportunities we have had to learn better. If we ought to have known better and subsequently realise what we have done we will confess it then as a sin we have committed.

The rightness of our conscience is not, then, a subject on which we can be cocksure. A conscience which tells us surely what is right and what is wrong; a conscience which can weigh accurately the force of two laws of conduct when they come into conflict in our lives, as they frequently do; such a conscience is a result of great spiritual effort and self-discipline. We must get on as best we can with what we have, obeying that and praying for something better.

We have just glanced at a point which deserves more attention than can be given to it here, namely, the difficulties which arise when we discern two laws of right conduct which in a particular instance come into conflict with one another. It is at such times that we realise most acutely our need of an instructed conscience. It will happen, for instance, that what is obviously our duty to society as a whole, or the group to which we belong, or our family, cannot be

reconciled with what is equally our duty to ourselves. The scrupulous person has to be careful then, lest he give undue weight to his obligations towards the group, and the casual person, who is ready to follow his instincts and look after himself, has to be careful not to give undue weight to the law of duty to himself. In such cases it may be found useful to call in someone else to assist our conscience. His detachment may enable him to present the case more objectively than we can.

It is apparent that there are problems connected with right conduct which are most difficult to solve. It is hard enough to do what is right when we know what that is; it is harder still when we are not sure whether we do know and yet have to obey the dictates of our conscience. We should like some tests that we could apply to it which would stimulate confidence in the justice of its demands upon us. Bishop Jeremy Taylor attempted to provide us with tests of this kind, and his suggestions are simple and understandable.

(a) We should at once become suspicious if we find ourselves unwilling to examine *every* aspect of a problem of conduct. If there is one point which we find ourselves passing over in our attempts to reach a right judgment, our conscience is misdirected. It is probable that in the direction in which we do not like to look we shall find the decisive factor of our problem.

(b) We have no chance at all of receiving right guidance from our conscience if we decide first upon the conclusions at which we wish to arrive and then examine the matter. Inevitably then we

find only arguments which support that conclusion, and, if we act rightly, it is merely by good luck.

(c) It is very often the case that what we want to do for our own self-interest, and what it is right to do, are the same—though over-scrupulous people are apt to assume the contrary. But, if we find that our self-interest in the matter is obvious and that the spiritual advantage is small or uncertain, we should be very suspicious of our conscience.

(d) If we seek counsel from another in order to help us to arrive at a decision we should pay close attention to the motives which cause us to choose that particular person. Did we guess beforehand what he would say, and was that advice we expected to receive likely to support the conclusions we desired? And further was he more competent to decide the question than ourselves, or were we seeking merely the support of numbers?

§ SIN

We now need some definition of what sin is. For our present purpose, the definition which will serve us best is, that "sin is any action or habit which prevents or delays the progress of the soul to perfection, of the danger of which the soul is or ought to have been conscious."* We notice first that "ought to have been conscious." It covers

*K. E. Kirk. "Some Principles of Moral Theology." Page 228. Those who have read Mr. Kirk's book will recognise that it is by no means the only occasion on which use has been made of it here.

what we have been considering about ignorance which is our own fault and ignorance which is not our own fault. Only when we could have known that it was wrong, if we had wanted to, is any action sinful. And the next point which it is important for us to take up is, that there are certain influences which retard or prevent the progress of the soul over the origin of which we have had no control, and there are certain other influences for which we are solely or in part responsible. It is clearly only the latter which are sinful. The former, the influences over whose beginning we had no control, are the influences of temperament. There are in all of us certain tendencies which are characteristic of us. We may be by temperament indolent, or impulsive, or jealous, or easily depressed and so forth; and these temperamental difficulties, because they are not acquired but are innate, are not themselves sinful. We are born with them—as the Prayer Book says "being by nature born in sin." These bad tendencies of ours are connected with what theology calls "original sin."

But when it is said that there are influences for whose origin we have no responsibility, it is not the same as saying that there are influences against which we need not fight. We have no control over Satan, if it comes to that, but we have to fight him all the same. These difficulties of temperament have to be fought not only with our wills but with our heads, skilfully, using all the wiles of the serpent against them. It is largely in the conflict with these disabilities that our characters are formed. We all know what these temperamental difficulties

are in our own case. If we do not it is high time that we did. We may conclude, then, by considering how they should be dealt with when we are examining our conscience.

(a) It is wrong to get depressed about them or to think of them as things we shall never overcome. The grace we receive in Holy Baptism from the life of Christ was for their overthrowing. If we find we have given way to such dependency over them we must confess that as a sin.

(b) We will not pander to our temperament. We will not say: "It is all very well for him, but you see I have such a quick temper." That would soon soften our character.

(c) If, in spite of our natural indolence, or whatever the difficulty is, we honestly feel that we have made a steady fight to be industrious, we will not confess that we have been lazy. It is true that we shall be aware of the presence of that fault still inside us, and that we shall feel it as evil. But, if we have fought it hard so that it has been kept in check, we have done our best to prevent that innate disability from interfering with the growth of our souls, and that is our whole responsibility. This is true also even when we have not fought at all, but we find that we have not given in to our failing in any specific way, because there has been no occasion for doing so and therefore nothing special to fight.

It is important that we should keep in mind this distinction between *sin* as being something we do, which we know quite well hinders or prevents our soul's progress, and *original sin*, those innate

tendencies in us which have the same effect as sin but are not, in their beginning, voluntary, for it helps us to treat sin not simply as something to be got rid of.

We have now to consider a distinction which is made within the first of these—the distinction between mortal and venial sin. We have been told that it is only after the commission of mortal sin that sacramental confession is held to be of obligation. For venial sin less drastic measures are sufficient. We are all of us, therefore, concerned to know what mortal sin is and what venial sin is. That is a question which it is most difficult to answer. It is hard to speak of this subject without causing misunderstanding, and misunderstanding on this matter is very serious. It would be so delightfully simple if there could be a list of sins which are mortal, and we could know for certain that if we had not transgressed in any of those ways all was well with us. Such lists of grave sins existed in the early centuries, but they were lists for which, it was held, there is no forgiveness in this world. And when, later on, those lists were extended and pardon for such sins was given by the act of the Church, they included only such sins of act as could cause grave scandal. And we know that there are deadly sins which never proceed beyond the thought in the heart of man. But all the same, although no such lists could be relied on we tend often to make them up for ourselves. We regard certain kinds of sin as mortal and certain kinds of sin as not mortal. It may even come about that we find ourselves thinking of the term mortal as applying only to

three or four sins which it is conceivable we should be tempted to commit. That is a frame of mind which is dangerous to our welfare.

We are most likely to arrive at a true conception if we keep steadily before us that definition of sin with which we began. This definition is the best for our purpose for two reasons. (a) It impresses upon our minds that sin is not an isolated happening, a black smudge which remains upon our person doing no more harm by remaining there than it did at its first appearance, so that we can simply wait till we have time to wash it off. It is something which affects immediately the progress of the soul, and affects it more and more the longer it is allowed to remain untouched. (b) It makes plain to us that there are, indeed, degrees of sin. Some sins are more deadly than others in the effect they have on our moral and spiritual welfare. It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that there may be held to be degrees in the seriousness of sin. It is extremely important that we should realise this clearly. One reason why the treatment of this subject fills one with trepidation, is that in suggesting that there are degrees of sin the impression may be given that some sins matter very little. If it is our habit to think, as the Apostle bade us, upon Christ crucified, we shall know very painfully that this is not so. If we define sin as we have been taught to do, as a conscious and wilful act of disobedience to God our Father, we shall feel that we can never be sorry enough for any sin, and that there is no possibility of observing distinctions between sins in the light of our high calling. Supposing, then,

that, when we learn to call some sins mortal and some venial, we came to think that the latter did not matter much, it would simply mean that we were not thinking about God but about a thing called Law, which might prove troublesome to us if we were not careful.

So then, sins are more or less deadly from the point of view of their effect upon the soul's good health and from that point of view alone. It is obvious that this distinction is real. We observe that a sin which is committed as a result of habit is part of a far greater danger than a sin of exactly similar character which is an isolated instance. We observe also that if a distinction is to be drawn between a sin committed in thought alone and a sin which has proceeded beyond the thought into action—and we remember how our Lord cautions us about such a distinction—it exists only from this point of view we are considering. For it is possible that if we only imagine ourselves committing a sin it may not have as lasting and deep-seated effect upon our souls as that sin put into practice. The sin of thought may thus, as it were, be given a body and become far less manageable. Both will be death-bearers to the soul, but it is likely that the act will bring death more swiftly than the thought by itself.

This, then, is what we have to bear in mind when we need to discover how deadly a sin is. We are not to dismiss any sin lightly, for no sin is really a light matter ; and what we regard as a small sin may have grave effects if it is persisted in. If we are apt to get impatient at frequent

interruptions or to get cross about people's mistakes, we are still a long way from a soul-destroying sense that God is not treating us fairly, and a long way from entertaining a deadly malice against our neighbour—though either might result if we were to give up trying to check our impatience or irritability. Such impatience or crossness is venial because it can be dealt with without resort to drastic measures. They neither of them indicate a really bad attitude of the heart to life.

But there are sins very different in their effects from these—sins which make life impossible for the soul. Whatever answers to that description must be called mortal, since it brings a condition resembling death upon us. Such must be dealt with at once and most drastically. If we think of the sins we have called venial as being like an attack of influenza, dangerous only if it is neglected, but not difficult to shake off if ordinary precautions and remedies are taken, these others are like those human ills which require the surgeon's knife or some such drastic treatment, if the soul is not to sink into lethargy and death. That is, indeed, the metaphor which our Lord uses when he speaks of them. "If thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire."—Mark ix, 43-48.

How are we to know what sins are mortal and what sins are venial? If we feel that we have a right to a definite answer to that question, our consideration of this subject may have led us to realise that it is more difficult than we supposed to make

this distinction with assurance. Yet we want to have some kind of solution, not because we would know which sins we need not trouble about, but because we want to be able to deal at once with any sin which is deadly in its nature. It is clearly not possible for the Church to do more than name certain conditions under which alone mortal sin can be committed. These conditions are so old and universal that we have probably heard them many times before, but it may be well to set them down once more. They are three in number.

(a) The sin must have inflicted or be inflicting grave injury to the person who commits it, or to his neighbour, to society, to the Church of God, or God himself. Such sins as murder, sins against chastity, theft, false-witness, blasphemy and despair are not the only sins of this nature. We have to remember, for instance, that a fixed habit of mind of a sinful nature, though it may show itself only in small overt acts is capable of being deadly in its effects.

(b) There must be full advertence. Obviously in all sinful acts there is some advertence (or at least culpable ignorance) but it is not always full. A sin is not death-bringing in its nature if the sinner is not fully aware of its evil character and consequences. The sinner must be in possession of his reason, recognise that his sin is an offence against God, and that it is absolutely unlawful to commit it.

(c) There must be full and free consent; the will, that is, being free, must have deliberately accepted the evil suggestion of the mind although aware of its consequences.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

¶ HOW IT IS MADE

It may be well for us to begin by reminding ourselves that we are not going to think of how we have disappointed our friends lately, nor of the ways in which our self-respect has suffered. Either of these may have some bearing on the work we have to do, but our main thought has got to be "I am the child of God. What would my Father have had me do, and what have I done?" Our examination must begin, and go on, and end with that, for, unless this is what we are doing, sin will cease for us to exist. It is only when we examine our conduct in the light of that one fact that we can bring to light the hidden things of darkness.

We find in most books of devotion lists of questions which may be put to our conscience: "Have I done this?" "Have I failed to do that?" These questions are generally based upon the Ten Commandments. There are perhaps times when such lists can be useful. Some people have found them of use when preparing for their first confession. They may help us too at other times by reminding us of duties we have neglected or of habits into which we have unconsciously slipped. But always they should be used with great caution and common sense, since their effect upon us may be bad. It is worth while to consider the ways in which they may be dangerous as we learn in doing so something about our subject.

(a) These forms may create in us a kind of false conscience. This is liable to happen because they are necessarily drawn up for people in general, and

not for us in particular; and what may be a duty for one is not necessarily a duty for another. We may find such a question as "Have I read my Bible every day?" though we have no ground for asserting that every Christian is morally bound to do so. Furthermore, though there are quite a number of these forms sensibly drawn up, there are also a certain number which contain silly questions. Our confession has got to be the act of our own conscience unencumbered. There may be times when it is necessary for us to confess something as wrong because all Christian people hold it to be so, though our conscience is not roused by it. But it is, generally speaking, true that it is better that we should fail for a time to realise some of our sins than that we should confess something as a sin, not because we thought it wrong, but because our book of devotions said it was. If it is really sinful our prayer will reveal it to us in time. We shall not develop a conscience sensitive to the distinction between right and wrong if we learn to confess as sin what does not trouble it. It would be a miserable state of affairs if we came to hold some act as a sin when preparing for confession which we went on committing at other times without a twinge.

(b) There is a danger in the use of the sacrament of penance which the unintelligent use of these forms may increase. We have always to see to it that our confessions continue to be *moral* and not simply *legal* acts. Directly there is anything legal about the spirit in which we approach confession the risk of dishonesty is increased. For when we suppose ourselves to be called upon merely to fulfil

the requirements of the law for dealing with sin, we shall try to find the easiest way through or round that law. We shall begin to ask ourselves "Have I said enough to get absolution for my sins?" instead of asking simply "Have I confessed my sins?" The first suggests legal requirements, the second implies a moral issue. As long as it is the latter we shall not be concerned with the easiest way of finding out our sins, or the least painful way of confessing them.

(c) No man spends time and trouble in weeding a piece of ground merely for the purpose of getting the ground clear. He weeds in order to plant or to allow that which has been planted the opportunity for the fullest growth. Nor has self-examination and confession the purpose of merely eradicating faults. Its end is spiritual growth. For the furtherance of that end we have to deal with our sins. If we are content to go through a list of sins and to note which we have committed we may easily lose sight of that end. It is extremely important that we should be positive rather than negative, and forms of self-examination tend to be rather negative. There may not at first sight, appear to be much difference between asking ourselves "how have I sinned against pride?" and "what have I done about being humble?" but it will be found in time that there is a very great difference indeed. We need to have in the forefront of our mind that beauty of God to which we aspire, and thus to discover the ugliness of our thoughts, words and deeds. The result of our confession has got to be that we want with all our hearts to become

good, and not simply that we cease to be bad. We confess our sins not just that we may be rid of them, but in order that we may grow better.

As to the act of self-examination itself, we are each of us free to evolve our own method, but the following preliminary suggestions may be of use in arranging that method.

We begin by trying not to think about ourselves at all, or our neighbours. We pray to God. He alone is our Judge. If we have spoken with him, we are less likely to be troubled by the thought of other standards of conduct, nor shall we slip into the sterile consideration of the ways in which we have broken the law. When we have done that, it may be best just to think of the time that has elapsed since our last confession, noticing specially anything out of the ordinary that has happened—not any sins out of the ordinary, but any unusual events. For it is from our reactions to new conditions that we learn most about ourselves. If we have been brought into close contact with some new person, or if there has been a change of work, or if we have had a holiday or illness, or anything unusual of that kind, we had better examine ourselves, our behaviour, in relation to that new thing first of all. As this is likely to be the most exacting part of the exercise it is well to do it while the mind is fresh.

After that we may turn to routine, the ordinary occupations, the usual difficulties. We know these failures so terribly well. Some of them we meet with almost every day when we examine our conscience. We have not to think at all hard to bring

them to mind, for these are ancient enemies of ours. But we must not be *unreasonably* disturbed because we have to confess them so regularly and so often. As long as the circumstances of our life remain the same, as long as we are meeting the same people, doing the same work, the difficulties will remain the same, and the temptations also. We remember that God has chosen these circumstances and these difficulties because they afford the best battle ground for us. We may think that we should do better against a new set of them. Very well, but God does not think so and he knows best. If we are to judge by what is happening in us now, we should conclude that new conditions would only mean new sins; and we do not want that. So we will look rather to the progress we are making in our contest with the old ones. It is unreasonable for us to say "it is no good for me to go on coming to confession for I always have to say the same thing."

In making this examination it is important that we should be as *concrete* as possible. If we want to grow spiritually we must not be vague in our accusations against ourselves. We will not say, for instance, "I have not loved God as much as I ought." It is obvious that we should not be making a confession of sin if we had done so. Nor should we be content to say "I have been proud," without adding as clearly as we can in what way we have sinned against humility. It is not enough to say that we have been selfish unless we have examined in what specific ways we have been selfish and confessed them. We are to confess our sins and not our general state of sinfulness. But even so difficulty

may be felt as to the extent to which one must go into detail and explain circumstances. A sin, then, must be confessed in such a way that the priest knows what is its nature and what is its gravity. It is not enough to say "I have lost my temper" when the trouble really is that we lost all control of ourselves and hurled something at our neighbour's head; and if someone confesses that they have been impure when the sin they have committed is fornication, they have only confessed a part of their sin. It is best to make a rule that we will consider with especial care the mentioning of a detail if the thought of mentioning it is repugnant to us, for it is *probable* in such a case that it is something which increases the gravity of the sin,* thus, we should say if the sin we are confessing has become habitual. It may be necessary to mention the relationship of a person to us, their position or office, or the place in which the sin has been committed. Any of these points may make a material difference to the gravity of our sin. It is also well to mention the motive of certain acts, a lie for instance, whether it was cowardice that made us tell it, or pride, or laziness. But details of circumstances should only be mentioned in the case of

*It is probable, but by no means certain; for sometimes the memory of a circumstance is painful to us not because that circumstance increased the gravity of a sin but because it damaged our self-esteem or had unfortunate consequences socially.

Further, in this matter of giving details, sexual offences are an exception. In confessing sins against purity the nature of the sin must be exactly stated, but nothing else.

those sins which we know to be specially dangerous to our soul's welfare. It is only in such cases that we are required to say how many times we have been guilty of a particular sin. We have to learn how to confess our sins without reservation, and at the same time to keep out any irrelevant matter.*

Finally, let us consider our confession of the things we have left undone which we ought to have done. Here especially it is necessary to be as concrete as possible. There is an obvious difficulty in determining what we could have done by the grace of God if we had really sought to live in the power of his Life. We are naturally overwhelmed by the sense of our shortcomings when we are preparing our confession. We catch a glimpse then of the highest and for the moment anyway "we needs must love it." But that glimpse is of no use to us, unless we also set about considering in what ways we have sinned by not doing things, in order that our purpose of amendment may apply to their remedy and not remain a vague resolve to do better. It is important that we should give this subject of what we are not doing very serious consideration. It sometimes happens that we have very little sense of sin because we actually commit very few sins (perhaps for lack of opportunity), while we are failing miserably all the time by not doing the things God is giving us to do.

*That is, matter which is not needed for the explanation of the sins we have committed. It should not be necessary to add that our confessions should deal with our sins only, and must not be made an opportunity for speaking of our opinions, emotions, reflections, etc.

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