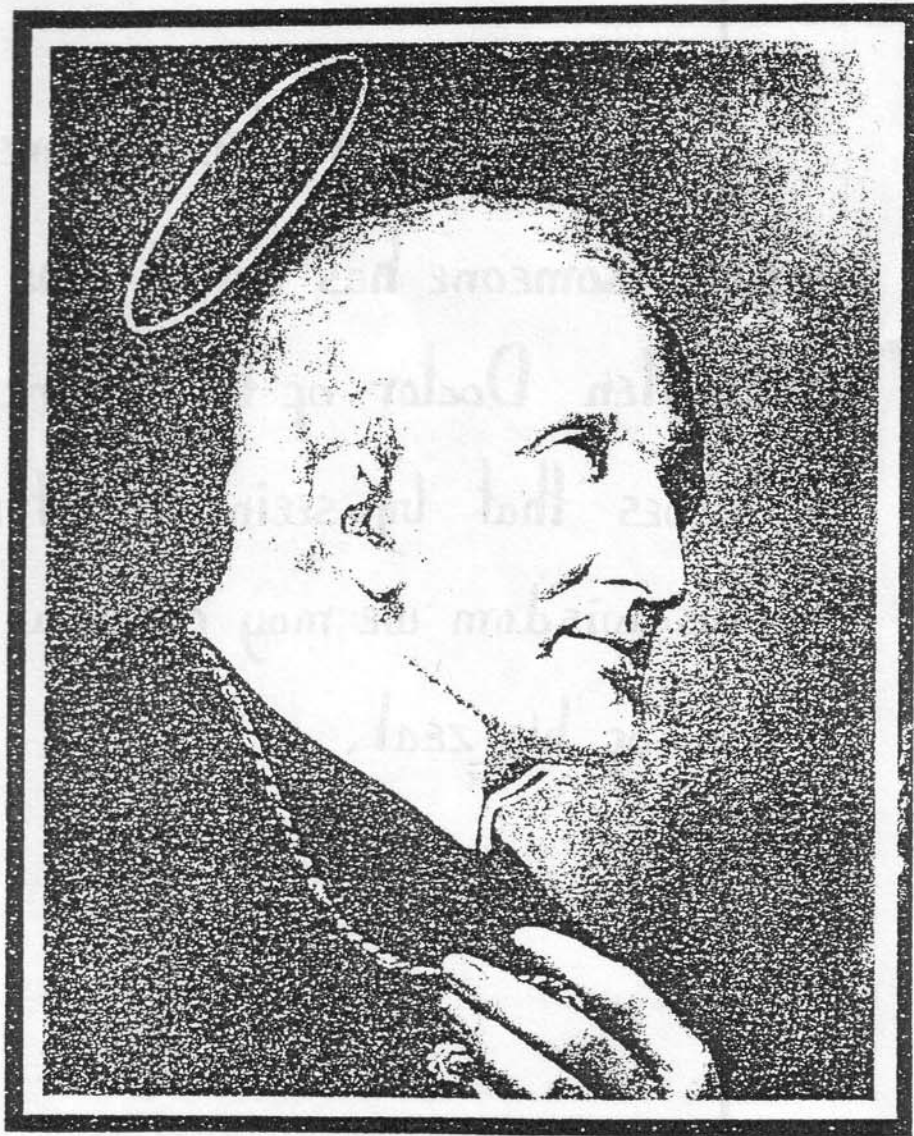


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FRATERNITAS SACERDOTALIS SANCTI PETRI

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Guide for Confessors



from the
PRAXIS CONFESSARII
of St. Alphonsus Liguori

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Christopher P. Blust

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Dedicated to St. Alphonsus

whom someone has called the
forgotten Doctor of the Church —
in hopes that by seeing a little
of his wisdom we may catch a
little of his zeal.

PREFACE

FORWARD

To recommend the *Praxis Confessarii* we could quote the *Cura of Ars* who once said that this is the book which made a confessor out of him. We could quote the Teresian Conference of 1923 which states that the *Praxis* contains all the mystical and ascetical theology of St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Alphonsus himself. But for the Redemptorist no other recommendation is needed then to say that it comes "from the pen of Alphonsus Liguori".

This edition of the *Praxis* has been made as an aid to students. We hope that they will find in it many striking examples of the theological genius and burning zeal of our holy founder. No attempt has been made to embellish the text. It is not a scholarly "publishable" edition - it is merely a student workbook. Perhaps some American Redemptorist theologian will give us the long overdue English edition of St. Alphonsus' moral works. And perhaps then St. Alphonsus will receive the praise from American priests that he so rightly deserves.

In making this translation we have tried to stay close to the Latin *Gaude* edition. At times we have followed the lead of the Spanish *Moriones* edition and omitted a section, but in each case of omission we have made a note of the fact.

Thanks go to those who pitched in to make the translation: J. Barreto, P. Voelker, J. Earl, E. O'Connor, J. Farnik, G. Enderle, K. Eberhard, R. Fenili, and R. Marchand. A very special word of thanks goes to Very Reverend Raymond Miller, who encouraged us in this project and allowed us to use his translation of chapter nine.

Thanks go too to Father M. Zeller and to R. Marchand who painstakingly checked over the first edition to erase as many mistakes as possible before the final draft was made. Thanks finally to all who helped put the book together: P. Sullivan, N. Delort, J. Hergenreder, D. Polek, E. Gastaldi, W. Cleary, K. Eberhard, R. Carabin, E. Morgan, R. Gama, H. Fontaine, L. Aniol, and Brother Aquinas.

R. Schiblin
Editor

FORWARD

Several years ago, at Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, a group of faculty and students worked out an English translation of the *Praxis Confessarii* by St. Alphonsus Liquori. This was a limited edition, mostly for classroom use. (Cf., Introduction)

With the renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, with the renewed study and discussion of the new rite, we thought it would be opportune to make the *Praxis* available to a larger audience of Redemptorists.

Very Rev. Joseph L. Kerins, C.S.S.R. has graciously agreed to finance the new edition and has asked that the *Praxis* be sent to all the confreres.

Rev. Robert J. Michalik, C.S.S.R. has done a great service by preparing the manuscript for this new edition. He has carried the work through from the first step to the last.

We seriously hope that this English version of the *Praxis* will be of help to many Redemptorists in their demanding work as Confessors and Spiritual Directors.

DANIEL L. LOWERY, C.S.S.R.
RECTOR/PRESIDENT
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Introduction

Without a doubt, God will richly reward priests who are conscientious confessors.* To work for the salvation of one's fellow men is to assure oneself of salvation. As St. James puts it: "Let him know that whoever brings a sinner back from his erroneous ways, will save his soul (and the Greek text shows that this means the soul of the one that does the converting) and will win the forgiveness of many sins." (James 5/20)

The Church grows sad when she sees so many Catholics on their way to Hell due to the ignorance and carelessness of bad confessors. The salvation of souls, she knows, depends to a great extent on the guidance given them in confession. Pope St. Pius V once said, "Let us have good confessors and we shall witness the transformation of all Christians." If only all confessors had that degree of learning and piety which their office demands, the world would not be so filled with sin, nor would Hell be so peopled with the souls of baptized Catholics.

When I say "piety" I mean more than the mere state of grace. I mean a genuine moral goodness with which he must nourish not only himself, but even his penitents. He must guide their consciences, and therefore he must be neither too indulgent nor too severe. He must deal with the disease of sin without becoming infected himself. He must discuss things with women and children which they are embarrassed to mention and yet not be hurt himself. He must be courageous in dealing with those whom the world honors and treat them without human respect. In a word, he must be rich in his charity, gentle in his meekness, and self-possessed in his prudence.

To do all this demands more than ordinary holiness. He needs a degree of virtue which will never be his unless he is a friend of prayer, faithful to his daily meditation. For these two means - prayer and meditation - are the only ways to win the graces and lights necessary for the lofty office of hearing confessions. It is an office, some say, which would put even the angels to the test.

Without further ado, let us begin this small work on the manner of hearing confessions. As we go along, I will refer many times to my Moral Theology where matters are treated more at length. I recommend that work to the reader, if he wishes to see more of the proofs and explanations.

*The reader will note that the paragraph numbering has been omitted. The only practical reason I could think of for keeping it was to facilitate reference to the original. However, before me I have four copies of the *Praxis* and each has a different set of paragraph numbers. For that reason, I think our system of sub-titles will do a better job of facilitating reference than the paragraph numbers.

Editor.

CHAPTER ONE

Four Duties

of Confessors

THE ROLE OF FATHER

In order to be a father to his penitents, the confessor must have charity. He must show his love first of all by receiving everyone who comes to him for confession with kindness - whether they be poor or uncultured or even sinners. Some priests will hear only devout souls; others hear only the wealthy because they do not have nerve enough to turn these away. But if some poor sinner comes to confession, he will hear him begrudgingly and then curtly send him away. And so it happens, that troubled souls - who often have to force themselves to come to confession - become embittered when they see how rudely they are received. They imagine that there is no one who will help and absolve them, and then they slip back into their habits of sin, in despair of their salvation.

A good confessor will act far differently. When such a sinner comes to him, he will welcome him with kindness and even with a note of triumph at the gain he has been fortunate enough to snatch from the devil's grasp. He realizes that this sacrament was instituted principally for sinners - not the just, because venial sins can be removed in many ways other than confession. He remembers the words of Christ: "It is my mission to call sinners, and not the saints." (Mk 2/17) Clothing himself with sentiments of compassion, as the Apostle says, (Col 3/12), he will soon discover how many men are sunk in the depths of sin. In order to win them back to God, then, he must receive them with deep love and let them see how much he wants to help them. Words something like these may be appropriate:

"There's no need to be afraid. Take your time and once you get a hold of yourself you can tell your sins. And there's no reason to hold anything back because you're ashamed of it. If you get stuck, I'll help you examine your conscience - so there's no need to worry. Say a little prayer of thanks to Almighty God Who has been good enough to give you time to come back to Him. Now you can start over. God will surely forgive you all your sins - no matter how big they seem - just as long as you are sincerely sorry for them. You've got every reason in the world to be at peace now.." (1)

Next the confessor must show an even greater kindness as he actually hears the confession. He must be careful to show no impatience or weariness. And above all, he must not show that he is astounded at the sins, as long as the sinner is not so callous and impertinent that he tells his sins without the slightest touch of shame and discomfort. Because then he would be bound, as well as he could, to make the sinner realize the hideousness of his sins and shake him from his dangerous lethargy. However he should not interrupt the penitent in order to make this correction lest he frighten him into concealing some of his sins. This is the ordinary thing, yet at times the confessor will have to interrupt and correct right away. This is necessary, for instance, when he confesses some very great sin or some habit of sin, in order to impress him with its gravity. Still the confessor must be careful not to irritate the penitent or to frighten him. When he has finished the correction, he should tell him right away to confess the rest of his sins.

"OK, then, let's not get upset over this. God's mercy is bigger than your sins. So go on now and tell the rest of your sins. Don't hold anything back. If you do, that'll be a sacrilege and that wouldn't be the way to finish this now that you've made such a good start."

At the end of the confession, the confessor must make sure that the penitent realizes the gravity of his sins and the terrifying state of his soul, but this he should do with the greatest charity. He must speak seriously in order to bring the penitent to a better frame of mind, but in such a way that it is clear he is not speaking in anger but with a deep love and concern for his soul.

"Do you realize now how sinful your life has been? Do you realize all God has done to deserve this is to love you? He has shown you nothing but love, and this is what you gave Him in return. Just for a minute let's recall who this God is - a Being

perfectly happy, in need of nothing - and He became man to show His love for you - and died on the cross to save you from the pains of hell. Where do you think you'd be now if you had died before to-night? You know where you'd be - you'd be in hell - forever in hell - with no chance to escape it. The same thing will happen to you if you go out of this confessional without the firm determination not to sin, to change your life for the better. Sin can only bring you unhappiness, here on earth and someday in hell. So wipe out the past and start over. Turn your back on sin and come into the arms of a God Who has waited to have you all these years. God wants to give you His grace - I want to help. What do you say? Will you make that determination?"

In order to draw his penitents to God, St. Francis de Sales took time out to tell them of the peace that God's friends enjoy in contrast to the unhappiness which fills the lives of those who live as strangers to God. (2) Then the confessor should help the penitent make an act of sorrow and absolve him if he is disposed. Finally he should make suggestions as to how the sinner can keep from sin, and then impose a penance on him. But if the penitent is incapable of absolution, the confessor should assign a day on which he should return:

"I will expect you back on such-and-such a day. Meanwhile put alot of trust in Our Lady and pray to her everyday. If I'm not hearing confession when you get here, then come to the rectory and have the brother at the door call me, and I'll be right down."

In short, be kind in sending him away. This is the way that sinners will be saved - namely, with as much love as one can muster. If, on the other hand, they come to a confessor who treats them harshly, they will come to hate confession and put it off, and will end up unabsolved and on their way to hell.

THE ROLE OF DOCTOR

To be able to prescribe the right remedy to his penitent's spiritual sickness, the confessor must know its origin and cause. Some confessors ask for nothing more than the number and the species of the sins. As soon as they are convinced that the penitent is disposed, they send him away almost without a word.

A good confessor acts very differently. First he investigates to find out how the sickness started and how grave it has become. He asks if there is a habit of sin, if there are occasions - some time or place or persons or circumstances that provoke him to sin. In this way, he can do a better job of correcting the penitent, of disposing him for absolution, and of giving him profitable remedies for correcting his sins.

Next he makes the pertinent observations. Even though he should treat his penitents as a loving father, still as a doctor he is bound, when it is necessary, to warn and to correct them. This is especially necessary in the case of the very sinful who seldom come to confession. He should warn and correct everyone who needs it, without respect of persons. It makes no difference whether he be priest or prelate, governor or elite, as long as he has confessed with little evidence of sorrow. Pope Benedict XIV compares the words of the confessor to those of the preacher: "The confessor's warnings are much more effective than those of the preacher, for he knows the case in question and the preacher does not. For this reason, he can make more pertinent warnings and prescribe remedies which fit this particular sin." (3)

The confessor should never worry about the ones waiting in line for confessions. As St. Francis Xavier said, it is better to hear a few confessions well than to hear many which bear little fruit. Confessors sin if they come across an indisposed penitent and immediately tell him to leave the confessional, for fear of wasting time with him. Learned theologians have said that, when a penitent comes indisposed, the confessor is obliged as far as possible to dispose him for absolution. To do this, he could tell the penitent, for example, how much his sins have offended God, how great is his danger of being condemned to hell, and so forth. And it makes little difference if others are waiting or even if they leave without going to confession, for the confessor is responsible not for them, but for the one who is here and now in the confessional.

The confessor is also obliged to instruct the penitent if he is culpably ignorant of any point of natural or positive law. If he is inculpably ignorant, it depends. If he is inculpably ignorant of something necessary for salvation, then the confessor is obliged to instruct him. If he is inculpably ignorant of some other matter (of which he can be ignorant) - even something of the divine law, the confessor should prudently decide whether the instruction will be profitable for the penitent. If it will not be profitable, he should not make the correction, but rather leave him in good faith.

The reason is: the danger of formal sin is a much more serious thing than material sin. God punishes formal sin, for that alone is what offends Him. This I proved more sufficiently in my Moral Theology. (4)

For the same reason, it is also commonly taught that, if a person has contracted an invalid marriage because of some occult impediment and is in good faith, the confessor should leave them in good faith when the impediment becomes known - as long as there is no danger of infamy or scandal or of incontinence - and meanwhile proceed to obtain the dispensation from the Sacred Penitentiary. If one of these married partners comes to confession during this time and accuses himself of not rendering the marriage debt, theologians say that the confessor must even oblige him to it by making some general statement about spouses being under grave obligation to render the marriage debt to each other. (5)

How should the confessor act with a couple who are about to contract an invalid marriage and there is prudent fear of formal sin or of scandal, if he tells them about its nullity? In this case the bishop has the same power of dispensing as he has in urgent danger of death, according to canon 1054. (6) And if recourse to the bishop is difficult, and the grave danger of infamy or scandal can in no way be avoided, the confessor can dispense occult cases, but only in the internal sacramental forum.

The confessor should also admit to demand restitution when he certainly foresees that the penitent, who is now in good faith, would surely disregard his warning.

Nevertheless, the following cases are exceptions to leaving the penitent in good faith:

- 1.) When the penitent's ignorance redounds to the harm of the common good. The confessor is a defender of the good of society and he is bound to prefer the public good to the private good of his penitent, even when he realizes that the correction will be useless. Consequently, he must always instruct rulers, confessors, prelates, and parish priests who are neglecting their obligations, because ignorance in these men - even if it is invincible - will always hurt society. People will see what they are doing and consider it all right to imitate them. Pope Benedict XIV teaches that confessors must also correct the ignorance of those who frequent the sacraments, lest others see what they are doing unchecked and consider it licit. (7)

2.) Another case where correction of ignorance must always be made: if the penitent asks about something, the confessor is then obliged to instruct him in the matter. For in this case the ignorance is not invincible in such a way that instruction can be omitted.

3.) Another case where correction must be made: if the confessor realizes that the penitent will quickly accept the correction, even though he would fight it at first. If there is a doubt about whether the correction will be helpful or harmful, follow these rules which I have outlined in my Moral Theology: (8)

- A.) If there is no positive reason to fear that it will harm the penitent, the instruction should be made.
- B.) If he doubts whether the correction will harm or help the penitent, the confessor should weigh the harm and the usefulness, and the degree of fear of harm against the hope of fruit, and choose the greater.
- C.) Otherwise, he must ordinarily try to avoid formal sin more than mere material sins.

After he has corrected and instructed the penitent, the confessor should dispose him for absolution by helping him make acts of true sorrow and amendment. And let me warn confessors that there are few penitents - especially among the uninstructed - who come to confession with pre-made acts of sorrow.

Some confessors think they have done enough if they merely ask the penitent something like this: Do you want God to pardon these sins? (which is not a true act of sorrow) Or: Are you sorry for these sins with all your heart? And with nothing else, they go ahead and absolve them.

Once again, a good confessor will act very differently, at least toward a penitent who is in mortal sin. He will speak to him to make sure that he has a true sorrow and detestation for his sins. First he should help him to make an act of attrition:

"Did you ever stop to think where you would be now if you had died in sin? Hell is not a very nice place. You would be there now - suffering the pains of hell-fire, rejected forever by God,

never any hope of even changing it all. This is what your sins would have done. Make an act of sorrow, then, telling God that you are sorry for having offended Him and having deserved hell." Note that it is not enough for an act of attrition merely to say: "sorry for my sins because they have deserved hell;" rather you must say: "sorry for my sins because they have offended God and deserved hell."

Next the confessor should try to draw the penitent to make an act of contrition. "Your sins have not only deserved hell, they have insulted the most loving Person that exists, they have made light of a Person Who is nothing but Goodness and Lovableness. You have turned away from Him and scorned His friendship and His grace. Are you sorry for this more than anything in the world? Do you hate the sins that you have thrown up in the face of so loving a God? Are you willing to die a thousand deaths than ever commit them again?"

Before going on we should note: if a penitent has obtained absolution and then immediately confesses another sin, he must elicit a new act of sorrow before being absolved again, because there is a new judgment to be made. (9)

Lastly the confessor should give a penance that he considers will further the penitent's chances at salvation, that is, one that is adapted to his particular condition and one that he judges will be carried out. He should take note that even though Trent demands a penance corresponding to the gravity of the sins, still he may, for a just cause, lessen the penance for a number of reasons. (10) For instance, if the penitent is really crushed with sorrow, if it is a time of jubilee, or very specially if the penitent is suffering some illness of body or soul. And lastly when the confessor prudently judges that a penance which corresponds to the sins will not be fulfilled. We know that Trent teaches that penance and sins should correspond to each other, but we say that besides this the penance should correspond to the penitent's capability. In this way, the penance will be a help and not a hindrance to the penitent's salvation. When it happens that the penance is neither helpful to his salvation nor fitted to his particular strength or weakness, then the penance is a poison and not a remedy. And yet in this sacrament, amendment of one's life is the end intended, rather than making all the satisfaction due for sin. The Ritual says this very thing when it tells the confessor to have "the disposition of the penitent" in mind. (11)

St. Thomas has something worth considering on this. "The doctor does not give medicine so strong that it is out of proportion to the patient's weakness, with the result that even a greater sickness hits him. In a similar way, guided by a divine impulse, the priest will not always impose the whole penance demanded for a sin, lest the penitent despair and abandon confession completely." In another place he says: "Just as a tiny fire is smothered if a good deal of wood is thrown on it, so it can happen that a penitent's first weak signs of sorrow can be smothered by an excessive penance." And he adds: "It is a good idea if the priest lets the penitent know how big a penance should be given, and then imposes one that the penitent can handle." And again he says: "It is safer to impose less than is due rather than too much, for God will be quicker to forgive excessive mercy than excessive severity. What is missed by excessive mercy can be made up for in purgatory." (12)

Gerson, Cajetan, and St. Antoninus all teach that the confessor should impose a penance which he prudently thinks the penitent will be able to handle, and which he will readily accept. If the penitent maintains that a penance is too much for him in his weak condition, then, as the saint points out, "No matter how much he has sinned, he should not be refused absolution, lest he despair." (13) He goes on to say that it is enough in a case like this, to impose the general penance using the words of the Ritual "*quidquid boni feceris, etc.*". In this way all the good that he does will be joined to the Sacrament, as St. Thomas teaches, and be of greater value in satisfying for his sins. (14) Many moralists teach with probability that there is just cause for cutting the penance down if the confessor thinks the penitent will be encouraged to come to confession more often.

St. Thomas of Villanova gives a bit of wisdom in this line: "Impose an easy penance, then encourage the penitent to more difficult things." (15) It is good to tell the penitent how big a penance his sins have merited. He goes on: "Even though you urge the penitent to do more difficult things, end up imposing only what you prudently think he will carry out." St. Francis de Sales says that it would be a good idea to ask the penitent, if he thinks he is strong enough to execute the regular penance; if he does not think so, then commute it to something else. (16) At times it is good to slip into the penance (but not *sub gravi*) a grave penance or an obligation due on some other title.

From all that has been said, it should be clear that confessors act imprudently if they impose penances that are beyond

the strength of their penitents. How many are there who do not hesitate to absolve indisposed recidives, foolishly thinking that they will cure them by burdening them with a grave penance, even when they realize that it will not be carried out? For instance, for a man who barely gets to confession once a year, they impose "weekly confession for a year"; for a man who ordinarily does not say five decades over the space of a week, they impose "fifteen decades a day"; or what is more ridiculous, they impose disciplines and mental prayer on those who have not even heard the words. What will come of this? -Even though they accept the penance in order to get absolution, they will afterwards do nothing about fulfilling it. Then they think (especially the uninstructed Catholics) that they automatically lapse back into sin because they think that confession is no good without the penance. They end up falling into their old way of life, and afraid at the thought of having to fulfill such a penance, they live out their days in sin. This is what comes of penances that are too big - some call them "fitting" (to the sin), but they should call them extremely "unfitting".

However, outside these cases (namely, a penitent's weakened condition or an extraordinary show of sorrow) the confessor is wrong if he imposes a light penance for a grave sin. While this is licit in certain circumstances, he should ordinarily impose a grave penance which obliges *sub gravi*. In line with this, I will make a few pertinent remarks:

- 1.) When a penitent forgets the penance, he is no longer bound to anything, unless he can easily find out what it was from the confessor who imposed it.
- 2.) The confessor cannot impose a public penance for occult sins; but he must impose a public penance if there is no other way of removing scandal or of repairing someone's reputation. Still he should not insist on the public penance if the penitent is opposed to it and can in some other way repair the scandal, such as by frequenting the sacraments.
- 3.) Sometimes a penance can be imposed on the condition "if the penitent will fall back into sin". But remember, penances like this are not very often successful, especially if they stretch over a long period. He will easily relapse into sin.

- 4.) If a penitent comes and asks that a penance imposed by another confessor be commuted, many say that the whole confession must be repeated to this present confessor at least in general, so that he will know the state of conscience. But many others say that this is not necessary, since it is enough if the new confessor knows that the penitent's own strength is not up to such a big penance. He can from the penance already imposed argue to the gravity of the sins for which it was imposed, and in this way guide himself in changing the penance. And probably the confessor himself can make the move to commute the penance, if he foresees that the penitent will very likely neglect the penance again, as he has already done.

However, an inferior confessor may not change a penance imposed by a superior for reserved sins, unless it is difficult for the person to return to the superior, or unless a grave cause urges that the penance be changed. For then he could reasonably presume the superior's permission.

- 5.) The penance cannot be changed outside of confession - not even by the same confessor. This can be done only right after absolution, before the penitent has left the confessional.

As to what precise penances should be imposed, remember that the penance is supposed to be not only a remedy, but a satisfaction for past guilt as well. Consequently, mortification of the senses should be imposed for sins of sensuality, almsgiving should be imposed for sins avarice, prayer for blasphemy, and so on. But he should also take into account what will be better and more helpful for this particular penitent. While it is very helpful to impose frequentation of the Sacraments, mental prayer, and almsgiving in themselves, it would be harmful for one who is not used to such things. The following are for the most part good penances for everyone: joining a confraternity, making an act of sorrow each evening for a certain time, making some particular resolution each morning saying with St. Philip Neri: "Lord don't let me out of your sight today or I'll turn my back on you." Making a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to an image of Mary asking for the grace of persevering in the state of grace. Saying at least five decades of the rosary. Saying three Hail Mary's morning and evening with the prayer: "My Mother, help me not to offend God today." (This

penance I always impose, or at least advise.) Reminding themselves before they go to bed that they could now be in the fire of hell or that they will one day die in this very bed. For some (especially clerics), reading each day from a spiritual book. But St. Francis de Sales warns that the penitent should not be loaded with too many things lest he be confused and frightened away. (17)

With regard to the remedies which should be given to the penitent, there are general ones and particular ones. The general ones are:

- 1.) To love God, since He has created us for no other purpose. He should make sure that the penitent knows about the interior peace that comes from friendship with God; and the hell-on-earth which is the lot of God's enemies.
- 2.) To pray to the Blessed Virgin, especially by saying the Rosary. They should pray to their guardian angel and patron saint as well.
- 3.) To frequent the sacraments. Especially tell them to go to confession immediately, if they should ever fall into mortal sin again.
- 4.) To meditate on the eternal truths, especially on death. Encourage the father of the family to make a daily meditation with his family, or at least to say the rosary with them.
- 5.) To practice the Presence of God, saying in the midst of temptation, "God is watching me."
- 6.) To make an examination of conscience each evening, with sorrow and a determination not to sin again.
- 7.) For the laity, to join some confraternity, for priests, to make mental prayer before Mass and a thanksgiving after it, or at least to make some spiritual reading before and after Mass.

Special remedies should be given for the different habits of sin. For instance, if a man hates another, suggest that he pray for the one he hates each day by reciting an Our Father or a Hail Mary

for him. If he is bothered by the memory of some injustice done to him, tell him to call to mind the insults heaped upon Christ. If a sinner has fallen into sins against the sixth commandment, he must be told to avoid idleness and to stay away from bad companions and occasions of sin. If he has developed a bad sex habit over a period of time, he must avoid not only the proximate occasions of sin, but even the remote occasions which (because of his weakness) have become proximate for him. It is especially in this case that the confessor should impose the three Hail Mary's morning and evening in honor of Mary's purity, telling him to say this prayer before her image, and to include a new resolve not to sin and a fervent prayer for perseverance. But most of all the confessor should see to it that a person with this kind of habit goes to Holy Communion frequently, for Communion is called "the wine springing forth virgins."

If a penitent is in the habit of blaspheming, the confessor should urge him to make fifteen crosses on the earth with his tongue each time he blasphemes, and to say an Our Father and a Hail Mary each day to make up for his blasphemy. Each morning when he gets up he should renew his resolve of accepting each occasion of anger meekly, saying three times to the Blessed Virgin, "My Lady, give me patience." This will serve not only to win for him Mary's help, but also to get him used to saying these words instead of blasphemy.

The confessor should assign other remedies for other sins - according to his own prudent judgment as to the circumstances, the person, and his dispositions.

THE ROLE OF TEACHER

"For the lips of the priest are to keep knowledge, and instruction is to be sought from his mouth." (Mal 2/7) It is the confessor's duty to know the law well, in order that he may exercise the office of teacher, for if he is ignorant of it, naturally he cannot teach it to others. Note that St. Gregory calls the task of directing souls through life to eternal salvation the art of arts. "Guidance of souls is the greatest of arts." (18) St. Francis de Sales said that the office of hearing confessions is the most difficult of all, because the confessor's knowledge is for nothing else than eternal salvation; it is the most difficult of all, because it demands a knowledge of all sciences, professions and arts, because moral theology itself embraces so many facets of life, and because

it consists in so many positive laws, and sacred canons which he must be able to interpret properly. And on top of all this, each case and each absolution differs because of a myriad of circumstances. Some men who call themselves great theologians look with disdain on moral theology which they call casuistry and study only briefly. They say it is enough to know the general principles and then one can hear confessions well. No one can deny, of course, that each particular case should be solved by principles, but we do say that where the difficulty lies is in trying to apply the principles to this particular case, entangled as it is in so many different circumstances. The problem lies in knowing which principles to apply to this case, and this cannot be done without careful attention to the reasons on each side. Now this is precisely what moral theology has done - it has gone into detail showing which principles should be used in solving many different cases. In our day, there are so many laws, so many decrees, so many responses that the ordinary priest cannot possibly know them except with the help of the casuists who collect them, and solve so many practical problems which the confessor can easily find. New authors are, consequently, more useful than older ones.

With good reasons does one author say that many theologians, while they know so much about the speculative sciences, are so ignorant of moral matters which, as Gerson says, are the most difficult of all. (20) There is not one so learned that he cannot at times learn something new in this field. It follows that confessors may never interrupt their study of moral theology. The learned Sperelli says that confessors are wrong if they spend their time in other studies to the neglect of moral. Afterwards they cannot distinguish one sin from another, with the result that both confessor and penitent are rushed into eternal damnation.

We do not deny, however, that less learning is needed for hearing the confessions of simple people than of politicians, businessmen, clerics and the like. Less knowledge too is needed to hear confessions in the country than in the city, especially if it is a place without a priest, and the people are left with the alternative of not going to confession for a long time. Still there is no excuse for the confessor who goes into the confessional unprepared. It is necessary that the confessor know at least some basic things:

- 1.) He should know how far his jurisdiction extends. Each priest must remember that he needs special faculties to hear the confession of religious women and their novices. (21) However, any priest could validly and licitly absolve any religious woman granting these conditions:

- a.) that the priest be approved by the ordinary of the place for hearing confessions of women (without this the confession would be invalid);
- b.) that the religious ask him seriously either in sickness or for quiet of conscience, either by approaching a confessor who is there for some other purpose or herself calling a confessor to come;
- c.) that the confession be in a church, oratory, or a place designated even *per modum actus*; if this condition is missing the confession would be invalid.

Each confessor should know which sins and censures are reserved, at least those which he is likely to meet more often. We will list the principal ones:

RESERVED TO THE HOLY SEE SPECIALISSIMO MODO

- a.) Sacrilegious abuse of the consecrated species.
- b.) Violent laying of hands on the Pope.
- c.) Absolving or feigning absolution of one's accomplice in a sin of impurity.
- d.) Direct violation of the sacramental seal.

RESERVED TO THE HOLY SEE SPECIALI MODO

- a.) Apostasy, Heresy, Schism.
- b.) Editing books of apostates, heretics, or schismatics which promote apostasy, etc.; also to defend or read such books or others forbidden *nominatim*.
- c.) Impeding the exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, by having recourse to the civil power.
- d.) False denunciation of a confessor for the crime of solicitation.
- e.) Forbidden *negotiatio* for a cleric.

RESERVED TO THE HOLY SEE SIMPLICITER

- a.) Enrolling in the masons or similar sects.
- b.) Violation of the clausura of nuns or regulars.
- c.) Engaging in a duel or being an accomplice in one.

RESERVED TO THE ORDINARIES

- a.) Marrying before a non-Catholic minister, baptizing or educating one's children as non-Catholics.
 - b.) Violent treatment of a cleric or a religious.
 - c.) Abortion, *effectu secuto*.
 - d.) Apostates from religion, and religious fugitives *in sacris* (suspension).
 - e.) Marriage in simple perpetual vows.
- 2.) Confessors should know, secondly, how to distinguish venial sins from mortal sins, at least those of common occurrence. As to those that are not common, to know at least enough to get a doubt.
- 3.) They should know finally which questions they should ask; the circumstances of the sins at least those that change the species; what constitutes the proximate occasion of sin; what induces the obligation of restitution; what kind of sorrow and resolve are necessary; and finally which remedy should be given in order to help the penitent out of his sinful habit.

Any confessor who dares to hear confession without sufficient knowledge is certainly in a state of damnation. God Himself condemns him: "Since you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from my priesthood." (Osee 4/6)

Even the approval of the bishop will not excuse him, if the priest is clearly incompetent. The approval will not infuse the necessary knowledge, rather it should presuppose it. However let me hasten to add: if a confessor only doubts about his confidence, let the superior's judgment re-assure him as long as he tries diligently to fit himself for the task.

As I said before, no confessor must ever lay aside his study of moral theology. The facets of this science are so many and so varied that even if he has studied much, he will easily forget them after a period of time because some things that he should know will happen so seldom. For this reason, he should review his moral theology over and over.

THE ROLE OF JUDGE

The last role of a confessor - that of judge - is very important. Judges are obliged to learn the facts, to examine the proofs, and then to pass sentence. The confessor must learn the state of the patient's conscience, then find out his dispositions, and finally impart or deny absolution.

As to the first duty - that of learning the state of the penitent's conscience. It should be noted first of all that this duty is primarily the penitent's. Yet it cannot be doubted that the confessor is bound to help him examine his conscience if he sees that the penitent has not done it well. He must ask him questions, first as to the sins which he is more likely to have committed - then as to their number and species.

He must remember in particular five things:

- 1.) It is extremely wrong to dismiss the uninstructed penitent, telling him to go out and examine his conscience better. Father Segneri calls this an unpardonable error, and with good reason. (22) Some men - for one reason or another - find it hard to examine their consciences properly. When they are dismissed without help, there is danger that fear of this difficulty will keep them from confession and they will be left in their sins. For this reason, the confessor should give them a hand in examining their consciences. He should go through the commandments, especially if they are the type that neglect their eternal salvation and are strangers to the things of God, living out of contact with sermons and churches. The error becomes tragic if because of a lack of examination he would send away some uninstructed person who had previously kept back a sin out of shame, even if it would mean doubling back over the confessions of many years. And all the more so, because of the great danger there would be of his losing his soul, if he did not return.

Still he should not question too minutely. He should only ask about those sins which they could easily have committed, judging from their condition and capabilities. And if the penitent seems to be properly instructed and is careful in making his confession, including the circumstances as best he can, the confessor is not bound to make any inquiry at all.

- 2.) The confessor should note secondly that it is better to ask the necessary questions as soon as the penitent mentions a thing, rather than wait till the end of the confession. This way the confessor will not forget what he was going to ask and will not have to ask the penitent to repeat parts of his confession. This would be a heavy burden on the penitent.
- 3.) Confessors should never think that they can pass a certain judgment on the gravity of a sin by asking a person whether he thought it was mortal or venial. For the penitent, as I know from experience, will very often answer the first thing that comes to his mind. And if the confessor repeats the same question a little further on, the answer may be just the opposite.
- 4.) Concerning the number of sins that flow from a bad habit, a certain number very often cannot be had. The confessor should then try to learn the penitent's condition, that is, his manner of living, the relation of the bad habit to other occupations, the amount of time spent with the accomplice, the place where he spends most time. Then he should try for the number by asking the penitent to tell him about how many times he has sinned in a day or a week or a month, proposing several numbers so that he can make a choice. And if the penitent chooses the highest number, it is a good idea to ask a higher number still.

Even with this, however, the confessor should not make a certain judgment concerning the number. He should note the frequency in general and make his judgment general - whatever the number is before God. Some theologians teach that with regard to internal habits of sin, such as hatred, bad desires, and bad thoughts, it is enough if you determine the period of time over which the habit has lasted; but this is not entirely satisfying to me, because of the different circumstances in which men live. Some live with few occasions of bad thoughts; others are more easily influenced by their passions. Therefore it is necessary in addition to ask some general questions about the occupation, the surroundings, and the passions which influence the individual. Only in this way can he make a judgment concerning the number of internal acts.

If after two or three questions, the confessor still cannot make more than a confused judgment, he should not be troubled. When he is dealing with such a mixed-up and confused conscience, it is impossible to expect for greater clarity.

- 5.) Finally the confessor should note that, even though general confessions are most useful, he should not be too demanding in having previous confessions repeated. Father Segneri says that there is no obligation to repeat confessions, except in the case where that is clearly necessary or in the case of some evident error. (23) The fact that a person has relapsed into sin is not a certain sign that the confessions have been invalid, especially if he did not fall for some time, or if before he fell he made some effort. It is different in the case where the penitent falls almost immediately - two or three days after the confession - without fighting the temptation at all. Here it seems almost certain that sorrow and resolve were lacking.

1. This series of exhortations has been somewhat edited to American idiom.
2. St. Francis de Sales, Avertissements aux conf. ch 1, art 2, #7.
3. Benedict XIV, Apostolica constitutio, June 26, 1749.
4. MT, Lib VI, n. 610 (Moral Theology of St. Alphonsus)
5. MT, Lib VI, n. 611
6. Brought up to date in keeping with the Code.
7. Benedict XIV, loc. cit.
8. These rules were taken from the Spanish edition of the *Praxis* (Moriones, Madrid 1952). They are included in a footnote on page 53, and taken from MT, Lib VI, n. 616.
9. A note was omitted here, which Gaude says was reversed by Alphonsus in a later edition of MT.
10. Trent; sess 14, de Poenit, ch 8.
11. Roman Ritual, Ordo ministr. Sacr. Penit.
12. St. Thomas: Suppl. qu 18, art 4; Quodlib. 3, art 28 and Opusc. 65, de Offic. sacerd.
13. St. Antoninus, part. 3. tit. 17, cap. 20.
14. St. Thomas: Quodlib. 3, art 28.
15. St. Thomas of Villanova, Serm. in fer VI post Domin. IV quadrag., n. 13, post med.
16. St. Francis de Sales: Avertissements aux conf. ch. 8, art. 1.

- 17. St. Francis de Sales: Avertissements aux conf. ch. 8, art. 2.
- 18. St. Gregory: Regulae past. liber, part 1, ch 1.
- 19. St. Francis de Sales: Avertissements aux conf., intro.
- 20. Giordanni, Istruz. per i novelli confessori, part 1 n. 18;
Gerson, Tr. de Oratione, part 3, in fine.
- 21. This section on confessional faculties and on reserved sins was taken from the Spanish edition, in keeping with the present code of canon law.
- 22. Segneri: Il Confessore istruito, ch. 2, v. f.
- 23. Segneri: ibid. ch 2, vers. med.

CHAPTER TWO

Guide for Helping Unprepared Penitents

The reader should not expect a detailed treatment of the commandments and precepts in this chapter. I have given that in my Moral Theology. Here I will limit myself to the things that confessors should ask when they feel that the penitent has come into the confessional unprepared. In one or the other case, I will note how the confessional practice differs from the theoretical consideration.

FIRST COMMANDMENT

1.) Ignorance of the Faith

The confessor should question to see if the penitent knows the principal mysteries of the faith, namely, that there is a God, that he rewards good and punishes evil, the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ. If the penitent does not know these four mysteries, he is not capable of receiving absolution, as Innocent XI made clear in his condemnation of proposition sixty-four.

Ask him if he knows the creed, the commandments, the sacraments, etc., at least with regard to the substance of these things.

Father Leonard of Port Maurice, the famous and brilliant missionary, makes a good point when he says that the confessor is bound to instruct the penitent in the mysteries of Faith, at least in the four principle mysteries which we mentioned. And he goes on to say: "It is not a good idea to send uninstructed people away with the advice that they should find someone else to teach them. After such advice, they will do nothing and will remain in their ignorance until their death. The best thing, then, is for the confessor to give them a short instruction in the principal mysteries. Have them make with him acts of faith, hope, love of God, and contrition. Then lay upon them the obligation of getting instruction from their pastor, not only in these four mysteries but in all the truths necessary by necessity of precept." (1)

If you are dealing with people who, even though they are uninstructed, would be offended if you questioned them as to their Faith, Saint Leonard says that it is opportune to tell them something like this: "Say, how about reciting the Christian acts together." And then while making the act of Faith the confessor will include all the necessary truths: My God, because you are the infallible truth and because you have revealed this truth to your holy Church, I believe all that the Church puts forth for me to believe. I believe especially that there is One God in Three Divine Persons. I believe that the Son became Man, died for us on a cross and rose from the dead and went to heaven from where He will one day come to judge all men, calling the good to enjoy heaven, sending the bad to be tortured in eternal fire.

Benedict XIV makes an important observation, namely that you must deny absolution to the person who has culpably neglected to learn the truths of faith which are necessary both by necessity of means and necessity of precept. If a person, on the other hand, is ignorant of truths necessary only by necessity of precept, he can be absolved if he sincerely promises to learn them. Here is what the Pope said on this second point: "The penitent can be absolved if he acknowledges his vincible ignorance and promises that he will make sure to learn even things necessary with necessity of precept." (2)

2.) Superstition

Ask the penitent if he has engaged in or taught superstitious practices, urged another's assistance, whom he led to cooperate in his sin.

Point out to them that every superstitious practice, even though done out of charity or in some necessity, is always illicit. In my Moral Theology I have given a fuller treatment of this. (3)

3.) Bad Confessions

Ask the penitent if he has omitted confessing any sins in the past out of shame. This is a good question to ask those who seldom get to confession. Ask if something is troubling them. And if there is, encourage them to make a good confession this time, to tell everything openly and with confidence, to get whatever this thing is off their chest, etc.

One priest used to say that by asking this question about past bad confessions, he kept many from making another bad confession.

If you find out that there have been sacrilegious confessions and want to determine how many, ask him how often he has gone to confession and communion since his last good confession. Ask him also if he has adverted to the sacrilege each time he went to confession or communion, for it is possible to make a bad confession and then afterwards forget about it. This is especially the case if the bad confession took place in childhood. This point is important for there is no obligation to repeat the confessions they made while oblivious of the former bad confession.

Ask him if he knew he was not fulfilling his Easter duty during these years of bad confessions. (4)

It is a good idea to ask this question about bad confessions as you begin helping the penitent. If you do it later and discover a bad confession, you merely waste time because the confession must be gone over again, and there will probably be little change from what has already been said.

Help them see what a serious sin it is to scorn the Blood of Christ by concealing their sins.

Finally ask him if he has fulfilled the penances given him. If he has not, find out if it was a case of forgetfulness, or because he did not want to, or because he put it off intending to do it later or to ask for a commutation. See if he thought he sinned by putting it off like this.

4.) Scandal and Cooperation

Ask him if he has induced anyone to sin, if he has accepted the help of others in sinning, or if he himself cooperated in the sins of others. Ask bartenders if they gave liquor to people who were always getting drunk. Ask women if they provoked men to bad thoughts by their indecent conversations, or jokes, by flirting, or by the clothes they wore.

As for cooperating in the sins of others. Here the confessor must know how to distinguish between formal and material cooperation. There is formal cooperation if one concurs in the sinful act itself, as in fornication, or when one cooperates in the bad will of the sinner, for example by protecting a thief or a murderer - for encouragement in sin means sharing the sinner's bad intention. Things like this are formal cooperation. They are always illicit because they are intrinsically wrong. (5)

There is material cooperation if one concurs in action that is indifferent in itself, but which the agent can use for an evil purpose, such as to sell wine to a man who wants to get drunk. Material cooperation can be licit if there is a just cause. However, the just cause must be proportionate to the cooperation. I have clarified this important consideration in my Moral Theology. (6)

SECOND COMMANDMENT

1.) Perjury

The confessor should ask if the penitent has sworn falsely in or out of court. If he has sworn falsely before a judge, he sins against justice as well as religion, and can at times be bound to make the truth known or to repair the damage he has caused.

If he swore, ask him if it was by God, by the saints, or by his soul. If he swore by his conscience, or by faith (without adding Holy Faith or Faith of Christ), he can most probably be excused of perjury and of grave sin.

The confessor should note that many ordinary people do not consider it a grave sin to swear falsely, when no harm comes to another. Nor do they think they are swearing falsely when they use

some such phrase, in order to threaten their children, even though they do not intend to carry it out. At least they do not advert to that.

2.) Vows

The confessor's first job here is to determine whether the penitent has really made a vow, for ordinary people often confuse the notions: desire, resolution, and vow. In trying to find this out, it is useless to ask the penitent if he bound himself under pain of mortal sin, because people quickly say no to such a question. It is better to ask if he thought - at the time he made the vow - that he would sin gravely in not keeping it. In this way, you can deduce whether he bound himself seriously or lightly.

If the confessor discovers what is certainly a real vow, he should find out whether the penitent thought it was a grave sin to delay fulfilling it, as he did, or if he thought he was justified by resolving to fulfill it later on.

It might be useful here to include some remarks on commutation and dispensation of vows.

The private vows reserved to the Holy See are:

- 1.) that of perfect and perpetual chastity, and
- 2.) that of entering an order with solemn vows -- provided both these vows are made absolutely, and after the person's eighteenth birthday. (7)

Non-reserved vows can be dispensed for a just cause, provided this dispensation does not harm some third person. Those who can dispense are:

- 1.) the local ordinary can dispense all his subjects and even *peregrini* in his diocese;
- 2.) the superior of an exempt clerical institute can dispense those under his care, namely, professed religious, novices and others who stay day and night in the religious house as maintenance people, as students, as guests, or as patients;
- 3.) those to whom the Holy See has given the faculty to dispense.

In this last group are confessors who belong to religious orders who, by reason of an ancient privilege which the code did not abrogate, can dispense all the vows of the faithful which the bishop can dispense.

As to commutation, the confessor must not be scrupulous in this regard, because any reasonable motive is sufficient. To lessen the danger of breaking the vow would even be a sufficient reason for commuting. He should not worry either, about whether the matter substituted is equal, since exact equality is not demanded, only a moral equality.

Ask the penitent if he ordinarily does some good work that is not obligatory, or if he is inclined to one, and then commute the vow to this. But the safest commutation for any kind of vow is frequentation of the sacraments. Note that perpetual vows can be commuted to temporary vows provided due proportion is kept, and that real vows can be commuted to personal and vice versa.

As to dispensation. For dispensation you need a greater cause. Examples would be: a grave danger of breaking the vow, great difficulty in keeping it, or the fact that the vow was made with little thought or deliberation. It is always a good idea, nevertheless, to add some commutation to the dispensation.

Both commutation and dispensation can be made outside of confession unless the contrary is indicated in one's faculties. Considering everything, it is best to give them during confession.

3.) Blasphemy (8)

The confessor should ask the penitent if he has blasphemed, that is, said or done anything that contained contempt or insult to God. It suffices that he be conscious of the meaning of the words or signs used; it is not necessary that he have the express intention of insulting God. To offer such contempt to someone close to God, such as a saint, or to something close to God, such as His Heaven, would be the same.

The confessor should distinguish this from a disrespectful use of the Name of God or of Jesus in anger or thoughtlessness. This is ordinarily only a venial sin.

Ask him if he blasphemed in front of children, because then there would be a sin of scandal besides.

THIRD COMMANDMENT

1.) Obligation to Hear Mass

With regard to this, the confessor should ask the penitent if he deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or holy days, if he adverted to the fact or if in missing it he doubted about the time for the Mass. For very often a penitent will put off hearing Mass till late, even though he may happen to find a Mass and attends it, nevertheless he exposed himself without just cause to the danger of missing it - and this many uninstructed penitents do not accuse themselves of.

If he says he did miss Mass, ask him the reason why, because sometimes it couldn't be helped. Examples of this are:

- 1.) mothers who cannot leave their children alone;
- 2.) those who have some sick person to care for;
- 3.) those who have a job that cannot be missed on Sunday;
- 4.) those who do not have clothes fit for church-going;
- 5.) travellers who cannot get to Mass without great difficulty or danger.

2.) The Obligation not to Work

Ask the penitent if he did forbidden servile work on Sundays or holy days. If he answers yes, ask him:

How long he worked and what type of work it was. According to the more common opinion of theologians one does not commit a mortal sin if he keeps under two hours. Others allow even a longer time if the work is light or if there is some more notable reason. If he says that he sometimes worked for more than two hours, sometimes less, ask him how many times he did this, thinking that he was committing a grave sin. Instruct him also in the fact that it is sinful to work for a long time, even when the work is done not for pay but solely for enjoyment.

Ask him what reasons he had for working. Was he following the custom of the locale, or was there necessity? -Certainly poverty can excuse; poor people are ordinarily excused if they cannot support themselves and their families without working on Sunday.

<http://www.obrascaticas.com/>
People who sew their clothes on Sunday because they could not sew them on other days are also excused, and similar cases. But you must correct the wrong notion that it is always permissible to work on holy days, if you are not working for a wage.

Many theologians allow a man to work in order not to be idle, if idleness is for him a probable danger of sin. I think this opinion is valid only in very rare circumstances when a person is so tempted that he cannot get rid of the temptation except by working.

Finally it sometimes happens that a man of the house will force his wife and children to work on holy days; in such a case they can be excused from the law forbidding servile work. At times employees are told to work on Sunday by their employers, and at times it is even impossible for them to get to Mass. In cases such as this the employee is bound to quit the job unless there is some written contract, or unless standing up to the boss like this would result in serious inconvenience. (9)

Here the confessor might also stop to ask the penitent if he broke the fast of abstinence on Fridays, on vigils, during Lent, and at the Ember days.

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

1.) Children

Ask children if they hate their parents. Here you would have two sins, one against charity, the other against piety.

Ask them if they disobeyed their parents by refusing to follow an express order concerning a serious matter, such as not going out at night, not engaging in serious games, not hanging around with bad companions, and so on.

But note: with regard to the choice of one's state in life, children are not bound to obey their parents. In fact parents sin gravely if - without some reasonable cause - they force their children into marriage, into the priesthood, or into the religious life. They would also sin if they unjustly kept their children from following the religious state if the children felt called to it.

Ask if they showed disrespect for their parents, in word or deed, or if they offered them a grave insult in their presence, as would be the case if they called them drunkards, brutes, crooks, fools, or if they expressed contempt for what they did or if they did anything else to offer them grave injury. However, to call them old or ignorant or stupid should not be condemned as mortal sin absolutely, unless it did offend them gravely.

The child who shows such a lack of respect for his parents must restore their wounded honor by asking their pardon, before those in whose presence he insulted them. The confessor would not act prudently, however, if he were to make the act of asking pardon too humiliating a thing. And especially if he were to demand that this humiliation be done before he would give the child absolution. It is better to exhort them to ask pardon, rather than to impose it as a grave obligation. (10)

2.) Parents

Ask parents if they are failing in their obligation of educating their children. In particular, ask them if they check to see if their children know the catechism, to see if they go to Mass and to the sacraments, to see if they avoid bad companions.

Ask parents if they have given scandal to their children by blaspheming in their presence and so forth. Ask them if they failed to correct their children, especially in matters of theft.

Ask if they allowed their teen-age daughter to bring home a boyfriend and be alone with him. Check above all if they have their children sleeping in the same bed with them, or if they have brothers and sisters sleeping together.

Ask them if they provide sufficient food for their children.

Ask them, finally, if they have unjustly forced a child into a state of life against the child's will, for this would be a mortal sin. While this may seem negligible to them, it is the cause of grave harm both to the child and to the church.

3.) Husbands and Wives

Ask husbands if they have provided for the family.

Ask wives if they have irritated their husbands, even to the point of making them blaspheme. And ask them if they have fulfilled their obligation in regard to the marriage act. Many a woman damns herself and her husband because of failure in this matter. If the husband is denied what is due him, he is drawn into a multitude of sins. In speaking of this, the confessor must be careful to speak in general terms: Are you obedient to your husband in the acts which pertain to marriage? Or do you have any anxiety with regard to your married life? This question is unnecessary in the case of a woman leading a solid spiritual life.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

1.) Sinful Desires

Ask a person if he delighted in some misfortune suffered by his neighbor, or if he wished evil upon him. In this matter, the penitent must specify the various things he has wished upon his neighbor - for instance, death, loss of honor, loss of wealth, etc. Each of these is numerically distinct when he efficaciously willed to inflict them on him, or when he specifically wanted one in particular to befall him. On the other hand, according to a probable opinion, it is not necessary to specify each desire, if he only desired them as one great misfortune, that is, if he desired them all as means contributing to his neighbor's fall.

Confessors often have trouble figuring out whether the curses of ordinary people are mortal sins or only venial. To find out:

- 1.) First see whether the penitent at the time he uttered the curse really wanted it to be fulfilled. But this alone is not enough to make a certain judgment. Consequently,
- 2.) ask whether the curse was aimed at a member of the family or at someone else. When a person curses a relative - especially his own children or his wife or parents - it is ordinarily not done maliciously.
- 3.) Finally find out what occasioned the curse. If it was made in a grave outburst of anger, then it is very possible that there was a malicious desire.

It will not suffice if the penitent tries to excuse his cursing by saying that he desired the evil only in the act of cursing and not afterwards. That in itself is enough to make the curse a mortal sin. The confessor should ask the number of sins and judge them at least as they are before God. If the person is a recidive in this vice, he should not be absolved unless he first corrects his ways or shows signs of extraordinary sorrow.

2.) Insults

Ask the penitent if he has seriously offended his neighbor, and if this was done in the presence of other people. If it was done before others, he is bound to restore the neighbor's good name in the presence of those others by asking his forgiveness or by giving some proof of his esteem for the one he has injured.

This obligation ceases if the confessor prudently judges that the injured party has waived his right, or if he refuses to receive a public apology either to avoid further disgrace or to keep others from remembering the incident. The obligation also ceases if it is feared that an apology will only inflame new hatred.

If the offense was unknown to others, the offender must still ask pardon, but only in private.

It is good to note that when two people are mutually insulting each other by calling each other names like thief, prostitute, etc., this is not always seriously sinful even though the accusations might be grave in themselves. The reason for this is that no one takes this seriously, the one who is doing the insulting does not mean what he says, and those who hear do not believe what is said. It is different however when particular incidents and accomplices are named.

Finally ask the penitent if he was responsible for causing enmity by telling someone what he heard from another.

3.) Hatred

Ask him if he hated anyone, or if he denied an enemy the ordinary signs of friendship.

Let us recall here the doubt which the authors consider: is the offended person bound to forgive the one who has offended him? Salmanticenses says that he is bound to forgive the injury but not to remit the public punishment because that looks to the common good. Speculatively this opinion is good. But in practice I have never dared absolve anyone who assured me he forgave his enemy, but at the same time demanded that justice take its course, saying that criminals should be punished. I could never persuade myself that their zeal for the common good and for justice was free from a desire for revenge, (for often they were themselves guilty of many offenses.) They cry out for justice not for criminals in general, but merely for their personal enemies. As many authors point out, this love for the common good is very possibly nothing more than a cloak for their own desires for revenge. Despite this however, I would absolve them in the following cases:

- 1.) if he is ready to forgive and only demands a just restitution for damages, unless it is a case where the offender is too poor to pay back even a part of the debt;
- 2.) if he forgives the offender on the condition that he move to some other locale. This, either because the person offended has sons or brothers just waiting to take revenge, or because the enemy is so insulting and quarrelsome that he does not think he could put up with his taunts.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

1.) Thoughts

Ask the penitent if he desired or took delight in impure things and whether or not he fully adverted to and consented to these things.

Ask if they had a desire for a young girl, a widow, or for a married woman, and find out just how far they intended to go. It is good to note that ordinary people commonly realize that rape is a greater sin than mere fornication; but on the other hand they do not know the special malice of adultery. Consequently it is not a good idea to tell those with a habit of adultery about its special malice, even when there is little hope that the admonition will effect anything.

If they have consented to bad thoughts, you must find out the number if you can. If this is impossible, find out how many times they consented in the space of a day, week, or month. If they cannot even do this much, ask them if they desired every woman they met or that came to mind - or if there was just one woman in particular that they thought of and always gave consent to the thought. Find out whether they were thinking of her all the time, or if it was just when they saw her.

Finally ask them if they did something to carry out their bad thoughts. As we pointed out in the Moral Theology (11), these things, even though indifferent in themselves, are contaminated by the evil end in view, and they must be confessed as external sins, (that is, as actions that are begun if the sin was not afterwards consummated.) (12)

2.) Obscene Speech

To find out how much scandal was given, ask how often and before whom this kind of conversation was engaged in: whether before men or women, married or unmarried, children or adults. Girls and boys are more easily scandalized than adults, especially those adults who are steeped in this vice.

Ask what they said, whether or not they named the genitals of the opposite sex. It is hard to excuse this from mortal sin.

Ask whether they said these things in anger or in fun. If they were said in anger, scandal and pleasure are not so easily present. The confessor should be careful not to absolve recidives in this sin, even if they saw it was all in fun, unless they first amend or show some extraordinary signs of sorrow.

Ask if they boasted of some sin. If they did, three sins are often present; namely, the scandal for all who hear, the boasting itself, and the complacency over the sin mentioned. They should therefore be questioned as to what particular sin they boasted of.

Finally ask them if they took delight in listening to the impure conversations of others. Did they realize their obligation to make fraternal correction at the time and think it was useful.

3.) Impure Actions

Ask with whom (i.e., with what kind of person) they sinned? Ask if they sinned more than once with the same person. Ask where the sin took place (in order to remove an occasion). Ask how many times the sin was consummated, and how many interrupted acts were present, apart from the sin. Ask whether they consented to the sin long ahead of time, for then the internal acts would be interrupted and it would be necessary to make the judgment: there were as many sins committed as there were interruptions intervening, such as sleep, distraction, etc. Judge this as it is before God, only asking the length of time the sin went on. The case would be different if the evil resolve was made two or three days before the sin took place, and was not retracted during that time, for then it is looked upon as one sin.

If they committed self-abuse, ask if they touched themselves in an improper way outside of self-abuse, admonishing them that these touches too are mortal sins. Ask if they desired or delighted in thinking of intercourse with one or more women or with boys, as they engaged in self-abuse. For they would then commit as many distinct sins.

It should be noted in passing that if anyone has coitus between the arms or legs of a woman, he commits - besides the sin against nature - a sin of inchoate or affective fornication, as theologians commonly teach. There would be two sins of different species, one against nature in effect, the other of fornication in intention. (13)

As to the sins of married partners, the confessor is not ordinarily bound to ask about the marriage debt. Nor is it fitting to ask if they rendered the marriage debt, unless the question is addressed to the wife in as modest a way as possible, for instance, "Did you obey your husband in everything?" As to other things, the confessor should not say anything unless he is asked.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

1.) Theft

Ask the person if he has stolen and from whom. Ask if it was from one person or from many, alone or with others, on one occasion

or on many. If he stole a grave amount each time, he committed a mortal sin each time. If he stole in small amounts each time, his sin will be mortal when all of these together form a grave sum, unless he had the intention of stealing a grave sum right from the start.

When the amount becomes grave, the penitent has a grave obligation to make restitution, at least of the last part which made the amount grave.

In small thefts more is demanded before they add up to a grave sum. The amount will have to be larger still if he steals from different people. In small thefts committed occasionally from different people, double the ordinary grave sum is required for a grave sin. And if a notable time has elapsed between thefts, namely two months, then there is probably no grave matter by reason of coalescence.

It is probable that the person who eats fruit from the orchard of another can be excused at least from grave sin. It would be different if the fruit were rare or worth much or if one took a considerable amount. In things like this which are so out in the open, there must be a greater quantity before the sin is grave.

For the same reason, servants can be excused who take things to eat in their employer's home, provided they do not take a great amount or extraordinary delicacies. Nor should you consider it a mortal sin for a man to cut wood or graze his herd on public land when this is forbidden - this type of prohibition is only penal law.

To figure out the gravity of a theft, keep in mind the status of the person who has been robbed. I have treated this at length in my Moral Theology. (14) When the theft is committed by one's child or wife, a much greater amount is needed in order to have a mortal sin, and only rarely will they be bound to restitution *sub gravi*.

2.) Restitution

Once the confessor has established the penitent's grave obligation to make restitution, find out if he is able to make it even if with some difficulty. Do not absolve until restitution is made, even if there are extraordinary signs of penitence. Goods are like the blood of one's veins - they leave only with violence and heart-ache. Because of this, experience teaches that a person will have a great deal of difficulty in making restitution after absolution.

The confessor can make an exception to this in favor of a person with such a delicate conscience that there is no room for doubt.

I said "even if with some difficulty." But if the penitent would have to suffer grave need in order to make the restitution, i.e., if he would lose his justly acquired social position, he could then delay making restitution, provided the person to whom restitution is due is not in grave need himself. However, even when the creditor is in grave need, it is a probable opinion that the thief has no obligation to make restitution when he himself is in grave need and restitution would reduce him to quasi-extreme need. But this latter is licit only under two conditions:

- 1.) that the thing stolen does not exist in the form in which it was stolen, and especially,
- 2.) the creditor's need did not arise from the theft.

When you have established that the penitent can licitly delay making restitution, you should try to get him to pay back a little at a time, or get him to do some work for the man he robbed, or have him give the man a gift now and then.

It is impossible to mention here everything the confessor should know about restitution, for it is a vast and detailed treatise. I will however note some of the things which happen more frequently and are more practical:

--When the robbery was made by a group of men, you decide if this particular man is bound to restore the whole amount by this consideration: did he go along with the others because he was urged to, that is, the robbery would have taken place in the same way without him? In this case, he is bound only to restore his share. But if there is a common agreement concerning the theft (each encouraging the other) then each is bound to the restitution of the whole amount (*in solidum*.) In practice, it is often difficult to convince ordinary people - especially those with a not too tender conscience - that they are obliged to restore what the others have stolen. On the other hand, the owner himself will be satisfied if each of the thieves returns the part he took. The confessor can rest content, then, if he makes known to the penitent his obligation to make restitution; he need not go into detail about the exact amount he is bound to restore, leaving that up to the person's own conscience.

--If a person inflicted some damage on another's property and in no way benefited from it, he is not bound to make compensation,

provided always that he did not foresee the damage he caused, or provided he is not tried in court and sentenced because of it.

--Sometimes the robbery is uncertain; that is, the person who was robbed is unknown. In this case, the penitent is obliged to make restitution either by having Masses said, or by giving alms to the poor or to charitable institutions. If the thief himself is poor, he could apply the money for himself and his family.

If he knows the person whom he robbed, he must make restitution to him. Surprisingly enough, many confessors tell the penitent to make restitution in the form of alms or of Mass stipends. I hold the opinion that in such a situation, the penitent is still obliged to make restitution to the owner, because in every theft, even accidental theft, the injured ownership must be restored to the owner. I have never been able to convince myself of the opposite opinion.

I have said it would not be seriously sinful for a man to make restitution by giving alms to the poor when it is a question of small thefts, even though the coalesced sum is grave and the owners are known, for the reasons given in the Moral Theology. (15) I would even excuse him from venial sin if he had a reasonable cause for doing this. For example, if it would be a notable inconvenience for him to make restitution to the owner, or if the poor in the area are so needy that he could presume the owner's consent to make the restitution in their favor.

One who cheats many of his customers in tiny amounts and is not sure which customers he cheated, is obliged to pay them back by lowering his prices or by adding something to the amount he sells. He should not make restitution in favor of the poor, as some allow. If he did do this, he would not be guilty of serious sin, as I mentioned before; and with a just cause he would not even commit venial sin.

--If a person takes or keeps something that belongs to another, presuming that the owner would willingly give it to him if he asked for it, he is not bound to return it.

--If a person forgets about the restitution he was obliged to make, and gives the person he robbed a gift, he would not be bound to make further restitution.

--If the stolen article no longer exists and the thief made no gain from the theft, there is a grave obligation of restitution only when three conditions are verified:

- 1.) the theft was a grave internal sin against commutative justice;
- 2.) there was an external action or influence which efficaciously caused the damage; and
- 3.) this action or influence was fully or gravely unjust and there is certainty on this point.

So much for the taking of another's property.

As to keeping it, the confessor cannot oblige the penitent to make restitution if he has on his side a probable opinion and legitimate possession. Certainly if he obtained the possession in good faith and tried seriously to locate the owner, there is no obligation to make restitution. This holds unless he is certain of the right another has to it.

Even when the obligation to restitution is certain, the confessor at times should not tell the penitent of it. This occurs when the penitent is surely in good faith and the confessor is certain that his instruction will be of no use. The authors teach that he should not instruct in this case. The reason is, he should not expose the soul to danger by letting what is only a material sin become a formal sin.

With regard to contracts and restitution, the confessor must consult with others, study books on the matter, and then make his decision. I will make only one observation here concerning contracts. If the confessor comes across a contract that has become the custom in some area, he should not condemn it too quickly. He should study all the circumstances. Some of these contracts seem exorbitant and unjust at first; but when you take all the circumstances into account, they are not unjust.

As to prescription, see what I have said in my Moral Theology.

(16)

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

First off, ask the penitent if he has hurt another's reputation. Ask if he did this by exposing some true fact or by inventing a story about them. If he exposed some true fact, find out if it was occult or public (because people were talking about it or because of a court trial.)

Ask him if he told his story before one person or many. Find out how many. Ask if he published gossip as if it were all his own or as if he picked it up from others.

As to restoring another's reputation. If the words were slander, the slanderer must reveal the truth. If the words were sinful detraction, the detractor must repair the damage as best he can, without telling a lie. For example, he can say: I made a mistake, I was mistaken. Some even permit: What I said was a lie - meaning "lie" in the equivocal sense in which Scripture says that every sin is a lie. I usually suggest this phrase: I was just talking through my hat. This is ambiguous, for whatever he says comes "Through his hat," that is, from his head.

Sometimes there is a real fear that restoring one's good name will have no more bad effects for the one injured than good ones. For example, when men have forgotten some rather scandalous event. The confessor should presume that this is the case when a long time has passed in which no one has spoken of the matter. It would not be right for the detractor to dig up the past in his attempt to restore the other's good name. Consequently, the best thing to do here is to have the sinner take some occasion to praise the goodness of the man he has detracted and thereby to raise him in the eyes of others.

The confessor should try to have this repairing of another's reputation done before absolution, where this is convenient, because to leave it till afterwards will make it difficult, even though not as difficult as is restoring money after absolution.

Note finally, that in the mind of St. Thomas, it is real detraction and a sin to reveal the sins of one's neighbor with the intention of hurting his reputation. It is not detraction if you mention the sins of another in order to avoid other evils. For instance, you may inform parents of their children's misdemeanors, employers of their employees', superiors of their subjects', so that these men in authority may make the correction or point out the harm that will come to others. However, the harm one wants to avoid by this informing must be of great moment or at least not much less weighty than the harm that will come to the reputation of the one who is informed on.

We discussed the obligation of restoring another's honor when it was ruined by insult in the section on the fifth commandment.

Authors usually discuss rash judgments when dealing with the eighth commandment. Many people confess that they have thought unkindly of their neighbor. As to this, it is necessary to keep in mind that when there are sufficient grounds for making a judgment

concerning an action, the judgment is not rash. It is just and free from sin. In most cases however, it is not a question of judgment but of suspicions. Parents and superiors will have to have these suspicions at times if they are going to stop certain sins; for example, to keep the servants from stealing, or to keep their daughter from committing sin with a boyfriend, and so forth. However the penitent should be advised to keep these suspicions to himself, unless there is some reason for conferring with another.

COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

With regard to the obligation to hear Mass on Sunday and to rest from servile work, confer the section on the third commandment.

When questioning a penitent or answering his questions about the fast and abstinence laws, the confessor should remember these points. (17)

Abstinence (binding all those past their seventh birthday) is called complete when no meat and no soup or gravy made from meat are allowed. Complete abstinence is to be observed on all Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the eve of the Immaculate Conception, Christmas Eve or December 23rd (all are free to choose either one), and on Holy Saturday (unless the Bishop dispenses). Partial abstinence (i.e., when meat and soup or gravy made from meat may be taken at one meal) is to be kept on Ember Wednesdays and Saturdays and on the vigil of Pentecost.

The fast binds all over 21 and under 59 years of age. It is to be observed on the weekdays of Lent, on Ember days, on the vigils of Pentecost and Immaculate Conception, and on the day before Christmas eve. On these days one full meal is allowed. This means one's ordinary full meal, or in the case of those whose ordinary meal is very small, it can mean the objective norm of 32 ounces so that their two lesser meals are not too small to maintain strength. Besides the main meal, two other meatless meals (sufficient to maintain strength) may be taken, but together they should not equal another full meal. There is, further, to be no eating between meals (this includes milk shakes and malteds).

Causes which excuse from the fast and abstinence are: sickness, convalescence, a mother who is nursing, a woman who is pregnant, those who know that fasting will cause them sickness (headaches, etc.), and working-men whose work is of an exhausting nature, even if they feel they could fast without injuring their health. When there is doubt about any of these excusing causes, the penitent could consult his parish priest or his confessor.

The law of fast is not divisible which means that once it is broken, it no longer holds that day. The law of abstinence is divisible which means that there is sin each time meat is eaten.

As to the gravity of these sins. To deliberately eat what amounts to a second full meal would be a grave breaking of the fast; and each time something is taken between meals would be a venial sin. To eat more than two ounces of meat would be a grave breaking of the abstinence laws; eating a smaller amount of meat would be only venial.

CONCLUSION

Once the confessor has helped the penitent examine his conscience, he should dispose him to receive absolution. That is, he should rouse him to sorrow for his sins and urge him to accept the penance. The confessor must be sure not to omit this examination when he thinks it is necessary. Sadly enough, many confessors fail in this regard.

1. Leonard of Port Maurice, Discorso mistico e morale, n. 26.
2. Benedict XIV, Const. Etsi minime, n. 12 (Feb. 7, 1742)
3. MT, Lib III, n. 14ff.
4. Canon 861.
5. This sentence has been added from Gaude's footnote to n. 23.
6. MT, Lib II, n. 63, v and Lib III, n. 571.
7. This and the following paragraph have been brought into line with present legislation. Can. 1309, 1313.

8. This section on blasphemy has been very much shortened. For interesting reading on Italian customs, confer the Latin.
9. Last paragraph changed somewhat, with ideas on employer-employee relations introduced from the Spanish, Moriones edition, pg. 119.
10. This paragraph abbreviated, due to the fact that "kissing the feet" is no longer a common confessional penance.
11. MT, Lib V, n. 32.
12. MT, Lib V, n. 42.
13. Tamburinius, Method. confess., lib 2 ch 7, n 64; Holzmann, De Praecept. decal, n 720 ad 4; and Sporer, Theol. mor., part-4, ch 3, n 636.
14. MT, Lib III, n. 527.
15. MT, Lib III, n. 534, qu 2.
16. MT, Lib III, ex n. 504.
17. Brought in line with present legislation by the editor from Father Browne's Handbook of Notes on Theol.

CHAPTER THREE

Dealing with

Various Professionals

In questioning his penitents, it is sometimes not enough for the confessor merely to ask whether they have fulfilled their obligations. If he has reason to suspect that the person is lax or careless in his duties, he should pose pointed questions as to their main obligations.

PRIESTS

Ask him if he has said his Divine Office and if he has satisfied his Mass obligations or put them off for a notable time.

Ask if he is involved in business enterprises, or if he engages in games forbidden by canon law. (can 138 and 142)

Ask if he has said Mass hurriedly. If he rushes through it in less than fifteen minutes, he could hardly be excused from mortal sin, for it is impossible to offer Mass - even a Requiem - in such a short time without mangling the words and ceremonies. Certainly it could not be said in that amount of time with the gravity and decorum called for by so solemn a Sacrifice. Added to this is the grave scandal given to the faithful who, says Bellarmine, must think that such priests do not believe in the presence of Christ's Divine Majesty. (1)

It is not out of place to ask him if there is a scarcity of confessors in the locale where he is. If there is such a scarcity, he can be obliged to himself for the hearing of confessions, as I have proved in my Moral Theology. (2) St. Thomas points out that God instituted priestly power in His Church, so that priests would administer the sacraments to the people: "*Et ideo posuit Ordinem in ea ut quidam aliis sacramenta traderent.*" This is why priests are called the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the helpers of God.

If, then, the purpose of the priesthood is the administration of the Sacraments, how can you excuse a priest from sin who does not equip himself for this office when the faithful around him have no one to confess to and consequently are living in sin and in danger of damnation? How can you excuse him when he frustrates the very purpose of his priesthood, if in his laziness he will not make himself available for confession, which after Baptism is the most necessary of all the sacraments for salvation?

The words of the Lord are terrifying when He speaks of priests who are negligent in the matter of their neighbor's salvation. "If I say to the wicked man, you shall surely die; and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his wicked conduct so that he may live: that wicked man shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death." (Exech. 3/18)

If a priest tries to make excuse, saying that he lacks the talent and ability for it, St. Francis de Sales accuses him of false humility. He says all this is a figment of self-love and false humility by which he attempts to cover up his own laziness. When God gives a talent, He gives it to be used. The one who makes use of it obediently is the one who is really humble. The proud have a reason for doing nothing because they are relying on their own strength. But the humble are the courageous souls, because they do not rely on their own strength, but they place their trust in God who loves to manifest His omnipotence through our weakness.

This is why the humble man is ready and willing to undertake anything.

If a confessor does hear confessions, and his fitness is prudently doubted, ask him if he has studied sufficiently and especially if he has kept up his study. As we pointed out in chapter one, to do a good job of hearing confessions, it is not enough to have studied once.

Ask him if he has absolved anyone who was in a proximate occasion of sin or a recidive who did not exhibit extraordinary signs of sorrow.

If per chance he has committed the crime of sollicitation *ad turpia*, remind him of the penalties attached to this: that he is suspended from the celebration of Mass and from hearing confessions, deprived of all benefices and dignities, and that in graver cases he may even be degraded. (c. 2368)

PASTORS

Ask him whether he fulfills his duty of correcting his subjects, especially those who harbor hatred, engage in obscene speech, and so on. (3)

Ask him if he sees to it that his subjects - one and all - fulfill their Easter Duty. How often in our missions we run into people, especially prominent people, who have for years been neglecting this precept, and the pastor has never called it to their attention or taken steps to help them.

Ask if he administered the sacraments in person when a subject was in danger of death or when they requested them - especially the sacrament of penance. I say "in person" because when he can do it himself, he does not fulfill his duty by entrusting it to others.

Ask whether he has duly assisted those who were dying.

Ask if he has preached on Sundays. Theologians say that a pastor sins mortally if he fails to preach for one straight month or for enough Sundays to add up to three months in the space of a year, provided of course he is not legitimately impeded.

If his is a large parish, ask him if he has given the surplus income to the poor, or to pious institutions as he should.

Ask him if he has been careful to teach Christian doctrine - the mysteries of Faith and the means of salvation - to children and to uninstructed adults. Inquire especially as to whether he has taught them the sorrow necessary to receive absolution, and if he has taught children what they need to know to make their First Communion, as soon as they are old enough to make it. Negligence in this duty is usually due to the fact that a pastor does not want to go to the trouble of instructing them. (4)

BISHOPS

When it seems to the confessor that a bishop has been negligent in fulfilling his obligations, he should ask first if he has used the necessary diligence to find out not only about the knowledge of the candidates for ordination, but also about their positive goodness of life.

He should ask if he gives confession faculties only to priests thoroughly examined in doctrine and practice - otherwise they will do more harm than good.

Ask how he administers the income for his benefices. After he has taken out what is necessary for decent support, he should distribute what remains to the poor.

Ask him whether he has complied with his duty of residence. He may not absent himself from his diocese for even three months, when it is for mere recreation and the like. (c. 338)

Ask him if he is careful to check on scandals in his diocese and if he remedies them in the best way he can, even to the extent of calling on the civil authorities if this is necessary.

Lastly, ask him if he makes sure to give good example. Prelates have a special obligation in this regard. If they are not what they should be, how can they correct those of their clerics who are lax?

CLOISTERED NUNS

Ask her if she has failed in her vows, especially that of poverty by taking things or giving them away without permission.

Ask if she has recited the Divine Office, for the opinion that nuns are not obliged to say the office in private is not sufficiently probable.

Ask if she has any dangerous friendships, at least by word or by letter. If she does have them and refuses to give them up, the confessor should be firm in denying absolution. Even if there is no gravely sinful purpose in these, there is always danger, and certainly there is scandal and bad example for the other religious.

Ask her if she bears a grudge against any of her sisters.

If the nun has some duty, ask her how she takes care of it. For instance, if she is an extern, does she carry suspect letters and messages; if she is doorkeeper, does she negligently leave the door open with some danger of scandal to the nuns or to outsiders. If she is prioress, does she take due precaution when men are allowed to enter the convent, or does she introduce abuses. Even small abuses must not be introduced, because they tend to have serious effect on regular observance and so they can be serious sin for her.

JUDGES

Ask them if they have discriminated against some clients. Ask them if they have executed the cases confided to them with dispatch. Ask them whether they have let themselves be carried away by passion in making their judgments, or if they have passed judgment without studying the matter enough.

NOTARIES

Ask them how they have conducted themselves in taking depositions. Ask if they have omitted key questions. Ask if they have diminished or decreased the depositions presented to them.

DOCTORS

Ask him whether he is sufficiently versed in medical knowledge and practice. Ask him is he is conscientious in studying the more difficult cases that come up, as he is obliged to.

Ask him if he has authorized a dispensation from fast, abstinence, or from office or Mass merely out of human respect, when there was no need for the dispensation, or at least not enough of a need to make the fast (or whatever it was he dispensed) harmful or seriously inconvenient.

Ask him if he has given dangerous remedies to those whose sickness had not yet reached the critical stage.

Ask him if out of friendship he has sent his prescriptions to druggists with little conscience and less training, or who are stocked with bad products.

Ask him if he has taken care of the poor, especially when they were in grave or extreme need.

Ask him if he has advised those who are dangerously sick to go to confession in due time. If he fails to do this at the start, the sick person will be frightened and lose all hope, when later on pressure is put upon him to make his confession. And the sick man will easily slip into the danger of death unconfessed. (5)

As to druggists, ask them if they have given pregnant women medicine for an abortion or sold one drug in place of another or for more than it was worth.

1. De Gemitu Columbae, Lib II, ch 5.
2. MT, Lib VI, n. 625.
3. Reference to engaged couples omitted; cf. pg n. 1.
4. A few lines concerning the age of first communion which was then 12 have been omitted; as well as a section on the pastor's duty of giving testimonials for ordinands.
5. The oath for doctors prescribed by Pius V in his Bull, *Supra Gregen*, has been omitted.
6. Omitted the last four sections on businessmen, tailors, salesmen and hairdressers--all of which are built on an economic and social atmosphere very different from ours, and for that reason are not easily adaptable.

CHAPTER FOUR

Occasions of Sin

The confessor must be very careful in dealing with those who are in proximate occasions of sin, whether they be habituaries or recidives. Confessors very often make mistakes in regard to these points. Consequently in the following two chapters we will treat, first of all, occasions of sin, and then habituaries and recidives.

It is a fact that if men took the precaution of fleeing occasions of sin, they would not fall nearly so often, for once the occasion is done away with, the devil is almost helpless. But when they voluntarily place themselves in proximate occasions, the enemy almost always claims the victory. An occasion - especially in regard to sex pleasures - is like a net which ensnares a man into sin and blinds his mind so that he can sin without realizing what he is doing. Let us proceed to some practical cases.

KINDS OF OCCASIONS

Occasion is first divided into voluntary and necessary. A voluntary occasion is one which can easily be avoided; a necessary occasion is one which cannot be avoided without grave harm or scandal. The next division is into proximate and remote. An occasion is remote when it only rarely provokes a man to sin or when he runs into it almost everywhere. It is proximate *per se* if in it the generality of men will fall into sin in most cases. It is proximate *per accidens* (i.e., relative) if it is not proximate for some but is proximate for others, because they frequently fall in this kind of an occasion or because, knowing their own weakness, they prudently fear that they will fall. Some authors hold that an occasion is not proximate unless a man almost always or very often falls into sin. But the common and true opinion teaches that a proximate occasion is one in which a man frequently falls into sin.

However it should be noted that even though an occasion is sometimes proximate for most men, it can be remote for some good and prudent individual person. And on the other hand, occasions which are commonly remote, may be proximate for someone else, who knows from past experience or from a sinful bent (especially in regard to impurity) that he is weak and inclined toward a particular sin. In a case like this, a person is obliged to avoid not only proximate occasions but even remote occasions (which for him are actually proximate).

Here by way of example are a few proximate occasions of sin.

- 1.) A man who cohabits with a woman who is not his wife.
- 2.) One who frequently falls into blasphemy and lying when engaged in games.
- 3.) One who often gets drunk or gets into a fight or falls into some impurity when in a particular tavern or house.

.....VOLUNTARY PROXIMATE OCCASIONS OF SIN

This type of occasion cannot be absolved unless the occasion-ary first gets rid of the occasion or at least promises to get rid of

it (which we will treat in the next paragraph). Similarly a person cannot be absolved if every time he visits a certain house -- even if only once a year -- he commits sin there; for such visiting is already a proximate occasion for him. Neither can he be absolved whose presence in a proximate occasion of sin gives grave scandal to others-- even though he himself does not fall. Some theologians add that absolution must also be denied to a man who will not avoid an external occasion of sin to which is joined some bad habit or serious temptation or violent passion, even though up to now he has not sinned in this occasion. The mere danger of falling is enough to oblige him to remove the occasion. Thus for instance, they say that if a maid is tempted by the man of the house she works for and she knows she will easily fall, she is obliged to quit her job if that can easily be done. It would be rash for her to think she is safe in such a situation. (1)

Generally speaking, young men and women who are beginning to "keep company" should not be indiscriminately accused of grave sin. Still I think that it is only with difficulty that they free themselves from a proximate occasion of grave sin. This is quite clear from experience: out of a hundred young people you will scarcely find two or three who have not fallen into mortal sin in this occasion. If it is not so at first, it will soon become so. At first, they see each other because of their mutual attraction, then the attraction becomes passion, and passion then fixes itself in the heart, becomes an obsession in the mind, and leads them into countless sins.

For this reason, Pico of Mirandola, bishop of Albano, issued an edict warning confessors in his diocese that such young people were not to be absolved if -- after three warnings from others -- they did not discontinue their company-keeping, especially if there were dates at night alone (with the clear danger of kissing and petting), or if this was done against the command of their parents, or with a companion whose speech was provocative. (2)

As a general rule, when confessors are dealing with the danger of formal sin and especially with sins of impurity, they must be as strict with the penitent as is necessary to safeguard his eternal salvation. A confessor whose "kindness" prompts him to allow them to remain or to put themselves in an occasion, is actually being very unkind. St. Thomas of Villanova calls a confessor who condescends to such a thing zealous without real zeal. (3) This kind of charity is against charity. Penitents often try to make the confessor think that removing the occasion will bring great scandal. But let the confessor stand his ground and pay no attention to such fears. There will be far more scandal if they see a person come out of confession

and go back to the same occasions of sin. Either they will know nothing of the penitent's sins and will suspect nothing when he gives up the occasion; or they will know of them, and by avoiding the occasion, the penitent will regain his good name rather than lose it.

Many moralists hold that occasionaries can be absolved once or twice before removing the occasion of sin, even if it is voluntary, provided of course that there is a firm resolve and a promise to remove it.

But here we have to make a distinction that Saint Charles Borromeo made, between occasions that are continuous and those that are interrupted. A continuous occasion is, for example, when a man keeps a mistress in his home, or when a maid gives in every time she is tempted by the man of the house. An example of an interrupted occasion is the man who blasphemes in a game, or gets drunk or gets into a fight when he is in a tavern. (4)

Keeping this distinction in mind, St. Charles teaches and rightly that a penitent who is in an interrupted occasion of sin can be absolved two or three times once he resolves to avoid the occasion. If, after this, he has not avoided the occasion and falls back into sin, he cannot be absolved until he first gets rid of the occasion.

But for those in continuous occasions of sin, St. Charles teaches that absolution must be denied until they have removed the occasion. We have shown that this opinion is absolutely to be held in our Moral Theology. (5) The reason is this: this penitent is indisposed for absolution if he does not first remove the occasion of sin, because he places himself in the proximate danger of breaking his resolve and consequently of remaining in the same occasion of sin. Let us explain more clearly. A man certainly sins gravely if he is in a voluntary proximate occasion of sin and will not remove it. Now this matter of removing an occasion is a very difficult one; it demands doing a great deal of violence to oneself. And this becomes all the more difficult if he has already been absolved. The threat of being refused absolution is gone and he will try to convince himself that he will resist the temptation rather than remove the occasion of sin. Consequently he remains in the occasion and is certain to fall back into sin. Daily experience proves that most penitents who have been absolved by some careless confessor make no attempt to avoid the occasion and immediately fall into an even worse state. For this reason, we hold that a penitent sins gravely if he seeks absolution before removing the occasion of sin and the confessor who absolves him sins even more gravely.

While this is the ordinary procedure in handling continuous occasions of sin, theologians make some exceptions, allowing the confessor to absolve before the occasion has been removed. Namely:

- 1.) The first case is the penitent who shows extraordinary signs of sorrow and the confessor makes the prudent judgment that there is no longer a proximate danger of breaking the resolution to remove the occasion. The extraordinary signs are then indications that a strong grace will help the penitent to be firm in removing the occasion. Still, when absolution can be deferred without much difficulty, I would like to see it deferred until the occasion has been effectively removed.
- 2.) Another exception is the case in which the penitent cannot return, or at least cannot return for quite a time. He can then be absolved if he is judged to be well disposed and promises to remove the occasion immediately. The danger of breaking the promise is considered remote in relation to the inconvenience that the penitent would undergo in having to leave without absolution or in having to seek absolution from another priest or in remaining for a long time without the graces of this sacrament. Since there is a certain moral necessity for receiving absolution, the penitent has the right to be absolved immediately, even before he removes the occasion. In this case the fact that he cannot remove the occasion before absolution is on a par with a necessary occasion; ---This exception does not hold however if the penitent has been warned previously by another confessor to remove the occasion, and has not done so. He is then considered a recidive and cannot be absolved until he shows extraordinary signs of sorrow, as we will see in the next chapter.

NECESSARY PROXIMATE OCCASIONS OF SIN

So much for voluntary occasions of sin. When speaking of necessary occasions, we must distinguish between physically necessary and morally necessary. An occasion is physically necessary when a person is in prison, or when he is in danger of death and there is no time or no way for him to break with his mistress. An occasion is morally necessary when it cannot be removed without scandal or

grave harm to one's life, reputation or fortune. When the occasion is necessary, the penitent can be validly absolved even with these occasions still present, for in this case he is not obliged to remove it. He must however promise to use the means necessary to change it from proximate to remote. These means are:

- 1.) in the case of impurity in particular to avoid the company of the accomplice, even, if possible, the mere sight of her;
- 2.) to frequent the sacraments;
- 3.) to pray frequently, renewing each day his promise not to sin again and to avoid the occasion as far as possible.

It is a good practice to make this renewal each morning before a crucifix.

The reason for this procedure with necessary occasions is that the occasion in itself is not sin strictly speaking, nor does it compel a person to sin. Consequently, an occasion of sin can easily co-exist with a true sorrow and the resolve of not sinning. We must still hold that everyone is under obligation to avoid proximate occasions of sin, but we must understand this of voluntary occasions -- of those which the penitent himself has freely chosen. For when the occasion is morally necessary, the danger is rendered remote by use of suitable remedies, and God will surely not withhold His grace from one who sincerely resolves not to offend Him. The scriptures do not say that he will perish who is in danger, but rather, he who loves the danger; whereas one who does not want to be in danger can hardly be said to love it. Commenting on this, St. Basil said: "One who places himself in danger or allows himself to remain in it because of some urgent cause or necessity - when he would not wish to at another time - is said not to love the danger, but to suffer it against his will. God then will pour out more grace upon him lest he perish in the danger." (6)

The moralists all agree that it is permissible to absolve those who will not give up some position, duty, or habitation which is an occasion of sin for them without doing themselves serious harm -- as long as there is always a true purpose of amending and of using the means to amend. Examples of this are: doctors who are in an occasion of sin when tending to women, or priests when hearing their confessions -- for if either of them drop these duties they could not live according to their state.

Still all agree that it is a good idea in cases like these to defer absolution at least to make the penitent more conscientious in using the means given him to render the occasion remote. I go further and say that the confessor not only can but even should defer absolution when he can easily do this, especially in matters of impurity. The confessor is obliged as doctor of souls to prescribe suitable remedies, and in my opinion, the best remedy of all for one who remains in a proximate occasion of sin is to defer absolution, since experience proves that many, once they have received absolution, fail to use the means prescribed and fall into sin again. But when absolution is deferred, they will be more careful to use the means and to resist temptations, because of the fear that they will be deprived of absolution again next time they go to confession.

Some will perhaps consider me too strict in this matter. But this has always been my practice and it will continue to be with regard to those in proximate occasion of sin, even though they be necessary occasions, and even though there are extraordinary signs of sorrow -- as long as I judge there is no special reason for absolving them immediately. This procedure is, I feel, much more advantageous for the penitent's eternal salvation. If all confessors would do this, think how many sins would be avoided and how many souls would be saved!

CONCLUSION

I repeat what I said above: when the confessor is trying to free a penitent from formal sin, he must use the more benign opinion in so far as prudence dictates. But if the benign opinion renders the danger of formal sin more proximate (as is the case with proximate occasions of sin), it is useful and sometimes necessary to use the stricter opinion. For in this case the stricter opinion is definitely more advantageous for the salvation of their souls.

If a person who remains in a necessary occasion of sin piles up, even with the help of the remedies, a record of similar sins and there seems to be small hope of improvement, he should be denied absolution as long as the occasion of sin lasts. I believe this is based on the Gospel command: if your eye scandalizes you, pluck it out. (Mk. 9/46) This excludes the case in which the penitent shows extraordinary signs of sorrow, for they can always be taken as a safe hope of improvement.

1. Omitted here a reference to engaged couples. As Ford & Kelly pointed out (Contemporary Moral Theology, I) Alphonsus' position seems "almost unbelievably stern" but the editor is not so reluctant as they to "explain it as pertaining to another time and another social milieu." Because of that it has been omitted.
2. No reference was given for the quote from Pico.
3. Thomas of Villanova, conc. fer. sexta p. dom IV Quad num 12.
4. St. Charles, Acta Eccl. Mediol., part 4.
5. MT, Lib VI, n. 454.
6. St. Basil, Constitutiones monastic., ch 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

Habituaries

and

Recidives

HABITUARIES

Habituaries are those who have contracted a habit of sin which they have not yet confessed. Theologians teach that they can be absolved the first time they confess the bad habit, or once they have rejected it -- provided they have true sorrow for it and the firm resolve of employing the means that will bring about correction.

However, if the habit is deeply ingrained, the confessor can defer absolution to see how faithful the penitent will be in carrying out the prescribed means and to impress upon the penitent the seriousness of his bad habit.

It should be noted here that in regard to external sins, five falls a month can constitute a bad habit, provided there is some interval between each of the falls. In the matter of fornication, sodomy, and bestiality, a considerably smaller number is enough to establish a habit. For example, a person who fornicates once a month over the space of a year can well be called an habituary.

RECIDIVES

Recidives are those who have gone to confession and then relapsed into the same, or almost the same, sinful habit, with no improvement.

According to the common opinion, recidives cannot be absolved if they manifest nothing more than ordinary sorrow; that is, if they merely confess their sins and say they are sorry and do not intend to sin again. The reason for this is that a habit of sin relapsed into with no sign of improvement gives grounds to the suspicion that the penitent's supposed sorrow and purpose of amendment are not sincere. Consequently absolution should be delayed for a time, until there is a good sign of improvement.

In regard to this point there has been regrettable harm done to souls. So often bad confessors injudiciously absolve scores of recidives, with the result that the recidives themselves see how quickly they are absolved and begin to lose their horror for sin and spend their lives sunk in the mire of sin.

Some theologians allow absolution to recidives who give only ordinary signs of sorrow - up to the third or fourth relapse. But I could never bring myself to agree with this opinion. An habituary who falls back into sin without any correction even after one confession is a true recidive, and there is a founded suspicion that he is not properly disposed.

RECIDIVES IN VENIAL SIN

Before going on, it should be noted that this rule holds even for recidives in venial sin. While it is commonly held that those who commit venial sin can be absolved more easily (because their occasions are more frequent), still there is a fear that confessions

of this kind are sacrilegious or at least invalid, because the common opinion teaches that it is a grave sin and a sacrilege to receive absolution for venial sins without true sorrow and purpose of amendment. It is not enough to be sorry for the astounding number of venial sins, while lacking sorrow for any sin in itself.

The confessor must be careful not to absolve these penitents injudiciously. Even if they are in good faith, he cannot be excused from sacrilege, for he would be imparting absolution to penitents who cannot be considered to have the dispositions necessary for absolution. Therefore, if he does not want to commit a sin himself, the confessor should take care either to dispose the penitent to be sorry for some particular venial sin which he hates very much, or to ask him to confess some serious sin of his past life. (He can confess this in general without giving the number.) In this way the confessor will have certain matter for absolution. Otherwise he would be obliged to delay absolution for some time.

.....DELAY OF ABSOLUTION

I said "for some time", because it is not necessary to delay absolution for months or even years as the rigorists demand, whether it be to recidives in venial sin or to recidives in mortal sin. Ordinarily a delay of eight or ten days will be enough, if the sin proceeds from weakness. Reputable theologians teach that a month's delay is excessive and dangerous, because, after this long a stretch, it is hard to get a recidive to return. (1)

Benedict XIV favors this opinion. In speaking of confessors who delay absolution when that is proper, he says: "Let the confessor urge them to return as quickly as possible, so that they may be given the benefits of sacramental absolution." (2) Notice the words "as quickly as possible" and "that they may be given". I hold that absolution can be delayed for fifteen or twenty days at most.

But this rule does not apply to the "Easter Lambs". Experience tells us to give them a longer delay, because there is sufficient reason to suspect that they are keeping out of sin in order to avoid the censure (3) rather than with the sincere intention of changing their lives.

Another exception must be made for those who succumbed to an external proximate occasion of sin. Most of these should be tested for a greater time, because, as we noted in the last chapter, an occasion is a more difficult force to resist. However even here a month's delay will be long enough, but the confessor must on no account tell the penitent not to return till the month is out. This would frighten him off. The better thing is to have the penitent return after one or two weeks, and then neatly put absolution off till the end of the month.

EXTRAORDINARY SIGNS OF SORROW

As we have said, ordinary signs of sorrow and purpose of amendment are not sufficient to justify absolution of recidives. The common opinion demands extraordinary signs, and says that these suffice. The reason for this: a solid and well-grounded extraordinary sign will remove the suspicion that the penitent is indisposed - a suspicion that was present owing to the previous relapse.

The Bishops of Belgium spoke rightly when they said: "In the conversion of a sinner, God does not regard the amount of time as much as he regards the amount of sorrow." Hence they forbade confessors to demand that recidives undergo a lengthy probation as the ordinary condition for absolution. The bishops acted correctly, for a probation period by itself is not a sign of conversion. Conversion comes by divine grace and that does not demand time but often works instantaneously. Thus a change of heart can be effectively determined by other signs even without a time of probation.

Other signs of the penitent's actual disposition are sometimes even better than a probation period for manifesting his conversion. These signs directly testify to the penitent's disposition, while the probation testifies only indirectly. It frequently happens, in fact, that a person will abstain from sin for a long time without being disposed for absolution.

Hence one author says: "If the relapse comes from a person's own weakness without any other extrinsic voluntary cause, it is almost rash to say that he is always indisposed." In another place this theologian says that if a recidive sins because of the compulsion of a bad habit, he should be absolved as long as he manifests a firm resolve to use the means for his correction. He adds: "In our opinion, other procedures are too rigorous, and confessors who employ them are setting aside the true spirit of the Church and of

Christ. The sacrament of penance is not only one of judgment, but also one of healing and salvation." (5)

The moralists list several things that are considered extraordinary signs of sorrow:

- 1.) An over-powering sorrow poured out in tears (provided they flow from compunction for their sins) or a heartfelt expression of sorrow, which is sometimes a more sure sign than tears.
- 2.) A lessening in the number of sins - provided the penitent was in the same occasions and temptations. Or: the penitent managed to remain in the state of grace for a considerable time after his last confession, say for twenty or twenty-five days when he ordinarily fell several times a week. Or: he fell only after a vigorous fight. Or: he had stayed clear of mortal sin for some time before coming to confession.
- 3.) Applying oneself diligently to the task of improvement is an extraordinary sign. For example, the penitent conscientiously avoided the occasions of sin, used the means prescribed by the confessor, or he used fasting, prayer, and good works in order to uproot the vice.
- 4.) Another extraordinary sign: he asks the confessor for a remedy or for a new way of improving himself. Similarly: he promises to use the means which the confessor suggests, especially if this is the first time that he has received that suggestion. However I question whether he can completely be trusted if he makes this promise without any other extraordinary signs of sorrow. Penitents often promise things quickly in order to get absolution - and then have difficulty in keeping their promise.
- 5.) A spontaneous confession. It is not spontaneous if the penitent comes only to fulfill his Easter Duty, or to keep with a custom of going to confession at certain times, for instance at Christmas. It is not spontaneous if he is forced into it by his parents, his teacher, or his employer. A confession is spontaneous only if he comes entirely on his own, led by some divine light, and with no other purpose but to receive divine grace. It is very clear if, in order to make his confession, he made a long trip, deprived himself of considerable gain, suffered

some grave inconvenience, or triumphed over a serious internal or external repulsion.

- 6.) If he comes because of some extraordinary impulse. For instance, a sermon he heard, the death of a friend, fear of some imminent calamity, such as an earthquake or a plague.
- 7.) If he confesses sins he has previously confessed out of shame.
- 8.) If after the confessor's counseling he shows signs of a new realization of the evil of sin and of the danger to his own salvation.

Some writers give other signs. For instance, if the penitent accepts a big penance willingly, if he claims he repented of his sin as soon as he had committed it, or if he protests that he would rather die than sin again. I am not so sure that these signs are sufficient in themselves. I would rather say that they serve to strengthen other sufficient signs.

MORAL CERTITUDE OF THE PENITENT'S DISPOSITIONS

Whenever there is one of these signs, from which the confessor can prudently judge the penitent's change of heart, absolution can be given. The confessor needs moral certainty concerning the penitent's dispositions in order to absolve. In some sacraments, where the matter is physical, physical certainty is required. But this is not the case with the sacrament of penance. The matter of confession is moral, that is, the actions of the penitent, and consequently moral certitude is enough.

Actually it is enough for the confessor to have a prudent probability as to the penitent's dispositions with no prudent suspicion of the opposite. If more were required it would be difficult to absolve any sinner, for all the signs a penitent could give us would never establish anything more than a kind of probability in regard to his dispositions.

The author of *Istruzioni per li novelli Confessori* says: "To impart absolution, nothing more is required than a prudent and probable judgment as to the penitent's dispositions. Therefore, if the circumstances do not give rise to a doubt about the penitent's dispositions, the confessor should let things rest and not trouble himself or the penitent by trying to establish a certainty that is impossible."

(6)

Here let it be noted: recidives in blasphemy can more easily be absolved than those in sins of hate, theft, or lust, for these latter habits are rooted more fiercely and involve a more impelling inclination to the sin.

PERMISSIBLE TO DELAY ABSOLUTION FOR A DISPOSED PENITENT

We have established the fact that the confessor can absolve habituaries and recidives who prove that they are disposed for the sacrament by some extraordinary sign of sorrow. We did not, however, say that the confessor must absolve him. It is up to the confessor to delay absolution if he feels that a delay is expedient. The penitent does admittedly have a right to absolution once he has confessed his sins, still he does not have a right to be absolved immediately. The confessor, in his office of doctor, can and sometimes must delay absolution when he judges it necessary for the spiritual progress of his penitent.

But is it ordinarily a good idea to use this delaying tactic without the penitent's consent? Certainly it would not be a good idea if it would do the penitent more harm than good, or if it would cause him to suffer some dishonor and perhaps the danger of losing his reputation.

Allowing for this exception, some hold that delay of absolution is the better practice when dealing with this type of recidive. On the other hand, others more commonly hold that it should be done only rarely. This opinion is held by the celebrated missionary, Father Leonard of Port Maurice. But I feel that it is better to say that no general rule can be made; rather the confessor must judge each case according to its own circumstances. He should pray for God's guidance and then proceed to judge according to his lights. (7)

My thinking on the matter is this. If the penitent has relapsed from his own weakness (as in the case of anger, hatred, blasphemy, self-abuse, and *delectatio morosa*), I hold - and this is the most common opinion of theologians - that it is hardly ever a good idea to delay absolution, if the penitent is disposed. We should trust that the grace of the sacrament will do more toward his progress than a delay of absolution.

But the picture is different with a person who has relapsed because of some occasion of sin, even if it is a necessary one. The reason is this: an occasion of sin arouses a more vivid craving for

the sin, and the presence of one's accomplice has a more violent effect upon the senses and upon one's affection for sin than does a habit of sin. Because of this, the penitent who is caught in some occasion has to do violence to himself, not only in order to overcome the temptation, but even in order to get himself away from the company and presence of his accomplice. He must do this in order to render a proximate occasion remote.

Delay of absolution is especially necessary if the occasion is voluntary and should be entirely avoided. To absolve in such a case would run the risk of putting the penitent in danger of breaking his promise to remove the occasion, as we have already mentioned.

With the habit of sin, the danger of breaking one's resolve is ordinarily more remote. On one hand, there is no external object strongly impelling him to sin. On the other, the retention of the bad habit is not voluntary - while the failure to remove the occasion in the other case is voluntary. Because of this, God gives greater help to the habituary, when he needs it, and we can consequently expect more progress from the sacrament than from a delay of the sacrament. The grace of God will be stronger and more efficacious in order to help the penitent uproot his bad habit.

In support of this opinion, Salmanticenses asks: "Why do we hope for more grace from a delay of absolution, which deprives the sinner of grace - than from absolution itself, which gives him grace and makes him a friend of God?" (8) Cardinal Toledo, speaking of the sin of self-abuse, feels that no remedy is more efficacious in counteracting this habit than a frequent reception of the sacrament of penance. This sacrament, he says, is the greatest restraining influence they can employ; a person who neglects it will need a miracle to rid himself of this habit. (9)

In the life of St. Philip Neri, we learn that the means he used for curing recidives in this kind of habit was nothing else but frequent confession. The Roman Ritual confirms this opinion in its treatise on Penance: "For those who easily relapse into sin, it is profitable to suggest frequent confession and, if useful, communion." (10) In saying "those who easily relapse", it is unquestionably speaking of those who have not yet uprooted their bad habit.

Some theologians seem as though they want to save souls through nothing but rigorism and say that recidives are worse off if they are absolved before progress has been made. But I would like them to tell me if all these recidives really leave stronger and if they all improve, when they are sent out without absolution and without the grace

of the sacrament. How many times during the missions have I run across poor penitents who had been dismissed without absolution only to give up their struggle against vice and sink into despair, not returning to confession for several years.

But once again, a person must follow the lights given him by God. In this matter of absolving recidives, those who are over-lenient are just as wrong as those who are too rigorous. In fact, they even do more harm and are the cause of many being lost, because their number is greater and the majority of habituaries come to them for confession. Still the rigorists do their share of damage, and I think that a confessor should feel guilty not only if he absolves a person who was indisposed, but also if he dismisses a penitent who was disposed without absolving him.

I will conclude this section by making three statements. First: I do not deny that sometimes a delay of absolution is profitable to a disposed recidive. Secondly: it will always be possible to frighten this kind of recidive by acting as if one cannot absolve him. Thirdly: ordinarily speaking, for recidives who have relapsed because of their own weakness and are now manifesting the fact that they are disposed for absolution by some extraordinary sign, the benefit of absolution will far outshine that of delaying absolution.

If only confessors would absolve just the recidives who give extraordinary signs of sorrow. It is a sad fact that so many absolve all recidives without distinction - without looking for an extraordinary sign, without warning them, without even offering them a suggestion for making progress. As a result, this wholesale harm to souls continues, thanks to this practice and not to the practice of delaying absolution for those who are disposed.

SEMINARIANS WITH A HABIT OF SIN

All that we have said up to now about habituaries and recidives does not apply - ordinarily speaking - to seminarians who have a habit of sin, especially that of impurity. There are special norms for them.

A lay person who is an habituary can be absolved as often as he is disposed to receive the Sacrament of Penance. But the seminarian-habituary is different, because he is headed toward Sacred Orders. It is not enough for him to be disposed toward the sacrament of Penance; he must also be disposed for Orders - otherwise he is disposed for neither one. The reason is this: a person who has barely escaped from

the state of sin is not fit to ascend the altar. If there is not positive proof of the progress demanded by the greatness of the state to which he aspires, he sins gravely by willing to receive Sacred Orders, even if he is presently in the state of grace.

For this reason, the confessor cannot absolve him unless he promises not to receive Orders - to which he cannot ascend until he has proven himself fit by a probation period of several months. This has been treated at length in my Moral Theology and it is the common opinion of theologians. (11) They teach that in order to receive Sacred Orders, common goodness (that is, mere immunity from mortal sin) is not enough, but a special degree of goodness is required, namely, that by which the ordinand is free from any habit of sin.

St. Thomas teaches this when he says: "Sacred Orders demand sanctity.....Hence the burden of Orders should be laid on walls that have already been seasoned with holiness...that is, those that have drawn off the dampness of vice." (12) The reason for this is that, if the ordinand does not have this special sanctity, he is not fit to be set over the people to exercise the great ministry of the altar. As St. Thomas adds: "Those who are set over the people by dignity of their Orders should also be superior to them by virtue of their sanctity." (13) And in another place he says the same thing even more forcefully: "Through Sacred Orders men are deputed for the solemn ministry which serves Christ Himself in the Sacrament of the altar. To fit them for this, they need greater interior holiness than is required even for the religious state." (14)

An exception to this must be made in favor of the seminarian who would receive so extraordinary a compunction from God that he would be freed of his former weakness. As the Angelic Doctor says: "Sometimes God converts the heart of man by such a strong grace that he immediately and perfectly reaches spiritual sanctity." (15) Still, conversions like this are rare, especially in those about to be ordained. The fact that a seminarian would seek out some religious monastery in order to make a retreat makes little difference, for many do this - not on their own - but because they are forced into it.

When a seminarian actually has received a great grace of this kind from God (Whose mercy is awesome), the confessor can absolve him. I am referring to a grace which would change him so much that, even though he still felt his sinful tendencies, he would feel at the same time a tremendous repugnance for sin. He would realize that his bodily craving was so notably diminished that with the help of grace he could now resist temptations with ease. Furthermore, he would be fully determined not only to avoid sin and the occasions of sin in the future,

but he would even resolve to use every worthwhile means to lead a priestly life- He would begin immediately to strengthen his conversion by repeated prayers for perseverance - with such confidence in God that the confessor could be morally certain of a profound change in his life. The confessor can surely absolve this penitent, even if he wants to be ordained immediately after confession.

Nevertheless, even if this kind of compunction is present, the confessor should still do all he can to persuade him to postpone his ordination. With such a postponement, the ordinand can effectively uproot the bad habit and put his resolution into practice. If it turns out that the ordinand will not postpone the ordination, the confessor, in his role of doctor, can for the penitent's greater good delay absolution, and thus force him to put off his ordination.

This course of action should be taken only if there is no danger of infamy by such a delay. For if there is this danger, the penitent has a right to be absolved right away.

Outside of this case, the confessor must be strict when it comes to absolving ordinands who are habituaries. Afterwards they ordinarily turn out for the worse and bring down upon the people and the Church a great deal of harm.

1. Juenin, Commentarius de Sacramentis, diss 6, qu 77, ch 4, art 7; Giordanini, Instruzione, part 1, ch 9, n. 215; Jorio, Instruzione, ch 1, #4.
2. Benedict XIV, Apostolica, #22 (June, 1749)
3. Referring to an excommunication which existed in various dioceses against those who did not fulfill the Easter Duty. (Moriones, Spanish Edition, pg 217)
4. Bishops of Belgium cited in Croix, Theol Mor., Lib. VI, part 2, n 1823.

5. Giordanini, Instruzione, part 1, ch 15, n. 356 and ch 9, n. 213.
6. ibid. part 1, ch 15, n. 360.
7. St. Leonard of Port Maurice, Doscorso mistico e morale, n. 10.
8. Salmanticenses, tr VI, ch 5, n. 68.
9. Toledo, Instructio Sacerdotum, lib 5, ch 13, n. 6.
10. Ritual, Ordo Administr. Poenit. n. 19.
11. MT, Lib VI, n. 63, 68.
12. ST. IIaIIae, qu 189, a. 1.
13. Supp. qu 35, a. 1.
14. IIaIIae, qu. 184, a. 8.
15. IIIa, qu 86, a. 5.

CHAPTER SIX

CENSURES,

RESERVATIONS,

IMPEDIMENTS

PENITENTS WITH RESERVED CENSURES

If a person comes to confession who has contracted a censure or a reserved case, it would be an act of charity for the confessor without faculties to take it upon himself to go to the bishop. The bishop can himself absolve, or delegate someone to absolve censures simply reserved to the Holy See. Or else the confessor should write directly to the Sacred Penitentiary, if the absolution has to come from the Holy See. The method of writing to the Sacred Penitentiary will be indicated later on in this chapter.

What we will note here is that, if anyone is ignorant of a common law censure, he does not incur it; nor does he incur the reservation, because cases reserved to the Pope are for the most part reserved *ratione censuræ*. It is different with episcopal cases. For when the case is reserved *ratione sui*, a person incurs it even if he is ignorant of the censure. Furthermore, no censure is incurred by one who is invincibly ignorant of it. (1)

We should mention too, that in the time of a jubilee a sacrilegious confession does not take away the reservation, as is clear from the statement of Pope Benedict XIV. (2) I hold the same thing if the confession was invalid.

But outside jubilee time, if someone makes an invalid confession to a confessor who has faculties to absolve reserved cases, it is the common and more probable opinion that he leaves absolved from the reservation. It is more common and sufficiently probable that the person who makes a sacrilegious confession is freed from his reservation, as long as he did not culpably keep back the reserved sin.

PENITENTS WITH AN OBLIGATION TO DENOUNCE

The confessor should keep in mind that he has a grave duty to impose upon the penitent the obligation of denouncing to superiors anyone who is seriously guilty of heresy or blasphemy, which is accompanied by intellectual error and pertinacity. There is no such obligation in the case of ignorance, carelessness, or slip of the tongue, for then it would be enough if the penitent merely called the error to the person's attention.

In addition to this, the confessor should insist that women and children denounce priests who solicit them *ad turpia* or engage in suggestive conversations with them in the confessional. In my Moral Theology I treat this matter more at length. (3)

Regarding this obligation, the confessor should keep in mind these practical points:

1.) He should not be too quick to impose on the penitent the obligation of denouncing when it is a case of solicitation. In doubt as to whether there was solicitation or not, the obligation should not be imposed. However, in these two doubtful cases, there is basis enough for moral certainty:

a.) when the words or actions of themselves implied solicitation and the penitent is in doubt only as regards the intention of the solicitor; or b.) when there was strong - though not certain - indication of solicitation, with no indication to the contrary.

- 2.) Secondly the confessor should not be too quick to take upon himself the obligation of denouncing. He could do this in some rare instance out of charity; for instance, when the penitent would have grave difficulty in approaching the superior.
- 3.) Finally the confessor should never omit imposing this obligation of denouncing on a penitent who has been solicited, even though he foresees that it will not be carried out. This obligation has been placed upon the confessor by the Pope himself. Consequently, if the penitent will not fulfill the obligation, the confessor should postpone absolution. The same treatment should be employed, if the confessor suspects that the penitent will have difficulty in fulfilling the obligation. On the other hand, it is a good idea to absolve the penitent if he seriously intends to denounce as soon as he can, even though at present he is impeded from doing so. These denunciations should be made at least within a month. (4)

PENITENTS WITH MARRIAGE IMPEDIMENTS

I. When the penitent has an impediment and the marriage has not yet been entered into, we must make several distinctions:

A. IN NORMAL CASES

The confessor who learns of a public impediment in the confessional should send the penitent to the pastor.

If the impediment is occult, the confessor himself should offer to obtain the dispensation. In doing this bear in mind that the local ordinary can dispense:

- 1.) when there is some doubt of fact regarding the impediment, if it is a case in which the Pope is accustomed to dispense;
- 2.) when recourse to the Holy See is difficult and there is danger of grave harm in delay, as long as the case is one in which the Pope is accustomed to dispense;

- 3.) when it is an impediment of minor degree, by virtue of the quinquennial faculties.

If, despite these faculties, the Ordinary cannot dispense, the confessor should have recourse to the Sacred Penitentiary.

B. IN DANGER OF DEATH OR IN CASE OF URGENCY

The confessor should have recourse to the ordinary of the place when there is danger of death (which is wider than "*in articulo mortis*") or when it is an urgent case. This urgent case is defined: when the impediment is discovered just when everything is prepared for the wedding which cannot be postponed until the dispensation arrives from the Holy See without probable danger of grave harm.

In the event that this recourse to the ordinary is impossible without some really grave difficulty or without the danger of violating the seal, the confessor himself can dispense. His power in this case must be exercised in the act of sacramental confession and is good only for the internal forum. It extends to every single impediment of church law, even though they be multiple, except these two: the impediment which proceeds from priesthood, and the impediment that proceeds from affinity in the direct line of a consummated marriage.

But take note. If this is only a case of some urgency, then he can dispense only occult impediments. If this is a case of danger of death, he can also dispense public impediments and even from the form prescribed for marriage.

II. When the penitent has already contracted an invalid marriage.

A. *SANATIO IN RADICE*. If the marriage has to be revalidated by a *sanatio in radice* and only in the internal forum, the confessor himself should write directly to the Sacred Penitentiary, since the *sanatio* is given exclusively by the Holy See.

B. *SIMPLE CONVALIDATION*. If it is to be revalidated by a simple convalidation, the directions we just gave concerning dispensations apply. Consequently in cases where the confessor himself can dispense from marriage impediments, he can also revalidate the marriage.

The confessor should remember that for this convalidation, two things are necessary, i.e., the removal of the impediment - if there is one - and the renewal of consent. The party who knows of the impediment is obliged to tell the other of the invalidity of their marriage. This is deduced from the usual formula employed by the Sacred Penitentiary: "*ut dicta muliere de nullitate prioris consensus certiorata, etc.*"

Strictly speaking then, it is not enough to say: "If you had not once married me, would you marry me now? Tell me you would." Or: "For my peace of mind, let's renew our former contract." For consents like this depend upon the prior consent which was null. Neither is intercourse sufficient, as some say, even when it is done with marital intent.

It is all right to say however: "Our marriage was invalid because of a certain circumstance (there is no obligation to manifest the precise impediment), let's renew our consent." Or: "When I married you, I did not have true consent" (for no consent is not true consent). Or: "I doubt the validity of our marriage, so let us contract it over again." In these cases the new consent does not depend upon the old one.

However, when it is prudently feared that the above-mentioned ways would bring the crime into the open with the consequent danger of quarreling, infamy, or scandal and on the other hand the one who is aware of the impediment could not be excused from rendering the debt - then, once the dispensation has been granted, it will be enough if he use any of the ways given above or if he alone renews his consent. In such a situation he can follow the opinion which says that his consent together with the consent the other party once gave is enough to convalidate the marriage, for they say that the other's consent virtually remains in the continued use of marriage or in the continued cohabitation.

MODELS FOR WRITING TO THE SACRED PENITENTIARY

First of all, some general norms. Remember that recourse to this tribunal is had only in matters of the internal forum, whether sacramental or extra-sacramental.

The address is: Emmo. D. Cardinali Poenitentiario Maiori, Palazzo dei Convertendi, Via della Conciliazione, Roma (Italia). The heading of the letter is: Emmo. D. Cardinali Poenitentiario Maiori, Eminentissime Domine:

Then the case is set forth, omitting the names and surnames of the parties involved, and substituting the letter N. or made-up names, Fabius, Titius, Livia.....

In explaining the case, the bare fact with clarity of circumstances is the first thing indicated. Then the reasons are given, and at the end the petition is expressed.

The letter concludes with a formula something like this: "Sacram Eminentiae Vestrae Purpuram deosculor," or "Qua par est reverentia me profiteor." Then: "Eminentiae Vestrae humillimum famulum."

Then give the place, day, month, and year in which the request is being made. Finally the signature of the petitioner. At the bottom of the written text are noted the name and address of the person to whom the response should be sent.

1.) Formula of recourse to the Sacred Penitentiary.

Emmo. D. Cardinali Poenitentiario Maiori
Eminentissime Domine:

Titius in excommunicationem incidit Sanctae Sedi simpliciter reservatam ob delictum de quo in can. 2342, #1. Absolutus in casu urgenti ad normam can. 2254 per me ad S. Poenitentiarium recurrit, paratus huius mandatis stare.

Qua par est reverentia me profiteor Eminentiae Vestrae devotissimum.

Chicago, 29 jul. 1951

John Doe, sacerdos.

Indicationes ad responsionem inscribendam: U.S. Rev. John Doe, 1472 Wellington St., Chicago, Ill.

2.) Formula of recourse in cases of canon 2254.

Emmo. D. Cardinali Poenitentiario Maiori
Eminentissime Princeps:

Caius sacerdos complicem suum (vel duos, tres, etc., complices suos) in peccato turpi semel (aut bis, ter, etc.) absolvit (vel

absolvere simulavit; aut etiam: complicem suum in peccato turpi, qui peccatum complicitatis, a quo nondum fuerat absolutus, ipso Titio ad hoc eum inducente, non est confessus).

Nunc poenitentia ductus ad me venit petens absolutionem admissi criminis, quem ego versantem in casu urgenti absolvi ad normam can. 2254, #1.

Hoc Eminentiae Vestrae renuntio, simul significans Titium libenti animo Eminentiae Vestrae mandatis obedire paratum esse.

Sacram Eminentiae Vestrae Purpuram deosculor.

Chicago.....

N.N., sacerdos.

Dignetur Ema. V. responsum sic mittere: U.S. Rev. N.N.,
1742 Wellington St., Chicago, Ill.

- 3.) Formula for requesting a dispensation from an occult matrimonial impediment.

Emmo. D. Cardinali Poenitentiario Maiori
Eminentissime ac Peverendissime Domine:

Caius et Caia matrimonium inire cupiunt; verum ligantur impedimento occulto, contracto ex adulterio et promissione sibi invicem facta futuri matrimonii durante matrimonio, quo alterutra (vel utraque) pars prius ligabatur.

Cum autem si dispensatio eis negaretur, probabile periculum adsit ne matrimonium dumtaxat civile celebraturi sint.

Humiliter rogatur Eminentia Vestra ut super criminis impedimento, quod occultum est, eis benigne providere dignetur.

Et Deus, etc. (Conclude as before.)

- 4.) Formula for convalidating a marriage which is invalid because of an occult impediment.

Emmo. D. Cardinali, etc.

Rufus contraxit matrimonium cum Flavia, cum qua adulterium consummaverat, mutuo fidem sibi dantes de matrimonio inter se inundo; quod ut celerius consequeretur Rufus, inscia Flavia, istius conjugii occulto mortem procuravit.

Cum impedimentum sit omnino occultum et separatio fieri non possit absque gravi scandalo et absque periculo incontinentiae, ab Eminentia Vestra dispensationem sibi necessariam humiliter efflagitat.

Et Deus, etc.

- 5.) Formula requesting a *sanatio in radice* for the internal forum.

Emmo. D. Cardinali, etc.

Sacerdos Ioannes Doe, United States, Emmae. Vestrae haec reverenter exponit:

N.N.N. et N.N.N. matrimonium contraxerunt die 29 jul. anni 1951 in ecclesia paroeciali s. Michaelis, oppidi N., Diocesis N... in United States, coram sacerdote N.

At matrimonium hoc nullum evasit quia sacerdos ei assistens necessaria delegatione carebat; qui defectus nuper cognitus fuit quamvis adhuc occultus manet.

Cum putati conjuges iam per tres annos vitam matrimonialem bona fide agant, et prolem habeant, magno dolore afficerentur si matrimonii nullitas eisdem significaretur, ut matrimonium in forma ordinaria convalidarent; et idem sacerdoti assistenti probrosum.

Quare orator ab Emma. Vestra supplex postulat ut dignetur praedictum matrimonium sanare in radice.

Eminentiae Vestrae Purpuram reverenter deosculor.....

- 6.) Formula requesting a dispensation from a vow of perpetual chastity.

Emmo. D. Cardinali, etc.

Titius, cum castitatis perpetuae voto sit obstrictus, et cum in gravi versetur periculo incontinentiae, suppliciter orat Eminentiam Vestram, ut dignetur oratori a praefato voto dispensationem indulgere, quo matrimonium contrahere possit.

Et Deus, etc.

- 7.) Formula requesting a dispensation from an irregularity arising from an occult delict.

Emmo D. Cardinali, etc.

Titius, sacerdos, in irregularitatem incidit ob procuratum abortum effectu secuto.

Cum ipsi sit periculum infamiae si a celebrando abstineat, humiliter ab Eminentia Vestra huius irregularitatis dispensationem exposcit.

Sacram Eminentiae Vestrae Purpuram...

When the confessor has been commissioned to execute the dispensation, he can use the following formula as an extension of the sacramental absolution: "*Et insuper, auctoritate apostolica mihi concessa, dispenso tecum super impedimento (criminis, proveniente ex adulterio cum coniugidicio), ut matrimonium cum N.N. rursus contrahere possis, renovato consensu; et prolem, si quam suscipies (vel suscepisti) legitimam declaro. In nomine Patris, etc.*"

FACULTIES FOR ABSOLVING RESERVED CASES

A. IN NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES

When a penitent with a reserved censure comes to him, the confessor should exhort him to go to confession to a priest who has faculties to absolve from censures - or if he prefers, the penitent can write (even via the confessor) to the competent superior. But the following points should be taken into consideration.

1.) The reservation of sins *ratione sui*, both papal and episcopal, ceases completely in these five cases:

- a.) When the sick who cannot leave their house confess. (The sickness may even be light - as long as it keeps the patient at home.)
- b.) When the penitents confess with a view to marriage, either to be contracted or validated.
- c.) When the legitimate superior has refused the faculty to absolve, when asked in an individual case.
- d.) Whenever the confessor prudently judges that the faculty to absolve cannot be asked from the legitimate superior without serious inconvenience to the penitent, or without danger of violating the sacramental seal.
- e.) If the penitent confesses outside the diocese where the sin is reserved (provided the sin is not also reserved in the diocese in which the confession is heard), even though he left his own diocese for the purpose of obtaining absolution. (6)

2.) In doubtful cases, either doubt of law or doubt of fact, the reservation does not hold. Doubt of law: whether or not the law of reservation extends to the penitent's particular case. Doubt of fact: whether he committed it, whether it is grave or not, whether or not the circumstances required for the reservation are present. This is certain for reserved *latae sententiae* censures and is with probability applied also to sins reserved *ratione sui* (c. 2245)

3.) The confessor should also check to see if the penitent was ignorant of the censure or of the reservation, for as we noted above, this exempts the penitent from the penalty and from the reservation.

4.) If the confessor, unaware (even culpably) of the reservation, absolves the penitent from the censure and from the sin, the absolution of the censure is valid, provided that it is not *ab homine* or reserved *specialissimo modo* to the Holy See. (c. 2247 #3)

5.) Missionaries at the time of the Mission (and apparently at the time of the retreat too) can absolve penitents from sins reserved by the bishop, even *ratione censurae*. (c. 899)

6.) At the time of a jubilee or holy year, the Bulls which promulgate it usually concede to confessors the faculties to absolve from almost all reserved censures and sins, even from those taken into *forum contentiosum*, except those reserved *specialissimo modo* to the Holy See.

B. IN DANGER OF DEATH

A danger of death is present when it is prudently feared that death can result from any cause; whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Examples are: grave illness, a difficult childbirth, a dangerous journey, and even mobilization of the army with the intent of war, as the Sacred Penitentiary declared on March 12 and May 29, 1915.

In this case, "all priests (even heretics, schismatics, excommunicates and degraded), although not approved for confessions, validly and licitly absolve any penitents (even religious women) from any sins or censures, no matter how reserved or how notorious (even those reserved *specialissimo modo*), even though there is an approved priest present." (c. 882) The absolution from censures however has its effect only in the internal forum.

The sole exception to this faculty is the absolution of one's own accomplice in a sin of impurity: while it is always valid in the danger of death, it is not licit on the confessor's part, outside the case of necessity. (c. 884)

The one absolved in this case is obliged to have recourse. If he was absolved from an *ab homine* censure, he must have recourse - once he has convalesced - to the one who inflicted the censure, or to his superior, successor, or delegate. If he was absolved from a censure *specialissimo modo* reserved, or from an excommunication incurred by a priest who attempts even a civil marriage and cannot separate from the woman, he must have recourse to the Sacred Penitentiary or to the ordinary or one with delegated faculties. He must submit himself to them under pain of re-incurring the same censure to execute whatever they impose on him. (c. 2252)

Concerning this recourse, note five things:

- 1.) The phrase "once he has convalesced" means once the cause which put him in danger of death has disappeared.
- 2.) He must have recourse within a month's time.
- 3.) The code does not command the confessor to admonish the penitent regarding his obligation of having recourse; still he should do so, if there is hope that it will be profitable.
- 4.) In practice, this admonition can be omitted if the penitent is near death, or beyond hope of recovery.
- 5.) The recourse can be made personally or by telephone or telegraph.

C. IN VERY URGENT CASES

A very urgent case occurs when the censure cannot be externally observed without danger of grave scandal or of infamy, or when it is hard for the penitent to remain in mortal sin during the time necessary to reach the competent superior.

In this case any confessor is, one who has faculties to hear the penitent's confession' *latae sententiae* censures in the internal forum, no *latae sententiae* how they are reserved. (c. 2254 #1)

Concerning this faculty, note the following things:

- 1.) Although the canon does not speak of *ferendae sententiae* censures which have already been inflicted by sentence or precept, still in the opinion of Regatillo the confessor can absolve *latae sententiae* these too. (7)
- 2.) The person absolved must have recourse, under pain of re-incurring the censure, in a month's time to the competent superior.
- 3.) The confessor must impose this obligation of having recourse on the penitent. If the penitent refuses to accept it without a just reason, he cannot be absolved. If the penitent cannot have recourse and the confessor can do it for him without grave difficulty, the confessor should have recourse. If it happens that it is difficult for the confessor too, recourse then is morally impossible, and the confessor can give absolution without imposing the obligation of having recourse. He should merely have him do what is required by law (such as repair the injury done and the scandal, and carry out suitable remedies) and impose on him a fitting penance and satisfaction for the censure. This penance should be so imposed that if it is not done in a reasonable amount of time, set by the confessor, the penitent will again incur the penalty.
- 4.) This recourse should be made with a fictitious name, by letter or through the confessor, as was said before.
- 5.) The only censure which the confessor cannot absolve in very urgent cases is the excommunication incurred by the priest who presumes to contract even a civil marriage, if for some reason it is impossible for the couple to separate, even though they are firmly resolved to live together as brother and sister without loss of chastity.

1. As can be seen this chapter has been brought into line with present code legislation - according to the Spanish Moriones edition of the *Praxis*.
2. Benedict XIV, encycl. *Inter praeteritos*, Dec. 3, 1749.
3. MT VI, n. 675ff.
4. Section on denouncing is taken from the original *Praxis* - except the last two paragraphs were omitted in the Spanish "*por no estar ya hoy en vigor*".
5. C. 1044, 1045.
6. C. 900 and 2247 #2 - English wording taken from A. Browne.
7. *Institutiones Juris Canonici* II, n. 979.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Special Situations

THE CONFESSOR WITH CHILDREN

With children the confessor should make it a point to be kind and very gentle. His first duty is to find out if they know the truths of their Faith. If they do not, he should instruct them patiently, at least with regard to those truths necessary for salvation. He should do this right then and there if time allows; otherwise he should refer them to someone else.

As to the confession itself, he should first let them confess the sins they remember. Once this is done he might think it necessary to ask the following questions, as a way of helping them examine their consciences:

- 1.) Did you keep back any sins that you were afraid to tell?
- 2.) Did you speak without respect about saints or holy days?
Did you swear to something that was not true?
- 3.) Did you miss Mass on Sunday or on a Holy Day? Did you talk during Mass? Did you work on Sunday?
- 4.) Were you disobedient to your parents, or disrespectful to them by making fun of them, by slapping them, by talking back to them, or by wishing evil on them. (Recall here what was said in chapter two under the fourth commandment about how children should be made to beg forgiveness from their parents.)
- 5.) Did you commit any sins of impurity? On this point the confessor should be careful in his questioning. He should begin in fairly general terms and not go straight to the point. First, did they use bad words? Did they tell dirty jokes with other boys and girls? Then he may ask if they committed any impure actions. Often it is good, even if the child says no, to probe a little further....How many times....Did you say five times? He may also ask if they sleep with anyone, and if they play with themselves when they are in bed.

He may ask girls if they have a "crush" on some young man, and if there have been any bad thoughts involved in this. From the answers he gets, he can go on to further questions. But he should never ask a boy or girl if he or she reached an orgasm. It is better to go without material integrity, than tell them about something they do not know and just arouse their curiosity. (1)
- 6.) Did you steal anything, or damage anything that belonged to another?
- 7.) Did you tell the secret sins of someone else?
- 8.) As to the precepts of the church: did you fulfill the law regarding confession and Easter Duty? Did you eat meat on abstinence days?

When it comes to absolving children, once again a good deal of care is required.

If you are fairly sure that they have sufficient use of reason, they should be absolved if they are properly disposed. You can judge their use of reason by various indications; for instance, how distinctly they confess their sins and how adequately they answer your questions, how aware they are of the consequence of sin - that it offends God and merits Hell for them. If they are recidives in mortal sin, they should be treated as adults: that is, if they do not show extraordinary signs of sorrow, absolution should be put off.

If you doubt whether the child has perfect use of reason, he should be absolved conditionally when he is in danger of death or when he needs absolution in order to make his Easter Duty. Signs that he has not reached the use of reason are: he doesn't remain composed in the confessional but looks around, fiddles with his hands, and brings up things not connected with confession. He should be absolved conditionally too if he confesses something doubtfully mortal. Conditional absolution is all right when there is a just cause for it and here the possibility of freeing this child from a doubtful state of sin is certainly a just cause. Even if the child is recidive, he should be so absolved. Absolution should be delayed for those who have the perfect use of reason, as a way of having them return properly disposed. But this hope is not to be found in children who lack the use of reason.

Many moralists teach (with probability) that a doubtfully disposed child like this can be absolved conditionally even if he confesses only venial sin - at least after a space of two or three months. This is so that he will not go for a long time without the grace of the sacrament, or perhaps even without sanctifying grace, if he has forgotten to confess some mortal sin.

The confessor should see to it that these youngsters make the act of sorrow necessary to receive absolution. For instance, he could put it to them in the guise of a little talk: "Do you love God Who is so great and so good - the God Who created you and died for you? You have hurt this God and now He wants to forgive you. Make an act of hope that He will forgive you out of love for Jesus Who died for you. But do you know that your sins deserve Hell? Say with me: My God, I do not ever want to offend You again, etc."

The penance imposed on children should be as light as possible. The confessor should insist that they say it as soon as possible. Otherwise they will forget about it or skip it. He should try especially to instill into children a devotion to the Mother of God, urging them to say the rosary every day and to say the three Hail Mary's morning and night with this ejaculation: "My Mother, keep me from mortal sin."

With regard to a child's vocation, a confessor must never decide it for him. He may prudently determine which state in life he thinks God wants the child to embrace, and then try to persuade him to embrace that state - but that is all.

If he is dealing with someone who wants to enter religion, the confessor's first obligation is to examine the order which he wants to enter, for if it is a lax order, it would be better (ordinarily) to remain in the world. Once he joins such an order he will begin to act like the others, and the hopes he had will be lost sight of. Unfortunately this has happened to many.

But if the child wants to enter a fervent order, the confessor should test the vocation by making the following inquiries: as to impediments that will bar him from entering, as to health, as to parents who may need his help. Most important of all he should evaluate the child's reasons for wanting to enter. Is it a good one - such as, to unite himself to God, to make reparation for his former life, to avoid the dangers of the world? Or is the principal motive a worldly one - such as, to lead an easier life, to be free of his family's hard lot, or to please his parents who are forcing him into it? If his motive is a bad one, the confessor must see to it that he does not enter religion, for there is no real vocation. And entering religion without a vocation would have a disastrous outcome. If, on the other hand, the motive is good and there is no impediment, neither the confessor nor anyone else should deter him from following his vocation. St. Thomas even says that to do so would be a grave sin. However sometimes it is a prudent thing for the confessor to delay the entrance, in order to make sure this is a firm and lasting resolution. This is especially true if he knows that the youngster is flighty. It is also true if the decision was made at the time of a mission or a retreat, for in a burst of fervor the child could very well make a resolution which lacked solid foundation.

If it is a boy who wants to become a diocesan priest, the confessor should not be quick to agree without a long and thorough

test of the young man's upright motives, of his knowledge, or capabilities. Diocesan priests have the same, and even greater obligations than religious have, and yet they must live surrounded by the dangers of the world. Consequently, to be a good diocesan priest, he must be careful to lead an exemplary life - cut off from the world's pleasures and from sinful men and given to prayer and frequenting of the sacraments. But *quis est hic et laudabimus eum?* Without this the diocesan priest will place himself in a state of almost certain damnation, especially if he takes on this life in order to satisfy the ambitions of his parents. (We mentioned before - in chapter two - how serious a sin parents commit by forcing their children to enter the religious life or the priesthood against their own choice.)

As to girls who want to consecrate their virginity to Jesus Christ, the confessor should not permit them to make a perpetual vow of chastity unless he is sure that they lead a virtuous life, are well acquainted with ascetical principles, and especially give time to prayer. At first, he should allow them to make a vow of chastity only for a time, say from one feast to another.

Finally, two things should be recalled with regard to those who want to or must get married. (I say "must" in reference to incontinent persons who will use no other means of restraining themselves but marriage.) First of all, parents sin who without just cause stand in the way of a suitable marriage for their children. Secondly, children sin (and consequently the confessor must forbid it) when they wish to enter a marriage which brings shame on their family. It is wrong too for them to wish to contract a marriage which their parents are against (even though it is not shameful but will prove a scandal to them) unless the children have an excusing cause. This matter I have clarified in my Moral Theology. (2)

THE CONFESSOR AND THE SCRUPULOUS

Many authors give rules for dealing with the scrupulous penitents. But certainly the greatest remedy after that of prayer is obedience to their director. Father Segneri calls this the only remedy, in fact. From this flow two important rules.

- 1.) The confessor must convince the scrupulous person that it is always safe before God to obey his spiritual director where there is no sure sin. In doing this, he

is not obeying man, but God Himself who says: He who hears you, hears Me. This is the teaching of St. Bernard, St. Antoninus, St. Francis de Sales, St. Philip Neri, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius Loyola, Blessed Dennis the Carthusian, Blessed Humbert, Venerable Master Avila, Gerson, and countless others.

- 2.) The penitent must be convinced that the only anxiety he should have is in not obeying. Scrupulosity exposes them to the danger of losing not only their peace of mind, their devotion and progress in virtue, but even their sanity and above all their soul. Scrupulosity can grow to such proportions that they are driven to despair, and end up (as frequently happens) taking their own life or letting down all barriers against sin.

The confessor must try to get it across to the scrupulous person that God does not weigh every least detail of our lives. He wants us during life to be uncertain about our salvation for our own good. We try, as best we can not to offend Him, and then leave the rest to His Mercy. We admit that we cannot save ourselves without the help of His Grace and so we pray for it with perseverance, confidence, and peace of mind. St. Francis de Sales once said: "It is a good idea for us to close our eyes in the darkness and difficulties of life and walk through them under God's loving care. We should be at peace if our spiritual director tells us we are doing well and let it go at that. The obedient man will never be lost." (3) St. Philip Neri assures the scrupulous penitent that he will never have to give God an account of his actions if he obeys his confessor. (4) St. John of the Cross calls it a mark of pride and lack of faith for a person not to trust the advice of his confessor. (5)

Because of all this, the confessor should speak very often to the scrupulous penitent of the confidence he should have in Jesus Christ Who died for our salvation, and in His most holy Mother whose great power is at the mercy of those who come to her for help. The confessor should try to get him to be convinced of the certainty of his salvation whenever he runs to Jesus and Mary who are ready to hear every prayer addressed to them.

The confessor should forbid them to read books which increase their anxiety and to mix with other scrupulous persons. If one of them is troubled with terrible guilt-feelings, he may even forbid him to attend sermons on terrifying subjects. He may even forbid him to examine his conscience in regard to the things that trouble him irrationally.

If the scruple is nothing more than the fear of giving into bad thoughts (as for instance, against faith or purity or charity) the confessor should not hesitate to disregard it and assure the penitent that these thoughts are trials and that there is not consent or sin.

In this matter, the confessor should use the rule: when a person has a tender conscience, he should be presumed not to have committed the sin unless he is extremely certain that he has. As Father Alvarez says, such a terrible thing cannot happen to one who hates sin without its being clearly recognized. Consequently, it is sometimes good to forbid the penitent to accuse himself of such thoughts again, unless he is sure and can testify under oath that he consented to them.

The confessor should take note that the scrupulous are not to be guided by particular rules but by very general ones. Particular rules will never help him reach the point where he can guide himself. He will always doubt whether or not it applies to this case. For the present circumstances will always seem a bit different from what the confessor had in mind.

The anxiety may be concerning past confessions - whether or not he sufficiently explained all the sins or circumstances, or whether he was sorry. If it comes to the confessor's attention that the penitent has made a general confession once before or for a notable time has constantly repeated certain things of the past, he should forbid him ever to think about these again. He should also tell him never again to confess his past sins unless he is ready to swear that they were certainly mortal sins and that they were certainly never confessed. When confession brings with it such inconvenience and danger, the scrupulous penitent is not bound to preserve material integrity - at least when there is any doubt about it - even if he forgets to mention a mortal sin. The authors teach that the anxiety that troubles him is more than enough to excuse from integrity.

The confessor should make sure that the penitent obeys him with exactness. If he does not obey, he should be reprimanded, deprived of Holy Communion and treated severely. The ordinary thing, of course, is to treat the scrupulous with kindness, but when it comes to obedience, severity has to be used. If they lose hold of this one life raft, they will sink into insanity or into a life of sin.

Some scrupulous persons fear that everything they do is sinful. In counseling one like this, the confessor should command him

to act without restraint and overcome his anxiety. He should tell him that his first obligation is to conquer his scruples, whenever what he is doing is not clearly sinful. This is what the moralists along with Father Segneri teach. (6) Some object that this is telling him to act in a state of doubt because the scruple is not settled, but their objection is invalid. It is almost impossible to expect the scrupulous to do such a thing. Their fear is not a true dictate of conscience (a formed conscience as Gerson calls it), nor is it a true practical doubt. It does not destroy the judgment previously made and virtually enduring, even though now, under the pressure of the anxiety, it is not adverted to. This judgment went like this: I do not sin by doing what I am not certain is sin. In acting, then, he does not go against this judgment but against his groundless fear. For this reason, the confessor may command the scrupulous to conquer their anxiety and disregard it by freely doing whatever it tells them not to do. And he may assure the penitent that he need never confess such a thing.

THE CONFESSOR AND THE DEVOUT

Those who are devout and go to Communion frequently should ordinarily be urged to receive the Sacrament of Penance once a week.

If such a penitent were to confess only imperfections and nothing was clearly a venial sin, he can be absolved conditionally, according to Bonacina. However I think this should not be allowed except on very rare occasions when they cannot - or cannot easily - mention something from their past life which would be certain matter. It is my opinion too that if the penitent does not present certain matter, the confessor is not obliged to go to the trouble of questioning him in order to absolve. And if he has inquired and found nothing, he is not obliged to give absolution, even conditionally. This, I repeat, happens when the penitent confesses faults which are only doubtfully venial sins.

It is different when the penitent confesses things that are certainly venial sins, even though of common or daily occurrence - such as impatience, intemperance, distractions in prayer, and so forth. In order to absolve this penitent, the confessor must check to see if he occasionally puts forth effort to conquer the bad habit. If he does, the confessor can make the judgment that his faults flow from human weakness rather than from a lack of sorrow or resolve. If, on the other hand, he falls back into these faults

frequently and without resisting them, he can be treated as a recidive as we mentioned in chapter five.

The confessor should never forbid his penitents, especially women, to go to another confessor. If he discovers that they have gone to another, he must show no sign of being displeased. In fact, it would be a good idea for him to tell them occasionally to confess to someone else. One exception to this comes to mind - a person who is very scrupulous should not be told to go to another priest if the confessor prudently fears that another confessor who did not know the situation would cause the penitent to lose his peace of mind. The confessor finally should never manifest a desire to direct a particular individual.

He should never speak unnecessarily about the mistakes of other confessors. He should sincerely try to excuse them from the mistakes they make.

The confessor should not undertake the direction of a person who wants to leave his present director unless there is an urgent reason for it. So, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales, St. Charles Borromeo, and others. (8) This kind of thing is the cause of all kinds of disturbance, dissipation, and even of scandal. Just because a penitent dislikes his present confessor is not reason enough to change. Neither is a lack of confidence in him sufficient, for, as St. Teresa says, this is often a temptation of the devil. (9) St. Francis de Sales says on this point: "The confessor should not be changed without a grave reason." (10) This is the general rule - but it is not necessary to hold this absolutely, if some legitimate cause (less than grave) for changing is present.

Lack of holiness is, as St. Teresa says, a just reason for changing confessors. "If the confessor seems inclined to vanity, he may be changed, for if he is vain, he will make others vain." (11) The confessor's lack of knowledge can also be a just cause for changing, but there should be some clear proof of this. Finally she points out that it is never wrong - and in fact it is very advantageous - to consult other directors about problems at times.

The confessor should be careful to show no partiality for one penitent. Some priests become involved with a particular penitent, and they end up devoting all their time, attention, and zeal to her. We do not deny, surely, that some penitents need more help than others. But help is one thing - involvement or attachment

which takes time and attention away from others is quite another. It would be a good idea for the confessor to set aside a particular day or time which will not inconvenience his other penitents for the one who needs extra help.

In hearing the confessions of devout persons, the confessor should never talk too loudly even if he is not talking about sins. If he were to do this, others would be afraid to confess their sins for fear that the confessor would speak just as loudly to them. (12)

He should not let devout young women go about visiting churches in such a way that they stay in church enough to cause anxiety to their parents. He should urge them rather to prepare themselves for married life by helping with the housework.

In regard to the way a confessor should guard against familiarity with his penitents, see what we have to say in the next chapter. And for more details on how to direct devout souls, see the whole ninth chapter.

THE CONFESSOR AND DEAF-MUTES

If a penitent is deaf - and as ordinarily happens - mute also, the confessor should take him to a private room for confession, in order to allow him the freedom to express his sins and his sorrow in signs, as best he can. It might be a good idea before hearing his confession to ask the man's friends if he has any vices and how to go about communicating with him. Then in the confessional, as soon as he recognizes some particular sin and some sign of sorrow, the confessor should give him absolution. But I would say: always absolve conditionally unless there is moral certainty about his dispositions.

As to a person who cannot speak, in our opinion he is bound to express his confession in writing if he knows how to write. When a person is bound to a certain end, he is bound also to the ordinary means of attaining that end. Note I said "ordinary". Writing would not be an ordinary means if it would entail a serious inconvenience to the mute person, or if there existed the danger that his sins might become known.

If a deaf person or one who is hard of hearing should come to confession and the confessor does not realize he or she is deaf until he begins to question him in the course of the confession, it is a doubtful procedure to tell him in a loud voice to come back at some other time or place. This case often comes up during the missions and is sometimes a source of great worry to the missionary.

I think the thing should be handled like this. If the confessor knows from the beginning that the person is deaf, then he can tell him to come back at another time. But if he notices this only after the confession is under way - from the way the penitent answers questions - the confessor must not then tell him to return in a voice so loud that those near the confessional would hear. This would surely give them the idea that the penitent had confessed some serious or doubtfully serious sin. Consequently, in this case, once he has some indication of the required dispositions he may absolve him absolutely - even if he confessed a mortal sin. If the dispositions are not apparent, then he should absolve conditionally. Lest he break the seal, he need not try to get more certainty as to the dispositions nor tell him to return. Finally, he should impose a light penance, because the loud voice he must use to give the penance will be overheard by others.

THE CONFESSOR AND THE DYING

In hearing the confessions of the dying, the confessor should not be too demanding as to the number and circumstances of the sins, especially if a priest has already arrived with Viaticum or if the doctor insists that Viaticum be given quickly. It is better at a time like this to worry about the dispositions of the penitent than about the integrity of the confession. It would be enough if he merely told the sick man to repeat the confession when he feels better. The penance should be very light: it makes no difference whether the confessor imposes a proportionate one to be said after convalescence or whether he tells the man to come back after convalescence.

For someone who ordinarily cannot be without an attendant - for example a wounded person or a woman in labor - it is enough if they accuse themselves of sinfulness in general or mention in particular only some venial fault, always of course with the intention of confessing integrally upon recovery.

The confessor should note that, if the dying man is bound to restitution and is able to do it at the time, he should be held to make it right away. It is not sufficient for him merely to leave this task to his heirs. If he refuses to make the restitution, absolution should be denied him.

If the word Viaticum would destroy the dying man's peace of mind, it is permissible for the pastor to give him the Eucharist - not with the words: *Accipe, frater, Viaticum* - but with the regular formula for communion: *Corpus Domini nostri, etc.*

If in the confessor's judgment the dying man is at the point where he should receive Extreme Unction and yet he refuses, the tremendous effects of the sacrament should be made clear to him. It gives, for instance, strength to resist the devil's temptations in those last moments of life. It frees from venial sin, and even from mortal sin if he has forgotten to confess one and it is still on his soul. It even gives bodily health if this is expedient for the soul's welfare. But this health will not be given if the dying man waits until recovery is impossible without a miracle. The sacrament follows the ordinary course of things by reinforcing the natural means of recovery.

If in spite of all this, the sick man still refuses to be anointed, many authors teach - and with great probability - that he commits mortal sin. It would be a sin against charity to him- self, since he further deprives himself of something he needs so much to strengthen himself.

THE CONFESSOR AND THE CONDEMNED CRIMINAL

With condemned criminals the confessor must employ the greatest charity and patience.

When he first visits the man, the confessor should try to get across to him the idea that death is actually a gift from God who wants him to be saved. He should tell him that all of us have to leave the world soon anyway in order to enter an eternity which is without end. He should speak to him about the happiness of those who are in heaven, and about the wretched state of the damned. Exhort him to thank the God who has waited for him until now and do not let him die in the state of sin. Finally try to get him to accept death with a certain amount of joy by uniting it to the death

that Christ suffered for love of him. Assure him that if he accepts death as a punishment for his sins, he will certainly be saved - in fact, his action will be extremely meritorious and in heaven he will be rewarded for it.

Next urge him to go to confession and tell his sins freely. Inquire especially if he bears hatred toward anyone, or if he keeps on his person any superstitious object. Ask if he has entered into a pact with the devil. Once he has been absolved, the confessor should try to have him communicate frequently. Do what you can too to instill in him a devotion to the Mother of God, asking her frequently for the grace to die a good death.

The confessor finally should be with him, encouraging him, as he goes to the death chamber. He should hold before him a crucifix and remind him that heaven is almost his. (13)

But what is to be done if the criminal obstinately refuses to go to confession?

First of all, the confessor should try to help him with prayer. He should get others as well, especially religious communities, to offer up for him their Masses and prayers.

Remind him that whether he repents or not the sentence will be carried out. Ask him if he has despaired of being saved and given his soul to the devil. If there has been such an agreement, do all you can to convince him that it has no binding force, for God alone is the Master of men. As soon as he revokes the evil intention, God will forgive his sins.

Ask him if it is hatred of some person that is causing his obstinacy. The confessor must realize that it is not a good idea to try to force confession the first time one visits an obstinate person. He will only become all the more obstinate. Instead, talk to him about the fact that everyone has to die, about the Mercy of God, the joys of heaven, and the pains of hell. Give him examples of sinners who died impenitent, or of criminals who died holy deaths. For instance, the story of the innocent man who was condemned to death. Someone asked him why he did not defend his innocence, and he answered: "Why should I? I've begged God for years to let me die a shameful death just as Christ died for me. Now my wish has come true. Should I turn around and throw away such an answer to prayer?" And with sentiments like these he walked off joyfully to the gallows.

Next the confessor should give the criminal time to think these things over. Later he should ask if perhaps he has changed his mind. Remind him that death is near and the choice of heaven or hell is in his hands.

If he still remains hardened, the confessor should get everyone near to pray for the man, especially to pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Once again beg him not to desire his own damnation. Even try to frighten him with threats if nothing else will work - but always end on a gentle note.

THE CONFESSOR AND THOSE POSSESSED BY THE DEVIL

Some of those possessed by evil spirits have nothing more than terrible apparitions and bodily torments. These are easy to cure. Prayer, patience, and above all, conformity to God's will should be urged in their case.

The confessor should never be so naïve as to think that all cases of possession by the devil are nothing more than a figment of one's imagination or a bodily defect. It cannot be denied that there really are possessed people, even among Christians. This is why the Church has composed so many forms of exorcism - a thing she has done from the very beginning. If there were no such thing as possession, the order of exorcist would be useless, and this we certainly cannot agree to. Still, we have to admit that a certain amount of suspicion regarding possession is good. Most of them are nothing more than deceitful tricks or the result of wild imaginations or of sickness, especially among women.

There are other situations, however, which cause the confessor far more trouble. These are the cases where the person is bothered by sensual images and touches and even by intercourse, by which the devil tries to arouse sexual passion. (14)

Whenever a person troubled by this type of temptation comes to confession, the confessor should use great wisdom in helping him meet this terrifying conflict. Cardinal Petrucci points out that they are in great danger unless many effective remedies are put to use - even extraordinary ones at times. Each act of resistance demands special help from God and tremendous effort on the part of the sufferer himself. It is hard to come out victorious unless he perseveres in severe mortification and fervent prayer. Over and

over he should recommend himself to Christ Crucified and to the Mother of God. If he should grow remiss in prayer or in mortification, he will run the risk of becoming secretly complacent in these sinful pleasures.

Now for a remedy. If the confessor is convinced that there is not guilt in these temptations, he should tell the penitent to follow this course of action: frequently call upon the names of Jesus and Mary, diligently turn away from the sense pleasure, go to communion frequently, renew his resolve frequently that he does not want to consent to any temptation or delight which the devil might offer him, use the sign of the cross and holy water, sprinkling his room and his bed with the latter, carry with him a relic of a saint or a small book of the Gospels. He should use private exorcisms on himself such as: "Evil spirit, in the Name of Jesus, I command you to leave me and never bother me again." Finally, urge him to humble himself whenever he is troubled in this way, and often to humble himself in other ways as well, for God often allows a trial of this kind in order to remove some interior pride.

But if a person is guilty in regard to these temptations, or if he seeks rather than avoids their occasions, he will be hard to help. It is not easy to convert sinners like this who are in league with the devil. First of all, the devil has acquired some sort of hold over their wills, and secondly they are too weak to resist. What they need is an extraordinary grace from God, but only very seldom does God see fit to give such a grace to this type of sinner.

Still, if one of them comes to confession, the confessor should not just "give up" when it comes to helping him. He should treat him with great kindness and try to re-assure him by telling him that where there is no consent, there is no sin. If he resists with his will, he does not sin.

The confessor should above all use at least a private exorcism against the devil. This is certainly licit. For instance: "I as the minister of God command you, impure spirit of spirits, to leave this child of God." Then ask the penitent if he ever invoked the devil or entered into a pact with him, if he ever denied his faith or committed some sin against faith. Ask in what form the devil appears to him - as a man, woman, animal, etc. For if the person had intercourse with him, besides the sin against chastity and religion there would be the added sin of fornication or sodomy or incest or adultery or sacrilege (at least in intent). The confessor should also ask where this meeting took place.

Next he should show how terrible this sin is, and try to get him to make a good confession and really begin anew. Sinners of this type often omit sins, even when they do confess.

Lastly, urge him to use the same things we mentioned above: calling on the Holy Names, using holy water and the sign of the cross, carrying a small Gospel book or a relic with him, and the private exorcism on himself.

The confessor should then defer absolution, but urge him to return often in order to keep check on how he is resisting the diabolical attacks and using the remedies. The confessor should not absolve him until he has been put through a long test, for such conversions are seldom real and very seldom lasting.

1. Omitted a few lines as not pertinent today.
2. MT, Lib VI, n. 849.
3. St. Francis, Life by Gallitia.
4. Bacci, Life of St. Philip, Bk 1, ch 20, n. 19.
5. John of the Cross, Treatise "delle spine dello spirito"
6. Segneri, Il Confessore Istruito, last chapter.
7. Bonacina, de Poenit. qu 4, p. 3, n. 1.
8. Bacci, op. cit., Bk 1, ch 15; St. Francis de Sales, Maxims of ...; St. Charles, Life by Giussano.
9. St. Teresa, Way of Perfection, ch 4.
10. St. Francis de Sales, Maxims.
11. St. Teresa, Way of Perfection, ch 5.
12. Omitted two paragraphs as not pertinent today, e.g., girls shouldn't learn to read or write lest it be an occasion of sin.
13. Exhortation to condemned shortened.
14. St. Alphonsus here went into a long treatment of the kinds of diabolical possession, which we have omitted, following the new Spanish edition. Of Moriones, pg 314, note.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Confessional Prudence

WEIGHING OPINIONS

Prudence comes into play most of all when the confessor is trying to choose between conflicting opinions. The question that will not concern us in this chapter is the old dispute about whether a confessor may follow a less probable and less safe opinion in the face of a more probable one. Authors say enough about this - I only wish they would give us reasons rather than bitter criticisms.

Back in the chapter on proximate occasions of sin I gave some space to this question - here I will repeat what I said there. When it is a case of avoiding formal sin, the confessor should ordinarily follow the more benign opinion, in so far as it is permissible. For only formal sin offends God.

But when the more benign opinion would expose the penitent to the danger of formal sin, the confessor is then obliged to follow the stricter opinion. In this case the stricter opinion is the better one, as far as the penitent's salvation is concerned.

However, when the penitent wants to follow a probable opinion, and is otherwise well-disposed, the confessor is obliged to absolve him. By reason of the confession the penitent has a certain and strict right to absolution, so that he will not be forced to get absolution from another priest, for this would involve the serious inconvenience of repeating the confession of sins. This is the common opinion, as I have shown in my Moral Theology. (1)

This holds especially when the confessor wants to bind the penitent to restitution and there is some probability that he is not bound to it. Even if the confessor does not consider the penitent's side as solidly probable, he would be obliged to absolve him - provided, of course, that the penitent is not just an ignorant person, but is actually backed up in his opinion by noteworthy moralists. This would mean that he has formed for himself a true judgment of conscience for his action.

However, this obligation to absolve does not hold if the penitent's opinion has no apparent probability. If the confessor considers it wholly erroneous - because in his opinion it goes against a certain principle, or a convincing reason against which nothing can shake his certainty - he cannot and must not absolve the penitent who will not peacefully accept his decision.

In the case where the confessor figured his admonition would have no effect on the penitent except to change a material sin into formal, he should dissimulate, except in some instances which I mentioned in chapter one.

CORRECTING CONFSSIONAL MISTAKES

If without guilt on his part, the confessor should make a mistake affecting the validity of the sacrament, he is not bound to tell the penitent except out of charity. And charity does not bind where there is serious inconvenience. This holds except in two cases:

- 1.) if the confessor is also the pastor, for pastors are bound in this case to repair the grave harm done to their subjects, and

- 2.) if the penitent is in danger of death or in danger of never confessing again. For in these cases charity obliges even when there would be great inconvenience.

If in making the mistake the confessor was seriously at fault the case is different. He is then always obliged even with grave inconvenience to repair the mistake - especially if it put the penitent in a proximate occasion of sin. This obligation is removed, however, when the penitent has gone to confession to someone else, or has at least gone to Holy Communion. The confessor may refer to this mistake outside of the confessional only with the penitent's permission if it could in any way harm the penitent.

If the mistake concerns only the integrity of confession - for instance, he did not question the penitent about the species or the number of sins, even through his own fault - the confessor is never bound to correct the mistake outside confession. For it would embarrass the penitent to hear a recounting of his sins.

If out of malice or culpable ignorance he exempted a penitent from making restitution, or unjustly bound him to make it, he must inform him of it - first asking the penitent's permission. Otherwise, he himself is bound to restitution. If on the other hand, he has not been gravely at fault in this, he is not obliged to advise the penitent whenever there would be some grave inconvenience to himself. Still if there is no such inconvenience and he can make the correction and fails to do so, he is bound to restitution himself.

Finally, if it was merely that he failed to warn the penitent about an obligation to restitution, he himself is not bound to restore - even if he is the pastor, or even if he failed gravely in the matter.

OBSERVING THE SACRAMENTAL SEAL

The confessor must be extremely prudent also when it comes to keeping the sacramental seal. The fact is well known and certain, that the confessor may never speak about things heard in confession whenever there is danger of breaking the seal either directly or indirectly or of harm to the penitent. This holds even when the confessor doubts whether or not he heard these things in confession or in relation to confession.

However, confessors are not forbidden ordinarily to mention sins heard in the confessional in a sermon, as long as others cannot identify the penitent, or as long as he has express permission from the penitent.

Nonetheless, all possible caution should be used in this matter.

Never say from the pulpit that a certain vice is common in this particular city, if you came to know about the frequency of the vice from hearing confessions. This holds however only when he has not learned of the vice in some other way and when the place is small. In a monastery especially, he should not come out too strongly against some particular fault which, from confession, he has found to be rather common.

The confessor should not pressure the penitent into giving him leave to speak. In fact, he may never use a permission that is not entirely spontaneous and free. He should consequently be as sparing as possible in asking such a permission when there is no definite need for it. It would be safer to suggest that the penitent himself bring up the necessary matter to the confessor outside confession.

Everyone realizes that the confessor may not speak about matters treated in the confessional outside of confession, unless he has the express leave of the penitent. In the confessional, however, he can bring up these things whenever he considers it worthwhile for the penitent.

Never speak of sins heard in confession in the presence of people whose simplicity may lead them to suspect a disclosure of confessional matter.

The confessor may never ask the name of an accomplice, for example to make reparation for some common offense; not even then - in my opinion - can the penitent be obliged to give the name of the accomplice to this particular confessor. The only thing that the confessor can and should do is command the penitent to name the accomplice to those who can prevent a scandal.

However, if the penitent spontaneously wants to name an accomplice to the confessor, he would do well to listen and repair the evil as he sees fit.

Let it be noted here that by this prohibition, confessors are not forbidden to question the penitent regarding the circumstances he needs to know in order to find out if different species of sin are present, or to help the penitent spiritually. For this reason, it might be good for him to ask if the accomplice is a relative, if he is bound by a vow of chastity, if he lives in the same house, if she is the maid, and the like - even if in the following of such a line of questioning he would indirectly discover the identity of the accomplice. But never should he ask for the person's name.

HEARING THE CONFESSIONS OF WOMEN

The confessor should be extremely prudent in hearing the confessions of women. The Holy Office has said: "It is necessary that the confessor always act cautiously, especially with his women penitents, vigilantly avoiding whatever might betray familiarity or foster dangerous friendship." (2) He should ordinarily be stern rather than agreeable when hearing the confessions of young women. He should not allow them to speak to him in front of the confessional, nor should he let them kiss his hand.

During the actual confession he should not let it be known that he knows them. Sometimes they want to be thought well of and when they realize the confessor recognizes them, they fail to make an internal confession.

It is not prudent to look directly into the face of the penitents, nor should he gaze after them as they leave the confessional.

Outside the confessional he should not stop to speak with them in the Church. He should avoid all familiarity and should never accept any little gift.

Especially, he should never go to their homes. The sole exception is the case of grave sickness. And then he should go only if he is called. When there, he should be very careful in hearing their confession. He should leave the door open, sit in a place where he can be seen by those outside the room, and never fix his eyes on the penitent's face.

All this holds especially if the penitent is a devout person, with whom there is danger of becoming overly attached. A very holy man used to say that the devil, in order to start a mutual attraction between devout persons, uses at first the pretext of virtue. He does this just to have the attraction slip from the virtue to the person himself.

For this reason, St. Augustine says: "Short and stern must be one's conversation with these women. Just because they are holier does not mean one need be less on guard. Actually, the holier they are, the more they will attract." (3) And St. Thomas adds: "Even though carnal attachments are dangerous for everyone, they are especially dangerous for those who deal with devout persons. The thing will seem to start in all innocence and then as familiarity grows, the original motives will fade out and purity will suffer."

He goes on to say how this will not be noticed at first. The devil is not about to shoot poisoned arrows right from the start; he is content with those which give just a tiny wound and at the same time increase the attachment. Then quickly, these people reach the point where they no longer act as angels, as they did at first, but as creatures of flesh and blood. They gaze at each other, enraptured with their pleasant conversations which still seem innocent. Finally, they begin to long for each other's company. "And," he concludes, "the spiritual devotion is turned into a carnal one."

How many priests, once good men, have lost both God and their soul due to such an attachment.

Confessors should be careful never to become so fond of hearing the confessions of women that they refuse to hear men who come to them. How sad it is to see confessors spend so much time hearing the confessions of devout women, and then have no time for the men and married women who come to them distraught with anxiety and problems and able to leave their homes only with difficulty. And it turns out that these people can find no one to hear their confessions. They live months and even years without the sacraments and without God.

Such a practice in hearing confessions is not done to please God, but to please self. I do not know what kind of a reward these confessors can expect from God.

However, it is another matter with those who spend time directing souls to perfection. Some call this a waste of time, but I hold that it is an occupation very pleasing to God. For this reason I will devote the entire next chapter to this subject.

Good confessors are the ones who hear confessions in order to please God. When they find someone in need, they prefer him to these devout souls. Time will not be lacking when he can help these latter, if the confessor really wants to help them.

He goes on to say how this will not be noticed at first. The devil is not about to show poisoned arrows right from the start; he is content with those which give just a tiny wound and at the same time increase the attachment. Then suddenly, these wounds reach the point where they no longer cut as angels, as they did at first, but as creatures of flesh and blood. They give at once other, unperceived with their pleasant conversations which still seem innocent. Finally, they begin to long for each other's company. "And," he concludes, "the spiritual devotion is turned into a carnal one."

How many priests, even good men, have lost both God and their soul due to such an attachment.

1. Lib I, n. 83 and Lib VI, n. 604.
2. Holy Office, May 6, 1943. Quote used in place of an out of date quote from the Sacred Congregations of Bishops, 1620.
3. This and following ideas from St. Thomas are from Opusc. 64 de modo confitendi.

CHAPTER NINE

The Guidance

of Devout Souls

God once said to Jeremias, "This day I set you over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant." (1/10) He says those same words to each and every confessor, whose job it is not only to uproot the vices of his penitents, but also to plant in them virtues. For this reason, we have thought it worthwhile to include here a chapter to help young confessors in guiding devout souls on to perfection. As we pointed out before, we must never drive real sinners away, but still God dearly loves the priest who devotes time to beautifying the souls of his loved ones, that is, by teaching them how to give themselves to Him wholeheartedly. In God's eyes, one perfect soul is worth more than a thousand imperfect souls. Consequently, whenever a confessor runs across a penitent whose life is free of mortal sin, he should do all he can to lead it on to perfection and a life of love.

To do this, he should show that person how much God Who is infinite loveliness deserves our love. He should show him the gratitude that we owe our Lord for having loved us even to the point of giving His life for us. He should tell him the danger that threatens a person who is called by God to a more perfect life and who turns a deaf ear to His voice. In general, the guidance of these souls resolves around three considerations which we will treat one by one:

- 1.) Meditation and Contemplation,
- 2.) Mortification, and
- 3.) Frequent Reception of the Sacraments.

THE PRAYER OF MEDITATION

The first thing a confessor should do when he finds a soul who abhors mortal sin and wants to advance in love of God is to guide it toward the practice of mental prayer, which means toward meditation on the eternal truths and on the goodness of God. Even though meditation is not necessary for salvation, nevertheless like prayer of petition, it appears necessary in order to keep a soul in the state of grace. Sometimes sin can co-exist with other pious devotions, but it can never co-exist with mental prayer. The person will either give up prayer or give up sin - one or the other. St. Teresa used to say: "No matter how many sins the devil throws in the soul's path, if only it perseveres in prayer, I hold it certain that God will bring it safely to port." (1) This is why the devil tries his best to hinder souls from practicing mental prayer. As St. Teresa says again, "The devil knows that he has lost a soul which tries perseveringly to remain faithful to mental prayer." (2) Love is the thing that binds and unites a person to God, and the furnace of love is mental prayer or meditation. As the psalmist says, "When I reflected, a fire flamed out." (38/4)

For these reasons, the confessor should begin by introducing the soul to the practice of prayer. At first he should set the time for it as half an hour and then gradually increase it in proportion to the increase of fervor. The confessor should not bend in this, even if the penitent raises objections such as not having enough time or a place in which to recollect himself. Tell him to try it in the mornings and evenings when the house is quiet, or even while he is at work, if that is the only thing possible. At these times, he should raise his mind to God and think on the truths

of Faith; the last things, for instance, especially death, are very profitable for beginners. He should also meditate on the Passion of Christ, which is a good meditation for everyone. If he can read, he should use some spiritual book, at least as a means of beginning the prayer. This was St. Teresa's practice.

He should advise the penitent to pick a subject for meditation which will best arouse his devotion. When he hits upon something that moves him to fervor, he should pause for a moment and stop meditating long enough to make acts of the will, prayers of petition, and resolutions.

First, with regard to acts of the will. These are acts of humility, gratitude, faith, hope, and above all, repeated acts of contrition and love of God, including a total offering of himself to God and complete resignation to His Will. He should try to repeat the act to which he feels himself most inclined.

Secondly, prayers of petition. Everything that he can hope for depends on prayer. As St. Augustine says, "Almighty God ordinarily will not give His graces, especially the grace of perseverance, unless we pray for it." (3) Our Lord Himself has said, "Ask and you shall receive." (Jn. 16/24) St. Teresa says consequently, that if we fail to ask, we will not receive. If we want to save our souls then, we must pray always and we should ask for two graces in particular - perseverance and love of God. Certainly there is no better time to pray than during meditation. Anyone who neglects meditation will not pray much, because he will not be reminded to think of the graces he needs and of the necessity of prayer. Whoever fails to make meditation, therefore, will find it extremely difficult to remain in the state of grace.

Thirdly, good resolutions. In order that the meditation may not be fruitless and in order that the soul may put into practice the lights it has received during meditation, good resolutions are necessary. St. Francis de Sales in his Introduction to a Devout Life wrote that meditation should never close without a particular resolution, something like avoiding a more or less frequent fault or practicing some virtue in which he finds himself weak. For more on this point, I refer you to the next chapter, the section on mental prayer.

The confessor should be conscientious in asking the penitent for an account of his meditation, or at least if they made it. If they did not make it, he should have them accuse themselves of this

omission as the first sin they mention in confession, because if they abandon meditation they are lost. "A soul that abandons meditation," says St. Teresa, "throws himself into hell without the devils having to turn a finger." (4) Think how much good confessors can do for souls if only they make this tiny effort. On the other hand, think what an account they will have to give to God if they fail to do this, since they are obliged, as far as they can, to see to the welfare of their penitents. Think how many people could be put on the road to perfection and freed from the danger of falling into mortal sin, if only confessors would go to the little trouble of introducing them to the practice of meditation and of checking up on them at least as they begin their spiritual life. Once a soul has formed a solid habit of meditation, it will scarcely, if ever, lose God again. For this reason, meditation should be recommended not only to devout people, but even to sinners whose relapses into sin are often nothing more than a question of not reflecting.

Confessors should pay special attention to this when their penitents are troubled with spiritual desolation. When people first begin the practices of the spiritual life, God often favors them with special lights, with tears, and with sensible consolations. But then after a while, He takes away these sources of consolation. His reason for doing this is to test their faithfulness and to incite them to greater perfection by detaching them from these sensible delights. A soul may easily become attached to these things with a certain amount of imperfection and ill-regulated self-love. Sensible consolations (and even supernatural inclinations) are indeed God's gift, but they are not God. In order to detach these dearly beloved souls from His gifts and bring them to a purer love for the Giver Himself, He lets them be deprived of the supports which they had found in meditation and lets them feel in its place weariness, aridity, torments, and sometimes temptations.

At times like these, confessors should take great pains to urge the troubled person not to give up meditation and Communion. He should speak to them as St. Francis de Sales would, "One ounce of meditation in desolation is worth more before God than a hundred pounds of it in consolation." (5) Actually, a person that loves God because of the consolations He gives, loves the consolations of God more than God Himself. But a soul that loves Him and clings to Him without consolations proves that he really loves God.

So much for meditation. I will next give a brief description of the infused prayer of contemplation, with its degrees. I will include other supernatural gifts and the rules given by the masters of the spiritual life for guiding souls whom God has favored with these graces.

THE PRAYER OF CONTEMPLATION

When a soul has been blessed with the gift of contemplation, the confessor must understand well how to guide it, and to save it from disillusion. Otherwise he will do a good amount of damage for which St. John of the Cross says he will have to render a strict account to God.

Contemplation is quite different from meditation. In meditation, a person goes out in search of God through the effort of reasoning. In contemplation, he gazes upon God Who has been found without effort. In meditation a person acts through the operations of his own faculties. In contemplation, on the other hand, God acts and the soul is only acted upon and receives the gifts which are infused into it by grace without any contribution of its own. The very light and the divine love which fill it make it lovingly intent upon contemplating God's goodness.

.....PRAYER OF RECOLLECTION

But before God gives the gift of contemplation, He usually draws a soul into the prayer of recollection, or the prayer of contemplative repose, as the mystics call it. This is not as yet infused contemplation, because the soul is still in an active state.

This recollection (I refer to natural recollection - supernatural and infused recollection will be treated further on) occurs when the mind has no need of going outside itself, as it were, to laboriously consider a certain mystery or eternal truth. Instead it withdraws itself from external things and, recollected somehow within itself, remains effortlessly and sweetly intent upon a truth or mystery, whatever it be. Contemplative repose is almost the same thing, except for this: in recollection the person is occupied with some particular thought, whereas in this repose there is a kind of general awareness of God and the person feels himself actually recollected and lovingly drawn to Him.

Some mystics say that in this recollection or contemplative repose, even though it is natural, still the soul should not only stop meditating but even stop making acts of the will (that is, acts of love, oblation, resignation, etc.) and just maintain an attitude of loving attention to God without making any acts.

However, I find myself unable to agree with such a "magic" formula. I do not deny that when a person is in this state of recollection, he should not try to do any meditating, because he has already found without effort what he set out to find. (6) And besides, Father Segneri says, ordinary meditating will itself produce after some time what is called acquired contemplation. This acquired contemplation is knowing at one glance the truth which a person once had to meditate on and work over in order to know. But at a time like this why should the person stop making the various acts of the will? What time could be better for making them than the moments of recollection?

It is true that St. Francis de Sales advised St. Jane Frances de Chantal not to repeat new acts of the will when she found herself in union with God during prayer. But why? Because St. Jane Frances already enjoyed the gift of passive contemplation. (7) But when a soul is still in the active state, how can good acts possibly interfere with the operations of grace? St. Francis himself set a certain number of aspirations to be said within a certain time by the devout souls he used to direct. When a soul is in the state of passive contemplation, even though it does not merit (because it is not acting, but only being acted upon), it still receives a great deal of strength in order to act with greater perfection later on. But when a soul is in the active state, it has to make acts in order to merit, because that is how a person merits divine grace.

For this reason, Father Segneri's conclusion is right. (8) When God is speaking and operating, a person should keep silent and stop his own activity and right from the start simply give loving attention to the divine operations. But when God does not speak, the person must help himself as well as he can to reach union with God, by meditating (when this is necessary), by affections, by prayers of petition, and by resolutions. Of course, it should be understood that these acts are not to be forced; a person should make those only to which he feels himself gently drawn.

.....SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION

Another thing to note is that before God raises a soul to contemplation, He usually purifies it by a supernatural aridity which is called spiritual purification. He does this in order to remove the imperfections which impede it from reaching contemplation. There are two kinds of aridity: sensible which is in the senses, and substantial, which is in the soul itself.

Sensible aridity, when it is natural, brings with it a disgust for spiritual things and a kind of darkness that is neither very oppressive nor very lengthy. But when it is supernatural (as we are considering it), it plunges the person into an extremely profound darkness, which lasts for a long time and grows more intense with the days. Nevertheless, in this condition a person feels on the one hand more detached from creatures and thinks continually of God and desires and resolves to love Him perfectly, and on the other hand he realizes that he is, as it were, incapable of doing all this because of his imperfections which seem to make God hate him. Still he never stops marching forward courageously in the practice of virtue.

This trying aridity is the activity of grace in the soul. It is a supernatural light, but a light which brings suffering and darkness. It attempts to come into direct contact with what you might call the eye of the spirit, and as it does, it finds the senses and the faculties of the soul not yet ready for it, because they are not as yet detached from sense pleasures. They are still material - filled with forms, figures, and images. And as a result, this darkness is caused in the soul - a darkness so painful and yet so profitable. By means of this darkness the soul acquires a detachment from all pleasures of sense, whether they arise from earthly or from spiritual things. In addition it acquires a deep understanding of its own misery and inability to do any good at all - and with that comes a great reverence for God Who reveals Himself to the soul in all His Majesty and Power.

While the person is in this state, the director must move him to hope for great things from the Hands of God Who is treating him like this. He should tell the person not to force himself to meditate, but to humble himself and to offer himself and abandon himself to God, completely resigned to the dispositions of His will, which thinks of nothing besides our good.

.....SPIRITUAL ARIDITY

Following this purification of the senses, Almighty God usually grants the gift of joyful contemplation and the gift of supernatural recollection, of quiet, and of union. About these things we will speak in a minute. But before union, and after the recollection and the quiet, God ordinarily purifies the soul with spiritual aridity. This is also called substantial aridity, because in it God wishes the soul to be altogether annihilated within itself.

Aridity of the senses is the withdrawal of sensible devotion. Spiritual aridity, on the other hand, is a divine light by which God makes the soul realize its own nothingness. In this state a soul finds itself in a terrifying agony because, even though it is intent on serving God, it gets a clearer glimpse of its own imperfections and the thought comes to it that God has driven it away from Him and abandoned it as being ungrateful of the graces it has received. It performs many spiritual exercises - meditations, communions, mortifications - but each of them causes it distress. Because it finds so much disgust and difficulty in performing them, it comes to think that they all deserve punishment and make it hateful in the eyes of God. Sometimes such a soul even imagines that he hates God, and that because of this God has already numbered him among his reprobated enemies and is now letting him even during life experience the torments and the abandonment of the damned. Sometimes too God allows such distress and abandonment to be brought about by many other temptations and arousments of impurity, of anger, of blasphemy, of doubts against the faith, and above all, of despair. And even though their will firmly resists all this, the darkness surrounding them hides the fact from them or at least makes it very uncertain, and in their profound darkness and confusion they begin to fear that they have given consent and that consequently they are all the more deserving of God's abandonment.

When a confessor meets a person like this, who is on the path of perfection and imagines that he has been abandoned by God, he should first of all not be frightened when he sees all this confusion and all these sentiments of fear and despair. Neither should he exhibit timidity and hesitation. He should rather strongly urge the person to fear nothing and to trust in God more than ever. He should tell him what God said to St. Teresa - namely, that no one loses God without knowing that he is losing Him. These ideas of

blasphemy, impurity and despair, these doubts against faith are not acts of consent to sin, he should say, but only sufferings which will bring him closer to God if they are borne with resignation. Tell him that God cannot hate a person who loves Him and has an upright will. Tell him that this is God's way of treating those whom He loves. St. Teresa used to say: "By means of dryness and temptations God tests His lovers. And though the aridity should last a life time, still if they do not give up mental prayer, the day will come when all will be repaid." (9) What a beautiful thought' this is for a person in desolation.

The confessor then should urge the person to take courage and expect great things from God with unbounded confidence, for He is leading it by the surest way - the way of the Cross. On his part, meanwhile, the person should humble himself as deserving this treatment from God for the shortcomings of his past life. Secondly, he should resign himself completely to God's Will, offering himself to suffer these pains and even greater ones as long as God wills it. Thirdly, he should throw himself like one dead into the arms of God's Mercy and into the care of the Blessed Virgin who is called the Mother of Mercy and the Comfort of the Afflicted.

Sensible aridity lasts until the senses are sufficiently purified for the soul to be properly disposed for contemplation. Spiritual aridity lasts until it is properly disposed for Divine Union. It should be noted that even after Divine Union, God will sometimes allow this aridity to return, so that, as St. Teresa says, the soul will not grow careless and will realize its own nothingness from time to time.

.....CONTEMPLATION ITSELF

When the purification of the senses and the sensible aridity is completed, God leads the soul into the state of contemplation.

Contemplation can be either affirmative or negative. Affirmative contemplation occurs when through a divine light and without any effort on its part, the soul sees some truth. It may be a created truth (such as the misery of hell or the happiness of heaven) or it may be an uncreated truth (such as God's goodness, mercy, love or power). Negative contemplation is the understanding of divine perfections - not in particular - but with a confused, general knowledge, which however produces in the mind a far higher

concept of God's greatness. It may also know confusedly some created truth, such as the fearfulness of hell.

Now let us turn to the three degrees of contemplation: Recollection, Quiet, and Union.

.....SUPERNATURAL RECOLLECTION

The first degree of contemplation is supernatural recollection.

We spoke of natural recollection earlier. This takes place when a man's faculties are joined in the consideration of God within him. It is called natural, not because the soul can produce it by itself (every act of virtue, after all, needs grace in order to be meritorious and is therefore supernatural), but because the soul is in an active state: with the aid of ordinary grace it is doing the work.

Supernatural recollection, on the other hand, is the recollection which God produces by means of an extraordinary grace which leads the soul into a state of passivity. It comes about then when the faculties of the soul are concentrated not from any effort on the part of the soul, but because of a light infused by God and lighting up an immense and sensible love of God within the soul.

While in this state, a person should not strain itself by trying to suspend the tranquil process of thoughts and sentiments suggested by this divine light. Nor should he, on the other hand, force himself to think about particular things, such as his unworthiness or his resolutions. Nor should he try to determine the nature of this recollection. He should rather allow himself to be guided by God to consider the things, and make the acts to which he feels that God is leading him.

.....SUPERNATURAL REPOSE

The next degree of contemplation is supernatural repose. In recollection the force of the love is communicated to the external senses, which God causes to be recollected within the soul. But in repose, love is communicated directly to the spirit in the depths

of the soul. It is also a more ardent love, and from the soul spills over into the senses, although not always, for it can often happen that a soul will have this prayer of repose without any sensible sweetness.

St. Teresa says that in this form of prayer not all of the faculties are bound, but that the will is suspended and bound because at this time the only object it can love is God Who is drawing it to Himself. The intellect, the memory, and the imagination are sometimes free to wander here and there. For this reason, says the saint, a person should not be troubled at this, but should "laugh at its thoughts and treat them like foolish ideas, remaining in peace; the will is master, after all, and so it should control the thoughts without any strain." (10) If, on the other hand, a person tries to recollect his thoughts, he will not accomplish anything and will lose his peace.

In this state, just as in Recollection, a person should not strive and strain to make resolutions or other acts of its own. It should make only the acts to which it feels itself drawn by God.

.....THE PRAYER OF PURE CONTEMPLATION

Let us turn now to the prayer of pure contemplation which is the negative contemplation we mentioned before and which is far more perfect than affirmative contemplation.

Negative contemplation is called "the bright darkness", because the intellect is darkened by the brilliance of the light, just as a person who looks at the sun is blinded by its light and sees nothing, realizing only that the sun is a strong light. Similarly, God trains upon a soul in this Darkness a bright light which does not give an understanding of any particular truth, but rather a general and undefined knowledge of His incomprehensible goodness. Through this it is enabled to form a vague but nevertheless highly elevated idea of God. When a soul begins to realize any one of the perfections of God, it naturally forms a high idea of His goodness. But when it realizes that the perfections of God are incomprehensible, its idea of His goodness is surely far higher.

Cardinal Petrucci says that this prayer is called the prayer of darkness because in this life the soul is incapable of knowing the divinity clearly, and consequently in this state it knows it

without knowing it, but knows it better than it could in any other way. Due to the fact that God is not a Being Who can be represented by any image or picture, the intellect cannot form any idea of Him, and so it knows only that it cannot know Him. Hence, the Areopagite calls this "the sublime knowledge of God through ignorance." (11) -- In this prayer of darkness the faculties of the soul and sometimes even the external senses are completely suspended and the soul enters a spiritual inebriation which causes it to break forth into uncontrollable outbursts of love, such as singing, abundant crying, leaping, as used to happen to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi.

.....THE PRAYER OF UNION

After these degrees, God leads the soul into the prayer of union. A soul's whole desire should be to acquire union with God; but this passive union is not necessary, active union is sufficient. St. Teresa says that not all souls - in fact, only a few - are led by God on supernatural paths, but in heaven we shall find many who did not receive these supernatural graces and are higher than those who did receive them.

Active union is perfect conformity to the will of God, and without doubt the perfection of divine love consists in this. "Perfection," says St. Teresa, "does not consist in ecstasies; true union of the soul with God is a union of the will with the divine will." (13) Active union, and not passive, is the necessary one. As St. Teresa also said, souls which have only active union very probably gain much more merit, because they have to struggle harder; and the Lord treats them as strong souls keeping back the pleasure that they might enjoy in this world, in order to give it to them all at once in Heaven. (14) Cardinal Petrucci says that a soul can easily reach the point of complete renunciation of self-will and its transformation with God, by simply willing only what God wills. And even though it may feel the motions of the passions, these will not prevent it from being transformed into God. Consequently, he adds, since all sanctity consists in this, everyone should desire and seek only this one thing, namely, that God rule him and accomplish His will perfectly in him. (15)

St. Teresa, whose authority in these matters is well known, goes on to treat of passive union. In this state, she says, the person neither sees, nor feels nor notices that he is in it, because

the abundance of light and love causes a blessed darkness in which all the faculties of the soul are suspended. (16) The memory remembers nothing but God. The will is bound to God by a love so great that it can love nothing but God. The intellect is filled with so much light that it can think of nothing, not even of the grace that it is receiving; it understands a great deal, but cannot realize what it understands. In short, a soul in this state has a clear and experimental knowledge of God as present and uniting the soul with Himself in the depths of its being.

This union, according to St. Teresa, does not last very long - a half hour at most. In the other forms of contemplation which we have mentioned, God makes His presence felt near the person; in this one He reveals Himself within him, and the person experiences His union with God through a sweet physical contact. For this reason, a person might doubt whether or not it is really God in other forms of contemplation, but here it is impossible. Nevertheless, the confessor must remind such a person that he has not, because of this, become impeccable. He should urge him to humble himself, to be detached, to love the cross and keep himself in complete conformity and uniformity with the divine dispositions. He should do this all the more, as he sees himself more favored by God, for he may very well fear that his infidelity and ingratitude may some day be punished severely by God. St. Teresa claims that she knew several people who had reached this state of union, but then fell back into mortal sin. (17)

.....UNION OF ESPOUSAL

There are three kinds of union: simple union, union of espousal, and consummated union or spiritual marriage. The one we have just been speaking of was simple union.

Let us turn now to the union of espousal. Almighty God usually causes substantial aridity, that is, spiritual purification, to precede it. We spoke of the spiritual purification a moment ago.

There are three distinct degrees to this union of espousal: ecstasy, rapture, and elevation of spirit. In simple union the faculties of the soul are suspended but not the bodily senses, even though they operate only with great difficulty. But in ecstasy, even control of the senses is lost, so that the person does not see,

nor hear, nor feel - even if he is being cut or burned. Rapture is a very strong impulse of grace by which God not only raises the soul to union, but sweeps it, as it were, by a sudden and violent motion, so that even the body at times is raised over the earth and becomes as light as a feather. Elevation of spirit occurs when a soul feels as though it were being pulled by force away from the body and raised violently above it, so much so that its first reaction is an overpowering fear. In elevation of spirit, there is both ecstasy (because of the loss of the senses) and rapture (because of the violent motion). A person who had been favored with this elevation of the spirit told me that it felt as though his soul had been torn from his body and raised up with such speed that it seems he was travelling thousands of miles a second. He became terrified because he did not know where it would end. But finally the motion ceased and he was given a special illumination on some hidden mystery of God.

But a doubt arises here: if in this state of union the faculties of the soul are suspended and the intellect is blinded by the brightness of the light trained upon it and cannot take note of what he sees, how can the person know and describe this mystery of God? The mystics answer this way: when God wants a person to understand some secret, or when He wants to favor him with a vision (either of intellect or imagination), He diminishes the light a bit, so that the soul is able to understand and grasp whatever God wants him to understand.

.....SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

The most perfect union of all, the one called consummated union, is that of spiritual marriage - the highest union which God can give to a man here on earth. In this state, the soul is transformed into God and becomes one and the same thing with God, just like a glass of water placed in the ocean becomes one and the same thing with the water in the ocean.

In other forms of union the mystics tell us that the faculties are suspended, but in this form they are not, because here they have been purified of their quality of sense and matter. Consequently now they are capable of being united with God so that the will loves its God with the greatest peace and the intellect fully realizes and grasps this intimate union with God which has taken place in the depths of the soul. It is as though a person were to gaze upon the sun without being blinded by it, and were to fully grasp its tremendous brilliance.

Furthermore we should note that this union is not transient like the previous ones, but permanent. The soul lives in continual enjoyment of the divine presence united to it. In this state there is an unbroken peace for the passions no longer disturb it in the least. It sees the passions, which appear but do not trouble it, as though it were above the clouds, looking down on the storms that rage below, not touching it itself.

OTHER MYSTICAL PHENOMENA.....VISIONS

It might be well to say a few words about visions, locutions and revelations, so that the confessor will be able to distinguish the true from the false.

Visions are either external, imaginative, or intellectual. The external are those seen by the eyes. The imaginative are those seen in the imagination. The intellectual, those seen neither with the eyes nor with the imagination, but only with the intellect under a divine light which infuses the *species intelligibilis*. This last kind of vision, says St. Teresa, is entirely spiritual, for there is nothing in it that belongs either to the external or to the internal senses. Note that a person cannot see things presented to his eyes or to his imagination unless they are corporeally represented, even though they be spiritual things *in se*; but the intellect, on the contrary, sees even material things as spiritual, or to speak more accurately, the intellect does not see them, but understands them - and understands them better than if they were seen with the eyes.

It is good to remember that visions can be caused by the devil as well as by God - even intellectual visions, as St. John of the Cross seems to say. This is however especially the case with corporeal visions, which are usually (especially among women) concocted out of their own imagination. (18)

The signs which distinguish the true are:

- 1.) they come suddenly, without the person's having thought about them,
- 2.) at first they cause confusion and terror, but then they put the soul at peace,

- 3.) they are rare; frequent ones are held in a good deal of suspicion,
- 4.) they do not last long; St. Teresa says that if a person gazes on a vision for a long time, it is a good sign that it is produced by the imagination. A divine vision passes like a flash of lightning, but remains permanently impressed upon the mind.
- 5.) Finally, true visions leave behind them a very deep peace and a vivid realization of one's own misery and a burning desire for perfection. In this they differ from diabolical visions which are not deeply impressed upon the mind, and leave the soul in dryness, in disquiet, with feelings of self-esteem and with a sensible longing for more visions.

However, if all these signs are verified, St. Teresa says a person cannot be sure, because very often the devil is able to produce a counterfeit of peace, of humility, of desire for perfection and it is hard to tell where they come from. (20) At times the devil will work himself into the heart so as to gain credence and then work some deception on the person.

Hence, ordinarily speaking, the director should not forbid a person to relate her visions to him, but should even command her to make them known whether it is true or false. Nevertheless, he should not betray any curiosity in regard to these things by asking for details or by prompting, such as: "Was it like this? Did you see such-and-such a thing?" Very often a person will say yes just out of malice or simplicity.

If a confessor comes to the conclusion that the visions are a result of the imagination or of the devil's work, since they draw the person away from obedience, humility and so forth, he should plainly say so. But if he is not sure of this, then it is not a good idea to say that they are diabolical or that they are figments of the imagination as some confessors do who are excessively incredulous. (Very different from others who are excessively credulous and say that everything is genuine!) To be sure, the confessor should tell the penitent to beg God to take him away from this dangerous path, and urge him to protest that here on earth he is content to know God by the way of faith. But whatever the visions be, the confessor should suggest that the penitent draw from them whatever fruit he needs, especially that of being right before God.

In this way, even if the visions come from the devil, his schemes will be foiled.

.....LOCUTIONS

Locutions may be successive, formal, or substantial.

Successive locutions occur when a person, while meditating on some truth of faith, seems to hear his own voice, as if another person were answering him. If this brings with it good effects such as love of God or extraordinary humility, it may be a special light from God. But if the person feels no increase in his ordinary love for God, this is a sign that the locution comes from the soul's own imagination.

Formal locutions occur when a person hears actual words coming from outside himself. These can be perceived by external hearing, by the imagination, or by the intellect. They should be examined to see whether they are divine or diabolical. This may be discovered from the things they express or command, and by the effects they produce. If they are divine and impose such things as patience, spiritual works, or self-denial, they will produce a great capacity for suffering, for work, and for humbling oneself.

Substantial locutions are the same as formal, with this difference in the effect: formal does nothing more than instruct or give precepts, whereas substantial immediately accomplishes whatever it expresses. For instance, if a substantial locution says: "Be consoled, encouraged, or inflamed with love..."

This locution is the surest of them all. The first is very uncertain; the second is very open to suspicion, especially when it commands certain things to be done. Consequently, if the director sees that they are things opposed to Christian prudence, he should absolutely forbid them. If, on the other hand, they are not contrary to prudence, it is still a good idea to delay their execution, especially if they are strange and unusual things - at least until he can reach greater assurance regarding them.

.....REVELATIONS

Finally, we come to revelations of hidden or future things, such as mysteries of faith, or the state of one's conscience, or

the predestination of individuals, or their death, or elevation to some dignity and such like. These may come in three ways, namely, by vision, by locution, or by understanding the truth.

A director should be extremely circumspect and slow in accepting these revelations as true, and especially slow in putting them into execution. If it is a question of giving out a bit of information received in a vision, he should above all forbid the person to make it known to others, and then himself proceed with extreme caution, even to the point of taking counsel with others who are competent to pass judgment in things like this. The reason for this is that this type of vision is very doubtful and open to suspicion. Not so questionable is a revelation which gives a deeper understanding of a truth, such as a divine mystery or an attribute of God, the malice of sin, or the misery of damned souls, etc. When such a revelation is in harmony with the teaching of faith, St. John of the Cross says that no one should seek them, but if they are given they should be received with humility and should not be rejected.

A question rises here: should all these various kinds of graces and supernatural communications be rejected or accepted? We must make a distinction here which St. John of the Cross and other learned authors make. Graces which lessen faith, in so far as they consist in certain definite revelations such as visions, locutions and revelations, should be strongly resisted. Those, on the other hand, which help to perfect faith, such as vague and general heavenly communications and "touches of God" which unite the soul to God, need not be rejected. A person may even desire them or ask God for them in order that he may be more closely united to God and more firmly rooted in His holy love. Still, this holds only for those who have already been favored with such graces. For others the safest way is to desire and seek the active union which is, as we said, the union of our will with God's.

When a director, then, comes across a penitent who has received contemplation, darkness, or union, he should not command him to resist them, but rather to receive them with humility and gratitude. However the confessor should talk in such a way as not to give the penitent complete assurance, but so as to leave him with a certain fear - not enough to cause him disquiet, but enough to keep him humble and detached. If, on the other hand, it is a case of definite revelations (such as visions, etc.), the confessor should firmly insist that the penitent resist them in a spirit of humility as was said above. This does not mean that the penitent should condemn the vision by spitting on it, by mocking

it, and the like. This is not allowed: he should rather protest to God that he wants to serve Him only in the way of simple faith.

In any case, St. Teresa says that whenever a person feels in the course of prayer that he is gently set on fire with the love of God, he should consider the communication as coming from God. This is not, indeed, for the sake of making him think he is better than others, but rather to make him walk more perfectly before God. If he keeps this in mind, God will see to it that even if the feeling comes from the devil, it will result in the devil's defeat - defeat from his own tricks.

.....CONCLUSIONS ON PRAYER

The director should keep three things in mind:

- 1.) He should put his penitent under obligation to refer to him all these communications received in time of prayer. Still he must never show that he is eager to know them, nor should he turn around and reveal these supernatural graces to others. Those who hear of such graces will begin to ask the penitent to pray for them and thus put him in the danger of becoming vain. Or they might see him commit some little fault of vanity and then be scandalized and treat him with contempt.
- 2.) He should not show this penitent any particular signs of esteem, and he should never send other penitents to ask advice or consolation or guidance from him. In fact, he should show him less esteem than others who walk in the way of faith. For as a general rule, these favored souls have to be humbled constantly.
- 3.) If he realizes that a penitent is remaining humble and fearful in these communications, he should help him and even at times reassure him, if he thinks it expedient. St. Teresa says that a person will not push himself on to do great things for God unless he realizes that he has received great things from God. There is no doubt about the fact that these special graces greatly inflame charity. As a matter of fact, when St. Teresa was assured by St. Francis Borgia and by St. Peter of Alcantara that the gifts she had received were from God, she began then not merely to advance but to fly toward perfection. (21)

The confessor need not think that these communications are nothing but deception and illusion if he sees the penitent committing some fault from time to time - as long as the faults are not fully deliberate, or committed with attachment, or committed without making any account of them. Almighty God gives these supernatural favors not only to those who are perfect, but sometimes even to the imperfect, just for the sake of freeing them from their imperfections and raising them to a more perfect life. Consequently as long as it is evident that these communications are leading the penitent to make progress in detachment from passions and in divine love and the desire for perfection, it is a sign that they are good.

In the matter of external graces (such as visions, locutions, and revelations) it is safer ordinarily - as we have said - if the director shows that he does not put much store by them. After her death, St. Teresa gave this bit of advice to a religious: "A person should not trust visions and special revelations, nor think that perfection consists in having these things. Even though some of them are actually genuine, many are false and deceiving, and it is hard to find one truth amid the many lies," (therefore the false outnumber the true). "The more a person seeks them and values them," she continues, "the more he will lose the way of faith and humility, which is the one God has established as more certain." (22) For this reason, he should tell the penitent to pray for true ecstasy which is total detachment from earthly things and from one's self, for without this it is certain that he will not become a saint.

It is an especially bad sign if the director runs across a penitent who is not convinced of his own lowliness and who tries to maintain that his communications are certainly from God, and is disturbed when he finds the director unwilling to accept them as such. This is a sign either that they are from the devil (which can be seen in the attachment to self and the pride which the devil is producing) or that the penitent is lacking some virtues, because he should at least begin to doubt when he sees his confessor in doubt. In a case like this, the confessor should try to humble the penitent and to arouse fear in him, as well as he can. If the penitent continues in his obstinacy, he should be deprived of Holy Communion and given severe mortifications, because he is then in great danger of being deceived by the devil.

Lastly, even when the confessor thinks it would be a good idea to tell the penitent that his communications are from God, he should urge him always to bring before his mind some point in the life or Passion of our dear Lord as he begins his mental prayer. St. Teresa used to say that a person who loses the guidance of

Jesus will never arrive at perfect union with God. Beginners meditate on the Passion in a discursive way; contemplatives do not use discursion, but they keep in mind some mystery or admire His goodness, mercy, or love, and God draws them, when He wants, to the contemplation of His divinity.

MORTIFICATION

When a person is first setting out in the spiritual life, God attracts him largely by sensible consolations and as a result the person will often want, in a burst of fervor, to kill himself with disciplines, cilicia, fasts, and similar exercises of penance.

During this time, then the director should be very sparing in allowing this type of mortification. Aridity will not be long in coming and then a person's sensible fervor will be taken away and he will give up all mortifications. The next step in his discouragement, will be to give up mental prayer or even all attention to his spiritual life, thinking that these things are impossible for him, and thus he will lose everything that he may have gained. Sometimes it will also happen that a beginner will be led in his fervor to perform pious indiscretions which will result in bodily sickness. Then he will give up all his spiritual exercises in an effort to find relief, with the danger that he will never again resume them. The director therefore should make sure that first of all they are solidly grounded in the spiritual life. Then he will take into consideration their circumstances of health, their occupation, and their fervor and will allow the external mortification which he judges suitable for them according to Christian prudence.

I say "according to Christian prudence" for there are two kinds of imprudent directors. One seems to think that the only way for a person to make progress is to load him down with fasts, cilicia, disciplines to blood, burnings and the like. The other seems to refuse his penitents absolutely any external mortification on the principle that all perfection consists in internal mortification. This however is equally wrong, for external mortifications help the internal and (where they can be done) are in some way necessary for the control of the senses. This is why we find all the saints - some to a greater degree, some to a lesser, but still all of them - practicing external mortification.

Beyond a doubt the most important mortification which should be required of the penitent is internal mortification. Examples of this are numerous: not answering back to insults, not revealing things that would feed one's vanity, yielding in disputes, giving in to the wishes of others (this of course without spiritual loss). It is sometimes advisable to refuse a person any external mortification until he has overcome some predominant passion, such as vanity, revenge, self-interest, self-esteem, or self-will. But to say that external mortifications are of little or no use is very wrong. St. John of the Cross used to say that you should never put faith in a person who condemned penitential practices - even were he to work miracles.

Right from the start, then, the director should demand that the penitent do nothing without or contrary to his permission. St. John of the Cross says that those who practice penances against obedience make progress in vice rather than virtue.

Then, as I have pointed out, the director should be very sparing in allowing external mortifications - no matter how earnestly the penitent may ask for them. At first it is sufficient to allow him some slight and infrequent penance, such as the cilicium or the discipline or some abstinence - so that he increases his desire for penance rather than his actual practice of mortifying himself. As time goes on, he may allow penances more freely as he sees the penitent making progress in virtue. Once he sees the soul well-grounded in the spiritual life, he may not with a free conscience deny him the penance suitable to his condition and circumstances.

In short, a general rule would be not to give external mortifications (ordinarily speaking) unless the penitent asks for them, for they are not very valuable unless a person actually wants them. When granting permission for such a penance, he should always give a little less than what was asked. As Cassian says, he should fail by excess in refusing rather than in allowing.

He should try very especially to suggest mortification of taste. Some devout people pay very little attention to this, but this is actually the hardest and also the most productive of spiritual progress; and occasionally it even benefits one's bodily health. St. Philip Neri used to say: "A person who fails to mortify his taste will never reach perfection." (23) On the contrary, a confessor should be slow to allow mortification in the area of necessary sleep, because this can easily harm the penitent's health.

and even his life of piety. Without sufficient sleep a person's mind is dull and unfit for meditation and the other spiritual exercises.

Lest the penitent surrender to vanity, however, the director should make it clear to him that no matter what mortifications he may undertake, they will be nothing compared to what the saints have done, or to the sufferings that Jesus Christ bore for our love. St. Teresa says: "Everything that we can do is dirt in comparison with a single drop of the blood that Our Lord shed for us." (24)

The best mortification of all - the one(s) that are the most profitable and the least dangerous - are negative ones. Ordinarily the director's permission is not even needed for these. Examples of these are: mortifying one's curiosity in seeing things or hearing news; speaking little; being satisfied with food that one does not like or that is not prepared well; depriving oneself of fire in winter; choosing the worst things for oneself; rejoicing when something is lacking, even something necessary. (In this last consists the virtue of poverty as St. Bernard points out: "The virtue of poverty is not being poor but the love of being poor.") (25) Another important one: not complaining about the weather or about the slights and persecution one receives from others or about the bodily pains that come from sickness. The stones of the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem are carved with the chisel of suffering. As St. Teresa said: "It is silly to think that God will admit people who love comfort into His friendship. Those who love God simply cannot ask for relief." (26)

A problem arises here. The Gospel says in one place: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good example and praise your Father Who is in heaven." (Mt. 5/16) Then in another place it says: "When you give alms your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing." (Mt. 6/3) The question is: should acts of virtue be manifested to others or should they be kept hidden?

The answer is to distinguish. Ordinary things that are a necessary part of Christian virtue should be performed openly - such as, frequenting the Sacraments, making mental prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, hearing Mass with devotion, practicing modesty of the eyes, keeping silence in Church, expressing the fact that one wishes to become a saint, avoiding idle or dangerous conversations, mortifying one's curiosity, and so forth. Things which are, on the other hand, "of unusual supererogation" and have

something singular about them should be kept hidden as much as possible. Examples of these are: the external penances which we have already referred to (cilicia, disciplines, praying with arms extended, eating bitter herbs and so forth) and things like sighing and weeping while at prayer. Other virtues too should be kept hidden as much as possible, such as caring for the sick, giving alms to the poor, humbling oneself in the presence of those who are insulting and the like. However, if at times these things can only be done publicly, they should never be omitted as long as they are done solely to please God.

FREQUENTING THE SACRAMENTS

Lastly, we come to the confessor's duty to direct devout souls in frequenting the sacraments, namely the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion.

Regarding confession, it is a good idea to suggest that they make a general confession if they have never done so before. If they already have made a general confession, however, or if they are troubled with scrupulosity, it should be forbidden to them. As for their ordinary confession, however, there have been penitents with extremely delicate consciences who have had a practice of daily confession. But generally speaking it is enough for a devout person, especially if he is scrupulous, to go to confession once or at most twice a week. If it happens that they cannot get to confession easily and they have some venial sin on their souls, they should not for that reason omit receiving Holy Communion. There are other means -as Trent teaches - of removing venial sin, such as an act of contrition or love of God. (27) Consequently it is better for them to use these means of freeing themselves from venial sin than to stay away from Communion simply because they cannot go to Confession. One learned author even says it will at times be profitable for these devout persons to prepare themselves for Communion by arousing these acts in themselves rather than by going to confession; for if they do it by themselves, they will probably come up with better dispositions through their fervent acts of contrition, humility and confidence.

As to Holy Communion, we are not considering the pastor's duty of giving Communion to any of his parishioners who ask for it reasonably. We considered this in the Moral Theology where we saw how Innocent XI left the practice of frequent communion completely

in the hands of a prudent confessor. (28) Because of this I cannot see how a pastor - except for some very obvious reason - can with a safe conscience deny Holy Communion to those who ask for it. And it should be noted too that this same decree forbids bishops to fix certain days on which their people may go to Communion. ---Rather what we intend to speak of in this section is of the confessor and the way he should proceed in granting his penitents the privilege of receiving Holy Communion.

In this matter some are too indulgent and some are too rigorous. Certainly, it is wrong - as Pope Benedict XIV says - to allow frequent Communion to those who frequently fall into mortal sin without any serious effort to do penance or to amend, or to those who go to Communion and retain an attachment to deliberate venial sin which they do not even have a desire of removing. Without doubt it is sometimes advisable to allow Communion to a person who would be in danger of falling into sin in order to strengthen him against the temptation. But for people who are in no such danger and who, on the other hand, ordinarily commit deliberate venial sins and show no signs of amendment or even of a desire to amend, Communion should not be allowed more than once a week. In fact, it would be a good idea to forbid them Holy Communion for a whole week once in a while, just to make them realize the terribleness of their sins and the great dignity of this sacrament. And this opinion is all the more tenable when you remember that the more common opinion holds that it is a venial sin of irreverence to the sacrament to receive Holy Communion in a state of actual venial sin or with an affection for it. (29) (30)

On the opposite side of the fence stand many directors who, clearly out of keeping with the mind of the Church, indiscriminately refuse frequent Communion for no other reason than that it is frequent. They are certainly mistaken in doing this and have no consideration of the needs or the progress of their penitents. Even the Roman Catechism, explaining the desire of Trent that all who attend Mass should go to Communion, teaches that pastors have an obligation to earnestly exhort the faithful not only to frequent, but even to daily Communion. They should instruct them, the Catechism continues, that the soul needs its daily nourishment just as the body does. (31)

I will not include here the texts which I might include from the Fathers and from the masters of the spiritual life which confirm what has been said, because they can be found in the many books which treat of frequent Communion. (32)

It is enough to point out (from the Roman Catechism and from the decree of Innocent XI quoted in my Moral Theology) that the practice of frequent Communion was always approved by the Church and by the Fathers. One learned writer says that the Fathers used every means they could to re-ignite the practice of daily communion, whenever they saw it dropping by the wayside. In the third council of Milan, under St. Charles Borromeo, the obligation is imposed on all pastors to urge their people to frequent Communion in their sermons. Moreover, bishops of the province were ordered to forbid to preach and to punish severely those who would preach the opposite - as spreaders of scandal and as opposing the mind of the Church. In the decree of Innocent XI bishops were ordered to see to it zealously that frequent and daily Communion be denied to no one, and to try to promote this devotion among the flocks.

Some rigorists admit that daily communion is allowable, but then they turn and say that there must be the "right dispositions".

But I would like to ask them: what do you mean by these "right dispositions"? If they mean worthy, who would ever dare go to Holy Communion? Only our dear Lord could receive worthily, because only He is God and only God can worthily receive God. But if they mean sufficient dispositions, we have already seen how it is right to deny Holy Communion to those who have actual venial sins on their souls or who retain an attachment for it. (29) But if you are referring to those who have got rid of their attachment even to venial sins and have overcome most of their evil inclinations and who have a great longing for Holy Communion, they may very well - with the consent of their confessor - receive Communion everyday, as St. Francis de Sales says. (33) St. Thomas teaches that, if a person experiences an increase in divine love when he receives communion, then he should not miss going to communion every day. These are his words: "If anyone discovers by experience that the fervor of his love is increased by daily communion and that his reverence is not diminished, he should go to communion every day." (34)

Even though it is also virtue to abstain from Holy Communion, still, as Father Granada says in his treatise on Communion, it is the common opinion that it is better to go to communion everyday out of love than to stay away out of reverence. (35)

St. Thomas himself confirms this when he says: (36) "Hence the reverence due to this sacrament is kept in either way: whether one receives it every day, or rather he at times abstains... Love and hope, however, to which Scripture is always urging us, are

preferable to fear." Actually as Father Barisoni points out, the one who goes to communion with the desire of increasing in divine love does not fail to make his act of reverence; in fact, he makes a positive act of reverence, while the one who stays away, makes a negative one.

Many saints, who surely had a great reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, would not miss a day in going to Communion, for instance, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa, St. Jane Frances de Chantal. And for those who say that we have no St. Teresa's today, it would be rash to suppose that God's arm has grown shorter. Fr. Master Avila goes so far as to say that anyone who condemns the practice of frequent communion does the work of the devil.

In any event, when you consider the doctrine cited above, it seems that directors cannot without some fault or sin refuse frequent and daily Communion to their penitents - with those exceptions: to forbid it once a week as some good directors are wont to do, to forbid it at times to try the penitent's obedience or humility, or for some other good reason. The penitent which we are talking about is one who wants to advance in divine love, as long as he is detached from any love of venial sin, tries to make frequent mental prayer, strives after perfection, and does not fall into even venial sins that are fully voluntary. This, according to St. Prosper, is the degree of perfection that a person can reach in this life in view of human weakness.

If the confessor considers it advantageous to grant such persons frequent communion, Innocent XI says that it makes no difference even if they are businessmen or working people or married couples. These are his words: "Frequent communion should be left to the judgment of the confessors. If they see that it will be profitable to lay people engaged in work or in business or to married people because it purifies their conscience and brings special good effects or leads to an increase in piety, they should prescribe it for them." (37)

Even if a person should now and then fall into a voluntary venial sin from mere weakness and then frequently repent of it and resolve to amend - if he should then desire to receive Holy Communion in order to obtain the strength he needed not to fall and to advance in perfection, why should Communion be denied him?

Alexander VIII has long since condemned the twenty-second proposition of Baius which reads: "Those who claim to have a right

to receive Communion before they have done penance for their sins are to be judged guilty of sacrilege." And the twenty-third proposition also: "Likewise those who do not as yet possess a most pure love of God, free from any admixture, are to be kept from Holy Communion."

Trent calls this sacrament: "The antidote by which we are freed from our daily faults and preserved from mortal sin." (38) Surely it was with a purpose of keeping people from falling back into mortal sin that the apostles gave daily Communion to the first Christians, among whom were certainly many who needed just such a means to save them from relapse - as can be gathered from the epistles of St. Paul and St. James.

In the postcommunion for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, the Church prays: "Let whatever is vicious in our minds be restored by the healing power of this Sacrament." Therefore Holy Communion was instituted for the imperfect also, that they might be healed by virtue of this food.

In his Introduction to a Devout Life, St. Francis de Sales, it should be noted, has the following to say on this subject: "If the worldly ask you why you go to Holy Communion so often, tell them: two kinds of people need frequent Communion - the perfect and the imperfect; the perfect in order to remain perfect, and the imperfect in order to become perfect. The strong need it so that they may not grow weak, and the weak need it in order to grow strong. The sick need it to get well, and the well need it so that they will not get sick. This is why you, who are so imperfect, sick and weak, need frequent Communion." Tell them that people who do not have to deal with worldly affairs should go to communion because they have the leisure. And those who have business with the world go because they need it." St. Francis concludes: "Go to Communion, Philothea. Go as often as you can according to the advice of your spiritual director. And believe me, the hares in the forest grow white because all they eat is snow, and you, by consuming Purity Itself in this sacrament, will become perfectly pure." (39)

In his treatise on Communion, Father Granada says: "A man should not stay away from this Sacrament because of his unworthiness, since it was for the poor that this treasure was left, and for the sick, this medicine. Consequently no one - no matter how imperfect he is - should stay away at a distance from this remedy if he really wants to be cured." Father Granada actually goes on to say that the weaker a person realizes he is, the more he should receive this food of the strong. This agrees with what St. Ambrose said: "Since I sin continually, I should continually take medicine. And St. Augustine: "You sin daily, daily receive." (40)

As far as the increase of grace is concerned, St. Thomas teaches that the effect of this Sacrament is not blocked by venial sins, as long as they are not committed in the very act of receiving Communion. He says that they are a partial but not a total hindrance to the effect of this Sacrament. This is also the common opinion. (41)

It is moreover the sound opinion of many good authors that this Sacrament of itself, directly and *ex opere operato* takes away the venial sins in which a person does not find actual satisfaction. This agrees with what the Roman Catechism says: "There is no reason to doubt that the Eucharist remits and condones the lesser sins that are commonly called venial. Whatever the soul lost by the heat of passion, the Eucharist, by cleansing away these minor faults, restores in its entirety." (42) As the Angelic Doctor says in line with the common opinion, Communion stirs up an act of charity by which the faults are taken away: "An act of charity is aroused in this Sacrament and by it venial sins are destroyed." (43)

If, however, it later becomes clear that the person is not advancing in virtue and is not correcting his deliberate faults - even though they are only venial, such as seeking to have one's taste or curiosity gratified, dressing vainly, etc. - it then seems advisable to restrict the reception of Holy Communion, to make him begin to think seriously about correcting his faults and improving his spiritual condition.

It should be noted too, that even though St. Thomas teaches that in approaching Holy Communion "great devotion is required," this devotion need not be the greatest possible nor need it be sensibly felt. It is enough if the director finds deep in the penitent's will a firm readiness to do whatever is pleasing to God. Otherwise, a person who stays away from Communion because he is not more fervent would be, as Gerson says, like the person who is cold but will not go near the fire because he does not feel warm. For this reason, Father Granada and Cajetan teach that pusillanimous persons who stay away from Communion because they fear their own unworthiness put their own progress in jeopardy.

To continue the practice of going to Holy Communion, St. Lawrence Justinian says that a person need not feel or recognize clearly in himself any increase in fervor, for at times this sacrament does its work without our knowing it. (44) St. Bonaventure says: "Even though one is cold, he should approach with confidence and trust in God's mercy. A person who considers himself unworthy, should realize that it is the sick man that is all the more in need

of medicine, the worse his condition is...You do not hope to be united to Christ in order to sanctify Him, but in order that you may be sanctified by Him." (45) And he adds further on: "Holy Communion should not be skipped if at times a man feels no special devotion when he tries to prepare himself for it, or as he actually receives it, or if afterwards he feels less devout than he may have hoped." In short, as the Saint puts it, even if a person feels less devotion after communion than before, he should not skip it.

Sometimes it is a good idea to mortify a person who has a great desire for Holy Communion, by putting it off once in a while - especially if this delay troubles him, for such disquiet is a sign of pride that makes him unworthy. Conversely, if a person feels dry and weary of going, it is a good idea to make him go more often in order to gain strength from this sacrament.

If only there were in the world many souls who had a sincere dread even of light faults and went frequently - even daily - to Holy Communion, in order to make improvement in their lives and progress in divine love. Some rigorists would call them irreverent and presumptuous. But I say that then surely we would see Jesus Christ loved very much!

Experience teaches those who have directed souls, as I myself have, what great profit is gained by those who approach communion with good desires. They see how Our Lord draws them on so wonderfully in His love, although very often He does not allow them to realize this for their own greater good, leaving them in desolation and darkness and without the comfort of sensible devotion. For these souls, St. Teresa and Blessed Henry Suso teach that there is no greater aid than frequent Communion.

In conclusion then, the confessor should try to encourage frequent Communion as often as the soul manifests a real desire for it and as often as the confessor sees that Communion helps him make progress in the spiritual life.

He should try moreover to have him spend as much time as he can in thanksgiving after Communion. Only rarely do you find directors who pay much attention to this point - that is, recommending that their penitents spend some notable time in thanksgiving - because only rarely do you find priests who stop to thank Jesus Christ after Mass. Consequently they are ashamed to ask others to do what they do not do themselves. Ordinarily the thanksgiving should last an hour - or at least a half hour. During it the person should occupy himself with loving affections and petitions. St.

Teresa says that after Communion Jesus is in the soul as on a throne of mercy, in order to grant the person graces. "What will you have me do for you?" He says. "After Communion," Teresa says in another place, "let us not lose so splendid a business opportunity. His Majesty is not wont to pay cheaply for His lodging if we give Him a warm welcome." (46)

The director should also suggest that the person make frequent spiritual communions. The council of Trent praises these very highly. "To make spiritual communions," says St. Teresa, "is extremely profitable. Do not fail in this, for this is the way to show Our Lord how much you love Him." (47)

FOR THE DIRECTOR OF NUNS: A RULE OF LIFE

By way of introduction, let me say that the things I mention here apply only in the cases where there is nothing barring the penitent in the line of health, duty or obedience. It should be understood too that all this is to be done with the permission of the spiritual director, and (in the case of external mortifications that will be public), the superior of the convent.

First as to prayer:

- 1.) At least three hours of mental prayer: one in the morning, one in the evening, another after Communion.
- 2.) A visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary for half an hour, or at least for a quarter of an hour. In these moments of prayer she should renew her vows several times a day.
- 3.) The rosary or at least five decades, and another vocal prayer. But there should not be many of these, because when there are many, they are said with little fruit, they put the person under strain, and they hinder mental prayer.
- 4.) The frequent use of ejaculatory prayers. For example: My God and My All. How good You are, my God. I love you, my Jesus, crucified for me. Lord, why do not all men love you? Would that I had never offended You! I will what You will. When shall I see You and love You

face to face? Behold me ready: do with me what You will. ---The spiritual director should strongly urge these loving ejaculations and the penitent should put great store by them.

- 5.) Along with mental prayer should go spiritual reading for half an hour out of Rodriguez or some other book treating the virtues, or from the lives of the saints which are very profitable to read.

Secondly, as to Holy Communion. It should be received every day except one day each week - but then every day during the novenas of the Holy Spirit, of Christmas, and those of the Blessed Virgin. She should make at least three spiritual communions each day.

Thirdly as to mortification.

- 1.) The discipline - not to blood - every day for about half an hour; discipline to blood once or twice a month.
- 2.) The cilicium in the morning until dinner-time; in the afternoon some little chain on the arm for a reminder. She should not wear the cilicium around the waist nor those made of horse hair, for these are very bad for the health.
- 3.) For those who can, fast on bread and water on Saturday and the vigils of the seven feasts of Our Lady - at least restrict oneself to one course at table. A fast ordinarily every evening - that is, not more than eight ounces unless there is some extraordinary necessity. Abstinence from fruit on Wednesday and Friday and during the novenas mentioned above, during which they may also abstain from one of the dishes they usually take and add to their food some bitter herb, but never ashes. Never eat outside of meals, for it is better to abstain, as above, every day rather than make a real fast two or three times a week. Not more than six hours of sleep, but not less than five. Depriving oneself of too much sleep is bad for the nerves and interferes with one's spiritual exercises.
- 4.) Keep silence three hours each day; that is, abstain from unnecessary talk.

GENERAL ADMONITIONS FOR PERFECTION

FIRST. Place all your confidence in God and distrust yourself and your own ideas entirely. Make a strong resolution to conquer yourself and occasionally to use violence with yourself. St. Teresa says: "If we do nothing to block Him, let us never fear that God will not give us the helps we need to become saints." (48)

SECOND. Avoid the least deliberate fault. The same saint says: "May God keep you from deliberate sin, no matter how small ... By means of little things the devil makes an opening through which bigger things can enter." (49)

THIRD. Do not grieve over the faults you commit, but immediately humble yourself and run to God with a short act of contrition and resolve; then be at peace. Always do this, even if you fall a hundred times a day. Regarding this, St. Teresa warns that no one should tell his temptations to imperfect souls - this would be harmful to them both.

FOURTH. Separate yourself from all your relatives, possessions, and pleasures. St. Teresa says: "If a person does not flee worldly pleasures, he will before long abandon the way of God." Avoid familiarity with persons of the opposite sex, no matter how religious-minded they are. Often the devil sneaks in unholy affection for them by starting it all off as something spiritual. Above all, renounce your own judgment and your own will, even in spiritual things such as prayer, communion, and mortifications when obedience does not allow these. In a word, drive out of your heart whatever is not God and whatever is not in accord with God's good pleasure.

FIFTH. Be light of heart whenever you find yourself the object of contempt, ridicule, or a lack of esteem. How beautifully a person prays when he willingly embraces contempt - especially in community life where this virtue is so necessary. Consequently, have a special love for your enemies and persecutors. Wait on them, do them a favor, show them respect - at least by speaking well of them, and especially by praying for them, as the saints were wont to do.

SIXTH. Have a burning desire of loving God and of pleasing Him. St. Teresa said: "Our Lord loves desires just as if they had been put into execution." Without this desire, a person will make

no progress in the path of virtue, nor will God give it His most special graces. St. Teresa also says: "Ordinarily God does not give His special favors to anyone but him who has desired His love for a long time." (50) To that desire should be joined the determination of doing everything you can to please God. The saint said: "The devil is in dread of generous hearts...God demands nothing of us but a strong determination, and He Himself will do the rest. "Also have a great love for prayer. It is the furnace in which love of God is inflamed. Because they loved God to an extraordinary degree, all the saints had a great love for prayer. Furthermore, you should have a burning desire for heaven, for in heaven souls love God with all their energy and this can never be accomplished here on earth. For this reason, God wants us to have a burning desire for this kingdom which Jesus Christ has won for us with His Blood.

SEVENTH. Conform yourself perfectly to the divine will in everything that is contrary to your own inclinations, and offer yourself to God frequently each day. St. Teresa used to do this fifty times each day. She said: "Progress does not mean getting for oneself more enjoyment out of God, but rather fulfilling His Will... True union means to unite our wills with the divine will." (51)

EIGHTH. Obey your rules, superiors and spiritual director with exactness. Venerable Vincent Carafa once said: "Obedience is the queen of all the virtues for all the virtues are subject to obedience." St. Teresa had this to say: "God asks nothing but obedience from a soul that sets out to love Him." (52) Perfect obedience consists in obeying immediately, faithfully, eagerly, without passing judgment or asking reasons whenever the thing commanded is not certainly sinful, as St. Bernard, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius Loyola, and all the masters of the spiritual life say. In doubtful matters, choose the thing which obedience would presumably have commanded. When you cannot make such a presumption, choose what is more contrary to your own inclinations. This is the *vincere teipsum* so often inculcated by St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius. They used to say that a mortified person makes more progress in fifteen minutes than an unmortified person makes in several hours.

NINTH. Always be mindful of the Divine Presence. St. Teresa says: "Every evil arises from the fact that we do not consider God's presence." (53) The man who really loves will never forget the object of his love. To keep the divine presence in mind, it is

a good idea to have some special picture or sign, even in your own room. You should cherish this presence very much by repeating often during the day acts of love of God and by asking for the gift of divine love. For example: My God and My All. I love you with all my heart. I give myself entirely to you. Do with me what You will. I wish nothing but You and Your Will. Give me Your love and I am rich enough. --These acts should be made without any violence and without desiring any sensible consolation, but with a kind of gentleness and with the intention of pleasing God alone. St. Teresa said: "Never fear that God will not reward every single raising of the eyes that calls Him to mind."

TENTH. Make an intention of pleasing God in every daily action whether spiritual or corporal, by saying: "Lord I do this only to please You." A good intention is called "spiritual alchemy" for it turns all actions, even the smallest, into gold.

ELEVENTH. Every year make a retreat for eight or ten days by cutting yourself off from all conversation and distracting business, as far as possible, in order to be free to converse with God. Set aside some day each month to recollect yourself. Celebrate devoutly the novenas of Christmas, of the Holy Spirit, and of the seven feasts of Mary, St. Joseph, your Guardian Angel, and your patron saint. During these novenas, go to Communion daily; make an hour of mental prayer, or at least a half hour more than usual; recite some other vocal prayers, but not many. It is far better to make a set number of acts of love or something like that.

TWELFTH. Build up a special devotion to St. Joseph, to your Guardian Angel and your patron saint, and especially to St. Michael, universal patron of all the faithful. But above all, cultivate a most special devotion to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, whom the Church calls "our life and our hope". It is morally impossible for a person to make much progress in perfection without a special and tender devotion to the most holy Mother of God.

1. Life, ch. 8.
2. Life, ch. 19.
3. Migne, PL 37/1324 and 45/1017.
4. Life, ch. 19.

5. Life by Gallita, Maxim 31.
6. De Concordia Inter Laborem et Quietem, p. I, ch. 1, n. 1.
7. Bougaud, History of St. Chantal, Tom 1, ch. 18; and Directoire de choses spirituelles, art. 12.
8. loc. cit.
9. Life, ch. 11.
10. Way of Perfection, ch. 31.
11. Aeropagite now commonly held as Dyonisius (Gaude). Cf., Migne, PL, 3/1002 and 1006.
12. Footnote in Gaude doubts that Teresa said this.
13. Foundations, ch. 10.
14. Advice for prayer, 22.
15. Letters, I, bk 2, tr 4, p 3, ch 6, n 5 & 6.
16. Interior Castle, M. 5, ch 1.
17. Interior Castle, M. 5, ch 4 and M. 6, ch 1.
18. John of the Cross, Ascent, ch. 24.
19. Interior Castle, M. 6, ch 9.
20. Interior Castle, M. 6, ch 9 and M. 4, ch 7.
21. Life, ch 10, ch 24, ch 30.
22. Found in a 1739 Venetian edition of her works.
23. Life by Bacci.
24. Life, ch. 35.
25. St. Bernard, Migne, PL 182/235.
26. Way of Perfection, ch 18 and Foundations, ch 10.

27. Sess 14, de Poenit., ch 15.
28. Innocent XI, Cum ad aures Feb 12, 1679.
29. Footnote from Gaude's edition of *Praxis*: "The Holy Doctor wrote this in 1755, but he later changed his opinion in Istruzione e Pratica, ch 15, n. 7 published in 1757: 'If a person would go to Communion with actual attachment to some venial sin, he would not in that commit a sin.' He made the same change in the 1759 edition of the Homo Apostolicus, though through an oversight he failed to note the change in an appendix."
30. Paragraph omitted; it refers to a decree which was doubtful in the first place and has dropped out of use by Alphonsus' time.
31. Part 2, de Euch, n 59-60 and Trent, sess 22, ch 6.
32. In passing we should mention what St. Alphonsus understood by frequent Communion: "Daily Communion I call that which is received every day, frequent, several times a week, but weekly I by no means call frequent." Gaude.
33. Introduction to the Devout Life, p II, ch 20.
34. In 4, dist 12, q 3, a 1.
35. Treatise on Eucharist, ch 2, and ch 8.
36. III, 280, a 10.
37. op. cit.
38. Sess 13, ch 2.
39. Part 2, ch 21.
40. Migne, PL 16/446; 39/1907; 16/452.
41. III, q 79, a 8.
42. Part 2, n. 51.
43. III, q 79, a 4.

44. De Disciplina et perfectione monasticae...ch 19.
45. De profectu religioso, ch 77.
46. Way of Perfection, ch 34.
47. Sess 13, ch 8; Way of Perfection, ch 35.
48. Way of Perfection, ch 16.
49. Concetti sulla cantica, ch 2.
50. Life, ch 13.
51. Foundations, ch 10.
52. Life of Carafa by Gisolfi, ch 31; Foundations, ch 10.
53. Life, ch 36.

CHAPTER TEN

A Word to Pastors

SUMMARY OF ADVICE FOR CONFESSORS

Out of what has been said, let us draw together some of the important things a confessor has to know in hearing confessions.

I. Before everything else comes his duty to show the greatest kindness in receiving sinners. He should encourage them to trust in God's mercy. On the other hand, however, he should not, out of human respect, fail to warn them sternly and to point out to them the unhappy state into which they have fallen - always, of course, accompanying this with the fit means they can use to rid themselves of their bad habit. He should be inflexible in delaying absolution whenever this is called for.

II. He should make it a practice to question the uninstructed to see if they know the principal mysteries of the faith.

III. He should never fail to question the uninstructed and those of lax conscience about the sins they are more apt to have committed - if they do confess them on their own.

IV. He should be very circumspect when questioning about matters of impurity - especially with youngsters so as not to give them ideas that they do not already know. If the confessor himself experiences temptations in regard to purity, he should raise his mind to God by turning to some holy picture or statue; and before he enters the confessional, he should always renew his right intention.

V. He should question fathers and mothers about the training of their children - not only in general but in particular. He should check to see if they correct their children as they should, if they are conscientious in teaching them Christian doctrine, if they make them avoid bad companions. As to girls, they should not allow them to keep company with boys and much less with those whose company would be suspect, namely, the married, religious, and clerics.

VI. If he suspects that some penitent has concealed some sin out of shame, as happens with the uninstructed, with women and with children, he should ask if they were scrupulous in the past and at the same time encourage them to confess everything. Many souls are in this way saved from sacrilege.

VII. Even when the number of penitents is great he should not go any faster than necessary. In an attempt to hear more confessions, he would neglect the integrity of confessions, or the proper dispositions, or he would fail to advise the penitent properly.

VIII. When a person confesses a grave sin, and especially if he has fallen into it many times, it is not enough to inquire just about the species and number. He should also ask if the penitent committed it often before, and especially if he committed the sin with another person and where he committed it. This way he will know whether there is a habit of sin or an occasion that must be avoided. Many confessors fail on this point, and because of this many souls are lost. By omitting such questions the confessor cannot possibly give the penitent the means he needs to uproot the bad habits and avoid the occasions.

In regard to recidives, remember that we said that they can never be absolved unless they have made improvement or show some extraordinary signs of sorrow. And when there is a question of proximate occasions, the confessor should act firmly and without human respect in postponing the absolution until the penitent removes the occasion, when it is continual. Even when the occasion is necessary, absolution should not be given until the penitent has at least rendered the occasion remote by using the prescribed means.

In particular, the confessor should be unyielding in denying absolution to engaged couples who spend long periods of time together alone. The same treatment should be given to parents who allow such a thing. He should not believe them when they say that there is no danger, for that is morally impossible as experience proves.

IX. The confessor should deny absolution also to those who want to receive Holy Orders while they are still unworthy of it because of a bad habit. It would be otherwise if they had acquired the virtues necessary for its reception, as we pointed out.

X. He should be very careful that he never out of human respect stand in the way of some youngster who wishes to enter religious life. To do this would be a mortal sin, as St. Thomas teaches. How many times have confessors without any scruple blocked young people from following their vocations to a more perfect state, for no other reason than to please the child's relatives - teaching them that children must obey their parents! The authors commonly teach, along with St. Thomas, that a person is completely free in choosing his state in life. (1) Besides, one should obey God Who is calling in preference to his parents. On the other hand, the confessor should recall that he may not absolve a person who wants to receive Holy Orders without a vocation.

XI. In hearing the confessions of priests, the confessor should act with respect. But he should also be firm in making the necessary corrections and in denying absolution, whenever this is necessary. In regard to a priest whose conscience is not overly delicate, he should never fail to question him about three things:

- 1.) If he failed to celebrate Masses for the dead for a month - when he has already received the stipend for them; or for two months, if the Masses were for the living. For this cannot be excused from mortal sin.

2.) If he says Mass too fast. If a priest spends less than 15 minutes in saying Mass, even though it be a votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin or a requiem Mass, he cannot be excused from mortal sin. The reason is this: to say Mass that quickly must involve a notable lack of important rubrics or at least an unbecoming performance of them. And these are so necessary for the respect due to this Sacrifice.

3.) If he has failed his obligation of reciting the divine office, especially if he holds a benefice.

In addition, the confessor should suggest to this priest that he fit himself - according to his ability - to gain souls for God, that he celebrate Mass with due preparation and thanksgiving, that he practice mental prayer without which he will only with difficulty be a good priest.

XII. In matters of restitution, he should ordinarily not absolve the penitent until restitution has been made, when this is possible.

Nevertheless he should remember that many are excused from restitution because of prescription in good faith. (2)

XIII. If the penitent has received damages for which the enemy is to be taken to court, do not absolve him, ordinarily speaking, unless he has already forgiven the injury.

XIV. When he foresees that his advice will be of no avail, and the penitent is in good faith, he should let things stand as they are - especially when it is a case of the invalidity of an already contracted marriage. It is otherwise, however, when it is a case concerning the obligation to denounce confessors who solicit penitents to impurity - because all confessors are directly obliged to impose this duty on any penitent who has been solicited.

XV. The confessor should see to it that all make an act of contrition in the confessional, unless he can presume with certainty that the penitent already made it. He should also put before them the motives for attrition and contrition, as we suggested. He should be careful to note whether or not the penitent has come with the proper dispositions, for if he has not, the confessor must try as best he can to dispose him for absolution.

XVI. The confessor should not absolve penitents who confess only habitual venial sins, unless he knows that they are really sorry and have a purpose of amendment at least with regard to one of them, or unless they include a mortal sin of their past life. Many are the invalid confessions (which are in themselves sacrilegious) because of the carelessness of confessors in this matter.

XVII. The confessor should give as penance only those things which the penitent can easily do, as we have noted. However, he should make sure that they are medicinal - for example, the frequent reception of the sacraments, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin, recommending himself to God in the morning and evening, reading some spiritual book, membership in some religious sodality, and the like.

XVIII. The confessor should suggest the practice of meditation to devout souls who frequent the sacraments. He should demand an account of it or at least ask if they have made it. This tiny effort can sanctify many souls. He should not be stingy in allowing frequent communion, as long as he knows or can prudently judge that the penitent will derive fruit from it.

XIX. To scrupulous people he should suggest obedience in everything, always inculcating the fact that by obeying they are doing the right thing, while in disobeying they are exposing themselves to the danger of damnation. He should always strongly demand obedience and always speak with firmness. He will only confuse them more if he is not sure of himself. He should give them general principles on which to solve their doubts in whatever manner will be more helpful to each one. For instance, for those who always doubt about their past confessions, he should command them to confess only sins which they know for certain were mortal and were not yet confessed. In regard to this the confessor must be absolutely unyielding; he should never listen to them if they do not obey, for if the confessor gives in once in a while, the penitent will never be cured. Some confessors do great harm to souls by listening to them at such times. To those who fear that all their actions are sinful, he should tell them to conquer their scruples and act without restraint as long as they are not certain that what they do is sinful.

XX. In knowing what opinion to choose, the confessor should often follow the more benign opinion - as far as prudence allows - when it is a matter of removing the penitent from the danger of

formal sin. However, when the opinion renders the danger of formal sin more proximate, then the confessor must definitely counsel the stricter opinion. I say: he should counsel, for if an opinion is probable and the penitent wants to follow it, the confessor cannot deny absolution, because the penitent has a certain right to it because of his confession of sin.

XXI. In hearing women's confessions and in talking to them the confessor should be stern, as prudence suggests. He should never allow them to kiss his hand, and in general he should avoid any familiarity or anything else which might lead to an attachment. How often have confessors lost their souls and those of their penitents because of negligence in this matter!

XXII. The confessor should be humble, and not over-confident of his own ability. He should frequently ask God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to give him the light to help solve cases properly, especially cases of doubt. "I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came to me." (Wis 7/7) The confessor who does not pray therefore will only with difficulty proceed correctly. In doubts which are more complicated and of greater import, he should consult those who are more learned and have more experience.

This is especially important for the confessor who is not well versed in the matters of the spiritual life and finds himself directing some privileged soul whom God has blessed with supernatural graces. Some with hardly any experience in mystical lore feel ashamed to ask advice from others. Those who are really humble are not. They not only ask for advice, but ask it from many as often as they need it. In addition, they have no difficulty in advising such souls to seek direction from confessors who are more learned or at least to follow their judgment. The confessor, however, should never hear the confessions of these devout persons on feast days; these days should be left for those who are more in need, especially those who live in the country.

ADVICE FOR PASTORS

It will be profitable here to mention briefly some of the special obligations that pastors have in regard to the souls entrusted to them.

.....INSTRUCTION

The pastor is obliged to instruct them in the mysteries of their faith and in the other things necessary for salvation. These are:

- 1.) The four principal mysteries; namely, the existence of one God who is all-powerful, all-wise, Creator and Lord of all things, full of Mercy and more lovable than any other good thing; that He is the just Rewarder of the good and the bad alike; the mystery of the Trinity; and that of the Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ.
- 2.) The necessary sacraments, namely: Baptism, Eucharist, Confession, and others at least when they are to be received.
- 3.) The points of the creed, especially Mary's virginity, Jesus Christ's position at the right hand of the Father, that is, He is with the Father in heaven and equal to Him in glory, the resurrection of the body for the last judgment which Jesus Christ will make, and the unity of the Roman Church in which alone is salvation, and lastly the eternity of heaven and hell. Everyone of the faithful is bound *sub gravi* to know these truths.
- 4.) The ten commandments and the precepts of the Church, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the acts of faith, hope, love and contrition.

Just as the faithful sin gravely who neglect to learn and in some way understand these truths, so too does the pastor sin gravely - according to the common opinion - if he neglects to teach them, at least as regards their substance, to his parishioners - be they children or adults ignorant of them. He must do this himself, or through some capable person if he is lawfully impeded, as Trent teaches.

Consequently, whenever the pastor sees parents neglecting to send their children to catechism classes, he is bound to take the proper steps with the Bishop who - as Trent again teaches - can "urge" the parents even with ecclesiastical censures. Prudent pastors will have a list of their children, so that they can check to see who is missing. In fact, Croix holds that if there are ignorant people who fail to come to Church because they have to work

or watch their homes, the pastor must go to them privately and instruct them if they are in grave spiritual necessity - no matter what kind of inconvenience it is to him. However, if this task is too difficult because there are so many people like this, the pastor should try to examine and instruct them at least when they come to make their Easter Duty or when they come looking for certificates for their confirmation or marriage.

It is also good for the pastor to inquire of teachers whether or not they instruct the boys and girls in Christian doctrine, and in the way of living a good life in the holy fear of God.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

The pastor is himself obliged to administer the sacraments whenever his parishioners reasonably ask for them. If he has appointed a delegate, he should be conscientious in looking into his life and knowledge. Otherwise he will have to render an account to God of all the problems that might arise.

The pastor is also obliged to go to the assistance of the dying, unless there is someone else already there. He must give special help to the habituary in danger of death, for they are in grave need of his assistance. In regard to Extreme Unction he should follow what was said in the Roman Catechism: "They sin very gravely who follow the custom of anointing the sick only when all hope of recovery is gone and when life and the use of the senses have begun to fail." (3)

He should also know whether his subjects fulfill their Easter Duty. And he should be careful not to entrust to just any cleric the duty of distributing Holy Communion.

He should check to see that young boys and teenagers who show no signs of a vocation do not enter the seminary. He should be diligent in instructing those who have entered the seminary regarding the ecclesiastical state. Without this instruction, they will go on to receive Orders - whether they should or not - with their bad habits - to the great scandal of their home town. And surely there will be a serious account to render, if the pastor gives letters of recommendation to ordinands whom he knows to be unworthy, or whom he has not checked diligently enough to find out their worthiness.

CORRECTING SCANDAL

The pastor should know those who are living in mortal sin, so that he may correct them. He should know the enmities and scandals, especially between married couples, so that he may help them as much as possible. St. Thomas says: "If a person has been entrusted with the spiritual care of another, he is bound to seek him out in order to correct his sinfulness." When the scandal is given by some important person (especially if it be a priest) and he cannot himself remedy the situation, he should at least notify the bishop so that he may take the proper steps to remedy things. The pastor may not omit this out of human respect or for any fear whatsoever. The good shepherd is bound to give up his life for his sheep.

The pastor should be careful not to allow engagements to last too long before marriage, because engagement will put couples in the danger of sin. (4)

If there are serious problems in a locale which the pastor cannot cope with, he should try everything possible to have a mission. It will always be a good idea to invite priests from outside into the parish for the benefit of timid souls, especially if a Lenten preacher does not ordinarily come to the parish to hear confessions. The wholesomeness of a pastor who neglects to have parish missions is suspect.

The pastor finally must not only root out evil, but also promote good. Conscientious pastors never fail to urge their subjects to frequent the sacraments, to join pious confraternities, to visit the Blessed Sacrament and the Mother of God, to make novenas, to accompany the priest when he carries the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, and most especially to make mental prayer which we will explain in a page or two.

.....DUTY OF PREACHING

The pastor has the obligation of preaching on Sundays and holy days. Moralists teach that pastors commit a grave sin if they fail to preach for one continuous month or for what adds up to three months in the course of a year - except however for the two months of vacation allowed by Trent for a just cause and with the permission of the bishop. (5)

Trent demanded that pastors feed their flock with the Word of God by preaching sermons adapted to their understanding, so that the people can understand what they preach. (6) Faith is spread and safeguarded by preaching (*fides ex auditu*) and consequently sermons are of little use if they are preached in a style foreign to the style in which Jesus Christ and the Apostles preached, who spoke "not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in convincing display of the Spirit's power." (I Cor. 2/4)

For this reason and justly did Venerable Master Avila used to say that those who preached to reap vain glory were not ministers but traitors to Jesus Christ. Father Gasper Sanchez used to call them the worst sort of persecutors the Church of God has. Preaching in this way, he said, they cause ruin to many, many souls, who would have been saved if they preached like the apostles. Useless words, elegant sounding phrases, superfluous phrases and descriptions are the pests of sermons, St. Francis de Sales used to say. (7) The sole purpose of the sermon is to move the wills of the listeners toward good - not to entertain them. We know from experience that sermons with so many figures of speech and flowery expressions do not stir souls to life, for God does not bless vanity. This applies to all who preach out of vanity, but especially to those who have care of souls for Trent says: "The archpriests, the pastors, and all who govern parish churches or have the care of souls in any other way, should feed their flock, either themselves or through others who are capable - if they are legitimately impeded - with the words of salvation at least on Sundays and holy days. The pastors should do this according to their own capabilities and those of their people." (8) Note the words "according to the capabilities of their people", for by these words the council shows its opposition to pastors who preach in a grand style above the understanding of their people.

While we are here, I will point out some of the things that merit attention when the pastor is choosing topics for his sermons.

As regards repentance, it is not enough to tell them to avoid sins, but that they must avoid even the occasions of sin. He should inveigh against men who spend a lot of time at taverns, showing them the many sins that are ordinarily a result of this besides drunkenness, namely blasphemy, fights, scandal, obscenity, quarreling with members of his family, loss of money which the family needs, and so forth.

He should often speak out against a vice which is common especially in the places of work, namely, unbecoming language. All the more if this kind of thing is used around children or members of the opposite sex. Think how many youngsters are perverted because of this impure speech. On this point, he should admonish parents, teachers, and employers to be diligent in correcting and punishing their children and employees who use this kind of language.

He should often tell them how great a sacrilege is committed by those who go to confession and communion, all the while keeping some mortal sin hidden. In order to impress them with a dread of this crime, he should often tell them terrifying examples of sacrileges committed by those who kept back mortal sins out of shame.

He should very often explain the necessity of sorrow and purpose of amendment as requisites for confession. Even regarding venial sins, he should advise them not to come to receive absolution unless they are sincerely sorry for at least one of the venial sins they confess, or unless they include as certain matter some sin of their past life which they have already confessed and for which they are sincerely sorry. This is necessary for validity. And since some people do not quite realize what sorrow for sin means, he should often show them that, in order to make a good confession, the penitent (whether it is contrition or attrition) should have an aversion for these sins, that is, he should hate his sins and detest them more than anything else.

He should admonish them to say some prayer (such as "Mary help me" or "Lord give me patience") in moments of anger.

He should try to make them hate superstitious and vain observances, which many (especially among Latins) use in an attempt to cure sickness or to know the future.

He should instruct parents to correct their children, especially when they blaspheme or steal. He should tell them about their obligations to watch and ask about those whom they associate with. They should forbid their children to run around with bad companions and with persons of the opposite sex. He should advise parents not to bring their children to bed with them. When they are too small, there is danger of suffocation, when they are older (that is, over six) there is danger of their taking scandal. Boys and girls should never be allowed to sleep together.

He should teach his parishioners to overcome temptations, especially against chastity, by calling on the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. This is the best way of fighting temptations.

He should tell them too, that if anyone falls into mortal sin, he should make an act of perfect contrition right away and resolve to go to confession as soon as possible. That way he will immediately regain the state of grace. He should try to rid them of the idea - actually a trick of the devil - that God would just as readily forgive two sins as one. It can happen that God will wait for them to repent after the first sin, but abandon them after the second.

The pastor should teach the Christian acts, which everyone should say in the morning, during the day and in the evening. To show you what I mean, I will give some examples:

Acts to be made in the morning. Make the sign of the cross. Then say: 1.) Lord God, I adore You and thank You for all the gifts You have given me, especially for protecting me during the night. 2.) I love You with all my heart, and I offer You, in union with the words and Sufferings of Jesus and Mary, all my sufferings and actions with the intention of gaining all the indulgences I can for the relief of the souls in purgatory. 3.) Today I intend to avoid all sin and all occasions of sin, and I ask You, for the love of Jesus Christ, to give me the grace of perseverance. I intend especially in the midst of difficulty to submit to Your will always repeating: Your will be done, Lord. My Jesus, please protect me today. Most Holy Mary, take care of me. My Guardian Angel and my patron saints give me your help. Then he should say an Our Father, a Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, and three Hail Mary's in honor of Mary's purity.

At the beginning of work: Lord Jesus, in union with Your perfect work, I offer You this work which is to be done according to Your Will. Before meals and after meals, the usual grace. When the clock strikes: My Jesus, I love You, please do not let me offend You. In moments of temptation: Jesus and Mary. When one falls into sin: My God, I am sorry for having offended You and I do not want to do it again. If it was a grave sin, confession should follow as soon as possible.

In the evening, when going to bed, he should say "thanks" for the blessings received. Then he should make an examination of conscience and finally recite the Christian acts as given above.

He should have mothers make their children recite these acts every day. He should tell parents that they have an obligation to see to it that their children receive the sacraments. If they do not receive them often, they will easily lose the grace of God, and this parents should check up on. Above all he should warn parents that they sin if, without a just cause, they prevent their children from getting married, or if they force them into marriage against their will. Likewise, children themselves sin if they enter marriage when their parents are rightly unwilling.

As we pointed out, pastors are bound not only to remove evil, but also to further good. For this reason he should counsel his people to make daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady. And he himself could make this visit with them in the evening. In doing this he should choose a time convenient to the people, for this custom has been introduced in many places with great profit to the faithful. He should mention that those who cannot come to church should make the visit from their homes. More than anything else, he should urge men to join the various confraternities. Finally, he should encourage them to receive communion often, as long as they are properly disposed and make a fitting thanksgiving afterwards. He should teach them the acts of faith, love, self-offering and petition which they should use in their thanksgiving.

He should constantly try to instill into his people a deep devotion to Our Lady. He should tell them how powerful and how merciful this Divine Mother is in helping those devoted to her. He should urge them to recite the rosary together at home every day, to fast on Saturdays, and to make the novenas before the feast of Our Lady, which he should announce from the pulpit when it is time.

The pastor would be worthy of our esteem who would give a short sermon on the Blessed Virgin each Saturday - always relating some example of devotion to her. Once a year a solemn novena should be celebrated in honor of Our Lady with sermons and with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. For this purpose he can use, among others, the book I wrote for this very thing, THE GLORIES OF MARY. In it he will find material and examples in digest form. Blessed is the pastor who makes his parishioners fervent devotees of our Blessed Mother. With her help they will lead good lives, and he will have won for himself a faithful and powerful advocate in the moment of death.

More important than anything else, however, the pastor should urge the faithful to ask God often for the grace of perseverance

through the merits of Jesus Christ and Mary. He should preach again and again that grace - especially the grace of perseverance - is not granted unless it is asked for. Ask and you shall receive. (Jn 16/24) He should point out Christ's promise that the Father will grant everything we ask for in his name. "I tell you that if you make any request of the Father, he will grant it to you in my name." (Jn 16/23) He should forcefully preach the practice of mental prayer, and he should try to make it with the people every day, or at least on feast days. He should also teach them a method for mental prayer, which they can use at home. To help the pastor as regards this last point, I will now move on to consider the necessity and the method of mental prayer.

A PRACTICAL METHOD OF MENTAL PRAYER

It is undoubtedly due to neglect of consideration of the eternal truths that the world is overrun with sin, and hell is filled with souls. "Desolate it lies before me, desolate all the land, because no one takes it to heart." (Jer 12/11) On the other hand, the Holy Spirit says that a man who often considers death, judgment and eternity is free from sin. "In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin." (Sir 7/36) One author makes the statement that if all the damned were asked why they are in hell, most of them would answer: we are here because we gave no thought to hell. St. Vincent de Paul says that it would be miraculous if a sinner made a mission or retreat and did not convert. For in mental prayer God is the one who speaks, and he certainly speaks better than any preacher.

All the saints became saints because of mental prayer. We know from experience that it is far from easy for a person who practices mental prayer to fall into mortal sin. If they do happen to fall at times, perseverance in prayer will win them the grace to repent and to return to God. Mental prayer and sin cannot exist together. One who was very close to God used to say that many people say the rosary and the office of the Blessed Virgin and do great fasts and still continue to live in sin, but that is impossible for a person who is faithful to mental prayer to live in the state of sin. And if it is mental prayer that he holds on to, he will not only abandon sin, but will even give up his attachment to creatures, and return to God. "In meditation a fire blazed forth." (Ps 38/4) Mental prayer is the furnace in which the love of God is made to blaze.

As to where mental prayer should be made, a church is, of course, the most fitting place. But for those who cannot get to Church or cannot stay there for any length of time, any place is all right, whether it be in the home or at work. Even travel and prayer are not incompatible, for even then a person can raise his mind to God. Many people, who have no time or place to set aside for prayer, make their mental prayer while traveling and working. If a person is willing, he can find God at any time and in any place.

As to the time for mental prayer, the morning hours are the best. Morning prayer will bring the blessing of God down on a person's daily activity. Two periods of the day are especially fitted to prayer - morning and evening. However, if there is no convenient time in the evening, mental prayer should at least be made in the morning. Venerable Charles Carafa, founder of the Pious Workers, used to say that an act of love made fervently in the morning at prayer is enough to keep a person fervent all day long. (9)

As to the length of time to be spent in prayer, the pastor or the confessor should decide this with prudence. It is certain that in order to reach a high degree of perfection, half an hour is not enough. But for beginners this is enough, and they should be urged not to omit this prayer in time of desolation.

Now let us pass to consider a practical method of mental prayer which the pastor can teach the people. Mental prayer consists in three parts: preparation, meditation, and conclusion.

The preparation consists in three acts which should be made with the mind: an act of faith in the Presence of God, and act of humility, and a prayer for God's guidance. These prayers might run something like this:

- 1.) Act of Faith - My God, I believe that I am in Your Presence and from the depths of my nothingness I adore Your Majesty.
- 2.) Act of Humility - Lord, because of my sins I should be suffering the pains of hell right now. I am sorry for having offended You. In Your Mercy please forgive me.
- 3.) Act of Petition - Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus and Mary, please give me Your light during this prayer, so that it will be profitable for me.

---Following these acts, a Hail Mary should be said in honor of the Most Blessed Virgin, asking her to obtain the divine help for us, and then a *Gloria Patri* in honor of St. Joseph, our Guardian Angel and our patron saint. These acts should be made with attention, but briefly, and then one should go on to the meditation proper.

As to meditation itself. It is a good idea for those who can read to make use of a book. But they should stop reading as soon as something worthy of consideration strikes them. St. Francis de Sales says that we should imitate the bees when it comes to this; they work on a flower until they have extracted all the honey - only then do they move on to another. As for those who cannot read, they should meditate on the last things, on the Goodness of God, and especially on the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ. This, says St. Francis, should be the usual subject of our meditations. (10) What an excellent book it is for devout souls! In it, better than in any other book, we can learn the evil of sin and the tenderness of God's love for men. A saint once asked a crucifix if he should learn how to read, and the crucifix answered him, "What good will reading do you? What would you read? I am your book, and that is enough for you."

However, mental prayer is not just meditation. It involves besides this, acts of affections, prayers of petition, and good resolutions. After a person has meditated on some eternal truth, and after God has spoken to his heart, it is only natural that one should then talk to God from his heart - by making acts of affection, faith, thanksgiving, adoration, praise, humility, and above all of love and sorrow (which is actually an act of love.)

Love is a golden chain that ties the soul to God. An act of love is a treasure which gives us proof of God's friendship. "For to men she is unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God." (Wis 7/14) "Those who love me I also love." (Prov 8/17) "He that loves me will, in turn, be loved by my Father." (Jn 14/21) "Love...wins forgiveness for many sins." (I Pet 4/8) Venerable Sister Mary of the Crucified once saw a huge flame of fire which instantly burned up all the straws thrown into it. She was given to understand that an act of love takes away and destroys all the faults one commits in the same way. This is in line with what St. Thomas teaches, namely, that any act of love merits a degree of eternal glory. "Every act of charity merits eternal life." (11)

Here are examples of acts of charity. My God, I esteem You above everything else. I love You with all my heart. I wish that

every man on earth loved You. It is also an act of charity to conform oneself to God's Will, for instance: Lord make me know what You want of me, for I am ready to do it. Again, it is charity to offer oneself to God without any reservations; for example: Here I am, Lord. Dispose of me and of what is mine according to Your Will. Acts of self-offering like this are treasured by God. This is why St. Teresa made an offering of herself to God fifty times every day. Still the most perfect of all is to say: I am happy just because You are God, the Highest Good, lacking in absolutely nothing, and so forth.

When a person realizes that he has been raised to supernatural or infused recollection (as we explained in the last chapter), he should not try to make any more acts other than those to which God draws him. Instead he should lovingly attend to God's action within him, for if he did anything else, he could be placing an obstacle to divine grace.

St. Francis de Sales notes another important detail. If at some time the Holy Spirit is drawing a person to some affection which he can hardly get off his mind, he should set aside the consideration part of mental prayer and merely make acts of this affection. Consideration, remember, is only a stepping stone to get the will started making affections. Therefore, once the end has been reached, the means should be set aside. (12)

It is also of the greatest importance to make many acts of petition during mental prayer; humble and confidently asking God for His guidance, for forgiveness of sin, for perseverance, for a good death, heaven, and above all for the gift of loving Him. St. Francis de Sales used to say that among all the graces, love of God is the one we should ask for with the greatest fervor. (13) Once a person has love of God, he would say, he has every other grace. Consequently, whenever a person finds himself in a state of desolation where it is impossible to do anything else, it is enough for him to repeat this prayer of David: "O God, come to my aid. O Lord, hurry to help me." Venerable Paul Segneri said that he had learned from experience that nothing was more profitable during meditation than the practice of making petitions over and over in the name of and through the merits of Jesus Christ. He it is who made the beautiful promise: "I tell you truly, if you ask anything from the Father in my Name, He will give it to you."

It is a good idea, at least toward the end of meditation, to propose to do something - not just in general (such as to avoid all

deliberate faults or to submit to God's Will), but we should get down to particulars. For instance, to be careful to avoid a definite fault which we commit frequently, to concentrate our attention on one virtue which we have many chances to practice, such as bearing with a troublesome confrere or superior, or to be more conscientious regarding a particular rule, or to make a greater effort to curb our desires for some particular thing. We should never finish mental prayer without making some particular resolution.

Finally, the meditation will come to an end with three acts. 1.) We first thank God for the lights received during prayer. 2.) We resolve to follow the resolutions made during meditation. 3.) We pray to God the Father, through Jesus and Mary, to help us to be able to keep our promises. Lastly we should pray for the souls in purgatory, for the prelates of the Church, for sinners and for all our relatives, friends, and benefactors, by saying an Our Father and a Hail Mary for them, for these are the most useful prayers which Christ and the Church have given us.

Before one finishes his prayers, however, as St. Francis de Sales points out, he should select a bouquet of flowers to perfume his entire day; that is, he should pick out one or the other thought which especially struck him during his meditation in order to think of them during the day. He should next give attention as to putting this into practice, for example, in calmly overcoming the annoyance caused him by someone who is angry with him, or in mortifying himself in sight or hearing or speaking. It is especially important that a person guard in silence the thought of these pious affections which God has given him in prayer. Otherwise, if he immediately goes out to his external activities and to useless talking, the fervor of devotion which he acquired in prayer will grow cold and disappear. (14)

Most of all, finally, the director should frequently warn his penitent not to omit meditation, nor to shorten it, especially during times of aridity. And a person, on the other hand, should never be disturbed when he finds himself in a long state of aridity and completely lacking in fervor. St. Francis de Sales used to say that many courtiers go to honor their master and are content to do nothing more than have him look at them. We come to meditation in order to honor God and serve Him. If He wants to talk to us and grant us favors, we should thank Him. If, on the contrary, He does not, it should be enough for us to be in his presence, adoring Him and making our needs known to Him. (15) Even if He does not talk to us, He will at least accept our attention and our loyalty, and He will hear our prayers because we trusted in Him.

1. II II, q 104, a 5; and MT Lib VI, n. 803.
2. Here St. Alphonsus goes into a short treatment of Italy's eighteenth century prescription laws which are hardly of use here.
3. p. II, ch 6, n. 9.
4. Another reference to the engagement situation which we have noted previously - slightly edited.
5. Sess 23, de reform, ch 1.
6. Sess 5, de reform, ch 2.
7. John Avila, Spiritual Letters, p I, letter 4; De Sales, Treatise on Preaching, ch 5, a 1 and a 8.
8. Sess 5, de reformatione, ch 2.
9. Life by Gisolfi, ch 32.
10. Treatise on love of God i, 6, ch 2 and Introduction to the Devout Life II, ch 1 and 5.
11. II II, q 24, a 6 and I II, q 114, a 7.
12. Introduction to the Devout Life, II ch 8.
13. Treatise on the Love of God, I, II, ch 4, 8, 9, 13.
14. Introduction to the Devout Life II, ch 7 and 8.
15. Ibid., ch 9.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Assisting the Dying

There is no act of charity more pleasing to God and more profitable for the salvation of souls than that of helping the dying to die a holy death. The condition in which each man dies is the thing that determines his eternal destiny. At death, the devils are working feverishly at a time when the sick man's resistance grows weak. In order to show St. Philip Neri how much He loves those who prepare the dying for death, God many times showed him angels surrounding the priest in the sick room and suggesting words to him.

This is not just the task of pastors who - because of their office - have the care of souls. It is the duty of all priests. Yet the Roman Ritual refers in particular to pastors and says that caring for the sick is a special part of their work. (1) For this reason, as soon as they learn that one of their parishioners is sick, it tells them not to wait for the sick person to call for him, but to go on his own to visit them. He should visit them not just once, but often if he finds that the person is also spiritually sick. If he is legitimately kept from doing this himself, he is obliged to provide another priest who is both a good and prudent man. Some priests, the Ritual warns, do more harm than good when fulfilling this duty - not only to the sick person but to themselves and the family as well. (Note that the priest should be of assistance to the family also.) The Ritual goes on to say, that if there are not priests available, the pastor must see to it that some holy and charitable layman goes to the service of the sick person to suggest uplifting thoughts and prayers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING THE SICK

The priest should first find out from the doctor whether or not the sickness is mortal, but he should do this secretly, because there is a detestable practice among doctors of deceiving the sick so as to save both them and their families from grief, as if informing the sick of their obligation to confess (which they must do when they realize the danger) were the same thing as telling them they are going to die.

From the relatives, friends, and from the sick man himself, the priest should carefully inquire about his state of soul, about his dispositions, and about his sins. He should find out which passions he has given in to and especially if he is bound to make restitution of goods or of a reputation. He should check to see if he bears a deep hatred for anyone, or if he has been carrying on some illicit love affair - all this so that he may be able to apply the suitable remedies. He should be careful not to remind the sick man of the person he hates or of the person whom he illicitly loves unless there is some need compelling him to do this. In the case of a sick person who has suffered some injury, once the confessor has found out what he needs for absolving the sins, he should not probe into who inflicted the injury or why and how it was inflicted. And if the sick man begins to speak of these things, he should carefully turn the conversation to something else. Similarly, if there is no need for it, he should not even mention disputes, children, and other irrelevant things.

Once he has found out that the man is dangerously sick, he should not begin speaking about the confession right away. He should treat him with kindness and ask about his sickness and his pain and about how he is enduring them. Then the priest should urge him to conform himself to God's Will and to join his suffering to the suffering of Christ as His life ebbed away upon the Cross, and to bear his pain patiently as a way of satisfying for sins. Thus little by little, prudently, he can bring up the subject of going to confession, by asking the time since his last confession. He should tell the dying man to put all his trust in God who can, if he wants to, restore his former health. But at the same time he should gradually let the man know how dangerous his condition is. He should get him to realize especially that he should not pin his hopes completely on what the doctors and the family say; they just might be trying to conceal the seriousness of his sickness from him, so that he won't think into despondency. Tell him that it is the mark of a wise man to plan ahead for the future. Urge him, while his mind is capable, to make his confession which will be not only good for his soul, but for the health of his body, if that is expedient for his soul. Writers speak of sick men who get right up out of bed in good health as soon as they had confessed their sins, and one tells the story of a soldier who was not helped a bit by medicine but got well immediately from confession.

Yet if a sick person wants to put confession off, and the danger of death or of delirium is not imminent, the confessor can go along with him. Still he should be careful that they decide upon a time, perhaps in the evening or on the following day, for hearing the confession. On the other hand, if the danger of death is imminent, the confessor should warn him, as St. Augustine used to do, that God has made no promises to wait for sinners; He will spare them only if they repent. "He has not promised a tomorrow; perhaps He will give it, perhaps He will not." (2) If it turns out that the sick man is not won by these warnings, the confessor should never desert him, but should keep trying to rouse him by arguments, first working on his fear, then calling him to confidence. He should also see to it that both private and public prayers are offered to God for the man's salvation.

If the sickness grows worse, he should urge the man to make some fitting disposition of his goods, for this is advisable for the peace of the family. And he should urge it all the more if it would also ease his conscience. However the priest should be careful lest he himself be given a sizable gift. If the man has brothers and sisters who are needy, he should instruct him on his grave obligation of leaving his possessions to them, at least enough to provide for their needs. This grave obligation, however, does not

seem to hold for more remote relatives. If he wants to set something aside for the benefit of his soul, warn him not to impose this burden on his heirs for experience teaches that almost none of these pious legacies are fulfilled. Instead urge him to assign a sum of money to be used for Masses or other pious works. The priest should carefully avoid advising anything that would be prejudicial to others, since it is not becoming for a minister of Christ to arouse the hatred of others against himself.

When he suggests to them the Christian acts, he should always use the vernacular. The Ritual warns the priest not to talk too much or too quickly as some do, for that will weary and confuse the sick man rather than help him. Father Recupito of the Society of Jesus said that once he was near death and he could not understand what was being said to him. All he could make out was an irritating murmur. Consequently, lest we disturb the man, he advises us to pause between the words.

Holy pictures of Christ Crucified and of the Blessed Mother should be placed near the sick person, and if possible they should be large enough and in such a position that he can see them and pray to them.

Make it a point to remove dangerous objects from the sick man's room, such as weapons, pictures which are even partially obscene, and especially any person who might be an occasion of sin for him. These should be removed not only from the room, but from the house. When the sick man seems to be approaching his death agony, the priest should have everyone leave the room, except for one or two who may be allowed to remain when it is necessary. He should not allow into the room those close relatives who might excite some passion.

REMEDIES FOR TEMPTATIONS

The best remedy for temptations is to repeat over and over the Names of Jesus and Mary and to make the sign of the cross. Still it will be useful here to add some remedies for special temptations of the devil.

FIRST: Temptations against the Faith. Those who have led an immoral life and have been too dependent on their own judgment (especially learned men) are the ones who are especially afflicted

with this terrible temptation. They should be warned that, whenever the devil suggests some doubt of faith or some subtlety they should immediately with a firm conviction answer in this general way: I believe whatever the Church believes for the Church believes and teaches the truth. He should encourage the sick man to thank God with all his heart for the fact that he has been a member of the Church from childhood, and to tell Him that he wants to persevere in his faith until the end of his life. The best way to get rid of a temptation of this kind, however, is to distract his mind with something else, and to make different kinds of acts, such as contrition, hope, love for God, and so forth. Bellarmine speaks of a professor who, when he was dying, decided to look into some article of faith with the devil; he was tricked, gave into the temptation, and died.

If the temptation continues to bother the man, the priest should show him very clearly the arguments for our Faith - that it is holy and unspotted, that it was spread over the whole earth by poor fishermen, that it is confirmed by so many miracles and that so many thousands of martyrs have offered their lives for it. Show him that these arguments prove the Church's truth, even though now we have to look upon the truths it teaches "darkly as in a glass", for if the mysteries of faith were evident to us, where would be the merit of our faith? It is called faith precisely because what it teaches is hidden and not self-evident. This is why Christ said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (Jn 20/29)

SECOND: Temptations to Despair. This is the main temptation which Hell uses against the sick man. For this reason, the priest should never talk to these souls about God's justice, or about the punishment of the damned. Neither should he exaggerate the sins they have committed. Instead he should give them reasons for trusting in God's Mercy - the Passion of Christ, God's promises to us, and Mary's intercession.

The first motive for our hope is God's Mercy, since God is called and really is the "merciful Father" of II Corinthians 1/3. He runs to catch up even with those who have not been looking for Him: "I was ready to respond to those who asked me not, to be found by those who sought me not." (Is 65/1) He actually wants to save us more than we want to be saved. With good reason does he complain about those who run from him when he desires to receive them. As St. Bernard says: "He complains that he is being deserted by those whom He desires to welcome." (3) His whole Being is inclined to forgiveness. "Our Lord is generous in forgiving." (Is 55/7) He cries out

that he does not want the death of the sinner; "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live." (Ezech 33/11) He says that when a sinner is sorry for his sins, He puts aside all thought of them. "But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die." (Ezech 18/21, 22) Who can ever lose confidence in God's Mercy, once he has learned these testimonies from the mouth of God Himself? One single act of sorrow is enough to destroy countless sins. The publican did nothing more than blurt out: "Be merciful to me a sinner" and he was justified. (Lk 13/13) The Prodigal Son, as soon as he returned to the feet of his father, was welcome. (Lk 15/20) When David said, "I have sinned," Nathan answered, "The Lord has removed your sins." (II Kings 12/13)

The second motive for hope is the Passion of Jesus Christ, Who told us that He came down to earth for only one reason: the salvation of sinners. "I have not come to call the just, but sinners." (Mt 9/13) He tells us that He will drive no one away from Him, "If anyone comes to me, I will certainly not reject him." (Jn 6/37) And, as Matthew says, He calls Himself the good shepherd who goes out looking for his scattered sheep, and if He finds one, He rejoices and picks it up and carries it home on His shoulders. And it seems that He loves this one with greater tenderness than the rest, as He did with St. Mary of Egypt, Blessed Angela of Foligno, St. Margaret of Cortona and other penitents. For this reason, no one with an upright will should ever fear that the Lord will condemn him, for it was just to save us from condemnation that our Lord did not hesitate to condemn Himself to the death of the cross.

The third motive is God's promise. Many times do the Gospels tell us how God promised His grace to those who ask for it: "Ask and you shall receive." (Jn 16/24) "I tell you that if you make any request from my Father, he will grant it to you in my name." (Jn 16/23) This promise holds good not only for the good, but also for the sinners, "All who ask, receive." (Mt 7/8) All one needs to do is to ask God for the grace of salvation in order to be sure of receiving it. "The Lord is good to those who seek him." (Lamentations 3/25)

The fourth motive for hope is the intercession of the saints and especially that of the Mother of God. God wants us, together with the whole Church, to call her our refuge, our life, our hope. "Refuge of sinners pray for us; hail our life, our hope!" This is why Blossius calls her "The hope of the hopeless" and St. Ephrem, "the help of the abandoned." The Mother of God herself revealed to

St. Brigit that her care for and protection of those who are devoted to her, when they are bothered by temptations and pray to her, is just like the love of any mother - she sees her child pursued by enemies and wants more than anything else to protect him. When a sinner comes running to her, she said, she does not weigh his merits, but looks instead to the intention that brings him to her. God Himself told St. Catherine of Siena that He had given Mary this privilege: any sinner who has recourse to her can never be conquered by the devil. (4)

THIRD: Temptations to Pride. St. Bernard says that pride is an arrow that "penetrates easily, but inflicts more than a light wound," especially if the person has nothing bothering his conscience. If a priest should ever notice a dying person who considered his salvation a sure thing because he puts too much stock in his own works, he should tell him that all we can claim as really our own are our sins. All good things we have received from God. "What have you that you have not received?" (I Cor 4/7) Since no one can be infallibly certain of his eternal salvation or of being in the state of grace, everyone should always be fearful and, as St. Paul says, work out his salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil 2/12) (5)

FOURTH: Temptation to Impatience. If the sick man is impatient with his suffering, he should be reminded of the great torments that the martyrs suffered for the Name of Christ. While they were still alive, they had their skin stripped from them, were burned, and sometimes cut into pieces. Especially bring to his attention all the things that Christ, Who was Innocence Itself, endured out of love for us.

It might be a good idea to tell him that he cannot get rid of his sickness, so he might as well accept it willingly for the sake of God, and doing this he will find a certain amount of relief now, and will have less to atone for in purgatory, and in heaven he will receive a greater reward. "Your sadness shall be turned into joy." Otherwise if he suffers it unwillingly, it will hurt him both now and in the next life. He should be told how the sufferings at the end of our life complete our eternal crown. For this reason, St. Bonaventure said that to endure our sufferings patiently is better than anything else we could do. In this he was merely following what St. James said, "Let patience accomplish a perfect work." (Jm 1/4) This is the way God treats his friends on earth, for the cross is a very safe sign of predestination. St. Clare led a life of suffering for 28 years. St. Lidwina was sick for 38 years without interruption. One day Mary told St. Brigit when she was sick: "Do you know why your

sickness will last so long? Because my Son and I love you so much." St. Paul offers us consolation in bearing with hardship and trials here on earth by saying "For our present light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure." (II Cor 4/17) And in another place he says: "I count the sufferings of the present time as not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed shining upon us." (Rom 8/18)

It is a good idea to urge a person like this to conform himself to God's Will not only in the matter of his suffering, but also as regards any mistake that the doctor might make, or any negligence of those caring for him. They should often be reminded to ask God for patience.

FIFTH: For those who are unwilling to submit to death so soon. Outline for these people how miserable this life really is - its infirmities, its troubles, and its danger of sinning and of being damned. This is the reason that holy persons desire death so longingly. St. Teresa cried out: "Oh, to think that at every moment of my life I could lose my God!" Because of this, every time the clock chimed she was grateful that she had survived the dangers of the past hour. The holy martyrs went happily to the instruments of torture, since they held out to them the prospects of getting away from all these dangers and of soon enjoying God. It is said in the Apocalypse (14/13), "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They are to have rest from their toils." In this valley of tears we are but travellers; "here we have no lasting city," as St. Paul said in Hebrews. (13/14) Every man - be he Pope or King - must die.

Urge the sick man to thank God for not letting him die when he was in the state of sin and for making it possible for him to die strengthened by the Sacraments. Tell him that at the very least, he should willingly undergo death, because it frees us from so many light faults which we can never escape in this life.

Say to him: "It is best if you conform yourself to God's Will, because He arranges everything for our good. Who knows whether or not you would even save your soul, if you live longer?" If the sick man should answer, "I want to live to make satisfaction to God for my sins and to gain some merit before death - up to now I have done nothing," the priest should in turn tell him: "No penance is more acceptable to God than to accept your death willingly as an atonement for sins and no act is more meritorious than to accept death as God's Will for you."

SIXTH: Temptation to cling to one's relatives and possessions. To those for whom death is disturbing because they cling too tightly to material goods, the confessor should remind them that these are not true goods because they are passing and they will soon decay. And even if they don't decay, they will still distress a person more than they will console him.

If, on the other hand, the man is troubled because of deep love that he has for his wife and children whom he must now leave, the priest should say to him encouragingly: "Everybody has to die. They shall all follow you when their time comes. So now take care of your own salvation and your own soul, and then you will be able to pray for them in heaven. And one day you will be all happy together for all eternity in heaven. Right now what could be more wonderful than to go and live with Jesus and the Queen of Heaven and all the saints.

If he is troubled because he leaves his family poor, the priest should re-assure him this way: "Listen, if you reach heaven, you will be able to do far more for them from there than you could do here on earth. Never worry about them, for God, Who feeds the birds, shall not fail to take care of them. If you love them much, think how much more God loves them.

SEVENTH: Temptation to hatred and revenge. If the dying man should happen to hate another because of an offense done to him....

First, tactfully remind him of God's commandment: Love your enemies. (Lk 6/27) Then tell him that a person who does not forgive cannot expect forgiveness from God Who says: "Outside are dogs." (Apoc 22/15) Dogs are the symbol of revenge and are driven away from heaven. On the contrary, God promises certain pardon to any sinner who forgives his offender: "Forgive and you shall be forgiven." (Lk 6/37) Thirdly, introduce the idea that, if his enemy has hurt him unjustly, he should think how much more unjustly he himself has hurt God. If he is asking God to forget his sins, shouldn't he all the more forget his neighbor's? "Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive." (Col 3/13)

Finally, show him how much he will please God if he forgives injuries. After St. John Gualbert had spared his brother's murderer, he went into a Church and kneeling before a crucifix he saw the Redeemer bend his head down toward him as if to thank him for forgiving the man. Before his death, St. James embraced the man who had accused him. St. Stephen prayed for those who stoned him. (Acts 7/59) St. Louis, King of France, had as a guest at his own

table the man who had tried to kill him. But more than all these, Christ Himself gave us the first example of this when from the cross He prayed to the Father for those who were jeering at Him and persecuting Him. (Lk 23/34)

MOTIVATIONS AND AFFECTIONS TO BE GIVEN THE DYING

FIRST: Motives of Confidence. We mentioned this once before when we were speaking of despair. To these we can add the following quotations from the Bible. "Has anyone hoped in the Lord and been disappointed?" (Sir 2/11) "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." (I Jn 2/2) Jesus Christ suffered death in order to obtain forgiveness of sins for us. "He has delivered him for us all, how can he fail to grant us all other blessings with him?" (Rom 8/32) How shall God refuse to forgive us when He has sacrificed His own Son for us?

Affections of Confidence. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? (Ps 26/1) In your hands I place my life - you have redeemed me, Lord God of Truth. Therefore we beg - help your servants whom you have redeemed with your Precious Blood. Good Jesus, hide me within your wounds. In you, O Lord, have I hoped, I shall never be disappointed. Your wounds are my merits. (St. Bernard) My Jesus, you shall not refuse to pardon me for you have not refused to give your life and blood for me. Passion of Jesus, you are my hope. Merits of Jesus, you are my hope. Death of Jesus, you are my hope. Mary my Mother, save me and have mercy on me. Hail our Hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me a sinner. We run to your protection, Holy Mother of God.

SECOND: Motives and Affections of Contrition. St. Augustine maintains that we should keep on deploring our sins as long as we live. -Do not enter into judgment with your servant. (Ps 142/2) My Jesus and my judge, forgive me before you come to judge me. A contrite and humble heart you will not despise. My God, I wish I had never offended you. My Lord, do not treat me as I deserve. Father, I am not worthy to be called your son. I left you - I despised your grace - I deliberately ran away from you. My God, I am sorry with all my heart - for the love of your Son, forgive me. Cursed be the sins that deprived me of God - I hate them, detest them, curse them. My God, what evil have you done that I have so offended you. For the sake of Jesus your Son, have mercy on me. Never again, Lord, as long as I live shall I offend you. For the rest of my life I am determined to love you. To make satisfaction for all the times I have

insulted You, I offer You my death and the sufferings that I will endure in dying. Lord, it is right for You to punish me, for I have offended You so much; but I beg you, punish me in this life - not in the next. Mary, obtain for me a sorrow for my sins, forgiveness, and perseverance.

THIRD: Motives and Affections for Love. My God, You are infinitely good, I love You above all things. I love You more than myself. I Love You with all my heart. My God, I am not worthy of loving You, because I have offended You so much, but out of love for Jesus make me worthy. Would to God that all men loved You. Sweet Jesus, I want to suffer and die for You, since You have suffered and died for me. Lord, punish me as You wish, but not by preventing me from loving You. My God, save me, my salvation is to love You. I long for paradise so that I may love You forever and with all my strength. My God, do not send me to hell as I have deserved; there I would have to hate You, but I do not want to hate You; what have You done to me, my Lord, that I shall hate You so! Make me love You, and do with me whatever You want. I want to suffer whatever pleases You - I want to die if it pleases You. I surrender myself entirely to You, My Jesus - never let me separate myself from You again. My God, make me entirely Yours before I die. When shall I be able to say: My God, I am no longer able to lose You? O my God, make me want to love You as much as You deserve my love. Mary, draw me completely to God. My Mother, I love You, I want to get to heaven to love You forever.

FOURTH: Motives and Affections for Conformity. Anything of value in our lives consists in the fact that we have conformed ourselves to God's Will. Life is in His Will. (Ps 29/6) God wants the things that are best for us. Jesus appeared to St. Gertrude offering her life or death. She answered: Lord, I want whatever You want. In the same way, St. Catherine of Siena, when Christ appeared to her offering her a choice between a crown of jewels and a crown of thorns, answered Him: I choose whatever is pleasing to You.

If God calls me to the next life, am I content? I am content. I shall always say: Lord, do with me whatever You want. Always Your Will be done. I will only what You will. I want to suffer as much as You want. I want to die when You want me to. In Your hands I place my soul and my body, my life and my death. I shall bless the Lord always - whether You console me, my God, or make me suffer. I love You and I will always love You. My God, I join my death with Jesus' death, and so united I offer it to You. O will of God, You are my love. O good pleasure of my God, I give myself entirely to You in sacrifice.

FIFTH: Motives and Affections for a Desire of Heaven. Blossius tells us that many revelations have made known the fact that those who had only a weak desire for heaven suffer a special punishment in purgatory, which the mystics call the punishment of languor. (6) This present life is a prison of pain in which we cannot see God. This is why David was right in crying out: "Lead me forth from prison." (Ps 141/8) And St. Augustine used to say: "Lord, let me die that I may see You." (7) St. Jerome used to call death his sister and would say to her, "Open to me, my sister," for death will open to us the doors of heaven. Similarly, St. Charles Borromeo once saw a figure of death depicted with a scythe in its hand and he ordered the painter to erase the scythe and paint in its place a golden key to represent the key to heaven. It is a good idea for the priest, then, to tell the dying over and over about the treasures of our heavenly home - reminding them of what St. Paul said: "What no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, what no human heart has ever thought of, namely, the great blessings God holds ready for those who love Him." (I Cor 2/9)

When shall I come and behold the face of God? (Ps 41/3) When will it be, my God, that I shall look on Your limitless beauty and love You face to face? In heaven I shall always love You - You shall always love me. We shall love each other forever, my God, my love, my all. My Jesus when shall I kiss the wounds You suffered for me? Mary, when shall I come before the feet of the Mother who has loved me and helped me so much? Turn then, O most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

SIXTH: Affections that can be Suggested to a Sick Person Whenever he Kisses a Crucifix. Sweet Jesus, do not look on what I have done to You, but look rather at what You have done for me. Remember that I am one of the sheep for whom You gave Your life. My Jesus, I accept being consumed for You since You were totally consumed for me. Lord, You have suffered far more for me than I am suffering for You. You were innocent - I am guilty. I kiss the feet that have walked so long to find me and to save this sheep that was lost. Most lovable Redeemer, I embrace Your feet as Magdalen did - spare me as You spared her. My God, forgive me for the love of Jesus Christ and let me die united to You. Eternal Father, for me You handed over Your own Son - I have handed myself over to You. My Jesus, I have been so ungrateful to You - have mercy on me. So many times have I deserved hell - not in the next life but in this life punish me. You have searched for me when I ran from You; do not abandon me now that I come searching for You. Gentle Jesus, do not let me be separated from You. Who shall

separate me from the love of Jesus? Lord Jesus Christ, by the bitter agony You suffered when Your soul left Your blessed body, have mercy on my soul when it leaves my body. My Jesus, You died for love of me - I want to die for love of You.

SEVENTH: Affections that can be Suggested to Priests and Religious. In peace and in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest My God and my all. What happiness will be mine if I leave everything to gain You, my greatest good. Into Your hands, Lord, I give my life. Do not reject me from Your face. Sweet Jesus, never let me be separated from You. I will die of love for Your love since You died of love for my love - St. Francis used to say this prayer. A contrite and humble heart You will never despise, my God. In You, Lord, have I hoped, I shall not be disappointed forever. Oh, that I may love You, Lord, my strength. Lord, let me die that I may see You. What is there for me in the heavens and outside of You what I want on earth? You are the God of my heart and my portion forever. The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? I am yours - save me. When shall I come and behold the face of God? Only give me love for You together with Your grace and I am rich enough. (St. Ignatius Loyola) My love is for me and I am for Him. I shall sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. Refuge of sinners, pray for us. Mary, Mother of grace, Mother of Mercy, protect us from the enemy and receive us at the hour of death. Salvation of those who call on you! (St. Bonaventure)

SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE LAST SACRAMENTS

.....CONFESSION

Previously in the book I mentioned that when the danger of death is pressing, or when Viaticum has been delayed and the confession would take a while, the patient is not obliged to confess each and every sin.

Besides this, I would like to point out the following.

First, in danger of death any priest whatsoever, even though he is not approved for hearing confessions, can absolve validly and licitly from all sins and censures, even if they are reserved and notorious, and even though there is an approved confessor present, saving the prescriptions of canons 884, and 2252.

This absolution extends exclusively to the internal forum.

The exceptions mentioned above are:

- 1.) absolution, in danger of death, of one's accomplice *in peccato turpi*, even though it is valid, is not licit on the part of the confessor outside the case of necessity.
- 2.) Those who are absolved in the danger of death by a priest, without faculties for it, from a censure reserved *ab homine* or *specialissimo modo* to the Holy See, have the obligation, if they recover, of having recourse to the competent superior and of accepting his mandates, under pain of re-incurrence of the same censure. (8)

A dying person who is unconscious can be absolved, at least conditionally, because this seems always to be the safer choice, provided that it is evident that the man had wanted absolution by giving some sign of repentance, or had asked for a confessor. This applies even in the case where the dying man has lost consciousness in the very act of sinning. We hold this on the authority of St. Augustine and from reason: on the one hand a conditional administration removes the irreverence to the sacrament, and on the other hand, we always judge in such a case that every man wishes to take care of his salvation, and does show some sensible sign, even though we do not perceive the sign because of his sickness. (9)

.....COMMUNION

In order to be able to receive Viaticum, the sick person need not have passed all hope of recovering; it is enough if there be a danger of death. If there is danger of vomiting, Viaticum may not be given, although the confessor may experiment with non-consecrated hosts.

Viaticum can be given even properly to children who have not reached the age of reason. It can also be given to the insane as long as it is clear that they have lived well and have confessed a short time before, and as long as there is no danger of irreverence. It is probably licit to experiment with non-consecrated hosts in their case too.

To those who are sick on Good Friday, it is not only permitted to administer Viaticum, but parish priests are even under obligation to do this.

The common opinion holds that in the same sickness a priest may give Viaticum often to a sick man who is not fasting - at least if a period of six or seven days intervenes. Many allow a shorter interval. Still, if a sick man has received communion in the morning out of devotion, he cannot be given Viaticum on the same day, unless the danger of death arises from some violent new sickness, such as an injury or poison.

If a sick person has just gone to confession and the sickness suddenly gets worse, the priest should carefully prepare him that he may receive Viaticum soon, and may do so with a clear understanding and with more abundant fruit. To do this, the priest should arouse in him a desire for Viaticum so that, once he has armed himself against the power of the devil, he may resist with greater effort and grace and may unite himself with Christ the Redeemer who wants to come to visit him and flood him with graces and bring him quickly to his heavenly home. Or if it is good for his soul, Christ may even give him back his bodily health. St. Cyril of Alexandria says that the Holy Eucharist also drives away sickness and cures the sick. And St. Gregory Nazianzen says that his own father received communion once and recovered immediately. (10)

The priest then should talk to the sick person something like this: "Even though we have not given up your health as hopeless, still you are in danger. Consequently, it would be a good idea for you to receive Viaticum as soon as you can. Christ may indeed restore your health, if this is advantageous for your salvation. On the other hand, if you should die, he will be ready to help you against the devil and to accompany you into heaven. What do you say? You do want to receive Viaticum, don't you? Prepare yourself to receive your Redeemer Who gave His life for you. Say with all your heart: Come Jesus, come, My love, my only good. Come, I long for you. What is there for me in the heavens or what do I desire upon the earth - besides You. The God of my heart and my portion forever."

When the priest arrives with Viaticum, he should see to it that the relatives are not present in the sick room, for they can arouse old feelings - namely, the wife, sisters, and others. In these moments he should add: "St. Philip Neri exclaimed when he saw the Blessed Sacrament enter his sick room: Behold my love, behold my love. You repeat the same thing: Behold my love. Behold, here

is the Son of God Who came down from heaven for my salvation, became a man, and chose to suffer death on the cross for me, and he is now here to visit me in my own room. Be of good heart - He has forgiven you your sins. You are sorry for all your sins. Now you love the Lord your God with all your heart, isn't that right? So tell him: I love you, my God, above everything else, and because I love you I am sorry that I have offended you. For love of you I die willingly; it is Your desire - I want to die that I may see You and love You forever."

Then the priest may say: "If you love Jesus, now out of love for Him forgive all those who have offended you in any way. And ask pardon of everyone whom you have injured and offended. Now turn your attention to Jesus, for He wants you to give Him all your attention. Tell Him with all your heart: Lord, I am not worthy. --- Even though you admit that you are unworthy of such a privilege, the Lord still wants to come to you. Tell Him again fervently: Come, Lord, come, my love. My God and my All, come. I thirst for You and I want nothing else but You."

Once the sick man has received Communion, the priest should help him make a thanksgiving. "Thank the good Lord now. He wanted to come to you and to have you welcome Him. The Blessed Sacrament is really the pledge of future glory. The Lord is with you, how can you be afraid? Rejoice, because God wants to give you His paradise. This is why He has given you Himself so entirely. Tell Him: My Lord, my love, I embrace You. I thank You, I love You, and I hope to love You forever. I am sorry that I have hurt You. Whatever time is left me now on earth, I am firmly determined to spend it in loving You."

"My Jesus, willingly do I offer my life as a victim, if it pleases You to take it. Your Will be done. I beg only that you give me holy perseverance and Your love so that I may die loving You and then love You forever in heaven. Do not abandon me - I shall not abandon You - therefore my God, we shall love each other forever."

.....EXTREME UNCTION

Due to the fact that Extreme Unction is the last Sacrament, St. Thomas calls it the crown of the spiritual life. (11) By it man is made ready and is disposed to enter his heavenly home. For this reason, this sacrament should be conferred while the sick man

is still mentally alert - so that it may be a greater benefit to him. Although it cannot be conferred unless there is a grave danger of death (at least a probable danger) - still it should not be put off until the very last moment. The Roman Catechism says that priests sin gravely if they confer Extreme Unction when there is no longer any hope of life and when the sick person has already lost consciousness. (12)

The priest should try to convince the sick man that Extreme Unction is not only good for his soul, but even for the health of his body, as Trent says: Where it is beneficial for the soul, it sometimes obtains health for the body. (13) However, this cure will not take place when it is naturally speaking impossible to recover one's health. John Heroldus speaks of one dead man to whom it was revealed that, if he had received Extreme Unction earlier, he would have been cured of his sickness immediately, but because it was postponed he had died and been condemned to the fire of purgatory for a hundred years.

Extreme Unction takes away the remnants of sin and as a consequence any hidden mortal sins, as St. Thomas teaches. (14) Consequently, the patient should be told that, as the five senses are being anointed, he should be sorry for the sins committed through each of them and should - together with those in the room - answer "Amen".

Extreme Unction gives special help with which to crush the power and the temptations of the devil in one's last agony. For this reason, it is very probable that a person commits a grave sin in refusing to receive this sacrament.

As to administering this sacrament. It is only speculatively probable that it is enough to administer the Sacrament with one drop of oil, not spreading it over the parts. In practice, however, this cannot be done for it would not be a true anointing.

The anointing of the five senses, according to the more common opinion, is necessary for the sacrament. Therefore, only in time of plague or in an imminent danger of death can a person use just one anointing on one sense, preferably on the head. He should do this with the abbreviated formula: *Per istam sanctam unctionem indulgeat tibi Dominus quidquid deliquisti. Amen.* (15) If the patient recovers, the anointing should be repeated on all five senses with the prescribed prayers.

It is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament to give a two-fold anointing to the two-fold parts. It is enough for liceity to anoint only one eye, one hand, etc., when there is danger of infection or something preventing the person from being moved. Anointing of the feet, according to the common opinion, is not necessary for the sacrament, but the Church's custom regarding this should be revered. Also, it is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament to maintain the right order in anointing the parts. Still one commits a grave sin by not observing this order.

Extreme Unction can properly be given to children who have the use of reason, even if they have not yet received Communion. When in doubt about the use of reason, the Sacrament can be administered conditionally. This however cannot be done for those who certainly do not have the use of reason.

Extreme Unction can be given to the insane and to the delirious, who have once had the use of reason, have given some sign of their proper dispositions, and have asked for it - or very likely would have asked - or given some sign of contrition - as long as danger of irreverence is remote. It can certainly be given if they have a lucid interval. In doubt as to whether the person ever had the use of reason, it can be given conditionally. The same holds for those who are drunk and in danger of death, unless it is clear that they were in mortal sin when they lost consciousness. It should be denied absolutely to those who are impenitent, to those who die in evident sin, and to the excommunicated as the Roman Ritual warns. (16) It can be given to women if they are in danger of death from childbirth.

In case of necessity, the prescribed prayers which are not part of the form can be omitted. These shall be said afterwards if there is any time. In such a case the sacrament can be given without candles, and also probably without surplice and stole.

Extreme Unction cannot be repeated in the same sickness unless the patient has probably recovered since the last anointing and has now fallen into another critical condition, as Trent teaches.

The priest should be careful in moving the sick person into position for anointing. However, if he is careful in moving him and the person happens to die, the priest does not incur an irregularity. An irregularity cannot be incurred except by a crime and there is certainly no crime here when he is doing something inculpably and out of charity.

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Finally, pastors can licitly keep the holy oils in their homes at night, whenever they foresee the probable danger of being called to give Extreme Unction and the oils not being handy.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE AGONY AND MOMENT OF DEATH

When the sick man reaches his agony, the priest should help him as much as he can. He should repeatedly sprinkle the man with holy water, especially if he is troubled with diabolical temptations and say: "*Exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici eius.*"

He should strengthen him with the sign of the cross and bless him with the words: "*Benedicat te Deus Pater qui te creavit; benedicat te filius qui te redemit; benedicat te Spiritus Sanctus.*"

He should give him a picture to hold and to kiss - a picture of Jesus and Mary.

He should make sure the person gains all the indulgences he can, and especially should he be sure to impart to him the blessing at the moment of death of Benedict XIV with its plenary indulgence. The pope gave to bishops and to those they would delegate, the faculty of imparting a plenary indulgence to the sick who ask for it, after they have received Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction - or, if they are unconscious, after they have given some sign of sorrow. However, it is not to be given to the excommunicated, to the impenitent, or to those who die in evident mortal sin. (18)

Repeatedly the priest should suggest thoughts of compunction, conformity, hope in Christ's Passion and in Mary's intercession, and desire of seeing God. The priest however should be careful to pause to give the man time to think about it and to rest.

He should make sure that the penitent says the names of Jesus and Mary over and over. He should say them in his heart if he cannot pronounce them.

When he reaches his agony, the priest should have those nearby say the Litany of the Blessed Virgin for him. It is also a good idea to have the bell tolled so that others will realize that someone is dying and pray for him; this can have a good effect even on those who are not sick. It should be mentioned that, in general, when a person has lost consciousness, prayers do far more good than words.

When death draws near, the priest should recite the customary prayers that are found in the Ritual in a reverent tone and kneeling beside the bed.

Even though it is allowed to touch the person's hands, feet, etc., to see if they have grown cold or whether they have lost their feeling-power, still he should be careful not to do it so often as to disturb him. Nor should one try to move a person in agony, for that can hasten death.

As long as the sick person is in sure possession of his senses, it is a good idea, after disposing him, to give him absolution frequently, in order to be more sure about his being in the state of grace, in case the previous confessions were invalid, or at least to increase his store of grace and lessen the punishments of purgatory. If he should happen to fall into mortal sin at this time, be careful not to frighten him, but urge him to call on the names Of Jesus and Mary. If he is tempted again, strengthen him with all kindness, get him to make an act of contrition, and immediately absolve him. Once he loses consciousness and shows no signs of sorrow or desire for absolution, it would not be right to absolve him many times within the same day, for even to absolve conditionally you need an urgent and weighty reason. Consequently the right thing would be to let a notable space of time intervene. However, in this the priest's procedure should depend on the man's conscience as he knew it. If the man had the habit of bad thoughts, if he is dying from an injury, if he has been involved in some deep hatred or an illicit love affair, if his sickness has been extremely painful and he has not accepted it willingly - for any of these reasons he could be absolved more often. It is all right to let only three or four hours intervene. It can be done even more frequently if he is about to die. It is a good idea to ask the sick person, while he can understand you, to give some set sign, when he wants absolution or when the priest wants to give it. Such as to close his eyes or open them, lift his hand, bend his head, and so forth.

Lastly, when it appears that he has died, the priest should be careful not to give the signal of death immediately, nor close his eyes or mouth immediately or cover his face with a piece of cloth. For if he were not yet dead, this would hasten his death. However, when it is evident that the soul has gone into eternity, the priest should ask everyone to pray for him and kneeling he should say the prayer "*Subvenite*" which is found in the Ritual or in the back of the breviary.

.....THE MOMENT OF DEATH

The priest should encourage the sick man to make affections of faith, hope, love, sorrow for sin - as were previously given. When he is just about to die, the priest should suggest the following: "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my life. My Jesus, I give you my soul which you have redeemed with your blood. (Note that the priest's voice should be strong and he should not stop making these acts.) Lord Jesus Christ, receive my soul. My God, help me, let me come to love you forever. My Jesus, my love, I love you, I am sorry for my sins. O never let me offend You. Mary help me - pray to Jesus for me.....Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus and Mary I give you my heart and my soul.

The priest should be able to recognize the signs of death so that he will be prepared to help the dying person. There are three main ones which always occur:

- 1.) weak and unsteady pulse,
- 2.) labored breathing, and
- 3.) sunken and glassy eyes, or more opened than usual, or too shining.

Some proximate signs of death are: the nose growing more pointed and becoming white at its tip, the nostrils puffing up like little bags, trembling hands, bluish fingernails, face turning yellow, blue, or different, the breath giving off a bad odor, a rigid body, a cold or sweating forehead, too much heat in the area of the heart, coldness in the hands and feet.

Still more proximate signs of death are: intermittent or faulty breathing, lack of pulse, drawing together of and grating of the teeth, gasping for breath, a certain soft gurgling or sighing, abundance of tears, a rigidity of the mouth, eyes, and of the whole body.

Some people may die with only a few of these signs and with a good pulse and even while speaking - especially, those suffering from dropsy, fever, or wound, asthma, pleurisy, vomiting of blood, quinsy, and rheumatism.

People are close to death from pleurisy when they have difficulty in breathing, begin fighting for breath, and their lips become blue. Those wounded in the head often die suddenly. Those with

dropsy, when their pulse stops and they have to fight for breath and foam at the mouth. Those who suffer a fever usually die at the beginning of an attack, while the convulsions are violent.

In some sickness the patient's breathing is so weak and their heart so quiet that they seem to be dead when they really are not. The more certain signs of death are: coldness in all the areas of the body, even near the heart; the body becomes a dead weight; the nostrils fail to respond to sharp, stimulating odors; a mirror held close to the mouth is not all that clouded, and similar things.

Lastly, sometimes the signs fail and the person dies suddenly without any of them. Therefore, as long as the person is in his agony, the priest should never leave him.

THE CHRISTIAN ACTS

One very important practice when a person is near death - one to which are joined many indulgences - is to have him recite the Christian acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity. (19)

Act of Faith. My God, infallible truth, because You have revealed to the Church everything I am supposed to believe, I believe everything that the Church proposes for me to believe. I believe that You are my God, the Creator of all things. I believe that you reward the just for all eternity in paradise, and punish sinners in hell. I believe in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, that is, I believe that you are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - but only one God. I believe that the second person, that is, the Son of God, became man in the womb of Mary who was always a Virgin, and died for us sinners. Then He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father. And from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the seven sacraments and especially in Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction. I believe that all men must rise again with their bodies. I believe, finally, all that the Holy Roman Catholic Church believes - in it alone is the true faith.

Act of Hope. My God, trusting in your promises, and because you are faithful, powerful, and merciful, I hope through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, final perseverance, and the glory of paradise.

Act of Love. My God, because You are infinitely good and worthy of infinite love, I love You with all my heart more than everything else. I repent with my whole heart of all my sins, and I detest them, because I have offended your infinite goodness. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace which I beseech You to give me now and always, rather to die than to offend You again. And I purpose also to receive the sacraments during my life and at my death.

1. Ritual, de visitatione et cura infirmorum.
2. Ennarratio in Ps. 101, Migne 37/1301.
3. Migne, 184/529.
4. St. Brigid, Revelations II, ch 23; St. Catherine, Dialogue, ch 139.
5. About three scripture texts have been omitted in this chapter - the new critical edition has them saying something different than what St. Alphonsus used them for, e.g., Eccl 9/1, Ezech 18/21,22.

6. Conclave animae fidelium, p 2, ch 13, n 18.
7. Migne, PL, 32/870.
8. This section brought into line with present code; taken from the Spanish (Moriones) edition.
9. St. Augustine, de conjugiiis adulterinis, Migne, PL, 40/470; two paragraphs omitted (with Spanish) as out-of-date.
10. St. Cyril, in Joan. Migne, PL, 73/586; St. Gregory, Oratio 18, Migne PGL, 35/1018.
11. ST, III, q 84, a 1; I II, q 102, a 5.
12. p II, ch 6, n 9.
13. Sess 14, de Extrema Unctione, ch 2.
14. Supp. q 30, a 1.
15. Taken from the Spanish - slightly adapted in keeping with present legislation - c 947; Alphonsus includes "et suam piissimam misericordiam" in the short form and Gaude notes that this was dropped in 1906.
16. de visitatione et cura infirmorum, n 3.
17. Sess 14, de extrema unctione, ch 3.
18. These notes on the Blessing were moved up from the very end of the book. This chapter-ending has been limited to the essentials - I have on my desk four different editions of the *Praxis* and each of them ends it differently - some with long lists of prayers, some with the new formula for the Blessing, one briefly with no prayers or Blessing formula. Consequently, I used my editor's privilege and dropped the prayers.