

"...AND AMEND MY LIFE"



Sause, Bernard A.

... and amend...

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PROGRESS FOR RELIGIOUS THROUGH CONFESSION



By

Bernard A. Sause, O.S.B.

A GRAIL PUBLICATION

St. Meinrad

Indiana

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"...AND AMEND MY LIFE

by Bernard Sause, O.S.B.

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THROUGH CONFESSION



By

Bernard A. Sause, O.S.B.

Price Seventy-five cents

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Indiana

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PREFACE

Few religious remain long in their vowed striving for perfection without profound gratitude to their confessor. Even the young carry tormenting doubts and problems to the confessional, and happily leave them there.

Nor do many advance so far along the path of virtue that need for help is past history in their lives; generally speaking, religious can never cease to intensify their love for the sacrament of mercy. Experience has taught them to appreciate it as one of the most powerful aids to their vocation.

Every effect intended and produced demands that they so evaluate the sacrament: pardon of sins and imperfections enables the penitent to serve God in sinlessness; renewed or intensified grace gives power and scope to religious effort; the confessor's brief admonition is often more fruitful than a sermon; the exercise of humility is the lifeblood of religion.

Madame Cecile de Bruyere expresses the thought compellingly: "We may truly say that [in the sacrament of penance] our Lord, in His anxiety for the progress of His loved ones, has broken down all barriers, and has put within our reach every means of cleansing and adorning ourselves and of removing from our path all hindrances to our perfect union with Himself."¹

One would expect the confessions of religious to approach the ideal about as closely as human effort will permit. The confessor is chosen according to canon law's exacting specifications regarding age, character, and pastoral experience. The penitent is a mature person, trained in religious principles, bound by vow to strive for spiritual perfection (canon 487); he brings to his weekly acknowledgment of sin helps of a way of life that have schooled him to derive maximum spiritual help from the sacrament. This quiet of the chapel, free of the distraction and irregularity of a parish church, should make for thoroughness in preparation, actual confession, and thanksgiving.

Unfortunately, ideal conditions often fail to produce ideal results. Many factors must be taken into account in order to confess well. Disregard of even one of them may deprive the penitent of much of the sacrament's potential efficacy.

¹ All exact references that are not of immediate interest to the reader are given at the end of the book. The complete list, together with standard sources, constitutes the principal bibliography employed. Scripture citations accompany the text without footnotes. Because of its familiarity through devotional use, the traditional Douay Version has been retained.

The regularly repeated acts of conventual life tend to make religious peculiarly susceptible victims of routine and its attendant evils. In mentally reviewing last month's confessions, one may find identical introductory statements, almost unvaried acknowledgment of faults that have been committed again and again, and a formula of conclusion that has not changed since catechism days. Such confessions hurt the penitent hardly at all. And there lies the cause of the failure to obtain greater benefits from the sacrament: confession *should* hurt. It was instituted to hurt. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that desirable results from the sacrament will normally be in proportion to the violence that forces one to subdue proud nature.

This booklet is intended as a help for religious in confessing.

There is no implied suggestion, heaven forbid, that it be perused from cover to cover, or that the examination of conscience be gone through, however cursorily, for each confession. On the other hand, the book is detailed enough to serve at the time of the annual retreat in preparing for the review confession that many make (which should be kept reasonably short).

Certain prayers and suggestions may appeal strongly to the individual reader. The prayers have been translated from the writings of doctors and saints, and are short enough to be marked and used over and over with spiritual profit. The recommendations are from reputable sources, are verified where they are distinctive, and incorporated here as contributing to the limited purpose of this book.

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January 15, 1955

CHAPTER ONE

PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

SIN is a mystery.

Its contradiction is particularly difficult to grasp when human frailty asserts itself in one who is striving to give his best to God.

In his worthier moments the religious is a person of great generosity in corresponding to grace. In the act of pronouncing (or renewing) his vows, he places on the altar all that he is, or has, and all that he may accomplish in life.

So intense is this act of love, so unreserved its offering, that the Fathers of the Church have likened it to the sacrament of baptism, and indeed have called it a second baptism, producing anew the most desirable effects of the first.² So great a sacrifice is involved that St. Thomas teaches that entrance into religion exceeds every kind of satisfaction for sin and, consequently, could never be assigned as a penance, regardless of the gravity of the offense that one might have committed.³

Can a person so dedicated be so willful as to sin? Yes; and indifferent in a vocation which exacts spiritual eagerness and virtuous zeal; thoughtless in a form of life that places a high premium on alertness and intelligence of observance; selfish and disobedient; often lacking in charity and the spirit of prayer.

Sin is man's willful violation of God's holy law. Weakened in nature through Adam's fall, man easily succumbs to temptation and offends his Maker. The religious state sets up an environment of grace and protection from the more common occasions of sin; it undoubtedly shields the professed from many offenses that otherwise would be committed. But it does not render sin impossible; if anything, it is calculated to make the professed more conscious of his numerous shortcomings and failures.

Repentance is a great deal more difficult than the commission of sin, or its acknowledgment. In fact, St. Ambrose did not hesitate to state that it is easier to find persons who have preserved their (baptismal) innocence than those who have practiced a fitting spirit of penance.⁴

Effective sorrow for sin depends largely on the ability to realize to some degree how a human act can stand in opposition to the Divine Will. And that is a gift, to be prayed for humbly.

For that reason, preparation for the sacrament of penance logically begins with the petition to the Holy Spirit for the grace and light to know one's sins, and especially to appreciate something of the malice involved in the disregard of God's holy law.



COME, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

(*Versicle*) Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created;

(*Response*) And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray: O God, Who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(An indulgence of 5 years. A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, when this prayer is recited daily for an entire month.)⁵



How warm, and consoling, and strong love is!

Because their love is so pure, parents overlook the fault of the repentant child even before the child has asked forgiveness. Among friends who truly love one another in Christ, an apology is as painful to him who receives as it is to him who offers it. For that reason, among sincere friends, few apologies are ever fully expressed: charity rushes in to cut short embarrassment and to assure the offender of forgiveness. On a less exalted plane even ordinary good breeding strives to imitate this noble disposition.

But where parents and friends *have* love and are moved by it, your Heavenly Father *is* love.

Before you go to confession, you must be absolutely certain of a truth which is so great that you can never wholly understand it: more than that, your whole attitude must be governed by it. In all His dealings with you, God acts according to His nature—while answering the needs you have expressed in prayer. He is love, infinite love. There can be no barriers to His love, nothing of weakness or limitation in it, no object to which it does not extend.

Because of this boundless goodness, God wills, infinitely more, to forgive you, than you can possibly desire to be forgiven! Because

He is all good and merciful, He instituted the sacrament you are about to receive. He asks little in return, only that you love Him enough to be truly sorry for having offended Him, and to resolve firmly to avoid your evil thoughts, words, deeds, and sins of omission in the future.

Beg that He make your love of Him strong enough to turn your soul from everything that is in the slightest degree displeasing to Him.

The following prayers touch points you would probably omit in your preparation. They need not, of course, be mentioned in your confession. Your mindfulness of them in a general way will perfect your worthiness in receiving absolution.



PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Alcuin of York

IN Thy loving kindness mercifully forgive, O Lord, the sins I have committed through ignorance, or with knowledge, or out of contempt. And all those in which I have acted wilfully, either through human weakness, or with deliberation. And the sins that result from deception or scheming, and all my failings of thought, word, or deed.

Forgive all my secret offenses, and those committed in the presence of others, whether their malice remains unrecognized by my soul—these too—or is known. Destroy those which gnaw at my conscience, as well as those that are disregarded out of a false sense of security.

Do not abandon my soul without the hope of pardon. So great is Thy love, that even after many serious and mortal offenses Thou dost instill in me the need of hastening to Thine infinitely kind mercy.

When Thou makest me think on the torments of future punishments, mayest Thou also always grant with the pardon of my sins the hope of eternal life.

Do not permit my conscience, now cleansed of its lies and vices, ever again to separate itself from Thee, or to be stained so that I will no longer be able to rise and correspond with the grace of

being cleansed. Banish all folly from my heart, O Lord. Purify me from secret vices. Give courage to my heart with Thy holy anointing, to enable me to subdue the passions. Strengthen my senses for gaining the victory in my battles against temptation. Make me justly angry at my sins; that I may obtain forgiveness of them all.⁶



ST. BERNARD'S CONFESSION

MINDFUL of Thy most bitter suffering, Lord Jesus Christ, Who tookest upon Thyself the punishment due to me, and didst undergo the painful atonement of my offenses, I confess to Thee all my sins, the evils I have committed, the virtuous deeds I have failed to discharge, and those I have performed without a pure intention or in a negligent manner. These I confess together with all who bewail their sins in sincere repentance and seek Thee in truth.

Far better than I, Thou knowest the number of my sins, their seriousness and extent. I acknowledge the days that have been lost from out of my life—days in which I have offended Thee, diminished Thy glory, fallen from Thee my highest good, and led my neighbor into sin.

Take for Thine own, Lord, the years that remain of my sin-filled life. For those years which I abandoned by living sinfully and lived by sinning in an abandoned manner, do not despise, O God, a contrite and humbled heart. (Psalm 50, 17)

My days have declined, passed away without fruit. I cannot call them back; but may it please Thee that I recount them in bitterness of soul. Lord, the depth of my misery calls on the depth of Thy most exalted mercy. Do not withhold Thy compassion in anger, nor permit the inexhaustible source of Thy mercy to dry up because of my sins.

Thou hast mercy on all, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made, overlooking the sins of men for the sake of repentance. (See Wisdom, 11: 11; *ibid.* 24.)

It is Thy nature, Lord, to forgive sins. Take pity on me while there is time for grace and mercy; while there is still chance for

correction, grant me to merit the glory of Thy blessing,* lest on judgment day the curse strike me.

I beseech Thee, Lord, make me put an end to my habits of evil and be zealous in doing what pleases Thee. Grant that the eagerness and attachment which until now I have spent on what is sinful I may, with Thine aid, devote to performing Thy Will, so that where sin abounded, Thy grace may more abound. (Romans, 5:20)

I beg Thee because of Thine infinite mercy, because of the love of Thy most kind Mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, and through the intercession of all Thy saints and Thy elect, forgive me all my sins, and everything of which I have been guilty through negligence or ignorance. Do not destroy me with all my iniquities, nor in anger reserve my evil deeds unto the end for judgment.

Be mindful, I implore Thee, Lord Jesus, that it is not Thy purpose to lose any of those that Thy Father gave to Thee (See John, 17: 24); but it is proper to Thee to have mercy always and forgive, to condemn no one, but to save. Thy Father sent Thee into the world not to judge the world; He sent Thee that we might have life through Thee (John 10: 10); and that Thou wouldst be our atonement and our advocate, not that Thou shouldst be against us.

Thou hast paid the debt we owed. Thou hast atoned for the sins we committed. Thou hast made good our defects where we offended in our heedlessness.

May this full, nay superabundant reparation, Lord, help me now, and in my last hours—now, to merit the grace of which I am unworthy, and to obtain for the future the rest and glory which Thy most bitter death, the inestimable price of the shedding of Thy Blood, won for us.

May the commemoration of Thy reparation, the adorable Mystery of Thy Body and Blood, which is offered to Thee daily in the Church for the welfare of Thy faithful servants, serve the same cause. In It Thou are Priest and Sacrifice; He who offers, and He to Whom the Sacrifice is offered.

* Blessing: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom..."
Curse: "Depart from Me, you cursed..." (Matthew, 25: 34 ff.)

Thou hast seen, Lord Jesus, my imperfections. But do not hold them against me unto eternal punishment, Thou Who art gracious and merciful, and ready to repent of the evil. (See Joel, 2: 13) Thou hast perfectly and wisely pre-ordained everything to work out to the highest and perfect good. Do not permit me to be struck from the book of life. By applying the merits of Thy precious Passion, grant me the portion assigned to me, in which Thou didst wish to have men as Thy co-heirs in the land of the living.

In order that Thou shalt not have placed man on earth in vain, let the consideration of human frailty move Thee and incline Thee to mercy, Lord. Thou knowest man's nature.

Preserve me, the work of Thy love, so that Thou wilt not have worked in vain. May the shedding of Thy Precious Blood not be fruitless in my regard!

Thou Who art performing the purification of sinners, grant that with the stain of my sins washed away by Thee, and with my mind illumined, I may know Thee, steadfastly advance toward Thee, and after a blessed death, be united with Thee, O Jesus Christ, my God, my Lord, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.⁷



Despite its simplicity, the following brief prayer of St. Thomas reveals the full power of the mind that composed the great master work of sacred knowledge, the *Summa Theologica*, when those mental gifts were focused on the humble petition for Divine forgiveness.

Every word mirrors the perfection of the dispositions which the religious should endeavor to bring to his confession.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

I, A SINNER, approach Thee, my God, source of mercy; deign to cleanse me who am unclean.

Sun of justice, give light to my blindness!

Eternal physician, heal me of my wounds!

King of kings, clothe the nakedness of my utter destitution before Thee!

Mediator between God and men, wipe away my guilt and restore me!

Good Shepherd, carry me back as the sheep that has wandered from Thee.

O God, have mercy on my misery; pardon my crimes; restore life to one who is dead; renew the innocence I have lost; and give again the anointing of Thy grace to my heart that is hardened in its sinfulness.

Most merciful Lord, I would run away from Thee by my sinfulness: call me back to Thee! My weakness would resist Thee: draw me to Thee! I live in constant danger of falling: raise me up! How weakly I stand before Thee: support me! Lead me as I follow the path Thou hast pointed out for me.

Do not forget me in my forgetfulness of Thee; do not abandon me when I desert Thee; do not despise me in my misery.

By committing sin I have outraged Thee, my God; I have injured my fellow man; I have not spared myself. O God! through my weakness I have sinned against Thee, all-powerful Father; by my ignorance I have sinned against Thee, Son of Divine Wisdom; in my malice I have sinned against Thee, Holy Spirit of infinite mercy. I have offended Thee, most adorable Trinity.

How miserable I am! How many and how great are the sins of which I have been guilty!

I have abandoned Thee, Lord. I complain of Thy goodness in the presence of evil love, and under the humiliation of evil fear. I have preferred to lose Thee rather than lack what I loved and wanted. I have chosen to offend Thee rather than miss what I should have feared.

O my God, how much harm I have caused by word and deed, sinning secretly, openly, stubbornly.

I most humbly beg that because of my weakness Thou wilt not dwell on my iniquity, but rather wilt contemplate Thine own immense goodness, and forgive in Thy clemency what I have done, granting me sorrow for my past offenses and an effective guard against them in future. Amen.⁸



THE MISERERE

Few persons have ever received the many wonderful gifts that were bestowed on King David. But even this holy and privileged ruler, so dear to his Maker, fell into sin. He scandalized his people with murder and adultery (2 Kings, 11; 1 f.) God gave David the chance to repent, and sent His prophet Nathan to the king to excite him to contrition and reparation. And because of his deep and abiding sorrow, David was forgiven: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin: thou shalt not die" (2 Kings, 12: 13).

Then, under divine inspiration, King David composed the *Miserere* (Psalm 50), which the Church has always employed as her favorite plea for forgiveness, and which religious have incorporated so extensively into their life of prayer. These sacred verses word simply and worthily the ideal dispositions for approaching confession: deep contrition tempered with unlimited confidence in the divine goodness.



HAVE mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.
And according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity.

Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.

To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee: that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou are judged.

For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me.

For behold Thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me.

Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.

To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness: and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.

Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.

Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.

I will teach the unjust Thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to Thee.

Deliver me from blood, O God, Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall extol Thy justice.

O Lord, Thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare Thy praise.

For if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings Thou wilt not be delighted.

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (*Psalm 50: 1-19*)



Perfect contrition is humble love: it is not the product of many words. The woman known as the sinner in the city did not open her lips, but her love was so intense that it drew forth her Saviour's praise and merited His pardon.

AND ONE of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with him. And He went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to meat.

And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment.

And standing behind at His feet, she began to wash His feet, with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

And the Pharisee, who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering, said to him: "Simon, I have something to say to thee." But he said: "Master, say it."

"A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

"And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most?"

Simon answering, said: "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." And He said to him: "Thou has judged rightly."

And turning to the woman, He said unto Simon: "Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet;* but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hair hath wiped them.

"Thou gavest Me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet.

"My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed My feet.

"Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less."

And He said to her: "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves: "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?"

And He said to the woman: "Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace." (*Luke, 7: 36-50*)



Right after receiving his First Communion, St. Peter denied Jesus three times. So intense was Peter's sorrow, so great Christ's love in the hour of the proof of His love for all men, that He made St. Peter realize with a single glance that his sin was forgiven.

The same infinite love awaits you in the sacrament of mercy.

LORD, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death."

And He said: "I say to thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, till thou thrice deniest that thou knowest Me" . . .

And apprehending Him, they led Him to the high priest's house. But Peter followed afar off.

And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were sitting about it, Peter was in the midst of them.

* Washing the feet of a guest who had traveled the dusty highway was an ordinary courtesy of the time. This and the following statements of Jesus are a rebuke.

Whom when a certain servant maid had seen sitting at the light, and had earnestly beheld him, she said: "This man also was with Him."

But he denied Him, saying: "Woman, I know Him not."

And after a little while, another seeing him, said: "Thou art one of them." But Peter said: "O man, I am not."

And after the space, as it were of one hour, another certain man affirmed, saying: "Of a truth, this man also was with Him; for he is also a Galilean."

And Peter said: "Man, I know not what thou sayest." And immediately, as he was yet speaking, the cock crew.

And the Lord turning looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, as He had said, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

And Peter going out, wept bitterly.

(*Luke*, 22: 33-34, 54-62)



And one of those robbers who were hanged, blasphemed Him, saying: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us."

But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation?"

"And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done no evil."

And he said to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom."

And Jesus said to him: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."

(*Luke*, 23: 39-43)



CHAPTER TWO

REGARDING THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

THE EXAMINATION of conscience is a practical judgment on the morality of what the penitent has done. As part of the preparation for confession it is prayerfully made to seek for the wisdom to understand and to detest, according to one's limitations, and in one's fullest appreciation of the divine law, the offenses that have been committed and, in the case of religious, the vowed promises and ideals that have not been lived up to. More briefly, it is an endeavor to see the state of one's soul as it is before God.

Religious should be most proficient in its exercise. Several minutes are assigned each day for the particular examen, a systematic and relentless concentration on an individual fault instituted for the purpose of banishing it from one's life, or at least of diminishing its harmful influence. The final community exercise before retiring in the evening closes with a prayerful review of the day's activities. In a way that laymen can rarely duplicate, persons who have professed vows in religion devote major attention to this rigorous control of their daily actions.

The compulsion to strive constantly for perfection under the highly regularized program of all religious institutes demands that unflagging attention be devoted to the examination of conscience. This daily checking on one's motives and activities looks to the past, both remote and immediate, but the principal concern is with the future. It studies sins and imperfections, negligences and failures to cooperate with the graces of the religious life, only in order to correct them. The person under vows realizes that these human shortcomings hamper his striving for more intimate union with God.

He knows that he must discover their causes. The humiliations of past failures warn him to lay the axe to the root of inclinations that thrive on negligence, indifference, or temporizing, and soon grow into pernicious habits. He must know *what* has been done, and *why* it is displeasing to God. This is asking much in the prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit—to see sin and failure in God's light. The examination of conscience before confession is not so much to prepare the penitent in what he is to say to his confessor: it is rather a question of his cooperation in directing the sacramental grace to the pardon and elimination of what is recognized as offensive to God.

Care must be exercised not to distort the examination of conscience in relation to the other steps in preparing for the sacrament of penance. A formal examination of conscience is not essential for receiving the benefits of the sacrament. One can never confess worthily without contrition. Neither is it possible to make a good confession without a firm purpose of amendment, nor ordinarily without submitting one's sins as one knows them to the power of the keys. This is not true of the examination of conscience.

If the religious has a *mortal* sin on his soul, then an examination of conscience is necessary insofar as it helps him to fulfill the essential parts of the sacrament. He must know all his mortal sins; he must be sorry for them with a supernatural and universal contrition; and he must be firm in his purpose to amend his life. To the extent that these essential acts make it necessary, the examination of conscience is indispensable.

In the relation of the examination of conscience to the other parts of the sacrament, and particularly when considered as a preparation for actual confession, good sound sense is of great importance. Venial sins *need not* absolutely be mentioned in confession, ever; there is no *strict obligation* to confess any sins that are not mortal.

Sanctifying grace is not lost by committing venial sins. It is still within the power of the person who has been guilty of imperfections and who has committed deliberate venial sins to perform works that are pleasing to God. There are many ways of removing those venial offenses from one's life—and in the case of religious, *all* of them should be employed, for sinlessness is his goal.

Any prayer that he recites, or virtuous deed that he performs out of intense love of God (an act of obedience, lending a helping hand in the spirit of charity, the observance of chastity), is an indirect repentance; if the motivation is intense enough, it forgives venial sins. So also does an act of perfect contrition. Particularly powerful are works of penance undertaken precisely to win the divine pardon, and humiliations suffered for the same purpose. More than all else, because It brings the soul into immediate union with the Author of divine forgiveness and into the fullest share in the Memorial of Christ's Passion, the worthiest possible reception of Holy Communion is an assurance of the pardon of venial sins and imperfections.

The most certain and the safest means, of course, always remains that instituted by Christ for forgiving all that is offensive to Him, the sacrament of penance.

Precisely because they are committed to strive for complete detachment from sin in their lives, religious are under obligation to confess every week (see canon 595, § 1, 3°).

That presents a big problem.

Since venial sins need not be confessed, one penitent may elect simply to mention a few imperfections that are of frequent occurrence in his life, such as impatience in the classroom, or faulty attention at prayer. A moment's mental review of the week suffices to assure him that these imperfections are still with him, and that no serious sin has been committed since his last confession. So casual a glance at the past can hardly be called an examination in any serious sense. A confession based on such preparation would still be a "good" reception of the sacrament; nothing has been concealed;—but much of the purpose has been lost sight of.

Another religious may examine his conscience according to one of the available lists of faults (some of them are ponderous), and give a full report to the confessor—a process little calculated to make for heartfelt contrition or firmness of amendment, simply because it places too heavy an emphasis on accuracy and detail of confession.

The happiest solution seems to be to examine one's conscience more or less independently of what one intends to state in the confessional, and to select from among one's faults those defects (three or four, hardly more) that interfere most with the ideals of the religious life. To these the penitent may commendably add a sin or habitual fault from his past life, making certain that it is clearly understood by the confessor as already forgiven and now included out of humility and to assure the sincerity of contrition.

The following pages offer a form of examination of conscience for religious. It is quite different from the examinations in available manuals that have been studied. It does not pretend to be complete in the sense of tabulating all the offenses that a religious might conceivably commit. Besides omitting all explicit reference to the Ten Commandments, the Commandments of the Church, and the capital sins, it purposely excludes many of the infractions of minute regulations—which may be of daily occurrence, but usually have only minor bearing on the bigger purposes of life in religion. The present examination considers the vows, the ideals of the religious life, the spiritual exercises, the works of zeal. They constitute the principal means of the distinctive sanctification to be sought within the enclosure. Failure with regard to them needs the help of the sacrament.



PRAYER BEFORE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

GOD of spotless holiness! Sun of justice! Grant me the grace to draw close to Thy light, that I may see more sharply than ever how the stains that disfigure my soul appear before Thee. Let the judgment I pass on my offenses be clear in strong faith and in deep love of Thy goodness. Allow me to understand how my sins, offenses, and negligences have separated me from Thee, or have weakened my union with Thee.

Do not permit me to consider any failing unimportant, nor to make excuses, nor blame others, even in my own mind. I desire to present my miserable condition to Thy priest as Thou knowest me to be guilty: only in so doing may I derive the full help of the sacrament of Thy mercy.

May my examination lead to humility and the realization of my present unworthiness before Thee, without concern about what the confessor may think of me. Let it result in deep sorrow for sin and hatred of every offense.

Stamp my conscience with supernatural delicacy and attachment to Thy holy Will. Make it help me to grow in the love and generosity to Thee that will repair my sinful past and protect me for the future. Let its faithful exercise, as an oft-repeated preview of the last judgment, prepare me for my final account before Thee, my Divine Judge.

Thy servant, St. Paul, teaches that in heaven we shall know Thee as we are known (I Corinthians, 13: 12). I humbly trust that my hope of that future reward will always do honor to Thee. But I make bold, even now, to beg to know the state of my soul as I am known—at least as far as I can bear the knowledge, and to the degree that it will help me to make a perfect confession.⁹



CHAPTER THREE

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

VOCATION

A CALL to the religious life may be defined broadly as that disposition of the Divine Goodness by which Providence singles out an individual and endows him with the required qualities and graces to strive for spiritual perfection. In the present discipline of the Church nothing is left undetermined in the idea of vocation: it involves the vowed observance of the evangelical counsels in a society instituted by the Church for the precise purpose of leading its members to the heights of virtue. It is a call from God to lead one more surely back to God; it is a summons to serve beyond the ordinary way of the Commandments; it is more vitally concerned with the question of eternal destiny than with the activities of the respective institute.

Before profession the candidate should arrive at the conviction that far more than the religious life needs him, he needs the life of the monastery or convent to develop the fullness of his personality in knowing, loving, and serving God.

In Chapter 58 of his *Rule of Monasteries*, St. Benedict established three criteria for determining with regard to the individual person the genuineness of this seeking of God: zeal for the Work of God (Divine worship), for obedience, and for humiliations. These qualities may appear to some self-evident, little concerned with the pressing problems of modern institutes and, in any event, somewhat difficult to discern in the immaturity of the novice; but they continue to be, for life, accurate norms for measuring cooperation with the graces of vocation.

Have I deliberately exposed my vocation to danger?

Are attachment to sinful habits, worldliness, indifference, or spiritual sloth frustrating the effort for perfection by which my calling is defined? Is unwarranted interest in happenings outside the cloister affecting my religious life unfavorably?—seriously? Have I been especially careful to avoid giving scandal to laymen?

Have I adhered steadfastly to the distinctive means of grace furnished by attachment to my religious family? Are they failing to produce their intended effects because I am lacking in simplicity, fortitude, constancy? Have I eliminated any serious fault in the past year; or progressed notably in any virtue?

Have I failed to adopt effective resolutions for leading a worthier religious life because, relying on my own power instead of placing complete trust in God, I fear that I shall only fail again, as I have failed so often in the past? Am I hesitant in this conversion because I am not yet willing enough or generous enough to make the sacrifice necessary for turning to God completely?

Do I regularly ask God in most earnest prayer to perfect what I have undertaken, which I recognize to be far beyond the limitations of my weak nature? Have I thanked Him for the many graces He has bestowed on me? When did I last pray the Renewal of Vows, which is recommended as part of the thanksgiving after having received Holy Communion?

LOVE OF GOD: CHARITY FOR NEIGHBOR

TIME after time, in the many ways that the simple truth permits itself to be known, St. John taught that "God is love." That love is infinite, for there can be no limitation to divine act.

Man, who in the present dispensation, must cooperate with the infinite power to effect that which he is made capable of doing in the supernatural order, can limit the effects of that love. In the state of mortal sin he deliberately shuts himself off from this divine light and warmth. By attachment to deliberate venial sin he screens off some of its effectiveness. Imperfections impede it according to their opposition to love.

Life in religion is the perfection of life in Christ, measured in terms of love. The doctrine of every founder of a religious institute, together with all the worthiest traditions, practices, apostolic works, add up to identical totals, expressions of the love of God, or they are meaningless.

In the right order of things, only one motive accounts for the existence of a religious family, or the public profession of its individual members. God alone can be that motive. That means love, for God is love. He permits man to possess Him, but in His way, through love. Everything in the religious life is a means to that end: the rule, the sacred enclosure, the blessed garb, the life of prayer, the practices of mortification, the activity, the vows and virtues. Should they ever lose that nature and be thought of as ends in themselves, the whole spiritual motivation would disappear. Fruitless externalism and formalism would be the result of such a deordering; and they hold their victims far from God.

In examining his conscience for confession the religious may be inclined to by-pass the question of the love of God as a self-evident; it is not self-evident at all, of course, but it deals with motive, and motive is intangible and does not reveal itself in a casual examination. Consciousness of concrete human defects will rarely allow him to adopt a similar attitude in examining his relationship to his neighbor. Admittedly charity toward superiors, the professed, novices, and candidates is difficult. The religious associates with the same companions in the chapel and the refectory, at work and during recreation, morning, noon, and night. Living in such close relationship tends to force many unconquered weaknesses to the surface.

The command of love is positive: "... and thy neighbor as thyself." It is a religious family's oneness in Christ expressing itself. It is not merely a question of wishing one's neighbor no evil, or of not being envious of him, or jealous. Charity demands that we be happy at his good fortune; we must will and pray that he be blessed with the goods, both spiritual and temporal, that we desire for ourselves.

Such love makes no distinction of persons, but treats all alike in Christ. It will not entertain deceit in the heart, nor make a false peace; it strives to love enemies and pray for them—in the love of Christ.

It seeks to be of help wherever possible. It tries to avoid scandal, and is zealous in making allowances for obvious shortcomings, and in repairing the bad example that has resulted from human frailty. It is quick to offer sincere sympathy and aid in tribulation. It prompts the religious to be eager in adopting what is useful to others rather than to himself.

Does my present religious observance show that I have lost some of the enthusiasm of novitiate days and the

early years of profession in serving God?—that I am content with the mediocrity I have attained in spiritual effort?—that I have done little of late to intensify interior motives in glorifying God?

Have I sincerely rejoiced in my neighbor's good qualities, in his talents, in his virtue and industry, as though they were my own? Do I often remember to thank God in humble prayer for the work of a confrere which has been brought to successful completion, a work in which, as far as I may judge, God has been praised?

Have I sought only the company of those whom I admire for intellectual ability and attainments, or to whom I am attracted for even less worthy reasons, and avoided others whom I consider inferior or less appealing?

Have I addressed fellow religious, or others, rudely, slightly, sarcastically? Have I spoken uncharitably about them, or encouraged the lack of charity in others by listening with readiness and approval to conversations that I realized were uncharitable? (Common sense must be observed in this point, as in all others: while it may not be commendable, harmless poking of fun at another's expense, even though one might be embarrassed if the remarks were reported to the person about whom they were made, is usually no sin at all.) Have I been guilty of detraction and lying? Is there anyone with whom I have refused to speak?—over an extended period of time? Are there others whom I merely tolerate, or whom I have pointedly avoided?

Have I given way to anger?—refused to offer an apology when I realized that one was called for?—refused to accept a confrere's attempt at reconciliation when he sensed that I had been offended?—borne a grudge?

Have I harmed the good name of my community by discussing the defects of fellow religious with relatives, friends, diocesan priests, members of other religious institutes?

HUMILITY

HUMILITY curbs all seeking of recognition of one's own excellence and, in subjection to God, inclines the religious to admit his unworthiness. The virtue expresses itself freely in acknowledging the natural and supernatural gifts God has bestowed on one, considering each an added cause for submission to the Divine Will. At the same time humility sees defects, past and present, sharply, vividly, and accurately for what they are.

Although neither so excellent in itself, nor so necessary for the holiness to be sought in religion, as are the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), humility is the foundation of the moral life. Humility devotes itself to removing pride, which interferes with the workings of grace. Unless grace operates freely in a subject who realizes that whatever is good, whatever in his soul is pleasing to God, can result only from God's working in his soul and from his cooperation with that work, there can be little thought of the objectives of the religious life. In this sense humility is indispensable for the person that dedicates himself, by solemn promise made to God, to seek for perfection.

Because it is so basic to the goals of life within the enclosure, this virtue needs to operate continually, almost as a second nature: in the evening examination of conscience almost any portion of the day can be measured in terms of humility. The virtue's principal expressions will be self-contempt (because of sins and imperfections); a sense of unworthiness of God's benefactions; the repressing of the desire to be acknowledged and honored; the subjection to God and to human superiors out of a love of God; the welcome embracing of less honorable positions, and contentment with what is less desirable in the things given for one's use.

Have I thought or acted as though the goods I possess are my own, and not bestowed on me by God? Have I acknowledged their divine origin, but considered them as bestowed on me because of my merits?

Are not many of my acts self-willed in the sense that they are neither for God's glorification nor for my neighbor's welfare? Have thoughtlessness and inattention arising from want of devotion to the means to be found in the religious life deprived these acts of their spiritual motivation?

Have I sought to impress others by simulating virtues, knowledge, rank, position, or other desirable qualities that I do not possess? Would I expect of a novice or a lay religious what I would not do myself, or would do most reluctantly?

Am I often testy, hard to get along with, ready to take offense, unwilling to bear injuries patiently, insistent that others take my feelings into consideration?

Have I despised others, ridiculed them, sought to be preferred to them?

Have I sincerely sought to imitate my Master: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart"?

OBEDIENCE

OBEDIENCE is a giving to God. It is the offering of what is ordinarily *not* given to Him. It is the submission of the will, man's noblest faculty, made through faith and through the desire to sacrifice that which is unfailingly acceptable to God. It is so broad that it directs all the virtuous acts of life in religion; it transforms into virtue acts which otherwise might well remain mere unreflective, so-called man acts, valueless, colorless, indifferent, into human acts, virtuous, offerable to God.

Its scope must be universal, for profession is more than a legal contract involving certain specified actions: it is the love-motivated consecration to God's service of all that one is, or has, as well as all that he may become or acquire in the future.

Because it is all-embracing, obedience may easily be disregarded. Habit and routine in the duties of the cloistral life may smother its spirit and substitute for it mere discipline and regimentation. The supernatural character of the virtue is to be purified and intensified, at the proper sources—especially in sacred worship and mental prayer, by trying to translate into action what has been learned in spiritual reading, through imitation of the good example of those about us who are striving, under grace, to make their observance pleasing to God.

This most sacred and difficult virtue is presented by all religious founders and leaders as an ideal—an ideal of imitating Christ who became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the Cross. In its observance the person under vows strives to grow in the belief

that the superior holds the place of Christ in his regard; from the motive of the love of God he seeks to submit his will in all that is commanded. When brought to perfection, obedience thus embodies a difficult and practical act of faith, and the sacrifice of the will, which is one of the very highest forms of praise of God which lies in man's power to offer.

Have I refused to obey? Have I shown a contemptuous attitude for the rule, or the regulations of my institute, or (generally much worse), for the specific commands given to me? Have I shown formal contempt of my superior in his capacity of superior? Have I sought to excuse myself by maintaining I could not do what I did not want to do?

Is part of my failure to make greater spiritual progress in my vocation owing to the want of submitting all the virtues to the moral dominance of obedience?

Criticism of the commands of a superior is an unmistakable sign that the religious faith essential to obedience has weakened. Have I allowed myself to become a victim of this baneful vice?

Has the submission of my will been "without hesitation, fear, delay, lukewarmness, murmuring, unwillingness"?

Has continued neglect, with little or no effort to improve my observance, adversely influenced the action and thinking of other members of the community, especially the young?

CHASTITY

IN THE VOW of chastity the religious binds himself, from the love of God, to abstain not only from all sinful venereal pleasure, but also from the pleasure which is honorable and licit in the sacrament of marriage. Although the superior excellence of the sacrifice of the will in obedience must always be maintained, fidelity to the vow of chastity sometimes becomes the severest test of the religious vocation.

In the Church's law the very first of the sacred canons governing religious commands that the religious state is to be held in honor by all (canon 487). So keenly and universally is the need of grace for the preservation of purity appreciated, and so manifestly is grace's environment created in the religious life, that chastity is one of the

most positively appealing forces of all institutes. The gloriously reigning Vicar of Christ states the thought in these exalted terms: "Holy virginity and that perfect chastity which is consecrated to the service of God is without doubt among the most precious treasures which the Founder of the Church has left in heritage to the society which He established."¹⁰

But appreciation by others, particularly by laymen who have followed their chosen vocations, is faint indeed when compared with the grateful experience of the conscientious religious. However embarrassing the recollection of his difficulties and temptations, the years of correspondence with grace in striving for perfection speak to him in terms of complete and undivided devotion to which nothing has been preferred; of familiarity with thoughts that lead close to God (in present fulfillment of the Beatitude which promises that the clean of heart shall see God); of gratitude begotten of the knowledge of having been chosen by divine call to serve the Church in so positive a way; of humility in the privilege of helping others, out of the love of virtue, by prayer, example, instruction, and exhortation—for "A virgin soul without the apostolic spirit is only half fulfilling her destiny."¹¹

The Apostolic See has extended the privilege of the consecration of virgins to certain groups of sisters in the United States in recent years. The ceremony, one of the most elaborate and impressive in the Roman Pontifical, has been in use for centuries: the virtuous way of life it blesses and shields is one which the Church has from its beginnings held in highest esteem. Traditionally the consecration has been reserved almost exclusively to nuns dwelling within the papal enclosure: now it is bestowed on sisters whose activity, which often takes them beyond their cloister, is about as intense as that of the more busily engaged congregations. The grant of the privilege can properly be thought of as one more manifestation of the Holy See's accommodation of the religious life to the modern needs and conditions of the Church. It could hardly be interpreted merely as an act of benevolence to honor certain religious groups: like all privileges of the spiritual order it begets reciprocal, if not legally defined obligations, in this case at least a striving for greater general worthiness of life and a more profound love of chastity, together with the great influence for good by communities so privileged. To all religious, and to the faithful generally, it must speak of the positive power of purity in the Church's warfare against the forces of evil.

But despite all its beauty, the enviable regard in which it is held

by the Church, and the incomparable consolations proper to it, the safeguards of chastity are weapons that the weakened wills of Adam's sons and daughters instinctively seek to shun: mortification, the fleeing of pleasure, the custody of the senses, and the vigilant *No*.

Often the struggle goes on, year after year. Father Garrigou-Lagrange assures us that "There are two very simple beings: the child, who does not yet know evil; and the saint, who has forgotten it by dint of conquering it."¹² In all but the most exceptional cases, the maturity needed for religious profession precludes the former; few have attained to the latter state.

For the soul that cooperates with grace, temptation, which is never far distant, teaches the supreme value of constancy, vigilance, and most earnest prayer. Repeated victories over temptation, won by cooperation with grace, beget calm confidence in God's goodness. Few rewards on earth compare with that of a religious who has suffered temptations against purity, has humbly and diffidently placed his victories on the paten at the Offertory of the Mass, and then resolutely and trustfully advanced to the stage of meeting all suggestions of the evil one with utter contempt, to be transformed into opportunities of growing in the love of God.

Abbot Marmion offers most consoling and spiritual advice: "Let us not be discouraged by the remembrance of past infidelities or the thought of possible failures in the future; the latter spring from our nature, and can be perfectly reconciled with goodwill; the former should be the occasion for us to humble ourselves and incite us to greater generosity."¹³

Have I violated chastity by purposely indulging in, or not banishing unclean thoughts—by glancing immodestly at others?—by participation in unclean speech?—by an action opposed to the vow?

Is my observance of chastity truly religious in that I distrust myself and depend constantly for its perfection on the help of my companions under vows and the protection of the enclosure?

Have I prayed for those (unknown to me) who will be confronted with serious temptations today?—and for those who have in human weakness succumbed to those temptations?

The spirit of mortification and the humble repression of natural inclinations are the means by which chastity

is placed in safety. Have my motives been what my religious training in the novitiate and my experience in religion have instilled into me, as to the custody of the senses, especially of the eyes, the denial of those gratifications of self-indulgence which experience has proved dangerous, and the repression of harmful curiosity in reading?

When troubled with temptations, have I set the humble goal of gaining a victory over my lower self in order to have some small token to offer to Jesus in proof of my love of Him?

POVERTY

BY A SINGLE ACT of His Will God brought into being all the great bodies of light and established their order in a space so vast that imagination can only toy with its immensity. He formed the earth with its wonders of the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, leaving everywhere evidences of His creative power. He breathed into man a soul so wonderful in its gifts that He Himself spoke of this uniquely privileged creature as fashioned in His likeness.

Throughout the vast universe which the Creator holds in His hand, all was peace and order. One creature had the power, bordering on the infinite, to disrupt that harmony. That is what man did, only to discover that once he turned his face from God he was without power for good.

God continued to love His favored creature, struck in His image. Out of His infinite goodness He made it possible for man to cooperate in the re-establishing of the disrupted order. He Who holds the universe in His palm descended to earth, became man, limited the activities which were executed in His human nature to the tiny speck of the Holy Land.

As the Firstborn of creatures He stands at the head of the human race that He was to represent and to redeem—but He identified Himself with the poor. Sparingly He used the material goods to which men are so drawn, and through attachment to which they are often led into sin.

But our Lord's example is more than a pattern of conduct to be admired: the renunciation of earthly possessions is His condition for those who would make bold to follow Him. In that sense the Church exacts the vowed promise of poverty as an integral part of the privileged status of her religious.

Have I sinned against poverty by acquiring, secretly retaining, or appropriating goods in violation of my rule?—by wasting or otherwise not properly using what has been assigned for my use?—by disregarding the practices of the common life in furnishings of the cell, in clothing, food?—by neglecting to obtain prescribed permissions?—by murmuring at what is distributed in the religious family?—by refusing to perform my share of manual labor (the lot of the poor)?—by envy, covetousness of the possessions of others?—by paying little or no attention to the ideal of poverty as an integral part of the order's asceticism?

PARTICIPATION IN SACRED WORSHIP

NORMALLY the religious vocation has its effective beginning at the altar; daily it is fostered and strengthened at the altar; ideally, it is brought to its termination on earth at the altar. Between the joyfully solemn beginnings of investiture and profession, and the solemnly subdued administration of the Church's last rites, spiritually significant parts of each day have been spent with the religious family as it gathers about the altar. Participation with the priest in offering the holy Sacrifice, reception of the sacraments and the sacramentals, public and private prayer sanctify the entire existence of professed men and women.

These sacred hours must not be thought of as independent and isolated units of the day's schedule: they serve to consecrate all other activity. Community prayer, for instance, may well be thought of as having something of the same character of consecrating the totality of religious endeavor that the *Come Holy Ghost* has at the beginning of a class period. It dedicates all to God: day and night, and their every part. The religious is a person devoted to prayer. From the moment of his first vows until his death there is never any part of any day that has not been consecrated to God in prayer. What is said of community prayer remains true, of course, even though it is recited privately by one whose assigned obedience prevents his praying with the religious family.

In terms of time distributed over a crowded schedule, the hours assigned to prayer add up to a considerable portion of the waking hours of every day; as regards their relative importance, rules and

statutes are careful to specify that nothing is to be preferred to them; more than all else, they form the bond of unity in Christ Jesus among the members of the religious family.

That is true, not only in the sense of giving impetus, inspiration, and direction to the works of the institute, but it helps to achieve a quality of worship that can normally not be equalled outside life in religion. This perfection of corporate worship is one of the most eagerly desired contributions that religious can make to the Church's spiritual life.

Have I absented myself from common spiritual exercises when I could conveniently have been present? Am I tardy in putting in my appearance? Have I failed to make up for the devotions at which I could not be present?

Do I fight distractions during spiritual exercises, only to return to their cause after prayer?

Have I been drowsy and inattentive at the Divine Office and other prayer?—given to routine assistance at Mass?—habitually guilty of mechanical and distracted recitation of my spiritual duties, intent only on fulfilling a legal obligation?—regularly wanting in adequate preparation for and thanksgiving after receiving the sacraments?

SPIRITUAL READING

USUALLY the appeal of life in religion begins on a note of inspiration. A retreat, even an individual sermon or an exhortation, an interview with one's pastor or the reading of a book are means that God often employs to implant the first seed of a vocation to the religious life.

Spiritual reading is a well ordered, carefully prescribed continuation of that inspirational appeal. God uses His holy word in the Scriptures and the lesser works of ascetical writings as occasions of external grace under which the soul is cast into a most favorable disposition for listening to Him in order to be instructed, corrected, motivated, and led on to the heights of virtue.

In prayer we address God; spiritual reading is often the form His answer to us assumes.

This literature is rich in the maxims and examples of our Lord, His Blessed Mother, and the saints; it is an invitation extended day after day to the religious to look beyond his immediate tasks and

surroundings, and to contemplate God. It is not a pious practice which the religious is free to follow or to disregard as he feels inclined. It is a matter of obedience, a training in holiness of life, a schooling in the principles of spirituality. On its conscientious observance much of the progress of any vocation depends.

Bishop Hedley holds steadfastly to the purpose of this holy exercise: "There is only one really essential and adequate rule as to spiritual reading, and that is, that we seek God in it. If we seek amusement, or mere information, or matter for sermons, or vague edification, or the satisfaction of a literary taste—we have no right to call it spiritual reading; and when we have read a book or a chapter with any of these motives uppermost, our spiritual reading is still to begin."¹⁴

Have I neglected my spiritual reading?—habitually?—excused myself lightly with regard to the obligation on the score of being too busy? Have I been drowsy and inattentive, spiritually unresponsive to the ideals presented?

Have I vitiated my taste for spiritual writings by extensive reading of matter foreign to or opposed to the religious state?

Have I read the principal ascetical commentaries on our rule?—on the lives of our founder and of the saints produced by the order?—the noteworthy literary monuments that form our tradition?

MANUAL LABOR

SOME RELIGIOUS receive special training within their own communities, or elsewhere at the expense of their institutes, to assume pastoral responsibilities, to teach, engage in works of a social nature, or to accept other kinds of spiritual duties. This sort of concentration has already affected the ascetical program of the older orders: it will tend to do so among more recently founded congregations as their tradition is built up. Such works of corporate zeal fall into a carefully thought out program, suggested or approved by the Church, and described in the constitutions. The spiritual obligations involved are so varied and detailed, and can be so thoroughly known from standard sources by the persons bound, that there is no need to include them for the purposes of this manual.

According to the definition of their form of life, monastic groups have no activity beyond the enclosure, in contrast to the religious bodies referred to above. Their ideal still calls for manual labor as an integral part of their ascetical program, even though at present the declarations to their respective rules usually provide for at least moderate parochial, educational, or similar religious duties.

Vocation requirements ordinarily specify that laybrother candidates must either have learned a trade or be capable of learning one. In small groups, sisters generally engage in domestic duties without exception for rank or seniority. Many questions must be answered to determine the quality of vocations among the young: this objective makes manual labor almost indispensable for postulants, novices, and junior members of *all* religious bodies.

Founders of religious institutes and authors of ascetical theology emphasize work with the hands because of its sanctifying character. It establishes a spiritual bond with the poor, with whom religious profess to identify themselves. It preserves, in most instances, a wholesome oneness with parents, brothers and sisters, because religious vocations frequently come from homes where hard work is a necessity. It is standard and indispensable equipment for those who would serve the Church in missions, foreign or domestic.

It dedicates man's whole being to God—his will, by the continued acceptance of an assigned obedience; his intellect, which is trained in this school of the Lord's service to be reflective and to banish distractions; his body, which grows tired and would rebel if it were not urged on by love of God. Everything connected with manual labor can be offered to God and, despite all its limitations and imperfections should be offered to Him with the assurance of its acceptability; for it is humble, obedient and, generally, zealous work. In the monastic breviary much of the second half of Prime is a blessing on the day's tasks.

Under capable spiritual direction physical toil, even when engaged in for only limited periods of time, can become a solid foundation for piety, simplicity, and holiness. Some of its qualities which contribute substantially to the religious ideal are the following: because of its humble nature it is marked by a calm intensity of effort that differentiates it from the fretting and activism of more pretentious undertakings—if allowed to produce its full effect, it can, even when assigned for only briefer periods (washing dishes of an evening, cleaning house on Saturday), give the latter their needed perspective and balance; it is corporate and tends to eliminate personal com-

placency; it begets stability, for the field of manual labor is small and develops a love of the religious home; more than any other activity, it fosters the spirit of detachment.

Archabbot Maurus Wolter, founder of the Benedictine Congregation of Beuron (Germany), explained the religious significance of performing menial tasks in these terms: "Manual labor is required for perfect imitation of Christ, Who by spending three years in teaching and thirty in heavy toil, bestowed the highest honor on work of the hands. To be worthy to be called a monk, you must remain ever willing to perform joyfully even the humblest tasks which may be assigned to you either because of your ability or because of some necessity of the monastery, and hold such work in high regard. Unless excused by illness, you are personally to perform the work necessary for keeping your room in order and your clothing clean, offer what help you can to the brethren, especially the sick, and take your regular turn in serving them in the refectory."¹⁵

Always valid in their own right, the primary ascetical purposes of manual labor remain constant. More immediate secondary objectives may well claim the principal attention of religious today.

Especially since the Industrial Revolution, innumerable sins have flouted "the principles of truth and justice" which dictate the condition of labor. As Pope Leo XIII pointed out: "The elements of a conflict are unmistakable: the growth of industry, and the surprising discoveries of science; the changed relations of masters and workmen; the enormous fortunes of individuals and the poverty of the masses; the increased self-reliance and the closer mutual combination of the working population; and, finally, a general moral deterioration."¹⁶

Many consider the sins of modern times committed against labor, and especially communism, with its injustice, its exploiting and brutalizing of human dignity, nothing less than a scourge that God has permitted to bring men to their senses. The errors of communism have been so far-reaching that they have influenced, to some degree, the destiny of every man, woman, and child now living in the world, and of many who have ended their earthly existence in misery. At present it seems quite possible that they may extend their evil domination even farther.

The Church has suffered discouraging losses, especially among the working classes. In his pastoral letter of 1947, Cardinal Suhard wrote with a grief-guided pen that "Ever increasing numbers have fallen away from religion... [to whom must be added] a large group of baptized Christians who do not practice their religion, yet are still

connected with the Church by a few important facts of their existence: baptism, first communion, etc." One facet of the problem in the statement of his Eminence seems colorless until scrutinized: then it becomes a warning signal not only to the diocesans of Paris, but to the world at large. It is the simple report: "Some [of those who abandoned the Church] even thought they were doing the right thing, finding the elements of a sort of apparent justification in the modern world and its spirit."¹⁷

There is much that should hurt every religious deeply in that statement. Materialism and communism have stolen the theology of labor, stolen it out of the hearts of the faithful—and often religious, and other spiritual leaders, who have had the opportunity of counteracting the evil by teaching, good example, and intensified spiritual lives, have remained silent and inactive; there is reason to suspect that they have not zealously made of their labor a religious weapon in this battle of the forces of good and evil.

Consider the enemies of the Church: they are out among the people, working in cells, ever active. However irrational their doctrine and unintelligible their language, they work hard, blindly, proudly. They are deprived of the great motivation which urges religious, and which can grow only from gratitude to the loving Father of mankind. In fact, they intend to accomplish their atheistic objectives, not by a philosophy, nor by any program of speculative thinking, but by labor. Their erroneous teaching and propaganda must be shown to be false, not only by teaching, but by living the truth; their insult to God must be atoned for by the sacrifice of hard work and by the exemplification of the dignity of labor; their influence must be stopped. Religious can make themselves the best equipped soldiers in this great holy war of modern times.

Were laybrothers and sisters (and other religious) to dedicate all the hours of manual labor of their life's work as a reparation of the blasphemy of materialism, the humble fulfillment of their vows would go far toward giving full meaning to their vocation.

Have I refused to perform menial tasks—invented excuses for not contributing my share of the physical work of the community?—considered such efforts beneath my dignity?—given way to sloth, laziness, lack of interest?—failed through indifference or thoughtlessness to give my work any spiritual significance?

Have I shown an intelligent regard for the manual work

of laybrothers or sisters who perform household tasks, or work at heavy manual toil? Have I criticized the more contemplative orders with their devotion to hard work, because I think that they are "not doing enough for the Church"?

TEACHING

IN THIS COUNTRY the teaching by religious, from grammar school through graduate studies, has assumed the role of a major contribution made toward the spiritual development of the faithful.

Teaching may be broadly described as a communicating to others of the plan of life which one has adopted upon mature and prayerful reflection—a mentality and a sense of values greatly influenced by the rule one has professed and by the best thought of the order's tradition. If thought of in such terms, its serious responsibilities are more or less self-evident. Teachers who are religious take over an important part of the duty of parents. As their pupils advance in age and maturity, these same religious become the principal, and often almost the sole, instructors to help the youth to grow in the knowledge and love of the Church's doctrine.

The task of the teacher abounds in challenges and difficulties. It is not merely a conveniently chosen activity to engage the hours of the religious that are not devoted to spiritual exercises. It is, in its own right, an imitation of and a striving for increased union with Christ, Who was frequently addressed as Master. Teaching by the professed, with the recognition that is granted to them by the Church, is primarily in the name of Christ, and undertaken with His authority.

As such it places a high premium on virtues which enhance religious spirituality: charity, obedience, zealous industry, patience, and oneness in Christ with fellow religious. For such is the nature and function of the school conducted by religious that no individual teacher can ever give an education to an individual student: it is eminently a corporate program that calls for the cooperation of all the religious of a family.

Have I been negligent in preparing for classes according to my training and ability?—indifferent to the progress that is being made in my field today?—careless in correcting tests and assignments?—unwilling to sacrifice the time and leisure for devoting individual attention where it seems

called for?—inclined to adopt teaching fads instead of devoting my efforts to the serious work of imparting solid instruction and training?

Does examination of conscience reveal that I am frequently wanting in patience in dealing with my charges, to the extent that it would be advisable for me to select patience as the topic of my particular examen for a while?

Have I cooperated with the other instructors of the school, so that my efforts have become a positive share in a truly religious undertaking? Have I absented myself from faculty meetings?—been disdainful of recommended procedures?—insisted on going my separate way?

Have I failed to draw, however passingly, the attention of those whom I teach to the religious implications of the subject matter? Have I been so immersed in the content of my courses (as presented by the textbook and easily enlarged on because of my past studies), that a layman, or even a non-Catholic, might have taught the course almost as religiously as I?

NURSING

CHRIST's attitude toward the sick and suffering who came to Him or were brought to Him was one of His most powerful appeals in proving His Divinity. For that reason alone it is understandable that those who vow to imitate our Lord make the care of the sick one of their chief spiritual concerns.

Our Lord's identification of Himself with the bedridden and helpless ("I was sick . . . and you visited Me," Matthew 25: 36) and the adaptability of a nursing program into the schedule of the religious life, have caused many institutes to concentrate on the care of the sick as their principal activity.

Besides the inherently virtuous act of mercy, other spiritual objectives deserve attention in developing an appreciation of this particular vocation, and in one's examination of his faithfulness to duty. One of these objectives is the opportunity of adding constantly to the goodness that goes to make up the life of the Church Militant. Another is the privilege of being instrumental in God's hand in breaking down prejudice against His Church, and even in leading persons to con-

version, duplicating, in a humble and imperfect manner, the very approach that Christ Himself employed.

As is true in teaching and other activities which religious institutes undertake with the explicit approval of their bishops, or of the Holy Father himself (religious of papal jurisdiction), those who are assigned to administrative work, or more menial tasks, share fully in the meritorious character, the corporate obedience, and in the responsibility of the religious family's undertaking.

Have I been short-tempered, impatient, or brusque with the sick—who do not always realize that they are served out of a love of Christ? Have I been negligent in my assigned duties, thereby occasioning increased suffering of the sick?

Despite their excellence, have I allowed the striving for efficiency and the dedication to rapidly advancing science to interfere with the simplicity of charity?

RULE, CONSTITUTIONS, TRADITION

THE numerous religious institutes now thriving are united in their common purpose of striving for evangelical perfection, and in the broad, sweeping lines of the Church's common law which regulates that effort. They are distinguished from one another by the inspiration of their respective founders, by the rules they follow, and by the zealous activities in which they engage with the Apostolic See's approval.

They have been likened to different gardens in the Church, with their great variety of the flowers of virtue, requiring different cultivation. A less poetic approach makes one understand that through the ages God has raised up great spiritual leaders, to establish religious orders and congregations to meet the needs of the Church.

Pope Pius XI describes these founders of religious institutes as inspired of God, and their followers as faithful sons, if they keep alive the holy ideals of the rule. He makes it clear that this is no mere sentimental or devotional relation. The Church seeks one contribution only of its religious: the zealous program outlined by the saintly founders, modified where necessary to harmonize with the conditions under which the religious must live.¹⁸

On profession day the candidate vows to serve God according to the rule of his order: when he pronounces solemn or simple per-

petual vows, that obligation, binding under the virtue of religion, is assumed for life. The spiritual duties involved are determined in detail: generally speaking, from the day of his profession until his death, the religious is never in doubt regarding what God wills of him.

The rule, the tradition of immemorial standing, the constitutions and the statutes accommodating the order's observance to modern conditions, are his inspiration, his guide and protection. Adherence to them guarantees security and the tranquillity of complete fulfillment of what was promised at the altar. Fidelity to them has produced saints; it stands prepared to do so now for those who are strong in faith and hope, and humble enough to acknowledge the power of these holy instruments. The rule, the tradition of the order, the constitutions are to be loved and adhered to gratefully.

Do I often "put a broad interpretation" on the rule of my order, and on other religious regulations, trying to justify myself in what is in truth only rationalization and presumption?

Has part of my failure to advance spiritually been owing to my neglect in employing the traditional, well-tried approach of my order and my rule to the work assigned to me?

Is my faith, strengthened by the many means of grace afforded in my religious family, lively enough to accept the rule without any reservation, as the way God has chosen for me to serve Him and His Church?

Have I disregarded the regulations governing silence, talking almost at will?—during the great silence of the night?—to the disedification of others, particularly those who are young in profession?

Have I retired at the prescribed hour?

Have I observed in the proper spirit the penances and little humiliations whose purpose is to assist me in striving for the goal of the religious life?



CHAPTER FOUR

FIRM PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

SOMETIMES religious become quite concerned and upset about their past confessions. It is possible to look back over an extended period of time and find cause for disturbance in the constant repetition of the same confessions.

There was no bad confession anywhere along the line: usually there were no serious disorders—some deliberate venial sins, perhaps, many imperfections and faults; nothing more. Preparatory prayers were said faithfully, if somewhat mechanically. The examination of conscience received as much attention as it did of an evening or during the particular examen; the sins were acknowledged humbly enough; the Act of Contrition was recited slowly and with the best devotion at one's command at the moment. Nothing was deliberately concealed; on the contrary, much was confessed that really need not have been mentioned.

But something has obviously gone wrong.

Most frequently the fault lies in the weakness of the penitent's purpose of amendment.

Painfully aware of the *past* humiliation of sin and imperfection, the purpose of amendment is the *present effective* disposition and resolve with regard to *future* conduct.

Most religious have taught Catechism at some level or other; in so doing they have explained the firm purpose of amendment, and its necessity for a good confession. An analogy that they themselves have employed in the classroom may make practical to teachers the doctrine that can remain theoretical, regardless of how accurately it has been taught.

Suppose that a religious grievously offended a close friend, one who has been kind, generous, consistently well-disposed, thoughtful. The offender admits that he is entirely in the wrong. He is unhappy until he can reach his friend, make a humble acknowledgment of his thoughtlessness or indiscretion, and ask pardon for it. The apology as such touches the *past*—what was said or done that caused the hurt. Regardless of how deeply he was wounded, or how reluctant he may now feel about overlooking the unreasonableness of what was done, a true friend would never question the *present sincerity* of an admission that is so obviously painful. Both parties understand that

the apology itself is the guarantee against *future repetition* of the fault.

Worthiness of the firm purpose of amendment in confession follows the same general pattern, except that the penitent is begging *God's* pardon, and is employing God's grace and help even to do that. The *past* is taken care of in the worthiness of contrition and humble confession: sorrow for sin is unfailingly acceptable where the Recipient is known to be infinitely merciful and lovable, One Who can love only with infinite perfection. The depth and sincerity of the penitent's *present* sorrow include, of their nature, the resolve to avoid *in future* whatever violates God's holy law. As an illustration; if on Friday, his regular confession day, the religious has admitted a deliberate sin of disobedience in a quite serious matter, the qualities of his contrition reach out, as it were, and embrace by reason of his firm purpose of amendment, the temptation to be disobedient again which he may face on Sunday, or a month from now.

But what about human weakness? Must the purpose of amendment be so firm that it extends itself to sins and shortcomings that may have troubled the religious for years? In the case of mortal sins it must do so, of necessity. In venial sins and imperfections that are opposed in some particular manner to the nature of the religious life, the striving for perfection (the Church's definition of the religious state), demands sincere effort. All who are under vows, except the unthinking and the unworthy, would love to be rid of their faults—but the worthier they are, the more realistically they fear that they will not succeed in being rid of them for a long time, and the more conscious they become of human frailty and the need for divine help.

Common sense is always valuable: here it is indispensable. It tells the penitent that if he has long harbored and fostered an attitude of disobedience in small matters, or has frequently violated charity, or has been negligent in prayer, he will hardly correct his ways as a result of one Friday's confession. The purpose of amendment must employ the sacramental graces and the many helps of the religious life, such as the example of worthy companions, the inspiration of holy reading, and the particular examen. As long as the effort to grow in virtue and to avoid displeasing God is sincere, and is based on the general principles of the religious life and those of one's own institute, there can be no reasonable cause for worry.

Today's confession deals with the immediate *past*; it also involves the penitent's *present* disposition. The confessor, who functions as a judge in exercising this phase of his ministry in Christ's name, must

have the assurance of the penitent's sincere sorrow and of his determination to try, with God's help, to avoid the occasions of sin *in the future*. The firm purpose of amendment means that *here and now*, while preparing for the sacrament of penance, and in his actual confession, the penitent proposes not to offend God again. This is not a solemn promise; neither is it a vow that would be violated by future failures. It is a resolve, made at this moment, at four o'clock on Friday afternoon, to cooperate more conscientiously with God's grace.

This may seem tenuous and unsatisfactory to one who has now seriously entered into himself, and is not happy at what he finds in his soul. He is probably miserably conscious of his weakness.

He must remind himself that conversion (literally, a turning to God), is God's own work. Usually grace operates slowly—for the sake of human weakness. Sudden and complete conversions from vice to virtue, or from thoughtlessness and externalism to wholehearted dedication, are rare. One has no right to expect such favors from God. The wisest procedure is to throw oneself on the divine mercy regarding the past, and to cooperate as fully as possible with the increase of grace through the sacrament: just as despair dishonors God as few other sins can dishonor Him, so confidence in the divine mercy is one of the most splendid means of giving glory to God—which is the primary purpose of all life in religion.



About ten years after his conversion and his writing of the first part of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine added the last four books (chapters) to his classical acknowledgment of God. Few statements ever made by a converted sinner compare with the following words for instilling courage into the heart of today's penitent.

TERRIFIED by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert; but Thou didst forbid me and strengthen me, saying: *And Christ died for all: that they also who live may now not live to themselves but with Him who died for them.* See, Lord, I cast my care upon Thee, that I may live: *and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law.* Thou knowest my unskillfulness and my infirmity: teach me and heal me. He Thy only One, in whom are hidden

all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with His blood. *Let not the proud speak evil of me*, for I think upon the price of my redemption, I eat and drink it and [as a bishop] give it to others to eat and drink: and being poor I desired to be filled with it among those that eat and are filled: *and, they shall praise the Lord that seek Him.*¹⁹



PRAYER TO RID ONESELF OF VICES

HOLY LORD, omnipotent Father, eternal God! Out of the depths of our heart we beg Thy mercy. Grant us, through the intercession and merits of all Thy saints a conscience free of sin; give us the grace to shun the attractions of earth and direct our gaze toward heaven, to hate sin and love sinlessness.

Root out of our lives solicitude for what is of this world, and bestow the perfection of Thy holy fear.

Rid us completely of attachment to gluttony, and develop in us a love of abstinence.

Keep at a distance from us the spirit of uncleanness, and permeate our beings with an ardent zeal for holy chastity. Extinguish in us every evil desire of possession and inspire us with a truly voluntary poverty. Restrain our anger and kindle in us a most tender love of God and neighbor. Remove from our lives all inclination to boastfulness and vainglory, and grant us a most salutary compunction of heart. Lay low our pride and perfect a sincere humility in us.

Destroy all the pretentiousness and abundance associated with vice and build up in us, simply, the keeping of Thy Commandments. Instill in us the tranquility of patience suited to our profession to help us do battle against impatience; love of the brotherhood, against hatred and envy; unflagging zeal for Thy holy praise, against all detraction and murmuring; and the favor of knowing that our effort has merited Thine approval, against all our vicious habits.

Cause a copious font of tears for bewailing our sins to spring up in us, and soften the hardness of our hearts through the practice of the spirit of penance.

Let whatever virtuous deeds Thou workest in us be solely for the increase of Thy glory and for the abiding grace to make us realize that even though we always remain sinners, we are never to cease from voicing Thy praise nor from performing Thy work, but that we are to persevere in fulfilling Thy holy Will. Through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .²⁰



CHAPTER FIVE

PRAYER FOR CONFESSOR

ON THE EVENING of His glorious Resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared before His apostles. He breathed upon them. He communicated to them His Holy Spirit. He bestowed on them, and their successors in His holy priesthood, the wondrous power to forgive sin in His name (See John, 20:22).

The relation between a religious and his confessor is unique. It differs, even in its purpose, to some extent, from a comparable relation of the layman who confesses quite often. The difference is explained in part by the nature of the religious life. The religious looks to his confessor not so much from compulsion to seek absolution (that is always present, of course), as from the necessity of depending on a minister of the sacrament of mercy who is also a guide along the difficult path of virtue, whereas in ordinary parochial life, spiritual direction tends often to be brief, incidental, and stereotyped.

Practically all other exercise of the sacerdotal power within the enclosure of the monastery or convent is for the community, whether the priest offers the holy Sacrifice, gives Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, preaches, leads the religious family in prayer, or imparts his blessing. In this sacrament, by contrast, the attention is eminently individual and personal. The confessor is a friend in Christ, if the terminology be restricted to the sense in which devout persons make bold to refer to Christ as their Brother. He is Christ's *alter ego*.

There is withal a marked impersonality surrounding his intensely personal ministry. If he lives apart from the community, as is often the case, the penitent need never even speak to him outside the confessional; if he is a member of the same religious family, the sacred penitent-confessor relationship is utterly and inviolably ignored once the final Amen of the absolution formula is pronounced. It is marvelous that so powerful a benefactor can be associated with daily on perfectly normal terms, on one sole condition: that it be fully recognized that his effectiveness and spiritual influence never be adverted to in the slightest degree outside the forum of conscience.

The confessor is either chosen by the individual or assigned for an entire religious community, as the Church's law stipulates (canons 518 ff). Not all priests can qualify for the appointment: blamelessness of life, prudence, pastoral experience, and maturity of age

are the principal personal factors taken into account (see canon 524). It is hardly thinkable that a confessor would assume this duty regularly without equipping himself with a reasonably thorough knowledge of the rule, the constitutions, and the more readily known customs of the particular order of his penitents.

The confessor's jurisdiction and authority are to be used in fear and trembling. The religious penitent realizes that he can never fully appreciate this operation of the priestly power, for it is of God. It is a part of the divine plan that no person can ordinarily help a religious in the spiritual realm so much as his confessor when he is granted full cooperation.

The Church recommends that the priest say the following prayer before entering the confessional. It emphasizes the principal virtues of the worthy minister of the sacrament of mercy. It expresses his humble plea to be effective as the instrument in God's hand in assisting penitents spiritually.

At the same time it acquaints the religious penitent with the motives and the scope of the confessor's exhortation and absolution. In so doing, it outlines, indirectly, how the religious himself is to cooperate. Mentally modifying its phrases to read in the third person instead of the first, the prayer establishes an anticipated bond of spiritual union between the penitent and the confessor that creates an ideal disposition for obtaining maximum fruit from the sacrament.



GRANT me, O Lord, the wisdom employed at Thy throne, that I may know how to judge Thy faithful with justice, and Thy poor in judgment. Make me so handle the keys of the kingdom of heaven that I shall not open the door to anyone on whom it should be closed, nor close it on him to whom it should be opened.

Let my intention be pure, my zeal sincere, my charity patient, my efforts fruitful. Let me be gentle without being lax, firm and unyielding without becoming harsh; may I never look down on the poor, nor flatter the rich. Make me kind in winning sinners, prudent in questioning them, and skilled in instructing them.

Grant me, I beseech Thee, expertness in restraining sinners from evil, diligence in keeping them virtuous, perseverance and earnestness in leading them to greater progress.

Bestow on me maturity in my answers, rightness in my exhortations, light in all difficult problems, wisdom in involved situations, and victory over all difficult cases.

Do not permit me to tolerate useless talk, nor to be corrupted by the evils which are made known to me. May I save others, and not be lost myself. Amen.²¹



PRAYERFUL STATEMENT OF INTENTION

St. Gertrude

MOST SWEET JESUS, because of Thy loving desire for our salvation Thou hast instituted sacramental confession for the consolation of all sinners, so that by its power we might be cleansed of all our iniquities and recover the grace we have lost. Now I return to Thee once more, wretched sinner that I am, after having offended Thee again by many sins and defiled my soul with many stains.

I now propose to receive this excellent sacrament with the unshakable hope and confidence that Thou wilt grant me pardon of all my sins. I desire to accuse myself before the priest, Thy representative, of all my sins, as far as I can recall them, with the most profound humility and contrition. I will not knowingly conceal any mortal sin, no matter how vile and shameful it be.

I desire to include in this confession all the sins which escape my memory, and all my venial sins. I confess them all to Thee as to my great High Priest. In the presence of the whole court of heaven I proclaim myself faithless and guilty of offending Thine adorable Majesty.

I beg Thee, therefore, most merciful Father, deign to look on me, a miserable sinner, with the same compassion with which Thou didst look upon Thy Son when He lay prostrate in the Garden of Olives, crushed to earth by the sins of all mankind. Graciously hearken to me as with all my heart I implore Thy pardon.

To make up for what is lacking in my contrition, which I realize is not what it should be, I offer Thee that most intense grief

which Thine only-begotten Son endured in His Sacred Heart throughout His whole earthly life on account of the sins of the world, but especially when in the Garden of Olives the extremity of His anguish caused Him to sweat blood. I beg Thee to cleanse my soul of all its stains in that most holy Blood and to adorn it with a purity whiter than snow. Amen.²³



CHAPTER SIX

THOUGHTS WHILE AWAITING YOUR TURN TO CONFESS

MANY lay persons will confess today. Probably a large number of them are preparing at this moment, as I am, to enter the confessional.

Few have attained my understanding of the sacrament. Scarcely any of them share the combination of my blessings that are commonplace among religious: the enclosure's protection which holds temptation at a distance; a schedule of prayer, work, and separation from the world in all that I do that rarely permits deviation from seeking God; almost unbroken companionship with my fellow religious who are intent upon their life of virtue.

Nevertheless, at times God gives lay people a deep spirit of contrition. Their detestation of sin and the firmness in amending their lives often constitute the greatest joy of the confessor. Humility, learned in simple love of their Saviour, gives beauty to the acknowledgment of their human shortcomings.

Lay folk often bring to the confessional much that is acceptable to God and little known to men: undaunted struggle against temptation and the occasions of sin; the bearing of crosses from exalted motives—crosses about which religious usually know little; the practice of virtue under difficult circumstances; childlike generosity with God and charity toward neighbor. The last prayer of the formula of absolution dignifies these acts of virtue by mentioning them with the sufferings of Christ, the merits of His Blessed Mother and of the saints: "May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . whatever good you [the penitent] have done, and whatever evil you have endured, be for you unto the remission of sins . . ."

It would be a terrible reversal of the right order of things if I, who am vowed to strive after perfection, were to pay so much attention to accuracy of numbers, meticulous correctness in stating my faults, and all the external acts of confessing that laymen would perform the humiliating task with greater love of God than I.

That Thou wouldst spare us...; that Thou wouldst pardon us...; that Thou wouldst bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee, Lord, hear us!

(Litany of the Saints)



“**G**OD allows sin; God allows me to sin. Why? I do not know, but it is something to know that God does allow it and that He has a good motive for so doing. Now the fact that God allows it does not in any way excuse me from the guilt and responsibility of my wrongdoing. These sins are sins, and I know quite well that I deliberately chose evil rather than good. It was a deliberate choice of my will. God’s permission does not therefore absolve me, but it does give me reason to think differently of my sin after the event than if it bore no relation to God at all. For it is clear that since He allows sin and since His motive in so doing is a good motive and since His only motive can be love, I am allowed to fall into sin because God loves me. However disconcerting this thought is, undoubtedly it is a valuable one because it makes me realize that something can be done with sin to make it useful to me.

“What else can that mean but that God wishes me out of my past sin to come nearer to Him, to find somewhere in that unhappy past a motive too for love? . . . Sin then can be used afterwards so as to make the memory of it an inspiration towards a greater love of God. This is also the real act of sorrow, the perfect contrition that thinks of sin and is sorry for it because it has offended God who is infinitely good in Himself. Here is true sorrow in which self is forgotten and God only remembered. It is not sorrow only, but sweet sorrow; it is love.”²³



A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

(Psalm 50, 19)



“Be filled with confusion at your wretchedness. O my God, how dare I appear before Thee? Alas! I am but an offscouring of the world and a sink of ingratitude and of iniquity. Is it pos-

sible that I have been so disloyal, that there is not a single one of my senses, or of the powers of my soul, which I have not spoilt, violated and soiled, and that there has not been a single day of my life on which I have not produced such evil effects? Is this the return that I should make for the benefits of my Creator, and for the blood of my Redeemer?"²⁴



That Thou wouldst bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee, Lord, hear us!

(Litany of the Saints)



If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool.

(Isaias, 1: 18)



IN THE SACRAMENT of penance, contrition (as, moreover, the other acts of the penitent: accusation of faults and satisfaction) bears a sacramental character. What does this signify? In every sacrament, the infinite merits gained for us by Christ are applied to the soul in order to produce the special grace contained in the sacrament. The grace of the sacrament of penance is to destroy sin in the soul, to weaken the remnants of sin and to restore life; or if there are only venial faults, to remit them and increase grace. In this sacrament, the hatred of sin felt by Christ in His agony and upon the Cross... passes into our soul there to produce the destruction of sin. This destruction of sin effected by Christ's substitution of Himself for us in His Passion is reproduced in the penitent. Contrition remains what it is, even outside the sacrament: i.e., an instrument of death to sin; but in the sacrament Christ's merits give to this instrument, as it were, infinite and supreme efficacy. It is at this moment that Christ washes our souls in His Precious Blood."²⁵



My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,

Jesus Christ the just: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

(1 John, 2: 1, 2)



THE ASCETICAL LITERATURE of religious orders treats at length of the greatly increased value of good works when they are performed without any attachment to sin. I must remind myself that being freed of sin is not something negative: it is the condition for bringing my spiritual faculties to their perfection and for fulfilling my duties under the virtue of religion as the Church desires me to fulfill them. It is also the means of effecting my worthiest identification with the purposes of my religious family. Sin is always a moral break from one's religious institute; virtue, on the other hand, intensifies the oneness of the brethren in Christ that is the foundation on which an order or congregation is built up: and corporate holiness, the united practice of good works draws down the blessing of God and merits the gratitude of the Church. Such spiritual forces are indispensable: they have no substitutes.

The first four of the concluding prayers of the Litany of the Saints are used in the formula of general absolution granted to some orders. The intent of the Apostolic See in granting this unusual favor on certain feasts of the year is evident: that God be served and adored in the name of the Church by representatives privileged to receive the fullest possible application of the power of the keys.

O GOD, Whose property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, receive our humble petitions, and grant that we and all Thy servants who are bound by the chains of sin may, by the compassion of Thy goodness, mercifully be absolved.

Graciously hearken to our humble prayer, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and pardon the sins of those who confess to Thee, that in Thy goodness Thou mayest grant us pardon and peace.

Be graciously pleased, O Lord, to show unto us Thine unspeakable mercy, freeing us from all sin, and delivering us from all punishments which we justly deserve for the same.

O God, Whom sin doth justly move to anger, and repentance turn again mercifully to forgive the same, mercifully regard the prayers of Thy people praying before Thee, and turn away the

scourges of Thy wrath, which for our sins we most rightfully deserve.



He hath chastised us for our iniquities: and He will save us for His own mercy. See then what He hath done with us, and with fear and trembling give ye glory to Him: and extol the eternal King of worlds in your works.

(*Tobias: 13, 5, 6*)



"It is not merely because I have been preserved from mortal sin that I lift up my heart to God in trust and in love. I am certain that even if I had on my conscience every imaginable crime, I should lose nothing of my confidence, but would throw myself, my heart broken with sorrow, into the arms of my Saviour. I remember His love for the prodigal son, I have heard His words to St. Mary Magdalen, to the woman taken in adultery, and to the woman of Samaria. No—there is no one who could frighten me, for I know too well what to believe concerning His Mercy and His Love."²⁶

"...I know that in the twinkling of an eye all those thousands of sins would be consumed as a drop of water cast into a blazing fire."²⁷

(*St. Thérèse of Lisieux*)



CHAPTER SEVEN

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTUAL CONFESSION

TIMELY, adequate preparation and all measures in conformity with religious decorum adopted to expedite the hearing of confessions show considerateness to the members of the community and are welcomed by the priest. If those who are waiting their turn to confess do not form a line, it is commendable for the one who is next to present himself to the priest to stand at a distance of a few paces—far enough away that there would never be any possibility of hearing the priest or the penitent, but close enough for promptly taking one's turn without delay. Where a double confessional, with grilles at either side, is used (an architectural device that has not merited universal adoption), the penitent should be kneeling when the confessor opens the panel.

The first requisite for confessing worthily is to place oneself as vividly as possible in the presence of the Divine Judge. Here the religious is a professional: the spirit of recollectedness that he brings to his sacramental acknowledgment of sin is part of the reward of many hours of meditation, of spiritual reading, examinations of conscience, private prayer, and the observance of silence. The light in the confessional will usually permit him to gaze lovingly on the figure of the crucified Saviour.

If a religious finds it necessary or justifiably convenient (it is never the ideal), to confess in a parish church, or elsewhere, at a time scheduled for lay parishioners, he should identify himself before beginning the accusative part of his confession. The simple statement, "I am a religious," helps to remove misunderstanding where profession may aggravate offenses acknowledged, and to determine the character of the priestly exhortation. Furthermore, it serves to eliminate embarrassment on both sides of the grille, and should be a guarantee of humility.

The penitent begins with the formula, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was made one week ago." The first statement is an expression of humility which introduces the accusation of sins with simplicity and directness. The approximate time since one's last reception of sacramental absolution is helpful to the priest in his capacity of spiritual judge. In some novitiates candidates memo-

rize a slightly different version of this introduction, and use the form they are taught: arbitrary deviation from the accepted custom would be a weak note on which to begin one's plea for divine mercy and for intensification of grace.

The ideal would be for every penitent to speak clearly, in a whisper or subdued voice, but loud enough to be heard without difficulty or straining, and for all confessors to be blessed with good hearing. In this vale of human defects, where false teeth, defective hearing, low-gear effort, and similar impairments are not unusual, the ideal is often not attained without conscious effort at cooperation. For those who are frequently asked to repeat what they have said in ordinary conversations, distinct effort at clarity in the confessional is obviously indicated. Best results are realized by speaking directly toward the grille or small opening. As the minister of Christ the confessor must judge the penitent's dispositions: to do so he must ordinarily hear every statement made. Otherwise he is forced to ask the penitent to repeat what has been said, which occasions needless confusion and embarrassment.

In some convents supplementary confessionals are erected, with proper permission, in the infirmary, reception rooms, library rooms, or other appropriate settings for the sick, the aged, and the hard of hearing. If this commendable arrangement is impracticable, the religious should state quite simply that he does not hear well and would be grateful if the priest were to speak a little louder or more distinctly than usual. If he fears that he cannot understand even when the confessor takes greater pains in addressing him, he may conclude his confession by asking, "Will it be satisfactory if I pray the *Miserere* (or the *De Profundis*, or a decade of the Rosary) according to your intention, Father?" If he cannot see the confessor, he may simply assume the answer has been in the affirmative.

Sins are to be confessed as briefly as possible. Should the religious have had the misfortune of committing mortal sins, he must, if possible, indicate their exact number and any circumstances which aggravate their seriousness.

If there are no mortal sins to confess, he should mention several (usually not more than three or four) venial sins and imperfections that have, in his judgment, the most direct bearing on his life as a religious. To list a greater number would tend to throw the emphasis on completeness of statement (which is not at all necessary with venial sins), rather than on contrition and firm purpose of amendment.

To make certain of the desired quality of contrition it is wise to include a sin or an evil habit from one's past life, especially the sin which offended God most seriously, a habit to which one remained long attached, the word, thought, deed or omission whose remembrance now causes the deepest shame, or which had the most far-reaching baneful influence in one's life.

Former habitual sins merit particular attention in this connection. Because they usually weaken the firm purpose of amendment until they have been corrected, they are in a special sense offensive to God, and can be confessed over and over with profit long after they have been conquered.

Care must be taken to specify that the sins have already been confessed and absolved, and that they are included in the present confession only for its perfection.

Even in so salutary a practice as accusing oneself of already forgiven offenses, one must guard against two dangers: generalizations and routine. It does not hurt deeply to say, "I am sorry for all past violations of my vow of obedience." The phrase comes easily: after it has been appended a few times to confession it may become practically valueless. Even a more specific accusation, such as "On one occasion, before entering the monastery, I deliberately absented myself from Mass on a holy day of obligation," would lose some of its effectiveness if it were repeated so often as to become habitual.

Better by far to include, week after week, different specific offenses from the past, so that each confession is made to contribute to a positive, unending hatred for sin, a life devoted to reparation of past failures. The opening sentence of the Prologue of St. Benedict to his *Rule* offers a workable definition of the monastic life: "Through the labor of obedience [which is a labor of love] we are to return to God from Whom we wandered through the sloth of disobedience." The process of returning to God is lifelong: the sacrament of penance should have a prominent part in it.

Confession must be accusative to produce its intended fruit in the soul of the religious. Excuses are entirely out of place, and are never resorted to by those who kneel in the spirit of Calvary.

The fifth degree of humility as taught by St. Benedict in his *Rule* (Ch. 7), emphasizes openness and candor in dealing with the spiritual father. The manifestation of conscience contemplated in this classic directive of monasticism has no more exact counterpart in modern religious life than in childlike simplicity and frankness in relying on the guidance of one's confessor. As an integral element of a

form of life that produced great saints, in times past, and intrinsically on its own merits today, it cannot well be disregarded. Like the other degrees of the difficult virtue, humble accusation and frankness must be prayed for earnestly.

The confession should be closed with this sort of statement (which is, of course, not obligatory): "For these and for all the sins of my past life, especially (as an example) for having criticized and for having interfered with the work of a local superior who was acting under obedience, I am truly sorry and beg for God's forgiveness through your absolution, Father."

After he has stated his sins, the penitent is to listen carefully to the admonition of the confessor, and to the assigning of the penance. Although the Church does not teach that the priest is inspired by the Holy Spirit in his exhortation to penitents, experience abundantly shows that decisions are made and principles applied with a wisdom that can hardly be accounted for merely by years of study and experience. The contribution to a satisfying and helpful confession that is made by the admonition is recognized by the faithful: in part, it accounts for their love of the sacrament.

What is not so commonly appreciated is the penitent's own contribution: the quality of the exhortation seems to parallel, to some degree, the humility and general worthiness of the confession. A profoundly spiritual admission of sins and faults will hardly fail to elicit a consoling and helpful response; stereotyped confessions, filled with generalities and indifferently made, are usually not going to draw forth gems of ascetical theology.

Because of the larger numbers who confess in motherhouses, or for less understandable reasons, the admonition of the confessor is sometimes pared to skeletal proportions, or omitted altogether. A few thoughts on the ideals of the religious life have been prefixed to each part of the examination of conscience in this booklet. Although admittedly reading is a poor substitute for the appeal of Christ's minister in the act of administering the sacrament of mercy, its moral union with the confession *after* one has made his thanksgiving preserves a certain appropriateness that is not lacking in effectiveness.

It is courtesy to thank the confessor. "May God reward you, Father," or simply, "Thank you, Father," are in good taste and in common use.



CHAPTER EIGHT

SACRAMENTAL ABSOLUTION

DESPITE all seriousness of preparation for the sacrament, the moment of absolution comes upon one with a suddenness that requires calm reflection for its full appreciation. The confessor's capacity of judge, necessarily and invariably passing a sentence of reconciliation with God once he has established the penitent's worthiness of disposition; his role of spiritual father, exercised by instructing, guiding, and warning; his duty as a physician in the spiritual order, diagnosing, prescribing remedies, and resorting to painful cures when they are needed—all seem momentarily to lose much of their significance as he begins his more effective function as the minister of Christ.

While the penitent recites the Act of Contrition, usually upon instruction from the confessor to do so, the priest himself pronounces his sentence, which, like the sign of the other sacraments, effects what it represents. It wipes away sin—completely, so that they will never again stand to the penitent's discredit. By the same action it restores or increases grace, extending the sacrament's efficacy to the future. It gives the pledge of eternal life.

The penitent's great concern at the moment rests with his own prayer, the Act of Contrition. It requires his undivided attention. In a general way he should be mindful, however, of his confessor's pronouncement, either by reason of having anticipated its action during his preparation for confession, or by swift advertence to what he knows about the sacred formula of absolution. Afterward he can commendably reflect at leisure on the beauty and simple power of the confessor's prayer: regardless of how often it has been studied, each examination seems to reveal hitherto unnoticed beauties, or to give intensity and depth to former appreciation.



Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis tuis, perducatur te ad vitam aeternam. Amen.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive your sins, and lead you to life everlasting. Amen.

Indulgentiam, absolutionem, et remissionem peccatorum tuorum tribuat tibi omnipotens et misericors Dominus. Amen.

Dominus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat: et ego auctoritate ipsius te absolvo ab omni vinculo excommunicationis, suspensionis, et interdicti, in quantum possum, et tu indiges.*

Deinde ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, ✠ et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi, merita Beatae Mariae Virginis, et omnium sanctorum, quidquid boni feceris, et mali sustinueris, sint tibi in remissionem peccatorum, augmentum gratiae, et praemium vitae aeternae. Amen.

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, absolution, and forgiveness of your sins. Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve you: and by His authority I absolve you from every bond of excommunication, suspension,* and interdict, in as far as lies in my power, and you have need thereof.

Furthermore, I absolve you of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, whatever good you have done, and whatever evil you have endured, be for you unto the remission of sins, the increase of grace, and life everlasting. Amen.²⁸



The Roman Ritual has no specific prescription regarding the manner of dismissing the penitent. The confessor may have several appropriate phrases which he may vary according to the circumstances of penitents and liturgical seasons. Usually he employs a short excerpt from the Gospel like "Go in peace, and sin no more," or he may say simply, "God bless you," or "Will you please include a prayer according to my intention?"



* The word "suspension" is inserted into the formula only when a person in major orders is absolved.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ACT OF CONTRITION

PROBABLY the penitent has never failed to recite this prayer on any day since he learned it. So deeply instilled into Catholic consciousness is the dread of retiring at night without having begged God's forgiveness of the day's faults, that even those who succumb to the inclination to cut their prayers to a minimum retain their devotion to the Act of Contrition after they have grown remiss about other prayers. Understandably, too, the oftener one lifts up his mind and heart to God, and the more he grows in the spirit of prayer, so much the more vividly will these simple phrases of sorrow for sin and detestation of what offends God dominate his soul.

As it is prayed during the absolution by the confessor the Act of Contrition differs a great deal from its recitation at other times. Here it takes on a sacramental character. The power that makes the sacrament what it is, namely the application of the merits of Christ, enters into the sinner's soul, and communicates to him something of our Lord's own hatred of sin. When it becomes truly heartfelt, as a result of humble effort, this detestation of sin is the rich experience of an intense love of God, to be appreciated to the fullest extent.

Realization of that goal necessitates that the penitent strive for the perfection of his part in the administration of the sacrament of mercy. There is a harmful tendency to be guarded against in so lofty an objective: some persons tense up nervously and struggle their way through the Act of Contrition, almost as though they considered themselves compelled to feel and express their sorrow physically. Crying, unusual inflection of words, pauses, and other manifestations are valueless as criteria of the sincerity of contrition: better by far to pray simply, unaffectedly, and just a bit more rapidly than one might be inclined to pray, with one sole thought in mind—to make fully one's own the meaning of these basic words which, because they are man's relation to God, children can understand and in which saintly individuals and gifted scholars always find new depths of love to probe.

Everything must be done in calmness: the Divine Author of the sacrament of forgiveness must not be thought of as willing that His

infinitely loving reception of the repentant sinner be a tormenting ordeal. The most desirable and impressive qualities of hatred of sin and gratitude toward God are calmness, reflectiveness, profundity.

As far as can be realized, the penitent must try not to allow anything to distract him from the sacredness of what is transpiring: not anything the confessor has said in his admonition (the penitent can return to that later), nor any sudden disturbance in the chapel, nor what others may think if one's confession has been somewhat longer than usual—nothing whatever. The endeavor should be to concentrate on one thought exclusively, the obvious, simple meaning of this beautiful acknowledgment of sorrow for sin.

The more humbly and worthily this prayer is said, the surer one is that absolution is being received with ideal dispositions. It is helpful to think of the two prayers being recited on either side of the grille as not only simultaneous, but complementary: the priest raises his hand in absolution as the penitent is in the very act of assuring God that he is sorry for his sins and eager to amend his life. Although it is so short that it can be recited in only a few seconds, the Act of Contrition states perfectly every thought that the penitent need keep in mind.

It is helpful to gaze upon the crucifix while praying the Act of Contrition: that is why it is erected in every confessional. Some persons prefer to bow their heads, glancing at the cross on their rosary, or on the printed figure of the Crucified Saviour in the book they are using. They are free to express their sorrow in whatever manner they find most helpful.

There can be no excuse for rushing through the Act of Contrition, or for mumbling it in a slovenly manner. There should be adequate time for praying it reflectingly and even reasonably slowly, for the Latin formula of absolution pronounced by the priest is about twice as long as the Act of Contrition. Should the confessor complete the recitation of the formula of absolution before the penitent has finished his prayer (some priests recite Latin quite rapidly), there is no cause for becoming upset. Ordinarily the confessor, whose experience has taught him to be observant, will notice that the penitent is still praying, and will wait. If he has failed to notice, and has pronounced his dismissal to the penitent, the latter can simply remain kneeling and say his prayer (this presents no problem where there is a double confessional), or return to his place in the chapel and do so.





O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell: but most of all, because they have offended Thee, my God, who art all good, and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.



CHAPTER TEN

AFTER CONFESSION

THANKSGIVING

THE MINUTES that immediately follow absolution are precious. They are comparable to the time that devout souls spend in prayer after receiving Holy Communion, if one thinks of the distinctive operations of divine love and compassion in this sacrament. They are an occasion of abundant grace and closeness to God. They are especially significant for the religious, because his whole existence is, in the ideal of every religious institute, a zealous striving for complete detachment from sin.

Pardon of offense has now been pronounced. Through the ministry of the priest, God has erased all that was marked to the discredit of the religious. Temptation for the moment remains at a distance. Eagerness to please God and generosity in doing so should be the dominant notes of these blessed moments.

The penitent's first thought should be one of humble thanksgiving. Ordinary politeness toward daily companions demands a fitting expression of gratitude when a favor has been received. Of course, there is no standard of comparison, really. Instead of mere politeness the penitent appreciates the inadequacy of words to express his thanks; he is not acknowledging a favor that a friend has performed, but seeks to praise the infinite mercy that has rescued him from eternal loss; he is not speaking to an equal, but with humility's lovable boldness, addressing his God.

Simply to kneel before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for a little while, saying nothing, desiring only to be with our Lord, permitting the heart to make its own humble attempts at appropriate sentiments is perhaps as worthy an expression of heartfelt appreciation as any. If a worthy thought spontaneously arises in the mind (such as kneeling in spirit on Calvary, entering more deeply into the keenness of sorrow experienced while gazing on the crucifix in the confessional), it should be encouraged, given free rein, and dwelt on as long as possible. If other forms of expression elude one, thanking the infinitely good and merciful Lord over and over constitutes an excellent prayer at the moment.

Important as it is, the fulfilling of the penance directly after returning to one's place in the chapel can hardly be considered fitting. Certainly it is no thanksgiving. Making due allowances for unavoidable necessity, such as an infirmarian returning to the care of the sick, for a religious to leave the chapel immediately after performing his penance, as often seems to be the practice, would reveal very little regard for the sacrament of mercy and less appreciation of its influence in the life of the religious.



ST. THOMAS' PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

I PRAISE THEE, I glorify Thee, I bless Thee, my God, for the great blessings Thou hast bestowed on me, despite my unworthiness.

I praise Thy mercy that so long and patiently awaited my conversion to Thee; Thy tenderness that pretends to take vengeance on me; Thy kindness in calling me back to Thee; Thy goodness in receiving me; Thy merciful forgiveness of my sins.

I glorify Thy goodness in bestowing blessings beyond any merits of mine; Thy patience in not holding my offenses against me; Thy humility in offering me consolation; Thy patience in protecting me; Thy eternity that preserves me; Thy faithfulness to Thy promises in rewarding me.

What can I possibly say, my God, in honor and acknowledgment of Thy generosity that defies description? For Thou dost call back to Thee the person that flies from Thee; receive the prodigal; give aid to the wavering and joy to the person in despair; incite the negligent to action; equip the fighter for battle; and crown the victor. Thou dost not spurn the repentant sinner, nor remember his wrongdoing.

Thou dost free us from dangers, and soften our heart for repentance. Thou dost deter us from sin by the terror of punishments, and draw us to Thee by Thy promises.

Thou dost correct us with the lash; guard us with the ministry of Thine angels; see to it that our material needs are provided; and hold in reserve for us the goods of eternity.

Thou dost exhort us by the dignity of our creation; invite us to the mercy of redemption; promise us eternal rewards. And for all these gifts I am incapable of saying anything in Thy praise.

I thank Thy divine Majesty for the abundance of Thine infinite goodness. Mayest Thou always increase Thy graces in me, preserve what Thou hast thus increased, and reward what Thou hast preserved. Amen.²⁹



ST. GERTRUDE'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

O ALMIGHTY and merciful God, Whose mercy is boundless and everlasting, and the riches of Whose goodness are infinite, I give thanks with all my mind and heart for the most amazing and exceeding goodness Thou hast shown me in graciously pardoning all my sins, and restoring me to Thy grace and favor.

Blessed be Thy Divine compassion, O my God, and blessed be the incomprehensible love of Thy beloved Son, which constrained Him to institute so gentle and so powerful a remedy for our sins.

In union with all the thanksgivings that have ever ascended to Thee from truly repentant hearts, I sing aloud Thy joyous praises in the name of all in heaven, of all now living on earth, and of the souls in Purgatory, for ever and ever. Amen.³⁰



In his excellent devotional manual of the seventeenth century, *Parasceve mortalitatis humanae*,³¹ Ranbeck recommends that the preceding prayer be recited in conjunction with Psalm 102, which is particularly appropriate after one has gone to confession.

PSALM 102

BLESS the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless His holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee.

Who forgiveth all thy iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases.

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion.

Who satisfieth thy desire with good things: thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord doth mercies, and judgment for all that suffer wrong.

He hath made His ways known to Moses: His wills to the children of Israel.

The Lord is compassionate and merciful: longsuffering and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always be angry: nor will He threaten for ever.

He hath not dealt with us according to our sins: nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For according to the height of the heaven above the earth: He hath strengthened His mercy toward them that fear Him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our iniquities from us.

As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame.

He remembereth that we are dust: man's days are as grass, as the flower of the field so shall he flourish.

For the spirit shall pass in him, and he shall not be: and he shall know his place no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity upon them that fear Him;

And His justice unto children's children, to such as keep His covenant,

And are mindful of His commandments to do them.

The Lord hath prepared His throne in heaven: and His kingdom shall rule over all.

Bless the Lord, all ye His angels: you that are mighty in strength, and execute His word, hearkening to the voice of His orders.

Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts: you ministers of His that do His will.

Bless the Lord, all His works: in every place of His dominion, O my soul, bless thou the Lord.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SACRAMENTAL PENANCE

IT IS wise at this point to fulfill the penance inflicted by the confessor if, as is ordinarily the case, it is an act of devotion to be performed in the chapel.

The penance or *satisfactio*, as it is commonly referred to in the Church's Latin, is in the nature of a compensation made to God in place of the debt of temporal punishment that remains after the sin itself has been forgiven. It differs entirely from penances inflicted in the religious life. These latter produce their intended salutary effect in proportion to and according to the spirit of cooperation and the merit of the one performing them (*ex opere operantis*). The penance which the confessor necessarily imposes, since it is an essential part of the sacrament, is a compensation for the temporal punishment due to sin and actually removes those penalties by the efficacy of the sacrament itself (*ex opere operato*) and is, consequently, far more efficacious.

Today extremely light penances are customary, if we compare them with the severity of the former discipline of the Church. In the confession of religious they should never be so light nor so foreign to the purpose of the sacrament as to lose their penitential character, as is the case with prayers that can be recited in a minute or two and prayed according to intentions that have little discernible connection with sorrow for sin. The religious needs to keep in mind the purpose of the Church, which he can make fully his own, even without the painful aid of her former severity.

The Council of Trent makes it clear that there is a fourfold fruit in performing the sacramental penance:

1. The penance teaches the sinner that sin after baptism is a great evil which is worthy of severe punishment; it is in the nature of a vengeance taken on sins... "after having received the gift of the Holy Ghost, [they] have not feared, knowingly to violate the temple of God (I Corinthians, 3: 17) and to grieve the Holy Spirit (Romans, 2: 4).

2. "Doubtless these satisfactory punishments greatly recall [that is, restrain] from sin, and check, as it were with a bridle, and make penitents more cautious and watchful for the future;

3. "They are also remedies for the remains of sin and by acts of opposite virtues, they remove the habits acquired by evil living"; (that is to say, as a punishment the penance is not only vindicative but also medicinal and preservative);

4. "By making satisfaction and suffering for our sins, we are made conformable to Jesus Christ, Who satisfied for our sins, from whom all our *sufficiency is* (II Corinthians, 3: 5); having also thereby a most sure pledge, that *if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him* (Romans, 8: 17). But neither is this satisfaction, which we discharge for our sins, so our own, as not to be through Jesus Christ."³²

Regarding the penance, the Code of Canon Law specifies that "The confessor is to impose a salutary and proportionate penance according to the quality and number of sins committed; the penitent must accept the same willingly and perform it personally (Canon 887). For serious offenses penances are inflicted which are grave in the sense that if one were otherwise bound to perform them, the obligation would bind gravely, as the recitation of a substantial part of the Divine Office, hearing Mass on a day of obligation, fasting or abstaining for a day, praying the Litany of the Saints with its accompanying orations on the days prescribed. Saying a few Our Fathers, the *Miserere* or any other Psalm, or the Litany of Loretto does not constitute a grave penance.

What is of importance for the religious who desires to derive maximum spiritual benefit from confession is the willing acceptance and fulfillment of the *satisfactio*, humbly uniting it with Christ's atonement for sin, from which union proceeds the full distinctive value of the assigned good work.



A SUGGESTION

AFTER CONFESSION your soul is free from all sin and all attachment to sin. It is at its worthiest, humanly speaking, for acceptable prayer. It is now impelled by the love of God.

Probably your confessor has assigned an intention according to which you have performed your penance. However willingly and worthily performed, these short prayers or little good works may not satisfy your present desire to give proof of your love of God and your present generosity. If your charity seeks more, the following intentions are suggested for their perennial appeal to religious. Pick out one or

the other and pray the Our Father in the spirit of charity for its realization.



Considering the constantly operating law of human dissolution, it is safe to assume that many religious will die today. Among those who lie suffering at this moment waiting, amidst the temptations and trials of their final hour before being released from their agony and being summoned before their Maker, there may be a religious, possibly of your own order, who stands in need of great increase of grace. He may have on his soul the same imperfections and stains of sin that you had a few minutes ago, before you went to confession. Beg God to send a priest to his bedside to prepare him for a blessed death and the worthiest possible termination of his vocation.



Occasionally one reads or hears of a lost vocation—a priest, a nun, or other religious who has made what is often an irreparable break, completely abandoning the grace of state. The experience is more sobering when it involves a companion of your own order, your province, possibly one of your novitiate and profession class, one bound to you by the ties of fraternal charity and oneness in Christ. It makes you sick at heart to appeal to such a person and to plead, only to sense that the effective response to grace is gone.

When the final break becomes known, disturbing thoughts may assail one:—maybe if charity had prompted me to pray zealously for him! . . . Did I contribute in the slightest way to his leaving? . . . Was I remiss in any obligation?

Flights from religion, apostasy, or secularization, whatever their immediate occasion, do not happen suddenly. Regardless of the virtue or the vow that is violated, formal dismissal from an order presupposes the contumacy of grave and repeated infractions of the rule after warnings; similar paternal and official action is taken with religious in simple vows. After a religious has departed illicitly or apostatized from his institute, official investigation usually discloses evidence of malicious intent that was concealed over an extended period of time, a gradual drifting from the order. That was when the person needed the help that the charity of confreres could have given him.

Considering how many are lost and, no doubt, the far greater number who withstand temptation, it is safe to conjecture that the devil is at work at this very moment. Somewhere a religious is toying with grace. Possibly he is a member of your own order. He has a claim on you, a claim of justice, or at least of charity. Pray for him.



The need for vocations is constantly felt. No matter how flourishing the present status of an order seems to be, superiors speak frequently of the necessity of greater numbers to meet the increasing demands that are made on their orders to do their work; they attend conventions, hold workshops, and employ other means for furthering the campaign of enlisting new members; they petition or order special prayers to be said that God will bless their orders with worthy candidates. Much work for God that is traditional among religious institutes must remain for the present untouched in this country because of the lack of the necessary man power: greater sacrifices for the foreign missions; new foundations to be made in sections of this country where the progress of the Church has been slow; the greater depth and breadth of the teaching undertaken by the orders; the increased care of the sick and the suffering by representatives of the Church; and numerous other works of charity that can ideally be taken over by religious. It must be remembered, however, that prayer for vocations should have for its first purpose the increase of God's glory through the greater worthiness of life of the religious.

Many consider the Prayer over the People at the end of the Mass on Tuesday in Passion Week as fully expressing their thought:

GRANT US, we beseech Thee, O Lord, a persevering obedience to Thy Will; that in our days the people who serve Thee may increase both in merit and number. Through our Lord...



Both in his personal pronouncements and in the instructions issued through the Sacred Congregation of Religious, our gloriously reigning Vicar of Christ, Pope Pius XII, has indicated his intense desire of directing most effectively the great power of religious institutes to the problems that currently confront the Church. "Accommodation of the principles of religious institutes to the modern needs of the Church" is a phrase that has been featured so prominently in many

recent documents addressed to religious that it may well become one of the keynotes by which the work of a great pope will be remembered in history. The need is real and serious. The obligation of obedience, a generous spirit of submission, is evident: "All religious are subject to the Roman Pontiff as their highest superior, whom they are bound to obey also in the virtue of the vow of obedience" (canon 499, § 1).

Zealous prayer that God will employ the services of the orders and congregations (and particularly of one's own institute) under the enlightened leadership of their respective superiors, to accomplish much that must be done in the Church today, is a worthy form of zeal and charity.



In his booklet *Religious and Monastic Life Explained*,³³ Abbot Prosper Guéranger offers a suggestion which seems particularly appropriate in the sinlessness of the period of thanksgiving after confession. Although written by a Benedictine for members of his order, it can be adapted by any religious to the works of his institute.

The motto of the order is that God be glorified in all things. This implies that the monk must constantly long for the kingdom of God, the immediate object of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. Inflamed by the ardor of such a motive, he will magnanimously recommend to God the works of zeal performed in the entire order. He will entreat God to accept all the efforts of every follower of St. Benedict, whether these be expended in the humble tasks performed within the confines of the community, or serve directly the sublime objective of the salvation of souls. The monk is to pray frequently that for God's glory and service the order may be filled with men powerful in word and deed, men after the pattern of the many illustrious saints of the monastic life, who became all things to all men and knew so well how to serve the Church and the souls ransomed by Jesus Christ...



Announcements of the death of confreres in the order are constantly appearing on the bulletin board; from time to time God calls to Himself those with whom we have worked for years. Charity toward all souls in Purgatory is a self-evident duty for those who strive for perfection; it is a far graver obligation toward former companions in religion.

The religious life is, by definition, a return to God. It is also the bond of unity in which brethren aid one another in observing the life of virtue and in striving for their common goal. The souls of former religious are detained in Purgatory, probably because of imperfections and unforgiven venial sins resulting from relaxed discipline, or because of those for which the penitent himself may have furnished the occasion. In any event, the return of the souls of deceased confreres to God has almost been realized; certainly death has not the power of severing the oneness in Christ which makes the religious life what it is; thoughtlessness should not be allowed to do what death cannot do.



ST. BEDE'S PRAYER TO CHRIST TO BREAK ATTACHMENT TO SIN

AFTER a sincere and humble confession of his sins, the religious does not worry about the past. Firmness of belief and unquestioning confidence in God's goodness and mercy, together with faith in the efficacy of the penance that has been performed with sacramental power, honor the Father of mercies as few other dispositions of which the human soul is capable.

But remembrance of past failures, awareness of present weakness, and the realization of dependence on divine protection not only do not dishonor God, but are a realistic acknowledgment of the help one needs to correspond to the graces of life in religion.

St. Bede, who led a life of singular detachment, has left us this beautiful prayer of great urgency that our Blessed Lord will guard us and shield us, and lead us to Him.

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, Deliverer of souls, Redeemer of the world, eternal God, immortal King! Although I am a sinner, I make bold to implore Thy boundless clemency. Out of Thy great mercy, and through the words of the Psalms [and other prayers] which I have addressed to Thee, free my soul from sin.

Turn away my heart from all wicked, perverse, and dangerous thoughts. Deliver my body from the slavery of sin. Keep all evil desires far from me. Free me from every hold that the devil and his ministers, visible and invisible, might have over me, and from all Thy faithless enemies who seek to plunge my soul into sin.

Protect me from these and from all other evils, O Saviour of

the world, who with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, livest and reignest, and dost govern as Lord of all, God, for ever and ever. Amen.³⁴



ST. THOMAS' PRAYER TO THE BLESSED MOTHER

MUCH of the history of devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is intertwined with her veneration by religious through the ages. This is entirely understandable, because those who are dedicated to the seeking of perfection beg with special confidence the intercession of the Immaculate Queen. Her whole existence exemplified every ideal of the religious life, and she derives great joy in the glorification of her Divine Son by those who strive to become like Him.

She knows their human frailty and their need of help. She delights in being sincerely and trustfully asked to plead their cause at the throne of her Son.

St. Thomas of Aquin has incorporated in the following prayer motives and ideals which every religious seeks to bear away with him after confession.

O MOST BLESSED and sweet Virgin Mary, Mother of God, consumed with the intensity of love, Daughter of the most high King, Queen of angels, Mother of all the faithful! Today and all the days of my life I commend to the heart of thy love my body and soul, all my deeds, my thoughts, desires, longings, speech, my works, my whole life, and my death.

May they all be directed for my welfare, through thy prayers, according to the will of thy Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that thou, most holy Lady, wilt be my helper and comforter against all the temptations and snares of the ancient enemy and all who seek my harm.

Deign to obtain from thy Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the grace by which I can effectually resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and always keep firm the purpose of never sinning again and of persevering in thy service and that of thy Beloved Son.

I beg thee, O my holy Queen, obtain for me suitable obedience and humility of heart that I may admit truthfully that I

am a miserable and weak sinner who am not only unable to perform any good work, but even to withstand the continuous assaults of the evil one without the grace and help of my Creator and thy holy prayers.

Procure for me also, most dear Lady, perpetual chastity of soul and body, to enable me to serve thy Beloved Son and thee with a pure mind and a chaste body in thy order [the Dominicans].

Obtain for me from Him the gift of voluntary poverty marked with patience and tranquillity of mind so that I may bear the burdens of the same order and labor for my own and my neighbor's welfare.

Procure for me also, thou Queen of great tenderness, the true spirit of charity by which I may love thy most adorable Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with my whole heart. After Him, let me love thee above all things. May I love my neighbor in God and for the sake of God. I desire to rejoice at my neighbor's good fortune, to grieve at the evils he suffers, to spurn no one, not to judge anyone rashly, nor prefer myself to any other person.

Grant also, O Queen of heaven, that my heart may always be governed by both the fear and the love of thy most Beloved Son; that I remain ever grateful for the wondrous benefits that have been bestowed on me through no merit of mine but only through His benignity; that by complete and sincere confession and true repentance of my sins, I may attain to mercy and grace.

I pray also that at the end of my life thou, my own Mother, gate of heaven and advocate of sinners, wilt not suffer me, thy unworthy servant, to turn away from the holy Catholic faith. Aid me with thy great love and mercy, and defend me from the evil spirits. With my hope confirmed in the glorious and blessed Passion of Thy Son, and through thine own intercession, obtain from Him the pardon of my sins, and direct me in the way of salvation and eternal welfare, as I die in thine own and His love. Amen.³⁵



ST. ANSELM'S PRAYER OF DEPENDENCE
ON THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

WHATEVER his confidence in God's mercy and goodness, the religious knows from experience that he will have to cope with

temptations and occasions of offending God that are not wanting in power and attractiveness.

When these present themselves, the religious must depend on the helps God has given him; the victory that gives glory to God does so because weak man employs the means of faith to withstand the powers of evil.

Among the great helps that God has given to each person is the protection of his guardian angel. This pure spirit stands ever ready to shield and aid the one whom he is assigned to protect. His purpose is to prevent offense to the divine goodness: his motive, obedience to God and love of the one whose cause he has adopted.

The ages of livelier faith abounded in prayers in honor of guardian angels. This one from the pen of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, is among the worthier expressions. It merits the attention of the religious today.

GUARD over me constantly and protect me, I beg of thee, angelic spirit, to whose watchful care God has committed me. Keep me always in thy sight. Shield me from every attack of the Devil. Never let thy loving watchfulness fail for an hour, or even for a moment, whether I am awake or asleep, night or day. Accompany me wherever I go. Keep all of Satan's temptations at a distance from me.

I realize that my merits do not justify my asking for so great a favor, but obtain for me that no shadow of vice darken my life: make this thy prayer before our most merciful Judge and Lord, Who appointed thee my guardian and assigned me to thy care.

When thou seest me about to enter into forbidden ways, use all thy power to return me to our Redeemer by the paths of justice. Whatever the difficulties I encounter, may I always enjoy the grace of Almighty God which thou wilt obtain by making my need known and pleading my cause.

If possible I pray thee to make known to me the time of my death. In the hour that my soul is going forth from this body, do not permit the evil spirits to terrify me, nor mock me, nor cast me into the pit of despair. Do not leave me until thou hast led me to the vision of my Maker where, with thee as my advocate, as thou hast been my protector in earthly life, I shall rejoice with all the saints for ever, through the mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.³⁶

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE NEW HOPE, FRESH CONFIDENCE

I HAVE CONFESSED as worthily as I could. I have done so with the firm conviction that God loves me with His boundless love, willing infinitely more to show that love by forgiving me than I, with all my imperfections and sins, could desire to be forgiven! My sins remain now only in my memory. I may look back on them; in fact I hope that I shall look back on them in humility to remind me of past faithlessness and malice and to keep me aware of my constant weakness that must ever depend on vigilance and grace, but never to question whether they were actually blotted out.

Many passages in the Church's official prayer are so optimistic and assured in tone that they are evidently composed to instill into the hearts of the faithful the confidence in grace that I now need to build up. They make it clear that the security and courage in which I have been found wanting are to be prayed for zealously. They instruct me in the ways of cooperating with grace to make my vowed life more pleasing to my future Judge.

It is readily understood that those parts of the Church's worship in which she venerates the heroes of the religious life emphasize the worthiest motives for those who today seek to serve God in the sacred enclosure.

In these prayers I learn that victory over my weakness is God's work.

Like a huge mural completely covering the walls of an immense church, the examples of the saints who were schooled in the religious life are held up for the admiration and imitation of today's faithful. Day after day through the greater part of the liturgical year the Mass and Divine Office present one virtue after another: their total is the perfection aimed at in the cloister.

It is God's work, man's worthiest oneness with Christ. Saints and blessed of all the orders and congregations have contributed admirably to the spiritual life of the Church: gratefully the Church extols their heroic virtue and places on our lips the prayers by which she honors them. Properly reflected on, these present the religious ideal. In the words of Pope Pius XII, "We should imitate the virtues of the Saints

just as they imitated Christ, for in their virtues there shines forth under different aspects the splendor of Jesus Christ."³⁷



WORTHIER FULFILLMENT OF VOWS

O GOD, Who dost shed splendor on Thy Church with the wonderful learning of Thy blessed confessor Thomas, and makest it fruitful by his holy deeds; grant us, we beseech Thee, to understand what he taught and to follow his example in what he practiced.

(*Collect, St. Thomas Aquinas, March 7*)



... so strengthen us by Thy grace in faith and love through his merits and intercession, that we may be found faithful even to the point of death in serving Thee.

(*Collect, St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, April 24*)



HEARKEN, we beseech Thee, O Lord, to the prayers we offer Thee in honor of Thy confessor and bishop, St. Basil, who deserved to serve Thee in an acceptable manner; may his merits move Thee to free us from all sin.

(*Collect, St. Basil the Great, June 14*)



ENABLE US, O Lord God, in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, to devote ourselves completely to learning the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which surpasses all understanding...

(*Collect, St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria, July 5*)



STIR up in Thy Church, O Lord, the Spirit to which our holy Father Benedict was obedient, that filled with the same we may zealously strive to love what he loved and put into practice what he taught.

(*Collect, Octave day, Solemnity of St. Benedict, July 18*)

... may we, through Thy grace, aided by his intercession and example, always put our trust in Thee, and desire only the things of heaven.

(*Collect, St. Cajetan, August 7*) St. Cajetan founded the Theatines.



... grant us at his intercession that, being freed from the bondage of sin, we may devotedly and zealously do what is pleasing to Thee.

(*Collect, St. Raymund Nonnatus, August 31*) St. Raymund was one of the first outstanding vocations with which the Order of Our Lady of Ransom was blessed.



O GOD, Who in Thine inexpressible Providence hast deigned to send Thy holy angels to keep watch over us, grant, we humbly pray, that we may always be defended by their protection and may rejoice in their fellowship for all eternity.

(*Collect, Guardian Angels, October 2*)



HUMILITY

O GOD, the exaltation of the humble, Who hast raised blessed Francis to the glory of Thy saints; grant, we beseech Thee, that through his merits and example we too may happily win the reward Thou hast promised to the humble of heart.

(*Collect, St. Francis of Paula, April 2*) St. Francis was the founder of the Minims.



UPHELD by the support of the spouse of Thy most holy Mother, we beg Thy mercy, O Lord, to lead our hearts to scorn attachment to all things of earth, and to love Thee, the true God, with perfect love.

(*Secret Prayer, Solemnity of St. Joseph, Third Wednesday after Easter*)



...mercifully grant that following his example, we may scorn all that the world has to offer, and so merit to attain to the rewards which Thou hast promised to the humble of heart.

(*Collect, St. Peter Celestine, May 19*) Out of humility St. Peter Celestine resigned the papacy.



...bestow on us, Thy servants, the grace to hold in contempt, as he did, the treasured things of the world, and always to seek after those of heaven.

(*Collect, St. Philip Benizi, August 23*)



OBEDIENCE

O GOD, Who to encourage us in imitating the example of unhesitating obedience set for us by the blessed Abbot Maurus, didst cause him to walk with dry feet upon the waters; grant that we may become worthy to practice the lessons he taught by his virtue and to obtain a share in the same reward.

(*Collect, St. Maurus, January 15*)



O LORD, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive what they ought to do, and have the grace and strength to fulfill the same.

(*Collect, Sunday within the Octave of Epiphany*)



CHASTITY

O GOD, Who, to show the path of innocence, didst cause the soul of Thy saintly virgin Scholastica to soar up to heaven in the likeness of a dove; grant us, through her intercession and merits, to live in such innocence that we may deserve to attain everlasting bliss.

(*Collect, St. Scholastica, February 10*)



...grant through her intercession that we may lead lives of angelic virtue and, renouncing all pleasures of earth, merit the joys that are eternal.

(*Collect, St. Angela Merici, May 31*)



GOD Who, in the distribution of Thy heavenly gifts, didst unite wonderful innocence of life with an equal severity of penance in the angelic youth Aloysius; by his merits and prayers grant that we who have not followed him in innocence, may imitate his spirit of penance.

(*Collect, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21*)



...cleanse from our hearts all stain of sin through her merits and intercession.

(*Collect, St. Gertrude, November 17*)



POVERTY

GRANT US, we beseech Thee, almighty God, to follow the counsel and example of Thy blessed confessor and bishop, Peter, that by despising all attachment to the things of earth, we may attain unto eternal joys.

(*Collect, St. Peter Damian, February 23*)



GOD Who didst adorn the blessed bishop Thomas in a singular degree with the virtue of compassion for the poor; we beseech Thy loving kindness, at his intercession, to pour forth the riches of Thy mercy on all those who humbly pray to Thee.

(*Collect, St. Thomas of Villanova, September 22*)



GOD Who, through the merits of blessed Francis, dost enrich Thy Church with new offspring; grant that imitating him we may despise the goods of earth and always find joy in partaking of the gifts of heaven.

(*Collect, St. Francis of Assisi, October 4*)

MOST MERCIFUL GOD, Who wast pleased to summon the holy Abbot Sylvester into the wilderness as he stood beside an open grave, meditating on the vanity of the things of this world, and to adorn him with the merit of a singularly holy life; we beg Thee most humbly, that like him, we may despise earthly wealth and enjoy fellowship with Thee for ever.

(*Collect, St. Sylvester, November 26*)



LOVE MOTIVE

O GOD, by Whose will blessed Francis, Thy confessor and bishop, became all things to all men for the salvation of souls; mercifully grant that, being filled with the sweetness of Thy love, we may, through the guidance of his counsels and the aid of his merits, attain unto the joys of everlasting happiness.

(*Collect, St. Francis of Sales, January 29*)



...may we be nourished by her heavenly teaching and grow in loving devotion toward Thee.

(*Collect, St. Teresa of Avila, October 15*)



...through her merits and example, give us the grace to love Thee in all things and above all things, and to become worthy to dwell in Thy heart for ever.

(*Collect, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, October 17*)



LOVE OF THE CROSS

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who didst endow blessed Paul with singular charity for preaching the mystery of the Cross, and wast pleased that through him a new religious institute should flourish in the Church; grant through his intercession, that always keeping the memory of Thy Passion before us in this life, we may be accounted worthy to partake of its fruits in heaven.

(*Collect, St. Paul of the Cross, April 28*)

MORTIFICATION

... grant in Thy mercy, and through the help of his merits and intercession, that we may continually carry the cross and produce worthy fruits of penance.

(*Collect, Feast of Impression of Stigmata of St. Francis, September 17*)



O GOD, Whom it pleased to make Thy blessed confessor Peter illustrious by the grace of a marvellous spirit of penance, and to bestow on him the gift of the highest contemplation; grant, for the sake of his merits, that we may so mortify our flesh that we may learn more readily to understand the things of heaven.

(*Collect, St. Peter of Alcantara, October 19*)



O GOD Who didst endow blessed John, Thy confessor and doctor, with a spirit of utter self-denial and a surpassing love of the Cross, grant that by following his example with constancy, we may attain to everlasting glory.

(*Collect, St. John of the Cross, November 24*)



O GOD Who wast pleased that in her unconquered love of Thy Cross, blessed Julia should enrich Thy Church with a new religious family for educating poor girls; grant at her intercession that by the courageous enduring of our sufferings we may attain to the joys of eternity.

(*Collect, Blessed Julia Billiard, April 8*) Blessed Julia is the foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.



VIRTUOUS ZEAL

MAY the sacraments we have received, O Lord, our God, nourish us in that ardent charity wherewith blessed Robert was so intensely inflamed that he spent himself continuously in the service of the Church.

(*Postcommunion, St. Robert Bellarmine, May 13*)

O GOD Whom it pleased to call many peoples to the knowledge of Thy name by the zeal of Thy blessed martyr and bishop Boniface; grant in Thy mercy that we... may also enjoy his protection.

(*Collect, St. Boniface, June 5*)



O GOD Who didst raise up blessed Norbert, Thy confessor and bishop, as an outstanding preacher of Thy word, and as the founder of another religious order for Thy Church; grant, we beseech Thee, for the sake of his merits, that Thy grace may strengthen us for putting into practice the lessons he has taught us by word and deed.

(*Collect, St. Norbert, June 6*)



O GOD Who didst adorn blessed Camillus with the singular gift of charity in helping souls in their last agony; through his merits inspire us with Thy love, we pray Thee, so that at the hour of our death we may gain the victory over our enemy and deserve to obtain a heavenly crown.

(*Collect, St. Camillus of Lellis, July 18*)



O GOD Who didst strengthen blessed Vincent with the power of an apostle for preaching the Gospel to the poor and for increasing the honor of the ecclesiastical state; grant, we humbly pray, that we who seek to venerate him for his holy life, may also profit by the example of his virtue.

(*Collect, St. Vincent of Paul, July 19*)



O GOD Who for spreading the greater glory of Thy Name didst strengthen the Church Militant with a new army by means of blessed Ignatius; grant that we who wage the spiritual fight on earth may with his help and in imitation of his example, become worthy to be crowned with him in heaven.

(*Collect, St. Ignatius of Loyola, July 31*)



O GOD Who didst inflame blessed Alphonsus Mary, Thy confessor and bishop, with burning zeal for the salvation of souls, and through him didst beget new children for Thy Church; grant, we beseech Thee, that imbued with his wholesome doctrine and strengthened by his example, we may, by Thy grace, be able happily to come to Thee.

(*Collect, St. Alphonsus Mary of Liguori, August 2*)



O GOD Who didst strengthen blessed Peter with wondrous charity and patience for aiding the enslaved Negroes when Thou didst summon them to the knowledge of Thy name; grant, through his intercession, that seeking the things of Jesus Christ, we may love our neighbors in deed and truth.

(*Collect, St. Peter Claver, September 9*)



MAY the heavenly mystery, O Lord, enkindle in us the fire of that love with which Thy virgin blessed Teresa consecrated herself to Thee as a victim of love for mankind.

(*Postcommunion, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, October 3*)



TEACHING AND DIRECTING THE YOUNG

O GOD Who didst raise up the holy confessor John Baptist to promote the Christian education of the poor and to confirm the young in the way of truth; . . . mercifully grant that, helped by his prayer and example, we may be inflamed with zeal for Thy glory in saving souls and deserve to become sharers of his crown in heaven.

(*Collect, St. John Baptist de la Salle, May 15*)



O GOD, Father of mercies, grant in virtue of the merits and intercession of blessed Jerome, whom Thou didst will to be a father and helper of orphans, that we faithfully preserve the spirit of adoption whereby we are, in name and in truth, Thy children.

(*Collect, St. Jerome Aemilian, July 20*)



O GOD Whom it has pleased to shed luster on Thy Church by the merits and teaching of Thy confessor blessed Dominic; grant, through his intercession, that the Church may not lack temporal help, and may continually advance in spiritual growth.

(*Collect, St. Dominic, August 4*)



O GOD Who has deigned by means of St. Joseph, Thy confessor, to provide Thy Church with a new band of helpers for training the minds of the young in knowledge and piety; grant, we beg Thee, that by his example and intercession, we may so work and teach as to gain an everlasting reward.

(*Collect, St. Joseph Calasanctius, August 27*)



HE that shall receive one such little child in My Name, receiveth Me. Alleluia.

(*Communion versicle, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, May 25*)



IN TIME OF TEMPTATION

BLESSED is the man that endureth temptation! For when he hath been proved he shall receive the crown of life.

(*Alleluia verse, St. Francis Xavier, December 3*)



PARTICIPATION IN SACRED LITURGY

GRANT, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that the examples of Thy saints may rouse us to lead a better life; so that through observing their feast days we may also emulate their deeds.

(*Collect, St. Felix, priest, martyr, January 14*)



O GOD Who didst choose blessed Pius for the supreme pontificate to crush the enemies of Thy Church and to reform divine worship; grant that his prayers ever be our defense, and that we may be so faithfully attached to the service of Thy praise that, foiling all the snares of our enemies, we may abide in Thy peace for ever.

(*Collect, Pope St. Pius V, May 5*)



CONSTANCY, PERSEVERANCE

O GOD, the strength of all who put their trust in Thee, Who didst fill blessed Gregory, Thy confessor and bishop, with the virtue of constancy in defending the freedom of Thy Church; grant that, helped by his prayers and example, we too may with fortitude overcome all opposition.

(*Collect, Pope St. Gregory VII, May 25*)

**DEPENDENCE ON GRACE**

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, Who having endowed blessed Jane Frances with wonderful strength of spirit, wast pleased to lead her, ever consumed with love of Thee, along the path of perfection throughout the whole course of her life, and through her to bless Thy Church with a new and illustrious family; graciously regard her merits and intercession, and grant that we who know how weak we are and who trust wholly in the strength that comes from Thee may, by the help of Thy grace, overcome the hostility of the forces that oppose us.

(*Collect, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, August 21*)



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOR A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD

PROFESSED RELIGIOUS who cooperate with the grace of their state draw close to God. They see themselves in His light—as far as He grants to them and to the extent they can bear. They see the purpose of their existence, the pattern of all that befalls them, and especially their human failings sharply and clearly. Making their life pleasing to the Lord is their dominant concern.

With the saints this resolve is a burning passion, not of recklessness or headlong action, but of intensity and firmness. Many of them who composed prayers to express their zeal wrote most appealingly on this thought. Religious of today may well learn from them.



ST. BEDE

O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, do Thou open wide my heart and teach it by the grace of Thy Holy Spirit to ask for what is pleasing to Thee. Direct my thoughts and my senses so to think and to act that by a worthy manner of life I may deserve to obtain the eternal joys of the heavenly kingdom. Direct my actions according to Thy commandments so that ever striving to keep them in my life I may receive for my deeds the eternal reward.⁵⁸



ST. ANSELM

OMNIPOTENT GOD, merciful Father, kind Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.

Grant me pardon of my sins. Put me on my guard against all allurements, temptations, and harmful pleasures; and enable me to gain the victory over them.

Give me the grace to stay at a distance, both in thought and deed, from all that Thou forbiddest, and to perform in perfect observance what Thou commandest.

Give me to believe in and hope for, to love and to live what Thou knowest and willest, and to the extent that Thou hast appointed for me.

Bestow on me compunction begotten of humility and gratitude; prudent abstinence and mortification of the flesh in order that I may love Thee, turn to Thee in petition, praise Thee, reflect lovingly on Thee, and make my deeds and thoughts harmonize with Thy will. Give me a pure, composed, and devoted mind as well as a true and efficacious knowledge of Thy law, that I may always progress humbly toward the greater good and never grow negligent.

Do not abandon me, Lord, to my own will, to human ignorance and weakness, to my own deserts, nor to anything other than Thy loving Providence. But govern my whole being, my thought, and my action according to Thy good pleasure, so that Thy will alone may always be done by me, and in me, and concerning me. Deliver me from all evil, and lead me to eternal life. Amen.³⁹



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

ALMIGHTY, eternal, just and merciful God, give to us wretches to do for Thee what we know Thee to will, and to will always that which is pleasing to Thee; so that inwardly purified, inwardly illumined and kindled with the flame of the Holy Ghost, we may be able to follow in the footsteps of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and by Thy grace alone come to Thee, the Most High, who in perfect Trinity and simple Unity livest and reignest and gloriest God Almighty for ever and ever. Amen.⁴⁰



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

BESTOW on me, most merciful God, the fervent zeal of desiring the things that please Thee, and diligence in searching for them faithfully in my life. Grant me the wisdom necessary for finding them, and grace to accomplish them for the praise and glory of Thy name.

Direct my life, that I may possess the knowledge for doing what Thou dost demand of me: help me to do what I am supposed to do, in the way I am supposed to do it, and as is most beneficial for my soul.

Do not permit either prosperity or adversity to make me negligent in duty, or separate myself from Thee. Keep me from being puffed up with pride by the one, or driven to despair by the other. Teach me to give humble thanks when all goes well, and to be armed with patience when difficulties arise. In this way I will learn to rejoice only in what draws me to Thee, my blessed Jesus, and to have sorrow only for what separates me from Thee.

When I am put to the test, give me the courage to seek to please no one but Thee, and never fear to displease anyone but Thee.

May what is short-lived and passing cease to hold attraction for me, Lord; but make me love all that is Thine for Thy sake, and Thyself more than all else.

Deprive whatever is indulged in without relation to Thee of its power to give me joy: do not let me desire anything that is foreign to Thee. May labor undertaken for Thy love always gratify me; may leisure that is not enjoyed by reference to Thee be irksome.

Give me the grace to lift up my heart to Thee often. When I become forgetful, grant that I may have sorrow for my sins with a firm purpose of amendment.

Make me, Lord God, obedient without contradiction; poor without turning in envy to those who are materially blessed; pure with no stain of corruption; patient without murmuring; humble without hypocrisy; cheerful without giving way to levity; sorrowful without dejection. Grant me the grace to be serious-minded without taking myself too seriously; busily engaged without the dissipation of my spiritual energies; blessed with fear of Thee without loss of hope; given to a love of truth without deceit; devoted to the performance of good works without presumption; possessed of charity to correct my neighbor without pride, and to instruct him by word and example without pretending to be other than I truly am.

Bestow on me, most loving Lord, a heart so devoted to prayer and watchfulness that worldly curiosity cannot distract it from Thee; a heart so noble that no unworthy attachment can draw it downward; a heart so righteous that no evil can turn it aside from what is virtuous; a heart of such constancy that hardship cannot overcome it; a heart so free from the allurements of sin that the most violent temptation has no power to conquer it.

Give me, O my Lord God, understanding for knowing Thee; earnestness for seeking Thee; wisdom for finding Thee; the grace of a life pleasing to Thee; the perseverance of hoping in Thee to the end; and the unshakable confidence of finally enjoying Thee for ever.

May I accept present afflictions as Thy punishments in penance; and use Thy blessings as the operations of Thy grace; but more than all else, have part in Thy heavenly joy as Thy glorious reward, Thou, Who livest and reignest, God, for ever. Amen⁴¹



ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

DEAREST LORD, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve Thee as Thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not ask for reward, save that of knowing that I am doing Thy will.⁴²



CARDINAL NEWMAN

O LORD, I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I—more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfill Thy high purposes in me whatever they may be—work in and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—I ask not to know—I simply ask to be used.⁴³



FOOTNOTES

¹ de Bruyere, Madame Cecile. *The Spiritual Life and Prayer; according to Holy Scripture and Monastic Tradition*. London: Art and Book Company, 1900. p. 74.

² See Morin, Dom Germain, O.S.B. *The Ideal of the Monastic Life Found in the Apostolic Age*; translated from the French by C. Gunning. London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1914. Chapter IV of this ascetical masterpiece on "Baptism and Profession" (p. 49-66) presents the teaching of the Fathers and merits repeated reading.

³ *Summa Theologica*, II, IIae, 189, art. 3, ad 3.

⁴ St. Ambrose, *de poenitent.*, lib. II, c. 10, n. 96. P.L. 16: 541.

⁵ *The Raccolta; prayers and devotions enriched with indulgences*; authorized by the Holy See. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1952. N. 287, p. 203.

⁶ Alcuin of York. *Beati Alcuini Opera. De Psalmorum usu liber. XI, Oratio monachorum* (first part of a lengthy prayer; translated freely). P.L. 101: 502.

⁷ St. Bernard. *Confessionis privatae formula seu oratio poenitentis ad Christum devotissima, quae B. Bernardo non male adscribitur*. P.L. 183: 773, 774. As the title indicates, it is not certain that the prayer is the composition of St. Bernard, but that there are serious reasons for attributing it to him. Many of the phrases are taken from the Liturgy of Lent, indicating that the prayer may well have been composed during the sacred season.

⁸ *D. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici et Scholarum Catholicarum Patroni monita et preces*. Vienna: Woerl, 1882. p. 69.

⁹ No appropriate prayer for the examination of conscience was found, despite diligent search. This prayer has been composed principally from Marmion's Chapter on "Compunction of Heart" [in: Marmion, Dom Columba, O.S.B., *Christ, The Ideal of the Monk*. London: Sands, 1926, p. 148 f.]

¹⁰ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Sacra Virginitas*, March 25, 1954. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 46: 161 f. Opening paragraph of the Encyclical. Official Vatican Translation, issued by N.C.W.C.

¹¹ Ketter, Peter, *Christ and Womankind*; translated from the second and enlarged edition, by Isabel McHugh. Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952. p. 174.

¹² Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald, O.P., quoting another in *The Three Ages of Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life*. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948. 2:111.

¹³ Marmion, Dom Columba, O.S.B. *Sponsa Verbi: the Virgin Consecrated to Christ; spiritual conferences*; translated from the French by Dom Francis Izard, O.S.B. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1925. p. 59.

¹⁴ Hedley, John Cuthbert, O.S.B. *A Retreat*. London: Burns & Oates, 1894. p. 379.

¹⁵ Wolter, D. Maurus, Abbas de S. Martini de Beuron. *Praecipua Ordinis Monastici Elementa*. Bruges: Desclée, de Brouwer et Soc., 1880. p. 486, 487.

¹⁶ Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, "On the Condition of Labor," May 15, 1891. [in: *Five Great Encyclicals*. New York: Paulist Press, 1939. p. 1.]

¹⁷ Suhard, Emmanuel Cardinal. *Growth or Decline? The Church Today*; translated by James A. Corbett. South Bend, Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1948, p. 37, 38.

¹⁸ Pope Pius XI, Apostolic Letter, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, March 19, 1924. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 16: 133 f. Especially on p. 135.

¹⁹ St. Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*; translated by F.J. Sheed. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943. p. 256.

²⁰ *Oratio contra vitia. Libellus Precum Sacrarum, ex MS Floriacensi annorum circiter 900, apud Martène, de Antiquis Ecclesiae Ritibus*. Appendix IV. P.L. 101: 1411.

²¹ *Preces et Pia Opera*. Rome: Vatican Polyglott Press, 1938. N. 693, p. 556.

²² St. Gertrude. *Preces Gertrudianae*; editio nova altera, recognita a monacho Ordinis S. Benedicti Archiabbatiae Beuronensis. Freiburg: i. B. Herder, 1919. p. 230, 231.

²³ Jarret, Bede, O.P. "The Place of Sin in the Divine Economy." [in: *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, April, 1934. 34: 716. 720.] This excellent article of the renowned theologian and provincial of the English Dominicans for sixteen years (d. 1934), was subsequently and posthumously published under the title of "The Sinner" [in: *Life of the Spirit: A Blackfriars Review*, April, 1951. 5: 484-489.] It well merits permanent and more available form.

²⁴ St. Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*; edited and translated by Allan Ross, priest of the London Oratory. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1951. Ch. xii, Meditation iv, Of Sin, p. 56.

²⁵ Marmion, The Right Rev. D. Columba, O.S.B. *Christ, The Life of the Soul*. 5th ed. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1939. p. 178, 179.

²⁶ *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower of Jesus; a revised translation of the definitive Carmelite edition of her autobiography and letters...* New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1927. p. 194, 195.

²⁷ In his chapter "God of Wrath or God of Love?" in the recent book, *Love and Violence*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954, p. 188, Père Philippe de la Trinité, O.C.D. adds this striking sentence to a more florid translation of the same excerpt. Presumably the addition is in the original French of the *Autobiography* and for some reason was omitted in the definitive American edition.

²⁸ Latin text from Roman Ritual, title 3, Ch. 2, *Absolutionis forma communis* [in: *Rituale Romanum*, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1944. p. 79.]

²⁹ *D. Thomae Aquinatis... monita et preces*. Vienna: Woerl, 1882. p. 68.

³⁰ *Preces Gertrudianae...* Freiburg: B. Herder, 1919. p. 213.

³¹ Ranbeck, R.P. Aegidius, monachus Schyrensis benedictinus. *Parasceve mortalitatis humane*. Ingolstadt: Typis Joh. Philippi Zinch, 1676. p. 36.

³² *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent celebrated under the Sovereign Pontiffs, Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV*; translated by Rev. J. Waterworth. London: Burns and Oates, 1848. Session xiv, Ch. 8, p. 102, 103. Excerpt adapted and arranged for brevity.

³³ Guéranger, Rt. Rev. Dom Prosper, Abbot of Solesmes. *Religious and Monastic Life Explained*; authorized version from the French by Jerome Veth, O.S.B., Conception Abbey, Conception, Mo. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1908. p. 24-27. Abbreviated and paraphrased for present purpose.

³⁴ St. Bede. *Ascetica: libellus precum B. Bedae Venerabilis, oratio prima*. P.L. 94: 529.

³⁵ *D. Thomae Aquinatis . . . monita et preces*. Vienna: Woerl, 1882. p. 61-63.

³⁶ St. Anselm, *Oratio 62, Ad angelum custodem*. P.L. 158: 967. As with many of St. Anselm's prayers, one finds slightly various readings of the text; all of them are substantially the same.

³⁷ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*. November 20, 1947. (Vatican Library translation, issued by N.C.W.C., June, 1948, § 167, p. 57, 58.)

³⁸ *Devotions of St. Bede and Other Ancient Prayers*; arranged by Abbot Gasquet. London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1907. p. 45. Latin text to be found P.L. 94: 529.

³⁹ St. Anselm, *Oratio 9, Ad Deum*. P.L. 158: 876.

⁴⁰ St. Francis of Assisi [in: *Franciscan Life in Christ*, by Mark Stier, O.F.M. Cap., Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1953. p. 89, quoting *The Writings of St. Francis*; translated by Paschal Robinson, O.F.M., Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1906. p. 118.]

⁴¹ *D. Thomae Aquinatis . . . monita et preces*. Vienna: Woerl, 1882. p. 63.

⁴² St. Ignatius of Loyola. This translation has been adopted because it is that used by the Jesuits of the Missouri Province (booklet for private circulation), which was lent for the present purpose.

⁴³ Newman, John Henry Cardinal. *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1893. p. 301, 302.



