

THE MEANING OF FREQUENT CONFESSION OF DEVOTION

How is it possible to give intrinsic reasons for making frequent ‘confessions of devotion’? This is the question with which this essay will be concerned.

There is no question here, therefore, of proving that it is *possible* to have venial sins forgiven by sacramental absolution, and this even on their own and independently of the sacramental forgiving of mortal sins. This possibility can be presupposed here. On the other hand, the mere possibility of confessing merely venial sins does not yet explain why more *frequent*, e.g. weekly, confession of devotion fits, in an internally meaningful and harmonious manner, into the total organic structure of the spiritual life. For every vital function, besides its mere possibility, has also to be incorporated into and subordinated to the meaning of life as a whole. Thus it cannot be determined from the mere possibility of confession of merely venial sins alone whether frequent sacramental confession of venial sins can be harmoniously fitted into the correctly balanced construction of the practices of the spiritual life. The history of the confession of devotion shows that a truly spiritual life does not always and in all circumstances necessarily demand such a habit of confession, for the confession of devotion was unknown for several centuries. It will become even clearer that this question cannot simply be answered by the affirmation of the possibility of confession of devotion, when we come to discuss some of the actual attempts which have been made to prove it in this way.

One thing should be noted from the very outset: no eventual difficulty about the justification of frequent confession of devotion can arise from the assumption that the spiritual life – at least at a certain stage of its development – excludes frequent concern with one’s own sinfulness. On [178] the contrary, the more genuine and the deeper one’s spiritual life is, the more (and the more directly) it will grow out of the ultimate, basic fact of our being, and the more exclusively the religious activity of the person will centre round the truly decisive conditions of our life. But these conditions undoubtedly include the fact that we are sinners and that, precisely as a sinner, man is called by Christian redemption before the countenance of the triune God. If our life is adoration of the triune God, then surely it is always adoration of the God who has been revealed in the countenance of Christ, who was crucified for our sins. Christianity knows of no other God besides the God of the one who died for our sins. If our spiritual life is the working-out of our salvation in fear and trembling, then we can never forget that we are only saved in hope and that we still have to fight against the devil, the world and the flesh. If our spiritual life is God’s grace and his works in us, then it is always a grace which was granted to the children of wrath without any merit on their part. If the life of a Christian is joy in the Holy Spirit, it is the joy of the redeemed who knows how to praise the mercy of the Lord all the better the more keenly he realizes his own unworthiness which has been visited by God’s mercy. Hence the spiritual life does not merely pass through one particular period when man is filled with a sense of the seriousness of God’s judgements on sin, but over and over again this life rises out of the dark depths of one’s own powerlessness into the eternal light of merciful grace and we still pray before the Consecration and before Communion: ‘*ab aeterna damnatione nos eripi . . . jubeas*’, ‘*et a te numquam separari permittas*’. Thus it is not the frequent concern with one’s sinfulness which puts frequent confession of devotion into question. Yet this alone does not yet answer our question. The recognition that one is a sinner is not, after all, dependent on sacramental confession. A St Augustine was able to pray his *Miserere* on his death-bed without going to confession.

At this point, one might ask oneself in general whether the attempt to discover the inner meaning of frequent confessions of devotion can have any success at all or whether the frequent confession should not rather be rejected as a false development of the spiritual life. Here and there, such a view has in fact been expressed during the last few centuries. Yet we must hold on to the possibility of justifying frequent confession of devotion, and this for reasons which are quite independent of whether a particular attempt at such an explanation of its meaning can be seen to be successful or not. These reasons lie in the approval and encouragement [179] given to confessions of devotion by the Church. This encouragement given to it by the Church carries theologically speaking such great weight, however, that confession of devotion cannot possibly be a false development in the history of the spiritual life. It will be sufficient here to refer the reader to the practice of the religious Orders and communities based on rules approved by the Church and to the prescriptions of Canon Law.¹ In addition, there is the explicit rejection of the 39th proposition of the Synod of Pistoia by Pius V: he rejected the disapproval of frequent confession of devotion expressed by this Synod, as presumptuous, pernicious and contrary to the practice of pious and holy people approved by the Council of Trent. Such a general, long-standing, obligatory exercise of positive actions in the whole Church cannot possibly be regarded as a false ascetic development. Such good and useful developments of the spiritual life in the Church are not refuted by proving what no one denies, viz. that for a long time they did not exist in the Church. The Body of Christ has to grow. The Spirit of God is always with the Church and the development of her spirituality; he was also – just as much or as little – with the spirituality usually referred to as ascetical, post-Tridentine or some other name, and which one is so fond of ‘improving’ by appealing to the good old days of the Church’s piety. The individual believer always finds the Spirit of God most surely in the Church of his own day. Thus it cannot be a malformation of the spiritual life if the Christian, docile to the spirit of his Church, sees in frequent confessions of devotion a practice which fits harmoniously into the spiritual life in its ideal overall structure.

But which among the ultimate structural laws of the spiritual life can allow us to trace frequent confession back till it is seen as a normal manifestation of that life? This is the question which is not yet solved by what we have said. It naturally cannot be a question of something which would make this frequent confession absolutely necessary. For confession of devotion cannot be proved to be absolutely necessary for the maintenance or development of the spiritual life.² All that is required is a reason which [180] would make meaningful as a particular and special practice of the spiritual life.

The defence of frequent confessions of devotion has always drawn attention to particular characteristics of this kind of confession which might well lead one to suspect them to be suitable for that explanation of its meaning which we are looking for. These characteristics are above all spiritual direction, remission of sins and the increase of grace. These factors are certainly connected with confession of devotion. Yet it may be doubted whether they alone sufficiently explain confession of devotion as an independent function of the spiritual life.

To take spiritual direction first; it cannot be denied that a good deal of thorough spiritual direction adapted to the individual personality may be connected with a good confession of devotion, and this especially if one observes the special indications given by ascetic theology for the furtherance of spiritual direction (as, e.g., the declaration of the basic fault, of a

¹ CIC c. 595 § 1, n. 3: weekly confession for Religious, c. 1367, n. 2: the same rule for seminarians in episcopal seminaries; c. 125, n. 1: frequent confession demanded of all clerics; c. 931 regards confession twice a month as nothing extraordinary even for the ordinary faithful. In addition, cf. Pius XII’s Encyclicals *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei*.

² Not even in the sense in which one tries to prove Holy Communion to be ‘necessary in itself’ for the preservation of the supernatural life.

particular resolution and its carrying out). Some people may perhaps prefer such a form of spiritual direction arising quite naturally from the secret nature of this sacrament and the objectivity associated with it. Thus, under this aspect, one certainly need not regret the fact that the sacrament of Penance and spiritual direction have never been separated from one another in Western spirituality³ in the way in which this was to some extent the case in the ascetic practice of the ancient Greek monks where the pneumatic, spiritual direction and the sacramental institution of confession had little to do with each other. By combining the two, spiritual direction will always preserve a certain sacramental consecration while the sacramental remission of sins will be preserved from becoming externalized. Indeed, once the inner meaningfulness of frequent confession of devotion is presupposed, there is nothing to stop the further supposition that the prescription of confession of devotion is one way among others in which the Church tries to accomplish the direction of consciences and of souls which seems necessary to her for certain categories of her children. In this sense, the advantages for spiritual direction may well be the extrinsic reason for the demand of frequent confession of devotion, but they are not by this fact alone the intrinsic reason for this demand. For one thing, a sufficient direction of consciences given exclusively in confession [181] will be rather difficult to achieve in many cases; in other words, some form of spiritual direction and advising will be necessary or, at least useful, outside the sacrament. But then it is difficult to see why it does not take place altogether outside confession. If confession of devotion is regarded too much from the side of spiritual direction alone, there will always be the danger of misunderstanding Penance in its sacramental character; there will always be a danger then of overrating its medicinal, psychological usefulness for the spiritual life, the danger that the priestly minister of a sacrament will be turned too much into a highly sensitive psychologist. Finally, and this is decisive, the usefulness or necessity for the spiritual life of advising consciences simply gives rise to spiritual direction as a useful or necessary function of the spiritual life but not to a sacramental happening.

With regard to the remission of sins as such,⁴ the following reason makes it unfeasible to regard the remission of sins as the real reason which gives frequent confession of devotion its meaning: the venial sins of someone living in the state of grace are already remitted by imperfect contrition. Thus confession of devotion is always and in every case the sacramental remission of the guilt of venial sin already forgiven before by contrition; for without any contrition at all, forgiveness is impossible in the sacrament. Since, moreover, there is no duty to make such a confession, it is difficult to see how it can be based solely on an effect which is always and in every case already present even without it. Even if, following some theologians, one wanted to suppose without any very clear reason⁵ that only imperfect contrition with a certain degree of intensity or arising from higher motives remits venial sins by itself and without the sacrament, this does not help us very much in our question. after all presupposes an earnest striving [182] for growth in the spiritual life and a certain degree of love of God, so that it will not be difficult in this case to awaken this higher imperfect contrition, provided there is some honest turning away from the venially sinful inclination.

³ The efforts made by the new Canon Law to leave the job of spiritual direction as far as possible in the hands of the confessor in non-priestly religious communities also point in the same direction. Cf. *CIC* c. 530, § 1/2.

⁴ I.e., if one prescind from the fact that the remission of sins takes place precisely in a sacramental manner, and this by a sacrament which as such is directed in the primary and most characteristic intention of its meaning to the remission of sins. If, however, one includes these factors and asks oneself about the exact properties of a remission of sin precisely by a sacrament which has the direct purpose of doing this, then this investigation will lead one in the direction in which we are here looking for the solution to our question.

⁵ *Plus minus non mutat speciem* is valid even in this case. Every truly perfect contrition effects a loosening of man from that sinful attachment which finds its expression in the particular venial sin repented of every such contrition is informed by the habitual love which lives as a presupposition in such a person. It is difficult to see why such a contrition should not remit venial sins.

Thus, even presupposing this view, it never comes to a first remission of venial sins in practice and so our question remains unsolved. Furthermore, it is not only explicit contrition which remits venial sin but every practical supernatural activity of the justified does so, to the extent in which and in so far as it is of its nature opposed to the venial sin concerned and thus implicitly contains contrition for this sin. Hence, even our ‘daily’ sins can be remitted by many different means (Council of Trent, 14, 5). Moreover, the Holy Eucharist is ‘the antidote which liberates us from our daily faults’ (Council of Trent, 13.2). Thus it is the reception of the Holy Eucharist which, according to the teaching of the Church, seems to be the sacramental practice which causes the remission of venial sins in our life of grace.⁶ Thus if we regard only the remission of venial sins as such, the overcoming of such merely retarding but not destructive interferences with the supernatural life of love would seem to be the task of the Holy Eucharist – a sacrament of the living, the sacrament of the life of grace which conserves itself and grows – rather than the task of Penance, which first and foremost is a sacrament of the dead, the sacrament of the reawakening of the lost life of grace. Hence the remission of venial sins as such does not suffice by itself to make confession of devotion comprehensible as a special function in the total life of grace.

Something similar is true of the increase of grace.⁷ Even this important task of the spiritual life can be achieved in many different ways, and sacramentally especially by the Holy Eucharist; for, strengthening, increase and complete fulfilment of the life of grace, increase of habitual charity and awakening of actual charity are all among the first and most characteristic effects of the Holy Eucharist. It is true, of course, that every sacrament [183] – and therefore also the confession of devotion – increases grace. But since it has this effect in common with other activations of the spiritual life, this is not sufficient to assign confession of devotion its proper place, the place which justifies its position in relation to these other spiritual practices.

If the properties of the confession of devotion we have discussed so far have thus been proved to be insufficient for solving the question we have posed, this is in no way meant to imply that these properties do not in fact exist or that they may not serve as purposes or motivations of the one who confesses. All these effects are given together with confession of devotion; they are all significant and more decisive for our actions than that characteristic which we are now trying to prove to be what is specific to the confession of devotion. For, two different activations of the life of grace can agree in an objectively very significant (generic) effect (thus, e.g., one sick person may be restored to the life of grace by the Anointing of the Sick, while another may be restored by absolution: two sacraments with the same effect which is also objectively the most significant one) and yet must nevertheless be distinguished in the inner structure of their meaning by a specific difference, if we are to make them comprehensible as two different activations. In our question, it is ultimately not a matter of the specific difference of confession as such but of the essential characteristic of frequent confession of devotion as a special function among other activations (not merely of a sacramental kind) of the life of grace. It is quite true that this characteristic will necessarily have to follow from the nature of confession as a *sacramental* act of forgiving sins, *directly* ordained to the remission of sins, for this is precisely the characteristic by which the confession of devotion distinguishes itself from those other acts which can be presumed to be

⁶ This can no doubt be said even if one does not assume that Holy Communion – presupposing the penitential attitude – remits venial sins directly and of itself, and not merely by stimulating personal, sin-remitting acts. For when the Council of Trent mentions the remission of venial sins as an explicit effect of the Holy Eucharist, it surely must be a question of an effect which belongs to it not merely in the way in which ultimately every sacrament forgives venial sins. On the other hand, one will have to keep firmly in mind that the remission of venial sins is not the primary and most characteristic intention of the meaning of the Holy Eucharist.

⁷ Both as far as sanctifying grace and the right to helping grace are concerned.

just as capable of taking over the function of remission of sins in the spiritual life as the confession of devotion. This specific property of confession, as distinct from other sin-remitting acts of the spiritual man, must therefore be the basis of the meaning which justifies the confession of devotion and its frequent use in the spiritual life.

But in what precisely does this special significance of the sacrament and of sacramental penance consist?

All sacraments presuppose in their growth a subjective, personal cooperation with grace. This personal activity of man – since it is supported by grace – already takes man away from himself into divine spheres; it [184] is in itself already divine life or at least has already a positive orientation towards this supernatural life. Already as such a supernatural activity and happening, the life of grace is primarily God's free, creative act, his work the act of his love, more than ours. To this extent, every supernatural work is already unique, independent, 'historical', and not merely an individual case of a clear general rule.⁸ But in the sacraments, this historical character becomes still clearer.

The supernatural life of redeemed humanity becomes visible in historical uniqueness, in the here and now of the Church on this earth, just as it also entered historically into humanity by revelation. Thus, the supernatural life – which, at least in itself, seems to lie quite apart from the human, historical reality – appears supported by what is visible and human, brought down into the earthly point of time, dependent on worldly things. And this spiritual life could not come otherwise; or at least only in this manner of appearing is its proper being accentuated.⁹ For this the supernatural character of our life from God means that this life is a freely creative, unique act of God, that it cannot be calculated by man and cannot be explained as a fulfilment or even an echo of merely human yearnings. On the contrary, by calling man to such a life, God has asked him to move out of the earthly spheres of his being and directs him beyond the paths prescribed for man by his own being. Such a vocation is therefore never simply given by the fact of man himself taken together with his inherent laws. Hence, such a calling does not come simply by the fact that there is a man; it is not simply the eternal universally binding, universally self-evident law of truth and goodness, but rather is a positive determination, a divine and incomprehensible 'free decision', i.e. the choice of God's freedom. If this is so, however, then such a revelation – if it takes place at all – can come only suddenly, here or there, at this or that point of history, so that there is not the same distance to the free God of supernature from every point of the being and history of man, both of the individual and of humanity as a whole. For He is a God who is merciful where and when He wills. To mention just one example of this [185] 'scandal' that the eternal salvation of man should be dependent on 'accidental truths of history': the cross which stood on the place of execution in Jerusalem in the year 33 according to our Western reckoning of time is the focal point of world history, and the bishop of Rome in Italy is the head of all those who will be saved. The pure 'Spirit', in contrast to history, is universal, is always equally near and equally distant, can be approached by anyone, can be reached equally quickly from every point of man's historical existence, floats as the realm of truth and goodness *over* history, giving meaning and value to everything historically individual and accidental. In Christian revelation, however, since there is question of what is gratuitous and supernatural, God and his salvation itself enter into history, become themselves historical, seize – not from above but from within – the fortuitousness of the historical here and now, blessing and judging man,

⁸ For instance, grace can be 'forfeited' but not a natural 'truth'. A person's supernatural life, with its decisions, is always a dialogue with a free God whose decisions cannot be calculated or directed by man. Thus man's supernatural life does not simply become history by man's answer, but is already history in God's call.

⁹ The first Vatican Council too derives the necessity of revelation from the supernatural nature of man's elevation by grace (sess. III, cap. 2). Revelation, however, understood as God's speaking to man, is necessarily a historical happening.

so that the ultimate decision of man is not concerned with ‘truth’ or ‘goodness’ in the realm of the pure Spirit, but with Jesus of Nazareth. In the same way, and for the same reason for which revelation has come historically, redeemed humanity, the kingdom of God, and the Church too are visible and historical. And just as the Church herself is visible, so also are the manifestations of her life, her vital powers, by which she herself – the Body of Christ – lays hold of the individual in the power of Christ and draws him more and more deeply into the circle of her life. And just as in the Church, so the historical and visible nature of the sacramental events in which the stream of supernatural life is carried by the passing uniqueness of words and gestures – is also meant to reveal again and again that the grace of the new life is not owed but rather is unmerited, the free proof of God’s goodness, that it proceeds from God and is not effected by man, that it is supernature and grace. This first property of our elevation by grace to the life-circle of God cannot be stressed better than by the fact that God’s grace comes in a historically visible manner, that it encounters man in sacraments.¹⁰

What is true in this sense of the sacraments in general is true also of the sacrament of Penance in particular. God’s forgiving grace comes to man by the decision of someone else, viz. the effective juridical verdict of the Church in her priestly representative. It is not the good, contrite man who causes the remission of sins, but God’s free mercy. Although this is [186] true of every remission of sin, even of that caused by merely subjective although grace-elevated¹¹ contrition, this is nevertheless revealed more clearly in Confession since there remission comes visibly and historically, and this in such a way that Confession causes both remission and grace, which are different from and independent of the grace and remission merited by contrition. Furthermore, Confession by its innermost meaning is primarily and directly concerned with this remission of sins and hence the sacramentality of Confession emphasizes above all the gratuitous and supernatural nature of this very remission of sins. To this extent it is also distinguished from those other sacramental actions which are in fact connected with a sin-remitting effect, in particular the Blessed Sacrament. These other sacraments are primarily directed to something else; they are not primarily penance and remission of sins.¹² Hence they do not reveal this character of the supernatural, free act of God as expressed in the remission of sin as such.

Since the recipient of a sacrament should enter into the objective nature and sense of the sacrament, and indeed does so,¹³ the ‘meaning-content’ of such a sacramental and in fact directly intended remission of sins will also make itself felt in the personal experience of the recipient and consequently also in the habitual spiritual outlook of the recipient. Every confession in its turning to the historically visible is a protest against every hidden rationalism of a humanitarian spiritual piety; it is an acknowledgement that ultimately our sins are remitted by God’s act alone and that ultimately he, the free God of grace, can be found only in his historical revelation, in his visible Church and his visible sacraments.¹⁴

¹⁰ Not as if every grace – even the non-sacramental grace of the opus operantis – were not thus the work of God and the expression of his free goodness. But this is more obvious in the visibleness of a sacrament, which causes grace of itself.

¹¹ This elevation, to which we cannot of ourselves contribute anything and which nevertheless is decisive, shows that even the ‘merit’ of contrition which causes forgiveness is itself again a gift from God.

¹² Since even the subjective outlook of the recipient must after all adapt itself more or less to this structure of meaning of the sacrament, what has been said applies also to the reception of a sacrament considered from the point of view of a spiritual experience.

¹³ The absolute minimum of this ‘entering into’ is included in the intention and disposition of the recipient necessary for validity and dignity, without which the sacrament does not come into being even objectively.

¹⁴ Without some sort of affirmation of such an element, there is no possibility of justification. For even when justification takes place without a sacrament, it always presupposes faith. The faith, however, means embracing a proper revelation (and not just a natural knowledge of God), i.e. a word by which God addresses man in a

Thus, every [187] confession is an open acknowledgement of the fact that only in this way does man ultimately find a merciful, forgiving and justifying God. That such an attitude is of decisive importance for the formation of a Catholic spiritual life requires no further explanation. It follows from this that frequent confession of devotion is most useful for the development of such a spiritual life.

Two further facts are organically associated with this. All contrition which is accompanied by the confidence that it will find forgiveness is also always a radical, humble placing of the sinful man in the hand of the God of inscrutable judgements, before whose staggering holiness and justice man, who is weak and unprepared, is never sure of having found grace (cf. Council of Trent, 4, c. 9; c. 13-14). 'I do not judge myself. I have indeed nothing on my conscience, yet I am not thereby justified. He who judges me is the Lord' (1 Co 3:4 sq.). But even this handing over of himself by man to the judgement of the holy God is expressed and reveals itself most clearly when even God's forgiveness – since it is different from man's contrition – becomes audible: and in this way it is revealed that more is necessary than just contrition. Even then there still remains a basic uncertainty about this earthly judgement of God passed on man, so that the hope of forgiveness still remains associated with that fear which alone renders love and confidence in the Infinite and Incomprehensible reverential and genuine. But the earthly judgement of God shows at any rate that God's answer must be added to man's contrition, so that He may have the last word and man may bow humbly before His judgement.

Furthermore: we have already looked at the sacraments as visible expressions of the life of the visible Church into which, considered as the Mystical Body of Christ, the individual believer is incorporated.¹⁵ Now, even though the merely venial sinner remains in this Body as a living member, yet every venial sin is in a true sense 'a spot and wrinkle' on the Bride of Christ. It is an obstruction to the love of God and as such it is also an obstacle to the free and radiant development in this member of the Church of that love which is poured out by the divine Spirit. 'If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it' (1 Co 12:26). Thus even venial sin is a spiritual injury, an injustice to the whole Body of Christ. This Body, however, is visible; it is a historical magnitude. Hence, if the [188] injustice done to it is to be repaired, then this could not happen more meaningfully and impressively than by acknowledging the sin before the priest, who is the representative of the community of Christ-believers, by having it forgiven by him and atoning for it by the penance imposed, in order to make reparation for the injury done to the Body of Christ. To this extent, confession of devotion is not merely a continued practice of the love of God but also a unique form of sacramental love of neighbour and a visible turning to the visible Body of Christ which is the Church.

Let no one say that this theory is too complicated to be meaningful for the spiritual life. Everyone, even the simplest believer, understands that it is something particularly salutary for him to encounter God's act of reconciliation visibly and audibly, when the visible redemptive act of the Cross reaches visibly and tangibly into the hours of his own life and into his ordinary life week by week, and when Christ's word of mercy – 'your sins are forgiven you' – remains eternally present not merely in its transcendent significance but almost in its earthly sound. For, just as this word spoken by Jesus is not simply an instructive statement of an eternally valid state of affairs quite independent of this word, but is the form in which – at the very moment it was spoken – the free act of divine forgiveness of sin took place, so also the words of absolution spoken by the priest do not simply 'declare' a philosophical truth about an always indulgent God, but they actually effect this not at all self-evident forgiveness

historical manner. Furthermore, even grace has also an inner orientation to the visible Church.

¹⁵ Cf. for the following: K. Rahner, 'Forgotten Truths concerning the Sacrament of Penance': *Theological Investigations II* (London & Baltimore 1963), pp. 135-174.

in the here and now in which they are spoken, so that this forgiveness remains eternally dependent on whether it really took place here and now in the words of the priest. The ordinary believer will not only understand this on account of the peculiarly tranquillizing and comforting nature of a grace which comes in this sacramental way, but also (the former is simply a consequence of this) because in this he always activates a basic characteristic of the Christian life, viz. the historical nature of God's desire to meet man. If the simple Christian seems to be less conscious of this, this is merely due to the fact that he almost automatically lives by the basic laws of the Christian faith and it is no 'scandal' to him that God's Son should have died for the salvation of the world two thousand years ago in Jerusalem and not at some other time or in some other place, or that God is closest to him when some priest – who, alas, has perhaps even the moment before shown little knowledge of psychology and little understanding for complicated souls – pronounces his *Ego te absolvo*.

[189] Though it may thus become clear that frequent sacramental confession, besides its objective and other effects, is also a training in a most basic Christian attitude towards God (and this towards the forgiving God), this does not of course make it possible to deduce *a priori* from its nature a mathematical rule as to its frequency. Any more exact determination of frequency is a matter for experience and positive law. There is no reason for doubting that the actual practice of the Church does as a general rule in fact hit the right measure. In individual cases it is recommendable to exercise a certain broadmindedness and latitude in applying such general rules regarding the frequency of confession to the individual circumstances and special needs of the penitent. For it must never be forgotten that there is no obligation of divine law to make a confession of devotion. No doubt there is also a frequency of confession which can no longer be justified for intrinsic reasons. In this matter, the principle 'the more the better' no longer holds. A sacramental judgement by God on the sinner of its very nature cannot be as frequent as, for example, the daily nourishment of the soul.

This clarification of frequent confessions of devotion does not of course say anything against the differences in attitude which this practice can have in different ways in the spiritual life of the individual, nor is it meant to deny that confession may be conducted and conceived in different ways according as to how the one Spirit of God may teach the different schools regarding the spiritual life.

That we might meet the reconciling God as often as possible in the way in which the God of 'un-owed' grace reveals himself most clearly: this is the meaning of frequent confession of devotion.