

THE STATUS OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Recently a new development has occurred in the sacrament of reconciliation that deserves to be examined.¹ For many centuries (since the early Middle Ages) the practice of this sacrament had hardly changed. Catholics had the impression that they were obliged to confess their sins at least once a year to their parish priest. And besides this the so-called confession of devotion was taken for granted by pious Catholics, who confessed minor sins in the sacrament of reconciliation more than once a year, or even as often as they received Holy Communion.

Today the sacrament of reconciliation is going through a critical stage. To put it in a few words, people go less frequently to confession, in many cases the sacrament is not received at all by Catholics who consider themselves devout Christians and who most likely receive Holy Communion every time they attend Mass. We wish to give some thought to the way one might pass judgment on such a crisis.

It is, of course, not true that every new development in the Church must be evaluated positively. There are undoubtedly developments of longer or shorter duration that are less desirable, that might even have to be resisted and suppressed. Because such a thing is quite possible in the Church, the question arises how the present state of the sacrament of reconciliation should be evaluated. This question must be asked, but the answer is not immediately clear. To answer it, we must first say something about another question, namely, what obligation divine law [206] imposes and does not impose on Christians with regard to individual sacramental confession.

CONFESSION AND SERIOUS SIN

The answer to the question about the obligation of divine law is that Catholics are obliged to receive the sacrament of reconciliation if, and only if, they have committed a sin that is subjectively and objectively grave. We will not inquire here how quickly they have to fulfill this obligation. This may be considered a secondary question, which we do not have to take up here. Actually this question has been answered by a commandment of the Church issued by the Fourth Lateran Council, which obliges a Catholic who has committed a sin that is objectively and subjectively grave to fulfill this obligation of the divine law within a year.

But we have to give some more attention to the general principle that we have mentioned above. According to the doctrine of the Council of Trent, it is difficult to question the obligation of Catholics who have committed a serious sin to erase their guilt by receiving the sacrament of reconciliation in individual confession, although even here a few theologians would have questions to ask. In such a case, neither purely subjective contrition with a private prayer for forgiveness nor a so-called penitential service is sufficient. Let us then take as our starting point that in such a case there exists the obligation of an “auricular” confession, an obligation imposed by divine law, which follows both from the nature of a person’s relation to the Church and from the nature of the Church herself and of the sacrament of reconciliation within the Church. Hence it is not within the Church’s power to

¹ On this see also K. Rahner, “Vom Geheimnis menschlicher Schuld und göttlicher Vergebung,” in *Geist und Leben* 55 (1982): 39-54.

abolish this obligation.

However, with such a principle the concrete practical question facing us is not yet answered. For when we admit this principle and want to translate it into practice, the question unavoidably arises about when such an objectively and subjectively grave sin exists. It is obvious that there are sins which do not belong to this category, which therefore a Christian does not have to confess. In catechism jargon we usually call them venial sins, as opposed to so-called grave or mortal sins. In other words, the question comes up now how to distinguish these two kinds of sins, which are essentially different. We are speaking not only of the *objective* difference between a grave and a venial sin, for instance, the objective difference between a murder and a voluntary inattention or distraction during prayer, or a voluntary but slight unkindness with regard to another person.

That there exists such an objective difference is a doctrine of the Church, which was clearly stated by the Council of Trent. But when we speak of an obligation to confess, we have to consider not only an objective distinction between grave and venial sins (only the former having to be confessed) but also the question of the person's subjective guilt. Certainly a person may violate an obligation that is, of its very nature, objectively grave in such a way that in God's eyes this person is not really guilty. It is wrong to poison somebody. But if, through some negligence, a pharmacist makes a mistake in preparing a prescription, and the client dies as a result, we may speak of an objectively grave offense. Yet subjectively, the error does not in the proper sense render the pharmacist absolutely guilty before God, that between God and this person there would occur an absolute, albeit remediable, separation.

So this principle, that we must have grave sins forgiven by means of an individual sacramental confession, must be understood for sins that are both objectively *and* subjectively grave. In the case of a sin that is objectively grave, but not really experienced as such by the person in question, there is, according to the doctrine of the Council of Trent, no absolute duty, obliging under pain of another grave sin, to make use of individual sacramental confession.

SUBJECTIVELY AND OBJECTIVELY GRAVE SIN

For many centuries – at least from the early Middle Ages until the present time – religious education in the Church more or less neglected this fundamental distinction between a sin that is both subjectively and objectively grave and one that is grave *only* objectively speaking. Ordinary Catholics in the sacramental confession that they made at least once a year, or even more often, simply confessed whatever the usual moral teaching called objectively grave. Not much thought had been given to the question whether the traditional evaluation of a sin by moral theologians was truly certain, or only a more or less reasonable but not absolutely certain opinion of theologians.

The obligation of Catholics, if not legitimately prevented, to attend Sunday Mass was called a grave obligation by theologians. Whoever did not fulfil it had committed a grave sin. Not much attention has been paid to the fact that in many cases the question came up whether an objective [208] transgression of this commandment of the Church was also subjectively a grave sin. Catholics simply confessed: "I have missed Sunday Mass so many times, although I would have been able to attend it, since I was not sick or in some other way legitimately prevented." And they have considered this the concrete performance of their obligation to confess serious sins.

Quite recently, for a number of reasons, there has been much discussion about what constitutes not only objectively serious sin but also one that is subjectively serious as well. First, even moral theologians now admit that, in a great number of cases, notwithstanding

traditional moral teaching, things that were formerly considered to be serious obligations or objectively grave sins are really not such. It is difficult to affirm today that every voluntary omission of a single Sunday Mass plunges Catholics into the same utter enmity with God that they would have incurred if they had treacherously murdered another person.

When we speak of sin today, we will make more distinctions and, in many cases, be more lenient with regard to *objective* gravity. We will also rightly and without any moral laxity say that, in many cases, there is no subjectively grave guilt. Many people do not in fact possess that power of moral discernment by which every objectively serious conflict with the divine will is felt to be so grave that they tell themselves: “If I do this anyway I say a really radical no to God and to God’s will.”

We know more clearly today than ever before that a great number of people have little power of discernment with regard to the urgency of a moral duty. That ability is often weaker than would be desirable. But it is weak. We know from modern psychology how often we may admit a lower degree of responsibility, not only in criminal cases but also in everyday life. Moreover, we also have the impression, rightly, that people who are poor, weak, living in a difficult environment will not so easily and so often enter into such a conflict with the divine will that this conflict (if not settled through contrition) would have to be punished with eternal damnation by God’s holy justice. We may even – and once more not without good reason – be of the opinion that a really subjectively serious sin, one that deserves eternal damnation, is not something that will occur very often and very easily in the life of a decent Christian. In this respect we are more optimistic, and why would we not have the right to be?

We do not have too high an opinion of the moral quality of the average Christian. We know that they are weak and strongly influenced by a public opinion that may be very un-Christian. Because of their background, [209] their lack of education, and the ups and downs of life, they may have a relatively obtuse and primitive moral sense. We cannot be very enthusiastic about the moral standards of most people today.

But at the same time, as Christians, we cannot rightly claim that people today are, as a rule, so wicked in the very core of their free will, that they address an absolute no to God, which is but the reverse side of eternal perdition. Basically we are more optimistic than Saint Augustine, who considered humanity *massa damnata* out of which only a few were saved through the exceptional grace of God.

DECREASE IN THE FREQUENCY OF CONFESSION

However, while on the question of the existence of subjectively grave guilt we take a more cautious position than formerly, and while we have a right to have an optimistic opinion of human beings in spite of their primitive moral sense, the question of when and how often a Catholic is strictly obliged to receive the sacrament of reconciliation is much more difficult. In its pastoral activity the Church has not tried very hard to make the faithful aware of the difference between objectively grave and subjectively grave guilt, nor has it elaborated this doctrine. But according to the Church’s official teaching it is undoubtedly true that only when the faithful have a sufficient moral (albeit not absolute) certitude that their sin is also subjectively grave are they obliged by divine law to go to confession. And if today, as explained above, we judge for good reasons that subjectively grave sins do not occur often or naturally in the life of an ordinary Christian, we have a right to say that the existence of a divine command to receive the sacrament of reconciliation does not occur as frequently as the formal pastoral doctrine practically and tacitly assumed.

We might, of course, say much more about what I explained above. We might speak of the problem of the difference between venial and grave sin, a question that is not as simple as I

have presented it above and as it is also assumed to be in our ordinary moral theology. We might inquire how, in the practice of Christian life, we might, with a certain moral certitude, reach a reasonable conclusion that in this case we have to do only with a subjectively venial sin, and in another case with a subjectively grave sin, and so on.

But here and now we cannot further discuss all these very important questions. We can only observe that, if we interpret more accurately [210] the obligation to confess, we will find it not so strange and inconsistent that people go less frequently to confession. Is this decline in the frequency of confession desirable or deplorable? Should it be stopped and reversed by means of prudent pastoral education? This is another question, about which we will have to say something later on. However, should someone ask whether the decreasing number of confessions is a clear proof that a great number of Catholics ignore the obligation to go to confession when they have committed a subjectively serious sin, we would answer this question negatively. The purely numerical decrease in the number of confessions does not allow us to conclude with certitude that today's Catholics transgress an important divine command. This might be said only if, on the one hand, people rarely went to confession and, on the other hand, if really subjectively grave sins occurred not rarely, but frequently. But since the latter statement cannot be made with certainty, and since we may certainly hope that such sins which render human beings worthy of eternal damnation do not, at least in a normal Christian life, occur frequently, or even at all, we may not, from the lower frequency of confessions, conclude with certainty that Catholics do not in fact comply with an obligation to confess that is objectively binding for them.

True, there are also Catholics who infringe such an obligation, while committing really serious sins, sins that are both objectively and subjectively grave. When a mother, who might very well have another child, who economically and personally would be quite capable of it, who is not living in cramped external conditions, but who merely out of laziness or for other shabby reasons, accepts an abortion, there is a real possibility that we are dealing not only with an objectively but also with a subjectively serious transgression of the fifth commandment.

But even if this is granted, it is not yet certain that subjectively serious guilt occurs so frequently in the life of the ordinary Christian that we may conclude, because of the infringement of the obligation to confess, that there exists a frightful and massive dechristianization. The praxis of the Church in pastoral activity, in sermons, in promoting the use of the confessional, and in catechetical instruction in the schools should not try to bring back a more frequent use of the sacrament by using false and invalid arguments, or by concealing principles that apply objectively in this matter and that we have mentioned above. Even a very devout Christian, on the authority of God's command, might say even at Easter: "I am not going to confession, and I am not thereby infringing the Church's commandment, because thanks to God's grace I know [211] that I am not guilty of any subjectively grave sin; therefore even at Easter there is no obligation for me to receive this sacrament."

I used to know a pious old lady who, possibly on account of a strange set of psychological reasons, was simply unable to enter the confessional and there to whisper something in the priest's ear. And she was a devout, prayerful woman, who would never hurt anybody and who loved God with her whole heart. We should tell her: If you have these subjective inhibitions against confession, you do not have to confess, even at Easter. That is perfectly all right, in full agreement with the doctrine of the Church and her commandments.

However, the considerations outlined above do not solve the problem. If only that which we have said up to now were important and taken into account, we might say that the present falling off in the frequency of confession is legitimate and nothing but the fulfillment of the divine precept that only really serious sins have to be confessed. We are rightly convinced that such sins are not all too frequent, or at least that there is no proof that they are very

frequent within the Church. Therefore, we might conclude, if today confessions are so scarce, this is nothing but the obvious application of the dogma which the Church proclaimed at the Council of Trent. However, things are not quite that simple.

CONFESSION – NOT PUT OFF UNTIL DEATH

To proceed further we must first submit a general consideration. There are necessarily in the Church many important things that are not immediately covered by a divine order, by the church institution itself. There are, for example, religious orders in the Church. The fact that a Franciscan, a Jesuit, a Benedictine order, and so on exists may not be considered a divine command strictly obliging on the Church. Yet there must exist in the Church the kind of life that flourishes in religious orders, that is organized and protected by them. We might say that the divine instructions about the Church and its life are, as it were, something like the skeleton of a living organism. Yet much more than bones are needed in the organism. There must be flesh, there must be metabolism, and so on. Something similar is true in the Church. There are religious orders, there are certain devotions, there are certain developments in theology, there are theological schools, there are special ways of leading a Christian life. All of these aspects of Christian life are present in the Church not simply as the result of a divine obligation.

[212] Almost paradoxically we might say: The Church is obliged by God to include realities, activities, signs of life that in themselves are not imposed by God. Whoever would claim that whatever expresses the life of the Church, of Christianity, needs a divine authentication *juris divini* would state something that is absolutely false and would – however strange this may sound – suppress the real life of the Church. In order to be fully alive the Church must include activities and lifestyles that cannot themselves immediately appeal to a divine authorization and that nevertheless belong more or less necessarily to the full life of the Church.

Something similar applies to frequent confession. The first evidence we might bring up is the simple fact noticed even by a few of the church fathers that, if only very serious sins were confessed, this obligation would in fact cancel itself out or be put off until the individual's death. If, for instance, it was certain that all the people waiting at the confessional had committed very grave sins – perjuring themselves, breaking their marriage vows in a really terrible way, and so on – it would be obvious that these people would not be waiting at the confessional, because, in that way they publicly accuse themselves of very grave sins. We cannot expect this from people.

This simple reason would already allow us to say that, if only grave sins were confessed because they have to be confessed, none would be confessed at all. From the pastoral point of view, it is clear that the Church will see to it that the sacrament of reconciliation is received also by those who are not obliged to receive it on account of a really grave sin. The ancient Church in fact experimentally demonstrates this. In the beginning only very grave sins were confessed. The result was that Christians often postponed confession until their deathbed

From the point of view of divine law it would be hard to demonstrate that such a postponement of confession of serious sins until the time of death is explicitly contrary to God's law. But everyone understands that a truly active Christian life, which supposes that one takes sin very seriously and that one is firmly resolved to be at peace with God, would be destroyed more or less by such a practice.

So from this point of view, the Church is right in her desire that the sacrament of reconciliation be used more often than is absolutely commanded. And ancient practice thoroughly convinced her that she may naturally use her powers of forgiving not only for

grave sins, in the strict sense of the word, but also for other offenses and sins. Jesus' statement in John 20:23, that when the Church forgives sins, she does so before [213] God, does not make any a priori distinction between sins. That is why it would be foolish to claim that the Church can only forgive very serious sins and cannot use for other sins the full power of forgiving given her by Jesus.

Moreover, there are still many other reasons that render frequent confessions of devotion meaningful. We cannot fully present and develop them here, because this would lead us too much into a theology of sin, into a theology of the life of a Christian between grace and sin, into a complete theology of the Church and of her nature as the sacrament of forgiveness in general. That is not possible here. We will only briefly mention a few points.

SACRAMENTAL AND EXISTENTIELL FORGIVENESS

First, for many centuries Christians have had the impression that their sins were more certainly and clearly forgiven when they submitted them to the sacramental judgment of the Church and heard God's forgiving word expressly from the mouth of the Church. If we are honest and use sober theological reflection, this conviction is not so obvious, for it is obviously true that, apart from grave sins, such sins can also be forgiven by God if we are truly sorry for them and refrain from them. Without such an inner disposition, which basically already brings about the forgiveness of such sins, the sacrament of reconciliation too would not have any effect. For those who only admit their imperfections and sins without at the same time being sincerely sorry and resolved to avoid them, sacramental confession is perfectly meaningless and useless. It was obvious to Saint Thomas Aquinas that whoever receives the sacrament of reconciliation must normally come to it in a state of mind that by itself before reception of the sacrament, already brings about the forgiveness of the sins for which one is truly sorry. From this point of view it is not so obvious why ordinary Christians feel that they may have more confidence in the remission of their sins when they receive sacramental absolution. It would be better not to separate this inner – we might say existentiell² – process of grace, justification, and forgiveness from the sacramental, ecclesial, bodily signifying process in the sacrament. It stands to reason, for instance, that if unbaptized adults believe, hope, and love before being baptized and turn with an inner heart-felt decision toward [214] the God of love, forgiveness, and grace, they are already justified *before* their baptism. Yet nobody will say: Therefore these adults, who are justified by their subjective acts, should forgo baptism. According to the principle stated above, baptism would be unnecessary, since its purpose is to render persons justified, and since these persons, before their baptism, are already justified, in the state of grace, bound to God in love through grace, and so on. This example, taken from another sacrament, from the most fundamental sacrament, shows that we should not consider the inner process and its outer sacramental embodiment to be two processes lying next to each other without any connection. They must be viewed as an inner unity. The sacramental sign must be the ecclesial incarnation of that which happens in the innermost center of a person's existence.

SACRAMENTAL ACTIVITY AS EMBODIMENT

In other domains too it is true that we almost necessarily translate through bodily expressions the inner sentiments of our heart. We do not simply love each other, we embrace each other,

² *Existentiell* might also be rendered "personally felt." –Translator.

kiss each other, and perhaps caress each other. We do not in inner secret loathing turn away from some outrage, we clench our fists. We do not merely adore God in the innermost core of our heart, we kneel down before God. In short, our innermost religious life in our relation to God spontaneously has the tendency to embody itself.

For the baptized sinner the fullest ecclesial embodiment of our turning away from guilt, of our turning back to God, is the Church's sacrament of reconciliation. There we not only hear mysteriously, intangibly, with the ears of faith, in the core of our heart, God's gentle word of forgiveness, we also hear with our bodily ears: "Your sins are forgiven." In God's place, commissioned by the Church, the priest causes the Church to make perceptible the intimate spiritual process, which – such is the nature of bodily humanity – has a congenital desire to be embodied.

Of course, this embodiment has many different degrees. When I like somebody I may shake hands with him, pat his back, I may perhaps also embrace him. And two people who love each other, who are really in love with each other, as a married couple, will express this innermost communion of their hearts not only by shaking hands or kissing each other, but in a much more intimate way. This embodiment of the most intimate subjective processes runs the whole gamut of intensities. Thus [215] people may really pray in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses," while having the genuine and true awareness, based on their faith, that God forgives them their sins. But they may also express this embodiment of their contrition, their hope of forgiveness, and their confidence in God in a much clearer and more solid way, precisely by having recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation. And even from the purely human point of view, independently of the Church's teaching on sacramental activity, such an expression of a human attitude rooted in our bodily nature not only expresses this inner attitude, but reciprocally it strengthens and deepens it.

When, for instance, two persons who love each other in true communion have in some way offended each other, it may happen – as is often the case in everyday life – that this is settled simply by carrying on as before without mentioning it further. Each party thinks, as it were, "Let bygones be bygones, let's forget it." But it may also happen that such an inner readiness to forgive becomes more radical, more genuine, more determined, if they express their forgiveness to each other. Pascal knew that a gesture expressing humility is not only the expression but also the cause of inner humility. There have been many people who have, as it were, finally had the courage to capitulate in love and hope before God only *after* kneeling down and not before.

In other words, the sacramental embodiment of contrition and forgiveness between God and humanity serves not only to express the fact of forgiveness in a human incarnational way, it also has the purpose of arousing that inner attitude of which it is a sign and an expression. This is the remarkable thing in human beings, that the body shapes the soul and the soul shapes the body. The inner and outer life are intimately connected, hence that *mutual* relation between that which in our body expresses our feelings and that which induces them.

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SIN AND FORGIVENESS

Many more considerations might, of course, be presented, but we cannot take them up here. For instance, the fact that practically, in all minor or major offenses and mistakes, we not only go astray as individuals, but we also assume a social debt. That too, among many other points, should be more carefully considered. Thinking up again a conviction that seemed obvious in the ancient and medieval Church until Luther, the Second Vatican Council taught that ecclesial forgiveness of sins also means our [216] reconciliation with the *Church*. The sinner offends not only God but also, more or less intensely, the Body of Christ. And this

offense inflicted on the Body of Christ is forgiven when one turns back to God with sorrow. It is therefore natural that this peace with the Church be embodied in and sealed by an act of the Church.

Much more might be said about this question that refers more to the usefulness of confession for one's supernatural growth, but we cannot do so here. It is a fact that most people clearly and deliberately face their sinfulness only when these sins are acknowledged and forgiven in the sacrament of reconciliation. Christians who lead a really Christian life must, of course, attach great importance to the petition for forgiveness of their sins in the Our Father. They should likewise take part in the confession of sins at the beginning of the eucharistic celebration, even though this is not in the strictest sense a sacramental action. They should occasionally attend a penitential service. Every night, in their evening prayers they should ask God's pardon for their sins, and so on. But individual sacramental confession, even though not imposed by divine law, is a concrete action that helps ordinary Christians to live up to this inner disposition which makes them constantly turn away from sin and turn back to God. The more searching examination of conscience, the possibility of making, on the occasion of such a sacramental confession, what the French call a *revision de vie*, all these and many other advantages are given with sacramental confession, advantages that Christian should not scorn and by which they may be induced to make use of sacramental confession when they are not strictly obliged to do so.

FREQUENCY OF CONFESSION

The question of the frequency of confession can probably be answered only on an individual basis. It depends on so many things: on the possibility or the practical impossibility of going frequently to confession, on the individual disposition of each person, and on the kind of life each one has to lead and in which more or less serious and numerous occasions of sin may occur. These and other factors make it difficult to suggest a general norm for the frequency of devotional confession. So we will not try to do it. But we will say that we surely may be excused from sacramental confession if, on looking back over a short span of our life, we can say, with some reason, that nothing has happened of which we might seriously repent.

[217] Of course, we may be sorry for more things than the ordinary Christian might consider. There is unkindness, indifference with regard to one's duties, lack of interest for one's environment, lack of care for one's neighbor, for whom one is perhaps responsible. There are such things that spread over a whole life almost unnoticeably. Thus a serious examination of conscience may make it eventually more possible for us seriously to repent and to change than we would suspect in our everyday unfeeling mood. On the other hand, as we said, nobody should feel obliged or bound to go to confession who can really say: "Here and now I really have nothing to repent. My daily life has proceeded so normally, albeit in a rather bourgeois way, that I cannot feel it right now as the proper object of a sacramental accusation."

When we look at both parts of our reflections a few more remarks seem called for. They are, to my knowledge, rarely mentioned or suggested in usual pastoral practice. If lay people (I am speaking of them here) are inclined to receive the sacrament more frequently, even though they are convinced that, strictly speaking they do not need sacramental absolution, they should make a wise choice of confessor. It stands to reason that, although all elements of a sacramental procedure must be present in every confession – examination of conscience, contrition, confession of sin, absolution – in a confession of devotion the emphasis shifts more to the subjective life of the penitent than is the case in the absolution given for a serious sin. In other words, frequent confession merely out of routine, in which practically nothing

happens for the subject's inner life, makes no sense as a sacramental activity.

The possibility of taking such a confession of devotion seriously also depends on which confessor one chooses. Ever since the Middle Ages the Church has tried more and more to put a great selection of confessors at the disposal of lay people. While the Fourth Lateran Council still prescribed that the yearly confession be made to the local pastor, the Church in canon law, made it more possible and pastorally feasible to choose a confessor freely. In a confession of devotion as we understand it today, quite correctly to my mind, it is evident that a mere sacramental absolution does not, in this case, make much sense. That is why the inner attitude of the penitent is of decisive importance, and such an attitude may be strongly influenced by a suitable confessor. There have been and there still are, of course, pastors who see in the greatest possible number of absolutions on Saturdays a triumph for their pastoral activity. There used to be Christians, for instance in convents where this was possible, who asked for absolution everyday in the sacrament of reconciliation. [218] Such practices that make no real sense for the life of the soul should be dropped. Ultimately the number of times we receive a sacrament does not matter. And that is why it is also important to choose the right kind of confessor for the correctly understood confession of devotion.

It is really not evident that every priest who has the liturgical and sacramental power of giving absolution is for this reason alone a suitable confessor. We should not exaggerate the effects of a sacrament. I believe that in the pious practice of the last few centuries there have frequently been confessions that were practically invalid. The accusation referred very often to sins which people really, in their heart, did not wish to give up. It followed that there was no real contrition; therefore the absolution was useless and ineffective. This may very often have happened in good faith, yet it is not to be recommended.

A good confessor should occasionally be ready for a serious conversation during confession. He should have an ear for things that have perhaps not been completely stated in the accusation, not in order to discover sins which the penitent would have forgotten or withheld – as happened with Don Bosco – but to discover real difficulties in the penitent's psychic life and to help him or her to the extent of his abilities. The confessor does not have to be a real psychotherapist in the sacrament. He has before him a penitent who is looking for forgiveness from God and the Church, not for psychotherapeutic advice. This may be quite true, yet the priest should not be an absolution-machine, because this makes no sense and is of no use. It contradicts the nature of a sacrament, in which, according to the doctrine of Saint Thomas, the person's inner personal collaboration is an inner element of sacramental activity and not merely a preparation for it. How can one find such a confessor? How should one speak to him in confession so that he may really be of help? The answers to these questions differ according to the penitent's different situations, and we cannot give any precise answers and directives