

Project Canterbury

Transubstantio Mundi Per Incarnationem

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

*A Practical Guide to Confession for those  
who wish to play a full part in lay-  
ing the foundation of the King-  
dom of God by building a  
Sacramental Common-  
wealth within  
this world.*

Society of the Catholic Commonwealth  
Oratory of Saint Mary and Saint Michael  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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### PREFACE

The questions for self-examination printed in this booklet are drawn largely from the excellent manual on Confession called "Sins and their Cure" first published by the Catholic Crusade (now the Order of the Church Militant) in England in the year 1916. This manual is not now obtainable in America. Also, in its original form, it contains material useful only for British Subjects. However, the actual list of questions suggested for those who wish to make proper use of the Sacrament of Penance is so superior to any other which has come to our attention that this Society has wished to make it readily available to its members. It is believed also that many other Church people may find it useful.

In issuing this guide to Confession, the original English questions have been revised for American use. Also, considerable new material has been added. Of their own list of questions the English compilers write: "The self-examination tracts of the present day reflect the bankruptcy of the modern Church, and show how it has failed to challenge the World, and how feeble is its fight with the Flesh and the Devil". This tract "recalls people to the living theology and sane casuistry of early and medieval times, not trying to copy the mere letter of the past, but to recapture its spirit.

We have studied the works of Dante, Chaucer, Piers the Plowman, in their treatment of sins, and such manuals as the *Layfolks Catechism*, John Myre's

*Instructions, Dunbar's Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins. In their brave attack upon the sins that really matter they put to shame the manuals of the present day".*

"The Confessional is here treated not as a luxury for the few, but as a necessity for the many. The Sacrament of Penance is considered throughout as a debt we owe not only to God but to man".

Apart from the questions themselves, all the rest of the discussion of sin and of the Sacrament of Penance is new and originates in the needs, emphases, and purposes of this Society. It is thought that the increasing number of Christians who are seeking a more adequate expression of the organically social nature of God's redemption of the world may find this present guide both instructive and useful.

Advent, 1941

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## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD

CHRISTIANS, in continuity with their religious precursors the Jews, view our natural world as essentially good. The natural world is the creation of God, Himself both perfectly good and also omnipotent. In a creation which issues from God as its Source, it is impossible to believe that there inhere properties or attributes which are in themselves essentially evil. To contend for the latter view would involve the belief that God also is not perfectly good; or else that as Creator He is not omnipotent and thus, for whatever reason, cannot prevent His own creation from containing elements of irredeemable evil which can contend successfully and indefinitely against His good will. This view of God and of His world is, for Christians, contrary both to human reason and to Divine revelation.

### OTHER RELIGIOUS VIEWS

In this very fundamental and central belief in the essential goodness of the natural world, Christians differ from the followers of many other religions. Buddhists, for example, together with believers in numerous lesser religions of eastern origin, have always viewed the natural world--more especially in its material aspects--as in part, at least, essentially evil and therefore irretrievably bad. If one really holds this latter belief about the world, the great problem for all who wish to achieve genuine goodness (that is, who wish for salvation) is to get out of its hopeless evil. Salvation must be achieved by extrication from the world's irredeemable environment. Therefore Buddhism (the outstanding example of this kind of religion) offers a religious technique of utter withdrawal from our natural world. It counsels not only escape from the entanglements of natural creation, but it points a way to the achievement of a state of genuine *non-being*. Because for the Buddhist it is not merely the remaining within our material level of human

existence which blocks all human perfection, but very being itself on any terms whatever, even the most spiritual, is evil. Therefore Buddhism both enjoins and provides a technique not only of getting out of our world, but of entering upon a state of non-being which is called Nirvana. Buddhism is perhaps the most thoroughgoing form of extricationism which has ever been devised, but all religions based upon its philosophy of the essentially evil character of creation are invariably, in one way or another, extrication religions. On the other hand, if, after this Buddhist fashion, Christians imagine that God's creation, including man as its most lofty element, contains elements of essential or constitutionally irredeemable evil, then they are themselves the victims either of vulgar misunderstandings or of semi-official perversions of the Religion of the Incarnation.

### THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SIN

This does not mean, however, that Christians believe that the world of our actual experience is really free from evil of any kind, and that what we call sin and sorrow and suffering and death are in any sense mere illusions. On the contrary, Christians above all others have the most poignant sense of the reality of the evil which pervades human life. And not only do they recognize human sin as an objective fact which has to be reckoned with, but, precisely because of their belief in God's own perfection and goodness, they possess a special awareness of the grievous quality of sin as a dereliction from God's will, over and above its merely human reference. Christians can therefore make a true and realistic evaluation of sin's disastrous quality and of the desperately difficult problem which it presents to us. But the point here made is that the Christian view of our creation as God's handiwork does mean that the source of human sin and of the evil found in human affairs is not to be sought, as many non-Christian thinkers have maintained, in some positive principle of evil which resides in the essence of the natural world itself.

Instead of this, sin, for the Christian, cannot have the character of a positive evil possessing a substantial existence in its own right. It has, rather, the character of a disorder which has been introduced into a creation whose nature still remains itself essentially good. And such a creation, even when sadly disordered as is our own at present, still retains the highly important potentiality of being reperfectable. Thus, to the Christian, the actual world of our present experience does not appear as one which is *essentially* corrupt. It looks instead more like a great and perfect work of art which has been broken into pieces. What we call sin, then, stems from the fact that the order of God's creation has been broken up. What we might call the materials of that creation--all the varied elements of human nature and of human life, including human material bodies, their qualities and attributes--are no more corrupt and evil in and of themselves than would be, for example, the individual pieces of a beautiful Chinese jar which had been smashed into fragments. The evil, in this latter case, stems from the jar's "brokenness", not from an essential corruption of those elements which originally entered into its unbroken and ordered beauty. And the fragments of the jar, like

the present disordered elements of the whole of God's creation, still retain the potentiality of being put together again. Their original proper relative positions can be restored and the perfect wholeness of the work of art can then emerge anew.

## CHRISTIAN SALVATION

For Christians, therefore, the problem of achieving perfection (commonly called salvation) does not present itself as a problem of withdrawal or extrication from an essentially or hopelessly evil natural world. Instead, salvation presents a problem of the restoration of order to an essentially good world which has become badly disordered, but which is still capable of regaining a functional organic perfection corresponding to God's will for it. This restoration of fresh order among the now disordered elements and relationships of human life is commonly called the redemption of the world. To restore order to the world is to eliminate sin. Individuals are themselves restored in the order of their own private lives (they are "saved", as popular terminology has it) in so far as they become involved in the corporate enterprise of the redemption or recreation of human life as a whole.

## PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY SIN

This view of what is called sin as a disorder introduced among the elements of human life while the elements of that life still remain in their essences potentially good, may seem, because of its unfamiliarity even to some Christians, somewhat to mitigate the grievous quality of sin itself. [Perhaps it should be stated that this is the orthodox Catholic view. It is *not* Pelagian.] There may be a tendency to say that if sin be "*mere* disorder" in a still essentially good creation, then it is not, after all, such a bad thing as had been previously imagined. But a moment's reflection will dissipate this falsely comforting notion.

In the first place, the disorders of human life do not come from God. They are now found in God's creation because they have been there introduced by the action of man. They are continued and, indeed, increased through man's ever-recurring defiance of God's will. For God created man as a rational free agent within His perfected creation. It was man's peculiar vocation and privilege, under God, to cooperate freely in the historical fulfilment of God's purpose, maintaining His creation in its original order and continually enriching it in its advancing ordered development in time. But this kind of freedom also involved the bestowal of power even to disobey God in these matters. This was that necessary risk, as it were, which God chose to take in creating man "in His own image". And man has actually chosen to use his Divinely bestowed freedom for ends and purposes which fall short of God's purpose. By this kind of wrong action, man has introduced those disorders which now threaten to destroy him. It is this action on man's part which is commonly called the Fall of Man. The ensuing disorders in history resulting from the Fall are called Original Sin.

It follows that the disorders now experienced in human society and in human individual hearts are the very sign and symbol of man's misuse of his rational freedom, of the self-perversion of his own true nature. They are the sign and symbol of a free created being's defiance of his Creator. Man has placed himself not only in a position of grave moral dereliction, but also in one of the most acute danger. For God is still omnipotent, and although He may bear with human disobedience for a space in order that man may have the chance to return into the way of salvation once more open to him, nevertheless, in the final count, God's will must prevail. Therefore he who persists in trying to thwart this will does so to his own eventual utter destruction. For the defiantly disobedient it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hand of the living God.

In the second place, the disorders of creation which we call sin cannot again be eliminated by man alone. This is for two reasons. Firstly, natural man's free rational powers, while sufficient to *maintain* the order of God's creation while that original order still prevailed, are utterly insufficient to *restore* that order once it has been lost. For the restoration of order presents a far more difficult problem than its mere maintenance. And secondly, the roots of the disorders present to the experience of any given generation of men, are inaccessible to them. Men are born into a world whose disorders have many of their origins in past time. It follows that no power of man, completely confined as this must be to working within a forward-moving time process, can ever completely correct or re-create the world's disorders. This kind of complete redemption of our world clearly requires a reaching backwards in time and, as it were, an "undoing" of those evil actions in past history which have given birth to present evils.

It appears, therefore, that human sin is a moral defiance of God. It is also desperately dangerous to man's very existence. And, in addition, it can be seen that man's unaided powers are completely inadequate to its elimination. Thus our "mere disorder" is not only a major disaster, but an ultimate and final one, unless God comes to man's rescue. For God alone has the power to *restore* a lost order to His creation; and God alone, since He transcends time, possesses the necessary other power to "dip into history" and thus actually to recreate the past as a perfected foundation for man's newly developing future.

#### THE INCARNATION AS GOD'S ANSWER

The method whereby God, the Creator of heaven and earth, comes to man's rescue in this enterprise of the *re-creation* of human life (the human world, human individuals, and human society in all their aspects), is the method of the Incarnation of His Son. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son, "through whom (in the beginning) all things were made", actually emerges anew within His disordered creation. He begins to clothe Himself with the materials of that creation. He appears as a Man among men and, in His individual humanity, initiates a process of clothing Himself with the elements or "materials" of human life. In this process, the disordered or "broken up" materials of human nature and

of human social living are received into the perfect Order of Our Lord's Person. They there begin to assume anew that perfected wholeness which really fulfils the potentialities of their essentially good natures. Human nature begins to be "put together again" and that disorder which we call *sin* begins to be eliminated.

Now this process begins clearly and objectively in Our Lord's individual humanity. Then, endowed with a Divine creative power utterly unobtainable by man alone, it spreads outward from Him into a new social order which is now called the Catholic Church. The individual members of the Church are taken into Our Lord's human body, as this extends itself in His social humanity, in precisely the same manner that the material and spiritual elements of individual human life were taken into His individual humanity. Beginning in Our Lord as an individual, the Process of the Incarnation, without any break or discontinuity, spreads outward to re-create the entire world into a new living organic perfection. This is the process of the redemption of the world. This is the beginning of Christian salvation.

#### THE CHARACTERISTIC CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY

Therefore the characteristic activity of Christians with respect to human life and human experience in the level of the natural world, is the activity of building among themselves that new social order which shall be the continuing vehicle of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos. Christians, reborn through Baptism into Our Lord's humanity, immediately undertake to give free course to the re-creative power of God the Son among them. They begin at once to build an entirely New World, a new and perfected material and cultural common life. They utilize for this, as did Our Lord Himself, the *materials* of that disordered natural world into which men are now born after the flesh. Every social unit of this new world must function as if it were in process of digesting the materials of the old world of its environment into its new Incarnationally informed and, therefore, perfectly ordered living organism.

#### THE CHRISTIAN USE OF THE NATURAL WORLD

For Christians, therefore, the sole values of their human achievements, the human experiences, actions, and relationships present or possible in this natural world, stem from their potential usefulness as contributions to the richness and perfection of Our Lord's Incarnate Life as this Life emerges in the new social order of the Sacramental Christian group. Christian ethics, Christian morals, set forth and describe the kinds of behavior, of intellectual understanding and of emotional attitudes which can find an appropriate and harmonious place in the re-created Christian social organism. They are, as it were, a description of the cultural atmosphere or climate of a re-created world. Relationships and actions, of whatever kind, already found in the disordered world's environment and which can find an harmonious place in the redeemed Society, may be conveyed into it relatively unaltered. Such materials will need but little "digesting" or re-creating

on the part of the Incarnational organism. But many, or even most, worldly relationships must be completely re-made. (This is where the Christian threat of revolution of the old world comes in). Unfortunately, this kind of appraisal of the world's materials is scarcely ever attempted by nominal Christians. Furthermore, for the present, many secular materials may even have to be temporarily rejected, since for the time being their entrenched secular disorders are beyond the recreative power of the Christian attack. (In this kind of selective dealing with the world lies the field of Christian asceticism. Note again that asceticism never involves the rejection of elements of the world as *essentially evil*, but only as too difficult in some individual case or for the time being to manage or to "digest").

### THE SOCIAL NATURE OF SIN

Disordered elements of natural creation, whether found in individual interior lives or in social, economic, or political relationships, when conveyed by its members into the social body of the Incarnation, unaltered, uncriticized, or without re-creation, are sins. Now only one human being in all history has succeeded in excluding every trace of disorder from the perfection of His own re-creative accomplishment within the natural world. This was Our Lord Himself, who can therefore be described as Perfect Man. It was by virtue of this accomplishment in His own right that He was able to initiate that Process of re-creative Incarnation into which all other men and women succeeding Him may now be engrafted. Whether or not an analogous perfection in individual human cases is conceivable, through the help of Our Lord's supernatural grace, is a theological question which it is not necessary to discuss here. But the actual fact is that, as men and women continue to fill out and to enrich Our Lord's social humanity through their own further contributions brought in from the world's environment, they never do succeed in excluding every trace of disorder. They never do actually live, even within the Incarnation, from day to day and from year to year, completely without sin.

It should be clear from this discussion that when an individual, in his own person, conveys a disordered element of the fallen world into the potentially perfect order of the Incarnation, it becomes at once a much more than private matter. In other words, sins have aspects which do not permit of settlement exclusively by a transaction between the individual soul in question and its God. Sins do have a private side, as it were, because they are both individual defiance and individual betrayal of God. Therefore, God's forgiveness must always be sought in individual acts of penance. But all sins, without exception, are (also matters of public concern to all the members of the Incarnation. The introduction by one individual of an element of unreclaimed disorder into the New World of the Incarnation damages and betrays the accomplishments of all the other members together. Individually and collectively, all Comrades in this corporate creative enterprise are thus betrayed, just as the Apostle Judas betrayed not only Our Lord, but the entire community of the rest of the Apostles as well. Therefore, there is not only an individual disorder which needs to be repaired and re-created when it

has been introduced into Our Lord's New World; there is also a corporate social disorder which needs likewise to be repaired. And no element of disorder within individual lives, no matter how secret and "private" this may appear apart from the Incarnate Community, is without this further social reference. For it gains a social reference as soon as it is brought into the organic structure of that Community in the person of one of its members.

#### THE SOCIAL NECESSITY OF SACRAMENTAL PENANCE

It is precisely because of the organically corporate nature of Our Lord's redemption of His world that all who enter into it and who subsequently fail it or betray it through sin, must make confession and ask forgiveness, not alone from God (as if in a purely individual transaction), but they must make this confession to God and receive His forgiveness also in and through His Divine Community. Social confession and social absolution through the Society of the Incarnation is provided by Our Lord Himself in His Sacrament of Penance.

In the early Church individual members of the Incarnation brought the uncorrected disorders of their lives and actions openly into the presence of God before the assembled company of their Comrades. This procedure is, in many respects, perfectly justified. However, it was found to have drawbacks and in many cases it proved unedifying, and harmful rather than helpful, to the group perfection. Therefore, from very early times it has been the custom for individual confessions to be made in the presence of a priest. The priest, when he hears a confession, acts as the official accredited representative of the whole Church, and the Absolution which he pronounces upon the penitent is pronounced also in the name of the delegated authority of the whole body of the humanity of Christ.

The situation of an individual penitent within the social order of the Incarnation is therefore somewhat as follows. A member of Our Lord's body is engaged in the activity of making the contribution of his life that this may be received by Our Lord as a fresh element, an added enrichment, within His ever-enlarging humanity. To this end, let us suppose, the penitent comes forward at some particular time and place to make a specific act of oblation of himself. [Such oblation is Sacramentally consummated in the Mass.] As his particular gift, at that chosen time, he will carry in his person (in his hands, as it were), the gift or offering of a certain section or segment of his most recent life. He will bring forward the actions and creative accomplishments of, perhaps, a month of his life's activities and experiences. Now, in order that this gift may be incorporated into the order of Our Lord's humanity, it must be given the actual perfection of that humanity. By Our Lord's grace, earnest Christians who have been received into Our Lord's Incarnate life are often enabled to bring forward much which is acceptable to Him. However, no human being can ever seriously examine his own human gift without discovering many disorders (sins, misuse of Our Lord's grace) in its fabric, although these may be present side by side with certain positively good accomplishments. The problem is to get rid of the disorders.

## THE NATURE OF SACRAMENTAL ABSOLUTION

As has already been said, the disorders which are found in a penitent's offering cannot be eliminated by any merely human power. The penitent may regret a past misdeed. He may make reparations for injuries inflicted on others. But the actual misdeed itself remains inexorably and obstinately in past time. It cannot be "undone" by a human being who, in the nature of things, cannot retrace history. A penitent therefore makes confession and lays bare before God those disorders which, on careful examination, he finds in his gift to Him. Our Lord then responds to this confession and this response is a true creative act. For, reaching back into the past life of the penitent. Our Lord, who *can* retrace history, lays hold on past disorders. To Him the past is not out of reach. At the petition of the penitent He re-creates and re-orders the disorders of the past. Such past disorders are not "blacked out". It would be more correct to say that their contents are rearranged. The penitent's gift remains both wholly his own and also complete in the sense that nothing is actually "deleted". The past is simply re-made. Whereupon the penitent can say: "This is what my life would have been had I perfectly followed God's will". Our Lord's action has been that of perfecting the life down to the moment of the offering. The penitent's gift can then be received into Our Lord's social humanity and can find an harmonious place among the ordered structure of all the rest of the members of Our Lord's body. This recreative act whereby the penitent's gift of his life is perfected into a completely adequate offering to God is called the Absolution or Forgiveness of Sin.

The Sacramental Confession is made in the presence of the whole Church, in the person of the Church's representative priest. It is made not alone before the Church Militant here in earth, but before the Church Expectant, the Church Triumphant, and the whole Company of Heaven. The Absolution comes from God, but by Our Lord's express delegation, through and in the name of the whole Company of the Incarnation. Thus, in the Sacrament of Penance, it is not alone the penitent's individual gift which is perfected. There is also knit together and re-created every disorder or damage which the individual in question has introduced into the *corporate* enterprise of Our Lord's Incarnation.

## THE SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION

It follows that every Sacramental Confession well made, and every Absolution well received, is a positive contribution to the perfected corporate content of Our Lord's body. To look upon Confession in a merely legalistic sense of an individual's confessing a wrong, receiving forgiveness from God and thus avoiding an individual penalty, is a seriously deficient view. For one thing, in the common understanding of "forgiveness", the actual disorder to which it is applied might itself remain. The popular notion of "forgiveness" means a kind of overlooking or forgetting with an accompanying agreement not to punish. But God's Absolution must be thought of as a truly creative act reaching into the past. It is by no means an "overlooking", but instead the very opposite of this. It is a

Divine cognizance, a recognition of a confessed disorder, and it is a merciful Divine response to man's human impotence in such wise that the past is really perfected. This perfected past then becomes not only a fresh element in Our Lord's humanity, but it also becomes a perfected foundation for the penitent's own future striving. It becomes a perfected new foundation for his future life, for his individual future gifts to God, in union with the corporate future gifts of the whole Christian Community.

It should be clear from these considerations that the use of the Sacrament of Penance is required of all who claim the name of Catholics or of Sacramental Christians. Sacramental Confession does not exclude individual private confession to God by all Christians. Indeed, such private acts of penance are continually presupposed. But private confession does not fulfil a Christian's whole obligation either to God or to His Church. Without the faithful use of the Sacrament of Penance, it is impossible to participate fully in the Divine re-creation or redemption of the world. *Indeed, it can be said that much of the weakness of Christianity in today's world stems from the rejection, the non-use, or the utter misuse of the Sacrament of Penance by the vast majority of those who profess and call themselves Christians.*

#### SOME TECHNICAL MORAL DISTINCTIONS

Moral theologians draw certain distinctions in the gravities of those disorders which are imported by individual members into the social body of Christ. Lesser sins are called *venial*. More serious ones are called *mortal*. Examples of venial sins would be carelessness about getting to Church on time or in keeping other appointments; permitting oneself to get impatient over trivial annoyances; carelessness in details of dress or cleanliness; inefficiency in the management of routine duties. Also, more serious offenses may be merely venial when they are committed in ignorance or without deliberate voluntary intention. Mortal sins are serious offenses committed with full knowledge of their sinfulness and with the consent of the will. Such sins are deliberate cruelty; pursuit of personal advantage at the expense of one's fellows (such advantage may be individually planned, or it may be had by mere passive consent to our Capitalist economic system which officially functions on this sinful basis); hardness of heart; refusal to seek the truth (because of the uncomfortable changes which truth often requires in personal lives); unchecked indulgence in (i.e. preoccupation with) the desires of the flesh; contempt for other people; continuing pessimism or lack of faith in the potentialities of other men, either as individuals or as whole classes.

In making a self-examination the penitent should exercise caution in making his own distinctions between venial and mortal sins. Venial sins may well shade off into mortal ones. For example, frequent lateness to appointments may be but a symptom of a deeply egotistical desire to assert oneself as superior to one's fellows. He who is "superior" to "little things" like punctuality may well be inwardly eaten by the mortal sin of Pride. On the other hand, other sins, like

certain ones of the flesh which conventional prudery places in the worst categories, may turn out on proper analysis to be relatively superficial. In such matters penitents should consult their spiritual directors from time to time.

Finally, the penitent should have it clearly in mind that an act of penance does not lie essentially in an emotionally felt regret. Such regret may be felt. In that case it should be accepted as a special favor from Our Lord. But *mere* regret is not repentance; for regret may be felt apart from all repentance, in which case it is called remorse. Also it is not proper to attempt to summon up a forced emotional sorrow for sin; for such sorrow can have the nature of a personal luxury.

Unfortunately, for example, the exaggerated wording of the sixteenth century Form of Confession in the English Prayer Book is open to the criticism of striving for emotional effect. The central reality of Penance, from man's point of view, lies in a new direction of the will. It lies in a determination, by God's grace given in His Sacrament, never again to import those disorders which are now confessed into the organism of His Son's humanity. The attitude of the penitent as he receives Absolution should be, as it were, one of a kind of Divine optimism. The penitent's will is directed to God's will. There is a determination not to repeat the sin. But this is no grim, merely human determination. Let there be no gritting of the teeth, no merely human resolve: "I'll never do that again". Such unaided human resolves are very apt to make future sins not less, but actually more, probable. Instead, let there be a cheerful and complete *willingness* on the part of the penitent to let God's grace act in him. That is all that is required of human beings. Then, with the past perfected in Sacramental Absolution, the penitent can face the future with all human strain relieved. He can go forward with a Divinely infused hope that God Himself will preserve him from all future defections of his human will.

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## PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

*When you are ready to prepare for your Confession, kneel, make the Sign of the Cross and say:--*

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*Various Prayers of Preparation may be chosen at will. The following are suggested:*

GOD, who didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and to adventure in heart and mind and body, with all steadfastness, wherever thou dost lead: Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, pour thy bright beams of light into my heart, that I may know the sins I have committed against thee; and, confessing and forsaking them,

may obtain mercy. And upon thy ministering Priest pour thy grace, that he may rightly bind up that which is broken, heal that which is wounded and, through the Divine Comradeship whose authority he bears, may restore to me that order of life which Our Lord Incarnate alone can give to men. Amen.

Remember that the object of your life in this world is, under God, to work in common with your Christian Comrades within the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, thus making a living visible reality of that New Social Order, that Commonwealth of Ordered Justice, Comradeship, Self-dedication, and Beauty, which shall redeem the old world from its present disorders and which shall emerge within our creation as the natural foundation of the Kingdom of God.

Examine your life--its acts, its failures, its motives--in the light of this truth.

The attached list of questions is intended to be an aid to such self-examination.

### **(1) Pride--The Sin against Humility.**

*Pride is the sin of setting myself above God and my neighbor instead of being their servant.*

Have I failed to recognize God as the source of the Justice, Order and Beauty in the Universe and in Mankind and so been unthankful?

Have I thought of myself and not of God as the source of what is good or clever in me?

Have I been contented with myself and despised my neighbor?

Have I been fatuous enough to be conceited about my looks, my cleverness, my wit, my virtues, my money, my position, my dress, my strength, my eloquence?

Have I been self-centered, unwilling that others should share my life?

Have I prided myself on my "respectability", saying "I keep myself to myself"?

Have I been anxious to be more important than my neighbor?

Have I told lies from fear of losing the good opinion of others? or in order to gain their good opinion?

Have I been a popularity-hunter?

Have I, through pride, sought or gloried in unpopularity?

Have I patronized other people--been a prig--enjoyed dictating to others?

Have I pretended to be more pious than others, scorning them as "unsaved" or "un-spiritual"?

Have I despised people because they are of another race?

Have I despised (been uninterested in) others because of their social or economic class?

Have I romantically exaggerated the evils of people in groups (e.g. the Capitalist class, the organizational officials of the Catholic Church) to whose principles and purposes I am militantly opposed?

Have I condoned evils such as official corruption or the use of violence simply because these occur in organizations such as Labor Unions or politically progressive groups whose principles and purposes I espouse?

Have I been guilty of any other kind of false loyalty to any other individuals, groups, or institutions?

Have I enjoyed being misunderstood, and indulged in self-pity?

Have I attempted to injure myself, pretended to be ill or even tried to take my own life because of wounded pride and a desire to impose myself on others' attention?

Have I boasted that I can do things that I know little about, and done them to the hurt of my neighbor?

Have I bored people by boasting of the things I can do, and by talking excessively about myself and my affairs?

Have I pretended a false humility and indulged in self-depreciation in order to have others contradict me and so win their praise?

Have I used my gifts just to show off?

Have I, through conceit, refused to respond to good leadership? Refused to merge myself in corporate social efforts?

Have I done "good" for the sake of gaining praise rather than for love of God and my neighbor?

Have I shown contempt for my Comrades by wasting, damaging or neglecting my private property or personal belongings on the theory that "what is mine is no business of anyone else"?

Have I shown contempt for the Comradeship of the Incarnation by refusing to give reasoned and intelligent response to the common and world-wide judgement of Christ's Holy Church in matters of doctrine, worship, liturgical forms or other discipline?

**(2) Envy--The Sin against Charity.**

*Envy is the grudging spirit which destroys the love of one's Comrades in the Incarnation.*

Have I been jealous of the good fortune, popularity, charm, or happiness of my neighbor?

Have I been pleased at his misfortune?

Have I disliked anyone being loved or praised more than myself?

Have I misjudged or underrated others--imputing evil motives, or listening to the same with pleasure; or have I, on the other hand, flattered, or in other ways been insincere?

Have I ever made my consciousness of my lack of another's gifts (good looks, intellectual power, social graces, etc.) an excuse for not devoting my own lesser gifts wholly to Our Lord and His Kingdom? (veiled envy).

Have I taken pleasure in telling my neighbor of his (or other's) bad deeds, or talked of them, when it was not necessary to do so as an objective duty?

Have I habitually moved in social circles where "polite" insincerity is demanded by convention?

**(3) Anger--The Sin against Comradeship.**

*Anger is hatred and ill-will towards my neighbor.*

Have I been bitter in my heart towards my neighbor?

Have I encouraged thoughts of revenge or given way to the same?

Have I tried or hoped to "put an enemy in his place"?

Have I been pleased with hurting my neighbor, with hurting children, or with hurting animals?

Have I used sarcastic or bitter language merely in order to hurt others?

Have I been inhuman, hard-hearted, void of pity?

Have I been pleasant to other people but cold, quarrelsome, or neglectful of my own family or my immediate circle of friends?

Have I been angry with anyone without a just cause?

Have I cherished or nursed anger against anyone?

Have I made a show of forgiveness in order to win praise or appear "noble"?

Have I been malicious or unwilling to forgive?

Have I hurt others by telling lies about them?

Have I read other people's letters or private notes without their knowledge?

Have I been ungracious towards my neighbor?

Have I been sullen or spiteful, and have I been habitually nagging, sulky, or cantankerous? Have I taken a joke against myself in a bad spirit?

Have I not tried to love my enemies, praying for them and trying to serve them?

In upholding the just quarrels of my country, or of an oppressed social and economic class or nation, have I done so without malice against our enemies?

Have I permitted righteous anger against injustice and oppression to turn into personal rancor and bitterness?

Have I indulged in, or acquiesced in, cruel sports or fashions, or in scientific experiments clearly involving cruelty (i.e. avoidable suffering)? (n.b. The latter puts valid arguments in the hands of anti-vivisectionists and might thereby impede the proper progress of scientific medicine).

Have I so neglected the "Rules of the Road" (e.g. run through traffic lights) or other common courtesies as to endanger the safety or the lives of others?

#### **(4) Covetousness--The Sin against Generosity.**

*Covetousness or Avarice, is setting up the idol of Gain in my heart in place of God and my neighbor.*

Have I habitually "sponged" on others, taking advantage of their good nature, especially when they could ill-afford to help me, or invited their pity by giving an untrue account of myself?

Have I taken advantage of the weak or the poor--paying less than I ought to someone who could not well refuse to take the smaller sum, taking advantage of the ignorance of my neighbor?

Have I stolen or cheated or in any way deceived my neighbors, or not attempted to restore goods gained in such a way?

Have I contracted debts, especially with poor people, with little prospect of paying, nor done my utmost to pay?

Have I taken advantage of the ignorance of my poorer neighbor in buying and selling?

Have I passed false money, especially on my poor neighbors, charged exorbitant prices to the poor, evicted them or distrained upon them when they were unable to pay, especially when my own bare necessities were not imperilled?

Have I cheated at my work or my play; put in bad work, although in receipt of fair pay?

If I gamble, in what spirit have I done so? As a Christian "sport", or in deadly earnest for the sake of gain? Have I gambled to the hurt of my family, or with anyone who cannot afford to lose?

Have I been stingy or miserly; spent money that really belonged to my wife (husband) or children, and was not my reasonable pocket-money, in a saloon or bar, or in other ways?

Have I been unjust in not giving generously to the needy, the Church, or to any causes I thought merited a just support?

Have I ever made my lack of another's financial means an excuse for not working to the utmost with my own lesser means? (veiled covetousness).

Have I used my political vote thoughtlessly or uncritically in ways calculated to strengthen or to continue the iniquities of the Capitalist system?

Have I supported any government policy which would exploit or enslave other peoples for the benefit of American imperialistic money expansion and business profits?

Have I supported any government policy which would be to the disadvantage of any underprivileged class of our own country (e.g. the Southern sharecroppers)?

Have I supported any government or business policy which would be to the disadvantage of Organized Labor? Which would tend to weaken the Labor Movement?

Have I done my utmost to help or to strengthen Organized Labor as being one of the chief human factors in preparing the way for the coming Divine Commonwealth of tomorrow?

If I am a working man, have I refused to join a Labor Union without good cause?  
Have

I paid my Union dues regularly? Have I been a good Union man in every sense of that word?

Have I sided with those who want to keep present economic, political, and social arrangements as they now are, even when I know that they are bad arrangements, because I want to stand well with the powerful, or through fear or selfishness?

*(For employers, those who live on unearned income, and other Middle Class people).*

Have I, by taking rent or interest, or by other means, desired to live--or justified myself in living--at the expense of my neighbors without trying to do adequate, socially useful work in return?

Have I failed to support and to work for the rights of Organized Labor?

Have I ever harbored an attitude of hatred, fear or distrust of the laboring masses?

Have I tried my utmost to pay anyone I employ a living wage, or to see that the workers employed in any concern from which I draw an income of any sort have the best conditions possible under the present system?

Am I doing my utmost to bring about a just economic system, or have I not tried to change the Capitalist system because of the effect that such a change would have on my position as an employer, or as a receiver of rent or interest, or as a privileged and highly paid employee (e.g. if I am a technical expert of some kind)?

### **(5) Gluttony--The Sin against Temperance.**

*Gluttony is contempt of God's gifts of food and drink.*

Have I thanked God for His gifts of food and drink by real enjoyment of them--using them in comradeship and appreciation to keep health and gaiety, not dulling my vigor by excess either in eating or drinking?

Have I used intelligence in the matter of food, making my meals from foods which conduce to a healthy physical life?

Have I used foods the preparation of which entails cruelty to animals (e.g. by trapping or avoidable cruelty in hunting)?

Have I been drunken, misusing beer, wine, etc., which should be an aid to gladness, in such excess as to make myself dull, bestial, and quarrelsome? In such ways as to make me ill and unable to fulfil my social obligations and do my appointed work?

Have I used alcoholic drink as a means of escaping from the reality of life in this world and to dull my sense of the urgency of Our Lord's work and my sense of obligation to His Commonwealth?

Have I imposed on the good nature of those who could not afford to "treat" me by allowing them to pay for food and drink?

Have I insisted on "treating" others to the point of their embarrassment?

Have I habitually gambled about food and drink or indulged in love of delicate eating and daintily prepared dishes?

Have I taken food or drink which in ordinary cases would be reasonable, when other people whom I could have helped have gone short?

Have I spent money on smoking which should have been otherwise used?

Have I smoked to excess and without regard to self-control?

Have I smoked through nervousness and fidgetiness without trying to discover the causes of my nervousness and to take proper steps to cure it?

Have I habitually bitten my fingernails without trying to discover the psychological reason for the habit and without trying to cure it?

Have I failed to develop the creative faculties of my children by doing things for them that they should do for themselves, or by depriving them of their right to choose their clothes, friends, leisure, etc.?

Have I allowed a passion for tidiness to make me so particular that others have felt ill at ease?

Have I been too strict in dealing with children, or "spoilt" them by over-indulgence?

Have I through an excess of duty to my home or parents so overworked that I have sacrificed my health and rightful leisure?

Have I worked to such excess that I have neglected recreation or the company of my fellows--especially that of my Comrades in the Incarnation?

Have I so far as possible kept the fast days, abstinence days, and the fast before Communion, as acts of discipline to make me a better worker in the battle for Our Lord's Commonwealth here on earth? (For a list of fast days and abstinence days see the Book of Common Prayer).

### **(6) Sinful Lust--The Sin against Natural Lust.**

*Lust is the natural passion of a healthy and vigorous nature. Sinful lust is the misuse or the exaggerated use of natural passion.*

Do I remember that my body and the bodies of my neighbors are temples of the Holy Ghost, to be kept in fitness, temperance, and chastity (if proper to my state of life), and should be clothed, fed, and housed properly?

Have I been prudish about God's gift of sex, calling unclean what God has made clean?

Have I ever been misled into the false notion that the gift of sex is in some manner inherently evil?

Have I recognized in marriage a loving relationship in which I can best serve God and His people?

Have I abused marriage by excessive indulgence or in any other way?

Have I entered into marriage being unwilling, for selfish reasons, to have children?

Have I artificially prevented children? If so, what is my motive?

Have I unjustly withheld myself from my partner?

Have I tried to destroy unborn life?

Have I indulged in masturbation?

Have I so used pictures, books, conversation, as to encourage sexual thoughts, thus impairing those energies which God gives me with which to serve my fellows?

Have I indulged myself erotically without trying to check myself, or have I deliberately encouraged erotic thoughts?

Have I used courtship, dancing, going to shows, physical contacts with another, etc., in such ways as deliberately to excite sexual desires in myself or others?

Have I tried in any way to involve others in disordered eroticism?

Have I committed any unnatural vice?

Have I resorted to brothels, etc.?

Have I had illicit (disordered) sexual relations with others? If so, have these been by fornication, adultery, or homosexuality?

Have I indulged lust by acts of cruelty? (such acts may be either physical or in words, sarcasm, etc.)

Have I committed any other sin against sex whereby I injure my neighbor, or is there any other circumstance which makes my sin worse, whereby I destroy myself as God's servant?

**(7) Sloth--Apathy, Accidie, the Sin against Enthusiasm and Vigorous Determination of the Will.**

*Sloth is the failure to be eager to give my life in the service of Our Lord and of my neighbor.*

Have I kept before me the fact that I am, by virtue of being a Christian, an enemy of the established orders of the unredeemed world^ that I am a Catholic revolutionary, ever striving to "put down the mighty from their seats and to exalt those who are now (unjustly) of low degree"?

Have I been sluggish and indifferent in the face of wrong done to God and my neighbor, content that men, women, and children should live stunted lives (living without adequate food, clothing, houses, music, theatre, recreation, leisure, books, education, comradeship, and freedom which belong to a full human life)?

Have I cared whether other people's claims on life are satisfied, or only my own and those of my family?

Have I used my own sufficient provision of food, clothing, housing, etc., without considering whether the working people concerned in their provision have a similar abundance? Have I, for example, kept in mind how I am involved, through the food I eat and the clothes I wear, with the wants and injustices suffered among workers in all parts of the world? e.g. China (tea), South America (coffee, fruit),

Cuba, Haiti (sugar), Southern United States, Egypt (cotton), India, the South Seas (spices, etc.), Middle West (Indian corn, dressed meat), Australia (wool), Liberia (rubber), Turkey, Virginia (tobacco)?

Have I been so busy putting the world to rights that I have neglected my wife or husband or children, my father or my mother?

Have I contrived to be so "busy" with unnecessary things that I have had "no time for" important things?

Have I stupidly promised to do more things than I could possibly accomplish?

Have I sought refuge in minor (or imaginary) indispositions?

Have I neglected to give my body proper recuperative rest and medical attention?

Have I let my likes and dislikes for individuals bias my enthusiasm in working for the coming of a Catholic Commonwealth?

Has my service in this been so impersonal and abstract that I have not cared for people as individuals?

Have I tried to find the remedy for the poverty, suffering, and lack of freedom with which the world is filled?

Have I blinded myself to the evils of the world--refused to face the facts, refused to use my imagination with the data easily accessible--in order that my peace of mind shall not be disturbed?

Have I permitted myself to grow romantic about the Kingdom of God? About the Labor Movement? About the "Proletariat"?

Have I supported "my country right or wrong"--failing to oppose unjust actions on the part of my Government?

Have I agreed to the evils in the world because to join the fight to alter them might lead to--

(a) Loss of money, position, comforts, prospects, or career?

(b) Disturbances in family and loss of friends?

(c) Working as a comrade with the poor, the despised, and the failures in society?

(d) Having my real friends among the working class and forsaking a "cultured" (meaning smooth) and "amusing" environment?

Have I failed to develop my mind and my body, that I may be a useful servant of God and my neighbor?

Have I luxuriated in bed after having had sufficient sleep or rest?

Do I realize that God wills beauty in nature and in man's use of nature and in all man's work? Have I tried to apply that standard to life?

Have I given way to discouragement, turning aside from the fight for the New World because I thought it was hopeless?

Have I given way to dullness or heaviness of heart, being contented although I do not love either God or my neighbor?

Have I allowed thought about the evils of the world to make me cynical, instead of stirring me to action against these evils?

Have I attempted to take my own life through despair?

Have I failed through cowardice or false charity to make public another's bad deeds when it has been necessary to do so for the public good?

Have I told lies in order to avoid just punishment or censure?

Have I withheld cooperation for good common ends from non-Catholics or from non-religious people because of "purist" or "perfectionist" notions?

Have I taken part in Protestant or other doctrinally deficient services of worship in such ways as to imply openly to others that I think "it doesn't matter what you believe", or that "all religions are the same thing under different forms"?

Have I refused to face the possible necessity of secular revolution that God's Justice may prevail among men?

Am I lacking in public spirit, not taking my share--by the use of my vote and in other ways open to me--in civic and national life, in the work of my Church, Trade Union, organizations for socially progressive action, and any other movement which I believe to be for the good of the people?

Have I so consulted mediums, fortune tellers, and the like, that I have run the risk of enfeebling and paralyzing that freedom of will which is God's most precious gift to me?

Have I been guilty of the practices of "Christian Science" or of any other kind of "Faith Healing" outside of the Incarnation which deny the reality of human suffering and bodily evils, which would annul Our Lord's Sacraments, and which

would reject the value of rational medical science? . Have I forgotten or neglected the Sacrament of Holy Unction which mediates the healing power of Our Lord to the members of His Incarnation?

Have I, through sloth or cowardice, failed to offer myself for active service in the work of the Incarnation by refusing to be confirmed? Have I, through sloth, failed to be present at Mass on Sundays and the greater holidays, thereby despising the Comradeship of the Incarnation, and rejecting the Food which nourishes me for the fight for Our Lord's Commonwealth?

Have I, through sloth or cowardice, failed to go regularly to Confession?

Have I, through sloth, neglected my prayers?

Have I, through sloth, broken my Rule of Life?

### HOW TO CONFESS

*When the Priest is ready, go up to the Confessional, kneel down and say:--*

Bless me, father, for I have sinned.

*The Priest responds:--*

The Lord be in thy heart and upon thy lips, that so thou mayest worthily confess all thy sins; In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Then say:--

I confess to God Almighty, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to all the Saints, and to thee, father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed: by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault. Especially I accuse myself that since my last Confession, which was .... ago, I have committed the following sins . . . .

*(If it be a first Confession, say instead:--)* Especially I accuse myself that I have committed the following sins: .... *Here confess your sins which, except for some good reason to the contrary, should be listed in writing and read slowly and distinctly. Continue then without pause:--*

For these and for all my other sins which I cannot now remember, I am heartily sorry, firmly purpose amendment, and humbly ask pardon of God; and of thee, my spiritual father, penance, counsel, and Absolution. Wherefore I beg blessed Mary ever Virgin, blessed Michael the Archangel, blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, all the Saints, and thee, father, to pray for me to the Lord Our God.

*The Priest then counsels the penitent, assigns a penance, and gives Absolution.*

### THANKSGIVING AFTER ABSOLUTION

*After completing the penance assigned by your Confessor, you should make a brief Act of Thanksgiving for your Absolution. The following forms are suggested. The Psalm (No. 103) may be learned and said while you are on the way out of Church.*

O LORD, I heartily thank Thee for having forgiven all my sins, and for restoring me to the order of the social humanity of Thine Incarnate Son. By Thy continuing grace may I serve Thee perfectly according to Thy will, from this time forth and for all days of my life. Keep me steadfast and unfailing within the Comradeship of the Incarnation, and grant that I may nevermore betray the corporate efforts of my Comrades by my individual failures within our common task; through the same Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

PRAISE the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me praise His Holy Name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits Who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thine infirmities; Who saveth thy life from destruction and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our wickedness. For look how high the heaven is in comparison to the earth, so great is His mercy also toward them that fear Him. Look how wide also the east is from the west, so far hath He set our sins from us. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*If for some reason Absolution be deferred, say:--*

CREATE in me a new heart, O Lord, and give me grace to renounce all sin and obtain from Thee full pardon for mine offences; through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

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### REMEMBER

In the Confessional you may ask questions or explain anything which you believe has been misunderstood. Never mention by name anyone else who has been involved with the disorders of your life. It is your own sins you are confessing, not those of your Comrades.

The seal of the Confessional forbids absolutely that the Priest shall ever bring up outside it what has been disclosed by a penitent. As a matter of courtesy, penitents should also refrain from discussing the Priest's words or counsel. The reason for this is that if the Priest is misquoted he has no means of correcting the error. In the Confessional a Priest may suggest that certain points (e.g. of doctrine) had best be

explained in an outside conference. In this case a penitent may return for such conference, but the initiative lies with him, since the Priest's lips are sealed.

The penance which the Priest assigns just before he gives Absolution is not to be thought of as a "punishment". As a punishment it would prove hopelessly inadequate in any case. But in obeying the Priest's injunction and by repeating a prayer or other form assigned as a penance, the penitent shows his humble willingness to place himself entirely within the jurisdiction of Our Lord's re-creative (atoning) power. Until this Act of Obedience is completed, the Sacramental Confession with its following Absolution is not complete.

### WHEN TO CONFESS

The Christian Comradeship has always held that we should go to Confession whenever we have committed mortal sin. In view of the fact that we often postpone the not altogether personally pleasant duty of Confession, a regular rule should be made about it and strictly kept. Also, because the Sacrament of Penance makes a positive contribution to the fullness and perfection of Our Lord's social humanity, it would be well if Christians would use the Sacrament at least once a month. The ancient rule of the Church of England is that its members shall go to Confession *at least* three times a year--at Christmas, Lent, and Whitsuntide. To those who understand the present grave crisis of Christianity, not the least factors in which are the inertia, compromising spirit, and dilettantism of most nominal Christians, this minimum rule will be seen as insufficient.