CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: PENANCE, ANOINTING OF THE SICK, AND THE LIFE OF SELF-DENIAL

A. Christian life as pilgrimage

The present world keeps falling to pieces around us. Suffering continues. Our loved ones die, but we live by faith: "What is seen is transitory; what is unseen lasts forever" (2 Cor 4.18). Heaven is present, all about us, but invisible. We wait for it to close in and overcome the passing, mortal world still affected by the consequences of sin. At present we are not with Jesus in the way we believe we can be, hope we will be, so much long to be. But we are ready and eager to come home to Him. "This being so, we make it our aim to please him whether we are with him or away from him" (2 Cor 5.9).

The entire Old Testament experience was based upon the seemingly endless journey of God's people traveling toward their promised homeland. It all began with Abraham, who was called by God to leave his original home. He responded with faith. His traveling, like that of others called by God, was symbolic:

> All of these died in faith. They did not obtain what had been promised but saw and saluted it from afar. By acknowledging themselves to be strangers and foreigners on the earth, they showed that they were seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking back to the place from which they had come, they would have had the opportunity of returning there. But they were searching for a better, a heavenly home. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb 11.13-16).

Detaching themselves from what had seemed secure, God's people always were compelled to move on. Christians too must leave everything behind to follow Jesus and in Him find fulfillment. To be a Christian is to be a member of a people perpetually on pilgrimage. One must "be intent on things above rather than on things of earth" (Col 3.2).

Vatican II has developed the pilgrimage theme, taking it to be very appropriate to our own time. Christians in pilgrimage on earth follow the path of Jesus in trials, under oppression, with suffering, by endurance, to glory (cf. LG 7). The Church as a whole is like a pilgrim in an alien country, pushing ahead despite the world's persecutions, consoled by God, proclaiming Jesus, overcoming obstacles by the Spirit's power, faithfully revealing the truth and love of Christ until He comes in glory (cf. LG 8 and 9). Convinced that the Church cannot be understood except in the perspective of the heavenly fulfillment toward which she travels, Vatican II interprets the Church in this light (cf. LG 48). Even the obligation to cultivate human goods in this world is squarely grounded in the more fundamental Christian responsibility: to seek heavenly things (cf. GS 57).

Despite this clear and sound teaching, the reality of heaven and hell--and the passing character of this present life--have been generally soft-pedaled and sometimes wholly forgotten since Vatican II. Faith and hope are greatly stressed, and it is well that they are stressed. But the need to do more than say "Lord, Lord!"--that is, the need to build a life of Christian performance on a sound foundation of living faith--often is passed over quietly (cf. Mt 7.21-27; Lk 6.46-49). The teaching of Trent that every Catholic "ought to keep severity and judgment in view as well as mercy and goodness," and that no Catholic should acquit himself or herself (cf. DS 1549/810) is too often violated by preaching and catechesis which at best is one-sided.

Perhaps part of the problem is that times have been comparatively comfortable. Pilgrimage means little in the jet age, especially if the world's troubles have little personal impact upon most people in affluent nations. Catholics must remember that the journey to heaven will be hard, that obstacles must be overcome, that much which is good must be left behind on the way, that the sacrifices which must be made and the sufferings which must be endured cannot be limited in advance, that there is no insurance protection against the cross, that the worldly environment through which we travel is hostile and can be seductive, and that the Church is not a vehicle to spare her members the hardships of travel by transporting them while they relax.

The Church is a gathering of people to make a hard journey <u>on foot</u>. The Church organizes her members into a band; she provides leadership and food for the journey; she heals wounds; she protects her weak and stragglers. But every member of the Church must make his or her own best effort to walk after Jesus; while doing so, all must bear one another's burdens.

As long as we are on this journey, disaster is possible. One can die along the way. The day of the Lord, the day of judgment, is coming; this judgment can spell doom (cf. LG 48). Eternal salvation is at stake at every moment of one's life on earth. Therefore, the concern to avoid or escape promptly from mortal sin is hardly inappropriate. There is much more to Christian life; but if one dies in mortal sin, nothing else matters. One must work out one's personal salvation in fear and trembling (cf. Phil 2.12).

This working out of one's salvation is itself a grace of God. "It is God who, in his good will toward you, begets in you any measure of desire or achievement" (Phil 2.13). The grace God gives is always sufficient; one need only yield to its loving appeal. Even when God permits sin, He does so only to bring from one's self-destructive acts the greater good of His merciful salvation (cf. 1 Tm 1.16).

Perseverance is necessary, and a special grace is required for it. This gift is sure to be given to those who are faithful to the graces they receive. Yet, we must be careful. Salvation is worked out not only in fear and trembling, but "in labors, in sleepless nights, in almsgiving, in prayers and offerings, in fastings, and in chastity"; good Christians "should be in dread about the battle they must wage with the flesh, the world, and the devil" (DS 1540/806).

All of us fall short in many ways. Accordingly, for all of us the way of Christ is a way of self-denial, not only (as it was for Him) to make up for the sins of others but also to make up for our own sins, to heal the effects of sin in ourselves, to strengthen ourselves for a more adequate fight, and to free ourselves from everything which holds us back in our journey along the hard route toward heaven. The sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick organize Christian life from this point of view. I now turn to the study of how they do so.

B. The necessity of penance in addition to baptism

The Catholic Church definitively teaches that the sacrament of penance (also called "sacrament of reconciliation") is necessary for those who commit mortal sin after baptism (cf. DS 1579/839, 1668/894). To remit sins subsequent to baptism, it is not sufficient simply to recall one's baptism (cf. DS 1623/866). Worthy reception of the Eucharist requires that one who has committed a mortal sin receive sacramental penance before receiving Holy Communion, unless one does not have access to a confessor and must say Mass or participate in the Eucharist. A priest who celebrates Mass without having confessed should confess as soon as he can (cf. DS 1646-1647/880, 1661/893).

Is it not sufficient to receive forgiveness to be genuinely sorry for sin out of love of God, even apart from the sacrament of reconciliation? The Council of Trent

> . . .teaches that, although it does sometimes happen that this contrition is made perfect through charity and reconciles man to God before the sacrament is actually received, nevertheless the reconciliation must not be attributed to contrition exclusive of the desire for the sacrament included in the contrition (DS 1677/898).

In other words, some sort of desire for the sacrament is necessary for perfect contrition. As in the case of baptism, this requirement raises a question as to the forgiveness of sins for nonbelievers (in the sacrament) who are in good faith, but this question can be solved by considering good faith a kind of implicit desire for the sacrament, just as with baptism.

The sacrament of reconciliation is similar to baptism in overcoming sin and conferring divine life upon one who receives it worthily. But the sacrament of reconciliation is not simply a repetition of baptism. The two sacraments differ in very important ways.

Repentance of sin committed after baptism not only requires that one give up one's sins and detest them (as baptism also requires) but also demands sacramental confession of sins (at least the desire to confess) and the absolution of a priest. Moreover, the newly baptized person is freed not only from the guilt of sin but also from all of the temporal punishment due to it; the person who has been sacramentally absolved of sin committed after baptism is required to do something to make up for the sins committed--in other words, one who has confessed must do penance by way of satisfaction (cf. DS 1542/807).

The requirement of confession of sins committed after baptism gives the sacrament of reconciliation an essentially judicial character; the sinner must, as it were, stand trial, although if right dispositions are present, pardon of all offenses always is given. The unpleasant need to confess together with the need to do penance to satisfy for sin make the sacrament of reconciliation a hard way to renew the integrity of baptism (cf. DS 1671-1672/895).

Jesus cleansed the temple of activities inappropriate to it; He did not wish it to be defiled. Still less does He wish His temple-body to be polluted with sin (cf. Jn 2.13-22). During His life on earth, Jesus often showed His power to forgive sins (cf. Lk 5.18-24, 7.36-50). When He handed over His saving work to the apostles after His resurrection, He gave them the sacrament of reconciliation as a means by which they might apply the merit of His death for the forgiveness of sin committed after baptism (cf. DS 1668/894). The Catholic Church definitively teaches (DS 1670/894) that Jesus instituted the sacrament of penance when He said:

> "Receive the Holy Spirit.
> If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them;
> if you hold them bound, they are held bound" (Jn 20.22-23).

Those who dislike or reject the sacrament of penance often deny that Jesus instituted it by this conferral of authority. However, the Church's teaching cannot be shown false by any amount of exegesis. Moreover, the binding and loosing referred to in the quoted passage is involved in no other centrally important act of the Church--certainly not in baptism, where no judicial act is required.

The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15.1-32) often are taken in homilies as illustrations of God's readiness and eagerness to forgive sinners. It is right to use these parables for this purpose. However, they do not clearly refer to the sacrament of reconciliation as distinct from baptism. It would be arbitrary to hold, for example, that the absence of confession and satisfaction in respect to the father's forgiveness of his prodigal son means that these elements are nonessential in the sacrament of penance. At the same time, it is right to point out that these essential elements are subordinate to what is central: contrition and absolution.

C. What is the essential fruit of the sacrament of reconciliation?

The essential parts of the sacrament of reconciliation are the acts of contrition, confession, and satisfaction on the part of the penitent, and the act of absolution on the part of the minister of the sacrament (cf. DS 1673/896). Absolution is the wiping out of sin; the bonds which held the sinner fall away.

> The complete effect of this sacrament, so far as its full efficaciousness is concerned, is reconciliation with God, which, in devout men who receive the sacrament with devotion, is sometimes followed by peace and serenity of conscience joined to a great consolation of soul (DS 1674/896).

As Lazarus in death was called forth by Jesus, freed of his bonds, and restored to his personal relationship with his loved ones (cf. Jn 11.44), so the friend of Jesus who is dead in sin is called forth by Him in this sacrament, loosed of the bonds of sin, and restored to the communion of the Church and the love of the Father.

God greatly desires the reconciliation of sinners. He does not wish any soul to be lost (cf. Mt 18.10-14; Lk 15.3-7). If we are faithful to Christ, we will enjoy glory with Him; if we are unfaithful, He will disown us. Yet, paradoxically, He is faithful even when we are unfaithful; He keeps His promises even when we do not; He constantly seeks our free surrender to His love (cf. 2 Tm 2.11-13). For this reason, not to embarress sinners, Jesus gave His Church the power to bind and loose. The Church from the beginning has used this power to rescue sinners (cf. Mt 16.15-19, 18.15-18; Jn 20.19-23; 1 Cor 5.1-5, 9.13; 2 Cor 2.5-11).

Nevertheless, one might wonder why the sacrament of reconciliation has to have a judicial aspect absent from baptism. Why is it not enough to seek in one's heart for reconciliation with God? The basis for an answer to this question is in the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament mentioned in Vatican II's statement:

> Those who approach the sacrament of penance obtain pardon from the mercy of God for offenses committed against Him. They are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, prayer, and example seeks their conversion (LG 11).

The Introduction to the new rite of penance expands upon the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament of penance:

> "By the hidden and loving mystery of God's design men are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others." Penance always entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins.
>
> In fact, men frequently join together to commit injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance so that they who are freed from sin by the grace of Christ may work with all men of good will for justice and peace in the world.[1]

Christians are not united to God in a purely spiritual way and as isolated individuals. Rather, we are united to Him only in the Church, by socially structured outward acts. Sin disrupts one's relationship with the Church. Reconciliation requires that one be restored to God by being humanly reconciled to the Church. For this human reconciliation, the human encounter and judicial aspect of the sacrament of reconciliation are indispensable.[2]

In chapter twenty-seven, section L, I discussed the ecclesial significance of mortal sin. Corresponding to the ecclesial significance of sin is the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament of penance. The old, solemn rite of public penance in the Roman Pontifical makes clear the ecclesial dimension of penance. Prayer is offered for those to be reconciled:

> Grant, O God, that they may re-enter the bosom of Thy Church, that Thy Son may cleanse them from all their crimes, and give them the grace to partake in the sacred festival. . .. Grant, O Lord, that with the ablution of their sins, they may be given back without harm to the holy community of Thy Church, from which they were separated by their sins. . .and that in this way the Church shall not be deprived of part of her body. . .bring back the saved members into the unity of Thy Body, the Church. . .in order that, having been clothed with the wedding garment, they may deserve to return to the royal feast from which they were expelled. . ..[3]

By mortal sin, one breaks communion with the Church. That is why the mortal sinner is excluded from Holy Communion. The absolution of the sacrament of reconciliation readmits the sinner into perfect communion with the Church and by this very fact brings the sinner back to friendship with God, who for His part never ceased to love His alienated son or daughter.

D. What does contrition contribute to reconciliation?

With respect to contrition, the Church has defined clearly what it is, precisely as an act of the recipent of the sacrament of penance:

> Contrition, which ranks first among these acts of the penitent, is a deep sorrow and detestation for sin committed, with a resolution of sinning no more. Moreover, this spirit of contrition has always been necessary to obtain the forgiveness of sin, and thus, in the case of a man who has fallen after baptism, it is certainly a preparation for the remission of sins, if it be accompanied by trust in the divine mercy and a firm desire of fulfilling the other conditions necessary to receive the sacrament properly. Therefore, this holy council declares that this contrition implies not only abandoning sin and determining to lead a new life and beginning to do so, but also hating one's past life . . . (DS 1696/897).

True contrition is the basic act of the penitent. It includes within itself a firm purpose of amendment and the utter rejection of one's past sin. It requires a sincere intention to fulfill all the other conditions for worthy reception of the sacrament. If this intention does not exist, contrition is not sincere, and any feeling of sorrow is useless. And yet contrition does not by itself remit sins; of itself it is a preparation for the forgiveness of sins.

The Introduction to the new rite of penance also stresses the need for sincerity of contrition. After quoting the central concept from Trent, the document goes on to identify contrition with conversion (repentance; metanoia)--"a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God. . .." Further: "The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ."[4]

The very possibility of repentance is mysterious, inasmuch as in sinning one does determine oneself. The time for repentance is limited (cf. Lk 13.1-9); it is possible while one lives in this changeable existence, but no longer possible when one is fully integrated with one's own free choices after death. Even now, contrition is a special grace of God; He visits the sinner with His love and produces sorrow which gives up sin without regrets (cf. Lk 19.1-10; 2 Cor 7.9-11).

There existed a longstanding controversy among Catholic theologians as to whether the contrition required in the sacrament of reconciliation must include as a basis for sorrow love of God for His own sake. The Holy See has left this issue open (cf. DS 2070/1146). The teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas is that genuine contrition and the conferral of charity are mutually dependent; the mortal sinner cannot love God as His child should love Him without becoming contrite and cannot become contrite without loving God again as His child. Both come together by the coming together of the grace of God and the sinner's free response created by this grace. This can occur before the sacrament

is received or in its reception, provided that one approaches the sacrament with the right intentions.[5]

Obviously, a penitent must believe in God and must hope in Him. One cannot approach the sacrament with serious intentions if one is not confident that God acts in it and that He is quite ready to do everything necessary to restore one to grace. Also, one must have rejected sin and must desire to do what is right, and in this desire is at least an implicit, human love of God as the source of all good. Still, such love is not identical with charity; the latter is not a human act, but rather a divine gift, as I explained in chapter eighteen, section L. At what moment this gift is conferred again upon those who have committed mortal sin does not seem to be determinable, except that the teaching on the sacrament of reconciliation makes clear that it is conferred on those who receive the sacrament worthily at least as soon as absolution is administered.

If what I have just now explained is correct, then the perfect contrition by which one begins again to live as a child of God out of love of Him is not psychologically recognizable. Prior to the reception of the sacrament, one cannot know that one has "made an act of perfect contrition"; one can only know with moral certitude that one truly is contrite and not out of purely selfish motives. One can know that one desires to submit wholly to God.

Moreover, even this experience of contrition can be spurious. It is possible to deceive oneself that one is contrite, and so to accept a mere appearance of contrition as a welcome substitute for the more painful reality. However, sincerity about confession, the intention to change one's life, and willingness to do penance in satisfaction for one's sins are significant indications that contrition is real.

Conversion, contrition, repentance, turning toward God--all the same thing--is not once and for all. If we sin mortally after baptism, a new and radical conversion is again needed. But even if we do not sin mortally, venial sins detract from our friendship with God. Thus, for all of us, continuing repentance is essential for our Christian lives (cf. Rom 6.12-14; 1 Cor 5.7-13; Eph 4.20-24; Col 3.1-17).

E. The confession of sins

The Church definitively teaches that to obtain remission of sins, confession of them--each and every mortal sin found during diligent self-examination--is required by divine law (cf. DS 1707/917). Also, the Church definitively and insistently teaches that such confession is not impossible and that the requirement of it is no mere human tradition (cf. DS 1708/918).

The requirement for integral confession of sins, in kind and number, is prescribed by Jesus Christ. It is implicit in the character of absolution, which is a judicial act in which the Church's power to bind and loose is exercised by pardoning the sinner. The judgment cannot be rendered without a statement of the case. Nor can appropriate penances be imposed if sins are not manifested (cf. DS 1679/899).

All mortal sins, including the circumstances which alter their kind and seriousness, must be confessed. Venial sins need not but may be confessed (cf. DS 1680-1681/899). The difficulty of confessing one's sins seems heavy, but it is lightened by the great benefits received with absolution for those who receive the sacrament worthily, and also by confidence in the secrecy of the confessional (cf. DS 1682-1683/900-901). In any human interpersonal relationship, a sincere and open admission of wrongdoing, by its very difficulty for the one who makes it, goes some way toward making up for the wrong done; so in the sacrament of penance, honest and complete confession of sin by one truly contrite is itself a penitential act of considerable value.

As in times past so today there is a tendency to evade the requirement of detailed, integral confession of sins. The likelihood that self-deception is involved should not be overlooked. One generally not only is embarrassed to speak openly of one's sins, but also is reluctant to make a perfectly clean break with them. If integral confession were not required, many of us would limit and so corrupt our contrition, thus to settle for a feeling of repentance without its reality.

It often is said today that one ought to be more concerned to locate the roots of one's sins than to provide a precise list of them. One certainly should try to locate one's most basic sins, and also should try to clarify their occasions. But sin is a matter of free choice, not a matter of psychological determinism. Sin does not have roots as do problems of mental health. To seek roots of sin apart from one's own ill will and the occasions of sin is to pretend that one is not a sinner. Such a pretense is a common consequence of self-deception and evasion of the clear light of moral truth. Moreover, even to the extent that less important sins have roots in one's more basic sins, the former still are important, for they are part of one's state of alienation from God and the Church which must be repaired by the sacrament.

F. How does penance organize the entire life of a Christian?

It is obvious that penance organizes Christian life by demanding that one examine one's conscience, repent of one's sins, and amend one's life. Amendment requires not only that the sins themselves be avoided, but also that occasions of sin be avoided or altered. It is less obvious, but still an essential point of Catholic teaching on the sacrament of penance, that even forgiven sin deserves some punishment; one must make up for the excess of sin by satisfaction of some sort (cf. DS 1689/904).

To understand the full implications of the more and less obvious characteristic of penance, one must distinguish carefully among various meanings of self-denial. Self-denial can be detachment, moral practice, mortification, resignation, or penance. The very same behavior can be two or more of these at once, yet they differ in their precise meanings.

Detachment is the surrender of any interest, desire, or objective which would limit one from using all one's time, energy, and resources to love God and neighbor. Detachment is self-liberation for service. The other side of doing everything for the glory of God and in Jesus' name (cf. 1 Cor 10.31; Col 3.17), is that any relationship,

any possession, any power which interferes with total dedication is to be left behind, set aside, thrown overboard. The pilgrim must travel light. I discussed detachment at length in chapter twenty, sections J through M, because it is one of the basic modes of Christian response.

Moral practice--asceticism in the strict sense--is a matter of doing good works which one would not choose for their own sake, but which one does for practice or training, so that one will be able to do other and more difficult good works when the responsibilities of one's Christian life call for them. The ideas of pursuit of a prize in a contest and of training for war, which one finds in St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9.24-27; Phil 1.27, 3.8-16; Eph 6.10-16; 1 Tm 4.7-10) suggest the model of asceticism in its narrow sense. An example of such training is the practice engaged in by many saints of wearing an itchy shirt, so that the habit of resisting sensory inclination to relieve the discomfort of the shirt would train one to resist temptations to sexual and other sins of sensory gratification.

Mortification is the putting to death of sin so that one can fully live for goodness in Christ (cf. Rom 6.6-23; Gal 5.24). Usually when one speaks of mortification, what is in question is an especially determined and systematic campaign against sin, not only against mortal but also against venial sin. From a positive viewpoint, mortification is vivification; it is the use of every ability and part of oneself to contribute to fulfillment in Christ (cf. DS 1535/803). Mortification pertains to Christian devotion, treated in chapter twenty-one, sections E through H.

Resignation is the acceptance out of love for God of everything evil which befalls one insofar as every such occurrence must have been permitted by God, directed to some good by His wise and loving providence, and intended to be a challenge either to one's ingenuity or to one's patience. When an evil can be healed by Christian, transforming love, then it is the work of resignation to accept and transform it; when an evil cannot be healed even by charity, then it is the work of resignation simply to endure it patiently, no matter how gross it is. The latter sort of resignation is especially necessary with respect to incurable suffering and death. Resignation is an aspect of Christian dedication and meekness, treated in chapter twenty, sections F through I. As I will explain in section M, below, resignation is especially related to the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

Finally, what is most strictly called "penance" is reparation; it is undoing the moral consequences of sin, which remain even after the acts of contrition and absolution. In chapter thirty, section L, I clarified the idea of retribution. It is not vengeance, but is a restitution of a balance which has been upset by wrongdoing. Sin is betrayal of the Church and a sort of adultery against God. One not only needs to be sorry and to be restored to communion; one needs to make up for what one has done to the relationship.

The situation is like that which would exist if a man committed adultery against his wife, repented, and was forgiven by her. It still would be necessary that by more generous love he should try to give his wife more of himself to make up to her for that of himself which he had wrongfully taken from her. In effect, the repentant, adulterous husband should try to compensate in happiness for the misery he has caused. So we with God. Although God is neither hurt nor pleased by us in a merely human way, still our relationship with God does matter to Him, and when we are unfaithful, we need to make amends.

Although the various aspects of Christian self-denial can be distinguished as I have just done, they are closely related. All of them are embraced in the Christian's sharing in the cross of Christ: "'If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and follow in my footsteps'" (Mk 8.34; cf. Mt 16.24-28; Lk 9.23-27). Like Jesus, each Christian must live a life detached from many good things which would interfere with holiness and a life of witness; must engage in moral practice; must accept suffering, death, and other evils as God's will; and must make reparation for sin. Unlike Jesus, we must make up for our own sins first of all; we must strive to overcome sin in ourselves, so that we can attain to full life in Him.

Christian self-denial by no means involves despising or rejecting created goods insofar as they are goods. It does flow from the insight that all human activity is infected by sin, that progress means the healing of this infection, and that this healing sometimes requires radical surgery and always involves unpleasant medicine:

> Hence if anyone wants to know how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians will tell him that all human activity, constantly imperiled by man's pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection. For, redeemed by Christ and made a new creature in the Holy Spirit, man is able to love the things created by God, and ought to do so (GS 37).

Thus all of one's life must be purged of the effects of sin.

With respect to penance in the strict sense, the Church teaches that satisfaction for sin is necessary, and that by it we are made like Jesus who satisfied for our sins. The satisfaction we make is not independent, but is made through Jesus, for of ourselves we can do nothing (cf. DS 1689-1691/904). Therefore, it belongs to the sacrament of reconciliation that a penance be imposed on the penitent (cf. DS 1692/905). However, doing this penance is only a gesture or token of the will to make up for sin. In addition to it is the fact that everything we suffer in life and accept from God can serve as a penance for our sins (cf. DS 1693/906). Therefore, it is appropriate that the confessor conclude the sacrament by praying that the passion of Christ, the intercession of Mary, and "whatever good you do and suffering you endure, heal your sins, help you grow in holiness, and reward you with eternal life."[6] The whole of one's life becomes a penance, as well as being a mortification for holiness, and a work of merit in God's eyes.

G. Likeness to Jesus in the penitential life

Insofar as it means living the way of the cross, Christian self-denial obviously is an essential aspect of following Christ. However, insofar as His self-denial was entirely for others, we are likely to overlook the extent to which our own struggle

against our own sin and its consequences within ourselves is a sharing in the passion of Christ. Yet it is clear that there is an important aspect of Christ-likeness in this struggle. So there is a great nobility in it which we tend to overlook. Perhaps we forget that as Christians and sinners we are split personalities: victims of our own freedom as sinners, beneficiaries of God's grace as Christians united with Jesus in a redemptive work which we must carry out first of all in ourselves. This point was considered to some extent in chapter twenty-nine, section L.

The imitation of Christ is an imitation of His self-denial. It also is an imitation of His endurance unto glory (cf. Heb 12.1-4).

> All the members ought to be molded into Christ's image until He is formed in them (cf. Gal 4.19). For this reason we who have been made like unto Him, who have died with Him and been raised up with Him, are taken up into the mysteries of His life, until we reign together with Him (cf. Phil 3.21; 2 Tm 2.11; Eph 2.6; Col 2.12; etc.). Still in pilgrimage upon the earth, we trace in trial and under oppression the paths he trod. Made one with His sufferings as the body is one with the head, we endure with Him, that with Him we may be glorified (cf. Rom 8.17) (LG 7).

The whole of Christian life is a putting on of the new man, created in God's image, and a putting off of the old self, with its illusions and false desires (cf. Eph 4.17-24).

The suffering of tribulations as a condition for the coming of the kingdom was proclaimed in the Old Testament, for example, in Daniel. Thus Christians were not surprised by their sufferings (cf. Lk 24.26; Acts 14.22, 17.3; 1 Thess 1.6, 2.15, 3.2-3; 2 Thess 1.5; and so on). Suffering with Christ is a condition of being glorified with Him (cf. Rom 8.17-18; Phil 3.10-11). The apostolic life, to which every Christian is called, as I explained in chapter thirty-three, cannot be without suffering (cf. 2 Cor 4.7-12; Col 1.24-29; Eph 3.1-19; Phil 3.17-19).

To share in the divine nature with Jesus is to separate oneself from the corrupt world (cf. 2 Pt 1.3-11). Faithfulness to our Lord Jesus necessarily means division from others who do not accept Him (cf. Mt 10.34-36; Lk 12.49-53). To sanctify themselves by suffering and to redeem the world from sin, the followers of Christ are left in the world, to which they do not belong (cf. Jn 17.15-16). Consecrated to the truth, Christians have God's Word to communicate; for this the unbelieving world inevitably hates them (cf. Jn 17.14). The Word of God is a burning coal in the mouth of those who utter it.

There is a natural tendency to wish to avoid and forget about this painful and fearsome aspect of Christianity. One thinks one perhaps ought to be exempted from suffering. But to be exempted from it also would be to be excluded from holiness. Jesus surely loved His mother dearly, but He did not prevent her suffering along with Himself, as Vatican II teaches:

> . . .the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan (cf. Jn 19.25), suffering grievously with her only-begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to His sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth (LG 58).

Surely, the great sorrow any mother naturally feels at the death of her child was increased immeasurably in Mary's case by the following facts: Jesus was her only child; Joseph almost certainly already had died; the relationship between Jesus and Mary was unmarred by selfishness on either side; the killing of Jesus was terribly unjust; the manner of His death was unusually cruel; Mary was present but unable to do anything tangible to help. God did not permit Mary to suffer so much except for the great good of the closeness to Jesus she achieved in this gift of suffering. This good and gift, like everything in Mary, is proposed to us by the Word of God and by the Church as a model for our own lives.

H. <u>What are the primary forms of penance suited to us today?</u>

Traditionally, fasting, penance, and prayer were proposed as the three typical acts of penance (cf. Is 58.3-10; Tb 12.8-10). Jesus dealt with abuses in these practices, insisting that they be done in a proper spirit, not for show, but He by no means abolished or criticized the practices themselves (cf. Mt 6.1-18).

Jesus' acceptance of the three practices is understandable. For sin is self-destructive, antisocial, and alienating from God. The destructive self-indulgence of sin is to some extent made up for by the self-restraint of fasting; the antisocial aspect of sin (its damage to the Church's communion of love) is made up for by the mercy of almsgiving; and the alienation from God and pride in sin is made up for by loving praise and petition to Him. Hence, fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are types of acts which clearly are suitable for penance.

Christian thought never has regarded these penitential practices narrowly, nor conceived them as arbitrary and irrational impositions. To keep watch and to pray is to keep a vigil--that is, to deny oneself rest as a method of serving the Lord more perfectly (cf. Mt 26.38-41; Mk 13.33; Lk 21.36). Moreover, as St. Leo the Great pointed out, fasting and almsgiving logically fit together; what one denies to oneself one has available for the satisfaction of the needs of others.[7] Essentially, then, the classic system of penance is: Give up what might otherwise legitimately be claimed as one's own, use it for the service of others, and draw nearer to God by prayer.

In his apostolic constitution on penance, <u>Paenitemini</u>, Paul VI puts traditional penance into a contemporary framework. He urges that internal conversion and external penance be linked closely. With respect to this point, he makes three subpoints. First,

> . . .that everyone practice the virtue of penance by constantly attending to the duties pertaining to his state in life and by patiently enduring the trials of each day's work here on earth and the uncertainties of life that cause so much anxiety of mind.

In other words, our penance is to do our jobs, to put up with one another, and to accept inevitable sufferings. The second point is that those who are especially burdened by infirmity, disease, or oppression should offer their misery. The third point is that

priests and religious should follow Jesus more closely in His self-emptying.[8]

The old penance of fast and abstinence is not entirely done away with, but it is considerably reduced as a legal obligation. Pope Paul suggests that in wealthy countries it is appropriate that Catholics deny themselves sufficiently that they show themselves not to be in conformity with their cultures, and that they practice charity toward others, especially including the wretched in distant lands.[9] The bishops of the United States have retained a minimum framework of the traditional discipline of penance, while urging works of mercy as especially appropriate penance.[10]

If we think about the question of penance in this framework the Church has provided for us, we can see easily many ways in which we can make our lives more like Jesus' life. A person who has completely organized his or her life by vocational commitments will have included the principles of penance to such an extent that no supplement of penance will be possible. But few if any of us are so well organized. Therefore, penances can be chosen in addition to those which in any case fulfill some other commitment.

In the line of fasting, one can think at once of many ways to deny oneself free and unrestricted use of one's own time, energy, money, and possessions. One obviously can give up unneeded food, drink, and sleep, according to older practices. One can give away things one likes. One can settle for less pay than one might obtain. One can take one's exercise in manual labor, as St. Paul did, rather than in a pleasant game or sport. One can deny oneself the pleasure of idle talk. One can allow others to have their way in matters of taste, as long as no question of principle is involved.

In the line of almsgiving, one can give money. But one also can give all sorts of help to others. One can give truth which is not welcome. One also can give one's time and energy more fully than one is strictly required to do in the fulfillment of one's duties. For example, a professional person might give more freely of time to clients or patients or students. A priest might carefully avoid recreational activities on Saturday evening and spend as many hours as possible in preparing a better Sunday homily.

Prayer remains an important form of penance. Prayer is involved in resignation, the acceptance of suffering and pain as God's will. For to accept is to do something: to control one's feelings and actions as much as one can in a way that is fitting for a Christian. For example, if a woman loses her husband to death or a man loses his job due to some injustice, then they accept what has happened by understanding it in faith, judging it with hope, and acting toward themselves and others involved with love. The beginning of the whole process is prayer. Without prayer, there is no Christian resignation, and without Christian resignation, there is no Christian life. For the largest part of any truly Christian life is disappointment, frustration, and pain.

I. <u>On the Christian use of the mass media</u>

The mass media of communication present a problem for Christian living to which too little systematic theological attention has been paid. The constant flow of controlled content through these media constitutes an unprecedented assault on human minds and souls. The electronic media undoubtedly present the most serious challenge, but the print media and various forms of public advertising, such as billboards, also are a problem.

In general, morally thoughtful persons, including some nonbelievers, agree in several observations about the mass media.

First, much of the content lacks real worth. It neither is of high esthetic quality, nor of educational value, nor of social importance. Rather, it is likely to be mere amusement and escapism, containing much falsity and misrepresentation, and produced to serve the very limited interests of certain privileged groups--such as the wealthy who make profits from the sponsoring corporations.

Second, the mass media must appeal to masses. To do this, they aim to provide quick and repeated gratification at the most vulgar level. The result is that people are less and less able to stand any delay in gratification. Moreover, people are habituated to having communication be entertaining. This habit renders difficult every effort at education in depth.

Third, the mass media--most especially television--tend to displace thought and conversation. The constant flow of stimulation renders the listener and viewer more and more passive. At the same time, persons in a house with such an inflow are far less likely to wish--or even to be able--to sit and talk with one another. Television also blocks many activities outside the home. People who in former times might have come to church for a devotional exercise or for choir practice now often are inclined to stay home to watch a favorite television program.

Television is especially bad for several reasons. It is most absorbing because it uses both sight and hearing. It offers little possibility of intelligent choice and selection (as a rack full of books, for example, does). Television advertising regularly gives inappropriate motives for making choices, and often persuades people to choices which most who live a Christian life ought not to make in any case.

To live a Christian life, Christians, especially children, must gradually draw out the value implications of their faith and apply these implications in action. To accomplish this task believers must reflect deeply and at length. Much of the liturgy, most of the time in any catechetical program, a part of every good homily, and much of the rest of Christian instructional material is directed toward this end: personal assimilation of the truth of faith and application of it to life. The mass media intervene to block this process, to abort each Christian's life.

To some extent, the media are not specifically concerned to accomplish this abortion. It is indirect. They are simply trying to make money and to pursue other worldly ends--for example, the fame of some and the self-gratification of others who perform, produce, direct, and so on. But to some extent, it seems to me, many who have power in the media have definite, malevolent, antireligious (and sometimes specifically anti-Catholic) intentions. There is hatred of the light and effort to put it out. One need only have had experience dealing with the media in a matter such as the legalization of abortion to have become aware of this fact.

Attempts to censor the media, except in some marginal cases, are unlikely to be very successful. Moreover, they probably cannot be carried far without injustice to those whose liberty censorship would infringe. In any case, what is wrong with the media is far more general than what is a specific occasion of sin in them.

The only solution is that Christians begin to provide themselves with a great deal more and better information--for example, by advance reviewing of television programs by panels of Christian critics--concerning the content of the media, and that they use this information to cut their exposure to the media to a bare minimum. In this way, peace, quiet, time, and reflectiveness can be recaptured for prayer, reflection, self-examination, conversation, and other human and Christian uses of the faculties which have been absorbed in and abused by the media during the period since World War II.

Among the young, music presents another special problem. Music is not morally neutral. It directly works upon the emotions, arousing and calming. Everyone knows that a cheerful song cheers, and a stirring march stirs. Much of the popular music of the adolescent is oriented either toward sexual arousal or toward rebellion. Often the lyrics are morally objectionable. To ignore or pass over lightly so obvious a problem is to surrender children to moloch without a fight.

J. How is restitution different from penance?

Although restitution pertains to the common responsibilities of Christian life rather than to Christian moral principles, I discuss the topic briefly in order to distinguish between restitution and penance.

Restitution for harm done is an obligation which follows in strict justice from all personal wrongdoing which unjustly causes harm to anyone. Harm is actual, definite damage of any sort. It is distinct from the inherent moral evil of sin, which is made up for by penance. The moral evil to oneself, to one's relationships with other persons, and to God is built into sin; the need to satisfy for this moral evil by penance follows whether one has unjustly harmed anyone or not.

An example will help to clarify matters. Suppose I steal someone's car. Morally, I need to repent and to do penance. But also, as a matter of justice, I have done the harm of taking another's property. I must give the car back. Perhaps I am caught and the police restore the car to its rightful owner. Still, I must repent and do penance to get straightened out morally. Perhaps, however, the person from whom I stole the car is a billionaire with a strange sense of humor. I repent and offer him the car back, but he tells me to keep it, since he never liked it anyway and had hoped I would steal it. In this case, I do not have to make restitution or reparation of harm, since there is no injustice in keeping the car. But I still have to do penance, for my sin has upset the moral harmony within myself, with other people, and with God.

Sometimes a person commits a grave injustice and it is impossible to make restitution or reparation for the harm which has been done. For example, an employer perhaps unjustly permits his workers to work under unsafe conditions. One of them is killed--a young man without family responsibilities or other dependents. Nothing the employer can do will make up for the harm done. There is no way for us to bring the dead back to life, and money damages are simply irrelevant in a case of this sort. Still, the employer needs to repent.

Restitution for harm is most often recognized as a moral obligation in matters of money and property. The obligation is wider. If a person harms others through bad example, he or she ought to try to help those scandalized to know that the example was bad and ought not to be followed. If a person harms another by careless, unfair talk, then there is an obligation to try to correct the erroneous impressions which have been given. Whenever one repents of any sin, one needs to ask oneself who has been harmed, whether the harm was caused unjustly (willing accomplices in one's sins are not harmed unjustly, and so restitution is not due them in strict justice), and whether and how restitution can be made.

One who does not conscientiously consider the obligation to make restitution is only half-sincere, if that, in repenting. Of course, restitution, although distinct in concept from penance, can also serve as penance, even as part of one's sacramentally imposed penance with the approval of the confessor.

The distinction between restitution and penance is very important, however, and must be borne in mind when one acts with only venial guilt but causes serious harm to others. In such a case, one need not repent as if of mortal sin, for one has not committed mortal sin. Still, the obligation to make restitution for the harm done is present. Thus, the thoughtless word which does harm to another demands careful effort to remedy the harm, even if the thoughtlessness was virtually blameless.

K. At what age should Catholics begin to receive the sacrament of reconciliation?

The longstanding practice of the Latin rite is that children do not receive Holy Communion until they are old enough to act with some moral responsibility--that is, after the age of reason, which is assumed normally to be at six or seven years. Together with this practice, there has gone the practice of introducing children to the sacrament of reconciliation at about the same time they are preparing for first Communion. Normally, children have been encouraged to make their first confession shortly before making their first Holy Communion.

In recent years this practice has been challenged and in some places set aside. In 1973, the Holy See published a document directing that contrary experiments should cease, and that everybody everywhere should conform to the decree, Quam singulari, of St. Pius X, which prescribes that children might receive the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist (in this order) as soon as they have the use of reason.[11]

Despite this judgment of the Holy See, which no one is authorized to qualify, many children are not at present prepared and encouraged to make their first confession before they make their first Holy Communion. If children in the Latin rite were permitted to make their first Communion in infancy and to go to Holy Communion regularly thereafter,

then they obviously could not receive the sacrament of penance before receiving the Eucharist. But as matters now stand, they can do so. It seems to me that in any case, children ought to be prepared and encouraged to make their first sacramental confession as soon as they have the use of reason, and they also ought to be encouraged to receive this sacrament regularly from that time on.

There are two theological reasons why this position is challenged. First, some hold that the sacrament of reconciliation should be received only when it is strictly necessary--that is, when one is conscious and morally certain that one has committed a mortal sin. They hold that mortal sin is perhaps never committed by children or, at least, is very unlikely. Therefore, they think that few if any children should make a sacramental confession. Second, some might accept sacramental confession for older children and adults even when there is no mortal sin on an individual's conscience, but they think that children of six or seven are too undeveloped in conscience to profit from such an act. They hold that children do not develop a mature conscience until puberty or later, and that until this time the sacrament of penance is inappropriate.

Contrary to the first opinion, the Council of Trent teaches that while the sacrament of penance is not necessary for the remission of venial sins, still it is altogether appropriate. The practice was challenged by Protestants; Trent firmly defends it (cf. DS 1680/899). This Catholic practice was explained by Pius XII, who begins by admitting that venial sins may be forgiven in many ways. Then he continues:

> But to hasten daily progress along the path of virtue, we wish the practice of frequent confession to be especially commended, a practice introduced by the Church, but not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. By it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, evil habits are uprooted, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary control of one's affections gained, and in virtue of the sacrament itself grace is increased.[12]

The Introduction to the new rite of the sacrament of reconciliation also strongly commends the practice of frequent and careful celebration of the sacrament as a remedy for venial sins.[13]

All of the psychological factors which argue for confession of sins--for example, the pressure this practice sets up against self-deception and the demand it makes to work continuously at self-improvement--argue for confession of deliberate venial sins. Against the practice of the Church, contrary opinion has little plausibility for individuals' judgments with respect to themselves, and no legitimacy at all for priests' and teachers' judgments with respect to the children entrusted to them by God and the Church.

Contrary to the second opinion, if children can make free choices, they can make sinful choices, and possibly even mortally sinful choices. No evidence, no reason, and nothing from revelation points to an immunity for children who can make free choices from the possibility of making sinful choices. To deny this possibility is pure sentimentality.

Perhaps in many cases children of six or seven have little insight into moral truth; perhaps in few cases are they tempted to do anything they know to be wrong with that sufficient reflection necessary for mortal sin. Still, the possibility of mortal sin cannot be ruled out entirely, and the possibility of deliberate venial sin clearly is present in small children.

If the sins of children generally are different in kind from the sins of adults, it need not follow that sacramental reconciliation is inappropriate for children. The sacrament is not a rigid object; it is a form of cooperation between sinners, the ministers of the Church, our loving Lord Jesus, and our God and Father who saves us all. God knows well how to enter into cooperation with each sinner at his or her own level; so does Jesus. The ministers of the Church also need to be adaptable; they must accept the sins of children as they are, and respond to them with the serious attention, the sympathy, and the gentle direction that Jesus wishes to give to each of His little ones.

Because of the manner in which conscience develops, the real sins of children are at first almost entirely instances of disobedience. The psychological background of this fact has been set out in chapter twenty-eight, sections B through E. However, it is not at all impossible for children to have some understanding at the level of moral truth that they ought to be obedient.[14] Hence, acts of disobedience can be deliberate venial sins of a rather serious kind. If a child confesses regularly and makes some effort to overcome the temptation and disposition to willfulness, a moral foundation is laid for other moral struggles sure to come in adolescence. If a child does not confess regularly and begins to indulge without restraint in deliberate disobedience, the foundation is laid for a summary rejection of moral authority, which inevitably is regarded by early adolescents as a quasi-legal authority.

Moreover, there are many things which children do spontaneously which are not sins for them, but kinds of acts not inherently wrong. But as children grow, they acquire definite responsibilities. These demand that earlier habits be changed; one must put off childish ways. To fail to do so, to continue to act with a younger child's spontaneity as one grows toward adolescence, is to begin to commit many venial sins. As I explained in chapter thirty, section E, habits of deliberate venial sin present a serious threat to Christian life. Therefore, children must be helped to develop an acute moral awareness, so that the period from six to twelve does not become a transition from infantile imperfection to adolescent obduracy in mortal sin. Herein lies the wisdom of Holy Mother Church in wishing to lead little ones to the sacrament of reconciliation.

One final point. If a child has not made a practice of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation before he or she becomes conscious of having committed a mortal sin, how likely is it that the child (or adolescent or adult) will be able to summon the courage to approach the necessary sacrament after a mortal sin has been committed? I think it is clear that those who fail to prepare and encourage children to make their first confession before first Communion are doing these little ones a grave disservice. To such persons are applicable the words of Jesus on giving scandal to children (cf. Mt 18.1-6).

L. How does the sacrament of the anointing of the sick complete penance?

The Council of Trent begins its teaching on the sacrament of anointing of the sick by linking it to the sacrament of penance. Trent says that the sacrament of anointing is a "culmination not only of penance but of the whole of Christian life which itself ought to be a continual penance" (DS 1694/907). The sacrament of anointing, according to this teaching, organizes the whole of Christian life by shaping it into a penitential preparation for death in Christ. This teaching makes clear that the sacrament of anointing is an important general principle of Christian morality.

The basis in Scripture for the Church's understanding of the anointing of the sick is the following brief passage:

> Is there anyone sick among you? He should ask for the presbyters of the church. They in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name [of the Lord]. This prayer uttered in faith will reclaim the one who is ill, and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed any sins, forgiveness will be his (Jas 5.14-15).

Trent teaches that in this passage all of the essential elements of this sacrament are included (cf. DS 1695-1696/908-909).

The effects of the sacrament are explained clearly and in felicitous form in the Introduction to the new rite of this sacrament:

> This sacrament provides the sick person with the grace of the Holy Spirit by which the whole man is brought to health, trust in God is encouraged, and strength is given to resist the temptations of the Evil One and anxiety about death. Thus the sick person is able not only to bear his suffering bravely, but also to fight against it. A return to physical health may even follow the reception of this sacrament if it will be beneficial to the sick person's salvation. If necessary, the sacrament also provides the sick person with forgiveness of sins and the completion of Christian penance.[15]

Anointing is a sacramental mopping-up operation. It brings to bear the redemptive work of Christ, to help the gravely ill person in every way appropriate in this ultimate situation. The temptation to despair before the terror of death is pushed aside; the soul and, if it is well, the body is healed.

The sacrament of penance sends the penitent out to a life of penance, a life of making up for sin by renewal according to the Gospel.[16] The suffering one endures as well as the good one does is consecrated for one's conversion unto eternal life.[17] In the sacrament of anointing, this consecration, which is as it were a promise of continuing conversion, is renewed for the last time. If one has not kept it perfectly, one receives a last chance to do so. One's life now is consecrated to the last penance: suffering and death with Christ. One receives a special role in the Church, that of serving as a reminder to every Christian what life is all about, what in the end it means, and how all of our lives will end.[18]

The Christian attitude toward suffering and death is at once totally realistic and completely mystical.

On the one hand, suffering and death are recognized as being completely unnatural, absolutely horrible, and utterly final. Suffering and death are consequences of sin; human persons and children of God ought not to have to endure such evils. Christian faith does not pretend that suffering and death are inherently natural, only conditionally evil, basically good, or remediable by cosmetics. The illusions of pagan mummification and secular humanist funeral practices are altogether contrary to Christian realism about suffering and death.[19]

On the other hand, Christian faith requires that suffering and death be accepted with hope. One must abandon oneself and one's loved ones to the mercy of God, confident that He can unite the death of Christians with that of Jesus, and so bring glory in resurrection for all who die in Christ. Death is not to last, contrary to the belief or wish of sinners (cf. Ws 2.1-20).

> I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I might arrive at resurrection from the dead (Phil 3.10-11).

The attitude of every Christian should be that of Paul in prison: "I firmly trust and anticipate that I never shall be put to shame for my hopes; I have full confidence that now as always Christ will be exalted through me, whether I live or die" (Phil 1.20).

Resurrection and glory are goods, the greatest of goods. The only way to them is suffering and death. Jesus completed His incarnation by sharing the human condition fully, by loving to the end (cf. Jn 13.1). For us to share in redemption we too must pass through the hell of death. For this passage our entire lives ought to prepare us. For the culmination of this preparation the sacrament of anointing consecrates us. A life lived in unity with Christ by willingness to suffer with Him and readiness to die for Him is not complete without the final act of abandonment.

M. The sacrament of anointing and death

In the preceding section, I have explained how the sacrament of anointing organizes Christian life toward death in Christ. Someone might challenge this interpretation of the sacrament by arguing that it is not only for the dying, but for the sick in general. The new rite, following a prescription of Vatican II, has used the phrase "anointing of the sick" rather than "extreme (last) anointing" to refer to the sacrament. Moreover, the text in James seems to treat the sacrament rather as one of healing than of consecration for death.

There is some room for theological argument here. One could maintain that the sacrament is primarily oriented toward health and only secondarily toward death.

However, I think that the Council's action has been misinterpreted and that the sacrament still ought to be regarded as a consecration of terminal suffering and dying. The statement of Vatican II should be considered carefully:

> "Extreme unction," which may also and more fittingly be called "anointing of the sick," is not a sacrament for those only who are at the moment of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived (SC 73).

The Council goes on to call for a continuous rite, including confession, anointing, and Viaticum. The quoted statement and the prescription of a rite including Viaticum both show that the sacrament is regarded as one which relates to death. What the Council wishes to exclude is the postponment of the sacrament until the very moment of death.

The Introduction to the new rite for the anointing of the sick repeatedly uses the words "danger," "dangerous," and "dangerously" in referring to the condition of the person to be anointed.[20] It assumes that the illness must be judged serious when it says:

> A prudent or probable judgment about the seriousness of the sickness is sufficient; in such a case there is no reason for scruples, but if necessary a doctor may be consulted.[21]

This provision clearly takes for granted that anointing for every minor illness or psychological problem is inappropriate.

Objectively, a person is dying only when he or she has some specific condition which probably will cause death. Psychologically, whenever a person is in a condition such that death can reasonably be feared as a personal prospect--not simply as a general aspect of the human condition--the person is suffering unto death from his or her own point of view and from the point of view of compassionate others. The sacrament of anointing becomes appropriate at this point. Perhaps the reasonable fear of death is based upon a serious (even if usually nonfatal illness); perhaps it is based upon old age; perhaps it is based upon nonelective major surgery. In any of these cases, a prudent individual contemplates death as a personal prospect. The help of the sacrament is needed, and its revelatory value to others is real.

If, however, anointing of the sick is done when there is no real personal prospect of death, then this sacrament loses its specific meaning. The Eucharist is the daily bread of Christian life; the body and blood of the Lord strengthens one for daily difficulties, including physical and psychological problems which are not likely to be ultimate. Anointing ought to be reserved for persons whose condition is dangerous enough to raise the specter of death and to call for reinforcement of the hope of resurrection.

What, then, about the text of James which refers so strongly to health? I think that the answer is that "health" considered in the light of Christian faith is a rather different concept than proponents of anointing as a healing sacrament sometimes seem to have in mind. Ultimately, health is attained only by resurrection. The sacrament is not a gift of miraculous cures, as experience tells us. It is a sacrament of faith that God will cure if that is good, but more especially that He will save:

> The anointing of the sick, which includes the prayer of faith (see James 5.15), is a sacrament of faith. This faith is important for the minister and particularly for the one who receives it. The sick man will be saved by his faith and the faith of the Church which looks back to the death and resurrection of Christ, the source of the sacrament's power (see James 5.15), and looks again to the future kingdom which is pledged in the sacraments.[22]

The health to which the sacrament of anointing is primarily directed is that health which never will fail, the wholeness of holiness which heals even death.

N. How are purgatory and indulgences related to penance?

The Catholic doctrines concerning purgatory and indulgences are based upon the Catholic doctrines of sin, penance, and the solidarity of the Mystical Body of Christ. In other words, purgatory and indulgences have their place in Catholic moral life, because they are tightly tied into the sacramental ordering of life by the sacraments of penance and the anointing of the sick. Both of these doctrines--on purgatory and indulgences--are often misunderstood.[23]

Many people imagine that indulgences are remissions of sin. They are not. On the contrary, indulgences are of no use whatever unless sin itself has been repented and forgiven. Many people think of purgatory as a kind of short-term hell, suited to those who are sinners but not great enough sinners to be damned forever. On the contrary, purgatory is an initial stage of heavenly glory, suited to those who are saints but who need a moment to adjust their garments--that is, the good deeds in which they are dressed--before making their entrance into the wedding banquet which lasts forever.

Basic to both doctrines is the conception of temporal punishment. Once sin itself has been overcome by repentance and reconciliation, there remains the existential effect of sin to be taken care of. This effect, a moral imbalance which disrupts harmony, is taken care of by penance, provided that one has a sufficient opportunity to do penance and does it. If one fails to do sufficient penance of one sort or another in this life, the rectification still necessary somehow is accomplished after death, in ways only God knows. This rectification after death is purgatory, as the Church definitively teaches (cf. DS 1304, 1580, 1820/ 693, 840, 983).

If someone dies in friendship with God, he or she is in an utterly diverse position than someone who dies at enmity with Him. Even if some adjustment is required, one who dies in friendship with God is welcomed into the kingdom. If some purification is needed, it is like the process of healing, not like the void of death. Therefore, purgatory is altogether diverse from hell, and the tendency to assimilate the two states is a product of imagination rather than of Christian understanding.

Still, some who die and many of us who live can use help in satisfying for our sins. All of the penance we can do either is not enough or would be too arduous for us to bear. At this point, the solidarity of the Mystical Body comes to the rescue. Having been redeemed by being united with Christ, our satisfaction for sin also can be achieved by His help and by the help of Mary and the other saints. We are not left to our own devices; if we were, our condition would be hopeless from the start.

By the will of Christ, the Church, which has the power to make effective in heaven what it does on earth (that is, the power of binding and loosing), simply extends to the repentant sinner in need of help in penance that help which is abundantly present in the merit of Christ and the saints. This extending of help is an indulgence. Thus, indulgences are remissions of punishment, not absolutions of sin. They are an act by which Christ in the Church after having taken away sin also takes away all or part of the moral consequences of one's having sinned.

The net result of the system of indulgences is that either the sacrament of penance or death in friendship with God together with a plenary(full) indulgence puts one who receives it in much the same position as a newly baptized person or one who died immediately after baptism without having committed any sin whatsoever.

The existence of purgatory makes clear the importance of the penitential dimension of Christian life. The granting of indulgences makes clear that this dimension need not and should not be onerous. Only mortal sin is ultimately evil. Penance is not sin. It is an important aspect of unity with Christ, who sinless paid for sin. In doing penance, even for our own sins, we are privileged to be united with Christ the redeemer. As in all the other tasks in which we cooperate with Jesus, we need not worry whether our contribution is sufficient. It is up to us to do what with God's grace we can do; whatever we do not do, despite a sincere effort, Jesus acting in the Church completes for us.

O. Prayer and devotional practices appropriate to Christian life as penitential

Pilgrimages are inherently suited to the penitential dimension of Christian life. They symbolize the fundamental characteristic of Christian life as a journey still to be completed toward our heavenly home. Unfortunately, pilgrimages today often are too easy and enjoyable to be a good devotional practice. A short steep walk to a nearby shrine, such as our grotto on the mountainside, perhaps has more the character of pilgrimage than an interesting, pleasant, and vacation-like trip to Lourdes or some other famous place of pilgrimage. Still, the devotional atmosphere of a great shrine is not without its religious value.

The essentially penitential practices of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting were discussed in section H, above. Also, very closely related to the sacrament of penance is the practice of regular examination of conscience, even when this examination finds only venial sins which are remitted apart from the sacrament.

Several sorts of prayer are especially relevant to this aspect of Christian life. Among prayers of petition, those against temptation, those seeking forgiveness, those asking for the grace of perseverance to the end, and those calling for the final coming of Jesus express our situation as one of struggle and incompletion. Among more meditative prayers, those in which we seek to understand God's will in our suffering and those in which we resign ourselves to His will are especially relevant to penance.

Although days of recollection, closed retreats, and the use of spiritual direction can have other purposes, all of these are important for the penitential aspect of Christian life. A day of recollection or a retreat is a good opportunity to prepare for and make a worthy confession. Spiritual direction can be very helpful for self-examination and for shaping a serious but moderate penitential life, as well as for a more regular and consistent use of the sacrament of penance itself.[24]

P. The penitential dimension of priestly life

The detachment required by priestly life--close obedience to ecclesiastical authority, celibacy, and a restrained use of material goods--is an important form of self-denial. Basically, this detachment is for the sake of liberation to serve Christ by ministering to His people (cf. PO 15, 16, and 17). But detachment for service also can be considered an instance of almsgiving, and in this way an important part of a penitential life.

Vatican II articulates very clearly the special ground in priestly life for mortification of every evil inclination:

> As ministers of sacred realities, especially in the Sacrifice of the Mass, priests represent the person of Christ in a special way. He gave Himself as a victim to make men holy. Hence priests are invited to imitate the realities they deal with. Since they celebrate the mystery of the Lord's death, they should see to it that every part of their being is dead to evil habits and desires (PO 13).

This practice of mortification inherently leads to the individual priest's personal holiness of life. But the Council also sees it as necessary for his vocation of service:

> As rulers of the community, they ideally cultivate the asceticism proper to a pastor of souls, renouncing their own conveniences, seeking what is profitable for the many and not for themselves, so that the many may be saved (cf. 1 Cor 10.33). They are always going to greater lengths to fulfill their pastoral duties more adequately. Where there is need, they are ready to undertake new pastoral approaches under the lead of the loving Spirit who breathes where He will (cf. Jn 3.8) (PO 13).

The mortification projected by this ideal--and it is well that the Council makes clear that it is articulating an ideal rather than describing the reality--would require tremendous self-control. Such self-control is easily considered an instance of fasting, as well as almsgiving to the extent that it is directed to service. Thus here again the demands of priestly life inherently lend themselves to fulfillment of the requirements of penitential living.

Vatican II also stresses the importance of prayer in priestly life, especially meditation on Scripture (cf. PO 13; DV 25). Pius XII makes clear the relationship between priestly meditation and the penitential life. Real piety, the learned Pope explains, is an act by which people give themselves utterly to God in true devotion. Such real piety

> . . .needs meditation on the supernatural realities and spiritual exercises, if it is to be nurtured, stimulated and sustained, and if it is to prompt us to lead a more perfect life. For the Christian religion, practiced as it should be, demands that the will especially be consecrated to God and exert its influence on all the

other spiritual faculties. But every act of the will presupposes an act of intelligence, and before one can express the desire and the intention of offering oneself in sacrifice to the eternal Godhead, a knowledge of the facts and truths which make religion a duty is altogether necessary. One must first know, for instance, man's last end and the supremacy of the Divine Majesty; after that, our common duty of submission to our Creator; and finally the inexhaustible treasures of love with which God yearns to enrich us, as well as the necessity of supernatural grace for the achievement of our destiny, and that special path marked out for us by Divine Providence in virtue of the fact that we have been united one and all, like members of a body, to Jesus Christ the Head. But further, since our hearts, disturbed as they are at times by the lower appetites, do not always respond to motives of love, it is also extremely helpful to let consideration and contemplation of the justice of God provoke us on occasion to salutary fear, and guide us thence to Christian humility, repentance and amendment.[25]

The prayer which is indispensable for devotion--prayer which blends meditative reflection with moral theology--inherently also has a penitential aspect.

Participation in the priesthood of Christ means putting on His priestly mind and sharing in His priestly heart. This is true for all the faithful (in virtue of baptism) and for all those engaged in apostolic witness (in virtue of confirmation). But it is true in a special way for those who act in the person of Christ (in virtue of holy orders). For them, especially, to share in Christ's priesthood

> . . .means that they must assume to some extent the character of a victim, that they deny themselves as the Gospel commands, that freely and of their own accord they do penance and that each detests and satisfies for his sins. It means, in a word, that we must all undergo with Christ a mystical death on the cross so that we can apply to ourselves the words of St. Paul: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross."[26]

In other words, all who share in the priesthood of Christ--and thus the ordained in a special way because of their special share--must live that sort of Christian life which is a constant preparation for the consecration of the sacrament of anointing. This is a consecration to share personally in the suffering and death of Jesus by one's own Christian suffering and death in Him.

Notes to chapter thirty-four

1. The Rites, p. 344. The internal reference is to another document of Paul VI.
2. For some historical background with respect to this point, see Peter Riga, Sin and Penance: Insights into the Mystery of Salvation (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 108-122.
3. See: Pontificale romanum, pars III, De expulsione publice paenitentium in feria IV Cinerum; Reconciliatio paenitentium in feria V Coenae Domini.
4. The Rites, p. 345.
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 3, qu. 84, art. 1, ad 3.
6. The Rites, p. 363.
7. See St. Leo the Great, Sermo 13, P.L. 54, 172.
8. Paul VI, Paenitemini, Apostolic Constitution . . . on Penance, The Pope Speaks, 2 (1966), p. 368.
9. Ibid., p. 369.
10. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Penance and Friday Abstinence," The Pope Speaks, 2 (1966), pp. 356-361.
11. Sacred Congregations for the Clergy and for the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Declaration on First Confession and First Communion," in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (Northport, N. Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), p. 241.
12. Pius XII, Mystici corporis, #103, AAS 35 (1943), p. 235.
13. The Rites, p. 347.
14. At a conference where a paper was read on the development of conscience, I narrated a childhood experience (before I was six) in which I was disobedient and realized that my disobedience was wrong, because it caused difficulty for my father who already had enough serious problems to deal with. In subsequent informal discussion, many participants in the meeting narrated more or less similar early childhood experiences of sin, which they were convinced involved true (venial) guilt.
15. The Rites, pp. 583-584.
16. Ibid., p. 352.
17. Ibid., p. 363.
18. Ibid., p. 582.
19. Ibid., pp. 582-583.
20. Ibid., pp. 584-585.
21. Ibid., p. 584.
22. Ibid.
23. On this matter, see Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, in Flannery, ed., op. cit., pp. 62-79. This theologically rich document provides a very clear and well-developed explanation of the matters treated in the present section.
24. See Pius XII, Menti Nostrae, Apostolic Exhortation to the Clergy of the Entire World (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1950), #51-54, pp. 19-21.
25. Pius XII, Mediator Dei, On the Sacred Liturgy (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1947), #32, pp. 15-16.
26. Pius XII, Menti Nostrae, #35, p. 14.