

# SIN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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# AND IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

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DESCLÉE COMPANY (1960?)

New York-Tournai-Paris-Rome

Originally published in French as part of *Théologie du Péché* (Desclée, Tournai, 1960).

Translated by Charles Schaldenbrand

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 66-11147.

[Translations of Latin and Greek expressions and phrases  
have been provided by the editor of this electronic edition.]

# Table of Contents

Part One  
**SIN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
 by V. Palachovsky

**Chapter I.**  
**A Review of the Fundamental**  
**Notions Relative to Sin**                    **9**

**Chapter II.**  
**Sin and Penance**                            **15**

- 1. From apostolic times to  
the fourth century                    15
- Original Sin*                            29
- 2. From the fourth century  
to the Middle Ages                    37

**Chapter III.**  
**Present-Day Theology**  
**and Practice**                                **51**

- 1. The confession of sins                53
- 2. Warnings and sanctions            73

Part Two  
**SIN IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES**  
 by C. Vogel

**Chapter I.**  
**The Theology of Sin according**  
**to Martin Luther**                            **95**

**Chapter II.**  
**A Synthesis of the Protestant**  
**Teaching on Sin**                            **101**

- 1. The nature of sin                      101
- 2. The sins of man  
*(peccata actualia)*                    102
- 3. The sin of men  
*(peccatum originis)*                104
- 4. The permanence of sin  
in justification  
*(peccator et iustus simul)*        104

# PART ONE

## Sin in the Orthodox Church

by

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9

### CHAPTER I

#### A REVIEW OF THE FUNDAMENTAL NOTIONS RELATIVE TO SIN

Our presentation of the Oriental doctrine on sin rests upon the traditional teaching of the Orthodox Church, such as we find it today both in theory and in practice. Since the homogeneous development of this theology, and of the tradition to which it corresponds, is most likely different from that of the Western Christian world, it has seemed to me useful to re-examine briefly certain questions which have already been discussed,<sup>1</sup> especially the examination of the scriptural texts, in order to integrate them squarely into our new perspective.

Most of all, I have found it necessary to re-pose the question: What is sin? Rom 5, 19, contains the answer: Sin is disobedience toward God. "For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just." Because

of sin, we share the situation of fallen Adam; we have lost the friendship of God, and the commerce which we enjoyed with Him. We are disobedient toward God, since we are no longer joined to Him in friendship. Our entire life is conditioned by our initial disobedience, which is not only that of Adam, but our own as well, for in him and through him we have all sinned. Alongside this state of sin, which we can all

10

call ontological sin, we also have sinful acts, or actual sin. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and defile a man" (Mk 7, 21-23). This text merits particular attention. It is from within, from the heart, that evil actions arise. It is man's fundamental corruption from the time of the fall which ultimately gives rise to sins. Man sins because he has become sin. Only through an interior purification, through the purification of his heart, can man escape from sinfulness, and find it possible not to sin. Still, he can never return to the paradisiac state, to the purity which he knew in the beginning. Consequently, man is not only ontologically a sinner, he is a source of sin, he is sinning, he is a sinner in his very activity.

The seriousness of sin is conditioned by the rejection of the divine will, which found expression, first in the commandment not to touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil, secondly in the Decalogue, and finally in the sermon on the mount. "Whosoever committeth sin committeth also iniquity. And sin is iniquity" (I Jn 3, 4). "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin was not imputed, when the law was not" (Rom 5, 13). Thus, non-conscious beings, whether animals or plants, do not commit sins. The same can also be said, in some degree, of the mentally deficient. Nevertheless, Rom 5, 13 distinguishes between sin in itself, and sin which is imputed. In our opinion, this is a distinction of great importance, and we shall return to it later. In effect, St. Paul is apparently distinguishing here sin as evil, or corruption, from sin seen as an act which violates certain juridical norms. It is precisely this distinction which marks the essential difference between sins of thought, and sins of word or deed. Having said as much, we have already begun to mark out the boundaries within which our study is to be conducted. "All iniquity is sin. And there is a sin unto death" (I Jn 5, 17). With these words, St. John introduces a distinction

11

between the *peccata mortifera* [mortal, or literally 'death-bringing' sins] and all other sins. Many subtle distinctions

<sup>1</sup> I.e., in *Sin in the Bible*, which preceded the present treatment in the French original, *Theologie du Peché*.

have been alleged to resolve the question: Which sins "lead unto death?" In my opinion, St. Augustine gives the best answer: The sins in question are those which demand public penance, i.e., reconciliation with the Church. Those who commit such sins are excluded from the Church. It is thus understandable that in virtue of a discipline which is fundamental to the Church, it is recommended not to pray for such sinners. Sin can consist, not only in the fact of having done this or that negative act, but in having failed to do something positive: "To him therefore who knoweth to do good and doth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas 4, 17). Not only is sin a total corruption of one's being, as there is a tendency to see it in Orthodoxy when seeking out the fundamental basis of sins, but there are also acts which are sinful in themselves: "Six things there are, which the Lord hateth, and the seventh His soul detesteth: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked plots, feet that are swift to run into mischief, a deceitful witness that uttereth lies, and him that soweth discord among brethren" (Prv 6, 16-19). We should note that the *peccata graviora* [weightier sins] (murder, false witnessing) and the *peccata leviora* [lighter sins] are indifferently placed together in this series, which is also the practice in modern day Orthodoxy, at least in Russian Orthodoxy, which considers states of sin (a lack of love toward God and neighbor, or pride) as sins in act. We also find this divine reprobation for evil actions in Prv 11, 1: "A deceitful balance is an abomination before the Lord: and a just weight is His will"; 12, 22: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal faithfully please Him"; 15, 9: "The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: he that followeth justice is beloved by Him"; 20, 23: "Diverse weights are an abomination before the Lord: a deceitful balance is not good." Unfortunately, in those religions in which confession holds a place of some importance, e.g., among Roman Catholics, and especially, perhaps, among the Russian Orthodox, these Old Testament

12

precepts are often forgotten in favor of a holiness which frequently is not attained precisely because the foundation has not been properly laid.

Nevertheless, not all sins are acts. God sees man's sins when they are still hidden in the secret recesses of his soul; Job 11, 11: "For He (God) knoweth the vanity of man: and when He seeth iniquity, doth He not consider it?"; 34, 21-22: "For His eyes are upon the ways of men, and He considereth all their steps. There is not darkness, and there is no shadow of death, where they may be hid

who work iniquity"; Ps 89, 8: "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thy eyes: our life in the light of Thy countenance." Sins are punished not only in proportion to their gravity, but also in terms of their quantity; Num 14, 34: "According to the number of the forty days, wherein you viewed the land: a year shall be counted for a day. And forty years you shall receive your iniquities, and shall know my revenge." Thus, daily sins, however unimportant they might be in themselves, can seriously endanger the salvation of the soul, and by this very fact make obligatory recourse to the sacrament of penance. This, however, is a subject which we will take up later.

The divine mercy far surpasses our guilt: "After all the evils that have befallen us, because of our evil actions and our immense guilt, O God, You have not inflicted the punishment that our sins have deserved, and You have allowed a remnant to remain among us." Nevertheless, this divine goodness is not to be thought of as a weakness: "And if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments: if they profane my justices: and keep not my commandments: I will visit their iniquities with a rod, and their sins with stripes" (Ps 88, 31-33). Not only the chastisements which God visits upon the sinner, but the very sins which he commits are to be seen as a punishment: "Many times did He deliver them, but they provoked Him with their counsel. And they were brought low by their iniquities" (Ps 105, 43).

The seriousness of a sin is also measured by the person of

13

the sinner: Amos 3, 2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities." The farther one has advanced in the spiritual life, the more serious are the sins which he commits.

The end of sin is death; spiritual death here below, and eternal death in the life to come; Rom 6, 23: "For the wages of sin is death"; Jas 1,15: "Then, when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death."

The cause of our sins is our corruption, the corruption which inheres in man's nature; Rom 7, 22-24: "For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

14 [blank]

## CHAPTER II

### SIN AND PENANCE

#### 1. From Apostolic Times to the Fourth Century

The apostolic preaching began with a call to penance: Acts 2, 37f: "Now when they had heard these things, they had compunction in their heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren? But Peter said to them: Do penance: and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." We should note that the penance in question is that which receives its expression in baptism, and is not a penance for sins committed after baptism. Moreover, the text from the Gospel according to St. John (20, 22f), which is commonly applied to the institution of the sacrament of penance, could only have as its first application the baptismal penance followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is clear, of course, that once this power had been received, it could be given a wider application. Moreover, we know from the words of St. James that confession existed during the apostolic period: "Confess therefore your sins one to another: and pray one for another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of a just man availeth much" (Jas 5, 16). These words point to the existence of confession, the exomologesis, as well as of a

16

concern to heal the sinner with a spiritual medicine, the ἰασις. Although we have here two of the elements which go to make up the sacrament of penance, it is still our opinion that we are not dealing here with the sacrament as such. In fact, the ordinary Christian would never have come in contact with the sacrament, which was only applied to grave falls, the *peccata mortifera*, which excluded the sinner from the Church, as was the case, perhaps, with the sinner at Corinth. Moreover, we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews a tendency to deny to Christians the opportunity for a new penance: "For it is impossible for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away: to

15

be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God and making him a mockery. For the earth, that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God. But that which bringeth forth thorns and briers is reprobate and very near unto a curse: whose end is to be burnt" (Heb 6, 4-8). Heb 10, 26<sup>1</sup> introduces the notion of the voluntary sin, a strange notion in my opinion, for it seems to me that man, or at least the Christian, only sins through a weakness of his will, i.e., involuntarily. According to St. Paul (Rom 7, 22f), there is a law of sin rooted in the body, which wars against the law of God, situated in the reason. Man sins in spite of his reason. In these two texts from the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as in Heb 12, 16f, the author has in mind not daily sins, or *peccata leviora*, but the *peccata graviora* or *peccata mortifera*. These are the sins which St. John says the Christian does not commit: "Whosoever is born of God committeth not sin" (1 Jn 3, 9). It is for this reason that the Epistle to the Hebrews assimilates those who sin (seriously) to

17

the rebellious, and warns Christians: "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau who for one mess sold his first birthright. For know ye that afterwards, when he desired to inherit the benediction, he was rejected. For he found no place of repentance, although with tears he had sought it" (Heb 12, 16f). Consequently, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, (grave) sins are irremissible, a tradition which apparently remained common in the Church until the appearance of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Nevertheless, the episode of the sinner at Corinth indicates that even serious sins could be forgiven. The struggle was to be worked out precisely between these two tendencies, the encratite on the one hand, and the orthodox on the other. For the present, however, we must leave aside this problem, which raises the fundamental question concerning the sacrament of penance: Is this sacrament, this baptism of tears, a possibility?

Let us consider for the moment the normal Christian life, that which knows only daily sins, for in the words of the prayer for the dead in the Byzantine liturgy: "There is no man who lives and does not commit sin." For the first century, we can refer to the words of St. James: "Therefore confess your sins to one another," and to those of the Didache, 4, 14: Ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐξομολογήση τὰ

<sup>1</sup> In effect, if we sin voluntarily, after having received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for our sins, but only the terrible expectation of the judgment, and the fire which is to devour the rebellious.

παραπτώματά σου, καὶ οὐ προσελεύση ἐπὶ προσευχὴν σου ἐν συνειδήσει πονηρᾷ. [‘You should confess your transgressions in church, and not approach your prayer with an evil conscience.’]

This exomologesis (a self-condemnatory public confession) took place in the church (in the assembly). Not only sins, but παραπτώματα, or transgressions were confessed, which indicates, perhaps, a certain seriousness, although we should probably classify them as *leviora* rather *graviora*. The purpose of the confession was to free man’s conscience before the oblation took place. Christ had said that the Christian must be reconciled with his brother before presenting his offering. Among these παραπτώματα we must surely include these offenses against one’s brothers in Christ. By confessing them, the Christian became free of these sins against his neighbor. This exomologesis had

18

thus a liberating effect, since it purified the conscience of the sinner. For this reason there is a danger of assimilating it to our present confession, which involves an absolution. It seems evident to me, however, that this absolution was not present in the exomologesis of the first century. This exomologesis had a liberating effect in itself, and it was through communion that the Christian received absolution from his sins, as it is still said today in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: ὡσε γενέσθαι τοῖς μεταλαμβάνουσιν εἰς νῆψιν ψυχῆς, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ ἁγίου σου Πνεύματος, εἰς βασιλείας οὐρανῶν πλήρωμα, εἰς παρρησίαν τὴν πρὸς σέ, μὴ εἰς κρίμα ἢ εἰς κατάκριμα [“so that they might be for those who partake unto watchfulness of soul, unto remission of sins, unto communion of Your all-holy Spirit, unto the fulfillment of the kingdom of the heavens, unto boldness toward Thee, [but] not unto judgment or unto condemnation”] (canon).

The liturgy has inherited certain formulas which seem to ignore the present practice among the Russians of obligatory confession before communion. Thus, before communion, penitential prayers are read on behalf of the faithful, and after communion, the priest pronounces the verse: τοῦτο ἤψατω τῶν χειλέων σου καὶ ἀφετεῖ τὰς ἀνομίας σου, καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου περικαθαριεῖ [“this has touched your lips and taken away your transgressions, and cleansed you of your sins”].

Has anything remained of this exomologesis in present-day liturgical practice? In Russia, as soon as the priest has finished the prayers before the iconostasis, he asks pardon first from God through the prayer: “O God, look down upon me, weak and alone, and forgive my transgressions, both voluntary and involuntary, whether in

word or in act, whether conscious or unconscious, whether of the day or of the night, whether in spirit or in thought; forgive them all, You who are good, and the friend of men.” Then turning toward the faithful, he says: “Forgive me, fathers, and brothers.”<sup>2</sup> These texts have been preserved only within the oral tradition, but in Orthodoxy, oral and written traditions enjoy a similar value. Having kissed the altar before beginning the great entry, the priest again turns toward the faithful and bows in their direction. It is at least

19

possible to interpret this bow as a request for forgiveness. Before his communion, the priest repeats the two prayers for forgiveness, the one to God and the other to the faithful, cited above. It is clear that these requests for pardon do not yet constitute a true exomologesis, since the priest does not make a detailed confession of his sins. Nevertheless, the principle of asking pardon both from God and from men remains present. This is done not only in the liturgy, but also at the end of compline and of the office for midnight. At these times, the priest does not ask pardon from God, but from the faithful only, again through the prayer: “Forgive me, fathers, and brothers.” As a response, the faithful answer him with a request for their own pardon, although this is not done in the course of the liturgy. Nevertheless, communicants ordinarily ask forgiveness from their relatives before receiving communion, or from anyone else whom they might have offended. Where the Roman liturgy has a formula of absolution after the *Confiteor*, the Byzantine liturgy, in the tradition of the *Didache*, has no such absolution after these requests for pardon.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, we should note that every office is ended with an apolysis, which is often, although mistakenly, interpreted as a dismissal.<sup>4</sup> In this formula, the priest affirms that Christ “will have pity on us, and will give us salvation, for He is good, and the friend of men.”<sup>5</sup> If this is not a formula of absolution in the strict sense, it is certainly more than a formula of dismissal; it is the affirmation that we will be forgiven on the day of the last judgment. Its importance is underlined by Etheria, who frequently claims

<sup>2</sup> This request betrays a monastic origin. The fathers are the monks, and the brothers the novices.

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, certain priests supply one by pronouncing a formula of this kind: “The Lord will forgive us and will have mercy on us, for He is good, and the friend of men.”

<sup>4</sup> The true meaning of *apolysis*, according to the dictionary, is deliverance.

<sup>5</sup> This is the Slavic recension of the formula; the Greek text only expresses the desire: “May Christ have mercy on us...”

to have assisted at the act of thanksgiving (*actio gratiae*) and the dismissal.<sup>6</sup>

20

Thus for her, the essential elements of the eucharistic liturgy seem to have been the eucharistic canon and the apolysis.

When did the exomologesis take place at the time of the first Christians? According to the Didachè (14, 1), every Sunday: Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες κλάσατε ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσατε, προεξομολογησάμενοι τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν, ὅπως καθαρὰ ἡ θυσία ὑμῶν ἦ [‘Gathered together each Lord’s Day, you break the Lord’s bread and give thanks, confessing your faults, so that your sacrifice may be pure’].

Thus, the exomologesis took place each Sunday (the day on which the liturgy was celebrated), and there can be no doubt that it was seen in closest connection with the liturgy. This connection is a possible argument for those who hold that the sacraments of penance and communion must always be joined together. Nevertheless, we consider it necessary to indicate that in our opinion the exomologesis did not include an absolution;<sup>7</sup> it had a liberating effect in itself, and it was communion which washed the first Christians of their sins. Thus, when the question is posed today: Should confession precede communion, we cannot look for an answer in the practice of the first Christians. In effect, our present day confession is composed of several elements:

- 1) the exomologesis
- 2) the absolution, which not only frees a man from sin but is also
- 3) a reconciliation with the Church,
- 4) the epitimion— the ancient ἔργον [‘work’]— whose purpose is to heal the sinner of the sickness which is sin. It produces the ἴασις [‘healing’]— the healing, which is the goal of the sacrament.

Of all of these elements, we find in the Didachè only the first, i.e., the exomologesis. Absolution was not necessary, for the Christian was already a member of the Church, and thus had no need of reconciliation. Absolution was given by the communion, which was at the same time the perfect ἴασις, being

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the *Pilgrimage of Etheria*, to be found in the appendix of L. DUCHESNE, *Christian Worship*, Eng. trans. M. McLure (London: S.P.C.K., 1904), p. 551.

<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason that we prefer this term to that of confession, which also implies an absolution.

21

the φάρμακον ἀθανασίας [‘medicine of immortality’]. Those who hold for obligatory confession consider that it must be applied as a whole, just as those who are opposed to confession reject it entirely, which surely leads to spiritual indifference and laxism. Should we desire to reestablish the primitive usage, it would be necessary to impose upon the faithful only the exomologesis, i.e., confession without absolution, this confession being followed by communion, which has an absolving effect. We should point out that priests are not obliged to confess their sins each time that they communicate, but only during the four periods of fasting. Some traces of the precept of the Didachè to perform the exomologesis every Sunday can still be seen in Orthodoxy however. A priest, for example, would not hesitate to give communion without previous confession to a layman who has communicated two or three days previously, but would refuse him communion if a week or close to a week had intervened since his last communion. Thus, for all practical purposes, one week continues to be the normal period of time for obligatory confession. It is clear that the Didachè had in mind only those Christians who were living members of the Church, those who in the terminology of St. John and of the Epistle to the Hebrews were without sin. In order to participate in the eucharistic communion it was necessary to participate fully in the ecclesiastical communion, which was expressed precisely (and which is still expressed) through the *communio in sacris* [sacramental communion]. Our own distinction between major and minor excommunication did not yet exist. Every excommunication was not only major, but even irremissible, according to the opinion expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Up until what period do we find the exomologesis such as it is described in the Didachè? We still find it in the Apostolic Constitutions, but we should point out that the practice described here is an archaism, and not a living ritual. With the decline of the primitive Christian fervor at the time of Decius, which led to the institution of penitential priests and private confession (for the sacrament of reconciliation), and even more with the

22

coming of the peace of the Church, which led the pious to flee from this world and to seek refuge in monasticism, a detailed exomologesis became impossible. Nevertheless, as we have already pointed out, traces of it can still be found, even to the present day. The rite of forgiveness which takes place in the Russian Churches on

the Sunday of the fall of Adam,<sup>8</sup> in the course of which the faithful ask pardon of each other, first in the church, and later in their homes, is perhaps the best proof of this.

Because it has thus disappeared, we can no longer speak of this exomologesis, although in our own opinion it must be given a place of first importance. The Church, moreover, did return to it, but only indirectly, through sacramental confession, which includes a private confession. We should note that the expression "private confession" is a *contradictio in adjecto* [the adjective contradicts the noun], for a confession can only be a proclamation, an exomologesis, and not a private little get-together in a confessional, this latter term as well being something of a misnomer.

The void which was left by the disappearance of the Sunday exomologesis was slowly taken over by sacramental confession. But was not the exomologesis itself already sacramental? We must answer negatively in the sense that it was not a sacrament of reconciliation, such as baptism, which reconciles man with God. Yet it was sacramental in the sense that it led the Christian through a desire for purification, to communion, which in turn cleansed him from the stain of his sins, and integrated him into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. If we make use of the Roman terminology, it was a sacramental, joined to the sacrament of communion.

With the preaching of Hermas we see for the first time a departure from the rigorism which would not allow a recourse to penance after baptism. This is, of course, not the repeated penance which we know today. To those who had (seriously) sinned, an exceptional penance was allowed. In effect, the

23

fundamental principle of the *Shepherd* is clearly expressed as follows: "It is necessary, therefore, that he who has received the remission of his sins (at baptism) sin no more, but that he remain pure" (Mand. IV).

Which sins were considered grave, i.e., as requiring a penance? In the *Acta Thomae* [Acts of Thomas], these are cited as fornication, lewdness, theft, ignominy, and slavery to the belly. Since this work is of encratite inspiration, its list includes sins which are not found in other more orthodox lists. The list of grave sins found in the Apocalypse and in St. Peter is more traditional: apostasy, fornication, sins against nature, murder, false witnessing, and usury.

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<sup>8</sup> The last Sunday before Lent.

The list of grave sins in the *Shepherd* includes adultery, murder, apostasy, fornication, drunkenness, stealing, deceit, false witnessing, blasphemy, and hypocrisy. From this list we see that Hermas, although a preacher of penance, was still something of a rigorist, since he included among those sins which could be forgiven only once by way of exception, stealing, deceit, and even hypocrisy.

Already in the *Shepherd* we find the terminology which will be used for the sacrament of reconciliation. Penance consists in a μετάνοια ['metanoia'],<sup>9</sup> a change in the condition of one's spirit, and in a decision to sin no more. This last condition is fundamental, and without it, the forgiveness cannot be granted. This μετάνοια is followed by the purification.<sup>10</sup> In what does this consist? Was it only the result of the μετάνοια, or did it involve an exomologesis? The *Shepherd* itself says nothing, but it seems to me that since we are dealing with a sacrament of reconciliation (penance), we can suppose the existence of the exomologesis and the absolution. Its goal and result was the ἴασις or healing. We find no evidence of the reserved case in the *Shepherd*. It is true that the penance which it preaches is exceptional, but it can nonetheless be applied to all sins.

24

By the time of Tertullian, penance had lost the exceptional character which it had in the *Shepherd*. It had become an ecclesiastical institution. Tertullian divides sins into two categories:<sup>11</sup>

- 1) daily sins which can be forgiven by the Church, i.e., those for which pardon can be obtained from the bishop:<sup>12</sup> anger, fighting, cursing, oath-taking, lying, horse-racing, and engaging in combat;
- 2) sins which are irremissible (cases reserved for God): homicide, idolatry, fraud, apostasy, blasphemy, lewdness, fornication, adultery, debauchery, and false witnessing.

Tertullian's list of daily sins is not exhaustive; he leaves certain ones unmentioned. If for these the exomologesis had already disappeared, there must have been, in our opinion, other means of ridding oneself of them, which we will find in other authors. For the other daily sins, Tertullian indicates the existence of a confession in the following manner: the sinner accuses himself, while prostrate at the feet of the priests, lying upon ashes and clothed with a hair shirt. This is the confession. He does

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<sup>9</sup> Sim., 8. 6, 3; 9. 16, 2-4.

<sup>10</sup> Sim., 9, 23; 8, 11; 5, 7, 3; 7, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *De Paenit.*, vii, 10.

<sup>12</sup> At this time, the bishop was the minister of all the sacraments, with the possible exception of the anointing of the sick.



not wash himself; he lives on bread and water; he groans and weeps— this is the ἔργον—, and finally he receives absolution. It is true, of course, that Tertullian was a rigorist, and held that certain sins were to be submitted to the discipline of penance which did not normally come under this discipline, just as he considered irremissible certain sins which as a rule were not seen in this light. At the very least, we can conclude from a study of the works of Tertullian that the sacrament of penance was widely used in his time.

The expression “irremissible sins” is possibly misleading. If certain sins were irremissible through the normal procedure of the sacrament of reconciliation, and through the ministry of the bishop, there still existed at least one means through which they

25

might be forgiven: it was sufficient to substitute the virtue of a martyr for the serious sins of the sinner in order that the latter might be purified of his guilt.<sup>13</sup> This practice was applied especially to apostates. The possibility of a forgiveness even for the reserved cases had thus come to be seen, but in an abnormal manner. It was not the Church in the person of the bishop which granted the forgiveness, but the martyrs, who had become the extraordinary ministers of the sacrament of penance. It seems to us paradoxical that the rigorists like Tertullian found this situation absolutely normal.

In his *De Oratione*, Origen draws up a more customary list of reserved cases:<sup>14</sup> idolatry, adultery, and fornication. In his opinion, these sins are absolutely irremissible, and cannot be forgiven through the sufferings of the martyrs.<sup>15</sup> The other *graviora crimina* [more serious crimes], classed by Tertullian among the “irremissible” sins, are considered by Origen as remissible.

Thus, the penitential discipline which we find in the third century seems (1) to have eliminated the ancient exomologesis for daily sins, (2) to know the sacrament of reconciliation for the *leviora peccata*<sup>16</sup> and the *graviora*

*crimina*,<sup>17</sup> and (3) to have two different usages or points of view concerning the truly reserved cases: either absolute irremissibility, or the possibility of obtaining forgiveness through the intercession of a martyr.

26

Nevertheless, two difficulties remained: (1) the reserved cases, and especially the practice of addressing oneself to a martyr in order to obtain pardon, and (2) the application of penance to clerics. Since the clergy were fully members of the Church, they could never be placed in the category of the penitents. There was felt to be an absolute incompatibility between the ministry and the sacrament of reconciliation, or re-integration into the Church. For his daily sins the cleric could perform the ancient exomologesis. In no case, however, could he receive the sacrament of reconciliation, for if he happened to commit a sin which demanded a reconciliation with the Church, he would have to be deposed, and having thus incurred one sanction, he could not fall under a second sanction, namely that of excommunication.

The increase in the number of sinners constituting reserved cases, especially from the time of the persecution of Decius, caused the Church to look upon them more benignly. A second reason which militated in favor of their being classed with other categories of sinners was the anomaly of their being withdrawn from the ordinary jurisdiction of the bishop. Even before St. Cyprian, adulterers were being reconciled at Carthage.

St. Callistus, the pope of Rome (218-223), took the decision to extend penance to the reserved cases, with the exception of apostates and murderers. The edict of Callistus almost completely ended the abusive concept of the privilege of the martyrs. St. Cyprian also struggled against the entry of the *lapsi* [apostates] into the Church on the basis of the *libelli* [certificates of indulgence, in which the confessors or martyrs interceded for apostate Christians] of the martyrs. He desired that the Church itself have the privilege of forgiving its children. For the older reserved cases St. Cyprian imposed the following discipline: (1) penance, (2) exomologesis, (3) the imposition of hands (absolution). The Council of Carthage in 251 introduced a distinction between the *sacrificati* [those who willingly offered pagan sacrifices], who after absolution could receive communion only at the moment of death, and the *libellatici* [those who, in order to avoid persecution, had secured certificates (*libelli*) of conformity to laws regarding pagan observance from the proper civil authorities], who were immediately reconciled one by one with the Church. At Carthage, the con-

<sup>13</sup> The following passage from EUSEBIUS' *Ecclesiastical History* (I. 45-46) is interesting in this regard: "Because of the martyrs, the mercy of Christ has been manifested: the dead were raised to life by the living; the martyrs were the grace of the fallen. Great was the joy of the Virgin Mother when she received as living those whom she had placed in the world of the dead. In effect, through the martyrs, the majority of the apostates re-entered the maternal womb"... learned once again to confess their faith... God has raised them up, who does not will the death of the sinner, but helps him to be converted."

<sup>14</sup> 38, 40.

<sup>15</sup> "He that knoweth his brother to sin a sin which is not to death, let him ask: and life shall be given to him who sinneth not to death. There is a sin unto death. For that I say not that any man ask" (1Jn 5.16).

<sup>16</sup> Remissible, according to TERTULLIAN.

<sup>17</sup> Irremissible, according to TERTULLIAN.

cern for those *lapsi* who could not be reconciled until the moment of death was so great

27

that the reconciliation could be performed by a deacon, who in this case would give communion to the dying man. At Rome, on the contrary, the *lapsi* were condemned to a perpetual penance. They were obliged to purify themselves through (1) an *actum poenitentiae* [act of penitence], and (2) an exomologesis, after which they were handed over to the judgment of God. They could hope in the divine mercy, but could never be admitted to the communion. At Alexandria, the *lapsi* were reconciled through communion (without an imposition of hands). Clerics who had fallen were not restored to the ministry. The necessity of reconciling the *lapsi* one by one caused this sacrament to pass from the hands of the bishop to those of the penitential priests who were ordained for this purpose.

The edict of Callistus also took up the problem caused by clerics guilty of sins submitting laymen to penance. It resolved the problem in a manner which indeed surprises us; it exempted the clergy from all canonical responsibility. A cleric could not be submitted to a public penance, nor could he be deposed, which until this time had been the equivalent punishment for a cleric.<sup>18</sup> It is evident that in the disciplinary framework of the day, it was unthinkable to submit the clergy to penance. The Fathers of the primitive Church had never done so. It could not be imagined that a cleric, who could not have been married more than once previous to his ordination, could commit any sins other than daily sins, and thus have need of the sacrament of reconciliation. As we have already said, there was felt to be an absolute contradiction between the exercise of the priesthood and the state of excommunication which was that of the penitent. If a cleric had need of doing penance, it was evident on these grounds alone that he was unworthy of the ministry. Deposition, or banishment from the ranks of the clergy, was thus the logical consequence. Nevertheless, the softening of the life of the

28

clergy and the increased number of cases submitted to penance made it necessary that some new measures be taken in this regard, based upon the primitive discipline. The manner in which St. Callistus resolved the problem, however, was clearly anticanonical, since it exempted the

clergy from all punishment for their misdeeds. Such a solution inevitably led to laxism.

In the question of the reconciliation of the *lapsi*, Rome quickly followed the lead of Carthage. This discipline became widespread first in Africa and Italy, and later throughout the East. Only the Council of Elvira still reflected a point of view which was no longer customary in the Church, and which became characteristic of the Novatians.

What was the discipline to which Christians were bound who had committed only daily sins, and who were consequently not subjected to the discipline of penance? In the first century, they had been freed from their sins through the exomologesis, followed by communion, but from that time on, at least in our opinion, the exomologesis in this sense had disappeared, and was only preserved as an integral part of the sacrament of reconciliation. Our source in this matter is St. Athanasius the Great, who, in his nineteenth paschal encyclical, tells us that the faithful ate the paschal lamb after having fasted and accomplished the vigils with genuflections in the spirit of contrition, and with a doxology expressing gratitude.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was through fasting, prayer, and contrition that the Christians prepared themselves for communion. There is no mention of an exomologesis. It is this discipline which has been preserved in certain Orthodox countries, for example in Serbia, where after a week of severe fasting the faithful receive communion without a previous confession. This is not true of all the faithful, however, but only of certain categories, for example the younger girls, who can reasonably be considered as being innocent of serious sin.

The Apostolic Constitutions give us certain details on the

29

procedure for the reconciliation of penitents: (1) the sinner presents himself for judgment to the bishop; (2) under the surveillance of the deacons he accomplishes certain salutary exercises, consisting of almsgiving or fasting; (3) he is reconciled by the bishop.<sup>20</sup>

The letter of Pope Innocent I to the bishop of Toulouse testifies to the fact that reconciliation was delayed until the time of death for cases of fornication and unchasteness.<sup>21</sup> If such was the discipline in this regard in the fifth century, we can be certain that it was so in the fourth century as well.

<sup>18</sup> If a bishop sinned, even mortally, he was not to be deposed from his charge. A cleric who remarried was to remain in the function of his order. exactly as if he had not sinned.

<sup>19</sup> PG, 26, 1429.

<sup>20</sup> C. 40, 41. PS, 1, 694-695.

<sup>21</sup> II, 6; PL, 20, 498.

St. Gregory the Theologian, at one time bishop of Sasima, and later archbishop of Constantinople, demanded of his penitents: (1) a sincere repentance, (2) a change of life, (3) a separation from the flock for a certain period of time, i.e., submission to an excommunication, and (4) an exomologesis.<sup>22</sup>

## Original sin

This demand for a μετάνοια made necessary a further investigation on the part of Eastern patristic thought, which from the fourth century on acquired its own particular characteristics. The demand for a μετάνοια was included in the ἔργον. In effect, the ἔργον was required in order to ascertain, from the effort put forth, the real will of the sinner to rid himself of his sins. This μετάνοια was already required by the *Shepherd*. It received its consecration in the ἰάσις, or healing. Moreover, the fact that, up until the fifth century, the sacrament of reconciliation could not be repeated implied the necessity for a total change of life, without which there could be no healing. Nevertheless, the use of this expression, precisely by an Eastern Father, invites us to study more closely the Oriental view of the fall of man which underlies the Oriental theology of penance. In our opinion, it is during the fourth century that a particular vision of things came to be

30

elaborated which, by opposing itself to the view commonly accepted in the West, has come to be known as Orthodoxy. If we are to understand Orthodoxy, therefore, we must be especially attentive to the doctrine and the practice of those Fathers who underlie this orientation of Christianity. I am thinking in the first place of St. Athanasius, of whom we have already spoken, but especially of the great Cappadocians, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, to whom we must add St. John Chrysostom, all of them doctors whom the West frequently considers as its own representatives, but from whose teaching it often departs. Let us attempt, therefore, to understand with accuracy the Eastern patristic teaching on the fall of man and its consequences.<sup>23</sup>

We have been created to do good works, says St. Gregory the Theologian, in order that the Creator may be praised and glorified, and in order that, in the measure

of the possible, we be imitators of God.<sup>24</sup> St. John Damascene will add that God has not formed us to punish us, but in order that we might partake in His goodness, because He is good.<sup>25</sup> Since man possesses the image of God, he should come to be like God. The fall of Adam and Eve has impeded this likeness from developing. But what is this likeness? According to St. Basil the Great, the image is the likeness in potency, and the likeness is the image in act.<sup>26</sup> According to St. John Damascene, the expression "in the image of" indicates man's reason and liberty, and the expression "according to the likeness" signifies his assimilation to God in virtue, in the measure in which this is possible. Since God has said, "Let us make man to Our image and likeness," how is it possible that elsewhere in Genesis (I, 26f) it is said simply:

31

"God created man to His own image." The explanation is given by St. Gregory of Nyssa: "Why has this project not been realized? Why is it not said: God has created man in His image, and in His likeness? Has the Creator failed? It would be impious to think that. Perhaps He has changed His plan? It would be irreverent to think thus. When it is He who has spoken, would it also be He who has changed His plan? In no way. Neither has Sacred Scripture said this, nor has the Creator failed, nor has His plan remained unfulfilled. We have been made in His image through Creation, but we must become like Him by ourselves, through our own free will. To be the image of God belongs to us by our primordial destination, but to become like God depends upon our *will*. But even that which depends upon our will exists in us only as something which is possible to attain, and can be attained only through our personal activity. If, in creating man, the Lord had not first said: Let us make him according to Our likeness, and if He had not given us at the same time the possibility of becoming like Him, we could never come to resemble Him through our own strength. At creation we have received the possibility of becoming like God, and by giving us this possibility, God has made us the architects of our own resemblance to Him."<sup>27</sup>

The patristic doctrine on the creation of man is expressed in the following way by the orthodox confession of Peter Moghila, the metropolitan of Kiev: "At the end, God created man, who is composed of an immaterial and rational soul and a material body, in order that, from the fact of this composition of man, this truth may be known: God is the creator of the spiritual world, and it is

<sup>22</sup> Or. xl. 8; PG, 36, 369.

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, see the article of Isidore TODORAN, "L'état paradisiaque de l'homme et son état après la chute, selon la conception orthodoxe," *Le Messager de l'Exarchat du patriarche russe en Europe Occidentale* (23 September, 1955), the documentation of which we have made use of here.

<sup>24</sup> Or. xxxix, 7; PG, 36, 431 C.

<sup>25</sup> *De Fid. orth.* 1; PG, 94, 969 A.

<sup>26</sup> *De Struct. hom.*, or. 1; PG. 30, 32 C.

<sup>27</sup> *In verba Faciamus hominem*, or. 1; PG, 44, 272A-273B.

also He who has created the material world. Thus is man called a microcosm, because he bears within himself the image of the macrocosm."<sup>28</sup> "The state of innocence or the absence of sin... is the ignorance of sin or the lack of temptation.

32

Before having sinned, Adam was in this state, joined both to perfection and to justice, which had been placed in him, in his intelligence and in his will. His intelligence possessed every kind of knowledge, and his will all justice and goodness. For Adam knew God perfectly, in the measure in which this was allowed him in his time, and to the degree that it was fitting. It was precisely because he knew God that through Him he knew all things. As for his will, it was always subject to his reason, even though it remained free, for man was capable both of sinning and of avoiding sin... In this state of innocence and absence from sin, man was like the angels."<sup>29</sup> The state of perfection of the human understanding was expressed by St. John Chrysostom as follows: "Did he not possess understanding and all knowledge who could give the appropriate names to the animals of the earth, to the birds of the heavens, and to all the other living beings, without confusing and mixing together the domestic with the wild animals, and without attributing to the wild animals the nature of the domestic animals, but rather giving the appropriate names to them all?"<sup>30</sup> This teaching of the Fathers is based upon Sacred Scripture: "He created in them the science of the spirit: He filled their heart with wisdom, and showed them both good and evil. He set His eye upon their hearts, to show the greatness of His words: That they might praise the name which He hath sanctified, and glory in His wondrous acts: that they might declare the glorious things of His works. Moreover, He gave them instructions, and the law of life for an inheritance. He made an everlasting covenant with them, and He showed them His justice and judgments." (Sir 17, 6-10). God has created man for immortality, and has made him in His own image (Wis 2, 23): "God hath created man upright" (Sir 7, 29). St. Augustine was in agreement with the Eastern Fathers when he commented on the text of Gn 2, 25

33

as follows: "For as it is written, 'They were naked and were not ashamed'— not that their nakedness was unknown to them, but because nakedness was not yet shameful, because not yet did lust move those members

<sup>28</sup> *Confess. orth.*, 1, r. 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, r. 23.

<sup>30</sup> *In gen.*, hom. 14, 5; *PG*, 53, 117.

without the will's consent."<sup>31</sup> In the words of St. John Chrysostom, "This constitutes the culminating point of innocence."<sup>32</sup> Because man's spirit was healthy, his body was also. It is because of the fall that the body has become subject to corruption. Diadochus of Photicè explained the matter this way: Κατ' εικόνα ἐσμὲν τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ νοερῷ τῆς ψυχῆς κινήματι τὸ γὰρ σῶμα ὥσπερ οἶκος αὐτῆς ἐστίν. Ἐπειδὴ οὖν διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ Ἀδάμ οὐ μόνον αἱ γραμμαὶ τοῦ χαρακτήρος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐρρυπώθησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν τῇ φθορᾷ ὑπέσπεσεν ['We are according to God's image by means of the noeric movement of the soul, for the body is as its house. Since therefore by Adam's transgression not only the marks of the soul's character are spoiled, but also our body has fallen by corruption'].<sup>33</sup> "For God made not death... God created man incorruptible... But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world" (Wis 1, 13; 2, 23f). Death is the consequence of sin (Gn 2, 17; 3, 19; Rom 5, 12; 6, 23). According to St. John Damascene, "God has created man by his nature (to be) without sin, and by his will (to be) free. I say without sin, not because he would be incapable of sinning— for only the divinity is without sin— but because it is not in his nature that there be a faculty of sinning, but rather in his faculty of choice. This means that he had the strength to remain and to make progress in the good, aided by the grace of God,<sup>34</sup> just as he had also the power to turn himself away from the good, and to do the evil, which God permitted because man was endowed with liberty. That which is done under constraint is not virtuous."<sup>35</sup> Man had received the image of God at creation, and it was his task to attain the likeness

34

of God. Bodily incorruptibility did not mean that by nature man could not die, but that he was able not to die by fixing himself upon God.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *De civ. Dei*, 14, 17; *PL*, 41, 425.

<sup>32</sup> *De Fid. orth.*, 2; *PG*, 94, 913B.

<sup>33</sup> As cited in *Cent chapitres gnostiques*, ed. E. DESPLACES (Paris, 1955), pp. 135ff.

<sup>34</sup> This grace was given to man by God in order that he might make progress in the spiritual life. Because of it, man was in communion with his Creator (St. DAMASCENE, 1. c. 176A).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. St. JUSTIN MARTYR, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 124, and St. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, *44th oration*, No. 4: *For the Sunday of the second week after Easter*, *PG*, 35, 1. c. 611.

<sup>36</sup> On this point, St. AUGUSTINE departed from the teaching of the Greek Fathers. As C. MARTIN explains in *Byz. Zeitschr.*, XL (1940), p. 469, the Greek Fathers are "fundamentally optimistic in all that concerns human nature. Undoubtedly if one had interrogated them on the precise state of the soul of Adam at the moment of his creation, or better, before the original fall, they would have answered, in conformity with the current opinion of their time, based on the account in Genesis (1, 26), that the first man had been enriched with perfect and gratuitous

St. Augustine expressed this same truth in the following manner: "Until the time of sin, the human body could be qualified as mortal in one sense, and as immortal in another. It was mortal because it could die, but immortal because it could also not die... if man had not sinned, he would have been able not to die. He was, therefore, mortal according to the nature of his body, but immortal according to the grace of his Creator."<sup>37</sup> We can see in these words of Augustine, however, which say that human nature was mortal in itself, a foreshadowing of the later Roman doctrine that grace is a *donum superadditum* [superadded gift]. According to Orthodox teaching, man before the fall was neither mortal nor immortal; both possibilities were his, or perhaps we should say that if his life had unfolded according to the divine plan, he was necessarily immortal.<sup>38</sup> In what did the sin of our ancestors consist? According to Scripture, in pride: "The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God" (Sir 10, 14). It is for this reason that pride is so serious, for it is the source of the other sins. In the Orthodox Confession of Faith of the Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, we read that the fall has provoked as a consequence the non-fulfillment of man's resemblance to God, and even the alteration or obscuring of the image of God in man,<sup>39</sup> because man has exchanged the love of God for vanity

35

(Rom 8, 20). Original sin has introduced corruption into man's nature. "We believe that through sin man has fallen even to the point of resembling the animals; his spirit has been darkened; he has lost perfection and freedom with respect to his passions, but he has not been deprived of the nature and the power which he had received from God."<sup>40</sup> The Orthodox teaching ignores the distinction introduced by the Roman doctrine between the *natura pura* [pure nature] and the *donum superadditum*.

It is man as such who has been called to the divine likeness; it is man himself, in his entire being, who has changed the love of God into a love of what is material. Orthodox theology does not know the fundamental opposition body-spirit, which necessitates the *frenum aureum* ['golden bridle']. In Orthodox teaching, the fall of man is not a lack of subordination of the lower powers to reason, but rather an about-face of man's being,

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gifts, such as immortality, the ἀπάθεια [freedom from passion], and perhaps, even, with supernatural grace..."

<sup>37</sup> De Fid. orch., 2, PG, 94, 924B.

<sup>38</sup> De Gen. ad litt., vi, 2S; PL, 34, 354.

<sup>39</sup> Confess. orthodox., 1, 23; 111, 20.

<sup>40</sup> C. MARTIN. Le principe de la ressemblance de l'homme primitif essentiellement dans l'âme humaine.

which having been turned toward God, is now turned toward nature. Original sin represents a corruption of man's will. The grace which had been given to man was not a *frenum aureum*, but a force placed at his disposition in order that he might realize his likeness to God. Human nature has not remained intact, as some theologians teach, but has become corrupted. Nevertheless, this corruption does not go so far as the Protestant theologians teach. "If the image of God, which is the sole basis within us for our union with God, our prototype, had been completely taken away, we would no longer be able to renew our union with Him, and Christianity would therefore have no meaning."<sup>41</sup> If, on the one hand, we can say with Sacred Scripture: "For there is no just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7, 21), on the other hand, God says to man in these same Scriptures: "This commandment, that I command thee this day is not above thee, nor far off from thee... but the word is very nigh unto

36

thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it... Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life, that both thou and thy seed may live. And that thou mayst love the Lord thy God, and obey His voice, and adhere to Him for He is thy life, and the length of thy days." (Dt 30, 11-20).

The μετάνοια should normally take place at the time of the first penance, that which precedes baptism, but the practice of infant baptism reduced this penance to symbolical acts. It is well and good if the Christian, under the direction of his parents and superiors, gradually accomplishes this μετάνοια in relation to the old Adam, whom he must reject in order to put on the new. It can also happen, however, that after a serious fall, the Christian must accomplish the second penance, that of reconciliation. The goal of penance, as indeed of all of the spiritual life, is the transformation of man, "thanks to the essential good, into that which he is not."<sup>42</sup> It is not a question of "being transformed into that which we were not, but of being gloriously renewed through transformation into that which we were,"<sup>43</sup> "with a still greater splendor."<sup>44</sup>

If "the role of baptismal grace" is to renew (ἀνακαινίζειν), to make brilliant (λαμπρύνειν), and to take away

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<sup>41</sup> MACARIUS, metropolitan of MOSCOW, *Théologie dogmatique orthodoxe*, 1 (Paris, 1869), p. 620.

<sup>42</sup> DIADOCHUS, *loc. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> DIADOCHUS, Sermon VI, *loc. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>44</sup> DIADOCHUS, *loc. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

through washing (ἀπονίπτειν),<sup>45</sup> this same role can be attributed to penance, the baptism of tears. It is through an interior purification, the μετάνοια, which is a change in the condition of one's spirit, that sinfulness is taken away, which is the necessary condition for

37

avoiding sin in the future. So also, it is toward this internal work, this examination of the movements of the soul, that Orthodox confession is directed. Its goal is not only to obtain the pardon of sins, but to eliminate their cause, to obtain the ἴασις, or healing of the sinner. But before going on to the study of the sacrament of penance as it exists in Orthodoxy today, we must return to the study of the history of penance at the point from which we left off, i.e., in the fourth century.

## 2. From the Fourth Century to the Middle Ages

The flowering of monasticism in the fourth century led to a more profound understanding of penance itself. It is difficult to establish the nature of penance during the period which preceded the fourth century. We can be certain that there were always bishops, and at a later period priests, who made use of their spiritual knowledge to guide their flocks into the way of righteousness, and to lead back those who had wandered astray. Nevertheless, none of the documents preserved by the primitive Church enlightens us concerning this question. All that we know is that the penitents were placed under the surveillance of deacons. We can suppose that this surveillance also implied some kind of spiritual direction. As for those who were fully members of the Church, we have no documentation at all, except concerning the fact that in the first century they performed an exomologesis of their sins. Our knowledge of the situation of the penitents is based solely on the sanctions which were applied to them, which is, of course, only the exterior side of penance. It thus seems likely that although penance always included an instruction on the means of struggling against sin, as well as a practical application of these methods, nevertheless it did not attain that technique which has been given us by monasticism.

<sup>45</sup> C. MARTIN, *op. cit.*, following chapter 59 of Diadochus: Δύο ἡμιν μαλὰ ἡ ἀγία χάρις διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος περιποιεῖ τῆς ἀναγεννήσεως ὀντινων τὸ ἐν ἀπέιρωσ τοῦ ἐνὸς ὑπερβάλλει. Ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν εὐθέως χαρίζεται ἀναχαίνιζει γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὕδατι καὶ πάσας τὰς γραμμὰς τῆς ψυχῆς, τουτ' ἐστὶν τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα λαμπρύνει, πᾶσαν ρυτίδα τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἡμᾶς ἀπονίπτουσα. (The baptismal renews us while we are still in the water, and makes the features of the soul, i.e., the image of God, stand out brilliantly, by removing all the wrinkles of sin.)

In the fourth century, as a result of the continual weakening in the moral life of the Christians, the layman seems more and more to have been considered as a sinner, as one who had been

38

excommunicated. He no longer received communion at the altar, but rather at its gates. The last evidence of laymen having access to the altar (including women) is to be found in St. Basil the Great. Not only were they forbidden to approach the altar, but a screen was set up to hide it from them, at least during the time of the communion of the clergy. Only the emperor retained the privilege of presenting his offering at the altar, and even of incensing the sanctuary, but communion was given to him outside the sanctuary at a portable altar. Nevertheless, he enjoyed the rank of a cleric, i.e., he belonged to the minor clergy. This situation of the excommunicated laity, which was expressed in a less and less frequent reception of communion,<sup>46</sup> was deeply experienced by certain laymen, who went off to the desert and consecrated their entire life to the task of ridding themselves of this virtual excommunication. It is thus that those persons who were more spiritual than the common turn of Christians lived as penitents, preparing themselves throughout their lives for what was often their sole reception of communion, immediately prior to death. Their entire life was a life of penance, a daily effort to obtain the ἴασις, or healing, which the first Christians had hoped to win through martyrdom. As a consequence, this monasticism elaborated a technique for the struggle against sin in its source—the thought of man—which in our opinion was not attained by the first Christian generations. Nevertheless, if these monks lived a life of penance, we cannot say that they often made use of the sacrament of penance. We should not forget that at the beginning of monasticism the sacrament of reconciliation could not be repeated, that the first monks were “laymen,” i.e., non-clerics, and that with the exception of those who through previous sins or through some grave fall had need of this sacrament, the vast majority of the monks had no reason

39

to make use of it. It is indeed possible that the monks, through the greater severity of their conception of preparation for the sacrament of the Eucharist, were in large part responsible for the sacrament's being received less and less frequently. The rarity with which communion

<sup>46</sup> At the time of St. Basil, it was customary to receive communion four times a week, on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, for which reason the Mass of the Presanctified was established in Lent. But how many laymen participated with this much fervor?

was received was occasioned more by a spirit of rigorism than by indifference on the part of the faithful. Nevertheless, if the monks did not at first make use of the sacrament of reconciliation, this does not mean that they did not practice a certain kind of confession. This confession was not an exomologesis, such as that described in the *Didache*, because it was not public. Nor was it confession in the sense in which we understand it, for it was not pronounced before a priest, and therefore did not include an absolution. Moreover, as we have already remarked, their sins were not such as to demand an absolution. This confession was made before another monk, i.e., before a "layman" (a non-cleric), or before the abbot, who was sometimes a deacon. This confession replaced the primitive exomologesis; its fulfillment and its liberating effect were achieved in the reception of communion. This was the origin of the principle of confession to a layman, which was upheld in the West by Hugh of St. Victor, St. Raymond of Pennafort, Lanfranc, Peter Lombard, and Gratian. St. Pachomius the Great (†348) recommended reciprocal confession to monks. Such confession had the advantage of giving to the monks mutual spiritual direction and assistance. St. Basil the Great made it obligatory for monks living in community. In his 229th response, he gave the advice not to confess oneself to the latest arrival, but only to those who were able to heal one from his sins. Thus, St. Basil based this institution upon the elder "ghostly" monks, those endowed with spiritual gifts, who, whether they belonged to the clergy or not, could still be considered as excellent directors of conscience. Such were the *startsy*, who through the work of Paisios flourished in Russia almost to the present day. Nevertheless, this practice of confession changed the character of the ἵασις. Previously, healing had been assured to the sinner

40

through his reconciliation into the holiness of the Church, as well as through his personal effort both before and after his reconciliation. The introduction of the practice of mutual confession transferred to the monk, or elder, the concern for the ἵασις or healing. In Russia, spiritual direction has continued in this fashion, sometimes joined to confession, but sometimes independent of it. It can be exercised by a *startets* [elder], who is not necessarily an ordained monk. Often, for reasons of convenience, the spiritual director, even though a priest, will not be the priest who serves as regular confessor. In this case, one confesses his sins to his confessor, and reserves for his spiritual director the confession of his thoughts and the secret movements of his soul. In this situation, the regular confessor will seldom give counsel

to the penitent, which implies that the ἵασις or healing is not necessarily joined to the sacrament of penance.

Not all the monks were saints, however. Pope Siricius, in a letter to Himerius, the bishop of Tarragona, in 385, delayed until the moment of death the reconciliation of apostates and of monks who had committed fornication.<sup>47</sup> We should remember that Rome was for a long time reticent on the question of the reconciliation of the *lapsi*. In what concerns adultery, Pope Callistus began to consider it as remissible;<sup>48</sup> he absolved certain cases himself, and others were forgiven by the *libelli* of the martyrs. But St. Innocent, as we have already seen, continued to delay the reconciliation of fornicators and the unchaste until the moment of death. In the event of recovery, communion was once again refused to the penitent until a new danger of death had arisen.

During this same period, the consequences of the edict of Callistus began to be seen. An attempt was made to overcome the evils by requiring clerics guilty of sin to make a retreat in a monastery. Even this practice, however, was not always

41

successful. Such was the case of the deacon Sabinian, whose misdeeds were recounted by all the gossips of the period. He seduced a woman, then fled from Rome and hid himself among the Samnite thieves. He boarded a ship and arrived at Bethlehem with letters of recommendation from his bishop to St. Jerome to the effect that he make a retreat in a monastery, which was equivalent to a *privata secessio* [private retreat or withdrawal]. Sabinian's misdoings were not yet finished however; at Bethlehem he attacked a consecrated virgin.<sup>49</sup>

This practice of performing a *privata secessio*— an ἔργον— was also introduced among the monks. It was the monk himself who defined the ἔργον which he was to perform. Often it was through their own tears that the monks washed themselves from their sins.

The difficulties caused in the East by the sins of the clerics led to the suppression at Constantinople in 391 of the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation by St. Nectarius, the archbishop of the city. While confessing to a priest, a woman accused herself of having had sinful relations with a deacon. In order to avoid the repetition of such crimes in the future, St. Nectarius suppressed absolutely the functions of the penitential priests. We should point out that in any case reconciliation could only be obtained once in a lifetime. Thus was established

<sup>47</sup> C. 5; *PL*, 56, 557.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. TERTULLIAN, *De Pudic.*, I and 22; *PL*, 2, 981 and 1024.

<sup>49</sup> St. JEROME, Letter cxlvii; *PL*, 22, 1195.

the non-repetition of this sacrament, as was also the case with baptism, confirmation, orders, for each degree, the anointing of the sick during the course of a single illness, and normally, also, marriage. St. Ambrose affirmed this by saying: "Sicut unum baptisma, ita una paenitentia, quae tamen publice aguntur [as there is one baptism, so there is one repentance, which however is done publicly]."<sup>50</sup> As a consequence of the disappearance of the sacrament of reconciliation in the East, the sinner became his own judge through: (1) abstention from communion, either total, as a consequence of his unworthiness, or for a period of time, by way of sanction; (2) contrition, which could be expressed

42

exteriorly,<sup>51</sup> and (3) the ἔργον. It was only in the fifth century that reconciliation began to be repeated, and yet it could not be received more than a second time... in a lifetime. Once again, this return to the practice of the sacrament was not everywhere successful, since it was rejected by the Council of Toledo in 589. Perhaps in reaction against the measure taken by St. Nectarius of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of the same city, was not only an ardent supporter of penance, but even of its repetition. "When a man has done penance a thousand times, he can still come and ask for it again." Even his friends disapproved of this teaching, and he was attacked by Sisinius, the Novatian bishop.

Nevertheless, for St. John Chrysostom, penance did not necessarily take the form of confession before a priest, such as we know it today. It could take different forms:

- (1) The confession of sins:
  - a. before God;
  - b. before a man in secret;
  - c. before the Church in public;
  - d. before a priest.
- (2) weeping,
- (3) humility,
- (4) almsgiving,
- (5) prayer,
- (6) Lent.

In speaking of the preparation for Easter, Chrysostom did not demand an obligatory confession before a priest. In his *Homilia in eo, qui primo pascha jejnant*, he expressed himself as follows: "Our Fathers, knowing that we commit sins throughout the year, have established Lent in order that we might purify ourselves from our sins through prayer, deeds of mercy, fasting, weeping,

confession, and through all the means which lie within our power, so that we might come to the Feast with a pure conscience."<sup>52</sup>

If we compare this text with that of his fourth homily on Lazarus, delivered, we may suppose, sometime during Lent, we can see what kind of confession Chrysostom had in mind. "Why are you ashamed to tell your sins? Is it because you tell them to a man, who will reproach you for them? Is it because you confess them before a fellow-servant, who will tell others of

43

your deeds? It is to the Lord, who is provident, the Friend of men, the Physician, that you show your wound... To Me alone, tell your sins in secret, in order that I may heal thy wound, and deliver thee from thine illness."<sup>53</sup> We thus see that at the time of St. John Chrysostom, the faithful freed themselves from their sins principally through the exercises of Lent, through the practice of mercy (almsgiving), and through confession to God. This procedure was normal for those Christians who had not committed any serious sins. For the others, before the time of St. Nectarius, there existed the sacrament of reconciliation for their first fall; after his time, they became the judges of their own cases. In the year 440, the function of the penitential priests had not yet been re-established. The vast majority of the Eastern bishops followed the practice instituted by St. Nectarius. Although St. John Chrysostom retained the optional character of confession before a priest (as marriage before a bishop was also optional) still, he, more than any other, emphasized the power of the keys which had been entrusted to the priests: "Creatures who dwell upon the earth, whose life is lived in the midst of the world, have been called to administer the mysteries of heaven, and have received a power which God has granted neither to the angels nor to the archangels. For it was not to these latter that He said: Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven. The powerful men of this world also have a power of binding, but it concerns only the body; the power of which Christ has spoken and which is exercised by the priests concerns the soul, and has its effect even in heaven. What the priest decides here below, God confirms on high, and the sentence which the servant pronounces here below, is ratified by the Master above. Has He not given to the priests all the powers of heaven? Every time you forgive sins they are forgiven, and if you do not forgive them, they shall

<sup>50</sup> *De Paenit.*, 1095; *PL*, 16, 541, 3.

<sup>51</sup> In Gaul, hair-cloth was worn.

<sup>52</sup> *PG*, 48, 867.

<sup>53</sup> *PG*, 48, 1012.



not be forgiven. (Jn 20, 22). Could there be a greater power? The Father has given to His Son all power of judging (Jn 5, 22), and I see that the Son, in His turn, has placed this entire power into the hands of the priests. Shall we not say that God has established them in heaven, that He has raised them above human nature, and set them free from earthly servitudes, in order to clothe them with such power?... We can be certain that all of these goods which we have received can come only through the consecrated hands of the priest. How would it be possible, without the priest, to avoid the fires of hell and attain the crown of heaven? It is the priest who engenders us spiritually in baptism. It is the priest who reveals Christ to us, and who makes of Christ our head, and of ourselves His members. Thus, we should honor Him even more than our princes and emperors, and love Him and hold Him in greater esteem than even our own parents...; the priests have given us the spiritual life which comes from God, and it is to them that we owe our blessed regeneration, our true liberty, and our title as sons of God... Yes, the priests of the new law have received a power of healing more than the leprosy of the body; they have the power to heal the leprosy of the soul; and they have been charged not merely to observe the healing, but to work the healing themselves... Let me return to the power of the priest. It was not to judge us or to find fault with us that they have received powers superior to those of our parents; they can also do us a much greater good... The priests engender us for the life to come;... the priests can save the soul both from sickness and from death. They can gently administer remedies, and they can even prevent us from falling, not only through their teaching and their counsel, but even more through their prayers. They have been charged not only with washing away our sins and regenerating us in the waters of baptism; they have also the power to forgive sins committed after baptism: Is there a sick man among you; go and find the priests; they will recite prayers over him, and will anoint him in the name of the Lord. Their prayers will save the sick

man; God will restore him, and if he has sins on his conscience, they will be forgiven him (Jas 5, 14f).<sup>54</sup>

At first reading, these texts seem to be an affirmation of the power of the priests to forgive sins through the sacrament of reconciliation. Nevertheless, a more careful examination of the texts taken from the *De Sacerdotio* would lead us to conclude that they do not apply to the

<sup>54</sup> *De Sacerdotio*, 4, 5; PG, 48, 643.

second penance, that which follows baptism, but to the first repentance which precedes baptism, and which is frequently mentioned in the Acts.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Chrysostom, having spoken of the power of the keys, goes on to speak of baptism leads me to think that he had in mind the exercise of the power of the keys in relation to those who with a sincere repentance had renounced Satan and his pomps. Continuing to speak of the sublime power of the priests, Chrysostom goes on to consider their faculties for healing the soul. We would expect at this time some considerations on the sacrament of penance. Such is not at all the case, however. As means of spiritual healing, he mentions only their teaching, their counsel, and finally their prayers. When at last he speaks explicitly of sins committed after baptism, it is only to appeal to the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as a means of forgiving sins. It seems that the following conclusions may be drawn from our study of the texts of this great Father: (1) a Christian could confess his sins (make an exomologesis) *ad libitum* to a priest; (2) the normal exercise of the sacrament of reconciliation had disappeared; (3) the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was already beginning to replace it. It is perhaps to

this period that we must trace the practice of anointing not only the sick, but also those who were in no way ill, which has been continued even to the present day in the cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow, and which now enjoys a certain popularity particularly in the Russian emigration.

In the West, at the time of St. Leo the Great (in the fifth century), the reconciliation of serious sinners could be granted only once in a lifetime, in agreement with the ancient tradition. Once again, in accord with a rigorism proper to the Roman Church, they were not fully restored to their previous state. They were forced to give up: (1) any military profession, (2) business dealings, and (3) more seriously, the use of marriage. Those who failed to observe the first two limitations were subjected to a total excommunication, i.e., banishment from the Church;<sup>56</sup> those who failed to observe the third were only

<sup>55</sup> Acts 2, 38: "But Peter said to them: Do penance: and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"; 3, 19: "Be penitent, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out"; 5, 31: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins"; 11, 18: "Having heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying: God then hath also to the Gentiles given repentance unto life"; 13, 38: "Be it known therefore to you, men, brethren, that through him forgiveness of sins is preached to you..."

<sup>56</sup> Today we would call this major excommunication.

deprived of communion.<sup>57</sup> For young people who had been reconciled with the Church, the discipline was still less severe. In the case of those who married to avoid fornication, this failure to observe the imposed continence was considered only a venial sin. In such cases, the penance was renewed annually. Already from the time of St. Innocent I (402-417), the *leviora* were assimilated to the *graviora*,<sup>58</sup> and those guilty of both classes of sins were reconciled on Holy Thursday. A single discipline was established for all Christians who were effectively members of the Church: at the beginning of Lent an excommunication was imposed upon all, symbolized by the imposition of ashes upon the head, as well as by a veil being placed in front of the sanctuary to separate the Christians from the altar. Only clerics, who could not be excommunicated, continued to have access to the sanctuary and to participate in the sacraments. On Holy Thursday, all these penitents were reconciled with the Church at the Mass of the penitents, in order to participate later at the Mass *in Coena*

47

*Domini*. As we have seen, a diametrically opposite procedure was followed in the East from the time of St. Nectarius, who suppressed the distinction between *leviora* and *graviora*,<sup>59</sup> and also with regard to the more serious sins. This assimilation is still the rule in the Russian Orthodox Church.

At approximately this same time, St. Augustine (354-430) gives us a complete classification of the different sins, and indicates the means by which each category may be forgiven. Continuing the ancient tradition, he calls the penance which precedes baptism the first penance. Among the sins which Christians commit there is a first group, the *peccata cotidiana*, which he also refers to as *minora*, *minuta*, or *modica* [lesser, minute, or small]. These consist of sins of the eyes, the ears, or the tongue, for example, a harsh word, immoderate laughter, excessive eating or drinking, or intemperance in marriage. These sins may be cleansed through: (1) the recitation of the Miserere, (2) almsgiving,<sup>60</sup> and (3) fasting.

In the eyes of Augustine, almsgiving on the part of a penitent had a redemptive value. We should note that St.

Ambrose was of this same opinion.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, according to St. Augustine, this almsgiving must be joined to prayer and fasting, i.e., to a complete spiritual life, in order to attain its full effectiveness. One of the forms of prayer especially powerful in this regard was the Our Father. All Christians, even bishops, were submitted to this means of purification, as can be seen from the following dialogue recorded by St. Augustine:

*Dicis modo forte: Et vos? Respondemus: Et nos. Et vos, episcopi sancti, debitores estis? Et nos, debitores sumus. Et vos? Absit, domine, noli tibi facere injuriam. Non injuriam mihi facio, sed verum dico, debitores*

48

*sumus* [Perhaps you now say, And you? We answer, And we. And you, holy bishops, are you debtors? And we, we are debtors. And you? Let it be, Lord, don't injure yourself. I'm not injuring myself, but I speak the truth: we are debtors].<sup>62</sup> The sins here referred to were only daily sins. In fact, the bishops were not subjected to the sacrament of penance.

Parallel to this group of sins was another group, that of sins subject to a sanction, which included the older *peccata graviora* and reserved cases. Sins belonging to this group were idolatry, divination, the exercise of the profession of healing, schism, homicide, adultery, fornication, theft, pillaging, false witnessing, sacrilege, drunkenness, avarice, fraud, and slander.<sup>63</sup> These sins could be forgiven through the exercise of the power of the keys on the part of the bishop. At this time the following demands were placed upon the sinner: humiliation of the heart, contrition of the spirit, and the tribulations of penance, i.e., the *ěpyov*. This reconciliation was granted only once, and those who fell again were excluded from communion for the rest of their life (Ep 162, 7).

For the ritual itself of the reconciliation two different practices were used. A different ritual was employed if the sin had been committed in secret or if, on the contrary, it was of public notoriety. In the first case, reconciliation was granted after a private penance, but for public sins a public penance was necessary.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, this latter was applied only to the *peccata mortifera*, which were: unchasteness (and so also, adultery), idolatry, and homicide. Consequently, we find in St. Augustine three groups of sins:

<sup>57</sup> In other words, minor excommunication.

<sup>58</sup> N. 20.

<sup>59</sup> We should note that the *graviora* merited this name only in a relative sense. As we have seen, the most serious sins formed a separate category, that of the ancient reserved cases, for which there could be only one reconciliation in the course of a lifetime.

<sup>60</sup> "Water quenqueth a flaming fire: and alms resisteth sins" (Sir 3, 33).

<sup>61</sup> "Si peccatum in secreto est, in secreto corripere; si peccatum publicum est et apertum, publice corripere, ut ille emendetur et ceteri timeant" (*Sermo* 83, 8; *PL*, 38, 519).

<sup>62</sup> *De Paenit.*, 9, 83; *PL*, 16, 538.

<sup>63</sup> *Sermo* 56; *PL*, 381-382.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

- (1) daily faults (*peccata levia*), which can be taken away by:
  - a. the personal prayer of the sinner,
  - b. almsgiving, and
  - c. fasting;
- (2) serious sins, which can be confessed:
  - a. a) either in private penance, or
  - b. b) in public penance.
- (3) the *peccata mortifera* for which public penance was obligatory.

In what concerns clerics, the sacrament of reconciliation was

49

never applied to them in the West in the fifth century.<sup>65</sup> According to St. Leo, the cleric came under the jurisdiction only of the divine judgment. Nevertheless, he imposed upon clerics guilty of serious sin a secret ἔργον and a retreat. At the time of St. Gregory the Great, the ἔργον had become a retreat in a monastery. Thus, in the year 533, Contumeliosus, the bishop of Riez, having been condemned by the Council of Marseille for "multa turpia et inhonesta," was not deposed, but was sent to a monastery *ad agendum paenitentiam* [for the purpose of doing penance], after which he returned to Riez and resumed his function. In effect, the *privata secessio* was a voluntarily accepted constraint, and included none of the degrading elements of the public penance.<sup>66</sup>

The monks, who were already leading lives of penance, freed themselves from their sins by ἔργα which they determined for themselves. St. Columban (†613), by introducing into the *privata secessio* the imposition of hands, i.e., an absolution, suppressed the difference which had existed between the *privata secessio* and the sacrament of reconciliation, and made of this latter the habitual form of penance in the West for clerics as well as for the laity. It is indeed possible that his influence served to reintroduce, at least partially, the sacrament of penance into the East. Thus, at the terminus of this evolution covering a period of several centuries, we find in Orthodoxy today two practices. The first derives from this entire evolutionary process of which we have spoken, and considers as matter for confession every sin, regardless of its gravity, and holds as well that all the faithful who have attained the age of reason (those over seven years of

age) are bound by this sacrament. The second, more archaic tendency holds either that certain categories of

50

persons cannot be subjected to penance, since they are incapable of committing the *peccata mortifera*,<sup>67</sup> or that confession should be left to the choice of the faithful. In this case, it is not considered as a necessary purification which must precede communion, but as a sacrament having its own autonomous value. Moreover, the faithful who make use of it address themselves by preference to monks whom they meet at random on a pilgrimage, seeking not only forgiveness, but also the ἰασις, or healing. This practice of seeking in the sacrament of penance the healing for one's sins had already been pointed out by John the Faster. Thus, the sacrament of reconciliation, which in the beginning had been primarily the lifting of an excommunication and a re-integration into the Church, became in his teaching one means of healing among many others.

From the seventh century on, confession began to be considered as the only means of obtaining the remission of sins. Thus, Anastasius the Sinaite recommended it before the reception of communion.

In the twelfth century, Balsamon testifies that the practice of confession had become general. He considered that the ordinary minister of confession was the bishop.

In the fifteenth century, Symeon of Thessalonica defended the idea of obligatory confession for all the faithful, on the grounds that no one is exempt from sins.

How is it possible that in spite of the testimony we have just seen, we still find certain archaic tendencies in Orthodoxy today? Possibly the best explanation is that although the idea of confession as an obligatory sacrament for all the faithful has become widespread, there are still certain regions which have preserved the older tradition.

<sup>65</sup> To priests and deacons who had asked for the imposition of hands, St. Leo replied with a categorical refusal: "Alienum est a consuetudine ecclesiastica."

<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, there was certainly already some fluctuation in the practice, since upon the intervention of St. Caesarius, Rome finally prevented Contumeliosus from returning to Riez.

<sup>67</sup> Young people, for example.

## CHAPTER III

### PRESENT-DAY THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Let us go on now to a detailed examination of the practice of penance in Orthodoxy today. We will be obliged to consider not only confession and the prayers which surround it, but also the entire prayer-life of the Orthodox Christian. It is interesting to consult the *Manual of prayer, for the use of the faithful of the Greek rite* of the archimandrite John Oquet.<sup>1</sup> We find there first the Orthodox formula for the morning prayer,<sup>2</sup> followed by the Roman formula.<sup>3</sup> While the second is made up of virtuous affirmations: "Most Holy... Trinity,... I believe... I adore You... and with all my heart I render the homage which is due to Your sovereign majesty,"<sup>4</sup> the Orthodox formula, after a prayer to the Holy Spirit in which we ask Him to "purify us from every stain," through His indwelling in us, passes immediately to the Trisagion,<sup>5</sup> which ends with the invocation: Have mercy on us. After a *Gloria Patri*, which serves as a connecting prayer,

52

there follows a penitential prayer addressed to the Most Holy Trinity: "Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us; Lord, forgive us our sins; Sovereign Master, pardon our offenses..." This prayer is followed in its turn by a triple *Kyrie eleison*. If we continue our study after the Sunday oration which follows, we find troparia taken from Matins which close with the exclamation: Have mercy on us. Thus, if we exclude from this formulary the three final formulas which are of Roman origin, we will see that the fundamental attitude of the Orthodox prayer-book is penance.

If we turn to the Russian ritual for morning prayer, this truth will become still more evident. After the troparia

and a prayer, we find the *Miserere*, the most perfect of all the psalms of penance.

If we turn now to those prayers particular to the liturgy, we will find ourselves in the presence of this same spirit. Let us consider for this purpose *La Priere des Eglises de rite byzantin* of Father F. Mercenier and Canon François Paris. In the first prayers pronounced by the priest at Vespers, during the chanting of psalm 103, we find the following expressions: "Lord compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and rich in pity,"<sup>6</sup> Lord, do not accuse us in Thy wrath, and do not chastise us in Thine anger...<sup>7</sup> Lord our God, have mercy on us, wicked and useless servants...<sup>8</sup> After the chanting of psalm 103, there follows a litany,<sup>9</sup> which has as its response chanted by the choir: *Kyrie eleison*. The great Vespers of Saturday has seven prayers of the litany type, each of which has as its refrain: *Kyrie eleison*. The ecktenie,<sup>10</sup> after the third request, has a triple *Kyrie eleison*. After the first request, the litya has the *Kyrie eleison* repeated forty times, after the second request, fifty times, and the last two requests are followed by a triple *Kyrie eleison*. Thus, the penitential acclamation of the *Kyrie eleison* appears as the dominant

53

tone around which the Orthodox liturgy is constructed. The *Miserere* also plays a great part, since it is read at Compline, at the Mesonycticon, and at Terce, and is recited by the deacon during the incensing which takes place at the end of the prothesis and before the great entry. Penance is thus the fundamental element of the Orthodox liturgy.

#### 1. The Confession of Sins

At the end of Compline and of the Mesonycticon, the priest asks pardon of the faithful, who in turn make the same request of him.<sup>11</sup> The priest asks forgiveness twice in the course of the liturgy, first at the prayers at the gate, and later before receiving communion. The yearly liturgy has produced a development of the rite of forgiveness on the Sunday of the fall of Adam,<sup>12</sup> called for this reason, at least in Russia, "the Sunday of forgiveness." After Compline on this day, or in the parish

<sup>1</sup> Beirut, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> First formula, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Second formula, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> So also with the other two prayers: "My God, I thank Thee.... I consecrate to Thee... all the thoughts, words, actions, and difficulties." "Adorable Jesus..., I will apply myself to the extent that I am able to make myself like Thee, meek, humble, chaste, zealous, patient, charitable, and resigned, and I will especially bend all my efforts today not to fall back into the sins which I commit often..."

<sup>5</sup> Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.

<sup>6</sup> First prayer.

<sup>7</sup> Second prayer.

<sup>8</sup> Third prayer.

<sup>9</sup> Or the great litany.

<sup>10</sup> In Russia, a strengthened ecktenie.

<sup>11</sup> The Roman liturgy also has the Confiteor during Compline.

<sup>12</sup> This Sunday is better known as the Sunday of the tyrophagein (cheese-eating Sunday), or more exactly of the giving up of the tyrophagein, for on this day milk products are eaten for the last time.

churches after Vespers, the officiating priest replaces the dismissal with the final prayer of the litya, during which the entire congregation remains prostrate. Among the many requests of the prayer, the priest begs the Lord to forgive our sins, and to have mercy on us and on the entire universe. After this, the priest asks pardon for his own sins by prostrating himself before the faithful according to the customary ritual, and the faithful repeat this same act before the priest. This rite differs from the daily ritual in that the priest performs this same act before each one of the faithful who process before him, asking him forgiveness. In the monasteries, the fathers and brothers, having passed before the abbot, form into a line, and each monk prostrates himself and asks forgiveness before all the monks of the community. In the parish churches, those faithful who know

54

each other also ask forgiveness of one another, and having returned to their homes, ask for pardon from their relatives, while prostrating themselves to the ground. This, at least, is the practice in Russia. I doubt that in the Balkan countries this usage has continued, except in the monasteries.

Having been reconciled with all his neighbors, the Orthodox Christian can set himself to the task of asking from God forgiveness for the sins which he has accumulated throughout the year. To this end, he will make use of the sacred time of Lent with its severe fastings,<sup>13</sup> abstinences,<sup>14</sup> offices,<sup>15</sup> and genuflections.<sup>16</sup> The offices of Lent are filled with penitential motifs; in a troparion which is chanted on the Sundays of Lent after the Gospel of Matins, the faithful ask God to open to them the gates of penance. All these penitential texts form the content of a book, the Triodion. Moreover, the office is penitential on all the Mondays and Tuesdays of the year.<sup>17</sup> We

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<sup>13</sup> On Monday and Tuesday of the first week, all eating and drinking are forbidden.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout Lent, meat, eggs, and milk products may not be taken.

<sup>15</sup> Every Christian will do all in his power to assist at all the offices of the first and last week of Lent, both morning and evening, and also at certain offices of the fourth week. The same is also true for the liturgy of the Presanctified on all Wednesdays and Fridays.

<sup>16</sup> The reading of the prayer of St. Ephrem involves four prostrations to the ground. This prayer is read at each canonical hour, i.e., nine times a day. In addition to this, the Orthodox Christian also reads it during his morning and evening prayer. Other prayers also require complete prostrations.

<sup>17</sup> That which corresponds to the temporal cycle of the Roman rite is found in the Octoechos. This book contains the offices for each day of the week, disposed according to the different tones. Each day has at least two offices, to which are adjoined the offices of the sanctoral cycle. Thus, a penitential office and the office of the angelic hosts are sung on Mondays, on Tuesdays a penitential office and the office of St. John the Baptist, on Wednesdays and Fridays the offices of the

should also note that the full liturgy is suppressed except on Saturdays and Sundays, the sacred gates are closed, a curtain is set up during the little hours, and the chant is sung in a minor key, thus giving a melancholy effect. Man who was created to be like God, and who has been re-

55

created in baptism through the resurrection of Christ, is placed by the liturgy before the truth that once again he has lost his initial purity. He lost it in paradise by giving in to the demon, and he has lost it again by the first sin which he committed after baptism. He continues to lose it each time he sins after receiving the baptism of tears. What has become of the New Adam with whom he was clothed when he first left the baptistry? It is the old Adam whom he encounters each day in his daily sins. It is for this reason that the faithful can no longer see the altar, which, moreover, is illumined only by a watch-light placed on a seven-branched candlestick. Moreover, what is the use of his contemplating this nuptial chamber which is the altar, for as it is said in the exapostilary of the first three days of holy week, he does not have "the garment with which to be admitted." Only after he has been purified by all the salutary exercises of the great Lent will the faithful see the sanctuary opened and brilliantly illuminated for an entire week, which is a prefiguration of the day which will never end, and which through penance has again become accessible to him.

But there is not only the great Lent. Orthodoxy knows three other periods of fasting, two of which last for forty days:<sup>18</sup> Advent, the Lent of the holy Apostles, and the fifteen days of fasting which precede the feast of the Dormition. Although these periods of fasting do not have their own special prayers, as does the great Lent with its Triodion, nevertheless Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are in principle a-liturgical,<sup>19</sup> and on

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cross and of the Blessed Virgin, on Thursdays the offices of the holy Apostles and of St. Nicholas, and on Saturdays the offices of All Saints and of the faithful departed.

<sup>18</sup> The Lent of the holy Apostles attains this number only in those years in which Easter comes early.

<sup>19</sup> It is necessary to add the qualification "in principle" for (1) when the feast of a saint having a right to an apolytikion falls on one of these days, the liturgy is restored, and consequently the reading of the prayer of St. Ephrem is suppressed; (2) during the period of fasting in the month of August, the vigil, the feast, and the octave of the Transfiguration retain the celebration of the liturgy; during this time, only the third and the fourth of August are a-liturgical, unless they fall on a Saturday or a Sunday; (3) this custom has unfortunately fallen into disuse, thus compromising the effectiveness of these periods of fasting, which, cut off from the liturgy, tend to disappear.

these days the prayer of St. Ephrem is read. In the course of a year, therefore, the Orthodox Christian has nearly 145 days of fasting, not counting the regular Wednesdays and Fridays. During one third of the year, he is animated by thoughts of repentance and penance. Throughout Paschal time and on all the Sundays of the year, however, he lives the reality of the resurrection, and does not kneel, but remains standing while at prayer. During the time of the Great Lent, on the other hand, certain of the faithful will not kiss the ikons, since they feel themselves unworthy of this contact with the sacred.

It is clear that what I have described is an ideal picture, the life of the "tserkovnik," of *homo ecclesiasticus*, who is ordinarily a layman, and often a bishop. I am not speaking of the monks, for whom this kind of life is the rule, since even at Easter time they continue to abstain from meat. But the other Orthodox Christians, each in his own way, will realize at least a part of this penitential life, which is directed by, and attuned to, the liturgy, the living tradition of the Church.

Moreover, it is typical that in the monologistic prayer, the formula, "Have mercy on me a sinner," came to be added to the invocation of the Lord Jesus which was already known by St. Nil. We must now ask, however, when does this feeling of repentance and penance experienced by the Orthodox Christian receive its final expression in the sacrament of reconciliation? We must first examine the Russian practice, which is at least partially followed by the other independent churches, and also the practice which we often find among the Greeks. Among the Russians, the two sacraments of confession and communion are joined together for reasons of piety; only rarely does the Russian receive communion, and he prepares for it most carefully. As a rule, every communion requires a week of preparation, and it is thus evident that the believer does not communicate very frequently. Moreover, for psychological reasons, a week often seems insufficient to the Orthodox Christian, and he therefore uses the Lenten periods to this same end of communicating worthily.

During Lent, the Orthodox believer feels himself closer to heaven, and thus communicates many times; during Holy Week, many receive communion at each liturgy from Holy Thursday until Easter, thus returning, because of the spiritual acquisitions of Holy Week, to the ancient tradition of the first Christians. On an average, the faithful receive communion on the day of their feast, on their

birthday, on the occasion of the twelve great feasts,<sup>20</sup> at the end of the Lent of the holy Apostles, and three or four times during the Great Lent. There are also those who communicate only once a year, and who even make a principle of this practice.

We must now consider how the Orthodox Christian prepares himself for the sacrament of communion, or for the two sacraments of confession and communion in those Churches in which confession precedes communion. One week before he is to receive, he stops taking "fat" nourishment, i.e. meat, milk products, and eggs, and eats only lean foods. In those Churches in which confession does not exist for all the faithful, the abstinence is still more severe. During this same period, the believer stays away from all kinds of entertainment, whether theatres, concerts, or motion pictures. At the same time, he tries to remember all those persons with whom he has had quarrels, in order that he might ask their forgiveness. This last obligation is considered very serious among the Russians, and the impossibility of meeting someone from whom forgiveness is to be asked makes it difficult for a penitent to receive communion in peace. Forgiveness may be asked either for some particular deed, or in a more general way: "Forgive me for all the wrongs that I have committed toward you." The other person responds: "May God forgive you. Forgive me also." And the first answers: "May God forgive you."

During the entire week, the penitent assists at the divine office both morning and evening. If his work prevents him from coming in the morning, he may come in the evening only. This practice of following the office for a period of one week explains the fact that many Orthodox communicate during the first and last week of Lent, for in any case it is customary to assist at the evening office (Compline), and at the offices of the presanctified on Wednesday and Friday during the first week of Lent, and at all the offices during Holy Week. Thus prepared, the penitent comes to the eve of his communion. If he lives in the same locality in which the church is located, he is obliged, according to the *Izvestie outchitelnoe*,<sup>21</sup> to go to confession that evening; if he lives at some distance from the church, he will confess in the morning, sometime before the liturgy. Once more, he must attend the even-

<sup>20</sup> The Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple of the Holy Virgin, the Nativity of Christ, Epiphany, the Holy Meeting (Candlemas), the Annunciation, Palm Sunday, the Ascension, Pentecost, the Transfiguration, the Dormition, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

<sup>21</sup> An explanatory notice at the end of the missal.

ing office.<sup>22</sup> Having asked to be confessed by his regular confessor,<sup>23</sup> or having taken his place in a line, he waits to be received into the confessional,<sup>24</sup> while still reciting prayers of penance. Previously, he will have provided himself with a candle, which he will place upon a lectern, upon which are found a crucifix and the Gospel.<sup>25</sup> This candle will be a secret offering for the priest,<sup>26</sup> who will return it later for money at the church coffer. This candle will also enable the priest to count the number of penitents, and so also the number

59

of communicants. This is important since the priest must know into how many particles he is to break the host (*amnos*). On those days on which there are a great many penitents, or at least several, the priest, before beginning to hear their confessions, will ask one of them to read aloud the opening prayers for the sacrament of penance. If none of the penitents is capable of doing this, the priest will do it himself. These prayers<sup>27</sup> are: the opening prayers beginning with the Trisagion,<sup>28</sup> the *Miserere* (Ps 50), and three penitential troparia taken from Compline, which are also recited each evening as a part of the evening prayer. These are the prayers read by the layman. Next, the priest reads the following two prayers: "God our Savior, who through Thy prophet Nathan hath granted the pardon of his sins to the repentant David, and who hath received the prayer of repentance of Manasses, receive also, according to Thy constant love for men, Thy servants... who are repentant for the sins they have committed, and turn away Thine eyes from them, Thou who forgivest sins and passest over iniquities. For it is Thou, Lord, who hast said: 'I do not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he live,' and that it is necessary

to forgive sins seventy times seven times. For just as Thy greatness is unequalled, so also Thy mercy knows no limit, for if Thou holdest our sins against us, who will stand? For Thou are the God of penitents, and it is to Thee that we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, shepherd and lamb who take away the sins of the world, Thou who hast absolved the debt of the two debtors, and who hast granted the pardon of her sins to the sinful woman, so also Lord, absolve, forgive, and pardon the sins, the iniquities, the voluntary and

60

involuntary, conscious and unconscious faults of negligence or of disobedience committed by Thy servants here present. And if, as men burdened with the weight of their flesh and dwelling in the world, they have been led astray by the demon, if they have transgressed the order of the priest, if they have been laid under an interdict,<sup>29</sup> if they have fallen under their own condemnation, or if they have been bound by an oath<sup>30</sup> or imprecation, do Thou, as a good Master without resentment, deign to absolve swiftly Thy servants here present, by forgiving them their own condemnation or imprecation according to Thy great mercy. Yes, Master and Lord of men, hear us who beseech Thy goodness for Thy servants here present; in Thy great mercy, turn away Thine eyes from their sins, and spare them from the eternal chastisement, for it is Thou, Lord, who hast said: 'Whatever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed in heaven,' for Thou alone art without sin, and it is to Thee that we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now, and forever, and throughout the ages. Amen."

These two prayers are followed by an exhortation to the penitent, the text of which is as follows: "My child, Christ is invisibly present to receive your confession; do not be ashamed, do not fear, and hide nothing from me. But

<sup>22</sup> When great numbers are present, confessions are started one or two hours before the office. They continue during the office, and are terminated afterwards, depending on the number.

<sup>23</sup> The penitent is free to choose his own confessor if he has no regular spiritual director; in this case he will go to one confessor, whom he will obey blindly. Nevertheless, if he is the object of an excommunication, he may not go to another priest until this excommunication has been lifted.

<sup>24</sup> Ordinarily the diakonikon (or sacristy) on the right.

<sup>25</sup> The Gospel is on the left, and the crucifix on the right. We should point out that an image of the resurrection is ordinarily engraved on the Gospel book. Thus the penitent situates himself before the two great mysteries of the Redemption: the passion and the resurrection.

<sup>26</sup> The other sources of revenue are the pannychidas (matins for the dead), and the molebens (votive matins) as well as baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

<sup>27</sup> The Slavic ritual for confession as distinct from the Greek ritual may be found in MERCENIER and PARIS, I, p. 356 of the first edition.

<sup>28</sup> These prayers are the Trisagion; Glory be to the Father...; Most Holy Trinity; Kyrie eleison (3); Glory be to the Father...; Our Father; Kyrie eleison (12); Glory be to the Father...; Come let us adore (3).

<sup>29</sup> And not malediction, as MERCENIER translates. This interdict is the minor excommunication. This prayer seems to contradict the principle that a minor excommunication can be lifted only by the priest who has imposed it. In this case, the epitimion is lifted by the prayer: "Good and merciful Lord, friend of men, who through compassion hast sent Thine only Son into the world to tear into pieces the act of accusation written against us, to loosen the bonds of those who were bound by sin, and to proclaim the liberation of the prisoners, do Thou, O Master, in Thy goodness, deliver Thy servant N. here present, from the bond which holds him, and grant him, in Thy magnanimity, to walk without sin at all times and in all places, with confidence and with a pure conscience, and to ask for an abundant forgiveness. Thou art a God full of mercy, and a friend of men, and it is to Thee that we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now, and forever, and for all ages. Amen."

<sup>30</sup> And have not kept it.

without reticence, tell all that you have committed in order to receive the forgiveness

61

of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. See His ikon which is near us;<sup>31</sup> I am only a witness who will testify before Him all that you will have told me.<sup>32</sup> If you hide anything from me, your sins will be doubled. Take heed, therefore; you have come to the physician,<sup>33</sup> be sure that you do not return unhealed."

After this, according to Mercenier, the priest interrogates the penitent "concerning all of his sins." More often, however, the priest prefers to wait until the penitent makes a confession of his guilt.

Certain priests, in accordance with the rubric of the ritual, will choose to ask questions concerning the faith of the penitent.<sup>34</sup> The uprightness of his faith is a preliminary condition without which confession is not possible. If the penitent is a non-believer, there is no longer any reason to hear his confession, and *a fortiori* to grant him absolution. If he is a heretic, he must be laid under a major excommunication; he is only virtually a member of the Church, and the sacrament of confession, which has to do only with minor excommunication, does not apply in his case. Only if he believes in an orthodox fashion, and does not express any doubts, does the confession continue with the *Credo* being read by the penitent. Most often, however, if this question is posed, the penitent will respond by confessing the weakness of his faith.

62

According to the ritual, the priest is to continue by asking questions in this same area: "Were you ever a heretic, or schismatic, and have you taken part in their meetings, gone into their temples, listened to their preaching, or read their books?" Although most often these questions are not asked, it is still very possible that they will be

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<sup>31</sup> More exactly, "before us," but there is no ikon of Christ especially for this purpose in the confessional. Perhaps the priest has in mind the image of the resurrection which is found on the Gospel book, or perhaps the reference is to a practice which has fallen into disuse.

<sup>32</sup> This idea of the priest giving testimony before Christ to the confession he has received seems indeed strange, and is apparently not founded on any earlier tradition. Nevertheless, it is an idea which has become popular, and which frequently finds corroboration in the priest's own consciousness of assuming these sins in order to obtain their forgiveness from Christ.

<sup>33</sup> More exactly, "to the hospital."

<sup>34</sup> The rubric is as follows: Before anything else, he asks him questions concerning the faith, saying: Tell me (my) child, do you believe that which the catholic and apostolic Church, planted in the East, and which came to believe there, and which from the East has gone out to all the universe, and which even to the present day remains firm and immutable in the East, believes and teaches? Have you any doubts concerning certain traditions?

raised when the Church is struggling against some schism, as was the case with the Renewers in Russia, or when it is defending itself against certain Protestant sects, such as the Baptists. This method is not used among the Russians of the emigration, in spite of the presence of schisms, except perhaps by the jurisdiction of the synod of the Church in exile.<sup>35</sup> It seems to me that since these schisms were not taken seriously by the laity, the priests chose not attach too much importance to them. Moreover, the priests themselves often paid little attention to them, and sometimes even concelebrated with schismatic priests.<sup>36</sup>

Next, the priest hears the confession of the sinner, or else, if the penitent begins to delay, will himself ask certain questions. Those penitents who know how to confess themselves will enumerate their sins while insisting on the spiritual causes which gave rise to them. It is the cause rather than the effect which the sinner must try to eliminate. For this reason, he will often spend much time speaking of his spiritual indigence but will mention only briefly the consequences of this lack of spirituality. Thus, the priest will be obliged to ask certain questions about this or that specific sin. Some penitents, in order to explain their state, have a tendency to describe the surroundings in which they live. In order that the confession not degenerate into a criticism of his neighbor, the priest must oblige the penitent not to make allusions to third parties. All of his attention is to

63

be turned first toward his interior condition, and secondly toward his own actions. The most important sins which the penitent confesses are undoubtedly his spiritual sins. Moreover, the question which the priest should pose to the penitent is this:

"Do you love anything in this world more than God?" If this question is not ordinarily posed by the priest explicitly, the penitent of his own accord will often confess that he does not love God sufficiently. He will also confess the other spiritual sins: pride, love of self, boasting, and sloth.<sup>37</sup> Next, he will consider his failings in charity toward his neighbor, making first a global confession of his lack of love for others, and then specifying in what ways

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<sup>35</sup> A schismatic Church which does not recognize the patriarch of Moscow, and which is violently opposed to him.

<sup>36</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between total schisms which involve a complete separation from eucharistic communion, and incomplete schisms, which allow a limited eucharistic communion to the faithful, and a restricted concelebration.

<sup>37</sup> Among all these sins, only pride is included in the questions which are to be asked by the priest. It is found again among the final questions which are posed. These spiritual sins are not included in the early lists of sins.



this absence of love has been manifested. He will begin by confessing those sins which have bothered him the most, and then will go on to the others. The most frequent sins are those which arise from contacts with others. If we return to our list of questions, we will see that the first sins to be investigated by the priest are false witnessing, the failure to fulfill promises, and blasphemy.<sup>38</sup>

Continuing with the ritual, the priest asks a new series of questions, beginning with the introductory phrase: "Tell me, my son." This series deals with sins of the flesh. It includes onanism, homosexuality, lewdness, incest, illicit relations with livestock or birds, abnormal relations in marriage, illicit relations with one's fiancée, and illicit relations with the body of a stranger. With this final question this chapter of the ritual comes to a close. We consider it our obligation here, however, to consider the matter in some further detail.

To begin with, the priest today does not pose the questions crudely, simply as they have been redacted in the ritual.<sup>39</sup> If

64

the penitent has confessed no sins of this kind, and the priest has some suspicions in this regard, he will tactfully pose a discreet question, and will be satisfied with the answer of the penitent, which often enough in no way corresponds with the rumors the priest may have heard.

The reader may justly have been surprised by the nomenclature used in the list cited above, as well as by the fact that it is apparently addressed to a man who is still a virgin<sup>40</sup> as well as to a married man.<sup>41</sup> A possible explanation for this latter fact is offered by the hypothesis that these questions apply to the same person, but correspond to different periods of his life. In this case, however, we must suppose either that the penitent has not been to confession over a long period of time, and thus has accumulated sins which suppose different states, or else that the penitent is obliged to repeat the confession of sins which were already confessed in the past, which contradicts the doctrine that a sin once confessed is forgiven, and consequently cannot be the object of a new confession. We are thus led to conclude that the text which we find in the ritual was prepared for different categories of sinners. We should also note that the text

<sup>38</sup> We should point out that the first was the object of an Old Testament commandment, and the last was classed by Tertullian among the reserved cases.

<sup>39</sup> Tell me, my son, have you corrupted your virginity through onanism? Have you masturbated?

<sup>40</sup> Have you stained your virginity through onanism?

<sup>41</sup> Have you sinned against nature with your wife?

seems to be directed only toward men, which is explained by the fact that the list of questions to be used for the reconciliation of women is found in a special appendix.

Perhaps a word should also be said concerning the order in which the sins have been classified. At the beginning of the list of sins of the flesh we find onanism,<sup>42</sup> while in the list of questions addressed to women, it comes after fornication and magic, but nonetheless before homicide. In our opinion, this derives from the fact that the questionnaire is directed in the first place toward

65

the unmarried man, and onanism is especially the vice of adolescents.

One question included in the list might cause us particular surprise: "With how many (women) have you sinned?" Today it is no longer customary to ask questions concerning the frequency of a sin, which is probably more in conformity with the practice in the West. As we have already had the opportunity to point out, what most disturbs the Orthodox is the interior defilement of the heart, a defilement which finds expression in sinful activity. Although the gravity of the sin is never such that it cannot be repented for, as the Lord said to the prophet Isaiah: "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Is 1, 18); nevertheless, in order to determine the epitimion which is to be imposed upon the penitent, the priest must know if the sin is only occasional, and if there is thus some hope that it will not be repeated, or if the sinner has developed an evil habit, which will only be overcome with great difficulty. So also, relations with a divorcee are less serious than those with a married woman; in effect, the Church has always distinguished between fornication and adultery.

If the priest continues to follow the ritual, he will next consider the sin of murder, whether voluntary or involuntary.<sup>43</sup>

After this the list of questions continues with stealing and the concealing of stolen goods. At this point the ritual contains an important notice according to which the thief must first return the stolen objects, then present himself before the bishop to receive absolution, and

<sup>42</sup> We should note that onanism is not mentioned in the early lists of sins, nor do we find it in Sacred Scripture. In effect, the sin of Onan was not onanism; the *malakia* (softness) which we find in St. Paul served to designate a form of homosexuality: effeminacy. On the contrary, in Slavonic, *malakia* is the term for onanism.

<sup>43</sup> Although involuntary murder is not ordinarily considered as a sin, nevertheless it places the one who provoked it in a state of impurity, which implies a purification through confession, prayer, and fasting.

finally, accomplish the epitimion which has been imposed upon him. It is interesting to note that, at least in this case, the Church demands the re-establishment of the justice which was violated by the crime before pardon will be granted. We should also note that it is the bishop who grants

66

the absolution; for serious sins this is the normal province of the bishop, and the priest only acts by delegation. This conception seems to have been completely abandoned, and the priest has come to consider himself as the absolute master of the power of the keys. Having obtained absolution, the penitent is obliged to "accomplish his canon," i.e., to undergo the canonical penalty of excommunication,<sup>44</sup> and it is only after this that he is allowed to receive communion. This indicates that at the time of the composition of the ritual, the seriousness with which the sacrament of reconciliation was administered had not yet been abandoned, and that this sacrament had not yet become the indispensable rite before communion in which all the sins which are confessed are treated in the same way.<sup>45</sup> We are perhaps surprised, however, to find this procedure which reminds us of the early discipline indicated only with respect to theft, and not also for such sins as murder or adultery. It is possible that since a murderer only rarely retains his liberty, the Church is more merciful in dealing with him. It seems to us, however, that we should see in this silence concerning murder and adultery an omission, rather than a discipline which is less severe than that which is applied to theft.

The list of questions continues with the following sins: oath-taking, the handing over of a weak man into the hands of one who is more powerful, and finally, offending or causing injury to another party. Here we find the same recommendation which we first encountered with regard to stealing: the necessity of repairing whatever evil has been done. After this group of sins which arise from contact with one's neighbor, the list

61

continues with a new series of questions dealing with magic. For these sins there is of course no mention of repairing the evil which has been done, but we do find a

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<sup>44</sup> The duration of this penalty will be indicated later on when we will consider magic; it lasts for 20 years.

<sup>45</sup> There has recently come to my attention an extract from a mandate of the *locum tenens* (at the time of this writing) patriarch ALEXIS, of July 22, 1944 reacting against this practice: "The priest should not only forgive sins, but sometimes he should retain them. The opinion that forgiveness, should be granted to all penitents, regardless of their sins, cannot, according to the teachings of the Fathers, aid their salvation, but on the contrary, can only do them harm" (*Ordo* for 1958, Moscow).

specific indication concerning the length of the excommunication: six years for the person who consults the sorcerer, and twenty years for the sorcerer herself.

Here we come upon an unfortunate characteristic of Orthodox penitential practice today, the disappearance of the epitimion and the canonical penalties. Although in principle the confessor is not obliged to grant the penitent the right to receive communion, and consequently can bind him until some future date, in fact this right is exercised only rarely. If the confessor imposes no canonical punishment in order to establish the sincerity of the sinner's repentance, we need not be surprised if soon after communicating he falls easily into his former evil ways. Only when the confessor has a good hold on his spiritual son will he make use of his right to impose an epitimion, in the form of exercises of piety whose purpose is the exercise of the will and perseverance in the good life are thus faced with the paradox that it is the best penitents who are given an epitimion, while the others are easily exempted. Msgr. Benjamin, the metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Gdov, has attempted to reintroduce the canonical penalties, although in a form not nearly so severe as they have been in the past. At the present time, their use is left to the judgment of the individual confessor, who in fact employs them rarely. Nevertheless, it seems to me necessary to distinguish between an occasional fall, even a serious one, after which we may reasonably hope for an honest reform, and a state of sin, for example, concubinage, especially if it is joined to adultery. It also seems to me that the suppression of every kind of censure represents a profound error from the point of view of the sacrament as a power for healing, and in fact does serious harm to the penitent. On the other hand, if the penalties are too severe, and especially if they are automatically joined to the gravity of the sin, the result may well be the loss of affection for communion, or even a profound despair. We must not

68

forget that, although the sinner tells his sins in secret to the confessor, he is nonetheless known and seen by other sinners, who will be encouraged toward laxism if they see in his deeds a loosening of the penitential discipline, but who will also be prompted to make a greater effort to remain upright if they see that it is only at this price that they may have access to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Returning to our list of questions, we begin a new series: Have you wronged your parents, or a priest, or a monk, or anyone else? Do you feel hatred toward anyone? We should note the descending hierarchy of these sins: 1) sins against parents, 2) against the priests, 3) against

monks. The most serious is the failure of respect toward one's parents; this was the sin of Cham, which brought a curse upon the sons of Cham, or Canaan, a curse which was fulfilled in his posterity.<sup>46</sup> This sin is therefore most serious; we find assimilated to it the sin of failing to respect one's spiritual fathers, the priests and the monks. The entire series is closed by the question: Have you animosity toward anyone? (If you have)<sup>47</sup> make an act of love. The explanation which follows is so important that in the margin we find the rubric *See* (pay attention): If you have animosity or envy toward anyone, your offerings and prayers will not be acceptable before God.<sup>48</sup> Often the priest will pose this question explicitly, and some priests make the observation of this condition a necessary prerequisite before they will accept the confession. This question is then posed at the very beginning.

69

At this point the interrogation turns from questions of a moral nature to those dealing with ritual observances. Have you eaten from cadavers, or tasted blood, or taken meat from animals which have been strangled, or trapped by a wolf,<sup>49</sup> or stricken by a bird? For all practical purposes the priest no longer asks these questions, and the faithful will abstain from eating meat which is forbidden by the canons of the Church. To these precepts, the Russian believer will add still another, that of not eating the meat of a pigeon, out of respect for the dove, whose appearance was assumed by the Holy Spirit. Also, certain priests look with some suspicion on the eating of horse meat.

The list of questions continues with an examination of the penitent's observance of the abstinence of Wednesdays and Fridays. Taking the text of St. Paul, "All things are lawful for me: but all things do not edify" (1 Cor 10, 23) as his point of departure, the Orthodox Christian does not consider himself to be bound under pain of sin by the precept of fast and abstinence. He knows that in

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<sup>46</sup> At least in a pan of his posterity: the Hethites, the Jebusites, the Gergesenes, the Hevites, and the Chanaanites, in the restricted sense of the term (Gn 15, 19-21; Dt 2, 24; 7, 1; Nm 32, 33, SO-56; Jos 3, 10).

<sup>47</sup> This phrase is understood.

<sup>48</sup> This affirmation is based on the following texts: "For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences" (Mt 6, 14f); "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath any thing against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift" (Mt 5, 23f).

<sup>49</sup> The first three prohibitions are those of the council of the Apostles; in our opinion the fourth and the fifth were added out of a fear over a possible shedding of blood.

the New Alliance the law no longer exists, but he also knows that if he has a true love for God, he will joyfully deprive himself of earthly goods in order to acquire those of heaven. For this reason, he will himself establish the degree of the severity of his abstinence without asking for a dispensation from anyone, and will, nevertheless, confess his lack of asceticism during Lent.

The list now turns to sins committed with the tongue, or against one's neighbor: sorcery, slander, cursing; or against religion: a remark directed against the faith, or against the law,<sup>50</sup> i.e., against morality. Finally, the priest asks questions concerning lying, false oathtaking, boasting, and drunkenness. This enumeration ends with the indication that it is through these sins that both the soul and the body are led to perdition.

70

The entire list is terminated by an enumeration of the capital sins:<sup>51</sup> pride, avarice, luxury, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth, and all the other sins which are engendered by these "seven mothers."<sup>52</sup> The ritual counsels that the questions be posed differently according to the quality of the persons<sup>53</sup> or their age.<sup>54</sup>

Having finished the confession of his sins, the penitent listens to the counsel which the priest offers him, the principal theme of which is not to fall back into these same sins. To this end, the priest gives concrete indications which the penitent is to follow in his struggle against his evil inclinations. This counsel on the part of the priest replaces the following exhortation which, according to the ritual, the priest is to address to the penitent:<sup>55</sup> "From this moment on, you are to keep yourself from all these things, for you have been baptized with a second baptism, according to the Christian sacrament. With the help of God, may you find it possible to begin again. Especially, do not treat these things with scorn, by returning to your former errors, out of fear of becoming the object of men's ridicule, for this is not fitting for a Christian. May God aid you to live virtuously, in justice and in piety."

Then the priest should say to the penitent: "Bow down."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This notion is unknown in the Orthodox world and seems to me to have been borrowed from the Roman world.

<sup>51</sup> There was already mention of these at the beginning of the confession.

<sup>52</sup> Of sins.

<sup>53</sup> Clerics, laity, or monks.

<sup>54</sup> Young or old.

<sup>55</sup> This rubric is ordinarily omitted.

<sup>56</sup> This is ordinarily omitted.

When the penitent has bowed his head, the priest says: "Let us pray to the Lord," and he reads the following prayer: "Lord God, salvation of Thy servants, merciful, generous, and longsuffering, You who are grieved by our sins, and who do not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live, do now have mercy on Thy servant, and give him sentiments of

71

penance,<sup>57</sup> the forgiveness of his sins, and absolution, forgiving him every sin, whether voluntary or involuntary, and reconcile him and unite him to Thy holy Church,<sup>58</sup> through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, with whom all power and glory are to be given to Thee, now and forever, and for all ages. Amen."<sup>59</sup>

This formula, which should itself have an absolving effect, is followed by a formula of absolution in the strict sense. The penitent is kneeling, except during those periods in which genuflections are forbidden,<sup>60</sup> and the priest, having placed the stole on the head of the penitent, pronounces the formula of absolution: "May our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, through His

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<sup>57</sup> This request, whose logical place would be at the beginning of the ritual for confession, might surprise us coming here at the end. The archpriest A. VETEV, professor at the ecclesiastical Academy of Moscow, has offered the explanation that sentiments of contrition are necessary after penance as well as during it, in order to achieve the elimination of sin. Moreover, as we have already pointed out, the normal state of the Orthodox Christian is the contrition which is expressed in the *Kyrie eleison*, genuflections, fasting, etc.

<sup>58</sup> This phrase originated at a time when the sacrament of penance was truly the sacrament of the reconciliation of the excommunicate with the Church, into whose bosom he was restored through this sacrament. We have already traced out its history at the beginning of this chapter. At present, it might seem superfluous, but some priests still say it even if the penitent has received communion that same morning, and consequently cannot be considered as excluded from the Church. This is to be explained by the fact that every sin, no matter how slight, is today considered as cutting off the Christian from the holiness of the Church.

<sup>59</sup> The text of this prayer is very close to the third formula of absolution found in the Greek ritual: "Lord God, salvation of Thy servants, merciful and generous, You who are grieved by our sins and our wickedness, and who hast said through the prophet Ezekiel: I do not wish the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live; do now, Lord and Master, merciful and the friend of men, come to the aid of Thy servant N., and grant him sentiments of penance, and the remission of his sins, by forgiving him all his faults, both voluntary and involuntary, through me, Thine unworthy servant. For it is Thou, Master, who hast said to Thy holy Apostles: Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained. Whatever you shall bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven. Do Thou, O Master, forgive Thy servant N., through me, all unworthy and miserable as I am; forgive him all the sins he has committed, and reconcile and unite him to Thy holy Church through Jesus Christ, our Lord, with whom all power and glory are to be given to Thee, now, and forever, and for all ages. Amen."

<sup>60</sup> Sundays, Paschal time, Christmas, and Epiphany.

72

blessing and the munificence of His love for men, forgive you, my child, for all of your sins; and I, an unworthy priest, through His power which has been given to me, forgive you and absolve you from all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

While pronouncing these final words, the priest traces a sign of the cross on the head of the penitent.

In the place of this formula introduced by Peter Moghila, the metropolitan of Kiev, the Greeks use three formulas of a deprecative nature. We have already cited one of these formulas in a footnote on the preceding page, and we give here the text of another: "Lord our God, who granted to Peter and to the courtesan the remission of their sins because of their tears, and who justified the publican who recognized his own faults, receive also the confession of Thy servant... and if he has happened to commit any sin whether voluntary or involuntary, in word, in action, or in thought, forgive him in Thy goodness, for Thou alone hast the power to forgive sins. Because Thou art a God of pity, of mercy, and of love for men, and to Thee do we give glory together with Thine eternal Father, and Thy Holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and for all ages. Amen."<sup>61</sup>

Whatever may be the wording of the formula used, the Church believes in its efficacy, which means that through this formula, the power of the keys is exercised.

Ordinarily, the rite of confession closes with this prayer.

73

Nevertheless we read in the ritual an ending which is similar to that of the canonical hours, or more exactly of the "typica." Some priests do make use of it; it includes the "Ἀξίον ἔστιν,"<sup>62</sup> the Glory be to the Father..., and the dismissal.<sup>63</sup>

Whichever ending is used, the penitent kisses the crucifix and the Gospel book, or more exactly the image of the

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<sup>61</sup> These formulas seem to me to be more in harmony with the Orthodox spirit, in which the role of the priest is less prominent. Compare the Orthodox baptismal formula: "The servant of God... is baptized..." with the Roman formula. The third formula is noteworthy in this regard, since it is not a prayer addressed to God, but a desire addressed to the penitent: "May God, who through the prophet Nathan granted forgiveness to David when he had confessed his own sins, and to Peter when he had wept bitterly, and to the courtesan when she had washed his feet with her tears, and to the Pharisee and to the prodigal son, may this same God forgive you, both in this life and in the next, through me, who am also a sinner, and may He call you before his dreadful tribunal without condemning you, He who is blessed for all ages. Amen."

<sup>62</sup> It is truly fitting to praise Thee, O Theotokos...

<sup>63</sup> May Christ our true God...

resurrection which is found there, since our redemption and consequently our forgiveness are joined to these two mysteries. Finally, he receives the blessing of the priest.

## 2. Warnings and Sanctions

At this point, according to the ritual, the priest should impose a "canon."<sup>64</sup> If the penitent is guilty of a multitude of sins, the "canon" is more severe, and consists in privation of communion for several years. This is what is called minor excommunication. In this case the ritual provides a warning to the penitent in which he is notified by the priest that he may not communicate for so many years, during which his only recourse to the sacred will be to drink "the great Haghiasma," i.e., water which has been blessed on the eve of, or on the day of Epiphany. A greater importance is attached to this holy water than to any other, for example that of the feast of the Ζωοδόχος πηγή, or that of Mid-Pentecost, or of the feast of the Holy Cross (August 1). Persons who have been laid under minor excommunication in this way may have recourse not only to the water described above, but also to the "artos," or bread which has been specially blessed on the night of Easter, and which is distributed to the faithful on Easter Saturday. This bread is a symbol of Christ, and its absorption, although not a real communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, does represent a certain spiritual communion.

74

Continuing his exhortation, the priest says to the penitent that if he abstains from communion, his sins will be forgiven, but if he does not, he will become a new Judas. This formula undoubtedly seems strange, in view of what we have already seen. It is not the execution of the epitimion, in this case privation of communion, which confers the forgiveness of sins, but the sacrament of reconciliation, and especially the formula of absolution which terminates it, and which consequently precedes not only the execution of the epitimion, but even its imposition. Perhaps all we can say is that the excommunication, by forcing the Christian to look upon his sins with more seriousness, helps him to eliminate them, at least those which have provoked the excommunication. In effect, the epitimion is a means of treatment against sin; it consists either in privation of communion for grave sins, or rather for states of sin,<sup>65</sup> or in ascetical exercises, such as genuflections, supplementary prayers, or sup-

<sup>64</sup> Or epitimion.

<sup>65</sup> An illegitimate union, or permanence in a grave sin.

plementary fastings.<sup>66</sup> Its purpose is the strengthening of the will, since the easy wiping away of the penitent's sins in the sacrament of penance could lead to a weakening of the will, and eventually lead to laxity. With the archpriest Vetelev, we can only deplore the disappearance of the epitimion. Without it, the sacrament of penance becomes an open door which unfailingly leads to the sacrament of communion, whatever might be the unworthiness of the penitent. Only those who are officially excommunicated, i.e., completely cut off from the communion of the Church, are not allowed to receive communion until they have done penance. Thus, this exhortation reflects the practice of a period in which the sacrament of penance truly represented the sacrament of the reconciliation of the penitent with the Church, from which he had been driven by sin. As a consequence of this, the exhortation mentions the canonical rule that in case of danger of death, the sinner may be allowed to receive communion,

75

but in the event that he recovers from his illness, he falls back into his state of excommunication.

Mercenier indicates after this a prayer for the lifting of the epitimion. In this he expresses the Roman doctrine of the epitimion considered as a satisfaction for the injustice which had been wrought by the sins. Nevertheless, this is not the Orthodox conception. The epitimion is not a satisfaction, but is either an excommunication, as a consequence of the incompatibility between the state of sin of the penitent and full membership in the Church, or an ascetical practice which is freely undertaken for the purpose of healing the penitent. This prayer is printed in the Slavic ritual after a penitential canon which deals precisely with the possible lessening of the rigors of the epitimion. At the present time, the prayer has fallen into disuse, since the epitimion itself has also disappeared. Nevertheless, it is clear from the place which it occupies in the ritual that it should be read only after the accomplishment of the epitimion. It would be useful to read it in cases of excommunication at the moment when the excommunication is being lifted. In effect, even in cases of privation of communion, the sinner is absolved from his sins, and the excommunication, as we have already pointed out, is only the declaration of the incompatibility of the state of the penitent with his full participation in the holiness of the Church, and is thus to be seen as a means of spiritual pedagogy. He can continue to present himself for confession if he finds this necessary. It is clear, however, that since absolution can be given only if

<sup>66</sup> Such a supplementary day of fasting is even provided for; Monday has been set aside for this purpose.

the penitent has the firm intention of abandoning his sin, it is impossible to give absolution to a "penitent" for sins in which he fully intends to remain. Such a penitent, therefore, is practically cut off from the sacrament of penance until he is willing to abandon his life of sin. It is possible, however, that the sinner, having committed some other grave sin, desires to obtain forgiveness. It is evident that in this case he can present himself for confession in order to receive absolution. Since the formula for absolution is general, it necessarily includes all sins

76

which have been committed by the penitent. This has no great importance, however, for in any case the penitent continues to be bound by the excommunication for his principal sin for as long a time as this has not been amended, or until the confessor judges it necessary, for the sake of the spiritual well-being of the sinner, to allow him once again access to the sacraments. This might happen, for example, when a penitent feels the need to hold fast to the sacraments in order to find in them the strength to free himself from his sin. If the penitent has only been charged with an epitimion, whose sole purpose is the education of his will in the struggle against evil, the prayer in question seems to me superfluous. As we have already noted, the practice of the epitimion has almost completely disappeared, and the confessor often considers it his obligation to forgive all the sins which have been confessed without laying any kind of censure upon the penitent, often fearing that if he does not do so, the penitent will simply address himself to another confessor who will be more "understanding." Such a viewpoint is most detrimental, principally for the penitent himself, who in this way is deprived of the *ἰασις* or sacramental cure. If he is truly in serious disagreement, either in his opinions or in his life, with the teaching of the Church, it is useless and even harmful to canonize this manner of thinking or living. It would be better to arouse him to amend his ways through this serious warning which is excommunication. If it is only a question of giving strength to a penitent whose will is weak, through the imposition of complementary ascetical exercises, once again it is criminal to allow him to go on unaided. It is true that in this latter case the confessor can impose only exercises which are freely accepted by the penitent, but if the priest is his regular confessor, he will be able to make very good use of this method of treatment. The one thing he must avoid is the obtaining of promises, since by the action of the devil and by a psychological effect which is easily understood, these are only rarely kept. In this case the sinner is not only a sinner but also a perjurer, which only

77

aggravates his condition, and is clearly opposed to the goal which is being pursued. The fear of seeing the penitent address himself to another confessor has little foundation, since once a penitent has been charged with an epitimion, he may not have recourse to another priest until the first priest has freed him of the measure which was taken. Moreover, in most cases the confidence in the confessor is such that the spiritual child willingly assumes the epitimion which is imposed.

Let us turn now to the *nomocanon* found in the Slavonic ritual, which examines cases which may arise in the course of applying the penalty of excommunication. It specifies that the calculation of the duration of the epitimion begins from the moment that sin is abandoned which has caused this measure to be taken against the penitent. This confirms our distinction between excommunication because of incompatibility with the state of a Christian, and that whose goal is to strengthen the repentant sinner in the way of salvation. In the event of a relapse into the same sin, the penitent must begin the entire penance all over again, and in the case of a penance imposed for a second sin, there is an accumulation of the two penances.

If the penitent, having abandoned some grave sin, imposes a penance upon himself, i.e., deprives himself of communion, the penance which is imposed begins from the moment the penitent takes on his own voluntary penance. Every ascetical exercise shortens the penance which has been imposed; genuflections shorten it by one year, almsgiving<sup>67</sup> takes away another. If the penitent fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays, another year is remitted.<sup>68</sup> So also if he abstains from meat on

78

Monday,<sup>69</sup> and if he abstains from cheese<sup>70</sup> or eggs on some other day. For other acts of virtue, still another year is taken away. For anyone who is less than thirty

<sup>67</sup> We should not forget the role of almsgiving as an act which frees a man from his sins. Here it is clearly a question of almsgiving done especially for this purpose, and not of the charity which we should always practice toward our neighbor. This application of almsgiving has been lost today, but the archpriest John Sergiev (of Kronstadt) has suggested that a good action should be done after communion.

<sup>68</sup> This might surprise us. In effect, the fast of Wednesday and Friday is not a supplementary ascetical practice, but an ordinary rule of ecclesiastical discipline.

<sup>69</sup> Monday as a day of fasting for penitent upon whom this epitimion has been imposed (unless perhaps they have imposed it upon themselves) is characteristic of Russian religious life.

<sup>70</sup> This means milk products in general.

years of age, there is a reduction of the epitimion by one year.<sup>71</sup>

If the penitent wishes to assume the monastic habit, two-thirds of his punishment is remitted. If he wishes to become a cenobite, the punishment is reduced by one-half. Nevertheless, if he falls again after taking the habit, the epitimion is restored in full.

This nomocanon is followed by a list of questions especially composed for women. The first question concerns the use of contraceptives and abortion. In the Russian Churches today, these questions are ordinarily omitted by the priest for reasons of discretion. Not only the use of contraceptives, but the entire domain of relations between husband and wife is, in the opinion of the confessors, too intimate to allow for investigations on the part of the priest. Although the priest will not ask questions concerning abortion, nevertheless, his reaction will be very strong if the penitent confesses it of her own accord. In effect, as it is specified in the ritual, abortion is a form of murder. On the other hand, in the Serbian Church, this is apparently a question which is often posed to married women, and is perhaps the real reason why they are obliged to go to confession before receiving communion. According to the case, the nomocanon stipulates privations of communion lasting from one to six years. The nomocanon next censures magical practices, to return once again to the use of contraceptives, for which the same epitimion is specified as that which is applied to murderers, namely excommunication for a period of twenty years.<sup>72</sup> It is evident

79

that such a practice has fallen into disuse; nevertheless, if a penitent confesses that she is obstinately opposed to any birth, and consequently refuses to realize one of the ends of marriage which is procreation,<sup>73</sup> the confessor can react with the power of the keys, of which he is completely the master before God. After this, the nomocanon returns once more to magical practices, used to determine the sex of the child to be born, or for the

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<sup>71</sup> This surely has reference to an epitimion for a sin of the flesh.

<sup>72</sup> This indication may seem at first sight strange, since the penalty for abortion is less than the penalty for the use of contraceptives. In my opinion, this is to be explained by the fact that in Orthodoxy, deeds are censured less severely than general dispositions. In effect, a mother of several children (and thus a person who is not opposed to procreation in general) might for some reason have had recourse to an abortion while in the other case we are dealing with a person who is making herself sterile through artificial means, and who is thus opposed to the order established by God.

<sup>73</sup> "In order that children might be given to them for the continuation of their race, and all that they ask for their salvation, let us pray to the Lord" (A request from a litany).

purpose of gaining some other information. The epitimion in this case is six years of privation of communion.

After this, there follows a new list of questions to be asked by the priest, which deal with the sins of fornication, magic,<sup>74</sup> homosexuality, murder, stealing, and unnatural relation. It seems to me that this last question is never posed today, for as we have already said, the domain of sexual relations between spouses is not ordinarily the object of investigations on the part of the Orthodox priest, who does not desire to penetrate into that intimacy in which is realized the unity of two in one flesh, and where the presence of a third person, even that of a priest and only by means of these questions, is unwarranted.

The nomocanon is followed by a reference to canon twelve of the first ecumenical Council of Nicea, and to canons two, five, and six of the Council of Ancyra,<sup>75</sup> which give complete freedom to the bishops either to lengthen the duration of the excom-

80

munication, or, on the contrary, to shorten it, in accordance with the type of life the penitent is leading. For those who deliberately remain in sin, the excommunication is total, i.e., for life. As long as the sinner<sup>76</sup> refuses to amend his ways, there is no sense in admitting him to the sacraments.<sup>77</sup> Only after he has abandoned his sin can there be any thought of shortening the epitimion.

A citation taken from the nomocanon of Matthew Blastares condemns the practice of the application of excommunication for a short period of time if the sin is grave.<sup>78</sup> The Council which took up the case cited by Blastares not only changed the decision of the bishop, but even leveled a temporary interdict against him. This interference of the bishops might seem at first sight highly irregular, since it might possibly be interpreted as a violation of the secret of the confessional. Nevertheless, serious sins are often of public notoriety, for example murder. It is, however, always a delicate matter for a confessor to consult with his bishop, for the penitent may always consider this a breach of the secrecy of his confession. It is consequently more prudent to exercise

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<sup>74</sup> Once again we find mention of magic. At the time when the nomocanon was composed, this was a serious problem. Moreover, recently, women have again been resorting to magic frequently in the Balkan countries.

<sup>75</sup> The Council of Ancyra is one of the nine councils whose canons have the same authority as those of the ecumenical councils.

<sup>76</sup> Who sins seriously.

<sup>77</sup> Unless the confessor judges it necessary for the salvation of the penitent's soul.

<sup>78</sup> The reference here is to murder.

the power of the keys by making one's decisions after the inspiration which comes from the Holy Spirit.

This is clearly a formidable moment for the confessor, but it is perhaps at this time that he exercises the most important function of his priesthood, that of curing spiritual sickness.

The great stumbling-block derives from the fact that, at least in the Russian Church, confession has become joined to communion. In principle, confession is to take place after the evening office. But when the number of penitents is great, especially during Lent, the confessions are heard rapidly, which of course greatly diminishes the usefulness of the sacrament. The penitent recites his sins, or perhaps the confessor asks him

81

certain questions. Since there is no time to explore the case further, the priest reads the prayer of absolution, and quickly goes on to the next penitent. It is evident that in healing the soul as in healing the body, a concern for time is an enemy which must be eliminated. But the case is more serious when the penitent comes in the morning, and the confessor is forced to choose between two sacraments, penance and the Eucharist. If he hears confessions conscientiously, he will be forced to delay the liturgy, which causes unrest among many in the congregation. Moreover, if it is often true that the liturgy does not begin at the hour which has been announced, it is precisely because of a sudden increase in the number of communicants, and consequently in the number of confessions which must be heard. When, on a Sunday, there are several priests in the church, it is ordinarily the hebdomadary who celebrates the liturgy, and if another priest is free, he is charged with hearing confessions. Here again, however, the matter is often complicated by the fact that the penitent often wishes to be confessed by his regular confessor, who is liable to be the priest who is to officiate. Since this priest was not expecting to be hearing confessions, he often finds himself faced with the dilemma mentioned above. The result of all this is frequently hasty confessions. When the confessor expects that there will be penitents in the morning, he makes certain that he will be in the church well before the liturgy is to take place, but if the penitents do not come until it is nearly the hour for the liturgy, this solution is of little avail. On days on which there are great crowds,<sup>79</sup> the priest comes to the church several hours before the evening office; he will hear confessions before the office, during the office, and often late into the evening. On the days of Holy Week, hundreds of persons pass

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<sup>79</sup> In Lent, for example.

before the priests, who are seated either in the confessionals, as we have already described, or behind folding screens. Toward 11 p.m., as the hour for the eucharistic fast

82

approaches, the priest who is to officiate on the following day will have a tendency to shorten the confessions, naturally to the detriment of the usefulness of the sacrament. Moreover, the better the confessor, the greater will be the number of his penitents, and consequently also, the more difficult will he find it to fulfill his obligation honestly.

For those who have gone to confession during Lent and who are desirous of receiving communion during the "great days of Holy Week" and of Easter, certain priests do not impose the obligation of another confession. This has the advantage of freeing the priest from hearing the confessions of the more pious, who have already received some spiritual direction during the year, in order to give more attention to those of his parishioners who only come for spiritual healing once a year. Moreover, those persons belonging to the first category often live such intense spiritual lives throughout Holy Week that it is absolutely normal to apply to them the discipline which was in force in the primitive Church, i.e., communion without previous confession.

### 3. In Expectation of Communion

Let us now return to our penitent whom we had abandoned<sup>80</sup> in order to consider certain details of the penitential discipline. Having confessed his sins, and having received certain helpful suggestions from the priest,<sup>81</sup> the penitent leaves the confessional with a soul freed from the burden of his sins. If he approaches this sacrament only rarely, which is responsible for the sacrament being considered as an obligatory rite before communion, and if he has come to the confessional truly to make amends for all his evil thoughts, words, and deeds, he call return calm and serene, at peace with his neighbor, with the whole universe, and with God. A new day has dawned for him, which in no way

83

resembles that which has just ended.<sup>82</sup> The life which he has abandoned, unfortunately not for long, was that of an unconscious man, living not according to his own will, but submitted to the devil, to whose whims he was sub-

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<sup>80</sup> Page 72.

<sup>81</sup> Unless he received an epitimion.

<sup>82</sup> We should not forget that the ecclesiastical day begins in the evening.



ject.<sup>83</sup> Through the requests for pardon from all those whom he may have offended, he has been reconciled both with his friends whom he may have criticized, and with his enemies toward whom he had felt animosity. He is thus surrounded by an atmosphere of exterior peace, which is a prelude to the interior peace which will soon be his. Through ascetical practices and prayer, he has renewed contact with authentic values, and has overcome the intoxication brought on by the goods of this world. Through the confession of his sins in the sacrament of penance, he has passed judgment on his life corrupted by sin, and at the moment of the absolution pronounced by the priest, he has heard his condemnation taken away, and has felt the heavy burden of his sins lifted from his shoulders. The penitent feels a genuine redemption, not that which was taught to him in the catechism, but one which, once again, he experiences directly.

Once more the sinner has gained his primitive innocence. He must keep it at least until morning, for it was in view of communion that his confession was made. If he sins in the meantime,<sup>84</sup>

it is only logical that he must confess himself again.<sup>85</sup> The remainder of the evening will be passed with this goal always in mind: to preserve the innocence which he has regained in the confessional, a purity of soul which corresponds to a cleanliness of his body, which he has already assured, or which he will assure that same evening by taking a shower or a bath. Throughout the evening, he will avoid conversations,<sup>86</sup> especially those involv-

ing third parties,<sup>87</sup> for fear of criticizing them, if not in word, possibly in thought. He will undoubtedly avoid all profane reading, and some persons even refuse to take food. It is evident that on this day he will not go out for any visits, but will wisely remain in his own home. Moreover, this is often not merely an exterior effort, but one which corresponds to a state of soul which is perhaps fugitive, but nonetheless real. In peace with God, the future communicant feels himself in peace with all the universe, and he would be ashamed to destroy this peace, and to leave it behind in order to cast himself into the troubled waters of the ocean of this world. In order to be in harmony with his interior sentiments, he will perhaps read from the Bible, or from the Fathers of the Church if he possesses a copy of their works, or possibly also from some other devotional book. Before going to bed, if he is familiar with the discipline to which the communicant is bound, he will read the "three canons." These are the canon of Christ, that of the Blessed Virgin, and that of the guardian angel, to which, during the week, must be added the canon of the saint of the day. Thus, on the eve of Monday, it is recommended to read the canon of the angelic hosts, on that of Wednesday, the canon of St. John the Baptist, etc. As a rule, in

order not to be late in the morning, he will anticipate his morning prayers by reading the office of communion.<sup>88</sup> In this office, the future communicant prepares his soul for this meeting with God, for this divine absorption which constitutes communion in the Body and Blood of Christ,<sup>89</sup> by proclaiming emphatically his own unworthiness,<sup>90</sup> and by appealing to the aid of the Mother of God.<sup>91</sup> This office must have been composed at a time or in a region in which confession was not obligatory before communion, *since* we find penitential motifs in certain troparia,<sup>92</sup> while today it is ordinarily read after con-

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<sup>83</sup> According to the word of St. Paul: "For we know that the law is spiritual. But I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will: but the evil which I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it: but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will is present with me: but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it: but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom 7.14-20).

<sup>84</sup> We ate not saying that the Orthodox Christian does not commit sin between his confession and his communion, for man is not able not to sin. It remains true, however, that the penitent who has confessed himself bends all his effort toward this goal: to retain the innocence which he has regained, at least until the time of his communion. He knows himself too well to hope to retain it much longer.

<sup>85</sup> Because of this, some penitents delay confession until just before the liturgy is to take place. This is a bad practice, however, for in this case the penitent reads the prayers in preparation for communion without first having confessed himself. Even though he has not yet presented himself for the preceding sacrament, he is preparing himself for the second one.

<sup>86</sup> By speaking as little as possible, especially by answering questions with a "Yes" or a "No".

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<sup>87</sup> "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin: but he that refraineth his lips is most wise" (Prv 10,19).

<sup>88</sup> MERCENIER, I, p. 289. It would be more exact to say "canon before the communion."

<sup>89</sup> May Your precious Body become for me a bread of eternal life, merciful Lord, and may Your precious Blood preserve me against all evils (first troparion).

<sup>90</sup> Stained by foolish works, wretched as I am, I am unworthy of Your immaculate Body and of Your divine Blood; O Christ, make me worthy (second troparion).

<sup>91</sup> Beseech on my behalf, O sovereign Queen, Him who has sprung from thy womb, and render me without stain and without reproach, I who beg you, in order that having received the spiritual pearl, I may be sanctified.

<sup>92</sup> O Christ, grant that I may pour out tears which will wash away the stain from my heart, in order that, with a purified conscience, I may approach with faith and with fear, Lord, the communion of Thy divine gifts.

fession.<sup>93</sup> Given the fact that certain penitents do not read this preparation, the Church supplies for their failure to do so by reading the three canons on the eve of those days on which there will be many communions, either during the office of Compline as is proper, or else during Matins, which are then anticipated on the previous evening. Thus, at the time of the synodal Church, since there were so many communicants on Holy Thursday, the liturgical monstrosity was often allowed of replacing the canon of matins for Holy Thursday by the reading of the three canons, for the purpose of preparing the communicants for their participation in the Sacred Mysteries. This is all the more unfortunate, since in certain of the troparia of the canon which is omitted, Wisdom invites the faithful: "Come, eat of my bread,

86

and drink the wine which I have prepared" (Ps 9.5). The canon of the office for communion was in this case interpolated between the little hours and the liturgy.

Having prepared himself in this way, the future communicant can welcome a refreshing sleep, although the *Izvestie outchitelnoe* specifies that the communicant is to remain in prayer from midnight until the following morning.<sup>94</sup>

Certain of the faithful are not content with merely reading the three canons and the office before communion, but also, as a preparation for confession, they will have read the penitential canon which is found in their parish book.<sup>95</sup> For the first week of Lent, or for the Thursday of the fifth week, we have the reading in church of the great penitential Canon of Andrew of Crete, which encourages the faithful to receive communion on the Saturday of the first week in Lent, and on the Thursday of the fifth week.

In the morning, the communicant will groom himself more carefully than usual. He will put on clean linen, and his best clothing.<sup>96</sup> A new day, not like the others, is opening before him. Already, the previous evening was not like the ones which preceded it. Sanctification must follow upon the innocence which he has gained. To the justice of the Old Testament must succeed the holiness

<sup>93</sup> Only if the confession has been delayed until morning does the penitent read the office before confession.

<sup>94</sup> *Molitvennik*.

<sup>95</sup> In this case we have the opposite procedure; the penitential canon is not read in preparation for the communion, but on the contrary, the reading of the penitential canon, through the purification which it brings, leads to communion as the normal recompense for the penitent.

<sup>96</sup> If he is in mourning, he will put aside his grief; women who are in mourning will wear white dresses for this occasion, just as at Easter time.

of the New. He will enter into this day progressively; its highlight will be his communion.<sup>97</sup> One last time, he will ask forgiveness from those whom he may have forgotten, and continuing his strict fast, he goes to the church. Having arrived at the church, he will buy his offering (a small

87

round loaf of leavened bread), or perhaps two, one for the living, among whom he himself holds a place, and one for the dead. With each loaf he will hand over a diptych on which are inscribed the names of all those for whom he wills to have the oblation made. Nevertheless, these loaves will not remain in their entirety in the sanctuary. Only a small particle will be placed upon the paten; the rest will be returned to him. In order to bring it back to his home, he will have brought with him a clean handkerchief, in which he will carefully wrap the one or two loaves. Identified with the particles, he and those for whom he has presented the offering will surround the Lamb (the host) who already symbolizes Christ, and at the time of the great entry they will accompany him in procession who goes once again "to be immolated and to give himself as nourishment to the faithful" (Cherubicon from Holy Saturday and from the liturgy of St. James). The communicant will assist at the eucharistic canon with possibly more fervor than is his custom; finally, when the moment for communion has come, he will ask the forgiveness of those fellow worshippers from whom he has not yet had the opportunity to do so. Immediately before communion, he will testify to his orthodoxy<sup>98</sup> by kissing the ikons of the Lord and of the Virgin at the iconostasis, as well as the ikon of the feast. At the appearance of the chalice, he will genuflect,<sup>99</sup> and will then read<sup>100</sup> three prayers which were previously among the preparatory prayers which he read before leaving his house.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> If it is the feast day of the communicant or his birthday, or a jubilee, congratulations will be offered only after the communion, or more exactly, in order to make the formula consecrated, he will be congratulated at this time, for it is only from this moment on that the day has truly begun for him.

<sup>98</sup> Since the last of the heresies of the period of the councils was iconoclasm, the clergy at the beginning of the liturgy, and the communicants before receiving communion, testify to their orthodoxy by kissing the sacred ikons, thus expressing their agreement with the decisions of the seventh ecumenical council, as well as with those of the preceding councils.

<sup>99</sup> Except in Paschal time. Normally genuflections should not be made on Sunday in virtue of the twentieth canon of the first council of Nicea, but the Russians still genuflect before the chalice.

<sup>100</sup> Or rather, the priest reads it for him.

<sup>101</sup> The penitential character of these prayers seems to ignore completely the absolution which has been received. This indicates that their

The first is a confession of faith in the Eucharist: "I believe Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who hast come into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first. I believe that this is Thine immaculate Body, and that this is Thy precious Blood. Therefore I beg Thee to have pity on me, and to forgive me my sins, both voluntary and involuntary, whether in word or in act, whether knowingly or through inadvertence, and judge me worthy to participate without condemnation in these spotless mysteries for the remission of my sins, and for life everlasting. Amen."

The second prayer is a canticle from Holy Thursday which we also find in the Ambrosian liturgy: "Make me to participate this day in Thy mystical Supper, Lord, Son of God, for I will not reveal Thy mystery to Thine enemies, and I will not kiss Thee as Judas did, but like the thief I confess: Lord, remember me in Thy Kingdom."

Finally, the third prayer is a brief expression of a desire of the communicant: "May this communion in Thy sacred mysteries be neither to my judgment nor to my condemnation, but to the health of my soul and of my body."

While distributing communion the priest says: "The servant of God... communicates in the precious and holy Body and Blood of Our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the remission of his (her) sins and for life everlasting." In this formula is expressed the faith of the primitive Church that communion absolves one from his sins.<sup>102</sup> As we have already pointed out, this notion has been completely lost, and if a communicant has forgotten to mention some sin in confession, he will confess it the next time he receives the sacrament for fear that the sin has not been forgiven.

After receiving communion, he passes before the ikon of the Virgin where he will offer a fervent prayer for that intention

89

which is dearest to him, knowing that at this moment it has the greatest chance of being granted. After this, he drinks a small amount of wine which has been cut with warm water, and eats a small particle of a prosphora.<sup>103</sup>

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composition goes back to the time when the sacraments of penance and communion had not yet been joined together.

<sup>102</sup> This faith is expressed also by the words which the priest pronounces after the communion of the faithful: "This has touched thy lips and will take away thine iniquities, and will purify thee of thy faults."

<sup>103</sup> In other words, of a small loaf, particles of which were extracted either for the living or for the dead.

The priest, who in order to communicate, has touched the Sacred Gifts, washes his hands and his lips.<sup>104</sup>

The liturgy continues with prayers of thanksgiving for the communion.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, since the communicant is accustomed to hearing these at every liturgy (Mass), he does not pay much attention to them. In order to thank God truly for having admitted him to His Supper, when he has returned to his home he will read certain thanksgiving prayers, one of which is addressed to the Virgin.<sup>106</sup> On days on which there are a great many communicants, in certain churches these prayers are read aloud after the liturgy is finished, either by the reader, or by one of the communicants. In any case, these prayers are supposed to be read either for or by the priest and the deacon.<sup>107</sup> This is one of the reasons why an attempt is made to permit those faithful who have received communion to benefit from them.

Having returned to his place, the communicant justly receives congratulations on the occasion of his communion. The communicants embrace each other, having been purified by the reception of the sacrament. After the liturgy, the communicant

90

spends some time in meditation, while listening to the prayers of thanksgiving,<sup>108</sup> after which he kisses the cross.

If the previous evening had been different from the ones which preceded it, the same must be said for the remainder of this day. Where the feeling of regained innocence had followed upon his confession, today he will be filled with an awareness of the inhabitation and presence of Christ within himself. His comportment will be very different from that of ordinary days. To begin with, if he

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<sup>104</sup> This last practice has tended to disappear in the Russian emigration.

<sup>105</sup> The sticheron: "We have seen the true Light," is already an allusion to communion, but it is with the following canticle attributed to the patriarch Serge of Constantinople that we are truly in the presence of a chant of thanksgiving for the communion: "Let our lips be filled with Thy praise. Let them sing Thy glory, for Thou hast deigned to make us participate in Thy sacred, divine, immortal, and life-giving mysteries.... This chant is followed by a litany of thanksgiving: "Arise! Having participated in the divine, holy, most pure, immortal, heavenly, life-giving, and dreadful mysteries, let us offer a worthy thanksgiving to the Lord."

<sup>106</sup> See "Actions de grâces après la divine communion," in MERCENIER, I, p. 307.

<sup>107</sup> If the office was said with a deacon.

<sup>108</sup> These prayers are followed by others which the priest and the deacon are to read while removing their liturgical vestments, and which for the sake of convenience are read aloud. These prayers correspond to the last Gospel of the Roman liturgy. Actually, they in no way concern the faithful who have just communicated.

smokes, he will not do so immediately after the liturgy.<sup>109</sup> Neither will he take a full meal right away,<sup>110</sup> but will begin with a light repast. This collation is justified by the fact that he has been fasting for some time, but even if the meal is already prepared, his host will first offer him some tea.<sup>111</sup> It seems to me that this custom is to be interpreted as a desire not to pass without some kind of transition from a sacred meal (the Eucharist) to a profane meal. The communicant has begun to eat and to drink at the church; he next takes a collation before sitting down to table.<sup>112</sup> It is also traditional on this day not to ask for the blessing of the priest, which ordinarily is done frequently, nor to kiss any ikons. So also, no genuflections are made, in the first place because this day, like every Sunday, is the feast of the Redemption, which should occupy the attention of the communicant rather than the fall, from which penance

91

has recently liberated him. Moreover, since Christ is within him, what need is there to prostrate himself before Him? So also, any kissing of the hand, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is forbidden on this day. All of these customs, however, are to be situated in the domain of local tradition, of what the Russians call the "byt," or style of living. This is not to deny its importance, however, for on the one hand, it expresses in a certain way the spiritual state of the faithful, and on the other, it exercises some positive influence on this state. Nevertheless, we must now pose the question: What becomes of the communicant's moral life? Is he as careful in this regard as we have seen him to be concerning certain traditional customs, which have, as we have recognized, a certain value? Unfortunately we cannot say that the communicant maintains for long the vigilance against sin which began on the evening of his confession. In the feeling of well-being and satisfaction that follows upon his communion, which, moreover, often coincides with some great feast, or perhaps with his own feast or birthday, he often allows his vigilance to slacken, and begins to sin in thought, then in word, finally to fall back into that profane life which is a life of sin, and consequently, as a re-

sult of the discipline of the Church today,<sup>113</sup> he again becomes an excommunicate, who must confess his sins before being allowed to receive communion.<sup>114</sup> Only for the feast of Easter, which transforms the faithful and lifts up their hearts, do some manage to live as Christians for a longer period of time, so that, with a clear conscience, they may receive communion each day.<sup>115</sup>

In our description of the Orthodox penitent receiving the sacraments of confession and communion, we have taken as our example a man of piety, who lives fully the reality of these sacraments. It is evident that not all have this same sensitivity

92

of conscience, and consequently confess themselves and receive communion with such fervor. Nevertheless, all experience, at least in some measure, the sentiments which I have ascribed to our penitent.

Thus, the life of the Orthodox Christian<sup>116</sup> is lived according to this rhythm: sin, penance, and communion, and a fervent man will make a constant effort that this rhythm should not become automatic, but that a constant progress can be seen from the Old Adam toward the New, so that on the day of his heavenly birth, he may, as a mature Christian, assume his place in the eternal Kingdom. This can be accomplished only through asceticism, i.e., through prayer and vigilance toward all sins, however small they may be, and especially toward sins of the spirit, which generate all the others.

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<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, these excellent traditions have been lost among the intellectuals, and in the emigration in general.

<sup>110</sup> Except for the Paschal midnight meal.

<sup>111</sup> This tradition is especially observed in the case of the reception of a bishop.

<sup>112</sup> That this is in fact the concern can be seen in the custom observed among certain Muscovite families, not to eat meat on the day of communion. If the Paschal midnight meal was an exception, it was possibly because some of the dishes (among them the meat dishes) had previously been blessed by the priest. Consequently, in this case, there was no passage from the sacred to the profane.

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<sup>113</sup> At least in the Russian Church.

<sup>114</sup> In fact, in certain churches, those who receive communion every Sunday are not required to confess themselves each time they receive.

<sup>115</sup> Until the Tuesday or Wednesday of Easter.

<sup>116</sup> Like that, in fact, of all the faithful.

# PART TWO

## Sin in the Protestant Churches

by

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When speaking of sin, the Protestant theologians use the same terms that we find in Catholic theology (original sin, actual sin, remission of sins, etc.), but the meaning which they give to these terms is, in fact, altogether different.

A serious error of perspective— and one which is often committed— consists in reducing the differences to the sole fact that the Protestant theologians refuse to distinguish between mortal sin and venial sin. This rejection of the classical distinction is certainly one characteristic of Protestant dogmatic teaching, but it is still a secondary one; it is not the only characteristic, nor is it the most distinctive.

In the pages which follow, which by no means exhaust our subject, we will attempt to understand the notion of *peccatum* in the Churches which have sprung from the Reform, concerning ourselves principally with those which refer themselves to the

94

*Confession of Augsburg*.<sup>1</sup> Our task will be complicated by the fact that we do not find in Protestantism a single act of any magisterium, which might be considered as an authentic expression of the doctrine, nor even, strictly

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<sup>1</sup> These are the Churches which are properly called LUTHERAN, as distinct from the Reformed Churches, which trace themselves principally to the reformers CALVIN or ZWINGLI. On the question of sin (and correlatively of justification), there is total agreement among all the Churches which have sprung from the Reform, except concerning certain points of lesser importance which lie outside the scope of our study.

speaking, a *theologia communis*.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, for the essential concepts, the theologians are in agreement among themselves, whatever might be the particular school to which they belong.

Finally, it has seemed best to present the Protestant position in terms of the writings of the Protestant authors themselves, without attempting to insert it into the framework of Catholic dogmatic teaching.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the place of official acts of a magisterium expressing an authentic teaching, the Protestant Churches possess a certain number of symbolic (or creed) books which contain the essential elements of their teaching, although we must recognize that no definitive character is attributed to them. It is important to be familiar with them. For the Churches which refer themselves to the Confession of Augsburg: *The Confession of Augsburg (Confessio Augustana)* of 1530; the *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae*, redacted by MELANCTON (1530/1531); the *Articuli Smalcaldici* of 1537; the two *Catechisms* of LUTHER (1527), and finally the *Formula Concordiae* of 1577 which was divided into two parts, the *Epitome articulorum* and the *Solida Declaratio*. All of these books have been gathered into a single volume which is published frequently. The texts are in Latin and German. On the whole, the best edition is that published by the German Evangelical Church under the title *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelischLUTHERischen Kirche*, third edition (Göttingen, 1956).

The principal symbolic books of the Reformed Churches are: *The Confessio Tetrapolitana*, (1530); the *Confessio helvetica prior* (1536); the *Catechism* of CALVIN (1541); the so-called *Heidelberg Catechism* (1536); and the Gallican Confession, called the *Confession of Faith* of CALVIN (1559). These may be found in H. A. NIEMEYER, *Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum* (Leipzig, 1840).

<sup>3</sup> We must be especially cautious of concluding to an identity of doctrine between the Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church simply because the vocabulary is identical. The same terms often refer to realities which are radically different. This is especially the case with the words *justificatio*, *gratia*, *peccatum*, *remissio peccatorum*, and *fides*. In the pages which follow, we have intentionally cited only Protestant authors, since we are not concerned with a study in depth, but merely with a *status quaestionis*.

## CHAPTER I

### THE THEOLOGY OF SIN ACCORDING TO MARTIN LUTHER

In order to treat adequately the notion of sin elaborated by Luther, it would be necessary first to analyze his notion of justification, for these two notions are intimately related.

All of man's justice is based upon the *opus Christi*, the redemptive work of Christ, and is nothing other than the very justice of the Savior:

*Hic pro me mortuus est, hic suam iustitiam meam fecit et meum peccatum suum fecit, quod si peccatum meum suum fecit, iam ego illud non habeo et sum liber* [he died for me, he made his righteousness mine and my sin his, so that if he made my sin his, then I no longer have it and am free].<sup>1</sup>

We see here the notion of forensic justification (*iustificatio forensis* [forensic justification]), entirely extrinsic, which is realized by an act of non-

96

imputation on the part of God, a notion which has nothing in common with the Catholic doctrine of the *iustificatio*, and which is equivalent to the remission of sins, i.e., to their non-imputation to the sinner.<sup>2</sup> In this context, we must recall the famous equations of Lutheran theology: *iustificari = absolvi = non imputare peccatum; gratia = misericordia Dei non imputantis peccatum* (a purely ex-

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<sup>1</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Ep. ad Romanos*, IV, 14. In so limited a space, we cannot even begin to mention the works which have been written on the theology of LUTHER. The best of them seem to be the following: HARNACK, *LUTHERS Theologie* (Erlangen, 1886); O. SCHEEL, *Dokumente zu LUTHERS Entwicklung* (Tübingen, 1911); R. SEEBERG, *Die Lehre LUTHERS*, (Leipzig, 1917); E. SEEBERG, *Grundzüge der Theologie LUTHERS* (Stuttgart, 1940) (with a selected bibliography); STROHL, *L'Evolution religieuse de M. LUTHER*, 3 Vols. (Paris, 1936-1939).

We must also mention the histories of dogma of A. VON HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3 Vols., 5th edition (Tübingen, [932]); F. LOOFS, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th edition (1906); R. SEEBERG, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4 Vols., 3rd edition (1920); W. KOEHLER, *Dogmengeschichte*, 2 Vols. (Zürich, 1951).

In what follows, we will cite the works of LUTHER by referring to the Weimar edition (W).

<sup>2</sup> Over and above the works cited previously, we should not fail to point out the excellent article concerning justification (history, Catholic doctrine, Protestant positions) of J. RIVIERE, "Justification," *Dict. de Theol. catholique* VIII, cols. 2077-2227. which even Protestant scholars consider as one of the best studies on this question.

trinsic relation); *fides = fiducia misericordiae Dei non imputantis peccatum; non imputare peccatum = imputare iustitiam* [to be justified = to be absolved = not to impute sin; grace = the mercy of God who does not impute sin (a purely extrinsic relation); faith = trust in the mercy of God who does not impute sin; not to impute sin = to impute righteousness].<sup>3</sup>

This *iustificatio Dei passiva* [God's passive justification] is granted to us in and by faith, and only by faith, understood in the sense of *fiducia misericordiae Dei: per tale credere nos iustificat i.e. iustos reputat* [trust in the mercy of God: through this, he justifies us, that is, considers us just].<sup>4</sup>

Sin is thus that which is opposed to our justification (*non-imputatio peccatorum*), in other words, the lack of faith: *nihil iustificat nisi fides, ita nihil peccat nisi incredulitas* [non-imputation of sins ... nothing justifies except faith, so nothing is sin except unbelief].<sup>5</sup>

The source of sin, or more exactly the sin above all others, of which the lack of faith is only the translation, resides in the total corruption of man. This corruption is not only a simple *infirmitas carnis* [weakness of the flesh] but a true sin involving guilt and punishment.<sup>6</sup> Actual sins are so many manifestations of this fundamental sin. Not only does man commit sins— understanding that he can also accomplish, if he wills, actions which are morally good— he is ineluctably a sinner:

97

*Corruptio naturae, radicale illud peccatum occultissimum... radicale illud fermentum, quod fructificat mala opera et verba* [The corruption of nature is that radical and most hidden sin... that radical grain which bears as fruit evil deeds and words].<sup>7</sup> The *liberum arbitrium* [free will] is a formula empty of meaning: *res de solo titulo, figmentum penitus* [a thing in name only, a figment through and through].<sup>8</sup> it is not a liberum arbitrium but a *servum arbitrium* [an enslaved will].

Luther, and all those theologians who follow him, see in this essential corruption the *peccatum originis* or original sin. It manifests itself in a lack of faith, an incredulous-

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<sup>3</sup> These equivalences are not to be thought of as arbitrary reductions or distortions of LUTHER's thought, nor as oversimplifications which misrepresent his teaching. These equations have been established by a Protestant historian, and are recognized as essential by students of LUTHER and by historians of Protestantism; see FR. LOOFS, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, p. 697.

<sup>4</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Rom*, 2, 60; 65; 105.

<sup>5</sup> LUTHER, *W. ed.*, 7, 231.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 109.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 104 and 105.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 146; 142; 144.

ness and a lack of confidence which turn us away from God. Luther, and the *Confessio Augustana*, mention also, along with this *defectus fidei* [lack of faith], the *concupiscentia* [concupiscence or innate desire], by which is to be understood the egoism of man in all its forms, which causes him to act anthropocentrically, and thus contrary to God. This is again a form of *incredulitas* [unbelief].

Given man's total corruption, it follows that all of his action is sin: *naturalia erga Deum plane corrupta* [natural things are clearly corrupt before God].<sup>9</sup> We find here some of the paradoxes used by Luther to express his thought: *nihil sunt gentium virtutes nisi fallaciae* [the virtues of the gentiles are nothing but faults];<sup>10</sup> *mali sunt etiam cum sunt optimi* [they are evil even when they are the best].<sup>11</sup>

In his analysis of the *peccata actualia* or *quotidiana* [actual or daily sins], which are the concrete manifestations of the *peccatum originis*, Luther rejected all rational argument— his sarcasm against Aristotle, i.e., against the Scholastics, is well known—<sup>12</sup> and refused to admit a natural order which would be accessible, at least theoretically, to the will of man. For Luther, natural man is a sinner; neither is man able, nor does he will, to love and serve God as God desires.

98

No act, therefore, is indifferent,<sup>13</sup> and neither can there be an act which is simply morally good, or *bonum moraliter*. Man deceives himself when he attempts to draw up lists of sins which are merely venial; God alone can make this discrimination.<sup>14</sup> Appealing to the authority of Gerson, Luther declares that all sins are mortal, since they are the fruit of the total corruption of man.<sup>15</sup> Inversely, all sins, whatever they might be, are venial, because in justification they are no longer imputed:

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 248; 613.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 252.

<sup>12</sup> We cite below some of the theses of LUTHER (from /9/1517), according to the edition of STANGE, *Ausgabe der ältesten ethischen Disputationen LUTHERS* (Leipzig, 1904); No. 41: *Tota fere Aristotelis Ethica pessima et gratiae inimica*; No. 50: *Totus Aristoteles ad theologiam est tenebrae ad lucem*; No. 63: *Assidue peccat qui extra gratiam Dei est*; No. 75: *Lex facit abundare peccatum, quia irritat et retrahit voluntatem a se ipsa* [No. 41: Almost all of Aristotle is very bad and an enemy of grace; No. 50: He continuously sins who is outside God's grace; No. 75: The Law makes sin to abound, because it irritates and pulls the will back from herself.].

<sup>13</sup> The term used to designate indifferent acts is ἀδιάφορα; cf., for example, *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae*, II, *De peccato originali*, ed. cit., p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> LUTHER, *W. ed.*, 2, 416; 419; 721.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, *W. ed.*, 8, 58.

*Qui in peccato i.e. in defectu fidei... ista infirmitas fidei est veniale peccatum, hoc est quod Deus ei non imputat in peccatum mortale, licet de natura sua sit mortale* [Who in sin, i.e., in lack of faith... that weakness of faith is a venial sin, this is what God does not impute to him as mortal sin, although it be mortal by its nature].<sup>16</sup>

Sin remains even in the justified man; this is a consequence of Luther's forensic and purely extrinsic concept of justification, whose process could never lead to an effective sanctification of the sinner. The difference between the man who is justified and the man who is not resides solely in the fact that, in the first man, sin is no longer imputed. Strictly speaking, it follows in the first place that justification is never finished: *homo iustificandus potius quam iustificatus* [man is to be justified rather than is justified], and secondly, that, in faith, man is simultaneously justified and a sinner: *iustus et peccator simul* [just and sinner at the same time]. He is a sinner because he is a man, and thus intrinsically evil, but justified because God, in His infinite goodness, no longer imputes his sin to him:

*Numquid ergo perfecte iustus? Non, sed simul peccator et iustus: peccator re vera, sed iustus ex reputatione et promissione Dei certa* [Can he really be perfectly just? No, but he is at the same time a sinner and just: a sinner in true fact, but just because of God's certain imputation and promise].<sup>17</sup>

*Non enim quia iustus est ideo reputatur a Deo sed quia reputatur a Deo ideo iustus est* [For it is not because he is just that he is therefore reputed by God, but because he is reputed by God, that he is therefore just].<sup>18</sup>

99

Defined as a *defectus fidei*, sin escapes the analyses of natural man; only one who believes, i.e., who sees man as God sees him, can recognize himself as a sinner. This idea is expressed in the Lutheran formula: *spiritualiter fieri peccator* [to become a sinner spiritually].<sup>19</sup> Like the work of justification, sin is perceptible only to the believer.

In order to define sin, Luther thus situates himself exclusively on the level of Revelation; in this perspective, sin appears as a lack of confidence and love for God, and thus, in the final analysis, as a lack of faith. He refuses every analysis of sin founded upon a natural ethic or moral teaching. All that is not of faith is sin. The antithesis *holiness – sin* becomes for Luther *culpability – non-*

<sup>16</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Rom.*, III.

<sup>17</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Rom.*, II.

<sup>18</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Rom.*, I, 10.

<sup>19</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. in Rom.*, II, 67.

imputation, or again, lack of faith – faith in God who justifies. Finally, man remains a sinner, even in justification.

[page 100 blank]

101 self (*superbia* [pride]), which, in the final analysis, is again a *defectus fidei*.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAPTER II

### A SYNTHESIS OF THE PROTESTANT TEACHING ON SIN

In this section we will present a brief synthesis of the doctrine on sin which we find in contemporary Protestant theology, basing our study on the works of two authors whose writings in this field have become standard, Otto Piper<sup>1</sup> and Paul Althaus,<sup>2</sup> authors who have exercised considerable influence in the Protestant Churches. Both theologians have remained faithful to the teaching of Luther.

#### 1. The Nature of Sin

Sin is an injury to our relations with God, such as these relations appear to us through the Revelation in Christ, and for us, in faith. Sin is thus essentially a refusal to believe, a lack of faith, a *defectus fidei*.<sup>3</sup> Concretely, man who is called to fear and to love God, and to have confidence in Him, can realize this program

102

only in the measure in which he is justified, i.e., in the measure in which he believes.

In order to define sin, the Protestant theologians also mention, along with the lack of faith, the *concupiscentia* [concupiscence or innate desire], thus remaining in the tradition of Luther and the *Augustana*. By this term they understand, not sensuality or sexuality in man, but all the forms of egocentrism, or egoism and confidence in one-

<sup>1</sup> Otto PIPER, *Die Grundlagen der evangelischen Ethik*, 2 Vols. (Gütersloh, 1928-1930).

<sup>2</sup> Paul ALTHAUS, *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, 2 Vols., 2nd ed. (Erlangen, 1936); so also *Grundriss der Ethik* (Gütersloh, 1936). PIPER is philosophically close to SCHELER. P. ALTHAUS is the founder of *Zeitschrift f. systematische Theologie* (*Systematische Theol.* is the equivalent for our term *dogmatic theology*).

<sup>3</sup> In no way does Protestant theology consider the lack of faith as one sin *alongside* of other grave sins. It is the sin properly so-called. On the incapacity to fear God and to believe in Him, see *Conf. Augustana*, art. II, ...*sine metu Dei, sine fiducia erga Deum at cum concupiscentia* [...without fear of God, without trust toward God but with concupiscentence].

The *concupiscentia* in man is by no means a simple tendency toward evil, a lack of balance or an *infirmitas carnis* [weakness of the flesh]; it is sin, and thus worthy of punishment; it is also incurable.

#### 2. The Sins of Man (*peccata actualia*)

Sin manifests itself in man through a series of acts: actions, words, and thoughts. Nevertheless, man is not a sinner because he commits sinful acts (understanding, of course, that he can also accomplish good acts); he commits sins because in his essence he is a sinner. Man's works (*opera*), which can be good or evil according to the scale of moral value, are nonetheless all of them sins, because the person who commits them is sinful.<sup>5</sup> The acts which originate in man can only be egocentric. From a poisoned spring, only a polluted stream can flow; an evil tree can produce only evil fruit.

In such a perspective, it is useless to ask how or why Protestant theology refuses the distinction between mortal sin and venial sin; the problem itself never arises. Every sin is mortal by its nature, but inversely, every sin is venial, for faith in the mercy of God who alone justifies us can obtain its remission. We must leave aside here the obscure question in Protestant theology of those sins which are said to be against the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

103

From a purely philosophical or ethical point of view, man poses both good acts and evil acts, which admit a hierarchy in goodness and in malice; good acts constitute the *iustitia philosophica* or *civilis* [philosophical or civil justice]. This is a state of fact which all the Protestant theologians recognize, following the first reformers.<sup>7</sup> Nothing

<sup>4</sup> P. ALTHAUS, *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, II, p. 58-60.

<sup>5</sup> P. ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 60-62.

<sup>6</sup> For LUTHER, the sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin of him who doubts the *remissio peccatorum* [remission of sins], or who expects this *remissio* from his own works. (LUTHER, *W. ed.*, 19, 199-201). In itself, this sin is remissible; it is irremissible in the case of a refusal of the Gospel (LUTHER, *W. ed.*, 28, 144).

<sup>7</sup> See P. ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 60-61. There follows a text from the *Confess. Augustana*, c. 18 *De libero arbitrio*: "De libero arbitrio docent (*the reformers*) quod humana voluntas habet aliquam libertatem ad efficiendam civilem iustitiam et deligendas res rationi subiectas. Sed non habet vim sine Spiritu Sancto efficiendae iustitiae: Dei seu iustitiae spiritualis quia animal is homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei [Concerning free choice they [the reformers] teach that the human will might have some freedom to do civil justice and to choose



would be more false— and more unjust— than to see in the propositions enunciated above a negation of the ethical order or individual effort. Whether man can or cannot observe the Law, he *ought* to observe it. But in relation to salvation, the hierarchy of moral values is deprived of all genuine signification.

*Sub specie salutis* [under the appearance of salvation], the natural order is only an order of sin. With regard to the God of Revelation, every action of man is evil, for man cannot love God and believe in Him (*fiducia* [trust]). In a theocentric perspective, the Protestant theologians conclude that *man can only sin, even in those acts which are morally good*. It is for this reason also that there can be no such thing as an indifferent act.<sup>8</sup>

104

### 3. The Sin of Men (*peccatum originis*)

The man who through his acts knows that he is a sinner, knows also that *all* men are sinners, and that his actual sins are only a necessary consequence of a will which is powerless in the order of the good (*servum arbitrium*). Even though they are personal, actual sins derive in fact from human nature as such. This fundamental incapacity

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things subject to reason. But it does not have the strength, without the Holy Spirit, of effecting righteousness: because the natural man does not perceive the things that belong to the Spirit of God]" (*ed. cit.*, p. 73). *Apologia Conf. August.*, c. 18: "Habet humana voluntas libertatem in operibus et rebus deligendis quas ratio per se comprehendit. Potest aliquo modo efficere iustitiam civilem seu iustitiam operum [Human will has freedom in choosing works and things which reason comprehends of itself. It can in some way effect civil justice or righteousness of deeds]" (*ed. cit.*, p. 311). "Igitur etiamsi concedimus libero arbitrio libertatem et facultatem externa opera legis efficiendi, tamen illa spiritualia non tribuimus libero arbitrio scilicet vere timere Deum, vere credere Deo, vere statuere ac sentire quod Deus nos respiciat, exaudiat, ignosceat nobis [Therefore even if we concede freedom and the faculty of effecting the external works of the law to free choice, nevertheless it's obvious that we do not attribute to free choice those spiritual matters of truly fearing God, truly believing God, truly remaining upright and thinking that God would look upon us, hear, and forgives us]" (*ed. cit.*, p. 1312). On the unquestioned difficulty of finding a foundation for a Protestant ethic, and on the dogmatic objections in this regard, see E. SEEBERG, *Luthers Theologie*, pp. 183-211.

<sup>8</sup> The following is a translation of a sentence from Althaus, *op. cit.*, II, p. 61: "Whatever might be the moral differences between men, and in each human life, between different actions, the refusal to give glory to God— whether it be in the transgression of the commandments or in the perfection of a purely moral justice— is an act in relation to which the distinction between *opera bona* [good deeds] and *opera mala* [evil deeds] and the difference of degrees between them loses all signification." In what concerns the Protestant ethic, it would be necessary to speak of a *tertius usus legis* [third use of the law], a program of life for the justified sinner, which includes the observance of the Law. Cf. *Formula Concordiae*, *ed. cit.*) p. 692.

for good is also a genuine sin which deserves punishment; it is the *peccatum originis*, or original sin.<sup>9</sup>

If, in this brief sketch, we have not followed the traditional division in Catholic dogma between actual sin and original sin, it is because this division of the *peccatum* has no meaning in Lutheran dogmatics, any more than the division between mortal sin and venial sin. The sin of men (*peccatum originis*) is inseparable from the sins of man (*peccata actualia*); all actual sins "are" the supra-individual *peccatum originis*.<sup>10</sup> By treating the one, the Protestant theologian necessarily treats the others.

There remains the problem of the origin of the *peccatum originis* and its extension to the entire human race. On this point we refer the reader to the works on Protestant theology to which reference was made at the beginning of this section, as well as to the histories of dogma.

### 4. The Permanence of Sin in Justification (*peccator et iustus simul*)

Justification is a purely forensic act which truly leads to the *remissio peccatorum*, but understood in the sense of an extrinsic

105

*non-imputatio* of one's sins;<sup>11</sup> in no case does it lead to an effective holiness in the sinner. The sinner appropriates justification through faith in the mercy of God, under the impulse of the spirit.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of the remission of sins understood in this sense, sin remains in the justified man in such a way that he is

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<sup>9</sup> On this point in Protestant theology today, see ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 62-71. Cf. *Conf. Augustana*, c. 2: "Item docent (the reformers) quod post lapsum Adae omnes homines secundum naturam propagati nascantur cum peccato, hoc est sine metu Dei, sine fiducia erga Deum et cum concupiscentia, quodque hic morbus seu vitium originis vere sit peccatum [Likewise (the reformers) taught that after the fall of Adam, all men born the natural way were born with sin, that is without fear of God, without trust toward God, and with concupiscence, and that this original sickness or rather vice would truly be sin]" (*ed. cit.*, p. 53).

<sup>10</sup> The concepts *original sin* and *actual sin* do not mark off two separate domains, nor do they designate two separate sins, but qualify the same reality of the *indivisible sin*; cf. ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, II, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Over and above the texts cited in all the histories of dogma, and in the article of J. Riviere in the *DthC*, see P. ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 154ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Confessio Augustana*, art. 4: "Item docent (the reformers) quod homines non possint iustificari coram Deo propriis viribus, meritis aut operibus, sed gratis iustificentur propter Christum per fidem, cum credunt se in gratiam recipi et peccata remitti propter Christum qui sua morte pro nostris peccatis satisfecit. Hanc fidem imputat Deus pro iustitia coram ipso [Likewise (the reformers) teach that men could not be justified before God by their own virtues, merits, or works, but would be justified freely by faith according to Christ, when they believe themselves to be been accepted into grace and to be remitted of sins according to Christ who made satisfaction by his death for our sins. God imputes this faith in place of righteousness before himself]."

*iustus et peccator simul*.<sup>13</sup> Far from substituting an effective justice for a state of sin, which would modify the relationships between the justified sinner and God in a real manner, justification *more reformatorem* [in the meaning of the reformers] is only a simple *extrinsic relation* between God and man, in which man sees his sins no longer imputed. We should remember in this regard that *grace* has not the meaning in Protestant theology which is given to it in Catholic dogma, but signifies only the mercy of God who no longer imputes man's sin (*miserericordia Dei non imputantis peccatum* [the mercy of God who does not impute sin]).

The faith which procures justification also brings a certitude of salvation, which is all the more absolute in that it is the exclusive work of God into which man in no way enters. This certitude, however, is to be situated in the domain of faith, and does not imply a psychological or religious experience of tranquility. It therefore follows that faith is always exposed to temptations (*Anfechtung* is the term used by the German theologians).

Justification understood in the Lutheran sense undoubtedly remains as the key notion of all Protestant theology, the *articulus*

faith; it is a *defectus fidei*. The notions of mortal sin and venial sin are relative; every sin is mortal *ex parte hominis*; every sin is venial *ex parte Dei* [on God's side]. It is impossible for man to determine various degrees in the malice of sins which would have an objective value.

Since our justice is only that of Christ which is imputed to us extrinsically, we remain in fact that which we are: justified yes, but nonetheless sinners: *homo iustus et peccator simul*.

106

*stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae* [point on which the Church stands or falls].<sup>14</sup> The notion of sin is inseparable from it. The essential themes which are related to the one and to the other are repeated with an almost wearying monotony.<sup>15</sup>

At the base of the Protestant concept of sin lies a refusal to accept every philosophical analysis, or every purely moral appreciation of sin. Man insofar as he is man is irremediably a sinner, and the *peccatum originis* is nothing other than this total corruption. The *peccata actualia* or *quotidiana* are its perpetual manifestations. As justice is given to us through faith, sin consists in the refusal of

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<sup>13</sup> LUTHER, *Comm. Ep. ad Rom.*, IV, 7: "Sancti intrinsece sunt peccatores, ideo extrinsece iustificantur semper... Mirabilis et dulcissima misericordia Dei qui nos simul peccatores et non peccatores habet; simul manet peccatum et non manet [The saints are sinners intrinsically, and therefore are always justified extrinsically... Marvellous and most sweet is the mercy of God, who has us both as sinners and not-sinners; at the same time sin remains and does not remain]." The identical doctrine can be found in the *Apologia Conf. Augustana*, II (*ed. cit.*, p. 153): "Peccatum originis manere post baptismum... Hic palam fatetur esse, hoc est manere peccatum, tamet si non imputetur [That original sin remains after baptism... here it is openly professed that this sin remains, even if it is not imputed]."

<sup>14</sup> All the historians of dogma are in agreement on this point. See, in particular, F. LOOFS, "Der articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae," *Studien und Kritiken* (1917), pp. 323ff.

<sup>15</sup> The expression concerning the "monotony" of the themes relative to sin among the reformers is from P. ALTHAUS, *op. cit.*, p. 61.