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Why a Catholic Is Required to Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Case of Serious Sin

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WHY A CATHOLIC IS REQUIRED TO
RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION
IN THE CASE OF SERIOUS SIN

by

Patrick D. Clementz

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
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Finally, I dedicate this work to my Mother, Dorothy, and my wife and sons, Diane, Joey, and Mikey. They alone can appreciate how good it will feel to read this acknowledgement and share that experience in our home at the completion of this thesis.

VITA

The author, Patrick Dana Clementz, is the son of the Late George W. Clementz and Dorothy Ann (Kramer) Clementz. He was born March 17, 1950, in Aurora, Illinois.

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CHAPTER I

STATING THE QUESTION

Why am I required to receive the sacrament of reconciliation if I am guilty of serious sin? This paper will attempt to answer this question.¹ It is a question often raised by Catholics seeking to understand why confessing their sins to God alone is not sufficient for total reconciliation. These individuals feel that confessing to God the Supreme Being should bring total forgiveness and full reconciliation.

While at first glance this reasoning seems correct, a further look is needed to recognize the total picture. A person can only be restored fully to God by being restored at the same time to all others. This is due, in part, to the closeness that God has chosen with each of us. Through the Incarnation, God became one with all men and all women. Therefore, any reconciliation to God must be simultaneously a reconciliation with all others. Whatever one does to the least of His brothers, that is also done to God the Son.² St. John teaches the same truth in another way when he says that we cannot love the God Whom we do not see, if we do not love our brothers and sisters whom we can see.³ Therefore, we cannot return to God unless we, at the same time, return

to our brothers and sisters. Love of God and love of neighbor are in a sense a simultaneous reality.⁴

Because of this closeness of love of God and love of neighbor, the baptized Catholic must specifically return both to God and to others. Private expression of sin to God alone is not sufficient. Although reconciliation with God and with other members of the Body may begin in the telling of one's sins to God alone, the sinner's return to others must be completed in sacramental action. An outward action toward the Body is needed so that the Body also can grant forgiveness.

Can a person be reconciled both to God and to others outside of the sacrament of reconciliation? Because of the power of God's grace and mercy, it is clear that a full reconciliation can occur outside of the sacrament.⁵ Even a generous act of unselfish love could be sufficient since the person who loves much will be forgiven much. However, the ordinary way a Catholic restores himself or herself fully is in the sacrament of reconciliation.⁶ For a full reconciliation to occur outside of the formal sacrament of reconciliation, both a reconciliation with God and a reconciliation with mankind must be present in some form. Anything less would not be a full reconciliation.

Perhaps the most crucial link in a Catholic's understanding of the rule to confess in cases of serious sin involves the difficulty for Catholics to comprehend the

dimension of the social nature of sin. An attempt to develop more lucidly an appreciation of what this social nature of sin actually is will be included later in this paper.

Nevertheless, one can first realize that sin, because it is destructive to the sinful member who is part of the body, also hurts the body itself. That is, the sin that hurts the Catholic, hurts the one body that he or she is a part of. Throughout the ages, the Church has recognized this very fact, namely, that sin hurts the body, by binding the serious sinner.⁷

Going further, part of the difficulty for today's Catholic in understanding the rule for sacramental reconciliation relates to their perceptions and experiences of the Church, their unclear views about the nature of sin, and their somewhat limited conception of the sacrament of reconciliation. Each of these will be explored in chapters within this paper.

Perhaps more than any other area, the Catholic of today can benefit greatly by realizing that he or she plays a very active part in the sacrament of reconciliation. He or she cooperates as one of God's instruments toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Without the "yes" of the serious sinner, the restoration in the sacrament is impossible.

Finally, central to the return of the penitent to

God and others is the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is the Love that is shared by the Father, the Son, and the Church and, as will be shown later in this paper, is the source of unity and reconciliation with both God and others.

CHAPTER II

HOW DO THOSE WHO ARE ASKING THE QUESTION EXPERIENCE THE CHURCH?

Before exploring specifically the rule to confess serious sin in the Church, it is valuable to look at many of the ways that Catholics both experience the Church and view sin. Then one can confront some of the mistaken perspectives.

Since it is people that make up the Church, each person's experience of the Catholic Church most often evolves from his or her personal experiences of others around them. In my work with adolescents and adults as a religion teacher and counselor, I have observed and encountered many of these experiences. In the following chapters, some of these experiences will be explored in greater depth.

Often, these encounters with the Church are negative because of the individual weaknesses and personal sins of those who make up the Church. Some individuals have experienced the Church as authoritarian. They perceive the Church as scolding them at times, attempting to run their lives, as condemning, and as pushing laws rather than love.

This experience has an historical foundation since the Church has at times tended to be juridical.⁸

Some of those teaching and guiding others in the Catholic Church have primarily emphasized that the laws must be obeyed. They have shown little concern for explaining why the laws have to be obeyed or why the laws are reasonable. The Church had become a "do this and don't ask any questions about it" structure in the experience of many.

Many individuals at some time in their lives have had persons in positions of authority over them who have operated too much from a law orientation or who have attempted to make decisions for them rather than let them integrate their own personal choices. Experiencing this as they do, many Catholics rightly get upset when somewhere inside of themselves, they feel this is not right. They sense, and they are right, that some individuals in the Church do try, albeit often unknowingly, to take away their human dignity by reducing them to skeletal conformers to law rather than integrated humans making good personal decisions. In the process, some authoritarian individuals in the Church have manipulated their main tools of fear and guilt to get others to conform to the law.

Being good is the goal of both those who want people to conform to law and those who want morally integrated individuals. However, in the first, there is a destructive denial of the basic, inherent goodness of the

individual who, if given all the information to make a choice, will choose goodness. That is, some individuals treat others as though they were inherently evil and demand conformity to law moreso than a free will given the chance to choose good.

Directly related to this, my own observations and encounters have made me aware of many Catholics who have experienced the Church as mechanical, stilted, judgemental, patterned, cold, and self-righteous. They have at times had to work with individuals who represent the Church who are robot-like, going about day to day tasks with little feeling for what they are doing. Also, some have encountered other individuals who are quick to judge others according to an exterior observation of behavior with no sense of the complexities of behavior nor of the interior motivation that leads to that behavior. Such individuals in the Church often exhibit a high level of self righteousness which leaves many in the Church disillusioned. It is understandable why many in the Church are reluctant to confess to a priest and even question the need to confess their sinfulness if they likewise experience the Church as cold, stilted, judgemental, and self-righteous.

Moreover, one of the single most important experiences that I have observed can be described as a fear of condemnation by an authoritarian Church. That is, many who have questioned me about why they need to confess

serious sin are not, as it might appear, defiant toward the Church. Actually, they are struggling against a conception which gives the Church too much control over their destiny. To them, the demand to confess to the Church overrides God's forgiveness. It is a fear of a Church that has so much power that it could condemn a person for not confessing even though he or she confesses to God. It is a fear that betrays an authoritarian background since it has its basis in a life experience centered in condemnation rather than in love. Nevertheless, it has been prolonged by a Church that has not always taken the time to explain the background behind its rules, and that, at times, has focused too heavily on the objective side of morality.

An image may help to develop this idea. Often, the most orderly and organized youth will become the most outlandish, disheveled, and purposefully different adolescent. He or she reacts to his or her overly structured and well ordered life because it has been imposed externally by adults in his or her life. In order to integrate his or her own personal order, the adolescent vacillates to the other extreme to eventually seek a compromise between the two extremes. By reacting toward the extreme opposite position to what they feel has been imposed upon them, individuals establish the healthy movement of independence in the only way they know -- a radical reversal. Later, they will integrate a personal balance

between structure that demands conformity and individuality that demands freedom of choice.

In the same way, individuals who struggle against rules that are imposed without explanation begin by fighting against the extremes that they perceive. In the case of the rule to confess serious sin, some of these individuals are reacting to a Church that they have perceived to have full authority in an extreme sense whereby even confessing to God will not be sufficient to save them. They will need to recognize that the Church's rule is not denying God's grace and mercy, but rather is asking the sinner to seek forgiveness from all those offended by their sin. In addition, they will need to realize that it is an unfounded fear of an authoritarian condemnation by laws and rules which leads them to react so strongly and negatively.

There is a second reaction to the rule to confess that is readily verifiable in day to day personal experience. This also is a reaction against authority. In the day to day experiences of life, people can readily recognize the fact that no one wants to be told what to do. Often, most individuals are willing to do what they know is best for themselves but, if they are told to do it, they tend to not want to do it. A story may illustrate this point:

A young boy on an Iowa farm just arrived home one day. He really enjoyed grabbing the newspaper to read the daily comics before he went out to do his farm chores. On this particular day, he hopped into his comfortable

chair and proceeded to read the comics. When he finished reading, he was in very good spirits as he said to himself "I better run up and change my clothes and then do the chores so that I'll be done by the time Mom has dinner ready." At that moment, his mother looked in from the other room and said "Go up and change your clothes and get out and do the chores so that you'll be done in time for dinner." His mood seemed to change immediately. His initial enthusiasm to do what he knew was best quickly departed from him, and he no longer felt like doing what moments before he was fully intending to do.⁹

This story shows us that, often, when a person is readily willing to do something, if someone tells him or her to do it, he or she no longer feels the same enthusiasm to do it.

In many ways, the rule to confess serious sin brings the same reaction. Many adolescent Catholics that I have spoken with, react so strongly to being told what to do that they are unable to acknowledge the value that they already recognize in sacramental reconciliation. Many times, the reaction of adolescents mirrors the attitudes of their parents.

In both of these types of reactions mentioned above, Catholics experience the Church as an authoritarian figure. To them, the Church seems more concerned with telling them what to do and what not to do. They feel, most likely because they have experienced others doing this in their lives, that the Church is trying to run their lives. Even though the overall Church is not authoritarian in this matter, some Catholics, understandably, though not always correctly, react negatively to this rule to confess.

Since this authoritarian feeling can be a common experience , it is important to clarify both the reasons for this reaction and the helpful spirit with which the Church presents this law to receive the sacrament. This can lead Catholics to heartfelt compliance to the will of God and not simply a legalistic conforming of the will to what authority has told them to do.

For example, if I can only see an unappealing law in front of me, this leads to an "I have to" feeling within the person and results in a minimal response. That is, I only do what I have to. However, if I can see that confessing serious sin really makes sense and is not just an external rule, this can lead to an "I want to" feeling which results in a response of my whole self. In this second instance, I will fully engage myself into what I see is best for me. This paper will show that the rule to confess serious sin really makes sense.

There is another view of the Church present within many adolescents who have asked me the question "Why do I have to confess?" This view identifies the Church very narrowly with a particular individual's own immediate community. For some of them, the Church becomes only those people that they are personally involved with and who represent the Church to them. This is a mistaken view since although the Church is present in a particular community, it is much more also. The Church goes far beyond the

particular weaknesses of the particular individuals in one's own community. One cannot rightly condemn the whole Church if it is only his or her own community that is very narrow minded, legalistic, impatient, or has its own particular problems or sins. Rather, that person must be willing to forgive his or her own community for its failings while acknowledging the goodness within it and the larger community.

Unfortunately, some do not participate in the sacrament because they are unwilling to look beyond and forgive the weaknesses of the particular Church that surrounds them. These make statements like "I'm not going to confess to the priest, he's a sinner," or, unforgivingly, they find fault with the priest saying "He shouldn't be that way, he should be holy, he's a priest." Unwilling to forgive, these particular Catholics are incapable of asking for forgiveness while harboring such an attitude.

My own experiences and reflections have indicated that beneath these comments is the attitude that a person is nothing more than the evil that he or she partakes in. That is, these individuals, in their own words, equate a particular person, such as a priest, with his or her weakness and with his or her particular sins. These Catholics need to recognize that the core of a person is not his or her sin and that all individuals are basically good. Despite his or her sins, a specific person is much more than

these faults. Every person has inherent goodness and is worthy of both giving and receiving forgiveness and love.

Moreover, the sacrament of reconciliation demonstrates the basic goodness of each individual. It says that even though each individual sins, there is more to each person that allows the sin to be removed and the goodness of the person to continue. Forgiveness frees the sinners allowing them to rejoice in the basic goodness of themselves, while condemnation can paralyze the sinners forcing them to curse the futility of their wickedness.

Going further, when members of the community are sinful, love demands that the other members reflect to these sinners their deeper goodness, raise their spirits, and help them to convert from their sins. For, specifically, it is the love, caring, and forgiveness of members of the community that bring sinners out of their fallen state. Christ's love for sinners in his lifetime exemplifies this truth.

Finally, in my years as a teacher, another similar attitude has surfaced. This attitude unreflectively assumes that a human being is not worthy or capable of granting forgiveness. A particular Catholic with this view is likely to remark: "The priest is only a human being like you or I, how can he forgive? God is the only one who can forgive." In fact, as will be shown later, going to a priest in the sacrament of reconciliation is, in actuality, going to

receive the forgiveness of God. However, God has seen fit to allow human beings to be instruments of His forgiveness in the sacrament. Such a privilege and honor that allows members of our community to bring divine forgiveness to others manifests the tremendous heights that God has raised the human race to since becoming a member of that race.

CHAPTER III

CONFRONTING AND DEVELOPING THE VIEW OF SIN THAT LIES BENEATH THE QUESTION

One of the main areas of misconception that lies behind the questioning of the need to confess serious sin involves different misunderstandings of sin. One of these, specifically, is a denial of the social nature of sin.

Beneath this denial is a view that has forgotten what the Church is. The Church is a community. The Greek word ekklesia, the equivalent in the New Testament for Church, originally meant the assembly of the citizens of a city. This assembly was made up of only those citizens who had full rights.¹⁰ The nature of the Church, then, is a gathering with others. Without them, there is no such thing as Church.

Flowing directly from this, a sin in the Church is not just an individual matter. Since the Church is an assembly or a community where individuals have full rights, personal sin affects others in that community as well. The next few paragraphs will explore at length the dimension of how sin affects others since it is a crucial step in the reason why the sinner has to return to the Church community and ask forgiveness.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AUTHOR
REVEALS HOW SIN AFFECTS OTHERS

In the Old Testament, the authors helped to reveal how sin greatly affects others. In the story of the first sin, Adam blames Eve for his mistake rather than take responsibility for it himself. Eve blames the serpent. Both demonstrate how sinners, not very different from today, abandon personal responsibility and push blame for their wrongdoing on others. It is evident here that sin's effects do not stop with the individual sinner. Others become targets of blame and are implicated falsely in the sin.

Similarly, when Cain kills his brother Abel, his sin is obviously not just between Cain and God. Abel is now dead as a result of the sin. Closer examination of the passage shows also that it was the sin already lurking in Cain's heart that led to the killing of his brother.¹¹ Here, in particular, even sin in one's heart can lead to the destruction of others.

The Old Testament author shows also how sin affects others by leading to even greater violence in others. This is portrayed in the words of Lamech: "I have killed a man for wounding me, a boy for bruising me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-seven fold." That is, the early author is indicating that a person's sin can lead to greater sin in others. Further, in these Old Testament

stories , we can see how sin causes alienation in a variety of ways. In particular, sin can cause alienation between the person and him or her self (depicted in Adam and Eve's nakedness), between the person and God (depicted in Adam's attempt to hide), between the person and another person (depicted in Cain's violence), and between nation and nation (depicted in the tower of Babel story).¹²

From the Old Testament, then, one can realize how sin definitely has an effect not only on the sinner but also on others. It is important to note, however, that it is primarily our sin against God that leads us to breaks in friendship with others in the human race.¹³ For each of these sinners, it was a break in their relationship with God that caused devastating effects on others.

OUR OWN EXPERIENCE POINTS IN MANY WAYS TO THE FACT THAT SIN AFFECTS OTHERS

Bringing in our own experiences today, the question arises: "How do I hurt others when I sin?" An easier way to view the answer is by asking "How do others affect me when they sin?" For example, when a person steals something from me, cheats me, lies to me, speaks falsely against me, or does anything directly that harms me, his or her sin brings about a definite effect on me. I can easily recognize , in these instances, that his or her sin was not an individual matter for him or her alone. Likewise, my sin does not

affect me alone since others feel the effects of that sin.

Another way that sin affects others is more indirect. Because a person is changed by sin, this change affects others. For example, because the person is not as loving due to his or her sinfulness, those close to that person receive less love. Because the sinner does not love God as freely as is possible, his or her love to others is diminished. Others, then, are indirectly affected by this personal sin.

Some day to day examples can illustrate this point. A teacher who is lazy does not give the same benefit of education to his or her students particularly because of that laziness. A parent that drinks to excess loses some vibrancy in his or her life that is consequently not shared with his or her family. A student who fails to participate in class lessens the full impact of the learning experience on all of his or her classmates. All of these show how sin affects others particularly because it has first changed the individual personally.

Sin's effects on others can also cause a chain reaction. The love that the sinner fails to give to another person as a direct result of his or her sinfulness may make it impossible for that other person to go out and give to still another. One often hears today that an individual cannot give love unless he or she has first received it. Thus, the love one fails to give due to sinfulness will

fail to encourage new growth in those that the sinner comes in contact with. For instance, a teacher who has habitually failed to curb his or her appetite for food may, on the way to lunch, neglect to take the moment needed to reassure a confused student. That student, specifically because his or her needs were not met, will not respond as readily to the needs of his or her fellow classmates in the cafeteria. Especially in a family, growth is hindered by sin which takes away some of the security, esteem, and nurturing love that are needed for growth in every individual. Thus, sin affects some by taking away some of the love that helps them to grow.

Another way that sin affects others is through bad example. Personal experiences can verify this. If a person does something wrong and this, in turn, leads one of his or her friends, family, or even someone he or she doesn't know, to sin, then, that personal sin has caused harm to another. The word originally used to describe this situation was scandal. Based on its Greek derivation, this word referred to a "stumbling block." If one's sinful actions cause another to stumble on his or her journey to God, the first person is considered a scandal to the second. The damage of this sinful act is much greater because it has hurt another not physically but spiritually.

In addition to these, two other areas in our own personal experience can point out the effects of sin on

others. One is how sin diminishes joy in the community. When a particular individual is selfish, he or she stops communicating and withdraws from others. This appreciably lessens the happiness of his or her group of friends. For example, whether it's a child on the playground who wants everything his or her way and so leaves the game, or a young high school student who uses drugs and begins to shut out his or her classmates, or an adult who begins to look at others with disdain and thus shuts them out, the result on the community they scorn strips that particular community of some of its sense of wholeness and joy. Most individuals can recall experiences where the sin of others has dampened the joy of a particular occasion.

Directly related to this is something commonly experienced by many individuals. As more and more sin occurs in the individuals of a group, slowly the support of that group that each experiences is lessened. That support is a very powerful stimulant of growth for each member. Sin lessens that support and the members of the group experience less assurance and encouragement from those around them. This lessening of support can have far reaching effects since individuals in the group will encounter many others outside the group in the course of their lives.

Here, then, we have seen that sin is not just an individual matter between the person and God. It has far reaching consequences. We experience the effects of others'

sin and they experience the effects of our sin. Sin is not just individual, it is also social.

Unfortunately, because sin causes individuals to close themselves to what is before them, they do not readily see the effects that their sin has on others. Unless a person takes the time to reflect on his or her own sinfulness and its consequences on others, he or she will be even less likely to accept this social nature of sin.

One particular underlying attitude toward sin that makes it difficult to understand its social nature occurs in Catholics who have an almost gnostic view of life. They look at the material world as something less than good and not to be engaged with. For them, to be religious means that the person should be apart from the world. Spiritual matters between God and the person are the sole determiners of whether the person is saved and will go to heaven. Good is only determined in this narrow area of the mind between God and the person. These are the individual Catholics who do not make the connection between their spiritual lives and their day to day lives in the world. How they treat others in business, for example, should never be confused with religion. This perspective leads to a mistaken understanding that confession is simply a place to examine the spiritual, moral area between God and I. For them, the question is why should I receive a sacrament of forgiveness

when my room at home is sufficient for taking care of spiritual matters that concern only God and I.

Fortunately, Vatican II has emphasized in its teachings that Catholics should be involved in the world and are bound to build up that world.¹⁴ Thus, one's responsibility to God is also a responsibility to the world He created. Spirituality is an involvement in the world and its goodness and is not a separation from it. Consequently, one must confess his or her sins in this world in order to be accountable to oneself and others. The Catholic must be so involved in the growth of this world-- to bring justice and peace to others -- that he or she is willing to publically admit when he or she fails in this task. As Jesus became personally involved in the world, so too Catholics are asked to be personally involved in this world. Catholics are not only responsible to God, but they are also responsible to others.

SIN IS A VERY COMPLEX

REALITY AND NOT A ONE TIME EVENT

Another concept of sin that seems behind the question of confessing serious sin is that sin is a one time act that ends in the moment it is committed. Catholics today must recognize that sin reaches into and permeates all areas of their lives.¹⁵ The effects of sin can and do linger on in the lives of people. Rather than a one time action that

someone commits, sin is a much more complex reality. Even the early Greek Fathers were very aware of this. Sin, in its complex nature, involves punishment and further inclinations toward sin that are not completely removed at the one moment of absolution when the guilt for the sin is removed. Because of this, the Greek Fathers felt that mortal sin could be confessed more than once.¹⁶

Today, it is important to emphasize that sin is a totality or complexity rather than a simple act. Understanding this about sin, then, Catholics today must recognize that doing penance, either inside or outside the specific sacrament, is a gradual healing process that removes the lingering effects of sin. Serious sin demands penance from the sinner. It is not optional. It is a way of life rather than a few isolated acts joined to a priest's absolution. This is so since penance combats not only the actions of sin, but also, its deeply rooted and pervasive nature. Just as life, in a positive sense, is a gradually developing process, so also is sin, in a negative sense, a gradually developing process. Consequently, the penance which counteracts sin must be an ongoing, gradually developing process. Only an extended practice of prayer and fasting can correct some sinfulness. Just as some wounds in the human body heal gradually with the right care, so also, sinful wounds within ourselves heal gradually with the right actions.

Looking at this from another perspective, sin, in itself, gives birth to its own punishment.¹⁷ In each act of turning away from goodness, one develops an ever increasing habitual attitude making it easier to sin again, making one less willing to change toward good, and holding one defiantly on a course away from God. This punishment or burden is a part of the very nature of sin. It is not added on by any authority or outside figure. If Catholics perceive this punishment as something imposed afterward by authority, as if it were separate from sin, then they will not understand the true value of penance. For, penance is demanded in order to specifically remove the effects of sin, namely: the habitual ease toward sin, the stubbornness toward accepting good, and the pattern of action away from God. Thus, because of the nature of serious sin, penance is required of the sinful Catholic.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CONCRETE IMAGES OF THE BODY OF CHRIST THAT HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE SACRAMENT?

In trying to understand the sacrament of reconciliation, one must begin to comprehend just what it means to talk about the Church as the Body of Christ. To do this, it can be very helpful to remind oneself of the original image of a human body that St. Paul used to convey this idea of Christ's body. Always, however, it must be noted that the image of the Body of Christ is only that--an image. How people experience the Church, as shown earlier, can be far different. In as much as the Church is what it is meant to be, it is the Body of Christ.

One of the first areas to explore with the Body of Christ is how does one become a member. Each Catholic became a member of the Body of Christ through his or her baptism. In baptism, there are no longer any individuals, but each person becomes a member of a community.¹⁸ Today, many parishes now welcome new members by baptizing them during Mass to show that they are becoming a part of the community. That is, the new member is brought into the Church community in the very midst of those who are a part of that community.

As the Catholic matures in his or her faith, a particular way of living is demanded if he or she is to be fully a member of Christ's Body. The Catholic must live no longer for himself or herself, but must live according to Christ's new commandment to love one another as He has loved them. An individual Catholic can only do this by dying to him or her self. Inasmuch as the Catholic Church consists of individuals who are unselfishly loving one another and using their gifts to help the community in its growth, the Church is in fact the Body of Christ. Catholics who do not enter into this communal love for others will have a difficult time understanding the importance and need of being reconciled to others in cases of serious sin.

Even more, because the Spirit of unity is offered to all who are baptized, the new Christian is judged not only as an individual, but also according to how well he or she enters into this communion with the Church.¹⁹ As he or she begins to enter into this Body of Christ, much more is now demanded of the baptized person. In baptism, the person is changed and now must live what he or she is, i.e. a member of the community or Body of the Church.²⁰

With this change, the person is expected, as St. Paul says, to put on the mind of Christ and live as Christ would. Christ will then be present in the world through him or her. When Church members do this, the Body of Christ is present and visible to others.

If the individual Catholic does not die to self in his or her day to day life in order to rise with Christ present in the community, he or she will not experience membership and responsibility in the Body. I have experienced many members of the Church who do in fact live out in their daily lives continual unselfish love for others. In them, the Body of Christ continues to exist. These individuals are the presence of Christ in the world.

Specifically, the life that the new Christian is born into at baptism is the life of the Holy Spirit, God's life, or a communion of love. Catholics often profess in the creed at weekly Mass: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life." In their daily lives, the Spirit's life should be lived in ongoing love for others. It is this life of love in the Holy Spirit that characterizes the Church and makes a person a part of that Church. That is, it is only as individuals love one another that the Body of Christ exists. The source of this living love is God the Holy Spirit.²¹

Throughout history even up to the present, this life of love given Christians through the Holy Spirit has been working not only in saints recognized for their love of others, but also in the no less significant individuals who, unobserved, have sacrificed and lived for the good of their families and others. The many religious institutions and religious orders that have been set up through the years by

Church members to take care of the sick, to educate the unknowing, to shelter the homeless, to care for the imprisoned, and to perform a wide assortment of other specific tasks, attest to the unselfish love for others that is in the Church. Most recently, the example of Mother Theresa is a modern symbol of the love for others that continues in our Church.

And yet, the sacrament of reconciliation is more meaningful to the Christian who has entered into this love. If a person has great love, he or she will more readily recognize the sinful loss of that love.

As Catholics share in this life of the Spirit's love, they share also a life of unity with others in the Church. St. Paul tells us as Christians to "Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force (Ephesians 4: 3)." By living and cooperating in the Holy Spirit, Church members find this Spirit to be the source of their unity and oneness in the Church.²²

The Catholic Church is a unified Church. Although some Catholics have chosen not to join in this unity, there are many more who align themselves with the Church's one faith, one Lord, and one baptism. The many efforts to welcome the Pope in his visits to this country have been a symbol of the many peoples who are united in the Church. Many Catholics joyfully seek to do God's will within their

day to day lives by educating their children, participating in weekly Mass, helping others in the secular world, and by making it a habit to do their best. They daily become the hands and arms of Jesus in the world.

Moreover, in order to be this presence of Christ in the world, each person who has been baptized receives his or her own particular task to accomplish in the Church. Each Christian, in his or her own particular history, visibly acts out the Spirit of Christ to others in a unique way.²³ As a gift to be used to help each other in the community, each is "given the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 7). In this way, each person becomes the Church working in the world.

It is clear in the Acts of the Apostles that Luke sees the Holy Spirit leading the early Christians. It was the reception of this Holy Spirit, after Jesus ascended, that led the Apostles in the conversion of three thousand on Pentecost. After receiving the Spirit, Stephen spoke out and became the first martyr. Philip was led by the Spirit to the coach of the Ethiopian whom he later baptized. Paul began his mission when Ananias, himself led by the Spirit in prayer, laid his hands upon him to give him the Holy Spirit.²⁴ In the twentieth century, Christians, although not always reflecting on this fact, carry on this tradition being guided by the Holy Spirit. Those that are open to Christ's Spirit working within them, are following Christ's

teachings, and share in the Paschal Mystery, constitute the Body of Christ.

Emphasizing anew the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Second Vatican Council teaches that the Spirit vivifies, unifies, and moves us as members of Christ's Body. In doing so, the Council Fathers recognize the Holy Spirit as so central to Christ's Body that they refer to the Spirit as the soul of the Body just as each of us has a soul or life-principle. They state it this way:

In order that we may be unceasingly renewed in Him(cf. Eph.4: 23), He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the head and in the members, vivifies, unifies, and moves the whole body. This He does in such a way that His work could be compared by the holy Fathers with the function which the soul fulfills in the human body, whose principle of life the soul is.²⁵

Thus, the Holy Spirit is the principle of life in the Church.

UNION WITH CHRIST IS

A CORPORAL, VISIBLE REALITY

In visible love for each other, Christians make the Spirit physically present in themselves and in the world. Just as the creed states that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that God became man to save us, so also, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Christian becomes the presence of Christ to lead others to salvation. Mysteriously, through baptism, the Christian becomes part of

the visible and invisible reality of Christ.²⁶ Union with Christ, then, is a corporal, visible reality. Too often, this extremely important visible dimension of the Body of Christ is forgotten. One of the greatest scholars of our Church -- St. Thomas -- recognized that the Christian's union with Christ was more than merely interior and spiritual. For him, it was also very much a corporal union.²⁷

This visibility or body-reality of being united with Christ makes demands on the Christian. He or she cannot arbitrarily choose to ignore his or her visibility as a member of the Church. When the Christian lives out the purposes of the Church in a visible or sacramental fashion, he or she is living out what the Christian life actually is.²⁸ In the outward sign of baptism, the Christian is brought into visible communion with Christ. Because of this, he or she is responsible to this communion in a way not asked of the non-Christian.²⁹ Baptism, then, makes demands that are not just interior, but need to be lived out in one's day to day life through visible signs.

Unfortunately, because of the wide expanse of incorrect interpretations that can be attributed to visible signs, this is an area that can be very confusing for the Catholic in his or her daily life. For example, in a world where the visible sign of life being destroyed in the womb is repeatedly interpreted as an act of greater freedom for

women, as a wise act of limiting the world's population, or even as a valid means toward determining the gender of family members, one can begin to realize that our accuracy of interpreting a visible sign has been greatly diminished. Thus, in order to recognize and live out the visibility of Christ's Body for what it is, the individual Catholic must be able to discern the true significance of the visible signs in this world. To the extent that the Church is an authentic sign of love and community, to that extent it is in fact the visible sign of the Body of Christ.

THE SPIRIT IS A
SPIRIT OF LOVE FOR EACH OTHER

The primary characteristic, then, that makes the Church the presence and body of Christ in the world is the members' love for each other. Since we are joined in this communal love through this one Spirit, we are called to share that Spirit of love with each other. This is what the early Church community did in their visible, day to day lives. "See how they love one another" was the response of those who observed and were very much attracted to the early Church. The early Church was visibly and authentically a community of people.

This love continues to exist today, though, as we say, it is always in need of improvement. It is this communal love that the serious sinner abandons and needs to

recover. It is a communal love that is not just human , but that shares in the Holy Spirit and divine love. In a particular way, the serious sinner has detached him or herself from this communal love by cutting off his or her union with others through actions that seriously contradict love and the community. Therefore, the serious sinner must seek reconciliation with the community.

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH FIND UNITY AND
SALVATION WITH CHRIST AS A COMMUNITY

From another perspective, the individual Christian can only be Christ's Body and accomplish Christ's work in this world, if he or she is one with Christ. Historically, the Church has believed that one is united with Christ particularly by being in union with the community.³⁰ No one is united with Christ if he or she is apart from His Body.³¹

Moreover, the Judaeo-Christian tradition preserves the belief that each person is saved in and through the community. Christians are called to salvation, not only as individuals, but also, as a people, as a community, or, using the image above, as one body. Early Christians believed that they could not come to God apart from the community:

... the early Christians did not believe that he could have access to God apart from the community. But for him the community was the new people of God, the body of Christ which is the Church. 'For in one Spirit we

were all baptized into one body' (1 Cor 12: 13). Separation from this body was death. Reconciliation to the body was life. For outside the body there is no salvation.³²

Therefore, to return to God, one must also reconcile him or her self in some way to the community. Our union with God is to be lived within the one community³³ where we find the one Spirit of God. As the letter to the Ephesians states:

There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all (Ephesians 4: 4-6).

Thus, Christians were joined by one Baptism into one Body and it is only by being in that Body that they can share in the divine life.³⁴

Specifically, Christians share in the Spirit in their relationships with others. In reaching out to others, Christians discover their unique gifts and the peace that comes with self-actualization. Paradoxically, in self-less love, individuals discover the peace of who they are. The Spirit is not something one holds inside, but rather it is an ongoing relationship with others in the community.

Finally, it is Christ's Spirit present in others that remains with us in our lives to save and heal us. He continues to share Himself personally with us, but He also shares Himself in the community through His Spirit of love and peace present in each of us.

CHAPTER V

GENUINE RECONCILIATION IS A RETURN TO THE WHOLE CHRIST THROUGH THE LOVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before seeing specifically how the sacrament of reconciliation is necessary, this paper will explore what the nature of genuine reconciliation is. A genuine reconciliation is mainly and fully one reunion, namely, a reunion of the serious sinner and Jesus Christ.

Just as sin gradually increases the sinner's separation from Christ, so also reconciliation with Christ involves a gradual process. Within this process, the sacrament of reconciliation is an essential moment.

THE SINNER RETURNS TO THE WHOLE CHRIST

A very important part of genuine reconciliation is that the sinner returns to the whole Christ. Christ cannot be separated from His Body nor from His Spirit which is the life of that Body.³⁵ Therefore, the sinner has to return to Christ's Body and His Spirit.

Although the Church represents that Body, one can recognize that, because of the nature of serious sin, everyone visibly in the Church is not necessarily in full relation to His Body. Also, many who are not visibly in the

Catholic Church are actively members of Christ's Body through their love for others. It is not always possible to determine if a particular person, whether inside or outside the visible Church, is in full relationship to Christ's Spirit. Thus, when talking of Christ's Body, this analysis will be referring specifically to those who have, by their action, united themselves with His Spirit irrespective of whether or not they appear to be in good standing with the Church. Genuine reconciliation, then, consists of the person who was separated from Christ by serious sin who now returns to Christ in his entirety, i.e. including His Body and His Spirit. Particularly, the focus is only on the seriously sinful Roman Catholic who is returning to Christ. He or she is required to receive the sacrament of reconciliation in cases of serious sin. All other seriously sinful Christians would, by the nature of their sinful act, be required to return in some way to the Body of Christ which would include both a reconciliation to God and a reconciliation to man.

GENUINE RECONCILIATION IS A
RESPONSE OF THE SINNER TO GOD'S INITIATIVE

The process of reconciliation begins when God initiates, through the Holy Spirit, the return of the sinner. Like the Father of the prodigal son, God continually awaits the return of the one who has left.

Through the Spirit, God leads the sinner back to Himself with abundant graces.³⁶ It is clear that God Who sent His Son to die for us in order to save us, will do everything to bring us back to divine Love except to force us.

Most crucial in this process, then, is the fact that the sinner must respond to these initiatives of God. Very often, the sinner forgets the importance of his or her own response. One cannot wait for God to bring about reconciliation. One of the dangers today is that individuals wait for someone to bring them back to Christ. They feel that it is the responsibility of God or those around them to heal them. In the process, they blame God and others for their condition. In understanding reconciliation, then, it is important to emphasize to each other that one's responsibility to return is just as crucial to reconciliation as God's calling the sinner to return.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AS A LABORIOUS BAPTISM

Moreover, the view of the early Church Fathers concerning the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation can help to understand this point. They believed that the first sacrament -- baptism -- removed all sins as a gift from God and that it brought the Christian into God's life and community. It came freely from God without any extra potential effort. All sins, even serious ones, were forgiven in baptism. However, if the Christian sinned

seriously after baptism, , they believed that the sinner had to return to God's life and community through a laborious baptism, i.e. the sacrament of reconciliation. The sinners own penitential actions were demanded as a means to restoration to the community.³⁷ Likewise, today's Catholic must must go through a laborious baptism to return to the life lost through serious sin. In the sacrament of reconciliation, therefore, penitential actions are very important.

BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE
LIFE OF THE CHURCH, RECONCILIATION OCCURS
WITH THE CHURCH AND WITH GOD AT THE SAME TIME

In reconciliation, the central person who unifies this return is the Holy Spirit. In particular, the Holy Spirit re-enters the sinner more fully at the moment when the sinner opens himself or herself to God and to others. Since the life of the Church is the Holy Spirit Who is present in relationships with others, the sinner receives the Church's life once again when he or she re-opens that relationship with God and others. The life of the Church and Christ's Spirit is specifically this life of love and union with others. This does not happen all at once, but it must develop as the sinner begins to go beyond self and enter again into caring, concerned love for others.

THE RETURN TO GOD AND THE RETURN TO THE CHURCH
IS A SIMULTANEOUS MOMENT IN THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

At this point, one can explore more completely the simultaneous nature of reconciliation with God and the Church. The question of the order involved in this dual reconciliation was left open by Vatican II.³⁸ Some have said that reconciliation with the Church occurs first, while others have argued that reconciliation with God must be prior. The position of this paper is that both occur at precisely the same moment, because of the nature of the Holy Spirit who is part of the Trinity and also part of the Church. This same Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son, the love between all Christians, and the love that holds all of these persons together.

A review of some historical beliefs will help to clarify this paper's position. It will further help to show that this position is consistent with the sinner's need to return to the Church through the sacrament of reconciliation in the same act of returning to God.

St. Augustine taught that a person's forgiveness is simultaneous to his or her restoration to the Church.³⁹ He also agrees that this dual nature of reconciliation is connected with the Holy Spirit. In one of his writings, he says: "The love of the Church which is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, removes the sins of those who participate ..."⁴⁰ It is this love for each other--

which is the Holy Spirit working in the penitent -- that brings forgiveness. By participating in this love, the sinner enters into the process of loving others which in turn heals the selfishness, stubbornness, and hate that gradually gripped the person because of sin.

St. Cyprian concluded that two things were clear in the beliefs of the early Church about forgiveness. One was that the person was saved through the Church and the other was that the person could only be forgiven by God.⁴¹ Receiving the Holy Spirit in the sacrament combines both of these. The penitent participates in the Love of the Holy Spirit by entering into a relationship with the priest in the Church.

Bartholomaeus Xiberta, more recently, stated that the immediate effect of the sacrament of reconciliation was a return to the Church.⁴² From this, one can see that returning to a relationship with the Church is the immediate effect because, in this relationship, the love of the Holy Spirit begins anew in the person. Thus, a relationship taking place is the moment of entry of the Holy Spirit into the person's life since the Spirit's Life is necessarily life with others.

The idea of binding and loosing can also be understood in this perspective. Binding meant to be excluded from community. Loosing was a welcoming back into community. As the ordinary way that the serious sinner

returns to the community, the sacrament of reconciliation is the means of contact with the community where communal relationship is restored and the Holy Spirit becomes once again the source of this unity.

In a similar way, both divine guilt and ecclesial guilt are removed through the Holy Spirit. This Spirit joins the sinner back to the community of Love with the Father, the Son, and the whole Body of those united in love.

THE PENITENT MUST RESPOND TO THE
HOLY SPIRIT AS UNIFIER IN ORDER FOR
THE OFFER OF LOVE TO BECOME A LIVED EXPERIENCE

The Holy Spirit is not only an advocate to the sinner, but also recreates a new life in that person. Since love exists only if it is freely chosen, the penitent must choose to love and act on that love. In the sacrament of reconciliation, the sinner reaches out in love to the whole Christ and, by doing so, lives out once again a loving relationship with Christ and the members of His Church in history. Without this lived experience of love, reconciliation is incomplete.

THE HISTORICAL MOMENT OF THE
UNION OF THE PRIEST AND THE SINNER
IS THE HISTORICAL BEGINNING OF COMMUNAL LOVE

Concretely, the historical moment of the union of the

priest and the sinner in the sacrament of reconciliation is ordinarily the historical moment of the restoration of the love between the penitent and the community. The sinner returns to the whole Christ by returning to His Body on earth in order to seek reunion. The sinner stands freely in time before another person asking for forgiveness. The priest, a member and representative of Christ's Body, stands willing to grant that forgiveness. Both are seeking a reunion. In that moment of reunion when the priest welcomes the already returning sinner back into the community -- in the words of absolution -- the reunion takes on a relative completeness. The sinner has returned and the priest has welcomed and accepted that return.

This is the renewed beginning of a loving relationship between the penitent and the whole community which is represented by the priest. In the reunion of the sinner and the priest, the sinner is now reunited to all others who are joined to Christ's Body. Here, as stated before, the Holy Spirit enters into human history and becomes the unifier between the priest and the penitent restoring communal love and acceptance between them.

In the sacrament, then, the penitent becomes once again a loving member of the Church and the Body of Christ through a greater share in the Holy Spirit.⁴³ He or she becomes the Church acting in history. This occurs in many ways. First, by taking part in the sacrament itself, the

sinner is already participating in the liturgy of the Church.⁴⁴ The penitent becomes the Church in his or her actions.⁴⁵ Also, by doing forms of penance such as acts of charity, worship, and mercy, the penitent becomes the Church by living out these realities that are the essence of the Church.⁴⁶ Even more, by leading others to reconciliation by example, charity, and prayer, each penitent becomes more actively a member.⁴⁷ In all of this, then, the serious sinner returns in the sacrament and becomes the Church itself acting in the world. This is an essential moment of the reconciliation process because it is a return to the life of love. The beauty of this process is that it is God's love that leads to greater loving action. That is, the Holy Spirit leads the sinner to act out, in his or her day to day life, his or her own particular ongoing restoration.

THE SINNER MUST RECONCILE
HIM OR HER SELF WITH ALL CREATION

To conclude this chapter, one final point needs to be made. Reconciliation to Christ involves even more than this reconciliation to all those who are united to Him. It involves also, in a way consistent with our beliefs, a reconciliation to all of His creation. The creed states that "through him all things were created." Consistent with this faith, one can recognize that all of creation is intimately connected to God's Son through Whom the Father

has given us this beautiful creation. Thus, to restore our relationship to Jesus, we must also restore our relationship to His creation. Pollution, exploitation of the minerals of the land, waste, and various ecological distortions caused by members of our world all point to a broken relation with Christ and His creation. They are both symptoms and sin. These, also, must be eliminated in the process of a complete reconciliation to Christ.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRAMENT ALONE IS THE SIGN AND MEANS OF NEEDED RESTORATION

In this chapter, the task remains to show how it is only through the sacrament of reconciliation that the seriously sinful Catholic can signify and obtain reconciliation. When one examines the situation that the serious sinner in the Church has put himself or herself into⁴⁸, it becomes clear that it is ordinarily only through the sacrament of reconciliation that he or she can be restored.⁴⁹ The serious sinner needs to go through the process of the sacrament to be healed and it is only in exceptional cases where God's infinite grace and mercy may intervene that this is not true.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in the divine plan, God primarily intended that the Christian use the sacrament of penance in order to be healed.⁵¹ In this chapter, then, one will see how the sacrament of reconciliation alone is the sign and means of restoration for the Catholic who has sinned seriously.

To recognize how God's plan requires the sacrament of reconciliation when serious sin is committed, it is important first to recognize that originally every Catholic joined the Church and its Spirit in the sacrament of

baptism. Each Catholic, through this sacrament, became one with Christ. His or her baptism was a death to sin and a rising with Christ.⁵² The water and the white garment of baptism -- symbols we are all very much familiar with-- indicated a cleansing from a life of sin and an entry into a new life with Christ. Through serious sin, the Catholic is no longer dead to sin and he or she is consequently cut off from this new risen life with Christ. Because receiving the Spirit in the sacrament of baptism is a one-time event, the serious sinner, wishing to return to the risen Christ, must return to his or her new life in the Spirit in some other way.

Specifically, in order to return to this new life of the Spirit, the sinner must receive the sacrament of reconciliation. He or she must repent from sin and also re-enter into the Spirit that distinguished Jesus' baptism from John's baptism. As the Spirit returns to the person and he or she again loves others, the person is reconciled. This communal love with God and with others, which we have already mentioned, is called by some ecclesial love and is the fruit itself of the sacrament of reconciliation.⁵³

Thus far, one can note that the sacrament of reconciliation is necessary in order to return to the life in the Spirit that was lost through sin.

Another reason that confession is demanded of the serious sinner relates to the fact that God became

Incarnate. Since Jesus is Incarnate, the sinner has to return to Jesus' Body on earth which includes all those within whom His Spirit is living. God is united in glory with all those who historically and visibly show the divine Goodness to others.

Here, one finds the reason why asking God for forgiveness in one's room is not sufficient. It is true that God, Who is primarily offended by our sin, is the only one who can grant forgiveness.⁵⁴ But, it is also true that God lives within those who are faithful -- the holy ones-- as St. Paul calls them. To return to God means to return to those in communion with God. The visible sign of these individuals is the Church.

Moreover, since the sin occurred in history, this return to the Church must also be historical. This can only occur specifically in the sacrament of reconciliation because God, the Holy Spirit has chosen to be one with the Church community and because that community has designated the sacrament as the means for the sinner to return. Thus, one must go through the community on earth back to God because, as was stated above, this was in the divine plan. In fact, one can see the consistency of this plan when he or she notes that God, wanting nothing to separate God and humanity, came as the Holy Spirit to live within people on earth. God chose to become an inseparable part of those on earth who share Love.

Finally, the sinner must go to those he or she has offended that are joined to God in heaven, in purgatory, and on earth. All are joined as a communion of saints and are affected by the sin of those who were baptized into this communion. Specifically, the sinner must go to his or her brothers and sisters to say "I'm sorry" for the particular offense against them in order to receive their forgiveness. Since the sinner cannot go to all who were offended, he or she must go to the priest who represents them. It would definitely be a genuinely appropriate action if the sinner could ask forgiveness, in particular, of those directly hurt. And, if feasible, this is highly encouraged. However, all who are indirectly offended by sin cannot be physically reached by the sinner. Therefore, God has set up individuals in the Church with the authority to heal and forgive while representing all others in the community.

DOES MAKING A PERFECT ACT OF
LOVE TAKE THE PLACE OF THE SACRAMENT?

Restoring one's union with God in a perfect act of love has been traditionally accepted by the Church as a moment when forgiveness can occur. Therefore, one might say that it is obvious that the sacrament of reconciliation is not necessary. On the contrary, for this perfect act of love to bring forgiveness, the Church has always recognized the need for the intention to confess serious sin at the

next suitable occasion.⁵⁵ In fact, the Church has always considered this intention to confess to be included in a perfect act of love.⁵⁶ It is precisely this intention to confess that is equivalent to seeking forgiveness from the Church community.⁵⁷ That is, even though a person can return to God and be forgiven in the privacy of his or her bedroom, it is only valid if that moment also represents a return to the Church. By a perfect act of love and the intention to confess at the next suitable occasion, the sinner has begun his or her return to God and the Church. In this moment, God's Spirit can return to the person because community is once again forming. This is true since the contrition here is considered to be part of the sacrament itself even though it does not occur in front of the priest.⁵⁸

And yet, we must recall that this return to God and the Church has not completely begun until it has become a living communal love.

The question arises here whether anyone other than a priest could grant this forgiveness. If a priest is not available and there is danger of death, the question of God's work through another Christian remains an open one that will not be considered here.⁵⁹

Particularly, the most important element in our reasoning is that the sinner must be, in all cases, reunited to the whole Christ, including all those who are joined to

Him, in order for the reconciliation to be complete. In the case of the perfect act of love, the intention to confess encompasses a reaching out in repentance to the whole Christ. The beginnings of the fullness of reconciliation occur when the sinner is reunited to others on earth who are the Body of Christ. This occurs at the moment when priest and penitent demonstrate visibly and historically a reconciliation in the sacrament. It is a symbol containing the actual reality of the two being reconciled. It is the forgiving Church welcoming back the repenting Church.

Here is specifically another reason why the sacrament is necessary. This community which has been offended by the serious sinner's wrongdoing must, in its own particular history, forgive the harm done toward it, in order for a total forgiveness of sin to occur. The sacrament of reconciliation is necessary to definitively include the community's forgiveness.

Likewise, forgiveness consists in not only being forgiven, but simultaneously being willing to forgive all the offenses of others. As Jesus taught us to pray in the Our Father, we always ask to be forgiven as we forgive others. Thus, the sinner must specifically return to the community in a gesture of reconciliation which manifests his or her love and forgiveness of those he or she has offended as well as those who have offended the sinner. Ordinarily, it is only by willingly returning to the community through

the priest that the sinner concretizes this unconditional forgiveness of the community. If he or she is unwilling to forgive others, the penitent is choosing to remain bound outside of the community.

More specifically, in the Catholic's day to day life, this means the Catholic must be willing to forgive his or her mother, father, spouse, child, boss, supervisor, friend, and whoever may have caused him or her pain through their sinfulness. In a community weakened by sin, the willingness to return to the sacrament is a necessary expression by the sinner which says "I forgive all of you who by your weakness have harmed me in any way. I am willing to forgive, forget, and reunite in love with all of you as I ask for your pardon in my serious offense against you." Thus, the sacrament is the only ordinary way to complete forgiveness, not only since the community must forgive the sinner, but also since the sinner must forgive the community.

The reason becomes even clearer when one realizes that often the sinner's unwillingness to acknowledge his or her sinfulness is because he or she blames others. That is, the unrepentant sinner will not receive the sacrament because he or she is unwilling to accept the community. The unrepentant sinner is blaming the community for his or her wrongdoing. To be repentant, then, the sinner must visibly return willing to forgive his or her community.

Still another very important reason why the sacrament alone is a necessary sign and means of restoration is that the serious sinner needs to recognize the gravity of his or her offense. One can only fully recognize the guilt of an offense when he or she seeks forgiveness for it.⁶⁰ That is, a person must seek forgiveness through the Church in order to recognize the damage sin has caused. In a world confused and uncertain about where sin really is ⁶¹, the person must go through the process of reconciliation in order to truly understand his or her guilt. The process itself is needed to re-orientate the person to goodness. Unless the sinner fully acknowledges the extent of his or her guilt by completely going through the process of reconciliation, he or she will progressively cover over or blur the full extent of personal sinfulness. That is, human beings tend to minimize their failings and lose sight of the nature of their sins unless they confront them in the full process of denouncing them.

Following from this, individuals cannot just go through the repentance process in their minds and hearts. The full process must be concretely expressed in visible human action. Day to day experiences show that it is only when certain things are expressed concretely in this world that they become historical reality and not simply an interior intention. To seek forgiveness from God and others, the serious sinner needs to go beyond intentions.

Because of this, the sacrament of reconciliation, specifically in each of its four essential parts--contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution -- must be expressed historically. We will explore very specifically these four signs in the following paragraphs to show how it is only through the total sign of all four of these realities that the serious sinner has the means to reconciliation.

Before beginning with this, however, we will explore more fully the nature of a sign which is essential to the understanding of this thesis. A sign is actually both the outward appearance and also part of the reality that is made visible. In the sacrament of reconciliation, the signs themselves produce the reality as well as point to them.⁶² That is, if the sign is not given, the reality does not occur. Using the specific signs will help to make this clearer.

CONTRITION IS A NECESSARY SIGN OF RECONCILIATION

First, in order to be forgiven serious sin, a sinner has to reject his or her sin and resolve never to sin again. This is called contrition. It flows from the sinner's love of God and is expressed in repentance. Contrition has to be expressed to those who have been hurt since they are the only ones who can forgive the wrong done to them. If this sign is never expressed, then it does not become reality.

The visible sign of this contrition or metanoia takes place in the sacrament of reconciliation.⁶³ Thus, the sacrament and this sign in particular are necessary. This sign is specifically necessary as a part of the sacrament since the seriously sinful Catholic experiences contrition as a member of the Church. As Michael Schmaus says:

Confession and conversion from mortal sin must be expressed in a special personal confession. This is so because a man experiences contrition as a member of the Church, to which he is responsible. For the sin of the member does not remain enclosed within the sphere of the individual ego. ...it involves the whole community; it is an offense against the 'we' of the Church, and must therefore be expiated before the community.⁶⁴

Thus, contrition has to be expressed specifically to the Church.

Most often, contrition begins at an earlier time in the silence of the sinner's heart. It becomes full contrition before God and the Church only in the outward sign or sacrament. If the motivation for the sinner's return is less than full love, it is perfected in the sacrament.⁶⁵ It is very important to realize that the interior contrition must be expressed to be complete and full contrition. One can understand this by comparing it to all the plans with the best intentions that individuals hold in their hearts. They will never become reality until each individual actually does them. So also with contrition-- it is not full contrition until it is expressed to those from whom one needs to ask forgiveness. As mentioned above,

this ordinarily only occurs in the sacrament of reconciliation when it is expressed historically to Christ and His Church who are represented by the priest.

CONFESSION OF SINS IS
A NECESSARY SIGN OF THE SACRAMENT

The confession of serious sin is also an essential sign and reality demanded if serious sin is to be forgiven. This particular act of the penitent is the manifestation of one's sins to the priest in order to receive forgiveness. The penitent's specific expression of his sins, even as difficult as it is at times, is the historical moment that expresses his or her striving for conversion since it is an action that demonstrates publicly that he or she wants to return and to be accepted back by those who have been offended. In daily life, one can recognize that the sinner actually withdraws from the community in his or her selfish acts. When the penitent tells his or her sins to the priest, this particular moment is an outward sign of the sinner's actual voluntary return to the community. It is essential because it is the first outward sign to the Church that the sinner wishes to return.

Going further, the sinner must acknowledge the sin and visibly seek the acceptance of those he or she hurt in order, first of all, to take full responsibility for the act. And, secondly, as we mentioned earlier, he or she must

confess so that the injured parties know they have been wronged and are given the opportunity to forgive. If the sinner did not historically tell to God and the Church the sins that were committed, he or she would visibly stand before God and the Church with nothing to be forgiven. Since this is a false statement about the serious sinner's own life, he or she must outwardly state his or her sin. By doing so, the sinner provides the Church with the matter needed to make forgiveness factual and effective in this particular sinner's life.⁶⁷ Without this matter, there could be no forgiveness given. Thus, the sinner must necessarily relate his or her serious sin within the appropriate sacrament of reconciliation.

What is essential here is that the sins must be acknowledged historically by the penitent to those united in the Holy Spirit before the forgiveness can occur historically.

SATISFACTION IS ALSO A NECESSARY SIGN OF THE SACRAMENT

Satisfaction or penance is another necessary sign that is part of the total sign of the sacrament of reconciliation. It is an outward actualization of the true conversion of the person. Satisfaction or penance here refers to the specifically given requirement by the priest within the sacrament. Additional self-imposed penances can

work toward the same goals as satisfaction. Satisfaction is particularly necessary in forgiveness of serious sin because the person must complete his or her conversion. Common ways for the sinner to make satisfaction are through personal acts, through positive changes in behavior, and through reparation of injuries.⁶⁸ Since satisfaction carries the conversion out of the heart and into action, it makes conversion a living reality in the Christian's whole life.⁶⁹ Satisfaction is demanded because the sinner must return to the Christian lifestyle which he or she had abandoned. Without satisfaction, the person does not yet bear fruit. Without fruit, the Christian has not yet begun to function fully as a member of the Church. Thus, the sinner must begin to make positive, good actions that once again evidence and begin anew the active life of a Christian.

Even more, the once active Christian who seriously sinned must do something sufficient to balance the wrong that resulted from the sin. He or she has to repair any injury caused to others or to self from his or her sin. In order to be reconciled with God, oneself, and others, the sinner has to overcome the separation that sin has caused. The sinner can only do this by bringing his or her interior conversion to fruition in acts of penance.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, the sinner is often one of the greatest victims of his or her own sin. The sinner causes damage to his or her self through personal sin. For

example, sin can spawn a more selfish attitude, a greater leaning toward desire, a gnawing drive to give up due to previous failure, and even a loss of true happiness in one's life. Satisfaction is a necessary action that helps the sinner to repair this damage. In forms such as self-denial, prayer, and works of charity, it leads the sinner away from self, it restores self-discipline, it removes bad habits, and it helps the penitent to experience once again that joyful feeling from being a fruitful and productive Christian. Satisfaction, then, restores what was lost because of sin.

It was stressed earlier that others are also victims of our sins. The new Rite of Reconciliation suggests penances which particularly repair the social breaks of sin. It recommends actions that serve one's neighbor and that involve mercy.⁷¹

ABSOLUTION IS A NECESSARY

SIGN OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Absolution is the fourth reality and sign of the total sign of the sacrament of reconciliation that is necessary for the serious sinner. Absolution is the act of the priest that removes the guilt of sin and thus returns the person to the community of shared love between the Trinity and the Church. Traditionally, it is the moment when the priest states the words of absolution in the

sacrament. If the form of the sacrament would change, what is essential here is that in order for the person to be forgiven, he or she must be accepted back into the community.

To understand the necessity of absolution, it is important to first examine the words of absolution. Specifically, the priest says "... I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."⁷² To absolve has its literal roots in the Latin words meaning to "loose from" or release from something. In these words, one can see the Church and God loosing the sinner who was bound by his or her serious sin outside the life of the saved community.⁷³

As the words further indicate, the priest, as representative of the Church, looses the sinner from his or her sins specifically in the name of the Trinity.⁷⁴ God alone forgives, but it is through the Church that forgiveness is given. In the human words of absolution, God grants forgiveness and gives Himself in love and mercy.⁷⁵ The priest's statement "I" indicates that forgiveness is definitely coming through him as representative of that Church.

When the priest absolves the sinner through the words of absolution, there is one action. It is a single action that is both from the Church and from God. In the words of absolution, the priest, a member of the Church, looses the

sinner on behalf of God. In this one action, both offended parties who share one Life -- God and the Church -- are present to forgive the transgressor his or her sins. The sinner is restored to this Life in a full sense at this moment. This visible sign becomes the reality of the forgivingness of the Church in God's name.⁷⁶ In this moment, the sinner is no longer bound outside the life of the community but joins again into fellowship with the community and the joy that comes with sharing this Life.⁷⁷

Most importantly, here is the major reason that the sacrament of reconciliation is necessary in cases of serious sin. The sinner has historically acknowledged the serious sin by manifesting his or her sin to the priest, has expressed visibly his or her sorrow to the parties offended (contrition), and has shown the offended parties a willingness to restore or repair the damages caused through sin (satisfaction). However, the reconciliation cannot occur unless the offended parties are, historically, reconciled to the sinner. The sign and reality of this historical moment of welcome, forgiveness, and reunion takes place in the sacrament when the priest looses the sinner through the words of absolution.

Accompanying these words, the priest sometimes uses the outward sign of imposing his hand on the person's head. This is a sign that signifies the giving of the Holy Spirit whose presence brings the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁸ It is

because of this Spirit that the Apostles and their successors are able to forgive.⁷⁹ In the words of absolution, one notes that not only the Holy Spirit, but also the entire Trinity becomes present.⁸⁰ It is precisely when the sinner is loosed from sin that he or she shares again communal love with the Trinity and the Church. In the words of absolution, as stated above, Church is present in the "I" of the priest, God is present since it is in the name of the Trinity that absolving is done, and the penitent is present in the "you". These words form the reality that is occurring. Outside the sacrament, this cannot happen except for a special intervention on God's part. Thus, each and every Catholic who commits serious sin must return to God and the Church through the gateway of sacramental reconciliation.

Two final comments will be made before closing this chapter. Although the Church is the visible sign and presence of the Spirit in the world, sinfulness within the Church has scarred the clarity of this sign. Nevertheless, the Spirit is the life of that Church and the members are the visible Body of that Spirit. Therefore, the sinner must return for forgiveness to that physical presence where God's Spirit dwells visibly in the world, i.e. the Church.

Secondly, many have referred to the peace of the Church that is given in the sacrament of reconciliation.⁸¹ This peace is the presence of the Holy Spirit, now given by

the Church, accepted by the sinner, and living again in the sinner. The Eastern Church emphasizes the connection of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness by representing penitence in specific symbolism on Pentecost.⁸² The successors of the Apostles, then, continue to reach out to others today, giving peace and mirroring Christ's actions, because of this Spirit that they received. Sent by Christ, as He was sent by His Father, they give peace to the sinner, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit they received and now share, they declare the sinner no longer bound but once again in union with God.⁸³ The sinner now once again shares in the peace of the Church which is Christ's peace -- the Holy Spirit present in the faithful.

CHAPTER VII

BEING FIRM AND STEADFAST IN THE TRUTH

In this final chapter, recognizing that the Church is always in need of reforming itself, it is necessary to examine more deeply what the members of the Church need to be and to do in order to help each other to experience and to actualize the Body of Christ in the world. In the final analysis, if the Church can in fact live as the Body of Christ, the need for a sacramental return to the Body will not only become conceptually accepted, but will prove to be experientially sound.

One of the most important goals that needs to be implemented in the Church is to educate its members. By helping individuals to understand what the Church is meant to be, what the nature of sin is, and how reconciliation can be achieved, the Church will be able to assist each member in moving toward that reconciliation. And yet, knowing the way to go is not sufficient. Catholics must live out what the Church is.

In addition to education through knowledge and changes in individual lives, the Church must avoid its past shortcomings. As much as possible, the Church cannot be or appear to be authoritarian. In presenting laws, reasons for the laws should be given as much as possible. In helping

other Catholics to comply to what is true and best, presenting the reasons behind the laws is not only beneficial to others, but is also demanded. Anything less than the best reasoning may ultimately turn into an obstacle or stumbling block to individual Catholics.

Moreso, in their relationships with others, Catholics must continually avoid any type of condemning attitude. If Christ as leader would not condemn the adulterous woman caught in the act of adultery, then His followers must be faithful to His direction in their own actions.

Above all, and this is the most important direction the Church must take, She must be firm and steadfast in the truth. Even at the risk of appearing authoritarian, she must continue to firmly confront others in their weakness and sinfulness. In loving, gentle ways, Christians must challenge others to be responsible for their lives, to recognize how their actions affect others, and to admit their own guilt. As a principal with many years of experience in Catholic schools expressed to me, many of our people do not grow in their faith precisely because parents, friends, and teachers have allowed them to get by. That is, no one has sufficiently demanded of them in their lives that they be responsible for their own actions. Rather than lovingly telling their friends, children, students, etc. when they see self-destructive or sinful behavior, many individuals tend to let it go because of the inconvenience

that being truthful would cause both their friends and themselves. Without loving challenge, the community will not continue to grow and individuals will leave the Church. Like some of the individuals depicted close to Christ in Michelangelo's Last Judgement scene, Christians must reach down, with loving confrontation, to those whose sin leads them to evil, and pull them back up to Christ. Even more, this leads to a very important need in the Church. People in authority, especially principals, priests, parents, and teachers, must more and more each day treat youth as good and equal members of society. A colleague of mine remarked that many adults treat our youth today as if they were presumed guilty. My own observations, especially through my years in education, confirm that many adults do in fact block the goodness in our youth by too often finding the negative in their actions and too seldom affirming their basic goodness. By listening to youth, trusting them, and understanding them, adults can affirm them in their goodness and give them the freedom to admit their mistakes and sins.

Going further, the Church must be firm and steadfast in the truth in its explanation of law and morality. Sin involves both the objective law and the subjective movement toward living out that law. Each person's life has psychological and historical complexities. While denouncing any behaviour that makes excuses or blames either the past

or the present, the Church must acknowledge that individuals often go against the law or goodness because of unconscious motives, pressures, and ignorance that can both lessen personal freedom and, in fact, lessen personal guilt. God alone, then, can determine the extent of an individual's guilt.

At the same time, Catholics need to help each other to discover and remove the obstacles, pressures, and attitudes that continue to enslave them in sin. With this in mind, the new rite for the sacrament of reconciliation has opened up the confessional to a face to face atmosphere where the priest can help the penitent to explore and remove the deeper attitudes and obstacles that lead to and perpetuate the person's sins. Church members, then, must, on a day to day basis, help each other to understand and remove not only sin but those personal and social conditions that predispose and pressure individuals toward sin.

Admittedly, to acknowledge the numerous influences that may lessen the guilt of sin is to risk that individuals, especially youth, will convert them to new excuses to continue sinning. More importantly, however, to do so is an act of trust in the individual that ultimately demands greater personal responsibility from him or her. That is, the particular individual is allowed to explore his or her own attitudes and background and consciously begin to remove personal obstacles while gaining greater control over

his or her choices. In helping others to discover greater control over unconscious motivators, Christians help each other to be more genuinely responsible for their own actions. When this risk is taken, it will lead both our youth and adults toward a more mature faith.

Being firm and steadfast in the truth also requires that the members of the Body of Christ admit their own sinfulness. It demands ongoing personal conversion. Christians who are honest about their sins do not as readily become scandals to others and are less likely to be self-righteous.

Oftentimes, those individuals who are unwilling to admit their own sins are those who are the most vindictive and harsh toward the failings of others. These individuals do not build the community, but rather damage the self-respect of those they verbally attack. In contrast, those that admit their guilt will be able to avoid the psychological trap of trying to remove their guilt by making another person the scapegoat for their sins. In accepting and forgiving their own sinfulness, they will be able to accept and forgive the sinfulness of others. If each member of the Church moves in this direction, the community will become supportive and accepting of the serious sinner. This, in turn, will free and strengthen him or her to admit his or her own sinfulness and to return to the community.

Another extremely important responsibility that lies with each member of the Church is to continually use the individual gifts that the Spirit has given him or her. In particular, each person must reach out in his or her own way and history to help those who, for whatever reasons, stand on the outside of the community.

One group, in particular, that must be reached are those Catholics who do not go to Church weekly. In my own experience as teacher, many of these individuals do not really experience, in a significant way, the community, because they do not worship with the community. Unfortunately, they neither realize what they are missing nor do they feel they are missing anything. The Church has a responsibility to help youth to understand the importance of the community and the value of weekly Mass.

Moreover, the members of Christ's Body must use their gifts to encourage both prayer and penance in the family, in groups of friends, and wherever two or more are gathered. Penance must become an ongoing part of the Church's action. Specifically, Catholics need to acknowledge the lingering effects and destructive habits of sin that need to be healed through ongoing penance.

In conclusion, the Church needs to be an assembly that celebrates Her gifts, especially the sacraments of reconciliation and eucharist. The Church can and should rejoice that God has given Her the power to forgive sin.

God has allowed Her to be an instrument of divine forgiveness. The community should be proud of this. It should emphasize the beauty and joy of the Eucharist that it have been given. Greater joy with the increased recognition of these gifts from God is something that can build the community and distinguish it. With lives of greater celebration, this community will be able to offer something significant to the serious sinner who is seeking to return.

Finally as Christians continually reform themselves to live lives of love, peace, forgiveness, and unity, they believe that they will become day by day more clearly what they are called to be -- the Body of Christ. By striving for greater humility as they live firmly and steadfastly in the truth, the Body of Christians will become the gentle breeze that is God's Spirit of Truth. As they risk the truth with each other, they also will be opening themselves up to and increasing even more within themselves the Spirit of Truth Who is the life of their community, namely, the Holy Spirit.

EXCURSUS

BINDING AND LOOSING IN THE CHURCH

Because of the nature of serious sin, the Church reacts to the condition that the sinner has put him or herself into. The practice of binding and loosing has had various forms through history, but it has always remained in some form. This is because binding is essential to the process of repentance. It should be noted that venial sin does not separate a person from the grace of the Church and, therefore, requires neither a full restoration of grace nor a full reconciliation to the Church.⁸⁴ Thus, binding is more specifically an action in response to mortal sin.

According to Karl Rahner, binding is one of the "forgotten truths" of the church. For him and others, the power to bind and to loose does not, as many think today, refer to the forgiving or not forgiving of sins. This popular interpretation is in fact not specific to the context in which Scriptures were written.⁸⁵ Actually, Matthew uses the words of Jesus -- "forbidding" and "allowing" (binding and loosing) in the classical text, Matthew 18: 15-20, to indicate the rabbinical practice of imposing banishment or lifting it. Therefore, the original sense of this text was some sort of banishment. It was not

intended, as many have thought, as a proof text to the Church's authority to forgive sin. This interpretation, however, has existed since Tertullian.⁸⁶

Developing this concept, then, Rahner recognizes that the power to bind and to loose is not another statement about the keys given to Peter. This power to bind and to loose spoken of in Matthew 16: 19, 18: 18, and John 20 (a power to forgive sins) must be seen, as he notes, in the Jewish context at that time. At length, he says:

In the light of more precise exegesis based on this it turns out that the state of being bound by sin signifies subjection to demonic powers. Thus, applying this to the act of the Church, 'to bind' ('on earth') signifies 'consigning the individual concerned to the power of Satan' (1 Cor 5: 5; 1 Tim 1: 20) and so exclusion from the community of the saved, while 'to loose' ('on earth') signifies the dissolving of this state of demonic bondage and so being restored to the community of the saved, the covenant people with its power to ransom. The Church, therefore, has the power to forgive sins ('in heaven').⁸⁷

Thus, the power to bind or to loose meant either to release a person into the power of Satan or to allow a person into the ransomed community. It is in this sense that there is a power to forgive sins. It is in the sense that being a part of God's ransomed community is where the individual is saved.

Moreover, St. Paul's actions point to this understanding of the power to forgive sins. When Paul encounters the serious sinner who refuses to repent,

He orders the Corinthians to hand over the sinner to Satan. An act of this kind certainly excludes the man

from the Church. It is clear that this binding is for the sake of loosing; the man is condemned in order that he might be saved.⁸⁸

Here, Paul reacts to serious sin by excluding the person from the Body.

A further very important point can also be seen here. The Church only binds a person in order to loose him or her.⁸⁹ Ultimately, the goal of binding is only to lead a fellow Christian to conversion and back to the community. Paul continually exhorted the early Church community to pray for the serious sinner and to accept the person back when he or she repented.⁹⁰ Even today, exclusion of the sinner only applies to the person who refuses to repent. The serious sinner can return to the community at any time by demonstrating repentance. The Church today will not refuse the sacrament of reconciliation to any sinner who sincerely seeks to reform his or her life.

This practice of banishing members from the community was prefigured in the Old Testament with those who did not keep the covenant. In the New Testament, as we saw above, St. Paul used it only when all other efforts to convert the sinner had failed.⁹¹

In addition, it is very significant that the sins that St. Paul and the early Church saw as excluding a member from the kingdom of God were exactly the same sins for which the Church community needed to expel the sinner.⁹² Binding in the Church occurs as a necessity. That is, the person

must be bound to show that he or she is already outside the kingdom of God and the community's saving power. The binding, in effect, notifies the member of where he or she is at. It is sinning that has put the person there. This act of binding can be an incentive to the Christian to work on returning to God's kingdom.

In the practice of the Qumran community, one can see a good analogy of the New Testament practice of banning the sinner. This group referred to itself as "saints". It also used the concept of the "temple" by applying it to each member in a personalistic way. If a person sinned, he or she would be excluded from the group. The purpose of this exclusion was to lead the member to contrition and then re-entry into the community. To express contrition meant the member was accepted back in. To refuse to be contrite could mean permanent exclusion for the member.⁹³

Throughout the history of the Church, this binding, in some form of banishment or exclusion, continued to be common practice. During the post-apostolic period, those who committed serious sin and would not repent were expelled.⁹⁴ Binding was also evident during the patristic days within the order of the penitents.⁹⁵ In those early centuries, the person who was excommunicated through mortal sin was still a member of the body, but no longer had the fullness of membership. This excommunication was made explicit in the community by the ban from receiving the

Eucharist. The sinner entered a special group and performed penances with the guidance of the Church. After sufficient penance, the person was reconciled with the Church which had been praying for him or her.⁹⁶

In the fifth century, the form of binding continued to be the removal of the baptismal rights of attending the Mass and receiving the Eucharist.⁹⁷ Later, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, binding included the forms of imposed penances and juridical excommunication. Here, the Church had the power either to exclude or admit the sinner in regard to full membership. The sinner was bound into making satisfaction to the Church because he or she had separated him or her self from that Church.⁹⁸ Toward the time of Trent, this practice of binding and loosing used satisfaction and considered it to be positive action. Rather than something negative, satisfaction was seen as something positive that the penitent did as the condition for his or her justification.⁹⁹ Thus the person was bound by a certain penance and he or she could show willingness to be loosed by performing the prescribed penance.

THE CHURCH CONTINUES TO BIND THE SINNER TODAY

This binding and loosing continues to be a part of the Church today. The serious sinner separates himself or herself from the Church and, at the same time, the Church recognizes that the sinner has already excluded himself or

herself from the community.¹⁰⁰ The sinner is excluded from the Eucharist¹⁰¹ and required to receive the sacrament of reconciliation as soon as he or she is able before returning to that Eucharist. These forms of binding show how sin is not just individual but also involves the Church.¹⁰² This form of a ban is lifted when the Church reconciles the sinner to Herself.¹⁰³ The sacrament of reconciliation today includes both this exclusion from the Church and later reconciliation.¹⁰⁴

Edward Schillebeeckx agrees with Rahner that it is the Church's lifting of this visible ban that brings about the forgiveness of sin. In earlier times, the Church lifted the ban through absolution after the satisfaction or penance was completed by the sinner and this indicated that the sinner was loosed both on earth and in heaven.¹⁰⁵ Today also, in being restored to the community, the person is, at the same time, given divine forgiveness.

The Church, recognizing the need for penance, continues to bind the sinner today by demanding certain penitential actions or specific satisfaction.

Nevertheless, Catholics today must realize that binding is the natural consequence to serious sin. It is not an arbitrary act of an authoritarian Church. It is, as mentioned above, the sinner who already separates himself or herself through personal sin. When the Church bans, then, it is not something that it adds on. It acknowledges

that the sinner has cut himself or herself off from the fullness of grace that comes with belonging to the Church. It also publically manifests that person's condition.106

More specifically, exclusion from the Eucharist is a particular reaction that is demanded because of the serious sin. To come together in union and to share Christ's body and to participate in the love of God presupposes a unity and good relationship with the members of that Church.107 Serious sin has severed that relationship in a significant way. By chosen actions, the serious sinner has shut himself or herself off from the love of the community. Consequently, he or she must now make a reconciliatory act in order to return to that same love with the community.

Catholics today must recognize that the Church continues to bind through penances because they are demanded in the healing process of the penitent. This is discussed more fully in the text.

To avoid any misconceptions regarding penance and satisfaction, it should be emphasized that these do not buy or earn forgiveness. Rather, forgiveness comes as a result of Jesus who shed His Blood for the forgiveness of sins. It is actually Jesus' redemption that brings us the forgiveness for our sins.108

Finally, binding is a natural reaction to sin because it visibly points out the lie that exists. To be Church is to be a sign of God's life and love in the world. Each

member must be for others a visible sign of this love and the interior presence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁹ The serious sinner is living a lie by saying that he or she is still this sign of love. Therefore, the Church must make this countersign visible to the world. The sinner himself or herself can be the Church doing this by self-exclusion from the Eucharist or when he or she returns to the sacrament of reconciliation. In this way, others will be able to see clearly the difference between God's love and misrepresentations of that love. The binding, then, is necessary to reveal the lie behind the serious sin.

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NOTES

1. This thesis will only analyze one current experience of and celebration of the sacrament of penance. Within the Roman Catholic communion today other forms exist that do not, for example, include absolution. This thesis does not include within its perspective the Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran sources.
2. cf. Matthew 25:31-46.
3. cf. I John 4:20.
4. For a development of this theme, refer to the writings of Karl Rahner, S.J., especially one of his last books entitled The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor, Trans. Robert Barr (New York: Crossroad, 1983).
5. Pope John Paul II, On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1985), pp. 48-49.
6. Ibid.
7. For a fuller explanation of the practice of binding, refer to the Excursus at the end of this paper.
8. C. Dumont, S.J., "La reconciliation avec l'Eglise et la necessite' de l'aveu sacramental," Nouvelle Revue Theologique 81 (June 1959): 580-581.
9. This is the paraphrase of a story told by Fr. James Barta, current president of Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa.
10. McKenzie, John L., The Dictionary of the Bible (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), p. 133.
11. The New American Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 5 (hereafter all biblical references will be from this edition unless otherwise stated).
12. Link, Mark, S.J., These Stones Will Shout, (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 41.
13. Pope John Paul II, On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1985), pp. 48-49.

14. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., gen. ed., "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," The Documents of Vatican II (New York: The America Press, 1966), paragraphs 34-36, pp. 232-233 (hereafter cited as Vatican II).
15. James F. McCue, "Penance as a Separate Sacramental Sign," in Sacramental Reconciliation, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 58.
16. Michael Schmaus, The Church as Sacrament, trans. Mary Lederer, in the series Dogma (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1975), pp. 225-226.
17. cf. James 1:15.
18. George McCauley, S.J., "The Ecclesial Nature of the Sacrament of Penance," Worship 36, no.4 1962, p.213.
19. Ibid.; this idea is also developed by Laurence Cantwell, S.J., "Pax Ecclesiae: Pax Dei; or, The Church and the Sacrament of Penance," The CLERGY REVIEW 48, no. 10 (October 1963): 614.
20. McCauley, p. 214.
21. Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," paragraphs 7-8, pp. 21-22.
22. Ibid., paragraph 7, pp. 21-22.
23. Ibid.
24. cf. The Acts of the Apostles 2:1 - 9:18.
25. Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," paragraph 7, pp. 21-22.
26. Karl Rahner, S.J., "Forgotten Truths Concerning the Sacrament of Penance," Theological Investigations, vol. 2, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Darton, Longman, & Todd Ltd., 1963), p. 137 (hereafter cited as Rahner, vol. 2).
27. Paul Anciaux, "The Ecclesial Dimension of Penance," Theology Digest 11, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 36.
28. McCauley, p. 214.
29. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 173.
30. Henri de Lubac, S.J., Catholicism (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1950).

31. Paul F. Palmer, S.J., "The Theology of the 'Res et Sacramentum'," in Readings in Sacramental Theology, ed. C. Stephen Sullivan, F.S.C. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 104.
32. Ibid.
33. Dumont, p. 584.
34. Palmer, p. 105.
35. Pope Pius XII, The Mystical Body of Jesus Christ (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1964), pp. 45-46.
36. The Rites of the Catholic Church, rev. by decree of the Second Vatican Council and pub. by authority of Pope Paul VI (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 344-345 (hereafter referred to as Rites).
37. Rahner, vol. 2, pp. 157-158.
38. Karl Rahner, S.J., "Penance as an Additional Act of Reconciliation With the Church," Theological Investigations, vol. 10, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), p. 130 (hereafter cited as Rahner, vol. 10).
39. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 169.
40. Cited in Zoltan Alszeghy, S.I., "Carita' ecclesiale nella penitenza cristiana," Gregorianum 44 (1963): 6-26.
41. Bernhard Poschmann, Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, trans. and revised Francis Courtney, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 59.
42. Bartholomaeus Xiberta, O.Carm.C., Clavis Ecclesiae (Romae: Apud Collegium S. Alberti, 1922). This is Xiberta's main thesis.
43. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 171.
44. Rites, p. 349.
45. Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 94-95 (hereafter cited as Rahner, Church).
46. John Paul II, p. 121.
47. Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," paragraph 11, p.28.

48. For a clearer understanding of serious sin in relation to the Church, refer to the Excursus after chapter seven dealing with the Church's binding of the serious sinner.
49. John Paul II, p. 115; St. Thomas Aquinas, Penance, in Summa Theologiae, vol. 60, trans. by Reginald Masterson, O.P., and T.C. O'Brien, O.P. (New York and Eyre & Spottiswoode, London: Blackfriars in Conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 23.
50. Carl Peter, "Integral Confession and the Council of Trent," in Sacramental Reconciliation, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 107, and John Paul II, p. 115.
51. Carl Peter, p. 107; J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J., ed., The Christian Faith (Dublin and Cork: The Mercier Press, 1976), p. 444 (hereafter cited as The Christian Faith).
52. cf. Romans 6: 3-11.
53. Alszeghy, pp. 23-24.
54. John Paul II, pp.27-122
55. Alszeghy, p. 26.
56. The Christian Faith, p. 436.
57. Alszeghy, p. 27.
58. The Christian Faith, p. 436.
59. Ibid., pp. 429-435.
60. Schmaus, pp. 222-233.
61. cf. Karl Rahner's writings on sin.
62. Rahner, Church, p. 34.
63. John Paul II, p. 119.
64. Schmaus, p. 223.
65. John Paul II, p. 119.
66. Jose' Ramos-Regidor, "'Reconciliation' in the Primitive Church and Its Lessons for Theology and Pastoral Practice Today," trans. Paul Burns, in Sacramental Reconciliation, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Herder and Herder,

1971), pp. 85-86.

67. Rahner, vol. 2, pp. 160-170.

68. Rites, p. 345.

69. John Paul II, p. 11.

70. Ibid.

71. Rites , p. 351.

72. Ibid. p. 362.

73. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (New York: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1963), p. 149.

74. Rites, p. 362.

75. Schmaus, pp. 243-244.

76. Rahner, vol. 2, p.171.

77. cf. I John 1: 3-4.

78. Rites, p. 351.

79. The Christian Faith, pp. 433-434.

80. John Paul II, p. 122.

81. cf. Rahner, vol.10, p.125-136; Rahner, vol. 2, p. 168; and, Ramos-Regidor, pp. 81-83.

82. Franz Nikolasch, "The Sacrament of Penance: Learning from the East," trans. Mark Hollebhone, in Sacramental Reconciliation, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 71-72.

83. Schillebeeckx, p. 149.

84. Bartholomaeus Xiberta, O.Carm.C., Clavis Ecclesiae (Romae: Apud Collegium S. Alberti, 1922), p. 89.

85. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 137.

86. Schmaus, pp. 203-204.

87. Rahner, vol. 10, p. 135.

88. J. Richard Quinn, The Sacraments of Growth and Renewal (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1969), p. 84.
89. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 142.
90. Schmaus, p. 202.
91. Ibid., p. 201.
92. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 143.
93. Schmaus, p. 201.
94. Ibid., p. 206.
95. Alszeghy, p. 23.
96. Rahner, vol. 10, p. 136.
97. Schmaus, p. 218.
98. Rahner, vol. 10, pp. 142-143.
99. Alszeghy, p. 22.
100. Rahner, vol. 2, p. 167.
101. Ibid., p. 148.
102. Schmaus, p. 215.
103. Rahner, Church, pp. 93-94.
104. Schmaus, p. 237.
105. Schillebeeckx, p. 149.
106. Rahner, vol. 2, pp. 138-167.
107. Schmaus, p. 215.
108. John Paul II, p. 123.
109. Rahner, Church, p. 93; cf. also Laurence Cantwell, S.J., "Pax Ecclesiae: Pax Dei; or, The Church and the Sacrament of Penance," The CLERGY REVIEW 48, no. 10 (October 1963): 615.

APPROVAL SHEET

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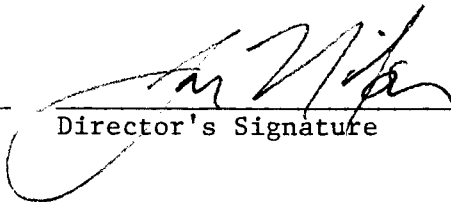
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14 October 1988

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Director's Signature

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jon Nilson", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.