

concerns of ordinary Christians. As Parker says, on his own hypothesis, there was in existence at least by soon after the middle of the first century a gospel which contained accounts of the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ. The great majority of contemporary scholars date Mark between 60 and 70 A.D., and most prefer a date after 65¹⁷. Now elaboration of the kind which, on the theory of Marcan priority, Mark must have undergone before being incorporated into Matthew demands that Matthew cannot have been written long before the end of the first century—a date which Parker himself gives as the most likely one for the final Greek version. If Luke is not dated before 80, the notion that the birth and resurrection narratives are pious legend becomes much more plausible than it is on the K hypothesis.

It is probably untrue to say that the theory of Marcan priority has definitely been proved to be false. But the arguments which the authors I have mentioned have brought against it, and the theories which they have suggested to replace it, at least merit serious consideration.

¹⁷It is generally agreed that the present ending of Mark (16.9 ff) did not form part of the original text.

Penance and the Teacher¹

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The liturgy, or work, of the Church has two aspects under which, in the proper sense, we may regard it, and this because whilst Christ in his physical body was incarnate as a single man, in his ecclesial body he is in some indwelling sense incarnate in many men, and these men, 'the community of Christ's faithful', perforce act sometimes individually and sometimes corporately. But whether acting corporately or individually, they must, as members of the Church, manifest the work of the Church. The solemnization of the liturgy, enacted corporately

¹The substance of a paper read at the third conference on teaching children the liturgy; Spode House, Oct. 1962.

through the hallowed traditions and forms of public worship, is obverse of what is commonly called the private life of the individual Catholic. The work of Christ is the work of the Church, and the work of the Church is manifested to the world in the lives of its members. Necessary as it is to study the mysterious, solemn and corporate expression of the liturgy, it is no less important to grasp the sacramental significance of the individual participation that each of us makes through his daily work in the liturgy of the Church and of Christ. The work undertaken by each of us expresses in some marvellous manner the transcendent work of Christ. Before considering the contribution made by the teacher to the work of Christ, it seems appropriate to say something about the place of penance in the liturgy.

It is the sacrament of peace. 'Peace of conscience and serenity', says the Council of Trent, 'with a lively sense of consolation habitually follow this reconciliation with God' (D.896); and Pius XII, in his first Easter sermon, said: 'It can only have been after a very grave decision that Christ our Lord decided that, on this day when He gave himself to be seen by His apostles for the first time since His resurrection, He would add to His salutation of peace and the most precious token of this peace, that is the sacrament of penance'. What is its essential element? The manuals of moral theology commonly answer this question in terms of matter and form, and this distinction is a most useful technical device and of great help in framing canonical and liturgical decrees, but it carries a risk, to which Fr Fransen, among others, has drawn attention,² 'that this terminology . . . may dangerously strengthen an interpretation of the sacraments which can only be described as mechanical', 'Until now', he adds, 'I have been unable to find any deep theological meaning in it'. What is it that, if it were lacking, would nullify penance? Without bread and wine there would be no eucharist, and without water no baptism, at least as we know them. There can be no sacrament of penance without sorrow. Such is the power of true sorrow that even before a man has come to confession, as soon indeed as he is truly sorry for his sin, it is removed and he has already received the effect of the sacrament. He cannot be forgiven *without*, but he may be forgiven *before* (as Père Roguet distinguishes) the sacrament. Apart from the directives of the Church, absolution may be necessary to supplement our dispositions. 'It is fitting', he says, 'that the Church should sanction visibly and unmistakably, and register in an official

²*Faith and the Sacraments* by P. F. Fransen, S.J. (Aquinas Paper No. 31; Blackfriars Publications.)

manner, the forgiveness which has perhaps already been given in the secret depths of the soul.³

What, I think, Père Roguet is getting at is that we need to distinguish carefully between confession and penance; the sacrament is called the sacrament of penance and not the sacrament of confession. The scriptures testify plainly to our Lord's institution of penance, and the tradition of the Church has accepted confession as the normal and divinely ordained manner of receiving the sacrament, but this is no reason why we should treat confession and penance as synonymous terms. It is not inconceivable that if Christianity had spread eastwards, instead of mainly westwards, many institutions of our Lord would have developed within the tradition of the Church in a radically different form from that with which we are familiar. In fact, it so happened that the Church emerged into the Graeco-Roman culture: the *pax Romana* took on a new meaning, and the popes found themselves not only successors of Peter in the apostolic see but also heirs of Caesar in the eternal city. That, I think, is why of all the sacraments it is the sacrament of penance, as we know it, that exhibits so firmly and unmistakably the features of law and juridical process that are endemic in our western civilisation. Such notions as 'tribunal' and 'determined offence' and 'penal sentence' permeate our concept of this sacrament (there are even reserved sins and a kind of appeals system), so that growing up in the atmosphere of a court-room confessional we tend to lose sight of the real nature of this sacrament. It is an important part of the sacramental purpose that the individual's sins should be forgiven, when after baptism he has lapsed from the high standards demanded of a Christian, but it is of at least equal importance that the Church, which on its human side is in some way open to infection by sin, almost as Christ bore the burden of men's sins, should constantly purge itself of impurities. The sin of the individual Catholic weakens the whole body of the faithful, and the reconciliation of the sinner cannot fail to benefit the whole Church.

The present discipline of the Church requires us to bring as necessary matter to confession all those mortal sins committed since baptism and not yet absolved in the prescribed canonical fashion, and these mortal sins are to be mentioned by their moral and theological species and by number. Whether one has committed a mortal sin in the sense that one has formally contracted the guilt is a very much more difficult thing

³Cf. *The Sacraments*, by A.-M. Roguet, O.P. (Aquinas Press). But cf. the article by H. McCabe in *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* for April 1963, pp. 408-10—ED.

to decide than whether one has committed a mortal sin in the sense that one has materially offended against the law. Because it is virtually impossible for the individual culprit to assess his own measure of formal guilt, and the degree to which it constitutes mortal sin, it is the usual practice for Catholics to mention in confession all matters in which they have transgressed the law—divine, natural or positive; that is to say we confess those actions which are known for materially grave offences, secure in the knowledge that if the formally grave element is lacking it is far from rendering our confession superfluous. At the same time what we cannot afford to forget is that our participation in the sacramental process of penance is a means of bringing not only the peace of God to our own selves, but also concord to the whole ecclesial body of Christ. This means that we should regard our sins not as merely private misdemeanours but *sub specie communitatis*, and in confessing our faults we should be motivated by more than a selfish desire for forgiveness, which is a very negative attitude—if only one were not guilty; we should do penance for the very positive reason that whilst we remain in sin we are responsible for an inadequacy in the human frame of Christ's ecclesial body, and that once we are absolved the effect is to make the Church more adequate to the work of our Lord, that work about which we must always be busy. You will understand, perhaps, why I am rather suspicious of those lists of faults, neatly ordered after the commandments and intended for the guidance of penitents, which are to be found in so many popular prayer-books and manuals of devotion. They are well-meant, no doubt, and characteristic of a kind of piety which has much good in it, but they monumentally testify to that ultra-judicial approach to the sacrament of penance of which I spoke earlier. The starting point for my examination of conscience should not be to consult some schedule of material offences, but to ask myself how far I have exemplified in the work of my daily life the work of Christ. And that, I think, brings me back to the question of the teacher and the liturgy.

'It seems to me', wrote Teilhard de Chardin to his friend, the Abbé Breuil, 'that in a sense the true substance to be consecrated each day is the world's development during that day—the bread symbolising appropriately what creation succeeds in producing, the wine (blood) what creation causes to be lost in exhaustion and suffering in the course of its effort'. To this daily development of the world the work of the teacher makes an important contribution. He does not directly concern himself with things, but with people. The world of commerce regulates

some of the affairs of men, but it is characteristic of a profession that it serves people, and of the teacher that he educates persons. The work, the liturgy, of the teacher is primarily located among his pupils and in his school. Every school is a community, but the Catholic school is something more than a human community, it is an *ecclesia*. It is convenient that the external organisation of the Catholic Church should be built up of parochial and diocesan units, but this does not mean that one is only a member of the Church in one's parish or diocese; where there is a community of the faithful, an *ecclesia*, there is the Church. Indeed, after the family, the school has usually a greater influence than the parish over a child. There in the school, in the classroom or on the playing-field, whether in or out of the chapel, the teacher takes part in the liturgy of the Church and of Christ. This work is conected in the chapel in the solemn and mysterious enactment of the liturgy, and outside the chapel in the daily round of teaching the pupils and serving the school. In class the teacher makes his more distinctively individual contribution (one cannot really call it 'private', for Christians cannot have private lives in the strictest sense) to the liturgy of the school, that is part of the liturgy of the Church, which is the liturgy of Christ, and in the chapel the teacher takes his place in the corporate celebration of the public worship of God, which is likewise the liturgy of the school, of the Church and of Christ. Let us not forget that this is also true of our pupils: they have their vocation in school, and they participate in the liturgy individually through their school-work and corporately in the chapel. What is said here about the teacher and penance applies also *mutatis mutandis* to his pupils.

The sacrament of penance, therefore, although it may be confined temporarily to the confessional, is not to be exclusively located there, for it has dimensions proper to it as a part of the whole liturgical action of one's life. Penance must be understood integrally in the liturgy, and the liturgy, as we have seen, has both individual and corporate aspects. The traditional acts of the penitent, contrition, confession and satisfaction, made when the sacrament is received, are necessary for the reincorporation of the sinner, and their acceptance by the Church as evidence of a true desire for absolution serves to underline the fact that they bring about our corporate participation in the sacrament of penance. But the essential thing is to have sorrow, and this sorrow, in accordance with our principle, has a two-fold liturgical expression, both corporate and individual. What is it that we do which in our individual participation in the liturgy parallels the acts of contrition,

confession, and satisfaction in our corporate participation? How should sorrow manifest itself in that half of the liturgy which is enacted outside the chapel? Our guide in this matter is our Lord himself, for my liturgy is in some sense his. In his work he encountered opposition, misunderstanding, and even humiliation, and these are familiar ingredients of the pupil-teacher and parent-teacher relationship. I am not saying that we have not a great deal to be thankful for in the generous co-operation and kind encouragement often given to us by children and their parents, but I think everyone of us is aware at some time or other of hostility, frustration and humiliation. It can come in relatively small matters when a child rejects our help, or when a class is unresponsive and near to ridiculing our efforts, and in more serious issues when parents are unappreciative of our efforts, and even misconstrue our intentions. But sorrow for our own sins, our deficiencies, coupled with that sense of inadequacy to which I referred earlier, should impel us towards a right acceptance of these difficulties of our life-work, so that we see them as no different in kind from what we must expect if our work is truly to exemplify the work of Christ and manifest to the world the work of the Church. Indeed, to indicate the close association between the corporate acts of the penitent at confession and his individual response to penance, one need only point to the patent insincerity which would motivate one who went to confession and fulfilled the prescribed formalities, and, returning to his classroom, continued to neglect his duties as a teacher. How could such a one be said, in any meaningful sense, to have sorrow? What our Lord said of us is what we should make bold to say of our pupils: 'For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth' (John 17. 19). And I shall sanctify myself if I am wholly committed to my professional work as a teacher, for the sake of my pupils.

As regards the act of going to confession, it seems to me, as Père Roguet suggests (*op. cit.*), the great secret for making a good confession is never to forget that we are members of the body of Christ, which is the Church, and that, according to a saying of St John of the Cross, 'At the close of this life we shall be judged by love'. 'Which of you, then', says St Matthew, 'is a faithful and wise servant, one whom his master will entrust with the care of his household, to give them their food at the appointed time? Blessed is that servant who is found doing this when his Lord comes; I promise you he will give him charge of all his goods' (24. 45-47). In going to confession the teacher is not only having his sins forgiven, but he is setting a sacramental seal on his work in the

school. Not merely is he now restored to a fuller life of peace, but the whole school has benefited, inasmuch as he is now more closely incorporated with his fellows in Christ. In the confessional he can accuse himself of his faults, those faults that he would not in other circumstances care to admit to his colleagues. (Has he avoided marking work carefully? Does he fall back on personal anecdotes to fill in lesson time when he has come to the classroom inadequately prepared?) In a sense one's preparation for confession is not made in the queue outside the confessional; it is taking place throughout the whole school day. For reasons to which I have already referred, confession is necessarily a time for mortal sin to be identified, but there is a danger that confessional practice may degenerate into an excessive preoccupation with the distinction between mortal and venial sin. I am not saying that one need not be on one's guard against mortal sin, but that in our concern to confess *mortal* sins we may be in great danger of divorcing our confession, which is a corporate participation in the liturgy of penance, from our school-life, which is an individual participation in the liturgy of penance. Moreover, we have agreed that at least for safety's sake materially grave offences shall be confessed, prescindng from the question of whether one is in fact formally guilty. I cannot in my own case decide this formal issue, but I certainly know well, almost instinctively, if my work as a teacher is not all that it should be, or even, perhaps, far from ideal. It would be grotesque to acquire the habit of confessing my mortal sins, which may not be mortal, whilst ignoring the extent to which I palpably fall short of the standards expected of one who is a teacher and a Catholic.

In making these suggestions for a more fruitful approach on the part of teachers to the sacrament of penance, I am reminded of what Fr Corbishley had to say in the October number of the *Clergy Review*, where he took what he called a last look round England before the Council: 'The sacraments produce their effect, we well know, *ex opere operato*; we may still plead for more obvious signs of the *opus operantis*'. One is always running up against this apparent dichotomy between the immenseness of what has been done for us and our own helplessness. At the sessions on the sacraments at the Council of Trent, the Dominican theologian, Melchior Cano, objected to the term *opus operatum*, particularly because it did not express the maturer thought of St Thomas, and Fransen (*op. cit.*) insists that 'as far as St Thomas is concerned it is noteworthy that in the articles of the *Summa* which are parallel to those in the *Commentary on the Sentences* he has discarded the

phrase *ex opere operato* and replaced it with *ex opere Christi*, "by the action of Christ"; *efficacia ex passione Christi*, "efficacious from Christ's Passion"; *in virtute Dei et Christi*, "by the power of Christ and of God". With this significant change of terminology, which emphasises that the sacrament of penance depends for its efficaciousness on a personal act, that is on the life-work of Christ, and bearing in mind what I have said about the work of the Church, as manifested in the life-work of its members, it is, I think, easier to see in what sense the *opus operantis* pertains to the essence of the sacrament. The term *opus operantis* could, I think, with great profit be discarded in favour of *opus Christifidelis*, where it refers to the activity of the recipient of sacramental grace. There is something very fitting in such an appraisal of the *opus operatum* and the *opus operantis*, so that they are seen in the sacramental moment as the meeting-point of the *opus Christi* and the *opus Christifidelis*, each making a distinctive contribution to the continuing work of Christ and the Church. The sacraments, after all, are acts of Christ in his Church and there is an enrichment of understanding if we can speak of their activity in these personal terms and not in the older abstract phrases. The result is also to clarify those notions which suggest a spiritual mechanism in the sacraments, a need especially urgent in the case of penance which is, after the eucharist, the most frequented of the sacraments and the source of so much strength for us. Penance leads us back, reconsolidates us in the ecclesial body of Christ, and the eucharist brings Christ himself to us, so that, consolidated himself in each of us, we may the more splendidly witness in our own lives to his life, manifest each of us the Church of which we are members, and display in our professional lives, in or out of church, the liturgy of the Church and of Christ. 'Let the peace of Christ', says St Paul, 'rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body . . . whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward' (Col. 3. 15, 23-4).