

The Father Confessor during Confession

By means of signs, in case of extreme need, they **confess and speak in a language unknown to the father confessor** (Prakticheskoe Rukovodstvo dlia sviashchenno-sluzhitelei [Practical Manual for Clergy], p. 190). These persons are not obliged to confess through a translator, but, in case of doubt concerning the moral condition of the penitent,, the father confessor should oblige the speaker of the unknown language to have a translator for him for the fulfillment of confession. This translator is obligated to protect the seal of confession in the same way as the father confessor, and that is why it follows to arrange confession in such a way that the person who confesses is hidden from the translator¹. (Napominanie sviashch. [A Reminder to Priests], p. 58; Zabelin, p. 195)

Half-witted by nature and furthermore idiots and cretins are those children, who owing to the sick condition of their organism have not developed consciousness, and that is why it follows to confess them in the same way as small seven-year children, i.e. being limited to the simplest questions, but absolutely not understanding it is possible to give them communion of the Holy Mysteries even without confession², as also children who have not reached seven years of age (Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastirej [Manual for Village Pastors] 1888, 12; see also Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger] 1892, 4).

During confession, constantly having in mind that "Christ invisibly stands, receiving the confession" of the penitent, the father confessor should also inspire every confessor, trying to raise and support the fear of God in them by their own example. The passionless and unbecoming behavior of the priest with a destructive image during confession acts on the souls of the penitent. Listening and asking, during the exhortation, teaching and questioning, the father confessor should always immutably project condescension, meekness and gentle love, appropriate to the student of Eternal Love in whose name he exercises judgment over the conscience of the sinner. Neither during confession nor after confession should the priest be proud, severe and heavy on his spiritual children³. He should not use any sharp, severe words there, where words of love may work; he should not be a proud and clever hypocrite, but is obligated to constantly remember that he, as a sinner, always has need of the grace of God for absolving his sins; throughout the confession he should very often lift up to God his thoughts and heart with prayer in order that He sends the Holy Spirit, like to him and like to the penitent. The priest should know that he is judging the penitent, but is only the witness of his repentance and the bondservant, defined exclusively for the service of human salvation (2 Cor. 4:5), that the sinful person sins to God alone (Ps. 50:6) and the penitent receives forgiveness

from God alone (Mk. 2:7), the priest is only the tool, through which God operates; the priest should always remember that his power is spiritual, not temporal, that it consists in serving, not lording over (Mt. 20:25-27), and that is why he should "use it with all humility of mind and tears (Acts 20:19), be gentle with all (2 Tim. 2:24-25), for edification and not for destruction"⁴ (2 Cor. 13:10). Therefore it is necessary for priests not to be proud, but "pray to the Lord for those who have confessed in their heart, day and night, until Christ is transfigured in them" (Gal. 4:9). (Kn. o Dolzhn. Presb. Prikh. [Book on the Duties of a Parish Priest], § 109; Past. Bog. [Pastoral Theology], § 74, 135; Napom. sviashch. [A Reminder for Priests], p. 92). When the priest learns the inner condition of the penitent whether through his own recognition, or examining by means of questions, he should offer him **teaching** in compliance with the condition of his conscience and convince him that he try to be a different, a new person, a good Christian⁵.

¹ The Confession of deaf-mute persons may be explained only in the language, not understood by the father confessor, are equivalent cases (A. Almazov, *The Mystery of Confession*, vol. 2, p. 448).

² Concerning Confession and Communion of the **feeble-minded**, one priest (Fr. J. Beliaev) in the "Penzenskiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Penzensk Diocesan News]" (1877, 23), by the way, wrote: "There are various degrees of stupidity, beginning from simple foolishness to the very edge of idiocy.

For example, in my parish there is a maiden 14 years old that does not show any sign of consciousness and is similar to a simple animal or even less than an animal. Beat her, how many it is necessary for you, and she will not take her hands away. She is not able to speak; she is not even able to sit, is not able to receive food. Not giving her food, drink, or to be more exact, not putting anything in her mouth, she will starve to death. Really, the subject is in the greatest degree of pity, but she is a Christian by the faith of her parents and sponsors. Now the question is how do you give her the Holy Mysteries? The answer to this question, in our opinion, is both short and simple: it should be given without confession as a child. It is valid, owing to the sick condition up to now of a child and of a child in the first days of development. Let her be 14 years old; but it would be strange to measure the childhood by one year, especially there where the matter is not about years, but about the development of consciousness, which usually changes with the years" (for more details see Svod uk. i zam. [Collection of Ukases and Notes]).

³ If the **penitent reveals some kind** of strange, unprecedented **crime**, which he committed, the priest should show neither amazement nor horror, nor shuddering, nor impose the sign of the cross on him, nor to push the penitent into extreme confusion and perplexity, but should remain fully calm and at the end of the confession to postpone an explanation, as the sins of the penitent are heavy and then to give him favorable instruction (Napominanie sviashch. [A Reminder to Priests], part 1, pp. 97, 149).

⁴ Neither during confession nor after confession, under the pretext, by the spiritual authority of the father confessor over spiritual children, should the priest ask from them something impudently and to demand this from them under terrible suspension or excommunication. So this happens, when, e.g., the priest asks or solicits by the sovereign, in order that he justify someone in court or has revoked punishment of the accused, even though that was with insult for the plaintiffs or with harm for the people. In this case the spiritual authority would become the tool of evil and filthy lucre and would serve for the destruction instead of for the creation of the salvation of the spiritual children (Duch. Regl. [Spiritual Regulation], Prib. o prav. prich. Tser. [Supplement for the Orthodox Church Clergy], item 8; Kn. o Dolzhn. Presb. Prikh. [Book on the Duties of a Parish Priest], 109). The decree of the Holy Synod, dated February 20, 1887, for № 4, the **payment** for Confession and Communion of the Holy Mysteries should not be raised, but deliberate exhibiting of platters for the acceptance good will donations at these mysteries is forbidden and instead of that it is given to the clergy, in place of collection a) during the recording of the confessor in the list of confessions, b) after reading for them the canon before communion and c) during the sprinkling of communicants with Holy Water after the end of the liturgy, to put, for acceptance of the good will donations, one general plate, with the inscription "for the use of the clergy". The income from this plate should be distributed among all members of the clergy on a general basis (Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1890, 49, 46; 1898, 24, 44; Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger] 1894, 10; 1896, 10).

According to the above-stated decree of the Holy Synod, together with, in view of this, that some parishioners, running away from the collections, evade fulfilling their Christian debt and fast in other parishes in that way deprive their church of income, - the Chernigov diocesan authorities forbid parish trustees to take various **collections** during time the time of fasting, as such: for the building and renovating the temple, for the building of houses for the clergy, for the employment of church watchmen, in gratitude to the clergy for administering the mystery of repentance and so forth (see Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastirej [Manual for Village Pastors] 1895, 8).

Concerning the candles brought by confessors to the father confessor, it is necessary to note that this gift although it exists in some places and without the knowledge of local diocesan authorities at all (see Ekaterinburgskiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Yekaterinburg Diocesan News] 1892, 15-16); but the confirmed decisions of the Holy Synod of the Enlightened Clergy of the South-Western country (meeting in September 1884 in Kiev) the collection of these candles for the use of the church or the clergy should not be allowed (see Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastirej [Manual for Village Pastors] 1885, 39), and in some dioceses the demand for these candles from confessors is more strictly forbidden also by the special orders of the local diocesan authority (see, e.g., orders of the Poltava Theological Consistory and in the Rukovodstvo dlia sel'skikh pastirej [Manual for Village Pastors] 1888, 27). Anyway in those places where there is a specified custom, **confession candles** must be for the use of the church. Nowhere in the legislated collections, articles and decrees published in the management of pastors of the Church, is it said, that confession candles is made the property of the father confessor (For details see Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1895, 9, 11; 1898, 38; Refer to Ekaterinburgskiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Yekaterinburg Diocesan News] 1892, 15-16; Strannik [Pilgrim], 1892, 9). Concerning the meaning of the specified custom, by the explanation of some, is that the penitent, offering an unlit candle to confession, thereby expresses that spiritual life in him has burned out, died, owing to sinfulness; but, having hope that it will be cleansed by the grace of repentance and the fire of a fruitful life is ignited in it, he gives the candle to the father confessor, in order that finally he will light it in the sight of the Lord, so that the father confessor is entrusted with the power of the action of grace of spiritual life is lit in the souls of the penitents (Tserkovniia Vedomosti [Church News] 1895, 9, 11). Thus, the direct purpose of confession candles is their lighting by their father confessor in the temple; but as a significant amount of the confessors brought candles, the father confessor has gathered much, then the father confessor can only light a few of them; in view of the specified reserving of confession candles, they all (as remaining unburned so, of course, also the candle ends from burnt candles) should be for the use of the church.

⁵ These **instructions** should concern: 1) the correction of the penitent and 2) for his further success in the virtue of ascesis; an ordinary subject of these statements: the rising up of disgust and horror for heavy and light sins, the loftiness of virtue, faith, hope and love for God and neighbor, the danger for all in general, temptations, inconstancy of the human spirit, also the pious occupation, conforming to the situation and calling (for details see in Napominanie Sviashchen. [A Reminder for Priests], pp. 133-165 and Past. Bogosl. [Pastoral Theology] § 147-151; also refer above to pp. 972-973, 981 and note 13 on p. 988). Certainly, there is no need to repeat those instructions, which have been given during the examination of the conscience of the penitent, at the end of a confession, certainly, if they have rendered a desirable influence on the penitent. There may be special instructions at the end of a lazy confession and in that case, if the penitent discloses compunction for his sins, the intention to drop them, or already has foregone depraved behavior for some days. But when the penitent tells his sins without shame, accuses others or has hidden some sins which though admitted, but thanks to the examination of the father confessor, does not make the promise to be corrected, then instructions and exhortations are not only rather appropriate, but even necessary for such a penitent (refer to note 2 on p. 1018) from the viewpoint of the father confessor (Zabelin, p. 197). It is certainly understood that during these instructions, as well as at all others, the pastor should lead "not by the spirit of the world, but by the Spirit, which is from God", to speak "not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13) to use the sayings of Holy Scripture, wherefore "for the word of God is living, and is effective, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even piercing ..., and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12), "it is useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).