



Practical Instructions for New Confessor

Fr Philip M Savatori SJ

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FATHER SALVATORI'S Practical Instruction for New Confessors, which now appears in an English dress, was first published at Rome in the closing years of the 17th century. It was received by the clergy with marked favour, and rapidly passed through several editions, not alone at Rome, but elsewhere, throughout Italy. It is still useful today. In fact, in the 18th century most Moral Theology manuals referred back to this work. "Experience proves that sinners, and especially those of the lower orders, do not, as a general rule, sin through formal and deliberate malice, but either through ignorance-which is, however, culpable and does not excuse from sin-or through the impulse of passion, or through the culpable absence of proper reflection. Wherefore many persons commit sin either without experiencing any feelings of remorse, or, worse still, actually believing that they are doing nothing wrong; and sometimes they go so far as even to boast of their misdeeds, and to feel in some degree displeased and ashamed that they have not been guilty of certain offences, so that they do not hesitate to represent themselves to their companions as stained with some crimes which, as a matter of fact, they have never committed." Indeed let us consider this next question: "How shall we inspire persons of this class with a due hatred of their sins? The only means of doing so is to instruct them in the first instance, and to make them reflect on the enormity of their transgressions; for man is so constituted, that, it is useless to attempt to influence his will, unless his intellect be first enlightened and convinced. And since, according to the Council of Trent, that sorrow for sin which is necessary for justification is nothing else than a hatred and detestation of past offences, with a resolution of sinning no more, if an enlightened and zealous Confessor shall gradually convince his penitent of the unreasonableness, the baseness, the malice, the wickedness, the deadly nature of his sins, he will certainly, with the aid of divine grace, which is always at man's disposal, move his will to detest all past sins, and to form a firm resolution never more to offend God: and proceeding in this manner, he shall find the penitent at the close of his confession excellently disposed to receive sacramental absolution with fruit, and with a heart inflamed with divine love; ..." Father Salvatori provides reflections for the various classes of penitents one may come in contact with. He gives a reflection for those who are quite happy to go to hell, because they shall not be alone there. "The blindness produced by sin carries men to such a degree of folly, that persons are actually found who thoroughly understand that their evil life is leading them to Hell; who believe this, and yet live on in undisturbed tranquillity. And should anyone bid them reflect on the risk they run of being eternally damned, they reply with a certain air of indifference, and sometimes even with a laugh: "Well, if I do go to Hell, I must only put up with it; I shall not be alone there; I shall have excellent company". This arises from the fact that these persons have never bestowed a really serious thought on what Hell is. I have found the following method the most effective, in making such persons realise this in the manner best calculated to inspire them with terror." At the end he recommends Fr. Quadrupani's work 'Light and Peace' for the good of the consciences of confessors and to help them direct others.

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