

## DECREE OF SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS

### *Sacrament of Penance for Women Religious in Particular Fitness for the Religious Life*

While the revision of Canon Law is in process, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes has judged it opportune, for a number of urgent reasons, to examine in Plenary Assembly certain questions concerning: 1) the use and administration of the Sacrament of Penance, especially for women Religious, and 2) fitness for the religious life in a special case.

After careful examination, the Fathers of the Plenary Assembly held on October 26 and 27, 1970, made the following decisions:

#### I

1. Religious, because of their special union with the Church which "incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal" (Const. "Lumen Gentium", n. 8), should value highly the Sacrament of Penance, by which the fundamental gift of "metanoia", that is, of conversion to the kingdom of Christ, first received in Baptism, is restored and strengthened in members of the Church who have sinned (cf. Ap. Const. "Paenitemini", AAS, 58 (1966), pp. 179-180). Through this sacrament pardon is obtained from the mercy of God for the offenses committed against Him, and we are reconciled with the Church which we wound by our sins, (cf. Const. "Lumen Gentium", n. 11).

2. Religious should likewise hold in high regard the frequent use of this Sacrament by which true knowledge of self is deepened, christian humility is strengthened, spiritual direc-

tion is provided and grace is increased. These and other wonderful effects not only contribute greatly to daily growth in virtue, but they are highly beneficial also to the common good of the whole Community (cf. Encyclical "Mystici Corporis", AAS 35 (1943), p. 235).

3. Therefore, Religious, in their desire to strengthen in themselves union with God, should strive to receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently that is, twice a month. Superiors, on their part, should encourage this frequency and make it possible for the members to go to confession at least every two weeks and even oftener, if they wish to do so.

4. With specific reference to the confessions of women Religious, the following provisions are made:

a) All women Religious and Novices, in order that they may have proper liberty, may make their confessions validly and licitly to any priest approved for hearing confessions in the locality. For this, no special jurisdiction or designation is henceforth required (Can. 876).

b) In order, nevertheless, to provide for the greater good of the communities, an ordinary confessor shall be named for monasteries of contemplative nuns, for houses of formation and for large communities, and an extraordinary confessor shall be appointed at least for monasteries mentioned above and for houses of formation without, however, any obligation on the part of the Religious to present themselves to them.

c) For other communities, an ordinary confessor may be named at the request of the community itself or after consultation with its members if, in the judgment of the Ordinary, special circumstances justify such appointment.

d) The local Ordinary should choose confessors carefully. They should be priests of sufficient maturity and possess the other necessary qualities. The Ordinary may determine the number, age and term of office of the confessors, and may name them or renew their appointment, after consultation with the Community concerned.

e) The prescriptions of Canons which are contrary to the foregoing dispositions, which are incompatible with them, or which because of them no longer apply, are suspended.

5. The provisions of the preceding paragraph (n. 4) hold also for lay communities of men in so far as they are applicable.

## II

The final clause of Canon 637 is to be understood in the sense that a Religious in temporary vows who, because of physical or mental illness even if contracted after profession, is judged by the competent Superior with the consent of his Council on the basis of examination by physicians or other specialists, to be incapable of living the Religious Life without personal harm or harm to the Institute, may be refused admission to renewal of vows or to final profession. The decision in such cases is to be taken with charity and equity.

His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, in the audience granted to the Secretary of this Sacred Congregation on November 20, approved these dispositions and directed that they be put into effect immediately, without any formula of execution, until such time as the revised Canon Law becomes effective.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome, on the eight day of December, 1970.

H. Card. ANTONIUTTI  
*Prefect*

E. HESTON, C. S. C.  
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