

Preface

There are many things this book is not. It isn't a systematic exposition of the theology of sin and the sacrament of Penance; it isn't a history of the sacrament; it isn't a treatise on spirituality; it isn't a polemic against those who hold other views on the matters discussed here. It is not even an argument for returning to the "good old days."

This book is an attempt to explain why Catholics who either no longer receive the sacrament of Penance or seldom receive it are making a mistake. Its intention is to encourage those who no longer go to confession to resume doing so, those who confess occasionally to confess more often, and those who already know the benefits of frequent confession from experience to share what they've learned.

I have consulted a number of works in preparing this book, most particularly Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (Reconciliation and Penance). I owe a special debt of gratitude, however, to Dr. Germain Grisez, whose *Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Franciscan Herald Press, 1984), has been an invaluable source of a number of the ideas expressed

throughout this work. I recommend it highly to those interested in a more detailed explanation of these ideas.

R. S.

WHY WE NEED CONFESSION

I

What's Happened to Confession?

Why don't Catholics go to confession anymore? This question, of course, overstates the case. Many Catholics do receive the sacrament of Penance, and quite a few receive it regularly and frequently. Penance remains an important element in their spiritual lives.

But the question also corresponds to a reality visible in parishes throughout the United States and, apparently, in other countries, as well. Long confessional lines are a thing of the past. Many Catholics receive penance very seldom, and some, perhaps, not at all.

In the 1980s a study of Catholic life in the United States found that among "core Catholics"—those who identify with parishes—27 percent never went to confession, 35 percent received the sacrament only once a year, 33 percent several times a year, and only 6 percent monthly or more often. Even among "parish leaders," 15 percent never went to confession and 33 percent only once a year. There is no reason to think things have changed much since then. Somewhat optimistically, the authors of