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The Psychological Experience of Guilt and Its Implications for the New Rite of Confession

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF GUILT
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE NEW RITE OF CONFESSION

by

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INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of this study is to examine the experience of guilt as it has been described by contemporary psychologists and to determine if some of their findings can be used by theologians to achieve a deeper understanding of the sacrament of Penance. In particular, the thesis will examine the implications of the psychological experience of guilt for the new rite of Penance. In this introduction, we will briefly touch on a few of the major points that will be developed in the paper.

A number of different theories concerning guilt are reflected in psychological literature. For example, Thomas Oden, in The Structure of Awareness, describes authentic humanity as "full and open responsiveness to the moment, the readiness to receive and re-create what is given in the now." In sin, this moment is lost forever. For Oden, subjective guilt is the awareness or memory of this lost moment.

Oden draws upon Carl Rogers' theories of incongruence and acceptance. It should be pointed out here, however, that the psychologist's view of guilt differs from the theologian's in a number of important ways. A theologian would say that subjective guilt is the awareness of unforgiven sin and that the state of sin remains. When

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a person seeks out a priest of minister in order to confess his guilt, he is seeking the forgiveness of Christ. The priest or minister, therefore, sees subjective guilt as the person's awareness that he is separated from Christ and now seeks to be reconciled with Him. Thus, guilt, in this perspective, is seen as a healthy or good thing because it directs the person back to Christ.

The perspective of a psychologist or psychiatrist is much different. He may be confronted with a person who is suffering from a sense of guilt (often based on a very real act) and who has no hope of forgiveness. The person has been unable to find any sense of reconciliation within his own circle of friends and family. In Rogerian psychotherapy, the therapist offers the client the one thing that will free him from his destructive sense of guilt and allow him to grow. That one thing is total acceptance.

The experience of Christ's acceptance is often very sudden. A person cannot hold his own guilt and receive Christ's acceptance simultaneously. As he experiences Christ's acceptance, he must come to accept himself. In theological terms, guilt can be seen as an awareness of separation from Christ and a call to new growth in Him.

The experience of acceptance in a psychotherapeutic situation is much different. The process of knowing and experiencing acceptance is gradual and often very painful. A person is likely to hold on to his sense of guilt even as he comes to know the therapist's acceptance. The therapist sees the patient's persistence in guilt (whether or not
the patient's sense of guilt is in proportion to the act) as a refusal to grow.

The difference between the two situations lies in the reality of faith and Christ Himself. A person who believes in Christ separates himself from Christ by sin. He experiences guilt as an awareness of his separation from Christ and a call to return to Him. Psychology does not and cannot presuppose faith. In human terms, a person does something that he perceives as being incongruent with his own self-image. He cannot incorporate this act as part of his own personality ("I couldn't have done it. It's not me." or "I can't help myself. I keep doing it."). The psychologist attempts to show the patient that he is unconditionally acceptable and helps him grow toward a more realistic self-image. To the extent that the patient persists in his sense of guilt and refuses the psychologist's acceptance, he is refusing to grow.

What theologians find of particular interest in this, however, is not a definition of guilt, but the means used to alleviate guilt. Two distinct schools of thought regarding guilt are represented by Hobart Mowrer and Carl Rogers. Mowrer's theory states that a sense of guilt is alleviated when one confesses his sin. (A psychotic patient, quoted by Mowrer to support his argument, calls this the "Dick Tracy theory of therapy." ) Rogers, on the other hand, suggests that the therapist provide the patient with a sense of being unconditionally accepted. As

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Ibid., p. 102.
the patient discovers that he is accepted despite both the action and the feelings that motivated the action, he can let go of his guilt. Thus, for Mowrer, the patient alleviates his own guilt by confessing his actions. For Rogers, guilt is alleviated by the experience of being accepted by another.

The significance of Rogers' understanding of acceptance becomes apparent when one views the change in emphasis from the old rite of Confession to the new rite. As will be discussed in the following pages, the emphasis has moved from confession and judgment to acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

This has been a brief introduction to a few of the ideas which will be discussed in the course of this study. Pope Paul VI, in his address on the significance of the Pastoral Norms on Penance (Papal Audience, Castel Gandolfo, July 19, 1972) referred to his fellow priests as "doctors of souls...'psychiatrists' of grace." Perhaps the science of psychology, concerned with the healing process of the mind, will be able to enhance our understanding of the healing power of grace in Confession.

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Ibid., p. 102.
Part I: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF GUILT
CHAPTER I

TRUE GUILT - A MATTER OF DECISION

A Question of Nature

In this section several theories of guilt will be examined (including those of Freud, Boisen, Mowrer, and Rogers) in relation to the psychologists' over-all vision of man. Obviously, none of these theories will be dealt with in detail. Rather, these brief sketches are designed to highlight several of the major schools of thought concerning the psychological experience of guilt.

At least in theory, Freud did not recognize the existence of authentic guilt as it was defined in the Introduction. Freud saw man as biologically determined and the purpose of man's life and "simply the programme of the pleasure principle." Fear of authority figures resulted in internalized rules and regulations which became the superego. In boys, this fear of authority figures could be traced to fear of castration by the father. Girls remained something of a mystery to Freud, and he never succeeded in pin-pointing the source of superego development in them. The superego (or when it operated on a conscious level, conscience) frustrated man's desire for pleasure and was, therefore, the source of man's misery.

2 Ibid., p. 33.
The superego forced the person to repress his natural drives and the frustration of these natural drives resulted in guilt-feelings. These feelings of guilt lay "...not in anything wrong or 'sinful' which the individual has done but in things he merely wants to do but cannot because of repression." Authentic guilt played no part in a world determined by biological drives.

Religion was, in Freud's theory, one of the major forces that kept man enslaved to the forces of the superego. Martin Buber dismisses Freud's contentions as a last gasp (hopefully, a dying gasp) of the Enlightenment attack against religion. David Bakan comes up with the extremely subtle, and what perhaps could kindly be called imaginative, theory that Freud was acting out a reverse Messianic complex. Freud saw his people, the European Jews, as victims of their own law, harrassed and persecuted because of a law that made them different and, therefore, vulnerable. In Moses and Monotheism Freud argues that Moses was a Gentile and thus the Jews were not responsible for the institution of the law. In attacking the superego or conscience, Freud becomes the new Moses, the one who liberates his people from the source of their misery.

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Freud's motives aside, his theories were soon attacked by many disillusioned disciples. In 1936, Anton B. Boisen published The Exploration of the Inner World, and challenged the then current practice among psychiatrists of equating "normal" with the "average." "The normal is what most people do, and any deviation from the normal they look upon with suspicion and disfavor...To be good is unusual and therefore abnormal."

Boisen saw man as an essentially social being who is not concerned with the average, but with the ideal. The determining principle of man's actions is not pleasure, rather "...of all human needs the deepest and most fundamental is that for response and approval by that social something which is symbolized by the term God." Boisen did not entirely reject Freud's theories on the importance of childhood, but saw the formation of the moral person as being a function of a need for acceptance within a group. (Boisen's strict social determinism is, however, mitigated by one other factor which will be described below.) Boisen maintains that it is the social group that sets moral standards and a person tries to live by those standards because of a need for approval of the group.

The relationship to the group becomes all important, and a person judges himself by ethical standards which are determined by the group with which he seeks identification and

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7 Ibid., p. 170.
whose approval he needs.  

The pain of guilt is the pain of isolation from the group. It is the violation of the group's standard and consequent isolation that cause pain, therefore, for Boisen guilt becomes the source, not the symptom of the person's problems. As guilt is incurred by a violation of the group standards, one is dealing with authentic guilt, not guilt-feelings, i.e., the repressed desire to violate a standard.

Boisen maintains that this guilt could be resolved in one of three ways: (1) change actions, (2) change groups, or (3) withdraw from the situation entirely and interpret reality to suit one's own needs. The result of the third alternative is mental illness. In this schema, a recognition of the action and restoration of harmony with the group is sufficient to resolve guilt. Boisen does not see forgiveness and reconciliation as part of a possible resolution of guilt, and that is one of the central weaknesses of his theory.

Boisen's position was reiterated by Mowrer in 1960 in The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion. Mowrer points out that if Freud's idea of guilt as a symptom were right, the person who never experiences guilt should be the healthiest, happiest person around. In reality, the person who cannot experience guilt is usually diagnosed as psychopathic or sociopathic. This particular personality disorder is one of the most

8 Ibid., p. 172.

9 Ibid., p. 179.
difficult to cure. On the other hand, the person who can admit to a sense of guilt is more often on the road to recovery. To treat guilt as a sickness, according to Mowrer, is to ignore the fact that the guilt may have a basis in reality. To recognize guilt as at least in some way authentic is to offer the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation. Mowrer says that the problem of mental illness is not one of illness but of sin.

"Sickness," as we shall see increasingly in later chapters, is a concept which generates pervasive pessimism and confusion in the domain of psychopathology; whereas, sin for all its harshness, carries an implication of promise and hopes, a vision of new potentialities. Just so long as we deny the reality of sin, we cut ourselves off, it seems, from the possibility of radical redemption ("recovery").

Mowrer, like Boisen, sees man as a social being, responsive and responsible. He sympathizes with Boisen's position on guilt but mourns the fact that the Protestant pastoral counseling movement, started in large part by Boisen, has tended to substitute insight for forgiveness. Man's need for truth demands insight, but his social nature requires forgiveness.

Therefore, in light of the total situation, I see no alternative but to turn again to the old, painful, but also promising possibility that man is preeminently a social creature and that he lives or dies, psychologically and personally, as a function of the openness, community, relatedness, and integrity which by good action he attains and by evil action he destroys.


11. Ibid., p. 44.
Many psychologists and theologians have praised Mowrer for his insistence on moral responsibility, however, there are also a number of weaknesses in his arguments. Mowrer insists that all guilt is authentic guilt and fails to make any distinction between authentic guilt and false guilt. Later in this study, it will be argued that false guilt may often serve as a mask or facade for true guilt, however, this does not mean that false guilt does not exist. False guilt must be dealt with in an explicitly psychological context in order to approach and confront the authentic guilt underlying it.

Mowrer also maintains that the only way to deal effectively with guilt is to confess it to a "Significant Other." A therapist or a priest, according to Mowrer, is not a "Significant Other" and confession to one of them, while perhaps enhancing that particular relationship, will do nothing to change the person's over-all sense of guilt. The Significant Other must be someone present and important in one's social life so that confession will entail both an acknowledgment of evil action and a loss of anonymity.

Mowrer ignores both the meaning of sacramental encounter in Confession and the theological presuppositions of the therapeutic relationship. As Filella points out, the Significant Other for the Christian is Christ. The sacrament of Confession is an encounter with Christ and

the priest who, by virtue of his priesthood, is the representative of Christ and the community of Christ, that is the Church. The social nature of confession and the consequent loss of the anonymity and deceit of sin, is brought about by virtue of the priest's representation of Christ and the Church. Because of the inter-relation (and one could say inter-dependence) of each person within the Mystical Body, confession can never be an isolated act. "In the Christian Community there is no such thing as a completely secret confession: all confessions are open in the deepest sense of the word."

The therapist's acceptance in the therapeutic model is seen as representative acceptance. The therapist may represent a significant person in the client's life or society itself. In the case of false guilt, the therapist accepts feelings the client cannot accept himself. He can do this, according to Browning, because all feelings (as distinguished from behavior) have been and are being accepted by God at every moment - this theory will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Four. In the case of authentic guilt, the client may also see the therapist's forgiveness as representative forgiveness insofar as the therapist represents society for him.

Morrer argues that ethics, for the most part, are identical with the group standard and are taught and should be taught to the child

13 Ibid., p. 200.
through a process called "defensive identification." "Defensive identification is, in essence, what the Rogerians would call introjection; it is a process whereby the child takes over the moral values of his parents as a way of defending himself from rejection, insecurity, disapproval."

Mowerr's idea of morality thus becomes a matter of conditioning rather than choice. Moreover, Browning argues that since this conditioning makes culture and society the criteria of moral standards, rather than God, it is essentially a form of idolatry. Although Mowerr initially appears to be an advocate of free choice and moral responsibility his idea of the moral formation of man is almost as deterministic as Freud's. Mowerr sees man as a socially determined being while Freud sees man as a biologically determined being.

Carl Rogers moves from an idea of man as a socially determined being to one whose primary drive is for growth itself. In *Client-centered Therapy*, Rogers states that "the organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism." Browning, in explaining this concept states:

This basic drive, or actualization tendency, is seen as a forward-moving force that propels the individual toward ever-increasing autonomy and socialization. In short, the actuali-

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15 Ibid., p. 191.

zation tendency can be seen as the striving of the organism toward ever-expanding areas of socialized autonomy... It should be pointed out that this basic actualization tendency refers to the organism as a whole, is not limited to one specific organ or tissue need, includes segmental or deficiency needs, but also transcends them. 17

In simple terms, Rogers' actualization tendency may be thought of as a need to grow. Whether man is propelled or drawn to change is, of course, open to debate (Rogers would say propelled), but growth itself remains intrinsic to the understanding of man.

In Browning's analysis of Rogers, two major concepts are involved with actualization: "the organismic valuing process" and "Congruence." The organismic valuing process, according to Browning, can be translated as "experiencing" and "feeling." What this means is that people tend to choose that which will enhance their own being, that which will "actualize" them. They make a decision based on the data available to them at that moment. However, as different people see different things as good at different times, this valuing is a process, not a fixed system. Rogers says that this ability to decide is an organic function.

A child is free to choose and does so naturally, unless his choices are interfered with by an adult. When confronted with a choice of doing what he wants or doing what the adult wants him to do, the

17 Browning, p. 97.

18 Ibid., p. 101.
child will do what the adult wants him to do in order to keep the love of the adult. For instance, a child may have been taught that anger is wrong; therefore, in order to protect his self-image of being a good, *i.e.*, lovable, person, he will refuse to admit feelings of anger into his self-awareness. Rogers calls this inability "incongruence." A person is incongruent if he denies or distorts organismic feelings in an attempt to protect his self-image.

A third concept necessary to understand Roger's thought is "the need for positive regard." The need for positive regard involves the social prerequisites that are necessary if a person is to grow, feel, and perceive the world "extensionally" or in terms of reality. Unconditional positive regard, or acceptance, in this sense, does not connote approval. Judgment is suspended.

A client is received psychologically if he senses that all that he is, 'fear, despair, insecurity, or anger,' is being admitted into the experiencing of the therapist. A person is receiving unconditional positive regard when he is being received into the organismic experiencing of the therapist without being misperceived by the secondary distorting and denying operations of the conditions of worth. 20

Because the need for positive regard is a prerequisite for change, it becomes essential for any successful kind of psychotherapy. In fact, it has been speculated that the particular technique utilized in psychotherapy is actually less important than the relationship that


20 Browning, p. 113.
exists between the therapist and the client. It is the relationship that makes growth and change possible.

Rogers' goal in psychotherapy is to free the person from false standards of worth by offering him unconditional acceptance within the therapeutic relationship (or acceptance that is an unconditional as the therapist is capable of offering). As the client gradually accepts the therapist's acceptance, he is able to admit formerly forbidden thoughts and feelings into his consciousness and is free to make self-actualizing choices.

To summarize, psychological thought has moved from an idea of man as a biologically determined being (Freud), to a socially determined being (Boisen and Mowrer), to a being that is characterized by a need to grow as an individual and in relation to others (Rogers). However, Rogers leaves two important questions open: what is the source of man's need to grow and what is the goal of his growth? Rogers says that the need to grow stems from an actualization tendency and the goal of actualization is socialized autonomy. In both cases, he is defining the source and the goal by the process. In later chapters of this study we will suggest that these two questions springing from a psychological theory may require theological answers.
A Question of Conscience

In psychoanalytic literature, the conscience was considered to be the conscious part of the superego. Since guilt was considered to be a symptom, the way to free a person from the pain of guilt-feelings was to go after the source. "Twenty-five years ago, in the heydey of Freudianism, most psychologists, if they were interested in the phenomenon of conscience at all, were concerned only to the extent of discovering how to get rid of it." 21

As was mentioned earlier, the superego was seen by Freud as being a set of standards internalized out of a sense of fear. However, there is another aspect to the superego, the ego-ideal.

Linked to the same idealization of parental power that led to identification with perceived value systems of the punishing parents is still another aspect of the superego. The ego-ideal, as it is called, is the love side rather than the hate side, of early relationships with the parents... 22

In a healthy, mature person the standard set by the ego-ideal is positive and realistic resulting in congruence. But the ego-ideal can set a standard that is unattainable and unrealistic and, when a person continually fails to live up to this standard, the result can be de-


pression and loss of self-esteem. The ego uses various strategies to protect itself from the guilt-producing feelings provoked by the super-ego. At the extremes, these strategies can appear as sociopathic behavior or scrupulosity.

Boisen saw conscience as a set of standards internalized out of a need to be accepted by a group. Hoffman agrees that conscience is formed out of the experience of relationship. Fear and genuine guilt "...should not be viewed as separate realities, but rather as positions along a spectrum of relationships..."

The recognition of the genesis of fear and its relation to guilt, however, points to a reality which is extremely important, namely, to the fact that love is the foundation of all morality, that a truly moral conscience cannot arise without the experience of a loving relationship even if it be an ambivalent one. 24

Although Boisen sees man's conscience as being largely determined by relationship, he rejects the idea of conscience as a static set of values. The standards change as the relational groups change, even though the influence of the primary relational group (the parents) remains strong. The influence of the relational group is mitigated by the influence of an ideal (or, perhaps, idealized) group - a kind of social equivalent of the ego-ideal.

But the ethical ideals and standards which are thus implanted


24 Ibid., p. 132.
by parents and childhood experiences are not fixed and rigid except in pathological cases. Conscience is not just backward-looking. It lies rather... on the growing edge of human nature.... And the ideals or standards by which we judge ourselves are determined not so much by the groups to which we have belonged as by that to which we aspire, not so much by the yesterdays as by the tomorrows. 25

The psychological theories of Freud, Boisen, and others, tend toward an emotive concept of conscience, i.e., a definition of conscience as "...a distinctive sentiment or mode of feeling." Philosophy and theology have tended to see conscience in cognitive terms. Sin is a decision and, therefore, is controlled by the will. The will is influenced by both the emotions and the intellect. Since conscience resides in the intellect, it is the intellect that must override the emotions and dominate the will if the person is to avoid sin. The following quotation gives an example of this definition of conscience:

In the final analysis this is just what sin is: will and emotion rebelling against the influence of God in the mind.... Shallow thinking is the worst enemy of the Christian desiring God's will in his life, because this is powerless to maintain the mind's necessary dominance over will and emotions. 27

The danger arises, according to McNeil, when man seeks to objectify a system of ethics. The result becomes a rigid structure of

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Boisen, p. 176.

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laws necessitating a judicial approach to the interpretation of moral situations.

All objectivized systems, especially the traditional idea of an ethics based on natural law, depend on the presupposition that man possesses a static, unchanging substantial nature as source of his actions. Such an idea has the advantage of rendering possible a moral philosophy of necessary, universal, and absolute principles. However, an overemphasis on these qualities of an objective system can lead, and has led to a systematic misunderstanding of the existent person as such, and tends to deliver man from the ultimate risk of his freedom, which is his grandeur. 28

McNeil believes that the concept of conscience, to be understood accurately, requires a dynamic view of man. His idea of man is very much like that of Carl Rogers' - man is characterized by growth in relation to other men. Man's goal in this sense is to become himself and the criterion for judgment, therefore, is his own authenticity.

To be true means to become that which one really is. It represents a search for all the necessary conditions of interior self-adequation, a search from within self-consciousness for the meaning and direction of man's freely willed activity.... Conscience within this perspective is a developing form of self-awareness; it is to be understood as the deepest self-consciousness of man insofar as it acts as a power of discrimination, deciding in every choice what will promote authentic selfhood and what will stand in its way. Man on the moral level is characterized by self-development. He perceives every choice as a choice between authentic or inauthentic humanity. 29


29 Ibid., pp 113 and 120.
The existence of a "good" conscience in a person is dependent on a clear vision of self. Man has the power to "look within himself and decide what kind of self he will be." This ability entails congruence, openness, trust. It presupposes an essential freedom - one is able to act in a way that promotes self-fulfillment, one is not destined to react in any predetermined manner.

The key presupposition...is an attitude of openness, of trust in life. One acts to achieve self-fulfillment; one must believe that by means of commitment one can achieve that self-fulfillment. Moral evil represents the refusal to be oneself; moral good, a sincere seeking of self-fulfillment.

Again, the prerequisite for actualization is socialization. In order to have developed a sense of selfhood, the self-awareness that McNeil terms conscience, one must have experienced positive relationships. Conscience, interpreted as self-awareness, cannot be seen in isolation. A person is able to decide only in relation to others. McNeil concludes that conscience (self-awareness) "...is transposed into love itself." Guilt, which was defined as the refusal to grow, becomes "the refusal to be for others." Conscience, formed in relationship, moves inexorably from love to love. "Ideal spiritual adulthood for the conscience would consist in this: that the compass of love would point the direction so unfalteringly that the external law is no longer needed."


32 and 33 Ibid., p. 121.
A Question of Acceptance

Guilt, which for Freud was a symptom, became the source of social disharmony in Boisen's theories. With Rogers' theories of actualization and socialization, the distinction between true and false guilt becomes more apparent. To persist in a sense of guilt is to refuse to grow. When one experiences a sense of guilt, one is aware that he has done something that is not in harmony with his own self-image. As a person becomes aware of the act which precipitated this sense of guilt, he becomes aware of a contradiction in his own personality. This painful contradiction has been described by Paul in Romans 7:14-20. In order to overcome this contradiction, one must grow into a more realistic understanding of self.

However, as Rogers points out, the prerequisite for actualization is acceptance. A person defines himself in relation to others. One cannot accept himself if he has not first been accepted by others. This acceptance (or positive regard) must be founded in truth if it is to be real acceptance. The process of rationalization intrinsic to sin destroys the fabric of truth that makes relationship possible. Simultaneously, rationalization destroys the truth that makes self-acceptance possible. The pain of guilt is the pain of a person who can no longer accept the reality of who he is.

If true guilt is the betrayal of the truth of what one is, false guilt denies that the truth exists. False guilt involves identity and presumes that acceptance has never been experienced (or that the ex-
perience has been distorted or was inadequate.) The person with a false sense of guilt is not concerned with a bad deed, but with a sense of being a bad person.

Guilt is never entirely true as no decision is ever entirely free. However, neither is guilt ever entirely false. Even in the psychotic there remains a 'core' that is not determined by a false self-image or perception of reality. If this were not so, there would be no hope of recovery for the person. Congruence and incongruence exist side by side in each person, and any attempt to resolve guilt must deal with both aspects.
CHAPTER II
FALSE GUILT - A MATTER OF IDENTITY

Conditional Badness

The difference between conditional badness and neurotic guilt is one of degree rather than kind. Both involve a sense of identity. Conditional badness is experienced when one feels himself to be an acceptable, lovable person only after he has won the approval of another. Approval is won through 'right' actions, and, therefore, morality becomes the price one pays to maintain a sense of worth.

This approval should not be confused with the acceptance discussed in the previous chapter. Acceptance is the positive regard or prizing of the whole person. Approval involves a judgment forcing morality to become the pawn in an elaborate game, the object of which is to maintain a sense of worth which insures survival. France terms this kind of morality "cheap morality," as opposed to costly or genuine morality which demands growth. "A genuine moral concern demands that I love my enemy; a cheap morality demands that I pay attention to the opinions of my friends instead."

There is, perhaps, a little of this kind of guilt in everyone,

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a feeling that someone is keeping score. Conditional badness is a childish approach to morality marked by a lack of a sense of worth, or a developed sense of identity. The immature person tends to be more concerned with the possibility of punishment than with the motives underlying his actions. A child, for instance, has little sense of the meaning of accident. Breaking a cup by accident is as immoral as punching a playmate in the stomach - and more so if the mother discovers the shattered cup but misses the violence wrought on the playground. Tournier points out that something of this association of guilt with accident remains in each adult, "a kind of latent, unconscious, yet fearful guilt."

The person who is trying to win acceptance by being good is, of course, doomed to disappointment. One can no more earn acceptance than one can earn heaven. Conditional badness can be thought of as a kind of psychological Pelagianism. The person acting out of a sense of conditional badness is actually searching for unconditional love, but his actions necessarily put conditions on that love and, therefore, whatever he receives in terms of love and acceptance will be inadequate. He places conditions on the acceptance he seeks from others because he feels that he is essentially a bad person and not worth loving. "As an adult he will always be looking for approval from his friends, but he cannot win it from himself. His position is very paradoxical; he is inviting

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others to love what he secretly cannot love."

Eventually, the experience of acceptance can make the need for approval less urgent, but, to the degree that acceptance has not been experienced, childish needs can become adult neuroses.

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3 France, p. 60.
Neurotic Guilt

To persist in a sense of guilt is to refuse to grow, to consciously deny the truth of one's own being. When one experiences a sense of false guilt, however, one acts because of a false self-image. The image is not the result of an act. A person who has experienced acceptance can grow in self-awareness and in awareness of the needs of others. However, if because of childhood experiences, a person fails to grow into a realistic awareness of himself (Neurosis), the person may become convinced that he is an evil person and act accordingly. In other cases, the person may be convinced that if he doesn't follow certain rigid formulas, he will certainly become an evil person. This is false or neurotic guilt. Like true guilt, it is the result of a failure to perceive oneself realistically. However, in the case of neurotic guilt, this failure is conditioned rather than the result of a deliberate decision.

Until someone invents or manufactures perfect parents, there will be imperfect, painful childhood experiences. These experiences, repressed or etched in vivid memories, are likely to form the basis for neurosis and incongruence. Everyone is a little neurotic and, to repeat what was stated in Chapter One, guilt always involves both decision and identity.

False or neurotic guilt is also known as pervasive guilt. It is
often experienced as "an agonizing conviction that oneself is essentially bad."

Because of this belief that one is essentially bad, one will act in a way that provokes punishment. The person experiencing a true sense of guilt suffers from it after the commission of an act. The person suffering from pervasive guilt feels bad all of the time and will act out these feelings in order to give his suffering a concrete cause and in order to incur punishment. "Pervasive guilt drives its victims to wrongdoing while normal guilt results from wrongdoing."

The person feels guilty because he has been rejected and has interpreted that rejection as punishment. According to Schneiders, the equation goes like this: "I am worthless, bad, and evil (since I am rejected); but only the guilty are bad and evil; therefore, I am guilty."

Isolation and guilt (true and false) are closely related. In the case of true guilt, a person becomes isolated as a result of his actions. With false guilt, the isolation is a source of the feelings of guilt. Never having been accepted, the person is unable to reach beyond his own pain to accept others. "Many people feel their loneliness to be an

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5 Ibid., p. 29.

accusation in itself; they think that others would have succeeded in retaining friends where they have failed. To be isolated is to be guilty already...."

The mature (congruent) person can cope with both separation and involvement. He can make a distinction between solitude and isolation; he sees involvement as a means to self-discovery and not an escape.

Jager sees neurosis in general, and neurotic guilt in particular, as a means of coping with isolation. One tries to control isolation by being a bad person and thus "being the author of...isolation." "I will accuse myself of every wrong-doing, of lack of will or of stupidity in order to hide from myself that my stagnation, my repetition of myself, my despair, my emptiness is in the reality the absence of others."

Two of the distinguishing characteristics of depression are a sense of isolation and a sense of helplessness. The person needs to be able to act for himself, but first he needs to be accepted (not directed) by others. Jager maintains that depressives use false guilt as a means to isolate themselves from others and avoid change.

In the world of the depressive, guilt spins around its own axis because in that world the very possibility for change is missing.

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7 France, p. 17.

That fundamental possibility is another person...The essential and primary fact of the world of the depressive is that it is closed off from others and that it has excluded others. 9

9 Ibid., p. 163.
Scrupulosity

Conscience in the scrupulous person, rather than being a self-awareness that invites growth and development, has become a rigid set of rules that impede development. Scrupulosity is a "defect in personality, and thus a defect in conscience. In the scrupulous person the superego has become too rigid, literal and inflexible." The person becomes caught up in a rigid set of rules and loses his capacity to feel or think freely.

The scrupulous person and the sociopath (who will be discussed below) are polar opposites in many ways, although both are extreme examples of false guilt. The scrupulous person, unlike the sociopath, often comes from a stable home with relatively happy family background. He is an obedient child and a model student who is very eager to please and very dependent on others for approval. Rather than act out his anger or sexual feelings as the sociopath does, he will repress them. "The scrupulous child tends to over-intellectualize, is over-controlled, inhibited, and constrictive."

Weisner lays much of the blame for the development of scrupulosity in children on the Catholic schools where children were taught sex is

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11 Ibid., p. 64.
bad before they knew what it was. Most children, when confronted with something they don't understand, will simply ignore it. Therefore, the dire warnings of the evils of impurity 'in thought, word, and deed' flew harmlessly over their heads. However, the scrupulous child, who is anxious, confused, and lacks natural spontaneity will take every word to heart and will develop elaborate mechanisms to combat his growing sense of guilt. One solution may be to transfer all responsibility for action to an authority figure, so that the burden of guilt and potential guilt is lifted. In adults this mechanism becomes the "external conscience."

False guilt often serves as a mask or facade for the person's persistence in a sense of true guilt, which is the refusal to grow. Weisner has found that in children and adolescents, scrupulosity masks an inability to accept sexual roles and independence.

In adolescents, resolution of the problem of scrupulosity seems to go hand-in-hand with acceptance of and adjustment to newfound femininity or masculinity. Toward the conclusion of treatment, these children begin to behave more like typical teenagers. They begin to engage in normal social activities with the opposite sex....This might be another way of saying that they were helped to develop a sense of identity and independence. They became secure and mature enough to reach a decision and act upon it. 13


13 Weisner, p. 69.
Growth and development always happen in relation to others. The 'morality' that prevents the scrupulous person from developing also prevents him from relating to others in any meaningful way.

I refer to people for whom the necessary ethical dimension of life, without which we are not truly human, has somehow become a burden which lessens their capacity to respond freely, lovingly and creatively to that very humanness in themselves and others which the moral imperative is supposed to safeguard. So encumbered are they with the necessity to be moral that they have lost the capacity to be loving. 14

14 Hoffman, p. 125.
Sociopathic Behavior

On the opposite pole from the scrupulous person is the psychopathic or sociopathic personality. In British psychology, the term is psychopath; in American psychology, the term is sociopath and is a type of acting out neurotic. Although the terms may change, the problem remains the same. The sociopath is a person without conscience who, apparently, is incapable of experiencing guilt.

In terms of childhood experience, there are a number of causes of sociopathic behavior. Barring serious brain damage, the causes all revolve around a sense of being a bad person and a need to incur punishment. Craft suggests that a false sense of guilt may be caused by severe rejection, usually involving one hostile parent and one disinterested parent. Another possibility may be a combination of mild rejection and mild damage to the brain area (probably the hypothalamus). It is also possible that the person may assume the guilt of his parents. He may have witnessed the evil his parents have done, perhaps in terms of hostility toward each other or towards him, and the child will not be able to accept the fact that these people, his parents, who are the center of his existence, could act in such a manner. Instead, he will prefer to believe that he is the source of evil, taking the

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guilt of his parents upon himself.

The person suffering this kind of false guilt will tend to act out in ways that will force others to punish him. He creates crisis situations that provoke reactions of anger and rejection. "Unresolved guilt creates a need to make amends, to make restitution, to suffer enough to pay back what is amiss, to set things 'right' by damage to self and thus balance the 'crime'." As Menninger points out, some of these actions are really "lifesavers." Forcing others to inflict punishment relieves the "guilty" person of the necessity of punishing himself.

The sociopath may be hurt and/or angered by the response of others, but eventually he may divorce the response from the original act that provoked it. He will start to expect hostility and rejection, lies and betrayal, as a matter of course. While the fabric of a normal person's world is woven with truth and trust, the sociopath's world is a paranoidic tangle of suspicion and fear.

Guilt tends to rob the self of any sense of well-being and does not allow us to enjoy fully our health, wealth, and well-being while we have them. It leads us to expect misfortune, the malfunctioning of machines, hostility from people. And what we expect becomes a factor in evoking what we receive. 18

16 Allison, p. 12.
18 Allison, p. 12.
Another characteristic of the sociopath is that he acts out of impulse. His actions are never premeditated, but rather are in response to the pressures and needs of the moment. Dorothea McCarthy, in her article on formation of conscience, mentions the relationship between the ability to defer immediate rewards and trust.

The well-cared for infant learns very early that when his mother is there, making certain sounds in getting his bottle ready, he will be fed, and that everything will be all right. The child thus learns to wait and trust his mother, and in so doing he also learns to defer immediate gratification of his desires. 19

The sociopath has never learned to wait or to trust others. He recognizes standards of right and wrong but only in terms of possible punishment. Predictably, his relationships are shallow and exploitative.

He knows the difference between right and wrong. Any anxiety or depression that he might feel is the result of having been caught or exposed, or the fear of it, not the result of the action itself. He rarely loves deeply and almost never allows himself to become involved in a meaningful love relationship with anyone. 20

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20 Hyder, p. 87.
The Relationship of True Guilt to False Guilt

Returning to Rogers, man is a being who needs to grow and needs to be accepted (socialized autonomy). A persistent sense of guilt can be a conscious refusal to grow. The person with a false sense of guilt has also stopped growing and is using guilt itself as a means to avoid the necessity of growth. The scrupulous person sees guilt lurking around every corner; the sociopath is unaware that guilt exists except in punishment. Both are oblivious to the people around them.

The inability to love is the key to the problem of false guilt. The person who is suffering from true guilt may refuse to love, but the person who is suffering from a false sense of guilt cannot love. In the process of growing to psychological maturity, the person learns to transcend himself, to love unselfishly. He can do this insofar as he has acquired a realistic image of himself as a loving and loved creature. But the person who is experiencing false guilt has stopped growing - he is fixated at an earlier stage. Although his words may indicate the opposite, he will feel that he is essentially evil and the only kind of love or nurturing he should or can have is punishment. Very often the person with a false sense of guilt will use it as a mask to avoid confronting true guilt.

Thus a 'false guilt' seems likely to blanket a 'true guilt' and to draw its implacable venom therefrom...this true guilt consisted in a certain refusal to develop, to assume full selfhood or total responsibility in a given situation. 21

21 Tournier, p. 65.
One illustration of the dynamics of the true-false guilt relationship is the student who is making very bad grades or is flunking out of school. Allison says if you show him a student who is flunking out, he'll show you a student with a false sense of guilt—probably towards his parents.

A college chaplain, who is an old acquaintance, insists that he has known no student to fail merely for academic reasons. "They all had an emotional need to fail. They flunk out because of some deep and usually unconscious need to fail." Incidentally, this phenomena is quite often related to the sense of guilt which the student has about his relationship with his parents. 22

On the surface, it appears that the student is experiencing a false or neurotic sense of guilt. He has an idea that he is evil and needs to be punished. Therefore, he flunks out of school forcing his parents to punish him. However, on a deeper level, the student is also masking a true sense of guilt resulting from his refusal to grow.

People grow to maturity as naturally as a plant grows towards sunshine. If a person refuses to take the next step to maturity, he will pay a high price for his denial of self. The student might prefer the wrath of an angry parent to the discovery that he is capable of being a successful, lovable person apart from his parents.

Excessive drinking (including alcoholism), drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, shoplifting and other forms of theft (the "rip-off"), all of these can be forms of false guilt into which a person escapes to avoid the necessity of real growth.

22
Allison, p. 12.
CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOLUTION OF GUILT

What It Means to Say "I'm Sorry"

Guilt that is unrecognized or ignored is essentially self-destructive. Living things are rarely stagnant; they are either growing or dying. To persist in a sense of guilt in the face of acceptance is essentially self-destructive. Therefore, it is necessary for a therapist to deal with the problem of guilt, not out of a desire to impose a particular ethical standard, but because guilt, as a self-destructive force, is opposed to the principle of life and the healing process.

It is not for the analyst to decide what is sinful for his patient or what he should do about it. The psychoanalyst believes that the qualities of aggression and self-destruction are evil, and this he can point out without charging the patient with moral turpitude, or committing him to a specific obligation, or himself (the analyst) to an esoteric or specific code. Why are aggression and self-destruction prima facie evils for the psychoanalyst to single out? Because both are opposed to the life principle, to the healing of the patient's disorganization and distress.

Menninger picks up many of Mowrer's ideas regarding guilt as a self-destructive force. Real guilt that is not acknowledged is, according to Mowrer, the primary source of neurosis and psychosis. In order to live, man needs to grow as much as he needs to breathe. Unacknowledged guilt robs man of his life.

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1 Menninger, p. 23.
If it proves empirically true that certain forms of conduct characteristically lead human beings into emotional instability, what better or firmer basis would one wish for labeling such conduct as destructive, self-defeating, evil, sinful?...there is, surely, no disposition on the part of anyone to hold that sin as such, necessarily dooms a person to interminable suffering in the form of neurosis or psychosis. The presumption is rather that sin has this effect only where it is acutely felt but not acknowledged and corrected. 2

Denial is a common way of dealing with guilt. One attempts to get rid of it by insisting that it doesn't exist and by trying to affirm freedom. However, amoral 'freedom' is valueless and 'valueless' tends to be synonymous with 'worthless.' The person who insists on his total 'freedom' while refusing to acknowledge guilt is saying that he is not worth struggling for - there is no ideal or vision of self against which to measure action. "In becoming amoral, ethically neutral, and 'free,' we have cut the very roots of our being; lost our deepest sense of selfhood and identity; and, with neurotics themselves, find ourselves asking: Who am I? What is my destiny?" 3

The ability to say 'I'm sorry' is the ability to recognize the truth about oneself. It is recognition of self as valuable and worthwhile. However, no one ever says 'I'm sorry' by himself. The words that confirm one's own sense of self-worth must be spoken to another person.

It is only because of this restored sense of worth - restored


3 Ibid., p. 52.
relation to another - that the person is able to accept himself. The process of reconciliation involves reconciliation with oneself as well as with others.

If guilt is to be healed, the victim must be reconciled to himself. Were his feelings mainly outgoing, there would be little problem if he felt nothing but grief at the damage which he had caused to others, reconciliation with them would follow easily. He would have no hesitation in saying 'I'm sorry.' But because his feelings are usually complicated by inner remorse and self-rejection, reconciliation becomes difficult...

Confession, repentance, apology are all attempts to restore a realistic vision of self. It is the acceptance of one's limitations and even the valuing or prizing of them. A persistent sense of guilt refuses to look at the truth. The person acknowledges the fact that a sin has been committed but does not see the fact that he can be both a sinner and saved. False guilt is a kind of moral myopia. Biebauskas says that the inability to accept one's whole being, limitations as well as virtues, is characteristic of the neurotic.

There is a doubt in the mind of some authors whether a neurotic is really accepting guilt as a part of his personality. Goppert (1960), dealing with a new approach to obsessive-compulsive neurosis, expressed this idea in suggesting that the basic difficulty in neurosis was failure to accept one's own limitations and thus to adjust within the framework of these limitations. 3

To say 'I'm sorry' is also to abandon attempts to manipulate

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2 France, p. 20.

people. The person who has a sense of guilt may substitute manipulation for relationship. To some extent, the guilty person has destroyed the truth that made relationship possible. For the guilt-ridden person, manipulation is not just a reaction in a particular time or place. It has become a way of life.

Manipulation in such a general sense is or becomes not merely the sum of whatever discrete games (in Berne's sense) a man has played in relation to particular people on particular occasions. It is instead a pervading style, a well-grounded, empirical though often unarticulated philosophy of human relations. Such a style frequently coexists with a profound distrust of oneself and of others, and contributes to a great dislike of oneself. 4

Finally, the statement 'I'm sorry,' as it attempts to restore truth, relationship, and a sense of self-acceptance, also signals a belief in the possibility of forgiveness and change. No one says 'I'm sorry' unless there is hope of forgiveness - if not by the person injured, then by someone representing that person - a friend, therapist, confessor. When genuine guilt, which can be the refusal to grow, is acknowledged in repentance, it is transformed into possibility. "Genuine guilt reveals itself in a world of possibilities and the guilty person avails himself of these possibilities in order to effect rectification. Only within a world of such possibilities can he hope for forgiveness." 5


5 Jager, p. 162.
What It Means to Be Forgiven

Forgiveness is a word or gesture that recognizes the truth and worth of the other. In the recognition of that truth the possibility of dialogue is restored. Thus the expression of forgiveness is the experience of the restoration of relationship. The ability to grow emerges in relationship and with it the possibility of love is renewed, both for the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. Forgiveness can transform the guilty and guiltless equally. "For the act of loving another gives life to the lover as well as to the one loved, and to speak the word of love is to be loved as well as to love." And to speak the word of forgiveness is to be forgiven as well as to forgive.

"Man becomes man in personal encounter." Man realizes his own limitations in encounter and tries to reach past them in dialogue. Paradoxically, it is in the recognition of limitation ('I'm sorry') and the restoration of dialogue (forgiveness) that the limitations are themselves overcome and man becomes truly free.

But what is here generally overlooked, it seems, is that recovery (constructive change, redemption) is most assuredly attained, not by helping a person reject and rise above his sins, but by helping him accept them. This is the paradox which we have not at all understood and which is the very crux of the problem...the moment he...begins to accept his

7 Ibid., p. 66.
guilt and his sinfulness, the possibility of radical reformation opens up; and with this, the individual may legitimately, though not without pain and effort, pass from deep, pervasive self-rejection and self-torture to a new freedom, of self-respect and peace. 8

The restoration of truth not only involves the recognition of and responsibility for action, it also involves the ability to accept thoughts and emotions as part of oneself. In the case of false guilt, self-acceptance restores the person's ability to think and feel freely. It is no longer necessary to repress wayward thoughts and emotions as evil and threatening.

Like angry, frightened children, thoughts and feelings which are honestly accepted, can be loved, and in love their natural development is reestablished. Eventually, irrespective of their original malfunction, they can become valued members of one's psychic family. 9

Forgiveness restores the person to a sense of peace and harmony. It is no longer necessary to repress or act out guilt feelings if the actual source of guilt has been confronted and forgiven. Repression tightens the web of lies and manipulation; forgiveness gently releases the guilty person from the web and restores a sense of peace that is both free and secure.

Finally, forgiveness does not simply restore one's ability to relate to the person who forgives. Forgiveness restores and strengthens

8 Mowrer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, p. 54.
9 Benson, p. 35.
one's ability to relate to everyone. Browning points out that acceptance in the therapeutic model is representative acceptance. If the therapist's acceptance only involved the therapist himself, the client's relationship with the therapist might improve, but his general condition would remain the same. However, the aim of psychotherapy is to change the patient's life, not just a single relationship.

In brief, the therapist's empathic acceptance announces, proclaims, and witnesses to the fact that the client is truly acceptable, not only to him as a therapist, but to some structure which transcends all finite referents, i.e., to the universe and whatever power holds it together. And, similarly, the client does not come to feel that he is acceptable simply to the therapist, but accepts the fact that he is acceptable in an ontological sense. 10

The key to successful psychotherapy in Rogers' model is the recognition of the worth and dignity of the person. This is the presupposition to all successful therapy. Similarly, forgiveness recognizes and restores a person to a position of worth. One must then take the next step and ask not only what it means to be forgiven, but why is forgiveness possible. How is it possible to offer acceptance and forgiveness? Browning's answer is the recognition that our standards are limited and that ultimately a person's worth is based on or measured by a structure that transcends finite standards.

Rogers has contended that the therapist must confront the client as a person of worth and dignity... It is a presupposition

10 Browning, p. 150-51.
to all successful therapy. . . . To say that each individual has an intrinsic worth and dignity is to say, in addition, that each individual has it irrespective of particular attitudes which fellow humans may hold toward him. It suggests that ultimately the individual's worth and dignity is measured by a structure which transcends all finite attitudes. 11

It is at the point of the source of worth, the possibility of absolute acceptance, that psychology and theology begin to differ.

While psychology looks to man for possibilities of growth and acceptance, theology finds the source of acceptance in Christ.

11 Ibid., p. 151.
Part II: SACRAMENTAL FORGIVENESS

With the new rite of Penance (*Ordo Penitentiae*, 1973), the emphasis in the celebration of the sacrament has moved from confession and atonement to acceptance, dialogue, and reconciliation. In the following pages we will examine these three ideas, acceptance, dialogue, and reconciliation, in light of the therapeutic model and explore the implications of these ideas for the new rite of Penance.
CHAPTER IV

A THEOLOGY OF ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance and Guilt

In discussing the therapeutic model, we said that the therapist receives or accepts the client as having essential worth and dignity and avoids imposing conditions of worth on the client. Browning describes the situation of acceptance as an "active-passive relationship." The therapist actively cares for and values the feelings of the client, but expresses this concern by passively receiving and accepting the client's feelings. At times, the therapist will receive feelings the client cannot confront or express.

Of course, the therapist's acceptance can never be fully unconditional, but Browning, Howe, and others have used this model to explain God's unconditional empathic acceptance of man. God is the being who is totally for others, thus his acceptance of the other is unqualified and unconditional.

In the ideal case, there would be nothing that others could do or say that would cause this individual to withdraw or put conditions on this capacity empathically to accept and receive the other. This would be the nature of the ideal instance of unconditional empathic acceptance. 1

1 Browning, pp. 176-77.
The individual Browning is referring to here is God. Because this acceptance springs from the nature of his own being for others, God must remain unconditionally accepting if he is to be consistent or congruent with himself.

Browning compares Rogerian incongruence with sin as it is described by Irenaeus in his Christus Victor theory of atonement. There is an element of idolatry in both sin and incongruence insofar as one is relying on finite values for one's sense of worth. Moreover, "...absolutizing finite values leads to estrangement." The relation between guilt and isolation was discussed earlier as was the role guilt plays in separating one from the truth of self and others. Here the sense of estrangement includes not only self and others, but God.

Browning goes on to compare incongruence with Irenaeus' idea of the devil. The devil offers man false conditions of worth. However, the devil does not exist independently of God. He is a parasite living off the life-giving energy of God. When the devil offers man false conditions of worth, he is simultaneously cutting off man from the source of his own life and energy in God. Similarly, conditions of worth in the therapeutic model live off man's own capacity to grow, the actualization tendency. If man is to regain his ability to grow, he must be freed from those false conditions of worth robbing him of his own energy and life. "The point is that Irenaeus' concept of the devil and the

2 Browning, p. 182.
psychotherapeutically derived conditions of worth constitute real powers from which man needs to be 'freed' if he is to be saved."

Pointing out that Irenaeus insists on maintaining man's freedom, i.e., the possibility of authentic guilt, Browning believes that Rogers fails to maintain freedom. Rogers only identifies two sources of incongruence: introjection and immaturity. Thus he seems to ignore the possibility of choice.

Browning's criticism of Rogers is, in this instance, unfounded. The point of Rogers' therapy is to free people from false standards of worth and restore their ability to experience and decide freely. This presupposes that a person has the capacity to decide. Rogers' theories also maintain that a person can choose to be helped, and can choose to accept the therapist's acceptance.

In terms of our consideration of guilt, the most important difference between Rogers and Irenaeus lies in the source of growth: for Rogers, the source is the actualization tendency; for Irenaeus it is the image of God in man. The similarity between them is in their understanding of the nature of guilt: "...here in both theories guilt emerges as an inhibitor to change rather than an objective fact that

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3 Ibid., p. 183.

4 Rogers and Stevens, p. 21.
condemns the client even if he were to change." Guilt may be imposed on man as a result of his own decision (true guilt) or by conditioning (false guilt); usually it is a combination of both. In either case, acceptance remains the prerequisite for growth. The therapist was the source of acceptance in the therapeutic model. In a theology of acceptance the source is God.

5 Browning, p. 138.
Acceptance and God

One of the presuppositions underlying the idea of God's unconditional acceptance of the world is that God is in relation to the world. Browning maintains that God accepts all feelings and yet remains unchanged and unaffected by these feelings. God's self-image is to accept empathically all feelings without conditions or qualifications - to remain completely for others.

The process of unconditional acceptance is an active/passive process because, as God accepts the feelings of the world, he also conveys his "care, concern, love and interest in the world." God's empathic acceptance can be seen from the perspective of creation in that his acceptance allows each new feeling in individuals to come into existence. The world is continually new because God knows the world in the Biblical, creative sense of the word 'knowledge.' His knowledge is also acceptance.

Heschel proposes a similar idea in his description of God's pathos, i.e., God feels the suffering of his people and yet remains fundamentally unchanged. Moltmann points out that this leads to a dualistic image of God in the sense that there is an external God that feels and an internal God unaffected by feeling. According to Moltmann, only a Trinitarian understanding of God can resolve this dilemma. Abraham Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Jurgen Moltmann, The Crucified God (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

Browning, p. 193.

Ibid., p. 195.
Although it may be subject to denial or distortion, man always senses God's empathic acceptance, even if he is only aware of it on a subconscious level. This knowledge of the existence of unconditional acceptance is the chief motivating (actualizing) force in man and Browning identifies it as the image of God in man. On a conscious level, however, man tends to react to unconditional acceptance with hostility and rejection because man is fighting to maintain his own conditions of worth. God's acceptance must include an acceptance of these negative feelings, otherwise, God's acceptance would be mere sentimentality. "Sentimentality is sympathy based on a shallow knowledge or feeling for the real feelings of the object of sympathy." If we are to believe that we have indeed been fully accepted - believe to the point of being able to put aside conditions of worth - and be transformed into something new, we must be persuaded that these hostile feelings which we believe to be most unacceptable in us have been accepted.

Browning says that the logical end of all these negative feelings is the death of the one accepting them: "...the cross represents God's capacity to feel fully the depths of sin's hostility...the relativity of God's absoluteness." The resurrection, on the other hand, indicates that God can accept the depths of man's sinfulness and still remain unqualified, totally accepting. In this sense, the cross and resurrection

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Ibid., p. 204.
manifest God's essence of "unqualified qualiﬁability" which, according to Browning, is the very structure of love.

Browning maintains that this essence of empathic acceptance has always existed, that it was first shown in God's "...creative caring and fellowship" and after the fall, through his "...graceful caring and fellowship." Moreover, God's acceptance has existed from all times, but, because of man's self-imposed conditions of worth, man has continually rejected it. God's acceptance remains, however, even in the face of man's rejection, and this unwavering acceptance is forgiveness. "Forgiveness is the continuation of God's unconditional empathic acceptance in spite of man's rejection of it. Forgiveness is the nature of grace."

There are two major problems with Browning's theory. The first is that it would seem that grace is a necessary part of creation, because of God's nature - a being totally for others - and his empathic acceptance of man. That statement would seem to contradict the more traditional description of grace as wholly gratuitous. However, this particular problem of the gratuity of grace vs. man's tendency toward the supernatural (the image of God in man) is beyond the boundaries of

10 Ibid., p. 205.
11 Ibid., p. 206.
12 Ibid., p. 207.
this study. The second and more immediate question involves Browning's understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This point is crucial for an understanding of the sacramental character of Christ's activities and of the sacraments themselves.

Christ, for Browning, is the manifestation of forgiveness that already exists, but not the cause of forgiveness. He maintains that the event of Jesus Christ does not "reconstitute our relationship with God," but rather shows us that relationship in terms we can understand. This view understands Christ only in terms of manifestation and overlooks the role of Christ as mediator. Browning has concentrated on Christ's function and ignored the person. In the next chapter we will explore Christ's role as mediator.

The importance of acceptance in the therapeutic model has been discussed and we have seen that the source of this acceptance is in God. But there were two parts to Rogers' description of the nature of man: actualization and socialization. Assuming that acceptance is a pre-requisite of actualization, how is it communicated - why can it be communicated? In the therapeutic model, the client experiences the acceptance of the therapist in dialogue. As we will see in the next chapter, Christ himself is the dialogue of sacraments.

13 Ibid., pp. 210 and 240.
14 Ibid., p. 241.
CHAPTER V

A THEOLOGY OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue and God

The old rite of Confession with its emphasis on anonymity and the use of fixed formulas maintained a reciprocal relationship with a sacramental theology that often tended to be highly mechanistic. As Schillebeeckx points out, "...the inclination was to look upon the sacraments as but one more application, although in a special manner, of the general laws of cause and effect."

Encounter has, no doubt, become something of a cliché in modern philosophical and psychological writing, but Schillebeeckx argues that encounter with God has always been recognized in theology as a reality. This encounter is experienced in and through dialogue. Man constantly seeks to encounter God, to experience his acceptance, but cannot do so by his own power. Browning maintained that God's acceptance is always experienced, at least on a subconscious level, because of the nature of God; however, if the therapeutic model holds true, acceptance can only be experienced in encounter. Schillebeeckx says it is the desire for encounter that is experienced by all men - but this encounter is only made possible through Christ. The first sentence of the Decree

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emphasizes Christ’s role as mediator. "Reconciliation between God and men was brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of his death and resurrection." 

Schillebeeckx follows Augustine’s history of man’s search for encounter with God, tracing it through pagan religions and Israel to the emergence of the Christ. "All humanity receives that inward word of God calling men to a communion in grace with himself." This call is the image of God in man and is the source of man’s need to grow, to ‘actualize’ himself. The world itself, as a creation of God (and, perhaps as important, our need to experience the world) is a ‘stimulus’ that lures us to further growth and greater openness to experience. "Life itself becomes a truly supernatural and external revelation, in which creation begins to speak the language of salvation." To the extent one refuses to grow and persists in a sense of guilt, one is also rejecting life itself.


3 Henri de Lubac, S.J. traces the same history in The Mystery of the Supernatural (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), however he concentrates on the paradox of man’s desire for the encounter with the supernatural and his inability to attain it by his own power. Schillebeeckx emphasizes the encounter itself.

4 Schillebeeckx, p. 7.

5 Ibid., p. 8.
The pagan 'Church,' according to Schillebeeckx, experienced moments of grace, touched upon the reality of unconditional acceptance. These moments (and here Schillebeeckx differs from Browning) were mediated through Christ, made possible by Christ.

Grace (and, using Browning's definition, forgiveness) becomes visible in Israel. In Schillebeeckx' interpretation of Ezekiel, one can see that Israel is defined by and given worth through its acceptance by Yahweh. "...thou wast cast out upon the face of the earth in the abjection of thy soul [i.e., because you were found worthless] ...passing by, I [Yahweh] saw that thou wast trodden under foot in thy own blood. And I said to thee when thy wast in thy blood: Live...and grow up..." (Ezekiel 16:5-7). This encounter, again, was mediated through Christ. Israel is, first of all, accepted; is told it is accepted (in dialogue made possible through Christ) and can, therefore, grow "like a plant in the field."

God's acceptance remains even when Israel chooses to reject it and to establish its own standards of worth. "You also took your fair jewels of my gold and silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men..." (Ezekiel 16:17). Nevertheless, God again offers Israel life and the possibility of growth (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

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\[6\]
Ibid., p. 12.
God continually offered his acceptance to Israel in dialogue, but Israel often would not or could not respond, would refuse to live and grow, would sink into the stagnant silence of a dying relationship. What was needed, says Schillebeeckx, was one who could respond in dialogue perfectly. In him the response would be so complete that the barrier between the word spoken and the response would be shattered. He would be the word itself, the dialogue itself: "...The perfection both of the divine invitation and of the human response in faith....This was Jesus."

Each act of Jesus, human and divine, is both an act of unconditional acceptance and a perfect response to that acceptance. Jesus, who was always the mediator of grace, makes grace possible. Moreover, this acceptance is manifested in a visible form, "a bestowal of salvation in historical visibility;" thus, it is sacramental.

In the therapeutic model, the invisible, interior realities of emotion and acceptance are communicated through dialogue within a visible encounter between two people. In a way, the expressions of acceptance that are sensibly perceived become a sign of an interior reality. It is because the client perceives the underlying reality that he is able to change. The encounter itself is not a sacrament (although it has been speculated that sacramental grace may be present in a counseling situation). However, it provides us with a good analogy of sacrament.

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7 Ibid., p. 13.
8 Ibid., p. 15.
Jesus is a visible realization of the grace of redemption, of unconditional acceptance. He is not simply the manifestation of acceptance which exists somewhere else, in someone else; he is acceptance itself. He is, therefore, a sign that causes what it signifies, a sacrament. "The man Jesus...is the sacrament, the primordial sacrament..."  

Christ is the center point of God's love for man and man's response to God. There is a downward movement, God's love coming to us "by way of a human heart," and an upward movement, Son to the Father, man to God. Christ is dialogue, but, as with every dialogue, there are innumerable levels of meanings, a rainbow of nuances. He worships the Father as his Son and as a man representing all men. He accepts the Father's love while bestowing it on men. He is "personally a dialogue with God the Father, the supreme realization and therefore the norm and the source of every encounter with God."  

Schillebeeckx also says that Christ's life is characterized by growth. He is not fully realized (actualized) at his birth, when he calls his first disciples, performs his first miracle, or is honored by

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9 Ibid., p. 15.
10 Ibid., p. 17.
11 Ibid., p. 18.
the crowds on Palm Sunday. He is not willing to trade the possibility of what he will become for security or power (Luke 4:1-13). He is established absolutely as the Christ at the Resurrection - life has grown to new life, love toward love.

Finally, as Schillebeeckx points out, Christ doesn't sit there at the right hand of the Father doing nothing. The dialogue continues. The Son continuously worships the Father, Jesus sends forth his love in the form of the Spirit. Sacramental encounter, man's dialogue with God, continues in the Church.

\[12\]

\[Ibid., p. 41.\]
Dialogue and Confession

Every sacrament is a prayer; a dialogue between man and God, and between men in a community made possible by God. There is really only one sacrament, the Church, and each of the traditional seven sacraments are expressions of the one. Because of the presence of many people, dialogue in the other sacraments tend to become formalized and ritualized. Confession is unique because it is a one-to-one encounter, a meeting of two people on an intimate level. Thus, Confession is the "dialogue sacrament par excellence." Through this encounter with another person, it offers the penitent an opportunity for encounter with God in prayer. The old rite of Penance tended to be ritualized, impersonal and mechanistic. From the first words of the new rite the sacrament is placed on a personal level and dialogue is possible.

Like the dialogue that is Christ himself, the dialogue of Confession exists on many levels. The new rite quotes Philippians 1:9-10 on the possibility of ever-deepening understanding: "My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception." As Buckley points


14 "The priest should welcome the penitent with fraternal charity, and, if the occasion permits, address him with friendly words." Rite, p. 16.
out, the dialogue can start at one point, and within a free-flowing conversation "peel off layer after layer of obstacles and defenses until the core of personality stands open before the gaze of God and man."

When the penitent approaches the sacrament of Confession, he does so because he has already experienced something of God's acceptance. No one says he is sorry unless there is hope of forgiveness.  Christianity itself is "the realization that it is safe to love." The penitent's act of coming to confess is an act of faith in God's acceptance and the worth that acceptance creates. It is a sign of the penitent's trust "that all is not lost, that growth is still possible."

God initiates this dialogue with the grace that first enabled the penitent to recognize his sin; the penitent's decision to confess is a response to that initiative. Thus, the priest's welcome, "with fraternal charity...with friendly words," represents still another level of dialogue within the process of Penance. The priest's words of welcome could, perhaps, also be taken as representative of the community's interest in the penitent. Earlier we examined the relationship between guilt and isolation; to refuse to grow is to cut oneself off from the community that makes growth possible. The welcome shatters the isolation that guilt has imposed and


offers the penitent the possibility of reconciliation with the community.

The reading of the Word of God opens both the priest and the penitent to still deeper levels of dialogue. God's mercy and love are again proclaimed, reinforcing the moments of grace that first touched the penitent's heart. He is again reassured that forgiveness and growth are still possible.

The Introduction to the Rite states that contrition is the most important act of the penitent but this "heartful sorrow" is the negative half; the section stresses that there should be "a profound change of the whole person." If guilt is a refusal to grow, then the recognition and rejection of guilt necessarily brings growth and change.

In confession the penitent must "...open his heart to the minister of God." Here the process of dialogue is brought to its deepest level. The penitent is brought to the reality of who he is. Illusions and rationalizations are swept aside as the penitent hears his own voice describing those things his heart had been afraid to acknowledge. The penitent may, perhaps, watch the reaction of the priest to see forgiveness as well as hear the words of absolution.

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18
Rite of Penance, p. 16.

19
Ibid., p. 10.

20
Ibid., p. 11.
Early in the history of the sacrament, the act of penance itself was the central part of the sacrament and involved everything from weeping and wailing at the door of the Church to embarking on long and arduous pilgrimages. Gradually, as contrition and confession came to be emphasized, the penance became routine and perfunctory. The new rite suggests that the act of penance be relevant to the situation of the penitent, "a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life." As in contrition, the point is to grow into new life.

If dialogue reached its deepest level during the penent's confession, it is most profound at the moment of absolution, for it is here that the dialogue becomes that of God to man. Christ is dialogue and this becomes evident as the priest pronounces the words of absolution. "In the sacrament of Penance, as in the Incarnation, the human voice becomes God's voice." As acceptance becomes visible in the Incarnation of Christ, so too, forgiveness becomes visible (sensible) during absolution.

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21 The name of the sacrament has also shifted along with the emphasis of the sacrament, moving from 'Penance' to 'Confession' to the somewhat awkward 'Sacrament of Reconciliation.' While 'Penance' remains the official term, the more informal 'Confession' has been used throughout this study because it emphasizes the experience of dialogue.

22 Rite of Penance, p. 11.

23 Buckley suggests that elaborate penance are unnecessary, "to love and keep on loving in a sinful world is hard enough for those who really work at it." Communio, p. 91.

The old rite tended to emphasize the penitent's role and the honesty and accuracy of his confession. Monden points out that what the penitent tells the priest is only a sign of what he is telling God. Unlike the situation of the therapeutic model, the dialogue of confession will not falter if the penitent's confession is inaccurate (assuming the inaccuracy is not willful) or awkward, or if the priest misunderstands the penitent's words. Confession is not a court of law, but a sacrament; the emphasis should not be on the testimony of the accused, but on the encounter with God. In fact, concentrating on a recitation of one's sins can become a means of avoiding a confrontation with the reality of God's love. It can be a means of persisting in a sense of guilt and refusing to grow.

The emphasis in the new rite brings the penitent out of a self-centered concentration on his own sinfulness to an experience of Christ's love. Reconciled through the dialogue that is Christ, the penitent can "live and grow like a plant in the field."

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27 Neophitosa, p. 24.
CHAPTER VI

A THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

Christ, who manifests and makes possible God's unconditional acceptance of man, is the center point of dialogue between man and God. He is a radical Yes to life and growth, to the full meaning of being human. "The Son of God, the Christ Jesus that we proclaimed among you - ...was never Yes and No: with him it was always Yes, and however many promises God made, the Yes to them is all in him." (2 Cor. 1:19-21).

Persistent guilt is a 'no' to one's own humanity. Rogers said that man is characterized by the need to grow and that the source of the need to grow is the actualization tendency. Growth is made possible by acceptance. Browning suggested that the source of the need to grow is the image of God in man and that growth is made possible through God's unconditional acceptance, the ground of all human acceptance. To refuse to grow, therefore, is to deny the truth of what one is and the reality of God's acceptance.

Mowrer believes that the problem of guilt is not so much the morality of a specific act as it is the anonymity of the act and the consequent need for deceit. Acceptance experienced within a social context is a prerequisite for growth, however, the result of a deliberate refusal to grow is to disassociate oneself from the people who communicate that acceptance - the Church. Refusing all opportunities of reconciliation,

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Haering, p. 23. 66
the person can become surrounded by an isolation that grows deeper and more impenetrable until it has reached a state that is hell itself.

"Hell is our isolated selves having finally obtained the wish expressed by our lives; self-entombed eternally frozen in the attitude of refusal that leaves at death the resume of our entire life." Therefore, although one cannot escape into nothingness through the "metaphysical suicide" of guilt, one does slip into a self-imposed isolation, which is itself a kind of nothingness.

The isolation of guilt is accompanied by a sense of worthlessness. In refusing to grow one has said 'no' to God's acceptance as well as to that of the community. Reconciliation breaks the barriers of isolation and the sense of worthlessness. It restores one to relationship with community so that one is able to listen openly with the entanglements of lies and deceit. When the penitent is able to listen, he can hear the words of God's acceptance and learn again of God's love. Forgiveness restores the penitent's sense of worth. "The...goal of the use of the new Rite is to encourage the penitent to have done with doubts about his worth, about the interest and goodness of God, and to himself take the initiatives which will heal him of the wounds of the secular

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3 Buckley, Communic, p. 89.
and the material." God's initiative of grace restores the penitent's own sense of initiative; he can once more grow through his own decisions.

Reconciliation cannot exist merely as an abstract theory, it must exist concretely as forgiveness between men. The new rite, with its rejection of anonymity, and its emphasis on encounter, brings the reconciliation of the Paschal mystery to a concrete expression of forgiveness. One is brought, for a moment, from the majesty of Christ's Easter appearance to the disciples (Jn. 20:19-23) to the intimacy of his encounter with Peter (Jn. 21:15-17). The celebration of Penance is the celebration of the Easter mystery on a personal, individual level. It restores the penitent to the process of growth and to life itself.

Christ's incarnation was a process formed in love and going through death to new life. This process of his life, death, and resurrection bestows on man his ability to grow. Each man, formed in Christ's love, rejects his own life when he refuses to grow. The new rite of Penance, recognizing the fundamental unity of man's psychological and spiritual life, offers man the 'yes' to new life and growth that is Christ himself.

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