

Concerning those negligent in the fulfillment of their Christian Duty of Confession

Those negligent in the fulfillment of their Christian debt of Confession and Holy Communion, the priest is obligated to teach, correct and offer exhortations about this not only in the form of lectures in church, but also individually at every convenient opportunity¹ (see pp. 966-972). At the end of the year the priest enters into the private **register all who were not** at Confession and Holy Communion² (except for children) with the notation of how many years in succession they were absent.³; the priest individually asks each of the named in this register about the reason for his evasion from the holy mysteries⁴, and if one who was not for only one year, explains with a good reason, or, having recognized his negligence gives his word to unfailingly do his duty in the nearest lent, and not later as in Great Lent, the priest excludes such from the register, leaving, however, as a note in the confession lists not in the former number⁵. If for two years in succession they were not at Confession and Holy Communion the priest at own discretion, either leaves or excludes them in the register⁶, with the confirmation of the negligent resolute, that when they do not fulfill their Christian debt even for the third year, then they will unfailingly be reported to the diocesan authorities⁷. The priest specially reports about those who have not fulfilled their Christian debt of confession for two or three years in succession to the diocesan hierarch⁸. His eminence, through the parish priest or through other entrusted ecclesiastics, or, finally, himself, depending on the circumstances and local convenience, explains to the negligent and tries measures of persuasion to return him to his Christian duty with an imposed penance at his own discretion on the basis of church canons⁹. In the same way he cedes even with these on whatever other lawsuits revealed in government offices is the absence from Confession and Holy Communion, but with this difference, that in this latter case the penance should be public, in the parish church or monastery, without the attachment of officials who are also domiciled from homes¹⁰. Those who will not be taught by exhortations, will not come to repentance and will not fulfill their Christian debt will be reported to the civil authorities who have supervision over them¹¹ (Uk. Sv. Syn. [Decrees of the Holy Synod] Sept. 24, 1858; Ustav Dukhovnikh Konsistorii [Ustav of the Theological Consistory], 17; Ustav about the Prevention and Suppression of Crime, article 22, publ. 1890). Never were they allowed at communion before the sworn witness (article 262 of the

Zakon sudoproizvodstvo [Law of Legal Proceedings] on the actions of punishment in part 2, vol. XVI of the Svod Zakonov [Code of Laws], and publ. in 1892).

¹ **Those negligent about repentance** and those neglecting the fulfillment their Christian duty, the **priest should** frighten with the wrath of God, increasing and gravitating for days after day, like a cloud over the heads of such people (Rom. 2:4-5; Is. 5:11 and so forth). Exhorting the urgent fulfillment of the Christian duty, it is necessary to point out that repentance of the sick and in fear of death, how it seemed sincere and heart-felt, may not always be sufficient justification before God, because in old age and sickness "we do not abandon sins, sins abandon us". The more it is necessary in good time to cleanse the conscience by repentance, so that before the death of the consciousness of sinfulness, thought about how the entire life was spent oblivious to God, in laziness and neglect of Christian duties, the sooner can the soul incline, which has not been nourished in the feeling of fidelity to the providence of God, to despair. Besides from heavy illness, from domestic crying, from fear of death it is impossible to be so steadfast and calm to turned over to reflection necessary for excitation in oneself of true feelings repentance, faith and hope in Christ. But the most important impulse for the urgent fulfillment of the debt of confession should exhibit that postponed repentance "often unintentionally dies before the righteous judgment seat of God" (See Kn. o dolzhn. presb. prikh. [Book on the Duties of the Parish Presbyter], § 98).

² Confessors, according to pastoral influence on them by the father confessor, **not communing** (refer to pp. 1025-1026), are noted in the corresponding column of confession lists of those who were not at Holy Communion "according to the advice of the father confessor".

³ In view of this, that **notation in the confession lists** sometimes out of date for psalm readers, is made without strict reasons with activity and for some parishioners gives them the possibility to evade from fulfillment of a most important Christian debt, the Novgorod diocesan authorities proposed that the names of parishioners, in the prevention of evasion from the fulfillment of their Christian debt of confession and holy communion, be entered in the confession lists not by psalm readers, but by priests themselves (Tserkovnyi Vestnik [Church Messenger] 1888, 10).

The Arkhangelsk Theological Consistory, with complete secure control over the fulfillment by parishioners of their Christian debt, ruled 1) to prescribe through the dean: a) that each of the clergy, if he has persons of other parishes who fulfill their Christian debt of confession and holy communion, soon after Great Lent notify the clergy of those parishes to which they belong, b) that psalm readers or deacons, while recording in the altar book of confessions, in the special column noted, who is of what parish; c) in order that priests explain to those confessing the necessity to take the Certificate of Confession and Holy Communion, if they are from another parish, and immediately to present these certificates to their clergy (See Pskovskiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Pskovian Diocesan News] 1895, 6).

Spiritual Board on Sept. 24, 1896 by the Protospesbyters of the Army and Navy Chaplains ordered that diocesan priests, having performed the mystery of confession for the **ranks** of those **military units**, establishments and institutions, in which it is not necessary for unassigned priests (but have fulfilled the needs by priests of diocesan departments), did not enter into the confession list of the churches of these ranks entrusted to them, but were limited to note those informed by their military authorities of the confession lists, after that and returned to the latter for sending to the Spiritual Board.

⁴ But for the Articles of War (See Bk. 1, part 3, article 366) neither arrest, nor does illness, nor stay for a neither trial, nor military leave **not release them from the annual fulfillment of the performance of the debt** of confession and Holy Communion.

⁵ If someone is from the **edinovertsy**, according to whatever circumstances, will not be at confession and communion of the holy mysteries, that they will be judged by their spiritual fathers according to their sacred rules. If

someone through negligence or contempt or for other illegal reasons will evade those holy things, then such will be written down in special books and be punished with penance and other spiritual correction (Visochaishii utvezhenie [Imperial ratification] 27 Oct. 1800 Rules for the Edinovertsy, item 13).

⁶ In the column "military men" placed on the **sheets** of the confession lists, it is necessary to place military men on active duty, in reserve, on leave and so forth, but also equally their children; but the persons who have ended the term of military service; and, hence, returned to civilian status, but also equally children, living with them who have already terminated their service, it is not necessary to enter into this column, though general and hard rules for the decision to do this do not exist (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1892, 24).

Under a heading "civil" in the sheet enclosed for the confession list, not all who approach are military men, with the exception, of course, for spiritual persons and peasants (Tserkovnyi Viestnik [Church Messenger] 1892, 18).

⁷ Such measures as **the priest not going** with paschal and other celebratory **Moliebens** in the homes of parishioners, for those absent for two years from confession and holy communion, action on such parishioners may easily make the return desirable i.e. not only to teach and correct them, but also to irritate and harden them and anyway to sadden their pleasure on the occasion of great feasts (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei [Guide for Village Pastors] 1893, 24).

⁸ In view of the more careful supervision over the movement of schisms and sectarians in the people, the Samara diocesan authority has obligated priests not to be limited in their sheets about those who were not at confession and the Holy Mystery of communion by the indication that only, how many years they did not confess and commune, but also **to accompany** these **explanatory notes of the reasons** for the evasion from the performance of their Christian debt, besides to include in the sheet not only those who avoid the Holy Mysteries for 1, 2 and 3 years, but also more. In 3 years the reason for evasion can be found out, whether it is really that one is unhappy or inclined to the raskol, sectarianism and which. They are allowed to represent such long-term absences not by name, but only briefly on the sheet, with the significant increase or decrease in the number of absences. Non-observance of these requirements deprives the sheet of that value that they should have, as an indicator of the beginning, of the strengthening or weakening in given parishes of the raskol and sectarianism (Samarskiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Samara Diocesan News] 1896, 5).

⁹ The Arkhangel'sk Theological Consistory in 1892 (Mar. 3, № 70), by the way, decided: to return to the clergy of the diocese, through the father deans, the lists presented by them about persons who have not fulfilled the Christian debt of Confession and Holy Communion, with them, so that persons named on these lists and have not fulfilled the Christian debt of Confession and Holy Communion due to negligence, have been imposed **public church penances**, without turning aside of these persons from usual employment, so that they went to church services in the temple of God, which is obligatory on every Sunday and feast day, and did full prostrations in the church to force the impenitent publicly to their knees in the church. If anyone who fulfilled this persists, does not appear in the temple of God and will not fulfill the penance imposed on him, then to report those immediately to the diocesan authorities (Arkhangel'skiiia Eparkhial'niia Vedomosti [Archangel Diocesan News] 1892, 7; refer to the Collection of Opinions, Supplementary Vol., pp. 597-598).

¹⁰ From this it follows that **in the monastery, public penance** in this case can be fulfilled only when this is probably without excluding government officials also settled from homes, hence without the seclusion in a monastery (Course on Church Rights, prof. N. S. Suvorov, vol. 2, p. 162).

¹¹ **The civil authorities** has in the present case only one power, this is again to send the negligent in the fulfillment of the debt of confession in the order of the spiritual authorities, because, according to article 208 of the Ulozhenie o nakazaniakh [Criminal Code of Laws], "persons of the Orthodox confession, who are inclined from Confession and Communion of the Holy Mysteries, to careless neglect, are exposed to church punishment, by the supervision and the order of the spiritual diocesan authority, with observation only that herewith they have not been for a long time officially separated from service, but settled from their homes and work" (for more details, see about

this in the work of Prof. A. Almazov, *The Mystery of Confession*, vol. 2, p. 394; refer to *Tserkovnyi Vestnik* [Church Messenger] 1896, 13, pp. 418-419).

*S. V. Bulgakov, "Handbook for Church Servers", 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 1037-1039.
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris on March 13, 2012© All rights reserved.*