

## Editorial

The Church is engaged in rethinking the forms of the eucharistic liturgy in order more effectively to meet the pastoral needs of her people. But if they are to be brought to genuine maturity in Christ it is no less important to think about the sacrament of penance. Any priest with pastoral experience will agree that an adult approach to this is rare. All too often one hears an impersonal catalogue of standard sins having little relationship to the realities of the penitent's life. Mr Cunliffe sketches out a very different approach in his article below. Since each man's life is centred on his daily work, and it is this above all that he is required to offer with Christ to the Father, then it must be his failure to do this work as well as he is able—lack of preparation, lack of interest, lack of consideration for the community to which he belongs—that he must above all bring to confession to ask forgiveness for and future help over.

But such an approach is unusual, and it is not easy to see how a remedy can be found. As so often, the damage is done in early childhood, where the attitude to the sacrament is necessarily immature; this will be the attitude people retain all their lives unless the instruction given then is based on right ideas and is developed through adolescence. Sr Agnes Julie's article shows what can be done to help children towards a genuine understanding of what it involved. Yet it is still open to us to ask whether small children, who should most certainly be eating the eucharistic bread with their parents from the earliest possible age, ought necessarily to begin confessing their sins sacramentally from the same age. To ask the question is not to deny that children can have a genuine understanding of sin, and distinguish this from mere breaking of rules, at quite an early age. But not all acquire this at the same age, and it seems strange to assume, in a matter so delicate, that a class of children should all be instructed for their first confession together. Moreover this has the effect of fixing in their minds the unfortunate idea, retained by so many adults, that confession and communion must always be associated together; you should never approach the one without the other. Clearly there are important arguments for and against children's going to confession at an early age, but parents and teachers ought to be discussing them together in this age of rethinking and renewing the traditions of the Church.