

The Papal System – XII. The Confessional



Continued from [The Papal System – XI. The Lord's Supper, The Eucharist, The Mass](#).

The Sacrament of Penance, Embracing Contrition, Confession and Satisfaction.

As the mass is the great aggregate of Romish doctrine, the confessional is the chief executive of the papal system. By it, the decrees of the infallible Church are applied and carried out with an unequalled measure of minuteness and rigor. The history of the confessional is of the highest moment.

Secret Confessions in the Ear of a Priest, to secure his Absolution, were entirely unknown in the early Churches.

Of course, there are confessions of sin made to Protestant ministers now, and such avowals were common in the experience of the early clergy. But they were wholly voluntary when given, and they were not general.

Chrysostom says: "It is not necessary that thou shouldst confess in the presence of witnesses; let the inquiry after thy sins be made in thy own thoughts; let this judgment be without any witnesses; let God only see thee confessing." In another place he says: "Why art thou ashamed and blushing to confess thy sins? Dost thou discover them to a *man*, that he should reproach thee? Dost thou confess them to thy fellow-servant, that he should bring thee upon the open stage? Thou only showest thy wound to him who is thy Lord, thy care-taker, thy physician, and thy friend. And he says to thee: I do not compel thee to go into the public theater, and take many witnesses; confess thy sins in private to me alone, that I may heal thy wound, and deliver thee from thy grief."

Commenting on the words, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup," Chrysostom says: "He does not bid one man examine another, but every onw himself, making the judgment private, and the trial without witnesses." Daillé has collected nearly twenty passages from the writings of this eloquent and orthodox father, showing that auricular

confession had no existence in his day.

Basil says: "I do not make confession with my lips to appear to the world, but inwardly in my heart, where no eye sees; the groanings of my heart are sufficient for confession, and the lamentations which are sent up to thee, my God, from the bottom of my heart."

Ambrose says: "Tears wash away sin which men are ashamed to confess with the voice; weeping provides at once both for pardon and bashfulness."

St. Augustine, expounding the words: "I said I will declare my own wickedness against myself unto the Lord, and so thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart," says: "His confession was not yet come to his mouth, yet God heard the voice of his heart; which implies that God accepts and pardons the penitent and contrite heart, even before any formal declaration is made by vocal confession either to God or man."

In his confession he speaks with contempt of telling his sins to human beings: "What, therefore, have I to do with men, that they should hear my confessions, as if they could heal all my diseases?"

Laurentius of Novara, in the north of Italy, who flourished A.D. 507, says: "After baptism, God has appointed thee a remedy within thyself; he hath put remission within thy own power, that thou needest not to seek a priest when necessity requires; but thou thyself, now, as a skillful master always at hand, mayest correct thy own error within thyself, and wash away thy sin by repentance."

When Theodosius, in a fit of guilty rage, slew seven thousand people in Thessalonica, A. D. 390, and afterwards came to Milan, Ambrose refused to permit the emperor to approach the Lord's table or even to enter the church. He wrote him the following letter:

"Sin can be removed only by tears and repentance. No angel or archangel can forgive sin; and the Lord himself, who only was able to say to us, 'I am with you, when we sin, forgives the sins of those only who come to him with repentance. Add not to the sin already committed still another—that of presuming to partake of the holy supper unworthily, which has redounded to the ruin of many. I have no occasion to be obstinate with you, but I have cause to fear for you. I dare not distribute the holy elements if you mean to be present and receive them. Shall I venture to do that which I should not presume to do if the blood of one innocent individual had been poured out where the blood of so many innocent persons has been shed?"

For eight months the doors of the sacred edifice, which were open to the lowliest slave and the meanest beggar, were closed against the greatest ruler in the world. At length, Ambrose, with difficulty, was persuaded to permit the emperor to enter, not the church, but the porch, the place of the public penitents; and, stripped of the insignia of royalty, prostrate on the pavement, beating his breast, tearing his hair, watering the ground with his tears, the conqueror in many battles obtained absolution.

During these eight months Theodoret says: "The emperor shut himself up in his palaces, mourned bitterly, and shed floods of tears." He appealed to Ambrose, "By the mercy of our common Lord, to unloose from him these bonds, and not to shut against him the door which is opened by the Lord to all who truly repent;" and then, as a proof of his sincerity, Ambrose required him to make a law to cancel all decrees in future made in haste and anger; and that when sentence of death or proscription is passed against any one thirty days shall elapse before it is executed, at the expiration of which the matter is to be reconsidered and settled. During all this long period Theodosius never saw Ambrose, or any priest, or entered any confessional. He performed the penance customary: in those days, and he was restored to church privileges.

The learned Bingham says that: "When the crimes of great and heinous sinners were public, notorious, and scandalous, they were required to go through a long course of penance publicly in the church. As to private crimes, they laid no necessity upon the consciences of men to make either public or private confession of them to any beside God."

Penances in the early Church.

About A. D. 390, in Rome there was a place appointed for the reception of penitents, where they stood mourning during the public service, from which they were excluded. They cast themselves upon the ground with groans and lamentations; the bishop who conducts the ceremony prostrates himself and weeps; the people burst into tears and groan aloud; then the bishop rises from his humble position and summons up the people, and after praying for the penitents he dismisses them. This custom, with slight changes, was universal.

Different Classes of Penitents.

Some were only candidates, seeking to be admitted into the list of ecclesiastical penitents: their place was at the church door, when, clothed in sackcloth, and covered with filthiness and horror, they lay prostrate, begging the prayers of the faithful, as they entered the sacred edifice, and entreating to be numbered with those to whom the church proposed, at some period, to extend forgiveness. Speaking of these, Tertullian says: "The exomologesis is the discipline of a man's humbling and prostrating himself It obliges a man to change his clothing and his food, to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to defile his body by neglect of dress and ornament, to afflict his soul with sorrow, to groan and weep and cry unto the Lord God, day and night, to prostrate himself before the presbyters of the church, to kneel before the friends of God, and beg of all the brethren that they would become petitioners for his pardon." Here was a very public confession, but nothing like the confessional of the popes.

The second class of penitents was called Hearers; they were allowed to pass through the discipline appointed for testing those who professed sorrow for some notorious offense. They were placed in the narthex or lowest part of the church, and were allowed to hear the Scriptures read and the sermon, but had to retire before the commencement of the common prayers.

The third class of penitents was designated Prostrators. These persons knelt

around the pulpit in humble reverence, while all the people prayed for them, and the bishop gave them the imposition of hands and his benediction,

The fourth class was known as Bystanders. They were allowed to remain throughout the entire service, including the observance of the Lord's Supper, but they were not permitted to present the ordinary gifts donated by the faithful on the Lord's day, or to partake of the eucharist. There was a class of people so execrably wicked that Tertullian says of them: "There were some impious furies of lust so far transgressing all the laws of nature, both with respect to bodies and sex, that they not only expelled them from the doors of the church, but from every covered place belonging to it, as being monsters rather than common vices."

Penance seldom permitted Twice in the early Churches.

Tertullian called one penance after baptism the second, regarding the repentance of baptism as the first, and he was satisfied that there should be no third penance. His words are: "God has placed in the vestibule of the church, a second repentance which opens to those that knock: but now only once, because now, a second time; never more, because the last was vain and to no purpose."

Ambrose says: "They are deservedly reprov'd who think of doing penance often, because they grow wanton against Christ; for if they did penance truly, they would not think it should be repeated; because as there is but one baptism, so there is but one penance, which, moreover, is performed publicly. For we ought daily to be sorry for sin; but that is for lesser sins, and the other for greater."

Augustine says: "Wisely and usefully it was provided that there should be a place for that humblest penance but once in the church, lest the medicine becoming contemptible, should be less useful to the sick."

Siricius, Pope of Rome in the fourth century, says: "Forasmuch as they, who after penance, return like dogs to their vomit, or swine to their wallowing in the mire, cannot have the benefit of a second penance, we decree that they shall communicate with the faithful in prayer only, and be present at the celebration of the eucharist, but not partake of the feast at the Lord's table."

Here there was no weekly or annual confession with its penances; once after baptism this grievous duty might be performed, but generally, for a length of time, that ended penances and public confessions for life.

The Severity of Penance.

For some sins men were required to do penance during the whole of their lives, and absolution was only granted them in death. And should they recover, after having received it, they were compelled to resume their old position of shame and sorrow. The common course of penance consigned men for ten, fifteen, or twenty years to its various humiliating stages.; So that to repeat such a process would have required a considerable life, as well as a

change in church regulations.

The Penitentiary Confessor.

About A.D. 250, there were many who had fallen from the faith through the fierce persecution of Decius. Among these, there were persons of different grades of criminality. And as public penance was the universal law of the churches for each notorious offender, a minister was designated in all centers of Christian population to hear the crimes of apostates, that they might be able to take their proper place among the sad ones at the church doors, or inside the porch, or near the pulpit on their knees, according to the grade of their sinfulness. One presbyter attended to this duty for all Constantinople in A.D. 390; for the office survived the scenes which called it into life, and continued to fix the grade of public penitents. A noble lady who had visited the penitentiary presbyter, was unfortunate in the church with a deacon; the public became indignant against the semi-confessional, and Nectarius, the bishop, abolished the office. This was the first instance of the suppression of this odious institution; but Sozomen tells us that the example was followed by the bishops of every region.

Absolution in the early Church for public Confessing Penitents.

After the long, distressing penance was completed, the candidate for restoration knelt down between the knees of the bishop; or, in his absence, between those of the presbyter, who, laying his hand upon his head, solemnly blessed and absolved him. The people received him with transports of joy, as one escaped from the coils of the old serpent, and he was restored to participation in the Lord's Supper.

The Form of Absolution.

They were received into communion with imposition of hands, and the prayer of the whole church for them. The following prayer of absolution, from the Apostolical Constitutions, is probably as old as the fourth century:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, thou shepherd and lamb, that takest away the sins of the world, that forgavest the debt to the two debtors, and grantedst remission of sins to the sinful woman, and gavest to the sick of the palsy both a cure and a pardon of sins, remit, blot out, and pardon our sins, both voluntary and involuntary, whatever we have done wittingly or unwittingly, by transgression and disobedience, which thy spirit knows better than we ourselves. And whereinsoever thy servants have erred from thy commandments, in word or deed, as men carrying flesh about them, and living in the world, or seduced by the instigation of Satan, or whatever curse or peculiar anathema they are fallen under, I pray and beseech thine ineffable goodness to absolve them with thy word, and remit their curse and anathema, according to thy mercy. O Lord and master, hear my prayer for thy servants; thou that forgettest injuries, overlook all their failings, pardon their offenses, both voluntary and involuntary, and deliver them from eternal punishment. For thou art he that hast commanded us, saying: Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound

in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven: because thou art one God, the God that canst have mercy and forgive sins; and to thee, with the eternal Father, and the quickening Spirit, belongs glory, now and forever, world without end. Amen."

A form of absolution like this existed for centuries in all parts of the Christian world. Cardinal Bona and Illyricus published an old Latin Missal about two centuries ago, with this absolution:

"He that forgave the sinful woman all her sins, for which she shed tears, and opened the gates of paradise to the thief upon a single confession, make you partakers of his redemption, and absolve you from all the bond of your sins, and heal those infirm members by the medicine of his mercy, and restore them to the body of his holy Church by his grace, and keep them whole and sound forever."

It is absolutely certain that the form of absolution: "I absolve you (absolve te)," was not known in the practice of Christians till the commencement of the thirteenth century. It was, down to that period, a prayer to God for remission and absolution. Thomas Aquinas, about the year 1250, was one of the first who wrote in defense of the form: "I absolve thee." In his day, the expression excited opposition, and was an undoubted novelty.

The confessional in the middle ages.

Isidore of Seville, speaking of this practice in the early part of the seventh century says: "There are two kinds of confession (exomologesis), the one of praise, the other of sins; and both the one and the other are chiefly made to God."

Hincmar, a leading French bishop of the ninth century says: "Our light and daily sins, according to the exhortation of St. James, are daily to be confessed to those that are our equals: and such sins, we may believe, will be cleansed by their daily prayers, and our own acts of piety, if with a charitable mind, we truly say in the Lord's prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

The second Council of Chalons, in A. D. 813, in its thirty-third canon declares: "Some say that we ought to confess our sins to God alone; others affirm that they ought to be confessed to priests: both are done with great benefit in the holy church; so that we confess our sins to God, who does forgive them; and according to the apostle's institution, we confess them to each other and pray for each other that we may be saved. So that the confession made to God purges from sin; and that which is made to the priest informs us how we ought to be purged from them." ... Here it is boldly asserted that God only forgives sins, that he pardons them through no priest, and that the priest only shows the way to Christ, the cleansing fountain.

Lanfranc, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in A.D. 1070, in a tract on the secrecy of confession, says: "The confession of public sins ought to be made to the priests, by whose ministry the Church binds and looses that of which it takes public cognizance; but that one may confess private sins to all the

ecclesiastics, and even to laymen; since we read that there have been holy fathers, who were the guides of souls, though they were not in holy orders."

Here there is no distinction between mortal and venial sins; the sins considered are public iniquities, and secret sins, however atrocious; and according to the greatest prelate, except Gregory VII, in the eleventh century, and according to a more learned bishop than Gregory, all private sins may be confessed to a layman.

Ivo, Bishop of Chartres, in the early part of the twelfth century, expresses in his 186th letter, the opinion then beginning to become general: "That confession of common and small faults, may be made to anyone, but that great offenses are to be confessed only to those who have the power of binding and loosing." This is substantially the papal doctrine today.

Up to A. D. 1215, the confession of sin was an optional thing in the Church of Rome. No canon or bull compelled it; it had been increasing in popularity for two centuries; it was highly recommended, but still it had no sovereign sanction, no authority to RULE THE ROMAN CHURCH, and in A.D. 1215, for the first time in papal history,

AURICULAR CONFESSION WAS ESTABLISHED BY ROMISH LAW.

Innocent III. was lord of the Christian Church at this time. Ambitious to establish a number of superstitions, he summoned the fourth Council of the Lateran, A. D. 1215, whose twenty-first canon reads:

"Every one of the faithful of both sexes, after he shall have reached years of discretion, shall, by himself alone, faithfully confess all his sins, at least once a year, to his own priest, and strive to perform according to his ability the penance imposed upon him, reverently partaking of the sacrament of the eucharist, at least at Easter; unless, perhaps, by the advice of his priest, for some reasonable cause, he should judge that for a time he should abstain from partaking of it; otherwise, let the living be hindered from entering the church, and let the dead be deprived of Christian burial. On this account this salutary statute shall be frequently published in the churches that no one may pretend as an excuse, the blindness of ignorance. But if any one shall wish to confess his sins to a foreign priest, for proper reasons, he must first ask and obtain a license from his own priest, since otherwise he would not be able to bind or loose him."

Calvin, though a somewhat stern man, commenting on this famous decree, says:

"The barbarism of the diction is sufficient to deprive the law of all credit. For the good fathers enjoin that: 'Every person of both sexes shall, once in each year, make a particular confession of all sins to the proper priest;' but some wits facetiously object, that this precept binds none but hermaphrodites, and relates to no one who is either a male or a female."

He farther in the same connection asserts the indisputable fact that: "It is

certain from the testimony of their own histories that there was no fixed law, or constitution, respecting confession till the time of Innocent III., that its friends were accustomed to cite nothing older in favor of the practice than the Council of the Lateran."

This decree subjected those who refused it obedience to the worst form of excommunication; which in that age meant a horrible death and the confiscation of all property. It was the darkest age of the last two thousand years in culture and morals, and fitly gave birth to transubstantiation, the confessional and the inquisition, The confessional had its church birth not an hour earlier than A. D. 1215.

The modern confessional.

The confessional as it exists today is chiefly the work of the fathers of Trent, and those who lived in the age immediately after. That synod issued the following canons on penance:

"If any one shall deny that three acts are required for the whole and perfect remission of the sins of a penitent, as the substance of the sacrament of penance, that is to say contrition, confession and satisfaction, which are called the three parts of penance; or shall say that there are only two parts of penance, the terrors struck in the conscience when the sin is avowed, and the faith conceived from the gospel or absolution, by which any one believes that through Christ his sins are remitted; let him be accursed."

"If any one shall deny that sacramental confession was either instituted by divine authority, or that it is necessary to salvation; or shall say that the secret mode of confessing to a priest alone, which the Catholic Church has always observed from the beginning, and still observes, is foreign to the institution and appointment of Christ, and is a human invention; let him be accursed."

"If any one shall say that in the sacrament of penance it is not necessary by divine command, for the remission of sins, to confess all and every mortal sin, of which recollection may be had, with due and diligent premeditation, even secret offenses, and those which are against the last two precepts of the decalogue, and the circumstances which change the species of sin; but that this confession is useful only, for instructing and consoling the penitent, and was formerly observed only for imposing canonical satisfaction, or shall say that those who desire to confess all their sins, wish to leave nothing for the divine mercy to pardon; or finally that it is not lawful to confess venial sins; let him be accursed."

Butler's Catechism says: "The chief mortal sins are seven: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth."

"If any one shall say that sacramental absolution, by a priest, is not a judicial act, but a mere ministry to pronounce and declare that sins are remitted to the person making confession, provided that he only believes that he is absolved, even though the priest should not absolve seriously but in joke; or shall say that the confession of a penitent is not required that the

priest may absolve him; let him be accursed.”

“If any one shall say that the whole penalty together with the guilt is always remitted by God, and that the satisfaction of penitents is no other thing than the faith by which they apprehend that Christ has made satisfaction for them; let him be accursed.”

“If any one shall say that priests, who are in mortal sin, have not the power of binding and loosing, or that priests are not the only ministers of absolution let him be accursed.”

“The holy Synod (of Trent) teaches that the form of the sacrament of penance, in which its force especially lies, is placed in the words: I absolve thee, etc.” And this absolution is not in words merely, for the Catechism of the Council of Trent says: “But the ministers of God truly as it were absolve.” And the same Catechism gives the priest authority for this or any other act in the confessional, by declaring that he represents Christ in it; and therefore is invested with divine attributes and powers. The words are: “Moreover, in the priest who sits a legitimate judge over him, he should venerate the person and power of Christ the Lord; for in administering the sacrament of penance, as in the other sacraments, the priest discharges the office of Christ.”

The Catechism of Trent teaches that, “Priest and penitent should be most careful that their conversation in the confessional be held in secret; and hence, no one can, on any account, confess by messenger or letter, as in that way nothing can be treated secretly.”

The Catechism of the Council of Trent says that, “Confession should be enjoined on a child from the time when he has the power of discerning between good and evil.” And it declares that, “Above all, the faithful should be most careful to cleanse their souls from sin by frequent confession.”

It declares that, “Theologians give the name of satisfaction to express that compensation by which a man makes some reparation to God for the sins he has committed.”

Such are papal teachings in modern times about the confessional. Without contrition, confession and penance, there can be no perfect remission of sins. Confession of sin to a priest is necessary to salvation. All and every mortal sin, even the most secret and infamous, must be confessed to a priest, or there can be no pardon from God. The priest is the judge of the soul, and in the confessional, sitting instead of Jesus Christ, he can keep the sins of any man bound upon him, or loose them, according to his discretion.

God never remits the sins of a man through faith only, says the twelfth canon of the Council of Trent on penance. That council, instead of being governed by the Spirit of God, was led by the spirit of contradiction to Christ—that is, by Antichrist. For God’s word faithfully translated, in the Catholic Vulgate, says: “He that believeth on me hath eternal life;” John vi. 47: (Qui credit in me, habet vitam eternam). “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that every one who believes on him might not perish,

but might have eternal life;" John iii. 16: (Sic enim Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret: ut omnis, qui credit in eum, non percat, sed habeat vitam zternam.) "But the just lives by faith;" Rom. i.17: (Justus autem ex fide vivit). The spirit that framed this canon is the spirit of ANTICHRIST in its full growth. They who believe on Jesus, without confession, absolution, or penance, are saved for eternity, notwithstanding the curses of councils, personal infirmities, or the warfare of the Prince of Darkness.

Sacerdotal Secrecy.

Du Pin reports a part of the twenty-first canon of the fourth Council of the Lateran, A.D. 1215, which declares that, "Those who shall disclose any sin, which has been revealed to them in confession, shall, be condemned, not only to be deposed, but also to be confined during life in a monastery, there to do penance for it."

Posture of the Penitent in Confession, and the Opening Address.

"Kneeling down at the side of your ghostly father, make the sign of the cross, saying: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'"

Then the penitent asks the priest's blessing in these words: "Pray, father, give me your blessing, for I have sinned." After this the penitent repeats the Confiteor: "I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to blessed Michael, the archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and to you, father, that I have sinned exceedingly, in thought, word and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." According to Hogan, the penitent, on her knees, has her lips nearly close to the cheek of the priest.

The Questions of the Confessional.

Many of these are too horrible to transcribe, and they shall not appear in this work. Those who wish to see the beastly vileness of the filthiest institution on the face of the earth, can consult Bailly, Peter Dens, and Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

Michelet, the celebrated French author, speaks of the manual placed in the hands of the young priest to guide his questions in the confessional, as "Addressed to a world of festering filth, which the religious wars left behind them. You will find in them such crimes as could never be committed except by the horrid soldiery of the Duke of Alva, or those bands without country, law, or God, which Wallenstein raised, true wandering Sodomites, which the old ones would have held in horror. And this young priest, who, according to you, believes that the world is still that frightful world, comes to the confessional with all that villainous knowledge; his imagination furnished with monstrous cases; you place him in contact with a child who has not left her mother, who knows nothing, who has nothing to tell, whose greatest crime consists in not having learned her catechism, or in having wounded a butterfly. I shudder at the questions he is about to put to her; at all that he is about to teach her in his conscientious brutality!" .

*Delicate Questions put in every Catholic Prayer Book in the Vulgar Tongue:
upon which every Woman is to Examine herself before appearing at the
Confessional.*

On the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

"Have you been guilty of any acts of impurity? Under this head all sins against purity must be carefully examined, as well as whatever tends to their commission or indulgence. Have you been guilty of filthy talking? of reading immodest books? of indecency of dress? of looking at unchaste objects? of taking any dangerous or improper liberties ?

"N. B. As the sins against this and the ninth commandment, (Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife) are most grievous, and at the same time most various, the prudent counsel of your director (priest) will assist you, if necessary, in more particular examination." – Garden of the Soul, page 199.

The Mission Book in the English language, a work of great popularity in the Catholic Church, suggests the following questions under the sixth and ninth commandments:

"Have you dwelt willfully and with complaisance, upon impure thoughts or imaginations? Have you in fact consented to them in your mind? How often?"

"Have you made use of impure language or allusions; or listened to it willingly and with complaisance? Was it sometimes before persons of another sex? Have you sung immodest songs, or listened to them? How often?"

"Have you been guilty of improper and dangerous freedoms with any of the other sex? How far have you carried this sinful conduct? Was the companion of your guilt a single person? How often? A relation? How often? A married person? How often?"

"Have you written improper letters or received them? How often? Have you gazed immodestly upon yourself or others; upon pictures or statues, or any object which could excite desires? How often? Have you indulged in habits of secret sin? How long? How often?"

"Have you, by the freedom of your manners, or your immodest dress, been the cause of temptation to others? Was this also your intention? Have you read impure books, or newspapers? How often? Have you lent them to others? Have you exposed yourself voluntarily to the occasions of sin by means of dances, shows, theaters, etc., by intemperance, by reading romances and plays, by walking out at night, by frequenting society, or by remaining alone with persons of a different sex? Have you been guilty of seduction? How often? Have your sins against these two commandments been sometimes of an unnatural kind? How often?"

A parent is required to examine his or her conscience, with a view to the confessional, on this matter: "Have you exposed the innocence of your children to danger by letting them sleep together without distinction, or by taking them to your own bed, or keeping them in the same room, when already old enough to be scandalized? How often?"

A wife, at the confessional, must be ready to answer these questions: "Have you been respectful and obedient to your husband in everything reasonable? Have you refused him his marriage rights? How often? Have you not persuaded him to offend God against the dictates of nature and of conscience? How often?"

Every question put by the priest must be answered on peril of damnation; he sits instead of Christ, you are confessing to God, the voice of the priest is Immanuel's; it is the Almighty that addresses the trembling penitent. And for this reason the priest hears everything, EVERYTHING, however shocking, shameful, frivolous, frightful; everything in thoughts, feelings, words, looks, and deeds.

And Michelet is right in describing a husband whose wife frequents the confessional as in a humiliating position; "It is," says he, "a humiliating thing to be seen, followed into the most intimate intimacy by an invisible witness, who regulates you, and assigns to you, your part; to meet in the street a man who knows better than yourself your most secret acts of weakness, who humbly salutes you and turns aside and laughs."

These questions just quoted are found in some shape in the prayer books everywhere in use in the Catholic Church; they are in the language of the people; they are modest, compared to the frightful questions compiled by theologians for the use of priests, and covered by the Latin tongue; and yet what blushes, shame, horror, and outrages upon delicacy these questions involve! That the modesty of women should be placed on the rack in the confessional by a bachelor priest, full of curiosity as well as sanctity, and torn, lacerated, and disjointed, under the awful sanctions of the Almighty, is indeed a dreadful thought.

Gavin tells us that in his time, in Spain, they had a class of priests who were known as Deaf Confessors. These men were not really deaf, but they acted as if they were. They lent an ear to penitents of every grade; they asked no questions about the secrets of any heart; and after each penitent had made his own statement to the confessor, he received a certificate which relieved him from the penalties of the church for a year. Is it any wonder that the Deaf Confessors were visited by throngs; that immense numbers of women should send for them or come to them, and that day and night they should be compelled to ply their calling with unresting activity? Would it not be a positive advantage to the world, and especially to religion, if every confessor was smitten with temporary but real deafness the moment he entered his wretched den of torture?

The confessional is the most odious system of espionage ever invented by cunning despots. It is the most flagitious outrage upon the rights of husbands and wives, parents and children, the sinning and the sinned against, that ever shocked modesty or ground trembling hearts under its fatal heel. It is strongly believed to be the greatest incitement to vice that a holy God ever permitted; frightful examples of which are on record. It turns priests into odious receptacles for the accumulated stench and nastiness of all the foul corruptions of thousands, making them sons of the MAN OF SIN, ready bearers of the iniquities of whole communities.

This plague claims to start from the Scriptures. James is quoted as authority for it: "Confess therefore your sins one to another; and pray one for another that you may be saved," v. 16, (Vulgate: Confitemini ergo alterutrum peccata vestra; et orate pro invicem ut salvemini). But this Scripture is quite as good authority for priests confessing to laymen or women, as it is for either party confessing to them. It is not: Confess your sins to the priest and he will absolve you. And if James had known anything of priestly confession, he would never have used the exhortation, "Confess therefore your sins one to another." The other authority from Scripture is in Matt. xviii. 18: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The same promise is given in Matt. xvi. 19, and John xx. 23. It is argued that as the apostles received power to free men from their sins, or bind their sins upon them, the confessional was instituted by that authority. But the inference is not quite just. Ananias and Sapphira made no confession of sin to Peter; nor did any mortal bear witness against them to him. Peter could bind and loose because the Holy Spirit rested so powerfully upon him that he could see the acts of those who were away from his bodily sight. He needed no confession box; and besides, the pope is not Peter, his bishops are not apostles. After the calling of Paul there were no more apostles; and they could have no successors, after the generation which knew Jesus had passed away, Acts i. 21-2. No man lives who walked with Christ and his apostles during his whole ministry, who saw him alive from the dead, so as to be a witness of his resurrection; and as Peter in this passage declares that such men are needed, there can be no successors to the apostles, or to their powers of binding and loosing; nor did they need the confessional to enable them to discharge their duties, and exercise their privileges.

The confessional has neither EXISTENCE NOR SANCTION FROM THE SCRIPTURES; it was WHOLLY UNKNOWN in all ancient churches; it had no LEGAL LIFE in the Catholic Church before the year TWELVE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN; it is in itself a withering curse, a cruel tyranny, without one redeeming quality; and as a MODERN INNOVATION, AND AN INSTRUMENT OF OPPRESSION it should be banished from the world.

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