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The confession and the confessional in the Roman Catholic church

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The Confession and Confessional in the Roman Catholic Church.

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Table of Contents.

The subject of the Catholic Confession and the Confessional as an institution in the Latin church is worthy of our study. In this paper it will be our object to prove:-

1. That Auricular confession is not of Divine origin; that it was unknown and unpractised in the early church; but that it arose with the need of it for ecclesiastical power.
2. Most of the passages which refer to the Doway version of the scriptures, which is the English standard version for all the English-Catholic clergy, are in reality mistranslations; and that in reality there is no scriptural ground for Auricular confession.
3. The Confessional, as the basis of the strength of the Roman Catholic church, offers the greatest means of temptation to an immoral clergy and the practices of the Confessional are distinctly immoral. Examples will here be cited for proof.

Chapter 1.

Auricular Confession is not of Divine origin; it was unknown and unpractised in the early church; but that it arose with the need of it for ecclesiastical power.

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During the middle ages there seemed to be considerable debate on the question as to whether sacremental confession was a Divine law or merely an innovation and novelty. Among

the earlier authorities, as Hugh of St.Victor and Peter Lombard, the idea of confession as a Divine law seems to be unknown. Their reasons for its practice seem to be but human ones which show its expedience and convenience.

Alexander Halles accounts for the absence of divine command by God's desiring confession to be a voluntary act on the part of the subject. He explains a passage of St.Ambrose by the fact that confession had not been instituted by Christ.

Bonaventura follows him in saying that Christ merely suggested it and left it to be worked out by the apostles.

Aquinas was the first to boldly assert that confession was of divine origin. But since he had no text, he argues that confession is a matter of faith and therefore cannot be of human law. He virtually assumes that because we cannot completely comprehend it, it must be of divine law; though no command as to it is recorded. One need not be a great theologian to see how thin is this logic of Aquinas. But despite this poor reasoning, the very fact that Aquinas upheld the institution, was sufficient to give it standing regardless of his lack of logic.

Chancellor Gerson makes no pretense that it is of divine origin save that the decalogue commands us to love our parents, and as the Mother church commanded it, we must honor her by obedience.

Spoleto speaks of it as not absolutely of divine or natural law tho it is impliedly commanded by Christ. Thus we can see the ample latitude of opinion.

On the eve of the Reformation, Baptista de Saulis and Prierias advocated that the Canonists held the confession to be of human origin. Thus we see that Erasmus was not specially guilty when he urged that confession was a human institution. Some of the great Catholic divines have been not a little troubled that such men as Hale, Bonaventura, and the Duns Scotus should admit that confession is not perscribed by Christ. If this is so surely the Catholics, who declare orthodoxy alone, will have nothing by which to confute the heretics. Because they, whom the church chose to call heretics, were constantly assailing this doctrine it was necessary for her to declare by the action of the councils of Trent and Lateran that the sacremental confession is a divine law and to anathematize all who take exception to this doctrine.

But this action on the part of the church in dogmatically stating thr confession was of divine lwa, did not silence the unbelieving heretics. These were to be answered. To thoroly complete this task each shred of literature has been searched with a result that a few passages, which at best have but an indirect allusion to the subject, have been found. Nothing is a greater proof of the fruitlessness

of the task than this. Truly if confession be so important and so essentially a part of the system that its origin is in divine law, some treatises would have been written for both confessor and penitent.

The apostolic constitutions embody the customs of the church toward the end of the third century but they remain silent on this. About a hundred years later Augustine covered the whole ground of Christian ethics but he, also, remains silent on the subject of confession. The councils too, at this time had no rules for confession or the confessional. No formulas were given to show us the treatment of penitents by Confessors. Only do these begin to crop out in the seventh century after Christ, and so few are the evidences here that we can se how rare an occurence was Auricular confession. The argument that the literature containing all thi evidence has perished is of no value. Tradition, as a proof, is powerless on the question of the historicity of confession.

If confession had been the practice of the early church, we can scarcely understand why such a tremendous clamor should be raised in 1216 in the Lateran council. For more than a hundred years there was hardly a council held that did not comment upon the new tasks imposed upon the priests. The new system was being thoroly tried. The literature of this period contains much information

especially with reference to enforcing confession and curbing the abuses which followed in its wake. So complete were that we cannot but assume the densest pre-existent ignorance on the subject. If confession had, before the thirteenth century, been the practice with its duties so arduous we would scarcely have expected the Catholic Fathers to have remained silent on so important a subject. Surely they would have made a record of their experiences for their less able brothers who later were to assume their responsibility.

Up to the time of 1215 or there about, confession as it existed was the spontaneous act of souls anxious for reconcilation with God. That confession did occur we know. It began with public confession of private sin in the audiences on Sunday. The priests urged men to do this. This had given way to secret confession in the ear of a priest. The church had long sought to popularize this auricular confession but ~~this~~ their success had ever been indifferent until a theory was constructed under which the power of the keys in the sacrement of penance promised absolution. As this view became adopted the necessity of confession becam accepted by all pious people. The priests taught men to dread the judgments of God and the practice of coming to confession increased in frequency.

The logical development of this whole movement was to

make confession obligatory. Bishops had tried to enforce this in their dioceses but with little success. They began to understand that so great an issue could be enforced only by the authority of a council. Accordingly, the council of Paris which was held in 1212 urged confession among the priests to their superiors. The opportunity for general legislation on the subject of confession came with the great Lateran council in 1215 and 1216. Here confession was made obligatory. One, in writing on the subject, says that the legislation thus enforcing confession upon folk was simply to do away with heresy. No doubt it was used for that purpose but we cannot believe that Pope Innocent III, who today has the credit for devising the plan and carrying it thru, was entirely blind to the far reaching effects of it in other and important directions. So great a factor was confession to become in the church that even the far seeing statesmanship of this great ecclesiastic, Innocent III, could hardly comprehend the power that was thus to belong to the Roman Catholic church in establishing ecclesiastical supremacy. It was truly destined to give to the church control over even the consciences of all men and thus establishing its authority on an impregnable basis.

Thus the power of the "Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" and the worth of sacrements became efficient means in the hands of every parish priest to mould the external and

internal life of each individual. He was in supreme authority over each member of his flock. Thus confession and the confessional, as an institution, becomes the means of the priests gaining for themselves great power; and thru a hierarchy that is wonderfully organized, this power goes back to the Pope as head of the church . Who, in the years since its beginning, can fathom the power the confessional has had in promoting the growth of a hierarchy which leaves in its wake the bleached bones of the millions who have died from spiritual starvation, who have hungered for vital gospel truth but who have received at the hands of Romanism the stones of empty ceremonials?

Chapter II

Many of the passages which refer to confession in Doway version of the scriptures, which form the standard for all English clergy of the Catholic Church, are in reality mis-translations; and there is no scriptural authority for confession.

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The custom of trying to get a scriptural foundation for novelties and innovations in the world of religion has become a common practise. Nor can men be censured for their desire to produce proof that they are right in the course persued. But the spirit which would cause any one to shamefully twist and torture certain passages of the Bible in order to gain a semblance of authority for their doctrines, ought to be condemned by every honest servant of God as well as by every lover of fair play. And this it seems the Romanists have done. We have tabulated below, in vertical columns, thirty nine instances in the scriptures from Genesis to Revelations with the reference, the translation of the Hebrew and Greek as is given in the Doway version, used by the English of the Roman Catholic Church, and the version of Arias Montanus which will show the premeditated attempt of Roman theologians to make the Bible correspond to their theology rather than making their theology correspond to the Bible.

Reference.	Doway Version.	Arias Montanus Version.
1. Gen. 6- 6.	1. It repented Him.	1. And it repented the Lord.
2. Ex. 13- 17.	2. They would repent.	2. Lest the people repent.
3. Ex. 32- 12.	3. Be appeased upon the wickedness.	3. Repent of this evil.
4. Ex. 32- 14.	4. And the Lord was appeased.	4. And the Lord repented.
5. Num. 23- 19.	5. That He should be changed.	5. That He should repent.
6. Deut. 32- 36.	6. Will have mercy.	6. Will repent Himself.
7. 1 Sam. 15-11.	7. It repenteth me that I have made Saul king.	7. It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king.
8. 1 Kings 15-35.	8. Because the Lord repented.	8. And the Lord repented.
9. Job 42- 6.	9. I do penance in dust.	9. I repent in dust.
10. Jer. 8- 6.	10. None that doth penance.	10. No man repented.
11. Jer. 31- 19.	11. I did penance.	11. I repented.
12. Ezek. 18- 21.	12. If the wicked do penance for all His.	12. If the wicked will turn from all His.
13. Ezek. 18-24.	13. If the just man turn himself away from his justice.	13. When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness.
14. Ezek. 18-27.	14. And when the wicked turneth away from his wickedness.	14. When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness.
15. Ezek. 18-30.	15. Be converted and do pemance.	15. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions.

Reference.	Doway Version.	Arias Montanus Version.
16. Matt. 3-2.	16. Do penance.	16. Repent ye.
17. Matt. 4-17.	17. Do penance.	17. Repent.
18. Matt. 9-13.	18. (No translation.)	18. To repentance.
19. Matt. 11-20.	19. Had not done penance.	19. They repented not.
20. Matt. 12-41.	20. They did penance.	20. They repented.
21. Matt. 21-32.	21. Did repent.	21. Repented.
22. Mark 1- 4.	22. Of penance.	22. Of repentance.
23. Mark 1- 15.	23. Repent.	23. Repent ye.
24. Mark 2- 17.	24 (No translation.)	24. To repentance.
25. Mark 6- 12.	25. They should do penance.	25. Men should repent.
26. Luke 13- 3.	26. You do penance.	26. Except ye repent.
27. Luke 15- 7.	27. That doth penance.	27. That repenteth.
28. Luke 16- 30.	28. Will do penance.	28. Will repent.
29. Luke 17- 3.	29. Will do penance.	29. Will repent.
30. Luke 17- 4.	30. If he do penance.	30. If he repent.
31. Acts 2- 38.	31. I repent.	31. I repent.
32. Acts 3- 19.	32. Do penance.	32. Repent.
33. Acts 17- 30.	33. Be penitent.	33. Repent ye.
34. Acts 26- 20.	34. Do penance.	34. To repent.
35. 2Cor. 7-10.	35. Do penance.	35. Repent.
36. 2 Cor. 12-21.	36. Penance.	36. And repentance.
37. 2 Tim. 2- 25.	37. Who have not done penance.	37. Who have not repented.

Reference.	Doway Version.	Arias Montanus Version
38. Heb. 6- 1.	38. Repentance.	38. Repentance.
39. Heb. 12- 17.	39. Of penance.	39. Of repemtance.

A glance over the above table will show that the main differences in translation between the Doway version of the Catholic Church and any other version hinges almost entirely upon the translation of the Greek and Hebrew terms which in the Doway version has been given "Penances" or similar terms and elsewhere has been translated "repentance", "repent", "repented", "repenteth", or some such similar word.

This is due entirely to the fact that in the Catholic church penance is a sacrement, and the confession is an integral part of the sacrement of penance with contrition and satisfaction as the other two parts. In the catechism of the council of Trent, the Fathers, at great length, proceed to show the virtue of the sacrement of penance. And in the internal virtue of the sacrement of penance we can find but little to criticise.

Concerning external penance the catechism of the council of Trent says, "With regard to external penance the pastor will teach that it i that which constitutes the sacrement of penance: it consists of certain sensible things significant of that which passes interiorly into the soul; and the faithful are to be informed in the first place why

the Redeemer was pleased to give it a place among the sacraments." Again, "To calm our solicitude the Redeemer instituted the sacrement of penance in which we cherish a well grounded hope that our sins are forgiven by the absolution of the priest etc."

Confession is admitted to be an act of the sacrement of penance. Hence the translation of these terms strikes at the very life of the confession. Time and space will not permit us to go deeply into a study of these scriptural passages but a few instances will be chosen which will be fair examples of the whole.

The Hebrew word שוב which signifies "to change the mind" does not necessarily mean that the change has been accompanied by sorrow. Whether this word imparts the idea of the "change of mind" being the result of sorrow, depends all together upon the context. In view of this the change applied to Diety, as in Genesis 6- 6, cannot be rightly judged in any other way than a change of mind or purpose. To translate it "doing penance" as the Doway version has presumed in so many places, is to present to the world an erroneous commentary instead of a translation.

The Greek term μετανοέω also imparts the idea of a change of mind or repenting. But in no place does it mean "to do penance." This being the primary element in the word then, when it is applied to our fallen race, it has reference

of a necessity to a turning from sin to holiness and a humble confession of our sins to Almighty God as well as to those we have offended and to utterly forsake and abandon our wickedness.

The word "penance" has no equivalent that is to be found in the original text of the scripture. As for scriptural example of doing penance either for satisfaction to divine justice or one ordered by a priest, there is none to be found and we will peruse its pages in vain if we search for it.

In the early history of the church the sinner who sought salvation from his sin appealed directly to his creator and was taught to earn his own salvation by his own efforts except by what help he might get from the intercessary prayers of the faithful. No special power was attached to the prayers of the priests. Those of the laity were equally efficient. When martyrdom went out of fashion this intercessary office was transferred to the martyrs. Even here it was difficult to shake off the idea that God was n not to e approached directly. Evidently He had not trusted forgiveness to any one else.

But in spite of this, there did grow up the idea that God had intrusted to his church a mysterious and undefined power. This was over the forgiveness of sins. This arose from the text found in Mathew 16:19 "And I will give unto

thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And Matthew 18:18, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And John 20:22-23,"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

At the time the Gospels were written the apostles were not supposed to have any successors. They, no doubt, expected the day of Judgment in this generation. The early Christians would have stood aghast at the idea that God would have bestowed this power upon every vicious man who thru any favor or purchase might obtain ordination.

The primitive church knew nothing of this for the early fathers are silent concerning it. St.Clement of Rome, the Didache, Barnabas, St.Ignatus, and the Shepherd of Hermas, while they council sinners as to a reconciliation with God, do not know of any authority under Him. Irenaeus asks how sins can be remitted unless God, against whom we have sinned, remits them to us. He evidently knows nothing of an intermediary function. Nor in the paragraphs of the Epistles of St.Polycarp, in which he touches upon the duties of the priests, is there any allusion to a mediation between God

and man. Had there been any sound scriptural basis for it these men would have practised confession and would have given a large place to it in their writings.

The passages we have named seem to be the ones upon which Romanism lays most stress. Giving to Peter the Keys of the Kingdom involved in reality two commissions- the ordinary and the extraordinary. What we call the ordinary commission, it is plain, was a most important faculty and has continued with those, who in attempting to spread the gospel of salvation, try to become worthy successors of the Apostles and will so continue to the end of time. But an important part of St.Peter's work may justly be applied to the extraordinary commission which Jesus gave to them. As a result of its extraordinary character it was not to be continued to others, who choose to call themselves apostolic successors, but it ended with them and could only be discharged thru the gift of inspiration. These men were forming the constitution of the Christian church and their office from the very nature of the case, could not have successors any more than one born in our generation can claim that because of the tie of blood relation he, with his ancestors, could be said to have signed the Declaration of Independence. Once laid down by the apostles, the principles for the foundation of the future church will remain "to the end of the world."

But there is more than the negative proof which we

can reach for ourselves. There are two passages which seem to be positive in their character. In 1 Timothy 5:20 Paul lays down the law for the Episcopal office, "Them that sin, reprove them before all, that the rest may have fear." Here is a plain rule which seems to argue against auricular confession in that confession shall be public- in the presence of the brethren. The secret of the confessional seems to be inconsistent with Paul here. If there had been a sacrement of penance in existence Paul would have made a different statement. He did not say that public reproval was to be the reward for public sin but for all sin.

In James 5:16 he says, "Confess your sins one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed." Here the Doway version has again corrupted the text for they, in a note, say that this means to the priests as in verse 14, and in verse 14 they translate "Elders" "Priests".

This is but a fraction of the scriptural proof which might be brought against the confession in the sacrement of penance. Not only is it without the slightest support but it is in conflict with positive scriptural evidence.

Chapter III

The Confessional, as the basis of the strength of the Roman Catholic Church, offers the greatest means of temptation to an immoral clergy; and the practises of the Confessional are distinctly immoral. Examples will here be cited for proof.

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The two points herein touched- the historical and scriptural- have totally lacked any reference to the immorality of the confessional. That it is immoral is an accepted fact. Mrs. Margaret Shepherd, herself a converted nun, says, "Roman Catholics plead that the confessional is a preventive against sin. In some few cases it may be, but generally its influence is demoralizing." While this is true in most cases still there are a few earnest minded priests who are truly concerned the confessional for the moral good of their penitents.

We do not wonder at the immorality when we remember that the "Moral Theology" of St.Alfonso Maria de Liguori is the manual of the confessor. The express object of this book seems to be to make religion easy and compatible with a life of sin. In proof of this Liguori maintains that a Roman Catholic may break <u>any</u> divine command under some circumstances and that all mortal sins will, for their benefit, be made venial. Portions of the book which deal with the marriage and sexual relations are so obscene that one would

be prosecuted were he to attempt to publish it. This was attempted in 1894 in Italy and the government refused to allow it to be published. And this is the standard text book for the confessor. Just as one cannot touch pitch without being tainted; just as the dyers hands take the stain of the dye he uses; so the mind becomes foul by contact with foul thoughts. In the confessional the subjects thought of and talked of are such as ought to make men blush with shame to discuss or hear mentioned.

The Rev. C. Neil of Poplar, London, says, "Auricular confession is in reality a moral anodyne, such as morphia or chlorodyne, which soothes, lulls, and pacifies, while at the same time it undermines both body and soul by habitual use." Thus sin almost ceases to be sin and is at times actually justified.

The confessional is most disastrous to the morals of the young. Two boys said that they could not understand what their father-confessor meant in some of the questions he asked them for he had suggested evils which they had never heard of. Many a child gains its first knowledge of evil in the confessional.One boy of nine reported to have said in answer to some of the questions of the priest, "Please dont ask any more of these questions which teach me more wickedness than I ever knew before." For every young person guarded from impurity by the use of the confessional many have been injured by the revelations of iniquity. So it is

easy to comprehend how the thoght and imaginations become evil.

A Protestant young lady, some time ago, wrote to the "London Times" and told this story. We reproduce it in substance only. She reports that one day she sought to peruse a Catholic missal and asked a Catholic young lady friend to loan her one. The book she received was entitled, "The Daily Companion", with a complete preparation, the sacrements and other useful additions, published in Liverpool. One of the chapters in this book was entitled "Devotions for Confession" and from this she quotes questions at which she was horrified. A comparison of the chapter with Liguori shows that it came from his "Moral Theology". She characterizes the book as follows: "Every crime for which Sodom and Gomorah were burned is here openly alluded to; and this book is a Catholic lady's daily companion."

This shows the effect upon the penitent. But what is the effect of all this evil upon the priest? The only answer that can be given is that both priest and penitent are alike demoralized. We can scarcely see how the training for the hearing of the confessions, by the study of Liguori's "Moral Theology" and such writers, can help but debase the mind. No doubt the priest enters upon his duties with an impaired and blunted sense. Then the listening to the deeds of shame swiftly and surely complete the ruin begun thus. The confessor falls. He becomes the accomplice in

sin with his penitent. Liguori takes account of this and openly "constrains the most virtuous priests to fall at least once a month." If the most virtuous fall thus frequently, what words can describe the others? Father Chiniquiy says, "The confessional box is, for the greatest part of the confessors and female penitents, a real pit of perdition into which they permiscously fall and perish." A single tale, which is vouched for by th ex-priest, Hogan, from the English Catholic church, will serve to substantiate this fact. Nor is it the exception. The same conditions might be duplicated in the writings of Father Jeremiah J.Crowley, who later left the church; Father Chiniquiy, Mrs. Margaret Shepherd, the converted nun, and many others. The story has been chosen because we think it a fair statement of the facts and conditions.

The mother of two fine sons and a beautiful daughter, who was greatly loved by all who knew her, was left alone in the world by the death of her husband. The husband had amply provided for her and the welfare of the children. When the two sons became of age commissions were purchased for them in the English army. The daughter was just emerging into young womarhood and the mother desired to give her the best advantages she could. The family were all members of the Episcopal church. In a near by town was a Catholic school of fine reputation. The teachers here were said to be the best in the whole country.and the mother thought that

here was her opportunity. So the girl was promptly sent to this convent school for her education.

The sisters who had the school in charge immediately made it their especial duty to convert this girl to the Catholic religion. Much influence was brought to bear on her and she finally accepted Catholicism. The next logical step was to choose for her a Father-Confessor and this was promptly done by the Mother Abbess. This was the ruination of her, body and soul. The confessional with her, as with hundreds of others, was but a systematic preparation for her ruin by a man who claimed for himself to have the right of a mediator between man and God. By the study of Liguori's "Moral Theology" the priest's life had itself become corrupt, and he sought to corrupt all the female penitents who came to confess to him. One has well described such a priest by saying that he is like a destructive, filthy snake, called the anaconda. It is recorded of this animal that when he is hungry, he will seize upon an object which he desires to devour and will take it to his den or place of retreat where he, at his ease, unseen and alone, covers his prey with slime that he may swallow it more easily, and then and there devours it whole. Truly this is the means of the priest. The slime of immoral suggestions made at the tire of confession makes an easy prey of the female penitent.

With this girl, beautiful both of body and soul, kneeling in the confessional with her lips close to the ear

of the priest, we can perhaps imagine the following conversation to have taken place:-

Confessor- What sins have you committed?

Penitent- I dont know any, sir.

Confessor- Are you sure you did nothing wrong? Examine yourself well.

Penitent- Yes, I did make some faces at a girl in school.

Confessor- Nothing else?

Penitent- Yes, I told Lothor that I hated Jane B.

Confessor-Have you had any immodest thoughts?

Penitent- Immodest thoughts! What can you mean?

Confessor- Do you ever think about men?

Penitent- Why yes, sir. I have two boy cousins whom I like very much.

Confessor- Did you ever think of them in an evil way?

Penitent- No sir.

Confessor- How long do these evil thoughts remain?

Penitent- Not very long.

This is but the beginning of the conversation but it shows well the type of questioning of the priest. The only logical result is that a conversation thus begun will soon be discussing subjects with pure minded girls and young women that even mothers would hesitate to touch for fear they could not be delicate enough in handling them. Week after week as the priest hears her confession, her mind is filled with evil to the full and her conscience, which at

first revolts at the subject, may reach the point where she will actually take a morbid delight in the questioning. The confessor possesses the secret of her soul. Because obedience is necessary to make a good Catholic, she soon looses what to a woman is worth more than all the wealth of a Croesus.

This beautiful young girl was thus defiled and urged to take the white veil. This she did. One day, a short time after taking the vows, she sent for the priest, who had preached her reception sermon, to come to her. He had been a personal friend before he became a priest and before she took the white veil. To him she told the story of how she, who had sworn to be a virgin all her life, had been betrayed by one who had renounced all sin and who had, as a priest in the Roman Catholic church, been hearing her say her confessions. To the systematic poisoning of her mind she lays the entire blame.

We might go on and tell how the Mother Abbess urged her to take some medicine which would cause abortion, and which medicine, because it contained a rank poison placed there for that purpose, killed her.

Such is but one example of the hundreds of thousands which are stains upon the Roman Catholic church. How intelligent men and women, who know its history and lack of scriptural basis as well as its positively immoral character, can sanction it we cannot see. Let us pray God that the day

will speedily come when confession and the confessional will be no more a fact in present day life and that the church that sanctions it will understand its true influence.