

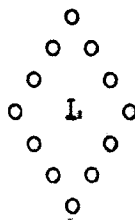
1915

The confessional system of the Roman Catholic Church compared with the New Testament teaching concerning confession

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/47135>

Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository

THE CONFSSIONAL SYSTEM OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
COMPARED WITH
THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING CONCERNING CONFESSION



GRADUATION THESIS

of

FRANK LINDER

1915

O U T L I N E

- I Introduction
- II The Development of the Confessional System
of the Roman Catholic Church
 - (a) Primitive Church
 - (b) The Present System
- III Critical Study of the Scriptural Basis for
the Confessional System of the Roman Catholic
Church
- IV The New Testament Teaching on Confession
 - (a) Synoptic Gospels
 - (b) Johannine Writings
 - (c) Pauline Writings
- V Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY

-oOo-

- H. C. Lea - Confession and Indulgences
Henry C. Sheldon - New Testament Theology
Henry C. Sheldon - Sacerdotalism
Encyclopedia Britannica
Catholic Encyclopedia
Schaff-Herzog - Encyclopedia of Religious
Knowledge
International Critical Commentary
Expositors' Greek Testament

THE CONFSSIONAL SYSTEM OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
COMPARED WITH
THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING CONCERNING CONFESSION

-oOo-

Confession may be defined as the expression of a voluntary effort of self-study. Psychologically considered, it seems to be the natural reaction of the human mind after some unusual experience. Thus the Prodigal in "the far country", did the natural thing when he said to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." It seems to be in conformity with the natural tendency of human nature also that in the light of a revelation of a worthy ideal, people look within themselves, and, seeing that which is unworthy in contrast with the vision splendid, attempt "to cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the soul."

It is the purpose of this paper to take this natural expression of the human soul which has found some degree of expression in most religions, ancient and modern, and trace its development in the Roman Catholic Church, to estimate its present use in that church, and to compare the confessional system of the church of Rome with the New Testament standard of

confession.

I. THE EARLY CHURCH

We approach the subject of confession in the primitive church understanding that the records of the period are comparatively meager, and that the references to confession are meager. However, whatever has come to us from that period points clearly to the conclusion that the primitive church taught and practiced confession before the group, a democratic confessional, or confession to God thru direct personal communion. For confession of this sort there is no scarcity of Scriptural basis, and in this the Scriptures seem to be in perfect accord with the demands of the higher life.

The earliest records of confession being recommended and enjoined refer to direct confession to God. H. C. Lea, who has made the most exhaustive study of this period, says that in all the writings of St. Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, there is no evidence that they had any knowledge of any other possible means of confession.

In the canons of Hippolytus, dated in the early part of the third century, in which all the duties of the clergy are minutely catalogued, the hearing of

confession is not mentioned. Early in the fourth century, Peter of Alexandria, first recommends confession to a priest as a wholesome exercise. The observation of one who comments on this statement seems to stand the test of common sense, when he speculates concerning this first recognition of confession to a priest. His theory is that it grew naturally out of the practice of public confession as enjoined in St. James. As the early Christian group grew larger public confession would become more embarrassing and as the priests were supposed to be specialists in religion and good men, they would naturally turn to them. This seems reasonable, but it is worthy of note in passing that in this early reference to confession to a priest there is no intimation of the power of the priest to pardon. The assumption of some such natural development of confession to a priest in the early church is not entirely without foundation in the early writings concerning the period, for Origen refers to confession not as a right of the church but as the natural act of a penitent to unburden the soul to a priest. Yet we are led to conclude that confession to a priest had no very wide currency up to the latter part of the fifth

century for St. Augustin enumerates the necessary conditions and acts upon which the pardon from sin is dependent and fails to mention confession, while John Cassianus, who belongs to the fifth century, seems to know only public confession and confession to God and counsels penitents who are ashamed to confess before the group to "go directly to the hand from whom nothing is hidden."

Based upon the records of the early church up to the sixth century then, we may conclude that public confession of one to the group was probably common and that confession to the outstanding leaders of the group was not unknown, while direct confession to God was practiced by the most intelligent, devout souls and recommended by the greatest leaders.

From the sixth century on the question with which we are primarily concerned is the way in which the developing church used, or abused, this natural impulse of the human soul. After the sixth century there is less reference to public confession and such as we have shows that public confession was declining. On the other hand, the fact that two well pronounced types of confession, to a representative of the church and to God, were increasing in favor and a discussion

as to the proper way of confession was developing is evident. The fact that the discussion swung around the question of the authority for confession and that one party claimed divine authority and the other the authority of the church, shows clearly the two methods of confession. This discussion did not reach its climax until the middle ages, and before the lines were closely drawn the early schoolmen, Peter the Lombard and St. Victor, spoke wisely concerning the basis of authority and placed it in human need. They did not claim divine authority or attempt to capitalize a natural expression of the human soul for the purpose of fortifying the interests of the church. Those who attempted to find in the scriptures a basis for the authority of the church read into such general statements as "do penance", meanings which any appeal to reason would overthrow. Alexander Hales says God gave no direct command for confession because He wanted confession to be entirely voluntary. Chancellor Gerson argues for a scriptural basis because we are commanded to honor our parents and the Mother church commands it, and therefore we must honor with obedience. This discussion is valuable in that it shows the general disagreement in the church concern-

ing the origin and authority for confession at a time not far before the seal of the church was placed upon confession as obligatory and to a priest, and this was made one of the strongest forces to compel the control of the people by the church.

The assault which Erasmus led against this theoretical position which was later made binding by the church council, culminated in the Reformation. The position taken by the Council of Trent, to the effect that Sacramental confession, meaning by that confession to a priest, was of divine origin, and branding all as heretics who denied the contention, was doubtless influenced by Erasmus and his followers.

The doctrine of the Roman church took definite form in the shape of the adoption of St. Victor's definition of contrition and penance. By the adoption of this definition of penance was made to include contrition, auricular confession to a priest, and absolution by him. The "Power of the Keys" claimed to find its scriptural warrant in John XX:21-23, "Whose soever sins ye forgive they are forgiven unto them, whose soever sins ye retain they are retained." It was an attempt to popularize and extend auricular confession. That this attempt was in a

measure successful is indicated by a regulation adopted by the council of Paris, 1198, which produced the first formal code for confessors. After some centuries of slow development, the auricular confession to the priest was finally made obligatory. The efforts of the Catholic theologians to establish the acceptance of the "Power of the Keys" had been in a large measure successful. The new definition of the Sacrament of Penance fortified by the doctrine of "The Keys", had also been partially accepted and through the decree of Innocent III at the Lateran council of 1215-1216, confession was changed from voluntary to obligatory. While auricular confession was made obligatory at that early date, confession to a priest was not absolutely demanded. It took four more centuries before the leaders of the church found it possible to limit confession to a priest alone. The decree of the church admitted the right of a layman to hear confessions as late as the fourteenth century. The synod of Cahours in this period approves of death-bed confession to laymen and also to women. But confession to laymen was not even restricted to death-bed confession, for Lan France says that confession for secret sins can be made to any cleric and in their

absence to any righteous man. Thus it seems quite apparent that the Catholic theologians were juggling this natural expression of an attempt to realize the higher life, to make it conform to their interpretation of the new dogmas of "The Keys" and Penance, but that in spite of this the belief still persisted that the virtue of confession lay in the act itself.

Just here we might, for the purpose of clearness, estimate the practical results of the unqualified acceptance of these two dogmas. "The Power of the Keys" if accepted, admits the monarchical power of the church over human life and destiny here and hereafter. Obligatory auricular confession to a priest gives to the church practical control of the hearts, minds, consciences, and conduct of men in this world and absolution, dependent upon confession, would become a judicial ruling with power to affect all of this life and reach even beyond the grave, from which there was no appeal. In fairness, it seems, that we may assume that the theologians of the church of Rome were not entirely ignorant of this practical result.

There was not a unanimous acceptance of the rule of the church council concerning confession in

the fourteenth century. There were debates on the question. Numerous pamphlets arguing for the validity of confession to laymen were circulated, and a growing opposition culminated in the decree of Martin V for the detention and punishment of Wycliff and Huss and their followers, and a very prominent charge in the decree was rebellion against the power of the priest to hear confessions. Yet in that decree it is stated that confession to a layman is a heresy only when a priest is present. Yet the attitude of the theologians who were in sympathy with the development of the doctrine of the Roman church was that, while confession to a layman was not a heresy, it was without value except as an indication of an attitude of penance and absolution was held to be impossible on that basis. Henry C. Lea, in summing up concerning the protest against the decree of the church which attempted to limit confession to auricular confession to a priest, as the protest took the form of insistence upon the right and validity of confession to laymen, says, "As a mute protest against the sacerdotal control of the keys, the custom died a natural death, yet its persistence until the seventeenth century shows how strong a hold the ancient

tradition held on the popular mind."

We have traced the development of the confessional system thru the centuries and have seen the growing tendency of the church to control and direct this normal expression of the introspective mind. At first the authority of the church was only theoretical and was only slowly accepted. It remained for the Lateran council of 1215-1216 to speak in terms of legal enactment and make confession a part of the system on which pardon depended, and to fortify that power impregnably behind the power of the Keys, thus giving to the clergy of the church absolute power over the conscience of every man who accepted the doctrine of "The Keys".

Extensive rules were made for priest and laity regarding this new act. The penalty for failure to confess to the local parish priest at least once annually was made the refusal of the rights and fellowship of the church to the living and christian burial to the dead, and the action of that council has not been modified in any of the fundamental rulings to the present day. Its rulings and penalties are still in force. The Lutheran revolt led the church to elevate the Lateran canon on confession to an article of faith

and also to take extreme measures against heretics.

The ruling of this council was not readily accepted by the loyal churchmen of that time and it could only be gradually enforced, while the Protestant revolution was the protest which had practical and historic significance. The people did not take kindly to the attempt to coerce them and members of the Roman church today say that it still requires stimulus to enforce yearly confession, and there are objections to the attempt to establish weekly confession, quite evident to all who mingle with Roman Catholics today. The protest past and present seems to be a valid argument in favor of the proposition that the ritual of the Roman Catholic church seized upon, elaborated, and capitalized for selfish purposes an idea which sprung from the fundamental need of human nature.

The attempt has been made to show that in the primitive church there is evidence that confession was normal and scriptural. The study has led us to believe that the growing Roman church took that normal expression of the heart life of the people and bent it to serve their ends. The next task is to compare the confessional system of the Roman church

as ratified by the council of 1215-1216, and as it is at the present, with the New Testament teaching on confession.

II. CRITICISM OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

There are two lines of argument for the confessional system of the church of Rome made by its defenders. The first may be termed the practical or ethical, which receives very little attention by Catholic theologians but which is worthy of mention because, in talking with several intelligent Catholic laymen; it was the only one they gave or seemed to know. The second basis of their defense, on which the church makes its stand, is the Scriptural basis.

Devout followers of the church maintain that if one is loyal to the confessional system that it has a practical ethical significance on the conduct. They argue that if one knows that he must confess all his sins, and that outbreking sins merit extreme penance, he will be more careful regarding his conduct and the influence will be wholesome. Cardinal Newman attempts a defense upon the same basis. He said, quoting from the Catholic Encyclopedia, "How many sould there are in distress, anxiety, loneliness, whose one need is to

find a being to whom they can pour out their feelings unheard by the world. They want to tell them to one strong enough to bear them and yet not too strong so as to despise them."

It seems difficult for us, from our point of view to understand how people can come to a clear realization of this human need and its practical, ethical significance and stop short of an appreciation of direct communion with God. All the direct benefits which they see in ideal, as coming from this system, are realized in a much more effective way by a conscious personal relation to the Eternal, not to mention the power of such consciousness upon individual soul growth and development. In that system the priest only, enjoys the consciousness of direct touch with the Divine. The New Testament grants the possibility of this beneficial experience to every man. The Christian conception of God as wise, moral, personal Father, whose attributes are life, truth, and love, satisfies fully the longings of the human soul; pointed out by Cardinal Newman, for one who is entirely worthy to hear the confession of sin. It seems very doubtful as to whether any merely finite being could measure up to these demands.

While this line of defense seems equally as valid as the attempt to find Scriptural warrant for necessary Confession to a priest and absolution by him, it is on the latter basis that the theologians of the Roman church have attempted to find support for their system. After the Council of Trent, the apologists made every possible effort to prove that confession, as endorsed by the church, had foundation in Divine law. They searched all available patristic literature and found only a few scattering and irrelevant passages. Some quotations and condensed reports from Roman Catholic sources will give us clearly their point of view.

(a) Definition. "Confession is the avowal of one's own sins made to a duly authorized priest for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness thru the power of the keys."

(b) Necessity of Confession. Confession is just as necessary for those who fall into sin after baptism as baptism itself is for the unregenerate.

(c) The Power granted by Christ to the Apostles and their successors was two fold; to forgive and to retain, to bind and to loose. "This grant would be nullified if the individual could appeal over the head

of the church to God himself."

(d) If Christ's grant of power to Peter and the Apostles is accepted, then we must make known our sins to the ones exercising the power of binding and loosing that they may exercise their power intelligently and the priests are the ones to whom such power is delegated.

The last assertion they fortify by presenting this quotation from the decree of the Council of Trent concerning confession, "Christ left his priests as his vicars, to whom as rulers and judges the faithful must make known their sins."

From these quotations, the position of the church of Rome seems to be made clear.

(a) They claim that the priest has absolute power to forgive or retain sins.

(b) They pretend to find their scriptural basis for the power of binding and loosing in the words of Christ as reported in Matthew 16:18 and John 20:21-23.

(c) Confession to the priest, they insist, is essential in order that he may do the work of forgiving or retaining sins, with a degree of intelligence. If we accept the first two propositions, the last should be granted freely.

In all the New Testament scriptures there are only two quotations which have been or could be pointed to as a scriptural basis for necessary confession to a priest. We have seen that the whole confessional system is admittedly dependent upon the doctrine of "The Keys" or binding and loosing. Unless it can be shown that the priest has absolute power over the destiny of men from which there is no appeal, then the absence of any necessity for confession to a priest is apparent. The whole system then swings around this dogma which has for its support these two scriptural references. We will examine them to see if they afford any adequate basis for the doctrine of necessary confession to a priest and absolution by him.

John 20:21-23 has been used by the Catholic theologians as the scriptural basis for the confessional system of the Catholic church. The quotation is: "Jesus therefore said unto them, Peace be unto you, as the Father hath sent me even so send I you. And when he had said this He breathed upon them and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins ye forgive they are forgiven unto them, whosesoever sins ye retain they are retained."

The argument against this scripture affording any

basis for the Confessional system rests upon the textual interpretation of the quotation and also upon the historic development of the present system of confession and absolution.

A very casual reading of the text makes it clear that the dominant interest revealed is the imparting of the spirit of Christ, and that just to the degree in which that spirit is possessed, in that measure may the ones so favored do the special work committed to their care.

The phrase, "He breathed upon them," is worthy of notice. The Greek word used is equivalent to the Hebrew word in Genesis 2:7, where it is said that "Jehovah breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul." Too great emphasis cannot easily be placed then upon this reception of the life of Christ as a preparation for the important work of forgiving and retaining sins. Now it seems fair, at this point, to compare this with the other teachings of Christ regarding the forgiveness of sins. Christ claimed to enjoy a perfect union with the Father and because of this perfect understanding of the nature and will of God, could logically claim to perfectly represent God in the judgment concerning the

forgiveness and retention of sin. He also claimed to know what was in man, which would be further equipment for this task. It was not recorded that Christ taught that any one purely human would ever attain in this life to a perfect sonship to God or to a perfect knowledge of the innermost secrets of his fellow-men. Unless these two gifts were possible to the point of perfection, then any absolute forgiveness or retention of sins by any human agency would be evidently unjust. Just at the point of the necessary knowledge of the inner life of the one to be forgiven, the Catholic theologians make their argument for confession to the priest. They say that since Christ gave to the Apostles the power of binding and loosing, and they are in an unbroken line of descent from the Apostles, then they must know the inner life of the one to be forgiven. Granting their claim of Apostolic succession because it seems because it seems to us to be unimportant, we could raise the question as to whether every priest, or any priest, has ever possessed perfect knowledge of the will and nature of God. If it could be shown that even one priest, bishop or pope, for example a ^{Alexander VI} Caesar Borgia, came short of a perfect knowledge of the spirit of Christ, then we would have

ample grounds for questioning the Confessional system of the Catholic church. On the other hand, we raise the question as to whether it is possible for anyone with human limitations, however fully endowed with that spirit of fairness which Christ had, to determine definitely and fully regarding any individual, even one who has honestly confessed all. The effect of environment and heredity, as contributing and influencing agencies, it would seem, could only be adequately determined by the divine himself. To delegate to any human agency the absolute power of binding and loosing, which Christ claimed only by virtue of his unique relation to God and only because he claimed to have a perfect understanding of the Divine nature, is a reflection upon the vision and judgment of the Infinite.

Based upon our understanding of the text and its relation to the sum of Christ's teaching, just what is the common-sense view as to the meaning of Christ in this text, admitting its authenticity? It is worthy of observation that in Matthew's Gospel, 16:18, Christ is reported, in the address to Peter, as giving to the church or Christian community which was to be formed, the same power, in these words, "What-

so-ever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and what-so-ever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Here it is a democratic power to be exercised by the whole body and, as a matter of historic fact, that is just what the early church attempted to do, and it was as late as the Lateran Council of 1215-1216 that the official sanction of the church was placed upon Confession to a priest as a part of the system upon which pardon depended. The reason for this is not far to seek as that completed the chain which gave the church control over the conscience of every man and fortified that power impregnably behind the "Power of the Keys." The common sense view is this. Christ was going away. He foresaw the development of Christian groups and communities. He knew that condemnation of sin and instruction for penitents would be necessary. He knew that only those who had a large measure of the spirit which characterized his life would be reasonably effective in this most important work. Their forgiveness and condemnation was not to be compared with the divine forgiveness and condemnation, but acting in the name of Christ and presumably in the spirit of Christ, his church and His Apostles, past

and present, were to use their power to condemn sin and to help honest penitents to come to that condition where Divine forgiveness would be possible. Then in so far as they have that important gift of the Divine spirit, which makes the understanding and interpretation of the Divine will possible, in so far their binding and loosing will doubtless be ratified by the Divine himself.

Before leaving this point, it may be of some value to point out the apparent fact that if any such interpretation as has been placed upon these two quotations by the church of Rome, was really meant by Christ, then it was at least six centuries after before any understanding of the true interpretation was revealed to men. Neither James, the Apostle Paul, or the church fathers reveal any idea of such an understanding of the mind of Christ. A further consideration, which has great significance to all who have an exalted conception of the Deity, is that such an interpretation makes a priest as powerful as God, The priest could send a man to Hell or Paradise and God would be powerless to intervene. The only possible hope for human redemption would be the machinery of the church of Rome, to which God would be subordinated.

We have followed very briefly the development of the confessional system of the Catholic church and examined the few texts given by its defenders who attempt to find scriptural warrant for the system. We now attempt an examination of the New Testament Scriptures in order to interpret the attitude of the individual to God, the method of approach available for the sin-burdened human soul into the realm of conscious communion with God. We shall not attempt to take one text and read into it a whole system, or use the text for the foundation of an intricate system, but will rather seek to know the attitude of the several books of the New Testament and draw our conclusions from that study. As the Old Testament is generally conceded to be a progressive revelation of Divine truth, of which the New Testament is the fitting climax, the development of the idea of individual relations to God, briefly pointed out, would seem to be a fitting introduction to the New Testament study. In Numbers 5:6-7, provision is made for confession and restitution. "When any man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, then shall they confess their sin which they have done, and he shall recompense their sin which they have done." In the very early time

from which this quotation came, Jehovah was supposed to dwell in the temple, and to be only approachable by the priests of the temple, and confession and restitution would doubtless be made thru the priest. In that age it was thought to be blasphemy even to speak the name of Jehovah. It is not out purpose to trace the development step by step, but merely to point out the fact that, with the developing conception of God and man, a new interpretation was placed upon the method of approach to God and the fact of personal communion with God, until the later prophets stand out as exponents of individualism and personalism, and as enemies of any ceremonilaism as a substitute for righteousness. Amos 5:21-24 is perhaps the earliest and classic prophetic utterance against ceremonialism. "I hate, I despise your feasts and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Your meal offerings I will not accept. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." But let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." This is significant in showing the prophet's conception of the attitude of the individual to God. The one

essential is to be the right attitude of mind and heart. The only acceptable worship will be worship in spirit and in truth. God had moved out of the temple and was preparing Himself a place in the hearts of men.

However, it was Jeremiah who, in a large measure, anticipated the general spirit of the New Testament on the point of possible individual relationship with God. In the high water marks of his book he gives expression to the thought that nothing in life could worthily be compared with fellowship with God. We feel the intensity and depth of this personal communion when we think of him as turning his face upward and saying, "Heal me, O Jehovah, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved for thou art my refuge in the day of evil." (17:14-17) "And so thru prayer, he found rest unto his soul, (6:16) and entered into peace, that peace which the world could not give."

As it has been pointed out that in the Old Testament the conception of man's relation to God was dependent upon the conception of God and man, the same fact will form the basis of our study of the new Testament. In the charmed realm of which Christ is the center, what he said about God and man and their

relationship, as reported by the authors of the Synoptical Gospels, must have the most direct bearing upon our subject. Out of a sense of perfect sonship toward God, Christ spoke of Him as Father. The whole of His teaching is shot thru with the conception of God as a Father, and when he formulated a prayer for the disciples, the salutation was "Our Father." From the whole tenor of Christ's teaching, it would seem most unreasonable to conclude that He had any other thought than that men were to approach God in the attitude of confiding children. The attributes of God's nature as pictured by Christ, are personality, supremacy, intense ethical nature, fatherly compassion and good will toward the last, the least and the lowest and if all men were not his children, living in the relation of conscious sonship, it was because they would not come unto Him that they might have life.

Christ's conception of man was that he was on the center of the stage as the child of God, and the subject of God's kingdom. Christ paid a high compliment to the worth of man and the conception of the possible heights to which he may arise, when he gave to man the ideal of divine perfection and said, "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Surely this conception of God and man is far removed from that from which it could possibly be deduced that man needed any human agency as mediator between him and the Divine.

From this close relationship which existed between God and man, according to Christ's teaching, would naturally flow the teaching regarding man as a possible candidate for immortal life, and this is another high tribute to the worth of man. But the relation of man to God beyond the realm of the mortal was to be one of perfect understanding and communion. How fitting that training and development in this conscious relationship should begin here if it is to reach its consummation in the hereafter, and how apparent it seems to be that any intermediary agency is contrary to the spirit and letter of the teachings of Christ.

The Johannine writings very closely reflect the teachings of the Synoptical Gospels regarding God and man and their relationship, as do all the other writings which deserve to be classed as closely related to the Synoptics. Again and again the term Father is applied to God in the Johannine writings. In the reported conversation between Christ and the woman of Samaria, God is presented as the Father to whom all true worship

ers may come. It is significant from the point of view of our study that these are the reported words of Jesus to a sinful woman, who had great need of regeneration. While Christ claimed power to forgive sins because of His unique relation of perfect sonship to God, He did not fail to tell this poor woman of the possibility of direct approach to God, even for such as she. In the Fourth Gospel emphasis is placed upon the benevolent nature of God and the affirmation is made that "God is love." This consideration has found a response in human life. The prominence given to love as fundamental in the nature of God may account in a measure, for the general preference among Bible readers for the Gospel of John. A sense of the most intimate relationship between men and God is apparent in all the Johannine writings, and it is in keeping with this that the classic expression of the New Testament concerning direct confession of the individual to God should appear in these books. In the first epistle bearing the name of John, which is so closely related to the Fourth Gospel in point of both style and content as to make it practically certain that they are from the hand of the same author, and in the first chapter and ninth verse the text is found which puts

into words the logical culmination of all the New Testament teaching bearing upon confession of sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Those addressed are very clearly a group of believing Christians and the theme is their conduct and their relations to God, and in this clear way the author presents the one worthy to hear the confession of human guilt, and gives an assurance of Divine forgiveness consistent with his estimate of the divine nature.

There is no disagreement between the Pauline teaching related to this subject and the teachings of the Synoptical and Johannine writings. The two dominant interest of the Pauline theology, touching man's relation to God, are justification by faith and the universal need and possibility of salvation. Underlying both of these is the assumption of man's personal relationship with the Divine. The actual references to the confession of sin in the Pauline writings are not numerous. Romans 10:9-10, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto right-

eousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The author is emphasizing the universal character of salvation, and faith is the condition for both Jew and Gentile.

Romans 14:11-12 has a more direct bearing upon the subject. "As I live saith the Lord every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The reference is to the final judgment, but we cannot escape the affirmation of individual responsibility to God, and the need of individual confession to God.

We conclude that there is abundant evidence that the authors of the New Testament were not unmindful of the demands of the higher life which express themselves in the confession of sins, and that the conception of the nature of God and man's relation to God, which we deduct from the total contributions of all New Testament authors, together with certain plain texts, fully warrant the conclusion that any individual who is oppressed by the sense of sin, may approach the great Father and, sincerely confessing their sins, may be assured that he will hear and forgive.

The attempt has been made to show the development

of the Confessional system of the Roman Catholic church
to examine the scriptural basis of that system, and
then to show the New Testament teaching on the con-
fession of sin.