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The confessional in the light of New Testament teaching

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THE CONFESSIONAL IN THE LIGHT OF
NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

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requirement for the degree of
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Approved
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OUTLINE

STATEMENT OF THE THEME OR PROBLEM

INVESTIGATIONS IN THIS FIELD

NATURAL AND UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF THE CONFSSIONAL

Definition of "Confessional".

Protestant and Catholic theories of penitence compared.

Universal demand for an approach to God.

Harnack's words concerning the imperishability of the Church and of conscience.

Weakness of human nature a reason for its appeal.

Henry Ward Beecher on the nobility of confession.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF CONFESSION INTO THE INSTITUTED SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

The Church was first a communion of the saved.

Until third century all confession was public.

Tertullian's "two planks of salvation".

Beginnings of penance in period immediately following Constantine.

Rapid development from impetus given by Augustine.

Real origin of Penitentials in Iro-Scottish Church.

Abuses connected with idea of accumulated merits, bartering, and indulgences.

Fourth Lateran Council (1215) first to formulate legislation concerning Confessional.

Thomas Aquinas' contribution in development of the theories.

Additional affirmation of penance as a sacrament in Council of Trent (1545-1563).

Casualty of the Jesuits.

Luther's reformation of the Sacrament of Penance.

OUTLINE - continued

PASSAGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BEARING ON THE
SUBJECT AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

The celebrated texts conferring 'power of the keys'.

Catholic writer's estimates of the 'power of the keys'.

John Wesley's exegesis of the texts.

Weakness of claim based on these texts.

Spirit of the New Testament teaching:

Humble in spirit exalted.

Confession one to another and mutual helpfulness.

The intimacy promised by Christ with his followers.

Human limitations in the face of so great claims for authority.

The Confessional in spirit opposed to these teachings.

CONCLUSION

Confessional deficient in substantiating claims for divine authority from Apostolic times.

Opposed to the spirit of New Testament teaching.

Solution of the problem: intelligent piety with an open Bible, and abandonment of the false distinction between priesthood and laity.

STATEMENT OF THE THEME OR PROBLEM

We shall attempt, in this discussion, to find out by what route the Confessional has come to be, and determine the validity of the claim that it is of Divine origin based on the Scriptures. The importance of the problem, we shall find, is not limited to the past, for the Confessional exists today in not only the Roman Catholic Church, but is prescribed in the ritual of the Greek, the Russo-Greek, the Coptic, the Syrian, and the other Oriental churches, and bases its claims for authority on divine sanction.

INVESTIGATIONS IN THIS FIELD

The most exhaustive and authoritative work in this field has been done by Henry C. Lea in his "History of Confession and Indulgences", published twenty years ago. Before him, William E. Jelf had

published an "Examination into the Doctrine of the Practice of Confession", (1875) in England, and Bishop J. H. Hopkins in this country a "History of the Confessional" (1850). Both of these latter writers were moved to undertake the study and publish their findings by the fear of the inroads of the Roman system into the Episcopal Church. Lea, however, as an authoritative historian, avowedly undertakes "to write a history, not a polemical treatise". By the use of the Catholic authorities themselves, and by referring frequently to the "popular works of devotion in which are to be found the practical application of the theories", he has presented such an array of facts as to not only heighten one's admiration for the author, but appreciation of the problem and of that wonderful organization, the historic Church. I quote frequently from Lea's work.

NATURAL AND UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF THE CONFESSIONAL

A good definition of "Confession", in the theology of the Church, Eastern and Western, is "an acknowledgment of sins to God in the presence of a priest in order to obtain absolution". There are the three persons: the sinner, his God, and his priest. Sin holds the center of the stage: sins to be confessed, and absolution for them to be obtained. All the theorizing and theologizing in endless controversies that extended thru four centuries have centered in the attempt to explain the relationship of these persons and the parts each played in the process of cleansing men's souls of sin. Tho there has been much questioning concerning the origin of sin or evil in the world, men, other than philosophers, have not questioned its existence. They have experienced its havoc in their own lives. Likewise, in their best moments the desire to rise out of their base selves has created the desire to be rid of the base sins that

hold them down. Conscience has sought relief quite naturally in the unburdening process of confession. Then has come the longing for assurance of relief, and a cleansed conscience thru absolution brings one back to the righteousness or rightness with God which he seeks. This reasoning sounds plausible: its spirit is Protestant, however. The growth of the Confessional has been based on a different process of reasoning, which will come out in the course of our discussion. But let us first seek to discover the reasons for its universal appeal.

One secret of the influence of the Confessional and its tenacity of life in the face of manifold vicissitudes, inconsistencies, and bitter denunciation of the system, is to be found in the universal demand of human nature for an approach to God. Many have there talked to Him. Harnack,¹ in speaking of the harmful influence of the Confessional, says,- "And yet, how imperishable is

1 - History of Dogma, VII;763.

this Church, and how imperishable is conscience that seeks for its God".

Other considerations,- such as the weakness of human nature; the reluctance of men to 'work out their own salvation', preferring rather that an intermediary should do it for them; and the need of restraint to keep men from a return to barbarities,- all these have influenced those practical men who as priests have had the shepherding and guiding of men's souls. Lea¹ says this, (and it is quoted by Catholic writers for consolation),- "No one can deny that there is truth in Cardinal Newman's argument: 'How many souls are there in distress, anxiety, and 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 and not to tell them, they wish to tell them to one who is strong enough to hear them, and yet not too strong so as to despise them'. It is this weakness on which the Church has speculated:- the weakness of those

1 - History of Confession and Indulgences, II-456.

unable to bear their burdens, who find comfort in the system built up thru the experience of the ages in exploring the follies and credulities of the human heart". Dr. Martensen¹ in speaking of the needs of human nature says: "It cannot easily be denied that Confession meets a deep need of human nature. There is a great psychological truth in the saying of Pascal that a man often attains for the first time a true sense of sin and a true stayedness in his good purpose when he confesses his sins to his fellow man as well as to God". And Henry Ward Beecher² reminds us of the nobility of confession in the following words: "Do not tell me that confession is all a degrading thing. Do not tell me that it is all a painful thing. It is painful as long as you strive against it; it is rendered painful by many of the lacerations of expiation; but, after all, thru confession of sin and renunciation we come to an atmosphere in which we breath the very breath of heaven itself. No

1 - Christian Dogmatics, quoted in Cath.Enc., art. on "Penance".

2 - Sermon, "The Nobility of Confession".

one who has done wrong can feel so happy as he who has come out of it, and has not covered it up but has forsaken it, and confessed it, and risen beyond it. That is the royal way."

We are studying, then, an institution that has its roots deep in human experience of need. This will come out even more clearly as we turn our thought to a study of the history of the Confessional from the earliest times.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF CONFESSION INTO THE INSTITUTED "SACRAMENT OF PENANCE"

Originally the Church was a communion of the saved; gross sinners were excluded from Christian membership. Until the end of the third century, unless by public confession, backsliders into idolatry, adultery, whoredom, and murder, were excluded. The forgiveness of God in the next world was reserved for them if they were penitent to the end.

Repentant sinners did works of mortification and almsgiving, and made public confession on the advice of priest or bishop as experts in spiritual affairs,"but that the Church made no claim to exercise control over them in this is rendered evident by the very absence of evidence".¹ A passage in Origen recommends to the sinner to lay bare his soul to some expert, and if he advises it, make confession in the face of the congregation. It is evident that the confessor, whether priest or layman, had no power to impose penance or to grant absolution. Additional evidence of a negative character to prove that in the early centuries, the only confession recognized by the Church was public, is found in the codes prescribing the functions of the priesthood and penalties imposed for derelictions -- the canons of Hippolytus and the Apostolic Constitutions, the so-called Canons of the Apostles, and others -- in which no injunctions to secrecy or other details connected with private

1 - Lea, I, p.18.

confession are mentioned. The Church was holding on tenaciously to the idea that no ceremony could replace baptism: God alone could forgive sins. By the latter half of the second century it allowed atonement for most sins to be made by public confession. When this was allowed, as Tertullian's "two planks of salvation",- the one baptism, the second confession for sins after baptism,-- the Church began to abandon the old idea that the church was a communion of saints, tho it still held out against whoremongers, adulterers, murderers, and idolaters. This rule was first infringed by Bishop Calixtus to avoid a break-up of the community;; he claimed the power for the bishops as successors of the Apostles, that is, as possessors of the Spirit and the 'power of the keys', to re-admit those who had relapsed into idolatry under the Decian persecution.

Under Cyprian and Tertullian, "no salvation outside the Church" came to be interpreted as, "the Church alone saves from damnation which is otherwise certain". Now she is the institution

from which proceeds the communion of saints: she includes both saved and unsaved. They now said, "The Church is a holy institution in virtue of the gifts with which she is endowed". The bishop was becoming practically the vice-regent of Christ; he disposed of the power to bind and loose. The Church was becoming secularized, and taking the power to absolve. When opposed by Novation, he said it could expose gross sinners once for all, but sins against God were only for him to pardon.

In the rapid extension of Christianity after Constantine, little is known regarding the history of ecclesiastical penance in the East. In the West there was a growing feeling that men occupied religious legal relationships, in which they were responsible to the Church, and were to expect from the Church the sacraments and intercessory aid in every case. The practice of penance now acquired influence in the West on all conditions of ecclesiastical constitution and theology. "From this point can be traced all the subtle workings of penance to the most remote dogmas."¹

¹ - Harnack, History of Dogma, V, p.37.

Augustine gave decided impetus to it -- not by creating formulas, or speaking of the sacrament of penance itself, but he has clearly expressed the thing itself. The Novation crisis drew from the Church the sacrament of penance, and thereby gave the impulse in general to substitute a system of sacraments for the sacrament (baptism) that blotted out sin. (The formal establishment of the sacrament was to wait for a long time.) Augustine had the conception that the grace of Christ was not exhausted in the retrospective effect of baptismal grace. In this period, baptism and penance were named together as if they were the two chief sacraments, without the latter's being expressly called a sacrament.

In Enchiridion, of Augustine, penance is combined with almsgiving: by these alone sinners can be saved. Everything good we give to others is alms: advice, comfort, discipline. By this we help to gain forgiveness for our own sins. Unfortunately from false weakness and shame, public penance is frequently withheld. He who believes

in and despises forgiveness of sin in the Church commits sin against the Holy Ghost.¹

Gregory the Great, influenced by Augustine, said that Christ gave us an example: his work is incomplete, however, and must be supplemented by our penances. In fact, in Gregory's teaching, Christ's death and penance appear side by side, as two factors of equal value. The whole life, even of the baptised, is still stained at least with small sins, and for this one must practice penance. Gregory systematized the doctrine in the exact form in which it passed over into the Middle Ages. These were the four points: perception of sin and dread of God's judgments, regret (contritio), confession of sin, and satisfaction (satisfactio). The first two might be called one, "converted mind". "Satisfaction" was necessarily felt to be the main thing. The notion of God was of an omnipotent absolutism.

In the Carovingian period, private penance was practiced in the presence of the priest.

1 - Harnack, History of Dogma, V, p.229.

"The gradual settlement of monachist (monastic) practice in the world Church alone explains the fact that actual confession of all sins to the priest, and the impositions of all sorts of satisfactions, for the hundred and one offences in life and conduct,- in a word, that private penance in the presence of the priest became the rule."¹ The practice began in the Iro-Scottish Church, where the monachist practice was strong. Penitential regulations were drawn up, and these books from Ireland passed over to the Anglo-Saxons, then on to the Franks and to Rome. Workman² says that Celtic monasticism was marked by elaboration of the Penitentials, and that it is more than likely that they originated with the Irish Church. Codification of the different systems was part of the reform work of Charles the Great. As illustrations of the rigorous type of Celtic monasticism: one monk would touch food only twice a week; of Drythelm of Montrose it was said that he would stand up to his neck in winter in the Tweed. From ascetism it was but

1 - Harnack, History of Dogma, V, p.325.

2 - Workman, Evolution of the Monastic Ideal, 212-216

a step to imposition of penances for sins of the soul. The Flagellants of the middle of the 13th century became contagious. St. Elizabeth of Thuringia was one such.

The penitential books as guides led to a deadening readiness of all to confess themselves mortal sinners. The people would have been hypocrites had they not been so simple. It acted as a police system to punish wantonness and barbarism, outbreaks of wild energy and passion. It was considered that the supplications of many and good persons: especially the prayers of saints helped much, in as much as their supplications were not for their own sins, and so were added merit. To them Christ's repeated sacrificial death in the masses was a reality, and led to an accumulation of merits for those who partook of the mass. Then came a bartering, both in merits earned and for money payments. The system of remissions, ^{followed} i. e., of commutations and redemptions, or of substitutions. Indulgences followed naturally. Attention was focused on punishment: entering the cloister,

giving goods to the poor, were all performed not because they loved God but to escape punishment.

All these penitential practices had a very marked influence on the dogma of the succeeding period. "It had wound itself round Augustinianism from the beginning, and had prevented it from obtaining complete sway in the Church; it influenced Christology even in the time of Gregory I, and then in the classic period of the Middle Ages it acted decisively upon and remodeled all the dogmas that had come down from antiquity."¹

As we turn to a study of the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), we find that it was here the first formulated legislation on penance and the confessional was laid down. Even now it was too ambitious a plan for the looseness of the Church's organization to successfully administer. "If after receiving baptism, any one shall have fallen into sin, he can always be restored thru true penitence." Every Christian is to make confes-

1 - Harnack, History of Dogma, V, p.330.

sion before the parish priest. In the 25th chapter it is stated: "Every believer of either sex after arriving at the years of discretion, must by himself faithfully confess all his sins, at least once a year, to his own priest, and must study to carry out to the best of his ability the repentance enjoined upon him, receiving reverently, at least at Easter, the Sacrament of the Eucharist." Already Anselm's doctrine of the atonement and theory of satisfaction had an influence toward making the principles of the practice of penance the fundamental scheme of religion in general. He stressed necessity as a basis, and strict reasonableness, viewing penance as a compensating penalty to the honour of God.

Even at this time, tho the two principal sacraments in theory were baptism and the Eucharist, as a matter of fact, the two closely united sacraments were baptism and penance (the "second plank after shipwreck", as Tertullian had called it). The frequency for penance and no other substitute for it, makes it a most important means of grace.

The theory in elaboration and defence of penance as a sacrament was first put forth by Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274). He affirms that it is not dispensed "by the ministers of Christ", but inwardly wrought by God. "I absolve thee" are the words spoken. The sacrament receives full effect from those things spoken by the priest; these words by the priest are the appointment of Christ: the priests are 'authorized ministers'. It is not the first act of penance by which blame is remitted, that liability to the whole penalty is cancelled, but by all the acts of penance when completed.

All these things were common property in Thomas' day, and so continued to be among the Schoolmen. The necessity of priestly absolution, hence also confession before the priest, and still further the idea of effectual action of the priest in the sacrament, were settled matters. With him for the first time the distinction between contrition and attrition is drawn: contrition is a perfect penitence disposition, i.e., a disposition prompted by love; attrition is not perfect, slightly

tainted, but still of account before God. Here enters the value of the distinction: attrition, thru the superadded confession and absolution of the priest, becomes contrition.

The second important piece of legislation in the development of penance as an established sacrament was put forth by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). It affirmed: "The whole Church has always understood that full confession of sins is required of all by divine law, because Christ has left behind him priests, representatives of himself, as overseers and judges to whom all mortal offenses are to be made known". The old dispute as to whether the priest only pronounces forgiveness, or bestows it as a judge, is settled according to the latter alternative. In 15th Canones, the 4th, is decreed: "Anyone who shall deny the necessity of the Sacrament of Penance, three acts required, namely: contrition, confession, and satisfaction, and shall say only two parts of penance: terror thru knowledge of sin and faith awakened

by the Gospel or by absolution by which one believes that his sins are remitted to him thru Christ, let him be anathema". This was an attempt to throw dust into the eyes of the Protestants.

Under the hand of the Jesuits, the sacrament of penance was used to wipe out sin with sin: to transform all deadly sins into venial sins. In the Jesuit ethical handbooks, "the most shocking things are dealt with in a brazen-faced way by unwedded priests as men of special knowledge, not with a view of calling down with prophetic power upon the burden of horror a heavier burden of judgment, but often enough with a view of representing the most disgraceful things as pardonable, and of showing to the most regardless transgressors a way in which they may still always obtain the peace of the Church".¹

The method has continued unchanged, and it exerts today its ruinous influence on dogmatics and ethics, on the consciences of those who receive and

1 - Harnack, History of Dogma, VI, p.101-102.

of those who make confession, perhaps in a worse degree than at any period. One learns to receive confession and give absolution, now that it has become a highly refined art, as one learns the art of speculation in the exchange. Again, I quote Harnack's words¹ : "And yet,-- how imperishable is this Church, and how imperishable is conscience that seeks for its God. God can be found by such a conscience even in the idol, and it hears his voice even where it hears at the same time all the voices of Hell".

Luther overturned the whole Sacrament of Penance of the Church, and substituted for it the thought of justification by faith. His points are: (1) repentance is alone created by God thru faith; (2) next is a true repentance or hatred for sin; (3) constancy of the penitent disposition; (4) he cancelled the necessity for priestly cooperation for either confession or absolution; (5) confession and absolution are joined in faith and not to be separated; (6) he removed all the abuses

1 - Harnack, History of Dogma, VII, p.63.

connected with the false distinctions between venial and mortal sins, eternal and temporal guilt; and (7) set aside the subtly refined doctrines of purgatory, of applied merits of saints, and of indulgences.

I have followed pretty closely in this exposition of the steps in the development of the ideas connected with penance, confession, absolution, that given by Harnack in his History of Dogma. We see how naturally, but tenaciously, the various doctrines were formulated: that the first actual legislation prescribing private confession was in the Fourth Lateran Council, later reaffirmed by the Council of Trent: that in the earliest period of the apostolic church and in fact until the close of the third century, only public confession was known and practiced; and that not at Rome, but in the Irish-Scottish Church was the penitential system first practiced, not thru any divine authority, but thru the natural outcome of the carrying into secular life of the abnormal practice of confession and absolution which was firmly fixed in the routine

of life within the walls of monasteries.

PASSAGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
BEARING ON THE SUBJECT AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

In defense of the claims made for the "power of the Keys": that of knowledge and insight sufficient to understand the soul's needs, and of power to grant the absolution which shall actually cleanse away the sins, the celebrated texts are:

- Mt. 16:19 "And I will give to thee (Pëter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven."
- Mt. 18:18 "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven."
- Jn. 20:22-23 "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

In a footnote, Lea makes this observation concerning these texts, which is satisfactory¹,--

"Even admitting that the texts have the sense

1 - History of Confession and Indulgences, I, 107-8

ascribed to them by the Church, there is a serious deficiency in the grant, for they do not say that no sins shall be remitted save those pardoned by the Apostles; the power must be exercised to be effective, and a sinner may make his peace with God otherwise. The point is of no importance save as affording an illustration of the boundless assumptions by which Catholic teachers maintain the power of the keys. Thus Palmieri asserts that the Apostles bind whomsoever they do not loose, and he even has the audacity to represent Christ as saying that independent of the ministry of the Apostles there is no remission of sins possible."

The primitive church accounted this as a personal grant to the holy men whom Christ had selected as his immediate representatives. The nearness of the Day of Judgment as taught and believed show clearly that they had no idea of the Apostles having successors even. The early Christians would have stood aghast at the suggestion that God would confer such awful authority on every vicious or ignorant man who thru favor or purchase might succeed in obtaining ordination.

That the early church knew nothing of this power is plainly inferable also from the silence of the early Fathers. St. Clement of Rome, Didache, Barnabas, Ignatius, Hermas, all give counsel to

reconciliation with God, but they know nothing of the authority under God. Ignatius magnifies the episcopal office but assigns no individual power. Irenæus speaks of God remitting sins, but knows no intermediary. Dionysius and Polycarp likewise say nothing of absolution.

It is interesting in this connection, to note that Tixeront,¹ a Catholic writer, says concerning Augustine, that "he believes the sinner restored to the spiritual life even before he is absolved by the bishop, yet he deems the intervention of the Church necessary: an intervention which truly loosens the sinners' bonds. This theory is then, far from being well defined."

In explanation of the theory of penance, the Catholic Encyclopedia says, (p.618), "In the New Law, repentance includes reformation of life, grief for sin, willingness to perform satisfaction. In the Christian Dispensation, this act of repentance has been subjected by Christ to the judgment and jurisdiction of his Church, whensoever there is

1 - History of Dogma, I, p. 416.

confession of sin committed after the reception of baptism (Counc. of Trent, session XIV, c.1). And the Church acting in the name of Christ not only declares that sins are forgiven, but actually and judicially forgives them, if the sinner already repentant subjects his sins to the "power of the keys" and is willing to make condign satisfaction for the wrong he has done."

It is interesting to Methodists to observe the exegesis of these passages by John Wesley in his "Notes on the New Testament":

Mt. 18:18 "In the primitive church, absolution meant no more than a discharge from the church censure."

Mt. 16:19 "Indeed not to him alone (for they were equally given to all the apostles at the same time, Jn. 20:21-23), but to him were first given the keys both of doctrine and discipline. He first after our Lord's resurrection exercised the apostleship. Acts 1:15. And he first by preaching opened the kingdom of heaven both to the Jews (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Under the term of binding and loosing are contained all those acts of discipline which Peter and his brethren performed as apostles; and undoubtedly what they thus performed on earth, God confirmed in heaven."

Jn. 22:23 "Here arises a difficulty: Are not the sins of one who truly repents and unfeignedly believes in Christ remitted, without sacerdotal absolution? And are not the sins of one who does not repent or believe, retained even with it? - What then does this commission imply?"

Can it imply any more than: (1) A power of declaring with authority the Christian terms of pardon: whose sins are remitted and whose retained? As in our daily form of absolution; and, (2) A power of inflicting and remitting ecclesiastical censures? That is, of excluding from and readmitting into a Christian congregation."

Moffatt says¹, in reference to the presuppositions about the likelihood of Jesus mentioning the church at all, that "they are far from justifying the later Roman interpretation; the absence of the saying from the Petrine gospel of Mark, its omission by Luke, and its deliberate correction by the author of the Fourth Gospel, are sufficient to indicate the (slight) importance attached to it by the early Church, if it did exist in the original text of Matthew." "He (the author of the Fourth Gospel) broadens out even the general promise of Matt. 18:18 into a promise for the disciples as a body, and associates it with the Spirit. Von Dobschütz further identifies 1 Cor.15:6 with this scene."²

1 - The Theology of the Gospels, p.32.

2 - Ibid. p. 187.

Some comparisons between the spirit of the New Testament teaching and that engendered by the practices of the Confessional will be enlightening.

In Matt. 11:25 f., "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I praise thee that while thou hast concealed these things from the wise and shrewd, thou hast revealed them to the children. Yea, Rather, I bless thee that such was thy pleasure": Jesus is thankful that the

true knowledge of God is not a monopoly confined to experts and exponents of the Jewish Torah, but on the contrary that it is open to the unsophisticated sons of men. As we have already pointed out the Confessional has had the effect of such a refinement and study of its administration as a fine art, until the breach between priest and penitent is like that between Jewish rabbi and publican of Jesus' day.

Of the early Christians, it was said, 'behold, how they love one another'. If we seek to know the reason for that spirit, we find in James' epistle the admonition (5:16) "Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another". The private and compulsory confessional has superceded this. Other passages of similar imprt are Luke 17:3

"If thy brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him". The forgiveness which a Christian is to grant to his erring brother depends upon the penitence of the latter. This relationship of mutual responsibility and helpfulness in the disagreeable things as well as agreeable has been relegated in the confessional to the one man, the priest. Mutual distrust is the result. Jesus taught the disciples to say, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us". "God so loved the world that he gave his own Son" to save men from destruction, not to journey to earth in order to hand over in person two keys of wisdom and power, and then himself go off the scene of action. It is the inexorable love of God interpreted thru the Son that brings men to a true confession. How sadly lacking is that motive in bringing men to the priestly confessional.

These words from Chrysostom will suggest how small a share in the ministry of reconciliation is assigned to Christ himself in the confessional:¹

1 - On the Priesthood, pp. 182-187.

"We have been commissioned to dispense things which are in heaven, and have received an authority such as God has not given to angels or to archangels.... 'All judgment hath the Father committed to the Son' John 5:22: but I see that they have been entrusted with all this by the Son, as if they had already been translated to heaven, and had got beyond human nature, and were released from our affections, to so great power have they been raised.... God has given to priests a greater power than that of our natural parents, and the two differ as much as the present and the future life."

Jesus own words were: "If you keep my commandments, you shall remain within my love: even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain within his love." "If the Son frees you (from sin) you will be really free." "If you remain within my word, you are really disciples of mine, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, for a slave does not know what his master does; but I have called you friends, for I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father."

How these words reveal the intimacy which Jesus will always bear to his followers: a growing intimacy, and an enlargement of understanding for

all truth-seekers. Intimate confidence which is the mark of the Christian experience and obedience is mediated only by the revelation of Christ.

Paul's words are for our time: "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:15)

The limitations of human nature deny the possibility of finding men qualified to administer the powers conferred upon those who hear confession. Jesus used strong words of denunciation for the Pharisees who boasted of their peculiar qualification to administer the religious rules and law. He saw the sham and weakness in human nature. The history of the confessional multiplies evidence to prove the unfitness of men to bind or loose the souls of other men.

CONCLUSION

It has been our quest to discover the origin and something of the route by which the Confessional has come to be. We have found that private confession was unknown in the early church; that first

traces of it are to be found near the close of the third century; and that the system of penitentials grew out of a secularizing of the practices within the monastery walls, beginning in Ireland and spreading to the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks and thence to Rome.

We have further found in comparing the practices and effects of the Confessional with the spirit of the teaching of the New Testament, that it misses the mark of Christ's teaching in his revelation of God the Father. Workman says,¹ "In condemnation of the principles and methods of the penitential system, historians and theologians are now substantially agreed."

Harnack has said, in his Berlin lectures discussing the general subject, "What is Christianity," once you admit the two propositions for which the Church contends: that it possesses the sole powers of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and that those powers are to be exercised as are earthly kingdoms, then all else in the organization and practices of

1 - Evolution of the Monastic Ideal, 215.

the Church quite naturally follow and are readily understood. But these are fundamental assumptions which we cannot admit. The problem of the Confessional, it would seem, will only be settled when men are given ready access to the teachings of the Bible as a source of intelligence and strength, and when that false distinction between priest and layman is broken down, and a democracy exists by which every man shall stand on his own feet.

Report of Work on Thesis

Read pretty thoroly:

- Lea, History of Confession and Indulgences,
vol. I and 100 pp. in vol. II.
Jelf, Examination into Doctrine of the Practice
of Confession, 100 pp.
Hopkins, History of the Confessional, 75 pp.
Casey, Notes on "History of Confessional", 25 pp.
Harnack, History of Dogma, 175 pp. in the 7 vols.
" , What is Christianity? 40 pp.
Sheldon, History of Christian Doctrine, 20 pp.
Workman, Evolution of Monastic Ideal, 25 pp.
Moffatt, Theology of the Gospels, 30 pp.
Articles bearing on the subject in various En-
cyclopaedias.
Brief portions in the other books listed in the
Bibliography.

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Hours employed 56