

Confession

A Leaflet for the Non-Catholic About Catholic Life.

By The Bellarmine Society.

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Confession is practiced and has always been practiced in the Catholic Church. Men whose greatness is recognized by all thinkers, scientists, and generals, such as Pascal, the philosopher and scientist, Pasteur, the scientist, and Foch, the general look upon Confession as an excellent and divinely appointed means to salvation.

WHY THEN ALL THESE ATTACKS ON CONFESSION?

Why do men still say it is unmanly and degrading, an incentive to sin, that it weakens character, or is the payment of a fine in order to sin again?

Because they do not realize that Confession is necessary for the forgiveness of serious sin. They do not realize what Confession is, nor what place it has in the life of a Catholic.

IN WHAT SENSE IS CONFESSION NECESSARY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS?

It is necessary because it is the means prescribed by Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The sinner is, indeed, always immediately forgiven when, moved by the Love of God, he repents; but, if he knows that Christ bids him confess all serious sins, he is bound to obey Christ's bidding.

HOW DOES A CATHOLIC VIEW CONFESSION?

We all have a deep-rooted tendency to do what we like. What we should like to do is often wrong and we know it. If we do it despite this knowledge, then we do wrong as Catholics say, we commit sin," we sin. Christ came on this earth, lived, taught, and finally died for us, that His Father might forgive us, in view of His sacrifice and our repentance. This forgiveness, however, was not to be a mechanical one.

THE SINNER'S PART AND THE PRIEST'S.

Before going to Confession, a Catholic must be sorry for all the serious sins he is guilty of; Against You only have I sinned" must be his attitude. He must recall his sins as far as he can remember. He must wish them undone, because they have insulted God's Majesty and crucified again Jesus Christ," through whom he hopes to be saved; or at least he must turn from his sins because he fears the punishments of sin which God has revealed. That done and it necessarily implies a resolve, with God's help, to avoid those sins in the future he goes to the priest as to the doctor of his soul. The priest, like the medical man, has spent years of study before he is qualified to diagnose and cure the ills of the soul; he needs a special diploma" before he is allowed to do so. But he, like the doctor, must be told what is the matter; then only can he judge of the case and give the kindly advice it needs. Then, satisfied that his patient is sincere and means to amend, he forgives him in God's name, by the power he has received from Christ. In this case, the patient is certain of his cure, for he

has God's assurance of forgiveness, having done his own part. Indeed no consolation is so great as the knowledge that he is friends with God" once more.

THAT is the Catholic idea of Confession ANY OTHER IS FALSE.

CATHOLICS DO NOT PAY TO HAVE THEIR SINS FORGIVEN.

If they did, why do priests in crowded parishes remain so poor? The Catholic Church says that even to accept money, freely offered, for Confession would be the grievous sin called Simony."

CONFESSION BEING EASY DOES NOT MAKE SINNING ANY EASIER.

Many argue that a Catholic may sin more readily because of the knowledge that he can be forgiven so easily. That is obviously untrue. Are there not often men who do wrong because nobody will ever know," who yet would think twice if they knew they would have to confess it afterwards? But suppose any particular Catholic should sin the more readily because of easy confession," he would show an appalling ignorance of the meaning of Confession. For Confession implies, not a mere recital of sins, but above all a true sorrow for them and a set purpose not to repeat them.

In fact, frequent Confession is the best strengthener of the will in its highest endeavours. So that Confession is not unmanly and degrading, for the mere fact of having to tell our failings to a fellow-man makes us face the issue more squarely than when left to ourselves. No! It is not unmanly, for how often we ourselves use the phrase, Go on own up and be a man."

Some say CONFESSION GIVES THE PRIEST TOO MUCH POWER ALLOWING HIM TO PRY INTO OUR PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

The priest may not disclose any information received even to save his own or another's life. He can use that information only to direct this particular individual, and that only in the Confessional. The secrecy to which the priest is bound, under most severe penalties, is called the seal of Confession," and is more binding than the obligation of lawyer or doctor to keep professional secrets.

And if he does ask a question, it is only that he may be able to judge better and help.

So that if Confession gives the priest any power it is that of promoting God's kingdom on earth by healing the sick of soul and giving that spiritual refreshment which Christ Himself promised to those that labour and are burdened.

Confession is an institution so noble that none but God could have conceived and fashioned it. It is God's own Court of Appeal on earth against the sentence, which, in the nature of things, is passed against the sinner in the moment that he sins.

And the priest has full powers from Christ, for He said: Receive you the Holy Ghost -- whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

This Apologetic leaflet was first issued by the Bellarmine Society of Oxford University. We are proud to reproduce it here in the hope that many more souls will benefit by its wisdom.

The Path through the Forest - The Catholic Church and the Bible.

The Catholic Religion Proved by the Protestant Bible.

Catholic Doctrine Is Derived From These Four Sources:

1. What the Bible explicitly or implicitly teaches.

2. Available Bible material is clarified or complemented or confirmed by truths derived from Sacred Tradition. These are often historical records (or oral tradition) such as the writings of the Fathers, inscriptions in the Catacombs, early rules and regulations of the Church.
3. The guidance of the Holy Spirit, Whom Christ promised to His Church (John 14:16 and 26). This provides guidance to the Church's Magisterium or Teaching Authority.
4. Our Lord's own presence in the Church, according to His specific promise. (Matthew 28:20).

Why There Are So Many Churches.

Today there are so many Protestant churches because there is so much different interpretation of the Bible; there is so much different interpretation of the Bible because there is so much wrong interpretation of the Bible. And there is so much wrong interpretation because the system of interpreting it is radically wrong. You cannot have one fold and one shepherd, one faith and one baptism, by letting every man and every woman distort and pervert the Scriptures to suit their own pet theories.

BIBLE VANDALISM.

In our day, there is no whim, fad or fancy that some one does not claim to prove from the Bible. Almost any man or woman is conceited enough to set himself up as a competent interpreter of the word of God. "I think the Bible means this, therefore it does mean this," is their modest position. These men and women want it thoroughly understood that our forefathers in the faith were all fools that for the last nineteen hundred years or more, the Christian world was in inky darkness. With them, however, light has come into the world. The truth is that no book in the world today is falsified, distorted, misapplied one tenth so much as the Holy Scriptures.

VARIOUS INSTANCES.

Some, like the early heretics, will prove from the Bible that Christ is only God and not man. Others, like modern Unitarians, will prove from the Bible that Christ is only man and not God.

Some denominations will prove from the Bible that in the New Law, Christ shared his priesthood with NO ONE. Others will prove from the Bible that in the New Law, even the women are priests; hence the name Presbyters or priests, from which "Presbyterian" and presbytery are derived, is a non-gender specific word (according to these interpreters).

One sect will prove from the Bible that baptism is unnecessary for children, but is necessary for adults. Others will prove from the Bible that baptism is necessary for no one; that it is only a ceremony, an initiation such as is required when one joins a lodge. (The Salvation Army Church does not even believe, on its interpretation of the Bible, that any Baptism is necessary at all!)

Campbellites or "First Christians" (named after Alexander Campbell, who is regarded, with his brother, Thomas, as the founder of Churches bearing the names of Churches of Christ founded in 1813,) will prove from the Bible that to be really baptized, one must be totally immersed in water. Others prove from the Bible that the whole thing is unnecessary and ought to be abandoned.

Russellites (named after Charles Russell, died 1916, whose chief legacy is the Jehovah Witnesses phenomenon,) prove from the Bible that there is going to be a millennium, a thousand years when every one will get a second trial.

Calvinists (named after the 16th century Swiss reformer) prove from the Bible that a large part of mankind do not even get a first trial, but are predestined to damnation irrespective of their merits.

BIBLE IS MISTREATED.

Some sects prove from the Bible that eternal punishment is going to be meted out to nearly every one, but the little handful of their particular false sect is going to escape. But others prove from the Bible that everyone is going to be saved. To even murderers, adulterers, and those who rob widows and orphans-and never repent-will Christ hold out His arms and say: "Come, Blessed of My Father, and possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Reduced to practice their theory means this: Read the Bible and believe as you like; if you like Martin Luther's theory, follow it; if you prefer John Calvin's Christianity, embrace it. If you think that Alexander Campbell, or Dowie, (John Alexander Dowie, the founder of the Zion churches of Africa and Illinois between 1896 and 1908) or Mrs. Eddy, (the founder of the Christian Science religion in 1879,) or the Adventists (founded by William Miller and Mrs. White in the 1840s) have "discovered" the truth, have succeeded in doing what Christ must have failed to do, then take them as your guide. If the theory of none of these persons suits you, make up one yourself.

RECENT FALLACIES.

Mrs. Eddy will prove from the Bible that man is all soul, the body is practically a delusion, and does not really exist, "Bible Students"(and their Jehovah Witness off-shoots) will prove from the Bible that the soul is all delusion you really have none. When you die, your soul knows not anything: the soul which God gave Adam was only air and nothing more.

In the Bible, we are told to serve the Lord in fear and trembling and so we have the shakers, (there was a Shaker religious movement begun in 1747,) the mourners and the weepers. Again, in the Bible, we are told to rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. And so we have the singers and the jumpers and the rollers. Surely, you would think that there is a sufficient variety to suit every one, but it seems not, for new sects are springing up constantly.

All these claim to prove their version of Christianity from the Bible; all these are willing to swear that their little handful are the only ones who are right and that every one else is wrong. Christ's Church for more than nineteen hundred years was a complete failure, but fortunately, they have finally come to set it aright. Meanwhile the Bible itself warns us:

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but... shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." - (2 Timothy 4:3).

Again, referring to the epistle of Saint Paul, the Prince of the Apostles tells us:

"As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:16).

CHRIST'S TRUTHS CHANGELESS.

For whosoever preaches any other but the accepted Christian faith of past centuries, by that very fact proves himself to be a false teacher, a false prophet, who as Christ says, "Comes in the garb of a shepherd, but inwardly is a ravening wolf." (Matthew 7:15.) The true faith must be and necessarily has been believed, as Saint Augustine puts it: "Semper et ubique;" - 1.e. always and all over - by at

least the vast majority of Christians. Of that accepted Christian faith, therefore, we can say what Saint Paul did of his own teachings: "Though an angel from heaven preach to you a different doctrine, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8).

Here are ten children. Give them all the same simple problem in arithmetic. Imagine that each gives you a different answer. Of these ten answers, you know that at least nine are wrong. Perhaps also the tenth. Here are four hundred sects. Here are 33,800 sects. Ask them all to solve the problem, "What does the Bible teach?" Each gives you a different answer. But you know that only one can really be correct. All the rest are wrong. Two and two are always four. There are a thousand wrong answers to every problem, but only one correct reply.

PARABLE OF THE FOREST.

PARABLE: Picture to yourself a marvelously beautiful and gigantic forest, a thousand miles in width and length.

APPLICATION: In the parable, the New Testament is this dramatically impressive forest composed of numberless giant trees. Each one of these trees represents; let us say, a verse or set of verses of the Bible; there are as many trees in that forest as groups of verses in the Old and New Testaments.

PARABLE: In preparation for this forest, men reclaimed a desert which was watered, irrigated, so that on it the giant trees could be grown. After the period of preparation, a first installment of giant trees was planted; then, after another interval, a second, a third, and others until the great forest was completed.

APPLICATION: The beginnings of the New Testament fit into this picture. The first ten years of the Church's history was the time of preparation during which not a line of the New Testament had been written. Then ten years after our Lord's Ascension, Saint Matthew wrote the first Gospel; saint Paul wrote his first canonical letter about 49 A.D. Following saint Matthews Gospel were the Gospels according to Saint Mark, Saint Luke and Saint John, together with other inspired books; the last of these was written about 100 Answer. D.

PARABLE: Thereafter, for a time, adversities and setbacks hampered the project; other trees, imitations of the kind desired, took root alongside those originally planted; after another interval, with the return of more favourable circumstances, the new-giant thousand-mile-square forest was carefully cleansed, pruned and extraneous growths removed.

APPLICATION: After the New Testament books were written came the greatest of the persecutions, during which other books, thought by many to be inspired, were written, and to a greater or lesser extent, were so regarded by the early Christians. With Constantine in 313, compilation of the New Testament began. Finally in 397 Answer. D., it was put under one cover by a council of the Catholic Church at Carthage and endorsed by the Pope in Rome (Successively they were popes Saint Siricius, Saint Innocent and Saint Boniface.)

PARABLE Meanwhile, even before the forest had grown, in order that humans might find their way in safety through the desert, and later through the forest, a carefully constructed and guarded path was provided which travelers could follow through the otherwise impenetrable desert and woods. The travelers, moreover, were given directions, supplementary information, to guarantee safety on their journey.

APPLICATION: In the parable, the path through the great forest and desert is the divine authority of Christ's visible Church, which enables men properly to understand the Word of God, instead of being prey to man-made theories. The supplementary information which the travelers received are reliable historical records, such as the writings of the Fathers, the inscriptions in the catacombs, the rules and regulations of the early Church - all of which are called Tradition. (Note that we use a capital T when speaking of this information.)

PARABLE: Later in our parable, come other men, who scorn to follow the safe path cut out through the otherwise trackless forest; these enter the forest, admire its gigantic proportions and other thrilling beauties, but with nothing to guide them, are quickly lost in the forest; some soon die of want; others eke out a miserable existence, subsisting on herbs, plants and other insufficient foods which the forest supplies. Others, however, wander long through the trackless areas, until they discover the guiding path, which they follow in safety.

MILLIONS LOSE THEIR WAY.

APPLICATION: In this part of the parable, those who scorn to follow the path which leads to safety, are the so-called reformers, who reject the accepted Christian faith of nineteen and more centuries and, each one for himself, sets out to explore the beautiful but trackless, limitless forest of Holy Scripture.

Inevitably, they lose their way; some of these perish, in the sense that they lose their faith entirely; others, as members of innumerable sects, subsist meagerly on the imperfect, defective diet of a little truth and much error. All of these are on the path to hell. Others, however, after wandering aimlessly about, are fortunate enough to find the correct path which Christ and Christ's Church had mapped out for them; these are the converts to the original or Catholic Church. Joyfully these pursue their journey, until, in the words of the well-known hymn, they are: Safe, safe at last the dangers past, Safe in their Father's home.

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APPEND9

THERE IS NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

For an understanding of this last statement, let us consult the following:

For this, we say thank you to Mother Angelica.

This section we owe to the EWTN Library. It can be found at:
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/SCRIPTUR/EXTRAIECC.TXT>

NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

By Fr. William Most.

It is a defined doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church.

Yet, as the Holy Office pointed out in condemning Father L. Feeney (in Denzinger Number DS 3866 - Denzinger has collected and categorized Church documents and is the standard reference

point when referring to Church teachings) we must understand this the way the Church means it, not by private interpretation.

First, we find that the Church insists many times over that those who through no fault of their own do not find the Church, but keep the moral law with the help of grace, can be saved.

Lumen gentium (Vatican 2) paragraph 16 says: "For they who without their own fault do not know of the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but yet seek God with sincere heart, and try, under the influence of grace, to carry out His will in practice, known to them through the dictate of conscience, can attain eternal salvation." John Paul 2 in his Encyclical on the Missions (Redemptoris missio) in paragraph 10 says the same underline added: "For such people those who do not formally enter the Church, as in Lumen Gentium 16 salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church." We underline the word "formally" to indicate that there may be something less than formal membership, which yet suffices for salvation. A similar thought is found in Lumen Gentium paragraph 14 which says "they are fully incorporated" who accept all its organization..." We will show presently that there can be a lesser, or substantial membership, which suffices for salvation But which falls short of full incorporation into His Church.

What should we say about a line in Lumen Gentium paragraph 8? "This Church, in this world as a constituted and ordered society, subsists in the Catholic Church... even though outside its confines many elements of sanctification and truth are found which, as gifts proper to the Church of Christ, impel to Catholic unity."

We must not overlook the words in Lumen Gentium paragraph 8 which speak of "this one and only unia Church of Christ, which we profess in the Creed..."

Similarly the Decree on Religious Liberty in paragraph 1 says that" it this decree leaves untouched the traditional Catholic doctrine about the duty of men and societies to the true religion and the one and only unia Church of Christ."

So there really is only one true Church. But really, we still face a difficulty. It seems that some think that Protestant churches are as it were component parts of the Church of Christ. And they think that follows from the words about "subsisting in" and the statement that elements of sanctification can be found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church.

This does not mean that there are other legitimate forms of Christianity. Pope Gregory sixteenth (as also Pius 9, and Leo 13,) condemned "an evil opinion that souls can attain eternal salvation by just any profession of faith, if their morals follow the right norm."

So although people who do not formally join can be saved, as Lumen Gentium paragraph 16 says, and Redemptoris missio paragraph 10 also says, they are not saved by such a faith. It is in spite of it.

Yet we can account for the words about subsisting in and about finding elements of salvation outside. For this, we need the help of the Fathers of the Church.

In this way, we find a way of filling in on what the Magisterium teaches.

We begin with Saint Justin the Martyr who around 145 Answer. D. in his Apology 1. 46, said that in the past some who were thought to be atheists, such as Socrates and Heraclitus, were really Christians, for they followed the Divine Logos, the Divine Word. Further, in Apology 2. 10 Justin

adds that the Logos is in everyone. Now of course the Logos, being Spirit, does not take up space. We say a spirit is present wherever it produces an effect.

What effect? We find that in Saint Paul, in Romans 2:14-16 where he says that "the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the works of the law. They show the work of the law written on their hearts," and according to their response, conscience will defend or accuse them at the judgment.

So it is the Logos, the Spirit of Christ, who writes the law on their hearts, that makes known to them interiorly what they need to do. Some then could follow it without knowing that fact. So Socrates: (1) read and believed what the Spirit wrote in his heart; (2) he had confidence in it; (3) he obeyed it. We see this obedience in the fact that Socrates went so far as to say, as Plato quotes him many times, that the one who seeks the truth must have as little as possible to do with the things of the body.

Let us notice the three things, just enumerated: Saint Paul in Romans 3:29 asks: "Is He the God of the Jews only? No, He is also the God of the gentiles." It means that if God made salvation depend on knowing and following the law of Moses, He would act as if He cared for no one but Jews. But God does care for all. Paul insists God makes salvation possible by faith for them (see Romans chapter 4). Faith in Paul includes the three things we have enumerated which Socrates did.

So in following that Spirit of Christ Socrates was accepting and following the Spirit of Christ, But then, from Romans 8:9 we gather that if one has and follows the Spirit of Christ, he "belongs to Christ". That is, He is a member of Christ, which in Paul's terms means a member of the Mystical Body, which is the Church.

So Socrates then was a member of the Church, but not formally, only substantially. He could not know the Church. So he was saved, not by his false religious beliefs but in spite of them. He was saved by faith, and similarly Protestants and others who do not formally join the Church today are saved not as members of for example, the Baptist church, which some seem to think is an integral part of the one Church of Christ - no, they are saved as individuals, who make use of the means of sanctification they are able to find even outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church.

Many other Fathers speak much like Saint Justin. A large presentation of them can be found in William Most, Our Father's Plan, in a 28 page appendix

Lumen gentium also likes to speak of the Church as a mystery. This is correct, for it is a mystery, since it is only partly visible. It does have visible structure, and no one who knowingly rejects that can be saved.

It has members visibly adhering. But it also has members who belong to it even without knowing that, and without external explicit adherence. Hence, there is much mystery, to be known fully and clearly only at the end.

So all other forms of Christianity are heretical and/or schismatic. They are not legitimate.

The Decree on Ecumenism states that the worship and liturgical actions of other Christian bodies can truly engender a life of grace and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation.

Here is the actual text of the Decree: "In addition, out of the elements or goods by which, taken together, the Church herself is built up and made alive, certain things, or rather many and excellent

things can exist outside the visible bounds of the Catholic Church: The written Word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope and love, and other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and visible elements: all these things, which come from Christ and lead to Him, belong to the one-only Church of Christ. Even not a few sacred actions of the Christian religion are carried out among the brothers separated from us... which beyond doubt can really generate the life of grace, and are to be said to be apt to open the entry into the community of salvation."

We notice the things mentioned:

(1) Scripture - Protestants read it.

(2) The life of grace - yes, one can reach the state of grace without formally entering the Catholic Church, as Lumen gentium 16 says: "They who without fault do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but yet seek God with a sincere heart, and try with the help of grace to fulfill his will, known through the dictate of conscience, can attain eternal salvation." Even pagans can do this.

(3) Faith - yes, outsiders can have faith, at least if they are not misled by Luther's great error on what faith is.

(4) Hope and love - again, even a pagan may attain these.

(5) Other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit - yes, if outsiders reach the state of grace, they also have the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

(6) And visible elements - Baptism if validly given. BUT we must note the next words in the decree: "all these things... belong to the one-only Church of Christ." In other words, it is not a protestant church as protestant that can provide these things - these are things that belong to the Catholic Church, which the Protestants have not completely rejected.

So some religious actions are carried out in Protestantism which can really generate the life of grace. Yes, Baptism does that. Reading of Scripture, prayers, and other things enumerated above in the first 6 items can do that. But again, it is not protestant worship as protestant that gives grace - it is things the Protestants have retained even after breaking with the one-only Church of Christ. As the previous sentence said: "In other words, it is not a protestant church as protestant that can provide these things - these are things that belong to the Catholic Church, which the Protestants have not completely rejected.

So the Decree continues in the next sentence cited above: "they belong to the one-only Church of Christ."

CONCLUSION.

We have hoped to show you, dear reader that it is the Catholic Church which can provide you with a clear path through the forest of life, the forest of Biblical confusion, and is able to lead you into the uplands of Gods heavenly Kingdom. It was for this reason that Our Lord and Saviour gave as his Church, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (First Timothy 3:15.)
