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c.2 ACB 5343

IS CONFESSION A DELUSION?

BY

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New York N Y
THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street

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By REV. THOMAS J. P. BRADY, A.M., PH.D.

IT is Jerusalem, past high noon, on Good Friday, more than nineteen centuries ago; though still early spring the air is heavy and sultry; all nature seems ill at ease and the verdant hills take on an unusual somber green. The multitudes wind their way to a mountain called Calvary. The world's greatest blessing and most horrible tragedy are in the making. Apart from the crowd there is a group of women weeping at the sight before all eyes. Near the summit there is another group, fewer it is true, among whom is a heart-broken mother standing, head uplifted, heart crushed, as she sees her only son, yet in manhood's prime, nailed to a cross, hanging in mid-air between two murderers and thieves who also hang upon crosses.

The heavens grow darker; the sun turns its face in shame, refuses to give its wonted light. Nature is losing its hold; the ground trembles and quakes; the rocks are rent; the murderers speak, one to criticize Jesus, the other to plead Jesus' innocence and to confess his own crimes. Jesus gives a farewell to His Mother.

Lo! all three speak again; a murderer joins the mocking rabble in their blasphemies. Jesus speaks

Nihil Obstat:

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, *Censor Librorum.*

Imprimatur:

✠ PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES, *Archbishop of New York.*

New York, July 21, 1938.

of Mercy; the other murderer groans in sorrow and repentance, crying out: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus' Heart is touched; He lifts His thorn-crowned Head, a smile traced upon His pale and bloody features, and says to the repentant sinner: "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Nine words from sinner, nine words from Jesus, and thief, malefactor and murderer publicly executed, joins the angels' choir. Sweetest story ever told; Confession's apotheosis.

Calvary's Meaning Ever Stands

The story unfolded herein has been repeated thousands of times; every time the priests re-enact the pardoning of sins repented of, and confessed. The drama of confession has not always the dramatic details of Calvary, yet it is a drama unbroken through nigh twenty centuries. The essentials from the story of Calvary are always present in every confession: avowal of sins, manifestation of sorrow and repentance, amendment of life, and the words of absolution uttered by the priest in the Name and by the power of Jesus Christ. Calvary's story gives the Christian mind and heart the significance, the import, the transcending effect of Christ as Redeemer and Saviour. Jesus came to save men from their sins and remantle repentant, fallen mankind with the sonship of God.

St. Paul (1 Tim., Chap. i, Verse 5; 2 Cor., Chap. v, Verse 20) tells us that priests are the ambassadors of Christ, that is, they represent and personify Christ Himself. The priest in the con-

fessional is a man, it is true, but along with his quality as man, goes also his quality as the delegate and official spokesman for Christ.

The Word of God records the Calvary event, a fact admitted through centuries by all friends and many enemies of the Bible. The ignorant, pagan mind typified in Pilate asks the question, "What is truth?" The same question is asked these days with a sneer and an impertinent air by those who would banish confession from the amenities of life. Man today as of yore proposes but it is God who in His wisdom and mercy disposes. Truth and fact must live. It is they that make humanity free. When either is denied we have falsehood. Only an abnormal mind shuts out truth. They may be cast away today only to arise tomorrow to confound and plague the offender. Their role is always that of triumph.

Defining Terms

The formal question thus presents itself, "What is Confession in the Catholic Church?" He who confesses makes a serious examination of conscience, determines the number, the gravity, the circumstances of sin committed, as also the nature of the intention involved in each; then he excites himself to sorrow for each, when grave, and then proceeds to avow his offenses, opening with the very telling words, "I confess to Almighty God and to you, Father, that I have sinned." There are classes of sin; actual and original; the latter never forms the matter for

confession as it is remitted in Baptism. Actual sin is either mortal or venial; a venial sin is a slight offense against God's Law; a mortal sin is a deadly sin against the Law of God.

The confessing-priest must be an authorized priest, that is, a priest who is authorized by a bishop to hear confessions and to absolve within a certain district. Anyone in danger of death may be absolved by any priest whether authorized or not. A priest is a man of mature years who has been ordained a priest by a bishop; deacons, subdeacons, and all lower ministers cannot absolve from sin, as they do not receive the power when ordained to their offices.

Confession, Sin, Are Not Fictions

The existence of moral evil, called also SIN, is denied. Every sin involves an abuse of both mind and conscience, and it is an abuse of free will; SIN is an effect and as such it must have a cause.

From the preceding it is clear that confession is not a fiction, a delusion forced upon a credulous world by the cunning of priests so as to furnish a pretext for meddling in the private and personal affairs of individuals and peoples. Rather is it a force acting as the sustaining wall of civilization, Christianity, and society in general. Rejection of the confessional leaves men and women to act as they please, and thus humanity with all its hopes and cares, faces inevitable ruin. As nations are but aggregations of individuals it ill becomes a

people to cast off the confessional, that safety anchor of immortal hope.

SIN is a reality and its deadliness as crime looms more threatening every day. Penal institutions are erected and their number and size increase every year with a very high percentage of high school and college students of both sexes as inmates. This increase is appalling. The cost of public school instruction alone in the United States exceeds two billion dollars annually. Despite this increase in the number of schools and colleges, the number of criminal youths of both sexes is increasing, yet, the popular belief, or rather, the "make believe" is that public schools alone will block crime. Facts give an emphatic challenge to this belief.

Material Cost of Sin—Spiritual Price

Crime is costly and the cost should make society pause and think. The annual bill for penal institutions in the United States mounts to many, many billions. Prisoners therein must be fed, lodged, and personelled by guardians and wardens; the buildings must not only be erected but they must also be enlarged; the personnel must be paid, lodged and fed. Insurance upon buildings, materials and properties of various sorts must be paid annually; water, light, fuel and provisions must be supplied, and all these weighty charges upon the private wealth of citizens must be forthcoming, and apparently, in a futile attempt to block crime, which is naught but SIN. These are the physical



tortures of crime and SIN but above all rise the spiritual losses to the prisoners themselves; their quality as children created and redeemed by Jesus Christ must be weighed and considered. Penal institutions are necessary, it is true; but they are not the most effective means to stop the death-march of crime and SIN. The acts of men and women are never any better than the state of the mind and soul that bring the reign of SIN into society.

The most powerful element in man is self-will. God created man without asking man but He will not save man from his criminal intentions and acts without man's use of free will to control himself. Yes, yonder jail and penitentiary are silently but eloquently in accents of fire telling society that crime or SIN must not be tolerated, since every sin is a revolt against God and no one can mock God or His sacred Laws. The civil law is but a second barrier to SIN, but God's Law is the supreme barrier.

Amplifying Role of Confessor

The role of the confessing-priest calls for amplification. Every priest is a man, but every man is not a priest. Society demands mayors, judges, governors and presidents, etc. These are men but again every man is not a mayor, a judge, a governor or a president. None of these acting for society are merely men. Each has authority; each speaks with a finality. And if society should with reason provide its spokesmen, why should not God

also? The priest in the confessional acts with authority and power granted him by God. When paying taxes does the citizen run to the mayor, the governor, or the president? These have delegates who act for them, they have authority to receive the taxes, and their action is final. God has often spoken directly to men but that is not His general plan. He has taken men to act for Him and to speak in His Name and by His power. As SIN is the greatest of man's enemies man must have a sure, certain and positive remedy therefor, and that remedy is the confessing of sins with sorrow, repentance and purpose of amendment joined to pardon from the priest.

Sin Must Out

Without God man is helpless. The graces of Christianity are in the main to come to men through the ministration of other men. Every one is his brother's keeper; every one is man's neighbor; the weaker must be helped by the strong. Apart from sorrow and repentance the whole creation of God has neither nook nor corner where the guilty may bestow his guilt and say that he is safe. Material filth is carted off to be burnt; and there is no filth like an infected soul. SIN'S home is Hell, and the soul that harbors SIN is in a most grievous Hell.

A splinter, a bullet lodged in the body, unless extracted will gradually infect the blood, inflate the flesh, and until these are cast out by the surgeon, relief is impossible. The afflicted cannot

dictate to the operating surgeon; he must accept the surgeon's skill and ability. And shall the soul wounded, blood streams affected, heart swollen by the splinters and bullets of crime and SIN, not be subjected to confession, repentance, sorrow, and the absolving word of the surgeons empowered by Jesus Christ to effect a positive cure? The soul will speak out when weighed down by grief and pain, as well as when abounding in joy and in happiness.

Confession's Inherent Excellence

Accepting these statements one finds that confession has its inherent excellence. Confession safeguards morality, promotes better standards of right conduct, breathes courage to souls, brings balm to the heart, speaks ever of hope in life's darkest hours and troubles, upholds individual and collective right thinking, speaking and acting, and robes repentant souls with the garments of peace and joy unalloyed. It functions among men and women not collectively but individually; it goes to the root of things; it investigates the intention that provoked the evil. The psychiatrist and sociologist attempt to remedy society's evils through lectures and books that generalize. The priest like the physician considers each sufferer individually and not en masse, and thus discovers the cause of the trouble, its symptoms, and applies then and there the precise remedy. The priest "hits the nail right on the head" and his aim is precise, true, and effective.

Confess, or

At the Feet of Jesus—Saviour and Redeemer acting through the priest, must confession be placed, to cheer the repentant Magdalens, the weeping Peters, the pardoned thieves and murderers and adulterers. When society sends these to the hindmost, naught is left for fallen man and woman, as despair black and final, stalks by day and night unending in its death-march to the grave. The sinner, man or woman, is thus without a home, a refuge. The fatal dose, the crack of the cold steel, the flash of keen deadly blade perform their gruesome work, a pitiful scene indeed, and poor, good easy man and woman, shuffle off their mortal coil, saying, "Now all is over for us." What a dreadful mistake! Horror of horrors reigns; eternity begins! Would to God that the bright star of Christian Hope radiating ever from the confessional could have cast her glance and favor upon both! Then both would have lifted their heads in conscious pride and courage, dreamed again of Mercy, and found Forgiveness, Hope and Everlasting Life.

SIN is the road to gloom, to despair and self-destruction; confession is the brilliant highway leading back to God. The bruised reed and the smoking flax the Lord will not quench; the fires of anger, the urge of revenge, the itching palm of the covetous, the blaze of lust, may all be drowned in the tears of repentance, sorrow and amendment. Perverse will builds the highway to perdition; avoiding SIN lights the way to Paradise for every sinner.

Being a Man

Of course to confess one's sins is unpleasant, but as abuse of free will is the efficient cause of every sin, one should do the manly thing, bend his pride, humble himself, be a man, face and toe the red line of Christian duty, make his confession, awaken genuine contrition, and resolve to mend his ways. Will-control makes the saint; abuse of will makes the sinner. No sinner, however vile and perverted, is helpless to refashion and ennoble his course in life. Confessing, resolving to turn "Right About Face" with God, watch his step, stop, look and listen, he will inundate his soul with joy, and command even the angels to rejoice, since he is again on the road to his Father's House and Home. It is noble in man to forgive; it is divine in God through the priest to forgive in confession.

Confession's Secret Character

In confessing one is sure that his sins will be forgiven and that no sin will ever be revealed. This is a mysterious psychological fact. Millions of souls dyed deep in crimes have been forgiven throughout twenty centuries, among all people and in all climes, and never has the secret of the confessional suffered a direct revelation, or has any specific person been charged with a specific confessed sin. Popes, bishops, priests have spoken of sins and written about sins but never has the violation of the seal been known. There have unfortunately been wicked ministers in the Church's long history who assailed the Church

with venom but all these are silent about the sins confessed to them. Priests have submitted to cruel punishment, sufferings, imprisonment and even death, rather than disclose anything that had been confessed in confession. This fact nullifies the statement that there is nothing stable in all humanity. Human secrets given even under oath, have been violated; the secrets of the confessional, never.

The canons of confession preach charity unto others, to sinners, to the fallen exclusively, yet the confessor can never apply his power over sin to his own soul, by confessing to himself. Like the humblest of the faithful, all, Pope, Cardinal, archbishop, bishop, must show themselves to other priests and from them obtain pardon for their sins. All must comply with the law of confessing, repenting, sorrowing, and amendment of life, and accept the penance that the confessing-priest gives. No Catholic of low or the highest degree is exempt from the duty of confessing his sins to the confessor. All must show themselves to the priests and have the priests cleanse them from the leprosy of sin. In confession all roles are the roles of sinners.

Confession Is Exacting

The confessing of sins is the most taxing duty of the priesthood. To sit for hours in a confessional-box, ears bent to hear everything said, concentration of mind upon what is said, and this always about SIN, is a most trying ordeal for flesh and blood. A thousand families in a parish

church involve a great task for the confessor every week, and oftener. When the sick-call comes there must be no hesitation; souls may be imperiled, and eternity with God often hangs in the balance. These calls may come at any hour of the day or night, in rain or shine, in hot summer or in bleak wintry blasts.

Rash, False Statements on Confession

The "romantic" historian has said that confession was instituted by the Church herself in the early part of the thirteenth century, at the Fourth Council of the Lateran. Myths and mythology are always with us, poor mortals. The truth is that at this Council there was a general law of the Church made that at least once every year every Catholic should confess his sins or take the consequences. Christ Himself instituted confession, and at this Council, confession had been over seven hundred years on its sainted task of mercy and pardon to humanity.

Telling God What's What

Some will say that they will select their own terms of reconciliation with God. At best, this attitude is foolish impudence. For as it is God who is offended by sin it belongs to Him exclusively to lay down terms of pardon. Do judges permit criminals to dictate to the court? Do parents permit their children to dictate home policies? Will a judge permit the criminal at the bar to dictate the verdict of the jury? Will a physi-

cian or surgeon permit the patient to dictate what has to be done in an emergency, an accident, or an aggravated case of sickness? In confession the penitent is the criminal, the sick and injured patient. He must accept what is offered by judge, jury, and physician and surgeon. And shall God accept a lower standard than the judge, jury and physician? Shall He permit the rebellious creature to lay down laws for Him to observe? The Lord needs no counselor. The sinner must accept exactly what God has decreed. Arrogance before God and before judges and jury invites only additional punishment, and a severer sentence. And if the attitudes of the court and others are right, shall not God's decrees on forgiveness be also right and just? He as God must be such. This modern world would make God into a sort of compromiser with man; as if to say: "God, do this to me, and I will do this for You." God cannot accept or make or suggest compromise except upon the conditions of confession, repentance, resolve to amend, and the absolution from His ambassador, the confessing-priest. When God gives an order it is do or die, without the reason why. Heaven is a reward and not a gift. It belongs to God alone to give mankind the how of reaching Heaven. Heaven is God's home, His house, and intruders and the rebellious are automatically excluded therefrom.

Suicide a Remedy?

Some so-called Christians say that they will keep their sins to themselves and that their secrets

are their own. This may be true in purely social secrets, etc., but it is a dreadful mistake when SIN is involved. Rough it, hew it, shape it as we may, SIN MUST OUT SOONER OR LATER. A life of sin without repentance but aggravates the evil. Conscience will make a coward of such a one and by its ceaseless gnawing within his breast, he will be obliged in sheer relief to chase the evil from the temple of his body. Some resort to suicide to kill the pain of conscious crime and sin, forgetting that suicide is both conviction and confession.

Criminals Emphasize Confession

Guilty souls have often and openly avowed their guilt and clamored for the penitentiary, the gallows, the lethal chamber, the thirsty guillotine, the hangman's noose, the firing squad. They are tortured unto death within, and thus preyed upon, they cry out that they are the criminals who slew the sleeping victim, who gave the fatal dose, who fired the shot that chilled the victim unto death, who like Cain shed his victim's life blood. They say that they must out with the facts, come what may. Guilt is writ upon their faces, branded upon their brow. They ask for the charity of death unto themselves by which they so ruthlessly silenced their victims. Before their eyes they see their victims bleeding, their corpses outstretched, and these cry out for an eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and blood for blood. They cry out thus because crimes unatoned feed upon crime and that blood can be sated only in blood.

A Paradox

The world is silent upon what particular man invented confession and yet it is asserted with vehemence that it is an invention. Twenty centuries have come and gone, confession continues, and the man-inventor is unknown. But associated with the fiction that confession is an invention, it is most strange that this imaginary inventor should have excused himself from the application of his invention, since we are all too prone to legislate for the "other fellow." In thus legislating he failed to "save his own face." He rather naïvely did not excuse himself.

Gored by One's Fallacy

It has been said that God has ordained that man shall be saved through the agency of man acting under divine authority, and according to this divine authority. Christ was scorned because He showed that He could forgive sins. The priest, too, is treated in a similar manner. Yet, this fact stands out in the professed belief of many non-Catholics of different faiths, that when Baptism is conferred by them, men, sin is blotted out. These ministers surely are not entitled to be classified as the ministers of God any more than a Catholic priest; the logic is all against them, when they say and believe that only God can forgive sins, and yet they can by giving Baptism wipe away sins from the souls baptized; but when the priest forgives sins in confession, they say that he is usurping powers beyond his authority, that the

priest makes himself, a person with divine power. It will be shown that a priest does in the Name and by the power of God really and truly forgive sin when the same is confessed, repented of, sorrowed for, and absolution is given by the priest. How will these non-Catholic ministers explain their inconsistency? How does it come to pass within the limits of logic that in one sacrament, Baptism, sin may be forgiven through men, and in another sacrament there can be no such thing as pardoning of sin? It is distressing, indeed, to find oneself in the horns of a dilemma: the crushing force of logic.

Summoning Churches

The Catholic Church is not the only Church that exercises the power of forgiving sin. In the Apostles' Creed, generally accepted by non-Catholic churches, we find the words "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." In the Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Jewish, and Lutheran faiths, there is a form of confessing of sins, and the "Mourners' Bench," "Hitting the Trail," have their setting. In several Episcopal churches we find "confessionals," and we hear ministers of the Episcopal churches calling themselves "Fathers" and maintaining that they are "priests"!

History and Custom to the Rescue

Reliable Church history informs us that the Greek Churches, both Orthodox and Uniate, the Chaldean, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Maro-

nite Churches have for centuries taught and practiced confession. Travelers in Rome can see today in the Catacombs the proofs that confession was a sacred belief and practice even in the first century. The tombs of the early saints and martyrs existing there proclaim it profusely. The writings of the early Fathers and Doctors of the Church as also many Apologists, set forth the doctrine and general acceptance of confession of sins. These writings go back as far as the second century. With Bible citations to be presented later, we find that professions themselves admit the open avowal of sin. The physician often when diagnosing traces physical diseases to a moral source. He may not state openly his belief, but he knows. Nature often arises to smite the culprit in the flesh for daring to violate her sacred sanctuary within the human body. Parents often must see and hear the evil done by their offspring. Lawyers hear tales of crimes done by the criminal class. The judge and the jury hear blood-curdling incidents of crimes. Violations of civil laws are also violations of God's law, since all authority comes from God. Nor are the facts of crime by society's stern enactments to be kept secret; on the contrary these facts must be disclosed, and in open court.

We hear of apologies being offered for improprieties of speech, especially when slander and calumny are alleged. An apology is an open admission of wrong, with the offended party acting as pardoner. Wayward boys and girls often illus-

trate confession. Like the prodigal, boys and girls take to the broad road of wild life and foul pleasures, and there, wounded in their innocence and honor, torn with grief and sorrow, they become tired of the husks fit for swine, and nobly turn their faces homeward, acknowledge their wrongdoing, and receive the embrace and kiss of parental forgiveness. Language itself lends its force to the avowal of sins by such words as "mercy," "pardon," and "forgiveness."

Christ and Bible, Invincible

Finally, the Catholic and the Protestant Bibles have much to say upon confession in all its phases; first, that power was granted by Christ to the Apostles who were men, not angels; second, that this power was never to cease in the Church of Christ; third, (that church which discards confession is not Christ's Church since Christ Himself decreed it) that along with the power to forgive sins was the power to withhold forgiveness; fourth, that sins necessarily had to be confessed to those whom God had appointed.

The Following Are Texts From St. Matthew

Chapter ix, verse 13—"For I have not come to call the just, but sinners"; Chapter v, verse 21—"For he shall save the people from their sins"; Chapter xviii, verse 18—"Amen I say to you that whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall also be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in Heaven";

Chapter xxviii, verses 18, 19, 20—"And Jesus coming to them said, all power in Heaven and on earth is given to Me, going therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days even to the end of the world."

Analyzing these sacred words the conviction is that Jesus Christ had as primary motive in coming into this world to show sinners that their vocation was a call to sanctity, to the observance of His laws, and that because of their sins they were out of harmony with His designs upon them; that should they repent of their sins, they would be with the just. He showed them that He was really their Saviour from sin, and that salvation could be made certain through Him.

In the third He tells His Apostles that their power was effective both in Heaven and on earth; that should they bind anything upon earth that same thing would be bound in Heaven, and that anything that they would loose upon earth would also be loosed in Heaven. Christ here established the right and the power exercised in the confessional of releasing souls from sins or holding them bound in their sins. This third quotation shows Christ speaking to His Apostles, who, in His quality as God, He knew would in time die; yet He gives them the duty of teaching all peoples, all things whatsoever He had commanded, that nothing in speech or in action, from His sacred Life,

relating to His doctrines and precepts was to be trifled with, compromised, or cast out; that His commands were to be an integral part of His Church's teachings, and that in pledge of this divine assurance He was to remain with them forever, though Christ also knew that He was to die for the sins of the world. How this could be accomplished implied naught but that the Apostles were to perpetuate His commands among Christ's followers, and most especially, among those whom the Apostles would select as their successors in the preaching of the word of God. Nothing in this text refers directly to sin, but the inference is unescapable, when other texts are associated directly with the power of binding and loosing in the Church.

Texts From St. Luke

Chapter vii, verse 47—"Many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much"; Chapter xxiii, verse 43—"Amen I say unto you, today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise"; Chapter xv, verse 7—"I say to you there shall be joy in Heaven upon one sinner doing penance."

The opening words are said of Mary Magdalen, a sinner of low character and known as such. Jesus holds converse with her and melts the poor woman into tears; she avows her misdeeds, after Jesus had revealed to her the number and enormity of her sins. She is forgiven, forgiven directly by God, and she stands with St. John the Baptist, as the saint whose panegyric the Lord Himself pronounced. It is Mary Mag-

dalen who kneels at the feet of Christ as He hangs upon the Cross, the sinner kissing the feet of Him who died for sinners.

The next text has been presented with its impelling force on the opening page. That sinners who repent should make the angels rejoice is not strange, rather is it infinitely sublime. To sound its depths and grasp its full import is beyond the ken of man. Sinners should ponder these consoling words. The most powerful sermon might be preached thereon. With SIN a terrible thing, repentance must be transcending in merit, when at its sight the choirs of angels rent the heavenly atmosphere with their exulting hymns of joy. Who could or would ever think that repentance from such a revolting thing as sin could pierce the very heavens with its thrills of gladness? Only God could unfold such a truth and what a comfort and incentive should it not be to the heart of the man or woman freighted with the awful guilt of sin!

Texts From St. John

Chapter xiii, verse 15—"I have given to you an example that as I have done so do you also"; Chapter xv, verse 26—"When the Paraclete shall come whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, He will teach you all things"; Chapter xx, verses 19, 21, 22, 23—"Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them Peace be to you. Again He said Peace be unto you. As the Father hath sent Me so do I also send you. Saying this He breathed upon them, saying to

them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins ye shall forgive they shall be forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain, they shall be retained." (A more accurate translation of the Latin would be "must be retained," as the Latin text is *retenta sunt*.)

Did Jesus ever forgive sins? Yes, and often. The Bible texts are numerous in confirmation of the statement. Then, the Apostles by direct inference were also to forgive sins, since they were to follow Christ's example. Christ also said that Heaven and earth would pass away but that His word would not pass away; therefore His example and word stand until time shall be no more.

Christ gave the promise that He would send the Holy Ghost upon His Apostles. Christ expounds this Holy Ghost as it were, and calls the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth. Not only does Christ assure His Apostles of the import of His teachings, but He summons the Holy Ghost to strengthen His words so to speak. He will send the Spirit of Truth. Therefore no deceptions, no false teachings in the Church, since she has the Spirit of Truth, who was to abide with the Apostles and their successors forever. This Spirit of Truth is not promised for a certain time, a few centuries, but it is to be forever. Truth abiding with the Church and assured by Christ to remain there forever, how then can the Catholic Church be inventing doctrines and practices? How can she fail to stand forever for the integrity of Christ's doctrines? How then can she ever be in

the wrong in doctrine or Christian practice? If one denies the force of the logic contained in these questions, he must be one who would give the lie to Christ. There is something most emphatic and clear as the skies in the Heavens, in the last text from St. John. For, Christ "breathes upon His Apostles," tells them to receive the Holy Ghost, wishes them peace twice. This "breathing" refers to the unseen but real outpouring of the spirit of God. He says "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them," and the reference is to other men and women, others than themselves (the Apostles did not give absolution to themselves; they confessed to the other Apostles, for Christ in this text gives no power to any one to forgive his own sins) thus granting the power to forgive sins, giving this power to men, His ambassadors, who were to represent Him personally; He also gives the power of withholding pardon to those who are not rightly disposed. Here again rises a great point about disclosing sins in sincerity to the priest in confession. Jesus says it by implication, with all the force of logic, for how can any one withhold a sin if he knows nothing about the sin? Shall Christ grant powers over situations that do not and can not exist? Is there any trick of speech, any forcing of language, any torturing of words, to conclude from the very words of Jesus Christ that the avowal of sins was involved in both their forgiveness and their retention? It must be recalled that Jesus Christ stated that Heaven and earth would pass away but that His

word would not pass away; therefore, and in the plainest, most irresistible language, everything that Christ taught and exemplified in His sacred doctrines, yes, confessing of sins also, was to remain with His Church through the succession of other apostles, bishops and priests. Christ having said that He would always abide with the Church, teach her all truth, and recall everything that He had commanded, knowing that the Apostles would not live forever in this world, there must have been associated with the words of our Lord the duty of conferring this power upon others through the Apostles, since, without this provision, the very effect that Christ came into this world to exterminate, would still fester in men's minds and hearts and souls, and He in His divine quality as God of Mercy and of Forgiveness had to provide a remedy. The Catholic Church is not susceptible to any moral or doctrinal failure, since she is the handiwork of Jesus Christ who is God, and God makes no imperfect work; He provides in the order of grace everything to enable man to save himself from moral and doctrinal ruin.



