

The Absolution
An Anthology

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
The Augsburg Confession	12
Apology of the Augsburg Confession	14
Smalcald Articles	22
Small Catechism	27
Martin Luther's Admonishment to Go to Confession	32
Luther's Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.....	42
On Confession and the Lord's Supper, A Sermon .	62
The Babylonian Captivity of the Church	74

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

“Whoever’s’ sin you forgive, they are forgiven.”

Jesus, crucified, buried, and raised, stood before His disciples, breathed on them, blessed them with peace, and then gave them this astonishing authority: to forgive and retain sins.

“Whoever’s’ sin you forgive, they are forgiven.”

The victory of Jesus over sin, death, and the devil are to be made manifest in the world through the preaching of the Gospel, and most especially through the forgiving of sins. This is the absolution. The absolution delivers the victory of the cross. The absolution delivers the victory of the empty tomb. The absolution delivers the victory of Jesus over all our enemies which He made His own. The absolution presses into the ear and heart of the penitent the glorious truth and absolute certainty of the love of Christ for sinners. The absolution is a priceless treasure.

But the absolution has been lost.

Most Christian churches have only a shadow of the gift that Jesus bequeathed to His Bride, the Church.

I remember a time in college when I visited a Lutheran service. The pastor stood in front of the congregation and spoke the absolution, “As a called and ordained servant of the Word, in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” I was offended. “Who does that guy think he is, forgiving my sins? Only Jesus does that.” My faith, after all, was an individual matter. Forgiveness was immediate, happening in my heart without any external words or actions. This is the default theological position of much of Evangelical Christianity, and it makes the absolution unnecessary, meaningless, and even offensive.

After the service I asked the pastor, “Why were *you* forgiving sins?” He did the most wonderful thing he could have done. He asked for the Bible I was carrying, and he opened to John 20:23, pointed to the text, and read it to me. “Whoever’s sins you forgive, they are forgiven.” No argument. No excuses. No apologies. He let the word stand, and stand it does in stunning simplicity. Jesus gives us the authority to forgive sins, and He desires us to use it for the comfort of sinners and the salvation of the world.

It is not only the Evangelical Church that has lost the authority, certainty, and joy of the absolution. The Roman Church surrounds the absolution with the conditions of attrition and satisfaction, and limits the absolution with the requirement of penance. Reformed congregation speak of the “assurance of pardon”, diminishing the absolution from a declaration to a report. The liberalized denominations stopped worrying about individual sin and forgiveness a long time ago. We find in the church at large an absolution poverty.

The situation is not too much better in the Lutheran Church. Confession and absolution are often thought to be “too Catholic.” Private Confession and Absolution has long fallen out of regular practice. The Absolution is thought to be part of the formal liturgical rite of the Church, and not part of the daily, living conversation of Christians. Few Christians have heard the absolution spoken to them outside the Sunday service. Even fewer Christians have pronounced the absolution to a family member or friend.

This is tragic.

The absolution is the Gospel in its full force. It opens the doors to heavenly joy. It delivers the certainty of God’s love. It settles the heart, cleanses the conscience, brings spiritual freedom and life.

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

Jesus did not speak these words in vain. His death, His resurrection, His work of saving you are brought to you with this promise, “Whoever’s sins you forgive, they are forgiven.”

This *Absolution Anthology* collects writings from the Lutheran Confessions and Martin Luther on the topic of the absolution.

The Augsburg Confession was presented before Emperor Charles V on June 25, 1530. It set forth the Lutheran teaching. Articles 11 and 12 take up the topic of Confession and Repentance. The Lutherans were careful to note that they retained the practice of Confession and Absolution, but corrected the Roman Catholic practice. Article 12, on Repentance, is especially to be noted. It sets forth the two parts of repentance: contrition and faith.

The Apology of the Augsburg confession was a defense prepared by Philip Melancthon in 1531. The Lutheran position is extended further. One of my favorite quotations appears in the excerpt from Apology 12, “Faith is born of the absolution.” (In our version here it reads, “faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution.”)

In 1537 Martin Luther prepared the Smalcald Articles for a desired church council. The council never happened. In the third part he talks about the “superabundant riches of God’s grace,” and includes part 8, on confession. Luther wanders a bit far afield, but it is wonderful. I’m convinced that this selection is the most insightful writing outside the Scriptures.

Luther prepared the Small and Large Catechism in 1529. The first editions of both contained nothing about the keys, but sections were quickly added. We have included these selections here. Notice, especially in Luther’s Exhortation to Confession, how pastorally he presents the great treasures and gifts of the absolution.

Luther’s sermon on the 19th Sunday after Trinity (on the Gospel Matthew 9:1-9, the absolving and healing of the paralyzed man) is particularly important. He puts forth his understanding that the authority of absolution belongs to all Christians.

This Gospel teaches us to note particularly the good tidings which God has granted us, that we may here on earth say to each other, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” so that with the people here spoken of we may marvel and glorify God which had given such power unto men.

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

In 1524 Luther preached an important sermon on Confession and the Lord's Supper. This sermon was published as a pamphlet and became the basis for the Lutheran understanding of Confession against the teaching of Rome. The section which deals with confessions is here excerpted.

Luther also critiqued the Roman Catholic doctrine and practice of Penance in his monumental takedown of the Pope, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). This section is here excerpted.

All of the documents included in this anthology are in the public domain, and this text is also released into the public domain with the hope that the Lord's treasure of the Absolution would be rediscovered in the church.

Excerpts from the *Lutheran Confessions* (The Augsburg Confession, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles, and The Small Catechism) are taken from the *Concordia Triglotta*, 1921.

Luther's *Exhortation to Confession* is taken from the Henkel version of the Book of Concord, 1851.

These texts may be found at bookofconcord.org.

INTRODUCTION

The text for Luther's Sermon on Trinity 19 is taken from Luther's House Postils, Vol III, published in 1884 by J. A. Schulze. (Find it here: <https://goo.gl/rX39mP>)

The text of Luther's *Sermon on Confession and the Lord's Supper*, as well as *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* are drawn from the "Philadelphia Edition" of Luther's Works. The texts can be found here: <https://goo.gl/eodBAi>.

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller
Hope Lutheran Church, Aurora, CO
Maundy Thursday, 2018

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

(1530)

Article XI: Of Confession.

Of Confession they teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible according to the Psalm: Who can understand his errors? Ps. 19:12.

Article XII: Of Repentance.

Of Repentance they teach that for those who have fallen after Baptism there is remission of sins whenever they are converted and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance. Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin.

The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance.

They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins comes through faith but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

(1531)

Article XI: Of Confession.

58] The Eleventh Article, Of Retaining Absolution in the Church, is approved. But they add a correction in reference to confession, namely, that the regulation headed, *Omnis Utriusque*, be observed, and that both annual confession be made, and, although all sins cannot be enumerated, nevertheless diligence be employed in order that they be recollected, and those which can be recalled, be recounted. Concerning this entire article, we will speak at greater length after a while, when we will explain our entire opinion concerning repentance. 59] It is well known that we have so elucidated and extolled [that we have preached, written, and taught in a, manner so Christian, correct, and pure] the benefit of absolution and the power of the keys that many distressed consciences have derived consolation from our doctrine; after they heard that it is the command of God, nay, rather the very voice of the Gospel, that we should believe the absolution, and regard it as certain that the remission of sins is freely granted us for Christ's sake; and that we should believe that by this faith

we are truly reconciled to God [as though we heard a voice from heaven]. This belief has encouraged many godly minds, and, in the beginning, brought Luther the highest commendation from all good men, since it shows consciences sure and firm consolation; because previously the entire power of absolution [entire necessary doctrine of repentance] had been kept suppressed by doctrines concerning works, since the sophists and monks taught nothing of faith and free remission [but pointed men to their own works, from which nothing but despair enters alarmed consciences].

60] But with respect to the time, certainly most men in our churches use the Sacraments, absolution and the Lord's Supper, frequently in a year. And those who teach of the worth and fruits of the Sacraments speak in such a manner as to invite the people to use the Sacraments frequently. For concerning this subject there are many things extant written by our theologians in such a manner that the adversaries, if they are good men, will undoubtedly approve and 61] praise them. Excommunication is also pronounced against the openly wicked [those who live in manifest vices, fornication, adultery, etc.] and the despisers of the Sacraments. These things are thus done both according to the Gospel and according to 62] the old canons. But a fixed time is not prescribed, because all are not ready in like manner at the same

time. Yea, if all are to come at the same time, they cannot be heard and instructed in order [so diligently]. And the old canons and Fathers do not appoint a fixed time. The canon speaks only thus: If any enter the Church and be found never to commune, let them be admonished that, if they do not commune, they come to repentance. If they commune [if they wish to be regarded as Christians], let them not be expelled; if they fail to do so, let them be excommunicated. Christ [Paul] says, 1 Cor. 11:29, that those who eat unworthily eat judgment to themselves. The pastors, accordingly, do not compel those who are not qualified to use the Sacraments.

63] Concerning the enumeration of sins in confession, men are taught in such a way as not to ensnare their consciences. Although it is of advantage to accustom inexperienced men to enumerate some things [which worry them], in order that they may be the more readily taught, yet we are now discussing what is necessary according to divine Law. Therefore, the adversaries ought not to cite for us the regulation *Omnis Utriusque*, which is not unknown to us, but they ought to show from the divine Law that an enumeration of sins is necessary for obtaining their remission. 64] The entire Church, throughout all Europe, knows what sort of snares this point of the regulation, which commands that all sins be confessed, has cast upon

consciences. Neither has the text by itself as much disadvantage as was afterwards added by the Summists, who collect the circumstances of the sins. What labyrinths were there! How great a torture for the best minds! For the licentious and profane were in no way moved by these instruments of terror. 65] Afterwards, what tragedies [what jealousy and hatred] did the questions concerning one's own priest excite among the pastors and brethren [monks of various orders], who then were by no means brethren when they were warring concerning jurisdiction of confessions! [For all brotherliness, all friendship, ceased, when the question was concerning authority and confessor's fees.] We, therefore, believe that, according to divine Law, the enumeration of sins is not necessary. This also is pleasing to Panormitanus and very many other learned jurisconsults. Nor do we wish to impose necessity upon the consciences of our people by the regulation *Omnis Utriusque*, of which we judge, just as of other human traditions, that they are not acts of worship necessary for justification. And this regulation commands an impossible matter, that we should confess all sins. It is evident, however, that most sins we neither remember nor understand [nor do we indeed even see the greatest sins], according to Ps. 19:13: Who can understand his errors?

66] If the pastors are good men, they will know how far it is of advantage to examine [the young and otherwise] inexperienced persons; but we do not wish to sanction the torture [the tyranny of consciences] of the Summists, which notwithstanding would have been less intolerable if they had added one word concerning faith, which comforts and encourages consciences. Now, concerning this faith, which obtains the remission of sins, there is not a syllable in so great a mass of regulations, glosses, summaries, books of confession. Christ is nowhere read there. [Nobody will there read a word by which he could learn to know Christ, or what Christ is.] Only the lists of sins are read [to the end of gathering and accumulating sins; and this would be of some value if they understood those sins which God regards as such]. And the greater part is occupied with sins against human traditions, 67] and this is most vain. This doctrine has forced to despair many, godly minds, which were not able to find rest, because they believed that by divine Law an enumeration was necessary, and yet they experienced that it was impossible. But other faults of no less moment inhere in the doctrine of the adversaries concerning repentance, which we will now recount.

Article XII: Repentance (Selections)

39] Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because faith cometh by hearing, as Paul says Rom. 10:17. For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution [i.e., the promise of divine grace] is heard, the conscience is encouraged and receives consolation. 40] And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God [here on earth sins are truly canceled in such a manner that they are canceled also before God in heaven] according to Luke 10:16: He that heareth you heareth Me. Wherefore the voice of the one absolving 41] must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution [that blessed word of comfort] properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. 42] Meanwhile this faith is nourished in a manifold way in temptations, through the declarations of the Gospel [the hearing of sermons, reading] and the use of the Sacraments. For these are [seals and] signs of [the covenant and grace in] the New Testament, i.e., signs of [propitiation and] the remission of sins. They offer, therefore, the remission of sins, as the words of the Lord's Supper clearly testify, Matt. 26:26. 28: This

is My body, which is given for you. This is the cup of the New Testament, etc. Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the Sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles 43] with the terrors of sin and death. This method of repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the Sacraments, and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.

61] Moreover, to begin with, we ask the adversaries whether to receive absolution is a part of repentance, or not. But if they separate it from confession, as they are subtile in making the distinction, we do not see of what benefit confession is without absolution. If, however, they do not separate the receiving of absolution from confession, it is necessary for them to hold that faith is a part of repentance, because absolution is not received except by faith. That absolution, however, is not received except by faith can be proved from Paul, who teaches, Rom. 4:16, that the promise cannot be received except by faith. But absolution is the promise of the remission of sins [nothing else than the Gospel, the divine promise of God's grace and favor]. 62] Therefore, it

necessarily requires faith. Neither do we see how he who does not assent to it may be said to receive absolution. And what else is the refusal to assent to absolution but charging God with falsehood? If the heart doubts, it regards those things which God promises as uncertain and of no account. Accordingly, in 1 John 5:10 it is written: He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.

SMALCALD ARTICLES

Excerpt
Martin Luther
1537

Part III, Article VIII. Of Confession.

1] Since Absolution or the Power of the Keys is also an aid and consolation against sin and a bad conscience, ordained by Christ [Himself] in the Gospel, Confession or Absolution ought by no means to be abolished in the Church, especially on account of [tender and] timid consciences and on account of the untrained [and capricious] young people, in order that they may be examined, and instructed in the Christian doctrine.

2] But the enumeration of sins ought to be free to every one, as to what he wishes to enumerate or not to enumerate. For as long as we are in the flesh, we shall not lie when we say: "I am a poor man [I acknowledge that I am a miserable sinner], full of sin." Rom. 7:23: I see another law in my members, etc. For since private absolution originates in the Office of the Keys, it should not be despised [neglected], but greatly and highly esteemed [of the

greatest worth], as [also] all other offices of the Christian Church.

3] And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may [thus] be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. 4] For [indeed] the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word.

5] All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words. 6] Just as also our enthusiasts [at the present day] condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they fill the world

with their pratings and writings, as though, indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings and spoken word of the apostles, but [first] through their writings and words he must come. Why [then] do not they also omit their own sermons and writings, until the Spirit Himself come to men, without their writings and before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures? But of these matters there is not time now to dispute at greater length; we have elsewhere sufficiently urged this subject.

7] For even those who believe before Baptism, or become believing in Baptism, believe through the preceding outward Word, as the adults, who have come to reason, must first have heard: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, even though they are at first unbelieving, and receive the Spirit and Baptism ten years afterwards. 8] Cornelius, Acts 10:1ff , had heard long before among the Jews of the coming Messiah, through whom he was righteous before God, and in such faith his prayers and alms were acceptable to God (as Luke calls him devout and God-fearing), and without such preceding Word and hearing could not have believed or been righteous. But St. Peter had to reveal to him that the Messiah (in whom, as one that was to come, he had hitherto believed) now had come, lest his faith concerning the coming Messiah hold him captive among the hardened and

unbelieving Jews, but know that he was now to be saved by the present Messiah, and must not, with the [rabble of the] Jews deny nor persecute Him.

9] In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. 10] Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. 11] It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments. For God wished to appear even to Moses through the burning bush and spoken Word; and no prophet neither Elijah nor Elisha, received the Spirit without the Ten Commandments [or spoken Word]. 12] Neither was John the Baptist conceived without the preceding word of Gabriel, nor did he leap in his mother's womb without the voice of Mary. 13] And Peter says, 2 Pet. 1:21: The prophecy came not by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Without the outward Word, however, they were not holy, much less would the Holy Ghost have moved them to speak when they still were unholy [or profane]; for

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

they were holy, says he, since the Holy Ghost spake through them.

SMALL CATECHISM

Martin Luther

1529

V. Confession

How Christians should be taught to confess.

*What is Confession?**

Confession embraces two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these?

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, a man-servant or maid-servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any one by words or deeds; whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted aught, or done other injury.

Pray, Propose to Me a Brief Form of Confession.

Answer.

You should speak to the confessor thus: **Reverend and dear sir, I beseech you to hear my confession, and to pronounce forgiveness to me for God's sake.**

Proceed!

I, a poor sinner, confess myself before God guilty of all sins; especially I confess before you that I am a man-servant, a maidservant, etc. But, alas, I serve my master unfaithfully; for in this and in that I have not done what they commanded me; I have provoked them, and caused them to curse, have been negligent [in many things] and permitted damage to be done; have also been immodest in words and deeds, have quarreled with my equals, have grumbled and sworn at my mistress, etc. For

all this I am sorry, and pray for grace; I want to do better.

A master or mistress may say thus:

In particular I confess before you that I have not faithfully trained my children, domestics, and wife [family] for God's glory. I have cursed, set a bad example by rude words and deeds, have done my neighbor harm and spoken evil of him, have overcharged and given false ware and short measure.

And whatever else he has done against God's command and his station, etc.

But if any one does not find himself burdened with such or greater sins, he should not trouble himself or search for or invent other sins, and thereby make confession a torture, but mention one or two that he knows. Thus: **In particular I confess that I once cursed; again, I once used improper words, I have once neglected this or that, etc.** Let this suffice.

But if you know of none at all (which, however is scarcely possible), then mention none in particular, but receive the forgiveness upon your general confession which you make before God to the confessor.

ABSOLUTION ANTHOLOGY

Then shall the confessor say:

God be merciful to thee and strengthen thy faith!
Amen.

Furthermore:

Dost thou believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Answer. **Yes, dear sir.**

Then let him say:

As thou believest, so be it done unto thee. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive thee thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Depart in peace.

But those who have great burdens upon their consciences, or are distressed and tempted, the confessor will know how to comfort and to encourage to faith with more passages of Scripture. This is to be merely a general form of confession for the unlearned.

*These questions may not have been composed by Luther himself but reflect his teachings and were

included in editions of the Small Catechism during his lifetime.

MARTIN LUTHER'S ADMONISHMENT TO GO TO CONFESSION

1529

(Published in some early editions of the Large
Catechism)

In reference to Confession, we have ever taught that it should be free, that the tyranny of the Pope should be put down, and that we should be liberated from all his constraints, and relieved from the intolerable burdens imposed on the Christian community. For hitherto, as we have all experienced, nothing has been more grievous than the compulsion of every one to confession, at the hazard of incurring the highest displeasure. And this, moreover, was so very burdensome, and the consciences of men were tormented to such a degree with the enumeration of so many kinds of sins, that no one could confess fully enough; and what was the worst, no one taught or knew what confession was, or the benefit and consolation resulting from it, but made of it nothing but anguish and fiendish torture, we being compelled to submit to it, when at the same time there was nothing to which we were more averse. We are now

avored by proper instruction on these points, that we are permitted to make our confession through no constraint or fear, and are relieved of the torments resulting from so close an enumeration of all sins; and besides, we have the advantage to know how we may happily use it to the consolation and strengthening of our consciences.

But all men are inclined to this, and have, indeed, too readily learned to do that in which they delight, and thus assume to themselves the liberty as if they had no obligation or necessity to confess. For that which meets our approbation we soon embrace, and it is easily imbibed, where the Gospel operates gently and mildly. But such creatures, I have said, ought not to be under the Gospel, nor enjoy any of its blessings; but they should remain under the Pope, and suffer themselves to be coerced and tormented, so as to be compelled to confess, fast, &c., more than before. For whoever will neither believe the Gospel or live according to it, and do that which it is the duty of a Christian to perform, should likewise not enjoy its blessings. What would it be, if you wished to have enjoyment only, and would neither add nor contribute any thing to it? For this reason we would have nothing preached to such persons; and by our consent, we would permit none of our liberty to be shared or enjoyed by them, but suffer the Pope or his representative to reign over them again, who would constrain them

like a real tyrant; for nothing else belongs to that order of men, who will not be obedient to the Gospel, but a task-master who is God's avenger and executioner. But to others who freely permit themselves to be informed, we must ever preach, encouraging, inciting, and entreating them not to suffer that precious and consolatory treasure, which is presented through the Gospel, to pass in vain. We shall, therefore, say something also in reference to Confession, for the purpose of instructing and admonishing the inexperienced.

In the first place, I have said that besides this confession, concerning which we here speak, there are two kinds of confession, which might rather be called a common confession for all Christians; namely, that in which we confess to God alone, or to our neighbor alone, and ask for remission, acknowledgments which are also implied in the Lord's Prayer, where we say: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Yes, the whole of this Prayer is nothing else than such a confession; for what is our prayer, but that we confess our wants and the neglect of that which it is our duty to perform, desiring grace and a peaceful conscience? Such confession shall and must be made without omission, while we live; for in this, especially, consists the character of a Christian, that we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, and pray for grace.

In like manner the other confession, in which each one acknowledges before his neighbor, is also included in the Lord's Prayer, namely, where we confess and forgive trespasses among each other, before we approach God and ask for remission, Now, all of us are guilty; hence we should and may with propriety confess publicly, without fearing one another; for no one is pious, and no one performs his duty towards God or his neighbor; yet besides this general, there is also a particular guilt, where one has provoked another to anger, on account of which he should ask his pardon. Consequently, in the Lord's Prayer, we have two absolutions, namely, for sins committed against God, and for sins committed against our neighbor, which are forgiven us if we forgive our neighbor and reconcile ourselves with him.

Besides this useful, daily, and open confession, there is also a confession which may take place privately between two brothers. And if, from some special cause, we become disturbed with restless anxiety, and find our faith insufficient, we can make our complaint to a brother in this private confession, and obtain his advice, comfort, and support, whenever we desire. For this confession is not embraced in a command, like the other two, but it is left optional with every one who needs it, to use it to his necessity. And it derives its origin and authority from the fact that Christ himself has

placed and committed the absolution into the mouth of his Christian community, to release us from sins. Now wherever there is a heart which feels its sins and desires consolation, it has here an unfailing resource in the Word of God, that God through a human being releases and acquits it of sins.

Thus observe then, as I have frequently said, that confession comprises two parts. The first is our work and act, to deplore our sins and desire consolation and renovation of soul. The other is a work of God, who through the work, in the mouth of man, absolves me from my sins, which is the chief and most valuable thing, rendering it desirable and consolatory. Now hitherto our work alone was insisted upon, and no further thought was indulged but for us to confess fully indeed; but the other most essential part was neither regarded nor preached; precisely as if it were only a good work, with which we might compensate God; and that unless confession were made perfectly and in the most accurate manner, absolution would avail nothing, and our sins would not be forgiven. By this means the people were driven to such excess that every one had to despair of confessing so fully, (which was impossible,) and no conscience was able to be at peace, or to depend on this absolution. Thus they have rendered this desirable confession

not only useless to us, but severe and grievous, to the evident injury and ruin of souls.

For this reason we should so view confession as to distinguish and separate these two parts far from each other, and esteem our own work as insignificant; but the Word of God we should esteem as great and exalted; and we should not enter upon our confession as if we wished to perform a precious work, and make a contribution to God, but to obtain and receive something from him. You need not come and declare how pious or wicked you are; if you are a Christian, I know it well enough otherwise; if you are none, I know it still more readily. But it is to be done, in order that you may lament your wants, and obtain help, a joyful heart, and a peaceful conscience.

No one is allowed to force you to confession by authority; but we say, whoever is a Christian, or freely wishes to be one, has an impressive admonition here, to enter upon his confession, and obtain the precious treasure. If you are no Christian, or do not desire this consolation, we shall let some one else compel you. By this means we abolish altogether the Pope's tyrannical authority, which is nowhere to be tolerated; for, as said, we teach that whoever does not go to confession willingly and for the sake of absolution, should omit it. Yes, whoever presumes, on account of the

purity of his confession, to rely on his own work, no matter how pure and excellent he may have made his confession, let him abstain from it. But we admonish you to confess and make known your wants, not in order Page 546 to perform it as a work, but to hear what God permits to be declared to you; the word, I say, or the absolution, you should consider, and esteem great and precious, receiving it with all the honor and gratitude, as an excellent and valuable treasure.

Should we illustrate this, and in connection with it exhibit the necessity which should urge and impel us to the confession of our sins, we would need but little compulsion or constraint; our own conscience would truly urge each one, and so alarm him, that he would be glad of the opportunity to confess his sins; and he would embrace it like a poor indigent beggar, when he hears that at a certain place a rich distribution of money and clothing is made: here there is no need for a beadle to urge and to force him; he would indeed run of himself with whatever speed his physical powers would allow, lest he should fail in securing these benefits. Now, if we were to enjoin a command respecting it, that all beggars must run thither, insisting on this alone, and keeping silent in reference to what should be sought and obtained there, how could it be otherwise than that they would approach with reluctance, not expecting to obtain any thing there,

but to be exposed in their poverty and imperfection? From this there would be but little enjoyment and consolation derived, but they would become only the more hostile to this injunction, as if it were imposed upon them for reproach and derision, compelling them to let their poverty and wretchedness be seen.

Even so the legates of the Pope have hitherto remained silent with respect to this rich and excellent privilege and inexpressible treasure, forcing multitudes to confession for no other purpose than to expose our impurity and pollution. Who, under these circumstances, could go to confession with cheerfulness? We do not say, however, that people must see how full of pollution you are, and thus contrast themselves with you; but that they should advise you, and say: If you are poor and wretched, come, and use this salutary remedy. Now whoever feels his want and wretchedness, will indeed experience such a desire for confession, that he will attend to it with pleasure; but those who do not regard it or come of themselves, we suffer to take their own course; but this they must know, that we do not regard them as Christians.

Thus then we teach how excellent, how precious, and consolatory confession is; we admonish, moreover, that this precious treasure should not be held in contempt, but be regarded as highly

necessary. Now if you are a Christian, you need neither my constraint nor the Pope's command, but you will indeed importune, and entreat me, that you may become a participant in it. But if you despise it, and go on so haughtily without confessing, we conclude that you are no Christian; and that you should also not enjoy the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; for you despise that which no Christian should despise, and by this means render it impossible for you to have remission of sins. It is a sure indication too that you hold the Gospel in contempt.

In a word, we would know of no constraint; but we have nothing to do with those who neither hear nor obey our preaching and admonition; nor shall they enjoy any of the privileges of the Gospel. If you were a Christian, you should be glad to embrace the opportunity of going even a hundred miles or more to discharge the duty, and not permit yourself to be compelled, but come and urge us to hear your confession. For here the constraint must be reversed, so that we are subjected to the command, and you be vested with the liberty; we force no one, but permit ourselves to be urged, even as we are constrained to preach, and to administer the sacraments.

When we admonish to confession, therefore, we do nothing else but admonish every one to become a

Christian; if I succeed in bringing you to this, I have also brought you to confession. For those who long to be pious Christians, to be free from their sins, and to have joyful consciences, have the right hunger and thirst already, eagerly to grasp this bread even as the hart when pursued, and wearied with heat and thirst, as the 42d Psalm, verse 1, says: As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. That is, as longing and anxious as the hart is after the fresh streams, so anxious and concerned am I about God's Word or absolution and the Sacrament. Behold, this is correct teaching concerning confession; thus we should create a love and desire for it, so that people would come to it, and solicit us more than we might wish or desire. We shall let the Papists plague and torment themselves and other people who do not esteem this treasure, and debar themselves from it; but let us lift up our hands, and praise and thank God, that we have arrived at this knowledge and grace. Amen.

LUTHER'S SERMON FOR THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(House Postil)

Matthew 9:1-8. And He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy: "Son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee." And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemeth." And Jesus, knowing their thoughts said, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Arise, and walk?' But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) "Arise, take up thy bed, and go, unto thine house." And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

This Gospel teaches us to note particularly the good tidings which God has granted us, that we may here on earth say to each other, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," so that with the people here spoken of we may marvel and glorify God which had given such power unto men. And it is indeed a great power that one Christian may say to another: My brother, be of good cheer, you have a gracious God; only believe the assurance which I give you in Christ's name and it is as certain as if God Himself had said to you, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Such power, as we hear, originated in Christ and is now given unto men, especially to those who are in office and are commanded to preach the Gospel, that is, repentance and forgiveness of sins, in Jesus' name.

Other Christians, although they are not in that office, also have the command, in case of necessity, to comfort you when you are troubled on account of your sins, and to say: Why are you troubled? I, as a Christian, assure you that you are wronging yourself; God is not unmerciful unto you. You are for Christ's sake to put all your trust in His grace. You are to comfort yourself as surely with these words as if Christ spake them in person from heaven.

All now depends on this, that you accept such assurance and hold it to be true that God is merciful

unto you for Christ's sake. This we here learn from the man sick with the palsy. In the first place, the Lord admonishes him to believe, saying: Son, be of good cheer, and doubt not, thy sins are forgiven thee. As soon as the palsied man believed these words his sins were really forgiven.

Thus we come into possession of the forgiveness of sins in our day also, when the servant of the Church, or any other Christian, assures you: God is not angry with you, do not you be angry with Him, because He has, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, forgiven you all your sins. You should therefore, with all confidence, trust in this assurance and suffer yourself to be torn to pieces rather than to doubt it. For if you doubt, the absolution, even if it were pronounced over you orally by God and His holy angels, would profit you nothing.

Where there is no faith, there God is considered a liar, as though He did not tell us the truth and would not fulfill His promises. May God in mercy graciously deliver us from such unbelief and sin, although the devil is a real expert in leading people to consider God a liar and to distrust His promises.

But where the heart believes God is honored with the glory which is most pleasing to Him. For then we regard Him to be true, as a Lord who cannot lie,

though He spake of things which seem to be altogether impossible. Hence the Lord is especially pleased with the people who trusted in Him, that He would help the man with a palsy. He therefore very kindly says: My son, you are sick; the devil has caused your palsy, and God has, on account of your sins, given him permission to do so; therefore you have a troubled conscience and begin to think that God is angry and do not know how to help yourself. When God's visitation is heavily felt, it is natural to be greatly troubled. But, my son, do not give way to such thoughts of your heart, so as to ask: What does God care for me? And who knows whether He will be gracious unto me? and what am I before God? Do not look upon your disease but listen when I tell you, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Therefore draw the conclusion: Palsy or no palsy, my sins are forgiven me; in this faith neither palsy nor any other disease shall disturb me.

Thus the Word and faith must be together and neither can exist without the other. He that believes without the Word, has the faith of Turks and Jews, who also say that God is gracious and merciful; but they have not the promise and infact do not believe that God is gracious unto them and for. gives them their sins. For God will not be gracious outside of Christ. A Christian therefore must believe that God is gracious, not merely to others or to a few favored

persons, but to him in particular, forgiving his sins for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, the Mediator. And again, whoever has the Word and no faith, is not benefitted by it. Therefore the Word and faith must be joined together, like husband and wife, and not be put asunder.

A fanatic believes that the day of judgment will come in four weeks. Such a belief is nothing but a lie, for it does not rest on the Word. A Turk expects to enjoy the salvation of Mahomet, but his expectations are false, as they have no Word to rest upon. So the pope believes that a Christian must be raised to heaven by his works, but this is a false faith, for the Word and promise is wanting. Thus a person may have a faith, but if the Word is wanting it is a false faith and a delusion which amounts to nothing.

For us Christians the Word is not wanting. By the grace of God we have it full and pure. But we lack faith that holds to the Word, whilst those who have not the Word believe more firmly. The devil and our innate depravity draw us away from the word of truth and induce us rather to believe the untruth. Therefore it is difficult, even when we are in possession of the Word, to guard against unbelief. Our reason, flesh and blood, will not trust in the Word; they want to see, feel and touch what is to be believed.

This is the work of the bad spirit; he causes sluggishness everywhere, else we would be more cheerful and confident. Be assured, if we could truly and firmly believe what Christ says to the paralytic, and what he has said to you and me in baptism, in the words of absolution and in daily public preaching, that we have no reason to fear God's wrath and displeasure, we would leap for joy!

Would not all things then become to us pure sugar, gold and eternal life? But the fact that such is not the case, is an evidence, that the old Adam and the devil are always engaged in keeping us from faith and the Word.

Therefore learn that both must be together. You must have the Word and lean in faith upon that Word and as much as possible banish all doubts. Then you shall have all that the Word promises and all that is needed for both soul and body. Those who are without the Word find it easy to believe, because it is natural to believe falsehoods, and the heart is more inclined to them.

For this reason also the pope and his adherents believe very strongly in masses, in the merits of saints, in intercessions, in monastic vows, in singing, in fasting, etc. But this is a false and deceptive faith, and they, if the expression may be allowed, are prostitutes and knaves. The heart is a

strumpet, the false faith is a knave. But we, who, thank God, have the pure and holy brides, since the Word is pure and holy, cannot believe so firmly, though we should stoutly believe. But they should not be firm in their faith, because they have no Word. It is the fault of the devil and our old Adam, that we, on account of our natural depravity, have been led away from the Word and the truth to believe lies.

So we should learn from our Gospel-lesson that, in the first place, we must have the Word, and then secondly, that we should firmly believe it. For then it will prove itself to be the power of God, by which we have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, and help and comfort here and hereafter. Wherever the Word is not, people may also have faith, but it is a faith like that of the fanatics, Anabaptists, Turks, Jews and Papists. It is a faith without the Word, such as is inborn because of the fall of Adam, that is, a lying faith to which we by nature can cling more firmly than to the Word of God.

After our dear Savior had been thus teaching the man sick of the palsy and had forgiven him his sins, certain of the scribes said within themselves: This man blasphemeth, because he forgives sins. This also is an important point, to which we should give earnest heed. All fanatics and heretics, as we see, are in error and do not understand how sins are

forgiven. Ask the pope and all his dignitaries concerning the effect of absolution, and they will not be able to answer. The doctrine upon which the whole papacy rests is this, that grace is infused into man by a secret power, and whoever would obtain it must be penitent, confess, and render satisfaction.

But when they are asked concerning the use of absolution and the office of the keys, they will tell you that these are an external order which is observed in the churches. They do not make forgiveness of sins dependent on the Word and faith, on which alone they must depend, but on contrition, confession and satisfaction. This however is a wicked doctrine, by which the poor people are deceived and misled.

Thus also the Anabaptists say: How should Baptism cause forgiveness of sins? it is a mere handful of water. If we are to be cleansed from sins, it must be done by the Spirit; water cannot do it. They separate forgiveness of sins from the Word and do not believe, as the pious people in our text say, that such power has been given unto men.

Also the errorists concerning the Sacrament say: In the Sacrament of the altar we have mere bread and wine; therefore forgiveness of sins cannot be obtained by it; this must be granted by the Spirit,

the flesh profiteth nothing. In short,-no heretic, no priest nor monk, has been able to see that forgiveness of sins is a power given unto men, as stated in our text.

Learn then to speak thus of the matter: It is true, and I know and confess, that God alone can forgive sins. But I must know also by what signs I may ascertain that my sins are forgiven or what the means are by which my sins are forgiven. The Holy Scriptures teach me, and all Christians, that if I desire forgiveness of sins I must not sit down in a corner and say: My God, forgive me my sins; and then wait for an angel to come from heaven to tell me: Thy sins are forgiven thee. For God has promised to come Himself and assure me of the forgiveness of my sin. . .

This is done, in the first place, in holy Baptism. There we have the command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And in addition to this command we have the promise: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

But you say, Baptism is just water. That is true, but it is not mere water; God's Word is with it. Again, when you go to your pastor, who has the special office to this end, or to any other Christian, and ask for comfort and absolution, and he tells you: In

God's stead I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins through Christ, you may be sure that your sins are really forgiven through such external word; for Baptism and the Word will not deceive you.

This doctrine has not been preached in the papacy and is not taught by any papistic priest to this day. Therefore thank God for this grace, and learn that God will forgive sins. But how? In no other way than we here read, "that He has given such power unto men." So Christ here makes use of this power, and commands that it henceforth be used in the churches to the end of time, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in His name.

Thus everyone should seek forgiveness of sins among men, and nowhere else. Here alone it can be found; for the Lord Jesus promises, Matthew 18: "Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall loose here on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And again, John 20: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." God will not permit everyone to build a flight of steps or a ladder of his own into heaven; that He will attend to Himself.

Therefore, if you would have forgiveness of sins, go and be baptized, if you are not baptized already. And if you are baptized, remember the promises of God then made, and be not unbeliev~ ing. Again,

go and be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and ask for absolution. And when you hear the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins in Christ's name, believe it and you will truly have it. Then go also to the holy Sacrament and receive the body and blood of Christ. Do all this to the end that you may be certain that this precious treasure is meant for you and is yours for your enjoyment.

We should therefore not despise Baptism, Absolution, the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar, but use them for the purpose of seeking and finding forgiveness of sins thereby. For this purpose God has called your pastor, your parents, and every Christian around you, and has put His Word into their mouths, that you may receive comfort and forgiveness of sins through them. And though the words of absolution are spoken by them, it is not their word, but the Word of God. Hence we ought not to despise it, but firmly rely on it.

Therefore when a servant of the Church baptizes a child, after the command of Christ, you hear a man speak, who in his person is a sinner like yourself, yet he is acting according to the command of God. And when he says: I baptize thee in the name of the Father, etc. then hear and receive these words as though God had spoken them. So when your sins are forgiven in absolution, do not doubt that

God Himself has done it. He Himself decides then and there that you shall be loosed from your sins.

To be well informed concerning these things is of great importance, because the shameless and vexatious sectaries will continue to contend and to cry: Water is water. This they do not need to teach us; we know it quite well. But this they do not know, that the Word of God is connected with such water. For this reason it is no longer mere water, but a divine water, which is not given by the servant of the Church of himself, but at the command- of God, in order that we may be relieved from the burden of our sins and be born again and received into the kingdom of God.

As now God has given the Word, which is not ours but His, so also He gives us faith in that Word; both are His gifts; not merely the Word, but also faith. Hence forgiveness of sins also is the work of God, although He confers it through men. '

Accordingly we are directed to seek forgiveness of sins in the Word which is put in the mouths of .men, and in the Sacraments administered by men, and nowhere else, for nowhere else can it be found.

But the works which I perform are far different from the Word and works of God. This every one might understand. How then come the impious

Papists to seek forgiveness of sins in their own works? When they come at the day of judgment and present their works and merit, Christ will ask them: But where is my Word? Did I not appoint in my churches Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, Absolution and the preaching of the Gospel, in order that men thereby might receive forgiveness of sins and be assured of my grace? Why did you not make good use of these means of grace? Then you would not have failed; but relying on your works, you shall and must be disappointed.

Therefore, mark well these teachings and learn what forgiveness of sins is, how you can be assured of it, and where you are to seek and find it; namely, that you are to seek it nowhere but in the Christian Church, which has the Word and Sacraments. In these means you shall surely find it, and not in heaven, as the Pharisees think, who accuse the Savior of blasphemy because He forgives sins, which they say no one can do except God. Guard against such errors; rather say: God has enclosed forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism, in the Lord's Supper and in the Gospel,- yea, He has laid it in the mouth of every Christian, when he comforts you and assures you of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and you should accept and believe all as if you, like the paralytic in the text, had heard these assurances from the mouth of Jesus Himself.

Hence it is a great and dangerous mistake of the sectaries and fanatics to sever the Word from forgiveness of sins. This might be done if it were a word or water of man; but we here have the word and the water of God. \Whoever takes this from the people or explains it away, certainly robs them of forgiveness of sin.

Therefore the Anabaptists and other fanatics have lost forgiveness of sin, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Christian Church, and other Christian works, because they reject the Word, which they hear from their neighbor, and do not esteem it any more than the bellowing of a cow. Yea, if God would see proper to speak through a cow, or any other animal, as once He spoke through an ass, we should never despise that word, but recognize it as His Word; why then should we despise it when men speak it at the command and according to the ordinance of God. Though you bear but the voice of men, you nevertheless hear God and receive forgiveness of sins, if you only accept and believe, the Word which you hear.

I have thought proper to refer to this in order that you may be prepared for the errorists and be able to defend yourselves. In popery these teachings are altogether unknown. There it is held and taught, that, if man falls into sin, he is not benefitted

anymore by Baptism; but if he has a desire for the forgiveness of sins, he must confess and do penance for his sins by good works. Thus they teach concerning repentance. And this doctrine the devil does not oppose, because it does him no harm.

It is true, I have reason to repent and to be sorry on account of my sins; but by so doing I do not receive forgiveness. By what means then? Only by this, that I pay attention to the Word and promise and believe; and that, whenever the Lord Jesus speaks to me by His appointed servants or any other Christian, I depend on His Word and not on my penance and sorrow.

But they turn things around; they do not consider the fact that the servants of the Church and other Christians speak at the command of the Lord Jesus; but only behold their own sorrow and repentance. But thus they lose Christ and all Christ is; and therefore it is impossible for them properly to comfort and to assist a troubled soul; because the Word, by which alone they could help, they have lost, and now point people to their own repentance and piety.

But you learn to speak about forgiveness of sins, and also to teach others, that God speaks to us in Baptism, in the absolution, from the pulpit and in

the Holy Supper, through the servant of the Church and other Christians, and that we should listen to them and believe them. In this way we find forgiveness of sins, which had been altogether suppressed in the papacy. Not a letter of it is written in all the bulls of the pope. They only point to sorrow, as though forgiveness of sins depended upon that. May this suffice concerning the words, that God has given power unto men to forgive sins. Let us now refer briefly to the narrative in our text.

The man sick of the palsy is a picture of every sinner. It is the nature of this disease, that the person afflicted with it has no use of his limbs; it is impossible for him to draw in a foot or a hand; they rather will stretch out the more an effort is made to draw them in. Hence Aristotle compares such a man, in his Ethics, with the rude and impudent youth who can neither be tamed nor managed.

But the most suitable interpretation of this disease is to refer it to the self-righteous. For the more these endeavor to approach God and to reconcile Him, the further they are removed from Him; and when they imagine that they do the very best, they are doing the worst, because they have no faith.

Whoever, therefore, wishes to be delivered from this disease, let him come to Christ; He will help in a marvelous way, by merely saying: "My son, be of

good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” Such words strengthen joints and members, so that they may again bear and support each other. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there the wrath and punishment of God must vanish, and He is no longer displeased with our works. Yea, because sin has been removed, we are prepared to perform good works indeed.

This the Lord wants to teach by referring to the man sick with the palsy. This man was lying prostrated on his bed, stretching forth hand and foot after the nature of the disease. But when Christ commands him to arise, he arises, hale and hearty. And whilst before he had been carried on the bed, he now carries his bed and goes to his house. This the Lord wishes us to notice and to take for a pledge that He has power on earth to forgive sins.

The reason that He says “upon earth,” is, that He does not want us to gaze to heaven for the forgiveness of sins, as the pope teaches, nor hope, after death and in purgatory, to be delivered by the works and merit of others. For here it is written, that forgiveness of sins is a “power given unto men on earth,” and that this power is applied when we baptize, administer the Sacrament, absolve, and preach from the pulpit. And it is resolved that whatsoever is loosed on earth, is also loosed in heaven; and again, whatsoever is bound (that is,

excluded from the Word and Sacraments), is also bound in heaven.

This power, by which we bind or loose, does not, interfere with the honor of God, nor are we to be made gods thereby, as is said by silly people. For we have nothing more than the office, and this does not reach any farther than your faith. If you believe, you have it; if you do not believe, you have nothing. Hence God has united us by this office. If one Christian cheers and comforts the other, it is the latter's duty to believe the word when spoken to him in its purity and accept forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. This is the true road to God and the forgiveness of sins. Whoever is led this road will die a happy Christian.

But those who die according to the doctrines of the pope, depending on the intercession of saints and the merit of other men, will not die a happy death; for he has not the company which God has appointed and sent unto him, that is, he is without the true Word and Absolution. And though he has Baptism, he does not know how to derive comfort from it. This calamity the devil has brought about by popery, and now tries it anew with the fanatics. He cannot endure the Word; it is very offensive to him.

Therefore the pope has done away with the Word and has instituted monastic orders, masses, pilgrimages, indulgence, etc. These the devil can stand very well, because it does him no harm. The Anabaptists also help along by speaking contemptuously of water or of Baptism; and not less the errorists concerning the doctrine of the Holy Supper, by maintaining that in the Sacrament there is nothing but bread and wine.

All of these have lost the Word; therefore beware of them, and be assured that forgiveness of sin is not to be found except in the Word. And again, this Word is in Baptism, in the Holy Supper, in Absolution, and in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore they contain forgiveness of sins, no matter what men may say. Wherever the Word is, there faith will follow; and the limbs of the man sick with palsy will be well and straight. But without the Word the disease will continue, and it is impossible to arise and be well.

This I desired to say, at some length, because the pope and the shameless separatists are doing a great deal of damage, and in order that every one of you may be on your guard. The pope directs neither to the Word nor to the Sacraments. Therefore the separatists have learned to do nothing than to speak contemptuously of the Word and the Sacraments and to cry Spirit! Spirit! However, we know that

Luther's Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after
Trinity

the Holy Spirit will not carry on His work except by the Word and the Sacraments. Therefore we cannot do without the Word and the Sacraments, but have reason to value them highly and to consider them our most noble treasure.

May God give us grace that we may abide in purity by this doctrine to our end and be saved. Amen.

ON CONFESSION AND THE LORD'S SUPPER, A SERMON

Excerpt

Martin Luther

1524

4. In the second place, we must say the same thing concerning Confession.

First of all we know that the Scriptures speak of three kinds of confession.

The first is that which is made to God, of which the prophet David speaks in Psalm 32:5: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and my iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Likewise, in the preceding third verse David says: "When I kept silence, my bones wasted away as with the drought of summer;" that is, before God no one is able to stand unless he come with this confession, as Psalm 130:4 declares: "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;" that is, whoever would deal with thee must deal so that this confession

proceeds from his heart, which says: Lord, if thou be not merciful all is lost, no matter how pious I may be. Every saint must make this confession, as again we read in the Psalm mentioned, verse 6, "For this let everyone that is godly pray unto thee."

Therefore, this kind of confession teaches us that we are all alike wicked and sinners, as the saying is, If one of us is good, all of us are good. If anyone have special grace, let him thank God and refrain from boasting.

Has anyone fallen into sin, it is because of his flesh and blood; nor has any fallen so low but that another who now stands may fall even lower.

Therefore, as far as we are concerned, there is no difference among us, the grace of God alone is dividing us.

5. This kind of confession is so highly necessary that it dare not cease for a moment, but must constitute the entire life of a Christian, so that without ceasing he praise the grace of God and reproach his own life in the eyes of God. Otherwise, if he dare to plead some good work or a good life before God, his judgment, which can tolerate nothing of the kind, would follow; and no one is able to stand before it. Therefore, this kind of confession must be made, that you may

condemn yourself as worthy of death and the fire of hell; thus you will anticipate God so that he will not be able to judge and condemn you, but must show you mercy. Concerning this kind of confession, however, we will not speak at this time.

6. The second kind of confession is that made to our neighbor, and is called the confession springing from love, as the other is called the confession springing from faith. Concerning this kind of confession we read in Ja 5, 16: "Confess therefore your sins one to another." In this confession, whenever we have wronged our neighbor, we are to acknowledge our fault to him, as Christ declares in Matthew 5:23-25: "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art with him in the way etc." God here requires of both parties that he who hath offended the other ask forgiveness, and that he who is asked grant it. This kind of confession, like the former, is necessary and commanded; for God will be merciful to no one, nor forgive his sins, unless he also forgive his neighbor. In like manner, faith cannot be true unless it produce this fruit, that you forgive your neighbor, and that you ask for forgiveness; otherwise a man dare not appear before God. If

this fruit is absent, faith and the first kind of confession are not honest.

7. The third kind of confession is that ordered by the pope, which is privately spoken into the ears of the priest when sins are enumerated. This confession is not commanded by God; the pope, however, has forced the people to it and, in addition, has invented so many kinds and varieties of sin that no one is able to keep them in mind; thus consciences have been troubled and tortured in a manner that is pitiful and distressing. Concerning this, however, we will say that God does not force you to confess by faith to him, or by love to your neighbor, when you have no desire to be saved and to receive his grace. Neither does he want you to make confession against your will and desire; on the contrary, he wants you to confess of your own accord, heartily, with love and pleasure. In like manner, he does not compel you to make a private confession to the priest when you have no desire of your own to do so, and do not long for absolution.

This the pope disregarded, and proceeded as though it were a part of the civil government requiring that force be employed; he did not inquire whether a person felt willing or not, but he simply issued the order, that whosoever does not confess at this time shall not have burial in the cemetery. But God cares not whether a thing is done or not,

as long as it is not done with pleasure. It is better, therefore, to postpone a duty than to perform it unwillingly. For no one can come to God unless he come gladly and of his own free will; hence, no one can compel you to come. If you come because of the command and in order to show obedience to the pope, you do wrong. Yet it is the custom in the whole world that everybody runs to the Lord's Supper solely because it is commanded; hence this is very properly called the week of torture, since in it the consciences of the people are tortured and tormented so that they are really to be pitied, besides the injury and destruction of souls. Moreover, Christ himself is also tortured far more shamefully than when he hung upon the cross. Therefore, we may well lift up our hands and thank God for giving us such light. For although we do not bear much fruit and amend, still we have the right knowledge. Hence, it is much better to stay away from confession and communion than to go unwillingly: then at least our consciences remain untortured.

8. Hence we say of private confession, that no one is compelled to observe it. Still it is for this reason a commendable and good thing. Wherever and whenever you are able to hear God's Word you ought not to despise it, but receive it with heartfelt desire. Now, God has caused his Word to go forth through all the world, so that it fills every nook and

corner, and wherever you go you find God's Word. If I preach the forgiveness of sins, I preach the true Gospel. For the sum of the Gospel is: Whosoever believeth in Christ shall receive the forgiveness of his sins. Thus a Christian preacher cannot open his mouth unless he pronounces an absolution. Christ also does the same in the Gospel lesson when he says, "*Pax vobiscum*," Peace be unto you. That is, I proclaim unto you, as of God, that you have peace and forgiveness of sins; this is even the Gospel itself, and absolution. So also the words of the Lord's Supper, "This is my body which is given for you; this is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins etc." If I were to say, I will not go to confession because I have the Word in the Lord's Supper, I will be like him who declares, Neither am I going to hear the preaching. The Gospel must ring and echo without ceasing in every Christian's mouth. Therefore we are to accept it with joy wherever and whenever we can hear it, lift up our hands, and thank God that we can hear it everywhere.

9. Therefore, when you go to private confession give more heed to the priest's word than to your own confessing; and make this distinction, What you say is one thing, and what he says who hears you is another. Do not place much value on what you do, but give heed to what he says, to wit, that in God's stead he proclaims to you the forgiveness

of sins. It makes no difference whatever whether he be a priest, called to preach, or merely a Christian. The word which he speaks is not his, but God's Word; and God will keep it as surely as if he had spoken it. This is the way he has placed his holy Word into every corner of the world. Since, therefore, we find it everywhere, we ought to receive it with great thankfulness, and not cast it to the winds.

10. For in Confession as in the Lord's Supper you have the additional advantage, that the Word is applied to your person alone. For in preaching it flies out into the whole congregation, and although it strikes you also, yet you are not so sure of it; but here it does not apply to anyone except to you. Ought it not to fill your heart with joy to know a place where God is ready to speak to you personally? Yea, if we had a chance to hear an angel speak we would surely run to the ends of the earth. Are we not then foolish, wretched and ungrateful people not to listen to what is told us?

Here the Scriptures stand, and testify that God speaks through us, and that this is as valid as though he were to speak it with his own mouth; even as Christ declares in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" again in John 20:23, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them;

whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Here God himself pronounces the absolution, just as he himself baptizes the child; and do you say we don't need Confession? For although you hear the same thing in the Lord's Supper you ought not on that account to reject it, especially since it applies to you, as already stated, personally.

11. Besides this you have another advantage, in Confession you are enabled to disclose all your failings and to obtain counsel regarding them.

And if there were no other reason, and God did not himself speak in Confession, I would not willingly give it up for this one reason, that here I am permitted to open my heart to my brother and tell him what troubles me. For it is a deplorable thing to have the conscience burdened and prostrate with fear, and to know neither counsel nor consolation.

This is why it is such an excellent and comforting thing for two to come together, and the one to offer advice, help and consolation to the other, proceeding in a fine brotherly and affectionate manner. The one reveals his ailment; whereupon the other heals his wounds. Therefore I would not give Confession up for all the treasure of the world. Still it dare not be made a command, lest it be turned into a matter of conscience, as though a person would not dare to commune without first

making confession; nevertheless, we ought never to despise Confession, you cannot hear God's Word too frequently, nor impress it so deeply upon your heart that it could not be done still better.

12. Therefore I said that confession and absolution must be carefully distinguished from each other, that you give attention chiefly to the absolution, and that you attend confession not because of the command, or in order to do a good work by your confessing, thinking that because of this good work your sins are forgiven; on the contrary, we are to go only because we there hear God's Word and by it receive consolation. To this incline your ears, and be persuaded that God speaks through men and forgives you your sins; this, of course, requires faith.

Hitherto the manner of our Confession was as follows: when people were absolved so many works were required of them as to render satisfaction for their sins. This was called absolving, whereas in truth it meant binding worse than ever. Sins ought to be completely removed by the absolution; but they first imposed the task of rendering satisfaction for them, and thus force people away from faith and absolution, and induce them to rely upon their own works.

They should be taught thus, Behold, this word which I speak to you in God's stead you must embrace in true faith. If you have not this faith postpone your confession; yet this does not mean that when your faith is too weak you are not to come and demand consolation and strength. If you cannot believe, tell the brother to whom you would confess of it, and say to him, I do indeed feel that I have need of confession and absolution, but I find I am too cold and too weak in faith. For to whom are you going to confide your weakness if not to God? And where can you find him except in your brother? He can strengthen and help you by his words. This is confessing in the right way; and would to God the whole world were brought far enough at least for everyone to confess that he cannot believe.

13. Let it be said now concerning Confession that everything ought to be free, so that each person attends without constraint, of his own accord. But what ought one to confess? Here is where our preachers in the past have pounded a great deal into us by means of the five senses, the seven deadly sins, the ten commandments, etc., thereby perplexing our consciences. But it should be, that you first of all feel that which weighs you down, and the sins that pain you most and burden your conscience you ought to declare and confess to your brother. Then you need not search long nor

seek all kinds of sins; just take the ones that come to your mind, and say, 'This is how frail I am and how I have fallen; this is where I crave consolation and counsel. For confession ought to be brief. If you recall something that you have forgotten, it is not to trouble you; for you confessed not in order to do a good work, or because you were compelled, but in order to be comforted by the word of absolution. Moreover, you can easily confess to God in secret what was forgotten, or you can hear the absolution for it during the communion service.

We are therefore not to worry even if sins have been forgotten; though forgotten they are still forgiven; for God looks, not to the excellence or completeness of your confession, but to his Word and how you believe it.

So also the absolution does not state that some sins are forgiven and others not; on the contrary, it is a free proclamation declaring that God is merciful to you. But if God is merciful to you all your sins must be blotted out.

Therefore, hold fast to the absolution alone and not to your confession; whether or not you have forgotten anything makes no difference; as much as you believe so much are you forgiven. This is the way we must ever trust in God's Word in spite of sin and an evil conscience.

On Confession and the Lord's Supper, A Sermon

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH

Excerpt

Martin Luther

1520

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

We come in the third place to the sacrament of penance. On this subject I have already given no little offense by my published treatise and disputations, FA408 in which I have amply set forth my views. These I must now briefly rehearse, in order to unmask the tyranny that is rampant here no less than in the sacrament of the bread. For because these two sacraments furnish opportunity for gain and profit, the greed of the shepherds rages in them with incredible zeal against the flock of Christ; although baptism, too, has sadly declined among adults and become the servant of avarice, as we have just seen in our discussion of vows.

This is the first and chief abuse of this sacrament: They have utterly abolished the sacrament itself, so that there is not a vestige of it left. For they have overthrown both the word of divine promise and

our faith, in which this as well as other sacraments consists. They have applied to their tyranny the word of promise which Christ spake in Matthew 16:19, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind," etc., in Matthew 18:18, "Whatsoever ye shall bind," etc., and in John, the last chapter, (John 20:23) "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," etc. In these words the faith of penitents is aroused, to the obtaining of remission of sins. But in all their writing, teaching and preaching their sole concern has been, not to teach Christians what is promised in these words, or what they ought to believe and what great comfort they might find in them, but only to extend their own tyranny far and wide through force and violence, until it has come to such a pass that some of them have begin to command the very angels in heaven FA409 and to boast in incredible mad wickedness of having in these words obtained the right to a heavenly and an earthly rule, and of possessing the power to bind even in heaven. Thus they say nothing of the saving faith of the people, but babble only of the despotic power of the pontiffs, whereas Christ speaks not at all of power, but only of faith.

For Christ hath not ordained principalities or powers or lordships, but ministries, in the Church; as we learn from the Apostle, who says: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." (1

Corinthians 4:1) Now when He said: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," (Mark 16:16) He called forth the faith of those to be baptised, so that by this word of promise a man might be certain of being saved if he believed and was baptised. In that word there is no impartation of any power whatever, but only the institution of the ministry of those who baptise. Similarly, when He says here: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind," etc., (Matthew 16:19) He calls forth the faith of the penitent, so that by this word of promise he may be certain of being truly absolved in heaven, if he be absolved and believe.

Here there is no mention at all of power, but of the ministry of him that absolves, it is a wonder these blind and overbearing men missed the opportunity of arrogating a despotic power to themselves from the promise of baptism. But if they do not do this in the case of baptism, why should they have presumed to do it in the case of the promise of penance? For in both there is a like ministry, a similar promise, and the same kind of sacrament. So that, if baptism does not belong to Peter alone, it is undeniably a wicked usurpation of power to claim the keys for the pope alone. Again, when Christ says: "Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Take, drink; this is the chalice in my blood," (1 Corinthians 11:24 f.) etc., He calls forth the faith of those who eat, so that through these

words their conscience may be strengthened by faith and they may rest assured of receiving the forgiveness of sins, if they have eaten. Here, too, He says nothing of power, but only of a ministry.

Thus the promise of baptism remains in some sort, at least to infants; the promise of bread and the cup has been destroyed and made subservient to greed, faith becoming a work and the testament a sacrifice; while the promise of penance has fallen prey to the most oppressive despotism of all and serves to establish a more than temporal rule.

Not content with these things, this Babylon of ours has so completely extinguished faith that it insolently denies its necessity in this sacrament; nay, with the wickedness of Antichrist: it calls it heresy if any one should assert its necessity. What more could this tyranny do that it has not done? (Isaiah 5:4) Verily, by the rivers of Babylon we sit and weep, when we remember thee, O Zion. (Psalm 137:1,2) We hang our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. The Lord curse the barren willows of those streams! Amen.

Now let us see what they have put in the place of the promise and the faith which they have blotted out and overthrown. Three parts have they made of penance, — contrition, confession, and satisfaction; yet so as to destroy whatever of good

there might be in any of them and to establish here also their covetousness and tyranny.

In the first place, they teach that contrition precedes faith in the promise; they hold it, much too cheap, making it not a work of faith, but a merit; nay, they do not mention it at all. So deep are they sunk in works and in those instances of Scripture that show how many obtained grace by reason of their contrition and humility of heart; but they take no account of the faith which wrought such contrition and sorrow of heart, as it is written of the men of Nineveh in Jonah 3:5, "And the men of Nineveh believed in God: and they proclaimed a fast," etc. Others, again, more bold and wicked, have invented a so-called "attrition," which is, converted into contrition by virtue of the power of the keys, of which they know nothing.

This attrition they grant to the wicked and unbelieving and thus abolish contrition altogether. O the intolerable wrath of God, that such things should be taught in the Church of Christ! Thus, with both faith and its work destroyed, we go on secure in the doctrines and opinions of men — yea, we go on to our destruction. A contrite heart is a precious thing, but it is found only where there is a lively faith in the promises and the threats of God. Such faith, intent on the immutable truth of God, startles and terrifies the conscience and thus

renders it contrite, and afterwards, when it is contrite, raises it up, consoles and preserves it; so that the truth of God's threatening is the cause of contrition, and the truth of His, promise the cause of consolation, if it be believed. By such faith a man merits the forgiveness of sins. Therefore faith should be taught and aroused before all else; and when faith is obtained, contrition and consolation will follow inevitably and of themselves.

Therefore, although there is something of truth in their teaching that contrition is to be attained by what they call the recollection and contemplation of sins, yet their teaching is perilous and perverse so long as they do not teach first of all the beginning and cause of contrition, — the immutable truth of God's threatening and promise, to the awakening of faith, — so that men may learn to pay more heed to the truth of God, whereby they are cast down and lifted up, than to the multitude of their sins, which will rather irritate and increase the sinful desires than lead to contrition, if they be regarded apart from the truth of God. I will say nothing now of the intolerable burden they have bound upon us with their demand that we should frame a contrition for every sin. That is impossible; we can know only the smaller part of our sins, and even our good works are found to be sins, according to Psalm 143:2, "Enter not into

judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

It is enough to lament the sins which at the present moment distress our conscience, as well as those which we can readily call to mind. Whoever is in this frame of mind is without doubt ready to grieve and fear for all his sins, and will do so whenever they are brought to his knowledge in the future.

Beware, then, of putting your trust, in your own contrition and of ascribing the forgiveness of sins to your own sorrow. God does not have respect to you because of that, but because of the faith by which you have believed His threatenings and promises, and which wrought such sorrow within you.

Thus we owe whatever of good there may be in our penance, not to our scrupulous enumeration of sins, but to the truth of God and to our faith.

All other things are the works and fruits of this, which follow of their own accord, and do not make a man good, but are done by a man already made good through faith in the truth of God. Even so, “a smoke goeth up in His wrath, because He is angry and troubleth the mountains and kindleth them,” as it is said in Psalm 18:8. First comes the terror of His threatening, which burns; up the wicked, then

faith, accepting this, sends up the cloud of contrition, etc.

Contrition, however, is less exposed to tyranny and gain than wholly given over to wickedness and pestilent teaching. But confession and satisfaction have become the chief workshop of greed and violence. Let us first take up confession. There is no doubt that confession is necessary and commanded of God. Thus we read in Matthew (Matthew 3:6) "They were baptised of John in Jordan, confessing their sins." And in 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." If the saints may not deny their sin, how much more ought those who are guilty of open and great sins to make confession! But most effectively of all does Matthew 18:15 prove, the institution of confession, in which passage Christ teaches that a sinning brother should be rebuked, haled before, the Church, accused, and, if he will not hear, excommunicated. But he hears when, heeding the rebuke, he acknowledges and confesses his sin.

Of private confession, which is now observed, I am hearty in favor, even though, it cannot be proved from the Scriptures; it is useful and necessary, nor would I have it abolished — nay, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure

without an equal for distressed consciences. For when we have laid bare our conscience to our brother and privately made known to him the evil that lurked within, we receive from our brother's lips the word of comfort spoken by God Himself; and, if we accept it in faith, we find peace in the mercy of God speaking to us through our brother.

This alone do I abominate, — that this confession has been subjected to the despotism and extortion of the pontiffs. They reserve to themselves, even hidden sins, and command that they be made known to confessors named by them, only to trouble the consciences of men. They merely play the pontiff, while they utterly despise the true duties of pontiffs, which are to preach the Gospel and to care for the poor. Yea, the godless despots leave the great sins to the plain priests, and reserve to themselves those sins only which are of less consequence, such as those ridiculous and fictitious things in the bull *Coenadoinini*. Nay, to make the wickedness of their error the more apparent, they not only do not reserve, but actually teach and approve, the sins, against the service of God, against faith and the chief commandments; such as their running on pilgrimages, the perverse worship of the saints, the lying saints' legends, the various forms of trust in works and ceremonies, and the practicing of them, by all of which faith in God is extinguished and idolatry encouraged, as we see in our day. We

have the same kind of priests today as Jereboam ordained of old in Dan and Beersheba, — (1 Kings 12:26 ff.) ministers of the golden calves, men who are ignorant of the law of God, of faith and of whatever pertains to the feeding of Christ's sheep, and who inculcate in the people nothing but their own inventions with terror and violence.

Although my advice is that we bear this outrage of reserved cases, even as Christ bids us bear all the tyranny of men, and teaches us that we must obey these extortioners; nevertheless I deny that they have the right to make such reservations, nor do I believe they can bring one jot or tittle of proof that they have it. But I am going to prove the contrary. In the first place, Christ, speaking in Matthew 18:15 of open sins, says that if our brother shall hear us when we rebuke him, we have saved the soul of our brother, and that he is to be brought before the Church only if he refuse to hear us; so that his sin may be corrected among brethren. How much more will it be true of hidden sins, that they are forgiven if one brother freely makes confession to another? So that it is not necessary to tell it to the Church, that is, as these babblers interpret it, the prelate or priest. We have another proof of this in Christ's words in the same chapter: "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18) For

this is said to each and every Christian. Again, He says in the same place: "Again I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever that they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 18:19) Now, the brother who lays his hidden sins before his brother and craves pardon, certainly consents with his brother upon earth in the truth, which is Christ. Of which Christ says yet more clearly, confirming His preceding words: "Verily I say unto you, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20) Hence. I have no doubt but that every one is absolved from his hidden sins when he has made confession, either of his own accord or after being rebuked, has sought pardon and amended his ways, privately before any brother, however much the violence of the pontiffs may rage against it; for Christ has given to every one of His believers the power to absolve even open sins. Add yet this little point: If any reservation of hidden. sins were valid, so that one could not be saved unless they were forgiven, then a man's salvation would be prevented most of all by those aforementioned good works and idolatries, which are nowadays taught by the popes. But if these most grievous sins do not prevent one's salvation, how foolish it is to reserve those lighter sins! Verily, it is the foolishness and blindness of the pastors that produce these monstrous things in

the Church. Therefore I would admonish these princes of Babylon and bishops of Bethaven (Hosea 4:15; Hosea 10:5) to refrain from reserving any cases whatsoever. Let them, moreover, permit all brothers and sisters freely to hear the confession of hidden sins, so that the sinner may make his sins known to whomever he will and seek pardon and comfort, that is, the word of Christ, by the mouth of his neighbor. For with these presumptions of theirs they only ensnare the consciences of the weak without necessity, establish their wicked despotism, and fatten their avarice on the sins and ruin of their brethren. Thus they stain their hands with the blood of souls, sons are devoured by their parents, Ephraim devours Juda, and Syria Israel with open mouth, as Isaiah saith. (Isaiah 9:20) To these evils they have added the “circumstances,” and also the mothers, daughters, sisters, brothers- and sisters-in-law, branches and fruits of sins; since, forsooth, astute and idle men have worked out a kind of family tree of relationships and affinities even among sins — so prolific is wickedness coupled with ignorance. For this conceit, whatever rogue be its author, has like many another become a public law. Thus do the shepherds keep watch over the Church of Christ; whatever new work or superstition those stupid devotees may have dreamed of, they straightway drag to the light of day, deck out with indulgences and safeguard with bulls; so far are they from suppressing it and

preserving to God's people the true faith and liberty. For what has our liberty to do with the tyranny of Babylon? My advice would be to ignore all circumstances utterly. With Christians there is only one circumstance, — that a brother has sinned. For there is no person to be compared with a Christian brother. And the observance of places, times, days, persons, and all other superstitious moonshine, only magnifies the things that are nothing, to the injury of those which are everything; as if aught could be greater or of more importance than the glory of Christian brotherhood! Thus they bind us to places, days and persons, that the name of brother may be lightly esteemed, and we may serve in bondage instead of being free — we to whom all days, places, persons, and all external things are one and the same.

How unworthily they have dealt with satisfaction, I have abundantly shown in the controversies concerning indulgences. They have grossly abused it, to the ruin of Christians in body and soul. To begin with, they taught it in such a manner that the people never learned what satisfaction really is, namely, the renewal of a man's life. Then, they so continually harp on it and emphasize its necessity, that they leave no room for faith in Christ.

With these scruples they torture poor consciences to death, and one runs to Rome, one to this place,

another to that, this one to Chartreuse, that one to some other place, one scourges himself with rods, another ruins his body with fasts and vigils, and all cry with the same mad zeal, “Lo here is Christ! lo there!” (Luke 17:20 f.) believing that the kingdom of heaven, which is within us, will come with observation. FA417 For these monstrous things we are indebted to thee, O Roman See, and thy murderous laws and ceremonies, with which thou hast corrupted all mankind, so that they think by works to make satisfaction for sin to God, Who can be satisfied only by the faith of a contrite heart! This faith thou not only keepest silent with this uproar of thine, but even oppressest, only so thy insatiable horseleech have those to whom it may say, “Bring, bring!” and may traffic in sins. (Proverbs 30:15) Some have gone even farther and have constructed those instruments for driving souls to despair, — their decrees that the penitent must rehearse all sins anew for which he neglected to make the imposed satisfaction. Yea, what would not they venture to do, who were born for the sole purpose of carrying all things into a tenfold captivity? Moreover, how many are possessed with the notion that they are in a saved state and are making satisfaction for their sins, if they but mumble over, word for word, the prayers the priest has imposed, even though they give never a thought meanwhile to amending their life! They believe that their life is changed in the one moment of contrition and confession, and it

remains only to make satisfaction for their past sins. How should they know better, when they are not taught otherwise,? No thought is given here to the mortifying of the flesh, no value is attached to the example of Christ, Who absolved the woman taken in adultery and said to her, "Go, and sin no more!" (John 8:11) thereby laying upon her the cross — the mortifying of her flesh. This perverse error is greatly encouraged by our absolving sinners before the satisfaction has been completed, so that they are more concerned about completing the satisfaction which lies before them, than they are about contrition, which they suppose to be past and over when they have made confession. Absolution ought rather to follow on the completion of satisfaction, as it did in the ancient Church, with the result that, after completing the work, penitents gave themselves with greater diligence to faith and the living of a new life.

But this must suffice in repetition of what I have more fully said on indulgences, and in general this must suffice for the present concerning the three sacraments, which have been treated, and yet not treated, in so many harmful books, theological as well as juristic. It remains to attempt some discussion of the other sacraments also, lest I seem to have rejected them without cause.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

