

## ARTICLE XI: OF CONFESSION

1 It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However, in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, 2 for this is impossible. Ps. 19:12, “Who can discern his errors?”

### Roman Confutation, To Article XI

In the eleventh article their acknowledgment that private absolution with confession should be retained in the Church is accepted as catholic and in harmony with our faith, because absolution is supported by the word of Christ. For Christ says to his apostles, John 20 [23]: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." 2. Nevertheless, two things must here be required of them: *one*, that **they compel an annual confession** to be observed by their subjects, according to the constitution, canon *Omnis Utriusque*, concerning penance and remission\*, and the custom of the Church universal. 3. *Another*, that through their preachers they cause their subjects to be faithfully admonished when they are about to confess that although they cannot state all their sins individually, nevertheless, a diligent examination of their conscience being made, they make **an entire confession of their offences**—viz. of all which occur to their memory in such investigation. But in regard to the rest that have been forgotten and have escaped our mind it is lawful to make a general confession, and to say with the Psalmist, Ps. 18 [19:12]: 'Cleanse me, Lord, from secret faults.' (Jacobs' translation) \* *Required by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), cap. 21.*

## ARTICLE XII: OF REPENTANCE

1 It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance, 2 and absolution should not be denied them by the church. 3 Properly speaking, **true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow**, or terror, on account of 5 sin, and **yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution** (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. **6Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin would then follow**, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, “Bear fruit that befits repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

7 Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again.

9 Condemned on the other hand are the Novatians\* who denied absolution to such as had sinned after Baptism.

10 Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.

\* *Rigorists in Rome during the third century who denied restoration, even after repentance, to those who were guilty of grave sins.*

### Roman Confutation, To Article XII

...But to the second part of this article is utterly rejected. For when they ascribe only two parts to repentance, they antagonize the entire Church, which from the time of the apostles has held and believed that **there are three parts of repentance—contrition, confession and satisfaction.** (Jacobs' translation)

Lutherans have 2 parts to confession  
A. Contrition  
B. Absolution  
-Good works would follow

Rome has 3 parts to confession  
A. Sorrow in heart  
B. Oral confession to Priest  
C. Satisfaction by works

## AUGSBURG XXV. CONFESSION

<sup>1</sup> Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side.

The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time the people are carefully instructed concerning **the consolation of the Word of absolution** so that they may esteem absolution as a great and precious thing. <sup>3</sup> It is not the voice or word of the man who speaks it, but it is **the Word of God, who forgives sin, for it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command.** <sup>4</sup> We teach with great diligence about this command and power of keys and how comforting and necessary it is for terrified consciences. We also teach that God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if we heard God's voice from heaven, that we should joyfully comfort ourselves with absolution, and that we should know that through such faith we obtain forgiveness of sins.

<sup>5</sup> In former times the preachers who taught much about confession never mentioned a word concerning these necessary matters but only **tormented consciences without long enumerations of sins, with satisfactions, with indulgences, with pilgrimages and the like.** <sup>6</sup> Many of our opponents themselves acknowledge that we have written about and treated of true Christian repentance in a more fitting fashion than had been done for a long time.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning confession we teach that **no one should be compelled to recount sins in detail, for this is impossible.** <sup>8</sup> As the psalmist says, "Who can discern his errors?"<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah also says, "The heart is desperately corrupt; who can understand it?"<sup>1</sup> Our wretched human nature is so deeply submerged in sins that it is unable to perceive or know them all, <sup>9</sup> and if we were to be absolved only from those which we can enumerate we would be helped but little. On this account there is no need to compel people to give a detailed account of their sins.

<sup>10</sup> **That this was also the view of the Fathers** can be seen in Dist. I, De poenitentia, <sup>11</sup> where these words of Chrysostom are quoted: "I do not say that you should expose yourself in public or should accuse yourself before others, but obey the prophet who says, 'Show your way to the Lord.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore confess to the Lord God, the true judge, in your prayer, telling him of your sins not with your tongue but in your conscience."<sup>3</sup> Here it can be clearly seen that Chrysostom does not require a detailed enumeration of sins.

<sup>12</sup> The marginal note in De poenitentia, Dist. 5, <sup>4</sup> also teaches that such **confession is not commanded by the Scriptures**, but was instituted by the church. <sup>13</sup> Yet the preachers on our side diligently teach that **confession is to be retained for the sake of absolution (which is its chief and most important part)**, for the consolation of terrified consciences, and also for other reasons.

## **Lutheran Teaching**

1. Private Confession (and Absolution) consists of **two parts, confession and absolution**.
  - A. Confession (to the pastor) is of human right only, not commanded by Scripture, but ordained by the Church. (*Gloss, Of Repentance*)
  - B. Absolution (pronounced by the pastor) is of divine right, commanded by God.
2. Private Confession is not abolished among us. It is retained. **It is our practice** to examine and absolve all who are to receive the body of the Lord.
3. Roman deficiencies: Faith in the absolution, the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith were not being extolled, all the while satisfactions were immoderately extolled.
4. **Lutheran corrections**
  - A. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution as the voice of God, and pronounced by God's command.
  - B. The power of the Keys (given to the Pastoral Office) is set forth in its beauty.
  - C. Absolution brings great consolation to anxious consciences.
  - D. God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven.
  - E. Such faith in Christ's merit bestowed in absolution truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.
  - F. The doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.
  - G. Concerning Confession (to the pastor)
    - i. An enumeration of sins is not necessary. Furthermore the enumeration of all sins is not necessary. (*Decrees, Chrysostom*)
    - ii. It is impossible to recount all sins. (Ps 19:13, Jer 17:9)
    - iii. If no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace.

## **Roman Response**

1. The Lutherans confuse Private and Public Confession.
  - A. Sacramental/Sacerdotal Confession = Private Confession and Absolution
  - B. Public Confession = When there is a public sin that has caused offense to the congregation, the penitent is required to make a public confession before the congregation.
2. Three parts to confession, Chrysostom's 29<sup>th</sup> sermon
  - A. Sorrow in heart, B. Oral confession to Priest, C. Satisfaction by works
3. Oral confession of sins = Opening of Wounds: Chrysostom's 10<sup>th</sup> Homily
4. Lutheran position is the heresy of the Montanists

*Note: "The earliest of the heresies which is usually asserted to be concerned with the pardon of sins is that of the Montanists (A.D. 156-157).... He[Tertullian] seems to have been alarmed at a tendency manifested to exalt the functions of the Church in the remission of sins and his protest took the shape of quoting 1 John 5:16(" If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. "), and dividing sins into remissible and irremissible—penitence and the intercession of the faithful secure pardon of the one; for the other, man can assume nothing save that penitence will not be in vain; though man can assume nothing save that penitence will be not in vain; though man may withhold pardon the reward will come from God" (A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church by Henry Charles Lea, 1896).*

### Scripture on Confession:

Psalm 32:3-5, “When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. <sup>4</sup>

For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. <sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

St. Matthew 11:28 “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

St. Mark 1:15 Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

2 Samuel 12:13, “So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.’”

John 20:21-23 (NKJV) “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Luke 10:16 “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

Matthew 18:18, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16:18-19, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

### The Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article XII

...has **strong for words for those who despise it or do not offer it**, “For we also keep confession, especially because of absolution, which is the Word of God that the power of the keys proclaims to individuals by divine authority. It would therefore be wicked to remove private absolution from the church. And those who despise private absolution understand neither the forgiveness of sins nor the power of the keys;” and

Although it is clearly taught that NO ONE SHOULD BE COMPELLED TO GO TO CONFESSION, **the Large Catechism** gives this advice, “If you are poor and miserable, then go and make use of the healing medicine. He who feels his misery and need will develop such a desire for confession that he will run toward it with joy. But those who ignore it and do not come of their own accord, we let go their way. However, they ought to know that we do not regard them as Christians. Thus we teach what a wonderful, precious, and comforting thing confession is, and we urge that such a precious blessing should not be despised, especially when we consider our great need. If you are a Christian, you need neither by compulsion nor the pope’s command at any point, but you will compel yourself and beg me for the privilege of sharing in it. However, if you despise it and proudly stay away from confession, then we must come to the conclusion that you are no Christian and that you ought not receive the sacrament. For you despise what no Christian ought to despise, and you show thereby that you can have no forgiveness of sin. And this is a sure sign that you also despise the Gospel” (A Brief Exhortation to Confession, 26-29); and

## Apology, Article XI. 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.