

quote the Church Fathers in such a way as to give them a false meaning, contrary to the Fathers' will. They do this just as they wantonly pervert the simple, plain, and clear words of Christ's testament and the pure testimonies of the Holy Scriptures. Because of this, the Book of Concord directs everyone to the Holy Scriptures and the simple Catechism. The person who clings to this basic form with true, simple faith provides what is best for his soul and conscience, since it is built on a firm and immovable Rock (Matthew 7; 17; Galatians 1; Psalm 119).

## APPENDIX B: A BRIEF EXHORTATION TO CONFESSION

Note: Luther was very concerned to purge false notions about private Confession, but he never intended the practice itself to fall into disuse. He laments that since private Confession is no longer mandatory among Lutherans, people neglect it. In addition to private Confession to a pastor, there are two additional kinds of confession. One is confession to God alone; this is practiced throughout one's life. There is also the confession of sins one Christian makes to another. Christians are to confess their sins to one another and forgive one another openly and publicly without hesitation. Christians absolve one another of sins because of the gift of Absolution Christ has given to the Church, commanding us to absolve one another. In his exhortation Luther admonishes Christians to privately confess their sins so that they will hear the Lord's absolving Word from the lips of another human being. God's Word applied in this very personal way is another great treasure, which is so great and precious we should be willing to run more than a hundred miles to receive it. (See AC XI, XII and XXV; SA III III and VIII.)

The Exhortation first appeared in the 1529 revised edition of the Large Catechism. However, it did not appear in the original 1580 German and 1584 Latin editions of the Book of Concord; therefore, it was not included by Dau and Bente in the *Concordia Triglotta*. We have included it here since readers are used to having it from other editions of the Book of Concord. The following text is adapted from *Luther's Large Catechism: A Contemporary Translation with Study Questions*, tr. F. Samuel Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 122–27.

Here now follows an exhortation to Confession. 1

We have always urged that Confession should be voluntary and that the pope's tyranny should cease. As a result we are now rid of his coercion and set free from the intolerable load and burden that he laid upon Christendom. As we all know from experience, there had been no rule so burdensome as the one that forced everyone to go to Confession on pain of committing the most serious of mortal sins. That law also placed on consciences the heavy burden and torture of having to list all kinds of sin, so that no one was ever able to confess perfectly enough. The worst was that no one taught or even knew what Confession might be or what help and comfort it could give. Instead, it was turned into sheer terror and a hellish torture that one had to go through even if one detested Confession more than anything. These three oppressive things have now been lifted, and we have been granted the right to go to Confession freely, under no pressure of coercion or fear; also, we are released from the torture of needing to list all sins in detail; besides this we have the advantage of knowing how to make a beneficial use of Confession for the comfort and strengthening of our consciences. 4

5 Everyone is now aware of this. But unfortunately people have learned it only too well. They do as they please and apply their freedom wrongfully as if it meant that they ought not or must not go to Confession. For we readily understand whatever is to our advantage, and we find it especially easy to take in whatever is mild and gentle in the Gospel. But, as I have said, such pigs should not be allowed near the Gospel nor have any part of it. They should stay under the pope and let themselves continue to be driven and pestered to confess, to fast, and so on. For whoever does not want to believe the Gospel, live according to it, and do what a Christian ought to be doing, should not enjoy any of its benefits either. Imagine their wanting to enjoy only the benefits without accepting any of the responsibilities or investing anything of themselves—what sort of thing is that! We do not want to make preaching available for that sort nor to grant permission that our freedom and its enjoyment be opened up to them. Instead, we will let the pope and the likes of him take over and force them to his will, genuine tyrant that he is. The rabble that will not obey the Gospel [2 Thessalonians 1:8] deserves nothing else than the kind of jailer who is God's devil and hangman. But to others who gladly hear the Gospel we must keep on preaching, admonishing, encouraging, and coaxing them not to forget the precious and comforting treasure offered in the Gospel. Therefore, we here intend to say also a few words about Confession in order to instruct and admonish the uninformed.

8 In the first place, I have said that besides the Confession here being considered there are two other kinds, which may even more properly be called the Christians' common confession. They are (a) the confession and plea for forgiveness made to God alone and (b) the confession that is made to the neighbor alone. These two kinds of confession are included in the Lord's Prayer, in which we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" [Matthew 6:12], and so on. In fact, the entire Lord's Prayer is nothing else than such a confession. For what are our petitions other than a confession that we neither have nor do what we ought, as well as a plea for grace and a cheerful conscience? Confession of this sort should and must continue without letup as long as we live. For the Christian way essentially consists in acknowledging ourselves to be sinners and in praying for grace.

10 Similarly, the other of the two confessions, the one that every Christian makes to his neighbor, is also included in the Lord's Prayer. For here we mutually confess our guilt and our desire for forgiveness to one another [James 5:16] before coming before God and begging for His forgiveness [Matthew 5:23–24]. Now, all of us are guilty of sinning against one another; therefore, we may and should publicly confess this before everyone without shrinking in one another's presence. For what the proverb says is true, "If anyone is perfect, than all are." There is no one at all who fulfills his obligations toward God and his neighbor [Romans 3:10–12]. Besides such universal guilt, there is also the particular guilt of the person who has provoked another to rightful anger and needs to ask his pardon. So we have in the Lord's Prayer a double absolution: there we are forgiven both our offenses against God and those against our neighbor, and there we forgive our neighbor and become reconciled to him.

Besides this public, daily, and necessary confession, there is also the confidential confession that is only made before a single brother. If something particular weighs upon us or troubles us, something with which we keep torturing ourselves and can find no rest, and we do not find our faith to be strong enough to cope with it, then this private form of confession gives us the opportunity of laying the matter before some brother. We may receive counsel, comfort, and strength when and however often we wish. That we should do this is not included in any divine command, as are the other two kinds of confession. Rather, it is offered to everyone who may need it, as an opportunity to be used by him as his need requires. The origin and establishment of private Confession lies in the fact that Christ Himself placed His Absolution into the hands of His Christian people with the command that they should absolve one another of their sins [Ephesians 4:32]. So any heart that feels its sinfulness and desires consolation has here a sure refuge when he hears God's Word and makes the discovery that God through a human being looses and absolves him from his sins.

So notice then, that Confession, as I have often said, consists of two parts. The first is my own work and action, when I lament my sins and desire comfort and refreshment for my soul. The other part is a work that God does when He declares me free of my sin through His Word placed in the mouth of a man. It is this splendid, noble, thing that makes Confession so lovely, so comforting. It used to be that we emphasized it only as our work; all that we were then concerned about was whether our act of confession was pure and perfect in every detail. We paid no attention to the second and most necessary part of Confession, nor did we proclaim it. We acted just as if Confession were nothing but a good work by which payment was to be made to God, so that if the confession was inadequate and not exactly correct in every detail, then the Absolution would not be valid and the sin unforgiven. By this the people were driven to the point where everyone had to despair of making so pure a Confession (an obvious impossibility) and where no one could feel at ease in his conscience or have confidence in his Absolution. So they not only rendered the precious Confession useless to us but also made it a bitter burden [Matthew 23:4] causing noticeable spiritual harm and ruin.

In our view of Confession, therefore, we should sharply separate its two parts far from each other. We should place slight value on our part in it. But we should hold in high and great esteem God's Word in the Absolution part of Confession. We should not proceed as if we intended to perform and offer Him a splendid work, but simply to accept and receive something from Him. You dare not come saying how good or how bad you are. If you are a Christian, I in any case, know well enough that you are. If you are not, I know that even better. But what you must see to is that you lament your problem and that you let yourself be helped to acquire a cheerful heart and conscience.

Moreover, no one may now pressure you with commandments. Rather, what we say is this: Whoever is a Christian or would like to be one is here faithfully advised to go and get the precious treasure. If you are no Christian and do not desire such

- 21 comfort, we shall leave it to another to use force on you. By eliminating all need for the pope's tyranny, command, and coercion, we cancel them with a single sweep. As I have said, we teach that whoever does not go to Confession willingly and for the sake of obtaining the Absolution, he may as well forget about it. Yes, and whoever goes around relying on the purity of his act of making confession, let him stay away.
- 22 Nevertheless, we strongly urge you by all means to make confession of your need, not with the intention of doing a worthy work by confessing but in order to hear what God has arranged for you to be told. What I am saying is that you are to concentrate on the Word, on the Absolution, to regard it as a great and precious and magnificently splendid treasure, and to accept it with all praise and thanksgiving to God.
- 23 If this were explained in detail and if the need that ought to move and lead us to make confession were pointed out, then one would need little urging or coercion. For everyone's own conscience would so drive and disturb him that he would be glad to do what a poor and miserable beggar does when he hears that a rich gift of money or clothing is being handed out at a certain place. So as not to miss it, he would run there as fast as he can and would need no bailiff to beat and drive him on. Now, suppose that in place of the invitation one were to substitute a command to the effect that all beggars should run to that place but would not say why nor mention what they should look for and receive there. What else would the beggar do but make the trip with distaste, without thinking of going to get a gift but simply of letting people see what a poor, miserable beggar he is? This would bring him little joy and comfort but only greater resentment against the command that was issued.
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- 25 In just this way the pope's preachers kept silent in the past about the splendid gift and inexpressible treasure to be had through Confession. All they did was to drive people in crowds to Confession, with no further aim than to let them see what impure, dirty people they were. Who could go willingly to Confession under such circumstances? We, however, do not say that people should look at you to see how filthy you are, using you as a mirror to preen themselves. Rather, we give this counsel: If you are poor and miserable, then go to Confession and make use of its healing medicine. He who feels his misery and need will no doubt develop such a longing for it that he will run toward it with joy. But those who pay no attention to it and do not come of their own accord, we let them go their way. Let them be sure of this, however, that we do not regard them as Christians.
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- 28 So we teach what a splendid, precious, and comforting thing Confession is. Furthermore, we strongly urge people not to despise a blessing that in view of our great need is so priceless. Now, if you are a Christian, then you do not need either my pressuring or the pope's orders, but you will undoubtedly compel yourself to come to
- 29 Confession and will beg me for a share in it. However, if you want to despise it and proudly continue without Confession, then we must draw the conclusion that you are no Christian and should not enjoy the Sacrament either. For you despise what no Christian should despise. In that way you make it so that you cannot have forgiveness of your sins. This is a sure sign that you also despise the Gospel.

To sum it up, we want to have nothing to do with coercion. However, if someone does not listen to or follow our preaching and its warning, we will have nothing to do with him [1 Corinthians 5:11], nor may he have any share in the Gospel. If you were a Christian, then you ought to be happy to run more than a hundred miles to Confession and not let yourself be urged to come. You should rather come and compel us to give you the opportunity. For in this matter the compulsion must be the other way around: we must act under orders, you must come into freedom. We pressure no one, but we let ourselves be pressured, just as we let people compel us to preach to administer the Sacrament.

When I urge you to go to Confession, I am doing nothing else than urging you to be a Christian. If I have brought you to the point of being a Christian, I have thereby also brought you to Confession. For those who really desire to be true Christians, to be rid of their sins, and to have a cheerful conscience already possess the true hunger and thirst. They reach for the bread, just as Psalm 42:1 says of a hunted deer, burning in the heat with thirst, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for You, O God." In other words, as a deer with anxious and trembling eagerness straits toward a fresh, flowing stream, so I yearn anxiously and tremblingly for God's Word, Absolution, the Sacrament, and so forth. See, that would be teaching right about Confession, and people could be given such a desire and love for it that they would come and run after us for it, more than we would like. Let the papists plague and torment themselves and others who pass up the treasure and exclude themselves from it. Let us, however, lift our hands in praise and thanksgiving to God [1 Timothy 2:8] for having graciously brought us to this our understanding of Confession.