

Apology, Article XII (V): Of Repentance

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The year was 1970. The place was Madison, Wisconsin. I was with a group of NWC students who had gone there for a taste of the big city. We made the grand tour up and down State Street, not far from the ruins of the Army Math Research Center, lately blown up with Mark Fassnacht inside. The street was lined with shop after shop appealing to the degenerate (and degenerate wannabes). Immoral publications, godless literature and paraphernalia designed for consumption of illicit chemicals combined to stimulate the old Adam into tachycardia.

Closer to the Square, almost by itself, a diminutive emporium seemed out of place because of the goods it sold and the clientele it appealed to. The first Christian bookstore I had ever seen beckoned us. We went inside and I purchased one item, a \$1.00 button which read: **BOYCOTT HELL! REPENT!**

Possessing the vast theological acumen of a first-year N. W. C. student, I thought little about the shades of meaning the message of this button contained. It had a message and that message fit my faith and understanding. I did not analyze it in the light of Article XII (V) of the Apology. I am certain I not only had never read that article. I doubt I even knew that the Apology existed.

And I was the poorer for it. My button passed into the detritus of college life, along with my beanie and kazoo. But the rich truth God has delivered to us concerning the meaning of repentance and its relationship to “boycotting hell” have remained. The exposition of these truths in Article XII (V) of the Apology is a treasure trove for the evangelical preacher, teacher, student and counselor, not to mention, for each Christian.

Of Repentance

I. The definition of repentance

Article XII (V) of the Apology is Melancthon’s defense of Article XII of the Augsburg Confession. There the Lutheran church affirmed the Scriptural teaching that, “Repentance properly consists 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 from terrors. Good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.”

It should be noted that both Scripture and the confessions use the word “repentance” *stricte dicta* and *late dicta*. *Stricte dicta* it means “contrition.” *Late dicta* it means “contrition and faith.” This paper uses it strictly *late dicta*.

The first part of repentance is contrition, “terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin.” To be contrite is to be afraid, to be filled with dread. “Mortification signifies true terrors, such as those of the dying,” (46).

This terror has a spiritual aspect. “Contrition is the true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin” (29). The contrite heart trembles before the eternal wrath of God. Like the Philippian jailer, it gazes into the chasm of eternity and sees nothing but divine fury, power and retribution. Framed by dread, alarm, fright and panic, the contrite heart quivers, quavers, quails and quakes, shivers, shakes and shudders.

Contrition hurts. Nobody wants it, at least not when they realize what it is. “In these terrors, conscience feels the wrath of God against sin, which is unknown to secure men walking according to their flesh ... it also flees from the dreadful wrath of God, because human nature ... cannot endure it” (34). No one, this side of hell or the goat pen on Judgment Day, has ever, or will ever, experience perfect contrition. Only those who take a dip in the lake of fire know its ultimate terror.

The terror of true contrition concerns our relationship with God. “There is a different repentance, not a true but a false one, which Germans call a *Galgenreue*, when I repent in such a way that I am not ashamed of

having offended God but merely regret having injured myself. Such a repentance is very common. I myself have often repented in this way and deplored having done something foolish, stupid, and to my hurt. I was more ashamed of the stupidity and the harm than of the guilt, of the offense against God. But if we only deplore the harm we have done—that is a repentance which God does not know; nor do our own hearts know it.... For a genuine repentance looks at the wrath of God against sin; with Him it would be reconciled; it flees before the wrath of God. It does not give birth to pains only because of the harm that has been done,” (*What Luther Says*. Volume III, p. 1210).

A secondary aspect of contrition is sorrow over sin. “It [contrition] sees the turpitude of sin, and seriously grieves that it has sinned” (34). This grief comes from the knowledge that the Almighty ought to be revered and obeyed, and that every sin is an offense to Him. The heart feels badly that it has wronged God and is liable for divine punishment.

This sorrow is secondary to fear in contrition. It occurs, and occurs regularly (always in a Christian’s daily repentance). We even define “repentance” as “sorrow over sin and faith in the forgiveness of sins,” (*Luther’s Catechism*, p. 347). Yet the sorrow of contrition cannot be conceived of apart from the initial terror over the knowledge of sin. Becker writes,

“Contrition is often in popular language defined as ‘being sorry for sin.’ This definition, however, is rather vague and subject to a great deal of misunderstanding. Contrition is defined by the dictionaries as the state of being bruised or crushed. This definition is helpful in reminding us that contrition is something done to us rather than something done by us. Often Christians try to be sorry for their sins, as though it were something they had to do, and do not clearly recognize that contrition is something that happens to us when the Holy Spirit through the law convicts us of sin.... Sorrow out of fear is nothing to be proud of,” (“Contrition and Conversion,” in *Our Great Heritage*, pp. 5, 8).

The essence of contrition remains terror. Without fear over the knowledge of sins and its divine consequences, sorrow is as meaningless as the pity of the priest and Levite. Contrition without consequences is no contrition.

The idea of contrition out of love for God crosses the border of the absurd. “By ... griefs and terrors, they [the adversaries] say, men merit grace, provided they love God. But how will men love God in true terrors when they feel the terrible and inexpressible wrath of God?” (34). The terrors of contrition make love for God impossible. Contrition causes a person to be frightened of God, to hide in the bushes in a fig leaf loincloth. Far from producing love, “law brings wrath,” (Ro. 4:15).

So what are we to make of Walther’s words, “By the Gospel the love of God enters a person’s heart, and when contrition proceeds from love of God, it is indeed a truly sweet sorrow, acceptable to God,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 254?) Walther here distinguishes “the daily repentance of Christians from the repentance that precedes faith,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 254). He seems to be saying that because Christians are both sinners and saints, their faith in the Gospel can have an ameliorating effect on the fear inherent in their contrition. The dominant emotion then can become sorrow, based not on terror before the God of judgment, but on the knowledge that we have offended the gracious Lord of our salvation.

While this distinction has validity and value in understanding the sorrow contrite Christians feel, it tends to relegate God’s law to a secondary position in contrition. Walther’s statement stands: “Contrition is solely an effect of the Law,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 250). David was crushed when Nathan said, “You are the man,” not when he said, “The LORD has taken away your sin.”

Contrition takes place in connection with the conscience, the voice of God’s law in man’s heart. The conscience, inscribed with God’s commandments, judges our actions and finds us guilty. The conscience, informed of God’s threats, passes on the bad news to our hearts and gives us the sentence of death.

The terrors of contrition come from the knowledge of *sin*, not of *sins*. “In wicked men, who have lived a long time in sin and shame, the conscience may suddenly become aroused and charge them, for instance, with having perjured themselves. They are seized with palpitating fear because of the consequences. Or their conscience may reprove them with having soiled their hands with the blood of murder. However, these people

are not alarmed because they regard themselves as poor sinners, but it is one particular sin that frightens them. Outside of that they imagine they are good at heart,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 251). “There are many ... villains ... who ... may tell the pastor that they admit being at fault in this, that, or the other thing in which they slipped unavoidably, but they appeal to the fact that they are good at heart. If a pastor is satisfied with a partial contrition of this sort, he treats contrition as a merit, while it is nothing else than the bursting open of an ulcer. When a healing salve is spread on an open wound that still contains pus, the pus will eat deeper into the person, and the wound will not heal,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 252).

Popular radio psychologist Dr. Laura Schlessinger regularly chastises callers who own up to a particular sinful or unwise behavior and declare, “But that’s not me!” She challenges them, “Then who is it?” Contrition recognizes the adulterer in the adultery, the thief in the theft, the liar in the lie.

Contrition is terror because in it a person knows, painfully well, “It is I. I am a lost and condemned creature.” Contrition calls for lights, rushes in and falls trembling, crying in despair; “What must I do to be saved?” Contrition looks backward, sees the sin and sees the reason for it: “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me,” (Psalm 51:5).

Contrition results in despair. It knows no answer to the soul-numbing terror of God’s righteous anger. It finds no relief to the heart-wrenching grief of offending God. It increases exponentially. “To the sorrow of contrition there belongs also this, to sorrow over the fact that we cannot sorrow enough over our sin,” (*Examen*, p. 582).

This despair is necessary. “Just as those who neither know nor feel their sickness do not care about or seek a remedy, so no one sufficiently cares about, no one earnestly and tightly seeks and embraces the grace and mercy of God which is offered in Christ, except the one who has been rendered contrite and terrified through recognition, feeling, and trembling because of his sins and the wrath of God against sins,” (*Examen*, 583).

Do we hesitate to scare people? Are we reluctant to strike hearts with the terrors of conscience? Do we put hellfire on the back burner? It is not that we always have to be aware of terrors of conscience, either in our own contrition or the contrition of others. But do we always see the need for terrors? When it comes to contrition, the thing we need to fear is no fear itself.

Perhaps, like me, you have personally experienced the fear of contrition. I can hardly read Mt. 5:22 (KJV), “Whosoever shall say [to his brother], Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire,” without the shudder I felt the first time I called my brother Don a fool. I thought I had sealed my eternal fate as firmly as the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Since I cannot get arrested for being able to swim, I tremble at the picture of a millstone around my neck, dragging me to the bottom of the Mariana Trench (Mt. 18:6).

We see this fear-full contrition many times in Scripture. Adam and Eve hid in terror. David confessed after Nathan threatened him. Hezekiah describes his contrition in Isa 38:10-14: “I said, ‘In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?’ I said, ‘I will not again see the LORD, the LORD, in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind or be with those who now dwell in this world. Like a shepherd’s tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heaven. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!’” Peter did experience sorrow, but a sorrow mixed with fear. He knew also the words of Christ in Mt 10:32, “Whoever disowns me before me, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

Contrition serves a valuable purpose, but by itself it is worthless. It is nothing more than the sound of one hand clapping. It makes a person Judas or Saul, desperate in terror of heart and mind, destined for eternal terrors. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death,” (2 Cor. 7:10). “He who fears hell goes to hell,” (*What Luther Says*, Volume 3, p. 1499).

To contrition must be added faith. “The parts of repentance are contrition and faith,” (1). Faith changes servile fear to filial fear. “Filial fear can be clearly defined as such anxiety as has been connected with faith, i.e., where faith consoles and sustains the anxious heart. It is servile fear when faith does not sustain the anxious heart [fear without faith, where there is nothing but wrath and doubt],” (38).

Faith receives the forgiveness of sins—and sin. Faith lays hold of the full removal of all that terrified and threatened. It believes that God no longer finds the person guilty of a single misdeed, and further, that God considers the person holy and righteous, in perfect fulfillment of all His laws and commands, and so fully qualified for eternal glory and bliss. “To blot out the handwriting is to expunge this sentence by which we declare that we will be condemned, and to engrave the sentence according to which we know that we have been freed from this condemnation. But faith is the new sentence, which reverses the former sentence, and gives peace and life to the heart,” (48).

Faith does not produce or create or engender this divine pardon. “That by which the remission of sins is received [faith] is correctly added to repentance,” (63). God does not forgive because we believe. God’s forgiveness gives us something to believe.

Faith, and faith alone, distinguishes between the impenitent remorse of Judas and the Penitent fear and sorrow of Peter. “This faith shows the distinction between the contrition of Judas and Peter, of Saul and of David. The contrition of Judas or Saul is of no avail, for the reason that to this there is not added this faith, which apprehends the remission of sins, bestowed as a gift for Christ’s sake. Accordingly, the contrition of David or Peter avails, because to it there is added faith, which apprehends the remission of sins granted for Christ’s sake,” (36)

Just as contrition need not be perceived to be present, so also faith can exist in the heart of a person whose lips cry out, “I don’t know if I am a believer.” Our goal as pastors is not that an individual necessarily recognize his or her faith, but that an individual have faith. One pastor, after having a member despair repeatedly over his inability to discern his faith, finally told him, “To hell with your faith.” From there he was able to lead him to the object of his faith, which the person had trusted in to begin with.

Article XII of the Augsburg Confession states that “repentance consists properly of these two parts: one is contrition ... the other is faith.” To these it adds a third, though it is not properly part of repentance. “Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.” The Apology goes further: “If anyone desires to add a third, namely, fruits worthy of repentance, *i.e.*, a change of the entire life and character for the better, we will not make any opposition,” (28).

Although a person (like Judas) can be contrite without faith, no one can have faith without fruits, Jn. 2:26 notwithstanding. Rather, Jesus says that all who remain in Him will bear much fruit, Jn. 15:5. Penitent sinners, by definition, produce the fruits of repentance. “Somewhere Luther says that you need not tell a Christian that he should love the Lord just as you need not tell a pear tree to bear pears,” (“Christian Liberty,” in *WELS Proceedings—1983*, p. 186).

That the fruits of repentance must be motivated by faith cannot be emphasized enough. Any other impulse for them, such as atonement for shame, pity for the person wronged, desire to appear righteous in the eyes of others or fear of God’s anger, is outright legalism. We can never in any way make up for a single sin. “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law,” (Ro. 3:20). “We love because he first loved us,” (1 Jn. 4:19). “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love,” (Gal 5:6). “The fruit of the Spirit is love,” (Gal 5:22).

At the same time, those who, sorrowful from tenors of conscience and motivated by faith in full and free divine forgiveness, want to produce fruits are given a guide to follow. To produce proper fruits of repentance requires a dear understanding of and faithful application of the law in its third use. For example, the penitent thief is told, “He who has been stealing must steal no more, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need,” (Eph 4:28).

“Repentance calls for proper fruits. Scripture does not outline these in detail for every situation.... The term ‘fruit’ implies willingness and a degree of spontaneity. Fruit produced without legal compulsion. Hence we find that Scripture has not set up a code book that specifies the exact form which fruit of repentance must take in the case of every sin. But broad principles can be recognized:

Fruit of repentance is to desist from the sin for which one repents.

Fruit of repentance is to restore, if possible, what sin has ruined.

Fruit of repentance is to amend one's sinful life, to replace evil with good.

Fruit of repentance is to do all to the glory of God, whether we eat or drink, or work or play,"

("Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage! in *Our Great Heritage*, Volume III, p. 371).

II. The Production of Repentance

"Contrition is not something we manufacture; it is something we suffer," (*Studies in the Augsburg Confession*, p. 157). God works contrition in us. The old Adam has no innate fear of God. It lives and produces its thorns and thistles without thought, much less dread, for the consequences. God imposes contrition on us.

The Holy Spirit "convict[s] the world of guilt," (Jn. 16:8). Isaiah describes it in this way: "The LORD will rise up ... to do his work, his strange work, and perform his alien task," (Isa. 28:21). "He calls it the strange work of the Lord when He terrifies, because to quicken and to console is God's own work," (51). That God also produces faith in no way alters the fact that He produces terror. "The two chief works of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify," (53).

To create this spiritual terror God uses the law. "Contrition takes place ... when sins are censured by the Word of God, because the sum of the preaching of the Gospel (*late dicta!*) is this, namely, to convict of sin," (29). "The Law only accuses and terrifies," (34).

Luther states, "(The Law) is the thunderbolt of God by which He strikes in a heap both manifest sinners and false saints, and suffers no one to be in the right, but drives them all together to terror and despair. This is the hammer, as Jeremiah says, 23, 29: 'is not My Word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' This is not *activa contritio* or manufactured repentance, but *passiva contritio*, true sorrow of heart, suffering and sensation of death. This then is what it means to begin true repentance; and here man must hear such a sentence as this: You are all of no account, whether you be manifest sinners or saints; you all must become different and do otherwise than you now are and doing, whether you are as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you may. Here no one is godly," (Smalcald Articles, III/III, 2-3).

God's law is objective and universal. It applies to a person whether he knows and accepts it or not. Blindness of heart or callousness of conscience offer no excuse or exception. It applies to all people of all time. Through it God purposes to create in all a crushing fear and heart-rending sorrow, to drive all to "say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" By law, God sends terror, sorrow and utter despair.

As little as contrition is self-made, so also is faith. "When we believe our hearts are quickened by the Holy Spirit," (44). As little as a dead battery can recharge itself, so little can a heart, mortified by sin and its accompanying terrors, sorrow and despair, raise itself to the life of faith. This is God's work in us.

The Holy Spirit creates the faith of repentance by the Gospel. "in these terrors the Gospel concerning Christ ought to be set forth to the conscience, in which Gospel the remission of sins is freely promised concerning Christ," (35). "God truly quickens through the Word," (40).

Ministers of the gospel of repentance need to take special note of this. "it is a mistake that we so easily make: we imagine that we must 'sell' the gospel, that with our logic and with our rhetoric we can make it more effective. But no, the power is altogether of God and not of us. All our brilliant persuasion does not add one ounce of strength to the Word. We with all our winsome talk are but as clay jars, which add nothing of value to the treasure they contain. It is the word of the gospel alone that creates faith in a despairing heart. How could human persuasiveness overcome the terrors which the mighty God struck into the heart of a sinner?" (*Studies in the Augsburg Confession*, p. 159).

The gospel communicates to us the work of Christ. "For a terrified conscience cannot set against God's wrath our works or love, but it is at length pacified when it apprehends Christ as Mediator, and believes the promises given for His sake. For those who dream that without faith in Christ hearts become pacified, do not understand what the remission of sins is, or how it came to us," (64). "Therefore, we receive the remission of sins only through the name of Christ, *i.e.*, for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of any merits or works of our own," (65).

The Gospel is objective. "Let pious consciences know that the command of God is this, that they believe that they are freely forgiven for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our own works," (72). "As to the conditions on which absolution is said to depend we must say: the absolution rests neither on self-aroused contrition nor on true contrition worked by the Holy Ghost through the Law, neither on the confession of all sins before men nor on any sort of human satisfaction. Absolution is based solely on the fact of world reconciliation by the perfect satisfaction of Christ and on the divine command in Christ's name to proclaim the remission of sins provided by Him. And this proclamation of forgiveness for Christ's sake, in no wise affected by human worthiness or unworthiness, the hearers are to believe," (*Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, p. 194). "For as God swears that He does not wish the death of a sinner [Eze 33:11], He shows that faith is required, in order that we may believe the one swearing, and be firmly confident that He forgives us. The authority of the divine promises ought by itself to be great in our estimation. But this promise has also been confirmed by an oath. Therefore, if any one be not confident that he is forgiven he denies that God has sworn what is true, than which a more horrible blasphemy cannot be imagined," (94). "Man does not see the absolute necessity of universal grace so long as the terrors of conscience have not yet seized his heart. But when his conscience is truly terrified (feels the *terrores conscientiae*), he will find nothing consoling but the grace that avails without any limitation for all sinners, which, as Luther expresses it, is meant no less for the malefactor than for St. Peter, no less for the harlot than for the Holy Virgin," (*Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, p. 482).

Here we welcome the change in the wording of the general absolution in *Christian Worship*. In the *Lutheran Hymnal*, the minister began the absolution with these words: "Upon this your confession," (*TLH*, p. 16). Although these words could be understood correctly, some also saw in them an absolution conditioned on human confession (and the contrition behind it).

The proclamation of the gospel is the ministry of the keys. "The power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel," (39).

The thought follows that absolution may be a sacrament. "Absolution properly can be called the sacrament of repentance," (41). "If we call sacraments rites which have the command of God, and to which the promise of grace has been added, it is easy to decide what are properly sacraments.... Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance, are truly sacraments. For these rites have God's command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament. For when we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts must be firmly assured that God truly forgives us for Christ's sake. And God, at the same time, by the Word and by the rite, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith," (Apology XII (VII), 3-5).

The blessed result of this gospel-inspired faith in the justifying work of Christ is peace. "A terrified conscience ... is at length pacified when it apprehends Christ as Mediator, and believes the promises given for His sake," (64). "Faith follows terrors in such a manner as to overcome them, and render the conscience pacified. To this faith we ascribe justification and regeneration, inasmuch as it frees from terrors, and brings forth in the heart not only peace and joy, but also a new life," (60).

The "punishments" that follow repentance draw our attention. "Here [with David] a punishment is also added, but this punishment does not merit the remission of sins. Nor are special punishments always added Worthy fruits and punishments {likewise, patience that we be willing to bear the cross, and punishment, which God lays upon the old Adam} follow regeneration and the remission of sin," (56, 58). God, according to His inscrutable will and by His unfathomable love, allows and sends earthly reminders of sin as chastisements to and opportunities for the repentant. They do not punish, at least not in the sense that by them sin is atoned. Caring for the child born out of wedlock, the liver diseased by alcohol, the rift caused by anger remind the sufferers and others that sin has consequences.

Christian repentance never attains perfection in contrition, faith or fruits. "In Christians this repentance continues until death, because, through the entire life it contends with sin remaining the flesh, as Paul testifies that he wars with the law in his members, and that, not by his own powers, but by the gift of the Holy Ghost that follows the remission of sins. This gift daily cleanses and sweeps out the remaining sins, and works so as to render man truly pure and holy," (Smalcald Articles, III/III, 40). "[It] does not mean that those terrors are

banished from our hearts completely, never to return. That will not happen till we reach our home in heaven. While we continue here on earth, sin will daily beset us, and the law of God, which we violate with our sins, will continue to strike terrors into our heart. But painful though these terrors be, they shall not prevail; they shall not dominate,” (*Studies in the Augsburg Confession*, p. 160). “One of the principal reasons why many at this point mingle Law and Gospel is that they fail to distinguish the daily repentance of Christians from the repentance which precedes faith. Daily repentance is described in Ps. 51. David calls it a sacrifice which he brings before God and with which God is pleased. He does not speak of repentance which precedes faith, but of that which follows it. The great majority of sincere Christians who have the pure doctrine have a keener experience of repentance after faith than of repentance prior to faith. For, having good preachers, they have been led to Christ in no roundabout way. While they are with Christ, their former self-righteousness may make its appearance gain, in spite of the fact that it has been shattered for them many a time. God must smite these poor Christians again and again to keep them humble,” (*Law and Gospel*, p. 254).

The words of Themistocles strike a chord in the Christian’s heart. “When Simonides offered to teach the Athenian statesman Themistocles the art of Memory, Cicero reports that he refused. ‘Teach me not the art of remembering,’ he said, ‘but the art of forgetting, for I remember things I do not wish to remember, but I cannot forget things I wish to forget,’” (*The Discoverers*, p. 487). “Regret, the little black dog of a belated repentance, does not stop barking and biting the conscience, even though you know that your sins are forgiven,” (*What Luther Says*. Volume III, p. 1214). Only through faith do we hold on to God’s promise in Isa. 43:25, “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

III. Roman Catholic Errors

Since the Apology was written as a defense of the Augsburg Confession to the Confutation, the tone, direction and much of the content of Article XII (V) has to do with differentiating the Lutheran teaching from the Roman Catholic AC XII contained a scant nineteen words rejecting Roman Catholic error. The Apology contains little else.

The basic conception of what repentance is requires elucidation. Roman Catholicism sees it essentially as a church rite, the sacrament of penance, involving a prescribed ceremony and needing the actions of a priest to make it valid. Lutheranism sees it as an individual experience, an activity of the soul under the influence of God’s Word, having as its essence a change of heart regarding sin and salvation, with a resultant sanctification of life. The outward rite can be a means of bringing God’s Word to bear on the soul. But without a change of heart there can be no repentance.

We see the first errors of Roman Catholic teaching in contrition. “Papists talk about contrition as a blind man talks about color; they have never experienced a salutary terror on account of their sins,” (*Law and Gospel*. P. 241). Rather, they teach that contrition must come from love for God. “Contrition or sorrow is more than a moral hang-over, more than fear, remorse or disgust, more than the feeling of having done something despicable. Contrition includes the realization of having offended against the love of God. I have violated something that is not entirely my own. I have offended some God who loves me,” (*A New Catechism*. p. 462).

This contrition, when perfect, is considered meritorious. “it [the synod] teaches, furthermore, that although it may be that this contrition sometimes is perfect through charity and reconciles a man with God before he actually receives this sacrament, reconciliation is nevertheless not to be ascribed to such contrition without desire for the sacrament, which is included in it,” (“Concerning Contrition, Chapter IV, Council of Trent,” *Examen* p. 580). “The adversaries say that sin is remitted, because an attrite or contrite person elicits an act of love to God and by this act merits to receive the remission of sins,” (75).

Attrition is imperfect contrition. “Since no one could now how great the contrition ought to be in order to be sufficient before God, they gave this consolation: He who could not have contrition, at least ought to have attrition, which I may call half a contrition or the beginning of contrition; for they have themselves understood neither of these terms, nor do they understand them now, as little as I. Such attrition was reckoned as contrition when a person went to confession. And when it happened that any one said that he could not have contrition nor

lament his sins (as might have occurred in illicit love or the desire of revenge, etc.), they asked whether he did not wish or desire to have contrition. When one would reply Yes (for who, save the devil himself, would here say No?), they accepted this as contrition, and forgave him his sins on account of this good work of his,” (Smalcald Articles, III/III, 16-17). “With respect to imperfect contrition, which is called attrition, since it is commonly conceived either from a consideration of the turpitude of sin or from the fear of hell and punishments, the synod declares that if, with the hope of pardon, it renounces the will to sin, it not only does not make a man a hypocrite but is in fact a gift of God and impulse of the Holy Spirit, who does not, indeed, as yet dwell in him but is only moving him; by Him the penitent person is aided and prepares for himself the way to righteousness. And although this, without the sacrament of penance, cannot by itself lead the sinner through to justification, it nevertheless disposes him to obtain the grace of God in the sacrament of penance,” (“Concerning Contrition, Chapter IV, Council of Trent,” *Examen*, p. 580).

The attrite sinner as yet has no forgiveness. He must go to confession and enumerate his sins. “What a work there is in the endless enumeration of sins, which is nevertheless, in great part, devoted to those against human traditions! And in order that good minds may by this means be the more tortured, they falsely assert that the enumeration is by divine right,” (11). “The faithful are bound to confess, in kind and in number, all grave sins committed after baptism, of which after careful examination of conscience they are aware, which have not yet been directly pardoned by the keys of the church, and which have not been confessed in an individual confession,” (*The Code of Canon law*, p 178).

The next error concerns the power of repentance. ‘they falsely assert that the Sacrament itself confers grace *ex opere operato*, without a good disposition on the part of the one using it; no mention is made of faith apprehending the absolution and consoling the conscience,” (12).

The power of repentance lies in satisfactions. “The third act remains, concerning satisfactions. But this contains the most confused discussion. They imagine that eternal punishments are commuted to the punishments of purgatory, and teach that a part of these is remitted by the power of the keys, and that a part is to be redeemed by means of satisfactions,” (13). “The confessor is to impose salutary and appropriate penances, in proportion to the kind and number of sins confessed, taking into account, however, the condition of the penitent. The penitent is bound personally to fulfill these penances,” (*Code of Canon Law*. Canon 981, p. 177). “Aim indulgence is the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due for sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven. A member of Christ’s faithful who is properly disposed and who fulfills certain specific conditions, may gain an indulgence by the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the merits of Christ and the Saints,” (*Code of Canon Law*, Canon 992, p. 179).

Amazingly (or perhaps, to be expected), the *Code of Canon Law* has seven pages on the Sacrament of Penance, yet it barely mentions absolution. And when it does, it never connects it with Christ. Rather, their teaching denies the work of Christ. “They deny that faith is the second part of repentance.... The very voice of the Gospel is this, that by faith we obtain the remission of sins.... We cannot condemn the voice of the Gospel, so salutary and abounding in comfort. What else is the denial that by faith we obtain remission of sins than to treat the blood and death of Christ with scorn?” (2). “What need is there of Christ if we obtain remission of sins because of our own work?” (75).

Melancthon summarizes Roman Catholic errors in sections 1 7-27.

The source of these errors is the false foundation of tradition. “Our adversaries cry out that they are the Church, that they are following the consensus of the Church. But Peter ... cites in our issue the consensus of the Church: ‘To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins,’ etc. The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal,” (66).

Conclusion

The irenic Melancthon of the Augsburg Confession emerged from the chrysalis of the Confutation as an apologetic (even polemic) Melancthon, not by nature, but by necessity. “These dissensions in the Church do not delight us; wherefore, if we did not have great and necessary reasons for dissenting from the adversaries, we would with the greatest pleasure be silent. But now, since they condemn the manifest truth, it is not right for us to desert a cause which is not our own, but is that of Christ and the Church,” (90).

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