

THE VALUE OF CONFESSION

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The Value of Confession by Selden Peabody Delany

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SELDEN PEABODY DELANY

**THE VALUE
OF CONFESSION**

The Value of Confession

BY

Selden Peabody Delany

DEAN OF ALL SAINTS' CATHEDRAL

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

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INTRODUCTION

The natural instinct of normal-minded people is to share with their friends and with mankind in general any good thing they have discovered. If we have been stimulated or inspired by a book or a play, for example, we hasten to tell our friends about it. It would be inhuman to keep it to ourselves.

There is no reason why this principle should not apply to religious practices which we have found helpful and satisfying. Would you not feel grateful to any man who had made a thorough trial of some religious practice unknown or untried by you, and found it helpful, if he should tell you about it? Most people would. Therefore it is here proposed to take up sacramental confession from this standpoint. There are many Christians who have found it a practice well worth while. They are convinced that one's religious experience must be meagre and incomplete without it. Therefore they hasten to commend it to their friends.

This little book is an attempt to express the value

of sacramental confession, as felt by such people, in the hope of commending the practice to their friends.

At once the question arises, how may we best commend it? Shall we seek to show that it is the mind of the Church, as set forth in her official formularies, that we should thus make use of the power of absolution which Christ committed to His ministers? Or shall we appeal to history to prove that this practice has prevailed in the Church from the very beginning,—at first in the form of public confession before the whole congregation, and later in the form of private confession before the priest as representative of the Church? Or shall we select such texts in the Bible as may rightly be adduced as showing that confession is in accord with the Divine plan of salvation?

No, we may be quite sure that none of these is the best way of commending the practice of confession to-day. The modern mind is strangely impervious to the appeal to authority. You may tell people that the Church says they must do this and must not do that, or that the Bible commands it; and they will look at you with a dazed, pitying expression, and remain unmoved. You may even appeal to the tradition of nineteen centuries of Christian experience; and they will retort that they cannot see why they should do as their fathers have done in religion, when they have (so they think) progressed beyond the ways of their fathers in everything else. No, the only appeal that is likely to have any effect to-day is what may be called the prag-

matic appeal. One man urges another to take up the practice of confession, because he can testify from his own experience that it works. This experience is corroborated by the experience of thousands of our fellow men and women to-day. They have found confession peculiarly adapted to their deepest spiritual needs.

Similar testimony to the value of confession is often heard to-day from those who have never tried it. They cannot say that they have found it to work; but they do say they think it ought to work. Such testimony comes from the most unexpected sources. Some years ago people were wont to dismiss the subject very briefly by saying, "Oh, I have no use for confession; only Catholics go to confession." But now we are continually reading in the newspapers that some prominent Protestant leader has come out in favor of confession. At a recent convention of the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavor in California, for example, the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon, an eminent Congregational preacher and writer, said that Protestantism should restore the confessional. A few years ago the following appeared in the editorial columns of the leading weekly of the Unitarians, *The Christian Register*:

"The question is asked whether Methodism has a confessional or not. Of course it has; every family, every church, every community, has need of a confessional more or less organized and properly conducted. Roman Catholics are human beings, like the rest of us, and Protestants blunder greatly when they reject every-