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August 9, 2015: The Need for Forgiveness

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Title: The Need for Forgiveness

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8/9/2015—I was reading today in the Pittsburgh Catholic newspaper a short story about how Pope Francis is urging Catholics to go to confession, which is a practice that has gone out-of-favor in many parts of the Roman Catholic world. It was interesting to me the reason that Pope Francis gave for why he believes people are staying away from confession. Pope Francis believes that people are ashamed of what they had done. The question is whether non-religiously observant people have a need for forgiveness and how that need might be satisfied. The emphasis by Pope Francis on shame answers one objection from the nonreligious world. Pope Francis is not particularly concerned, apparently, with getting people to confess so-called sins, such as loving gay relationships, which particular Catholics do not believe are sinful. Obviously, although it is true that a gay Catholic would not feel the need to go to confession about such a relationship, the reason would not be shame. The reason would be that there is nothing to confess. Pope Francis is concerned about something else entirely, something that we tend to forget. We do bad things. We do bad things all the time. The bad things that we do all the time are inexcusable. We hurt the ones we love all the time. And we lack concern for those whom we do not know all the time. Now, how is a person to deal with such a circumstance? From Pope Francis's perspective, such a person, which is all of us, goes to confession, confronts the evil, his own evil, and is forgiven. But the structure of this particular forgiveness – – Pope Francis says that the confessing person does not confront angry judgment but a forgiving merciful father – – is not without a norm. Yes, I am forgiven for doing wrong, but I am drawn to acknowledge that I have done wrong. Even though I am likely to repeat the wrong, and even though I will be forgiven again, and even though I know that is the case, I still must admit in confession that I have done something wrong. It is this very characteristic, that is, the admission of wrongdoing, that I find utterly lacking outside the religious communities. The inability to acknowledge our own wrongs is killing us. It is a part of the great falseness and lie that seem to be at the heart of American life.