

QUO VADIS

SACRAMENTS OF HEALING: PART 1

Where are you going?



"DO NOT SAY, 'I AM ONLY A YOUTH'; FOR TO ALL TO WHOM I SEND YOU YOU SHALL GO, AND WHATEVER I COMMAND YOU SHALL SPEAK."

Jeremiah 1:6

CONFESSION, OR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

By Peter Rowe

One of the most common questions we are asked by our Protestant brothers is, "Why do you confess your sins to a priest?" This belief, that God alone can forgive sins, is one of the fundamental disagreements between the Catholic Church and Protestants. Or is it?

First, in both the Lutheran and Anglican traditions, confession to a pastor has been retained in a revised form. I have known more than one Protestant who committed a serious sin and received great consolation from reconciliation. Many Catholic priests speak of non-catholics and even non-Christians who received great help from confessing, but without absolution. It is my belief that many people go to

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Psychiatrists and Psychotherapists because of profound feelings of guilt. As Christians, we know that guilt is not *necessarily* a bad thing: there is bad guilt, say, in a person struggling with the spiritual illness of scrupulosity, over sins he never committed or an exaggeration of sins he did commit. But if somebody robs a bank at gunpoint, if he is spiritually healthy, he will feel tremendous guilt.

POPE QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**BY THE VERY FACT THAT IT
IMPARTS OR INCREASES GRACE,
THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE
OFFERS THE GIFT OF PEACE.**

JOHN PAUL II

The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the Sacrament of Reconciliation was instituted on the first Easter, when He told the Apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are

retained" (John 20: 22-23) (Q 298).

It must be understood that Confession has evolved over the years. At first, public sins, such as idolatry, apostasy, murder or adultery, were given absolution only after severe penance (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1447). Over time, the monastic practice of auricular confession came about to the more common form now present in the Church.

This is not to say that Confession to a priest of less serious sins did not occur. William Jurgens records several in his landmark *Faith of the Early Fathers*.

Tertullian clearly teaches that reconciliation can be had for these kinds of sins multiple times (in Jurgens' series, #'s 314 and 317). The Apostolic Constitutions say, "If you sin again, repent again; and as often as you sin, come to me and I will heal you" (Jurgens # 1230). Salaman Hermes Sozomen Scholastikos writes, "Because to be entirely without sin belongs more to divine than to human nature, God has decreed that pardon is to

be extended to those who repent even after many transgressions. Since in asking pardon it is necessary to confess the sin, it seems likely that from the very beginning priests saw that it was burdensome for the people to confess their sins in public and with the whole church as witness. So they appointed a presbyter who could conduct himself with the utmost self-control and prudence to be in charge of this. It was to him that the penitents went to confess their transgressions. His was the task of assessing the penalty that had to be exacted for each sin and, when satisfaction had been made, of absolving them." (Jurgens # 2165b.)

What is absolutely clear and was taught by many of the Church Fathers is that the Catholic Church has the power to absolve from sin. Tertullian, Cyprian, Pope Stephen I, Hilary of Poitiers, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine among others clearly teach this.

How about our Protestant brothers? Is it not God alone who can forgive sins? The faithful Catholic says, "Amen, we believe that too". Paragraph 1441 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his

name." We believe, as Catholics that through the ministry of the priests through the bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles, we can receive forgiveness of our sins which confess.

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Current discipline in the Catholic Church is that one must confess all of their mortal sins before receiving communion (1 Corinthians 11: 27).

Let me explain Confession. First, one begins with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the sins that we have committed. There are two kinds of sin: mortal, and venial. What exactly is a mortal sin? A mortal sin is something that directly violates the commandments, is done

with full knowledge and full consent (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* par. 1854-1859). Suicide is a mortal sin, objectively speaking. But say the person who commits struggles from a mental illness, such as Bipolar disorder, commits suicide in an impeded mental state? Just as society has mercy on those who are mentally ill when they commit a crime, God knows and has compassion on someone who sins out of weakness as well. We discern our sins with an Examination of Conscience, which is a list of the commandments and several ways of breaking them according to the Catholic catechetical tradition. (For Catholics, one can break the commandment by violating the principle of the commandment. For example, masturbation is a sin against the Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which has behind it the principle of sexual chastity.) The Alliance of the Two Hearts, a Catholic lay group, put out an excellent Examination of Conscience for youth at their 2008 Eucharistic Youth Congress in San Antonio, Texas. There are two major sections of the Ten Commandments in the Catholic tradition: the first is the first three commandments of the Decalogue, under, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The second seven commandments are under, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

After invoking the Holy Spirit, we read the first commandment, "You shall not have any gods before Me." The Second is "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain. The Alliance's examination of conscience will bring up: blasphemy, abuse of God's Name, speaking ill of God, words of hatred, reproach or defiance, magical use of the divine Name, profane words, perjury, curse, false oaths." At the 6th commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," proscribed are: lust, masturbation, pornography, fornication, divorce, concubines, rape, prostitution, incest, acting on homosexual/lesbian tendencies among a lot of other things. All those things which are mortal sins, we bring them before the priest. Yes, one must confess *all known mortal sins* and failure to do so is considered sacrilege, another mortal sin and we would have to confess them all over

SCRIPTURE QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound they are held bound.”

John 20:23

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Sacraments in Scripture

By Tim Gray

Sacraments in Scripture delves into the biblical foundations of the sacraments, the seven masterpieces of God's love. Tim Gray guides readers through the Gospels, showing Christ's deliberate acts to inaugurate these sacred signs of the New Covenant. With review questions at the end of each chapter, this study is ideal for both group and individual use, and is perfect for learning how to answer contemporary objections to the sacraments.

Sacraments in Scripture is available from the Coming Home Network at 740-450-1175 or www.chresources.com

CHURCH FATHERS QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"[A final method of forgiveness], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who say, 'I said, "To the Lord I will accuse myself of my iniquity"' (Homilies on Leviticus 2:4 [A.D. 248]).

**Origen [185-254 AD] De
Principiis (Book IV)**

again. But I understand the apprehension, especially of young people. "What if the priest tells my parents?" One of my friends, who has been active for years in youth ministry, tells of how he used to hide a sin in confession because he worried that the priest would do just that, as the priest was often at the family dinner table. I assure you, the Priest is *absolutely forbidden for any reason whatsoever to reveal anything he learns in the Sacrament of Reconciliation*. "A confessor who directly violates the seal of confession incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See" (*Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church, 1388*). This means that not only will the priest be defrocked, that is, expelled from the Priesthood, he is also excommunicated with the highest form of excommunication: an excommunication that only the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, can give absolution from.

Not only is somebody obligated to confess all their mortal sins, they should tell the priest any circumstances that makes the sin worse or alleviates guilt. A person struggling with clinical depression is not guilty of mortal sin if she has suicidal ideations and struggles to avoid them. However, to rob a Church or a homeless man out of his last dollar makes the sin that much more grievous. A venial sin - or even something ordinarily not a sin, like gambling - can become mortal if one is gambling away the rent money.

We must be truly sorry. If we are confessing with the intent to commit the sin again, then we are also guilty of sacrilege. But if we are confessing a sin very hard to break from, then our confession is valid. Also, if we are guilty of something such as stealing, we must resolve and follow through by returning the stolen goods. If we have destroyed somebody's name, we must try to repair the damage to the best of our ability.

Then there is the penance imposed by the Priest. The value of this penance is medicinal, and it helps us grow so we can sin no more. We also may have temporal punishments due to our sin (This is where indulgences come into play, an issue this article is not an attempt to even begin to deal with).

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One's first confession after entering the Church can be a very transformative event in our lives. It can also be a challenge to a convert who is confessing for the first time. My advice is

simple: do not be afraid! It is Christ who welcomes us to receive His merciful forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

CONFESSION

Mary Clare Pieczynski

Have you ever wondered where Catholics get the strange idea of confession? Have you ever been curious why Catholics head into a small room and reveal their deepest sins to another sinful person? What a strange thing to do-tell your sins to a man who says that your sins are forgiven. Isn't God the only one who can forgive sins? If you don't completely understand the strange phenomenon of Catholics confessing their sins to a priest, then this short essay is aimed at giving you a brief explanation and rational for why Catholics bother confessing their sins to a priest instead of going directly to God, the one who actually forgives the sins anyway.

First of all, while the Catholic Church professes that only God has the power

to forgive sins, it likewise affirms that Christ, as God Incarnate, "by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1441). The Catholic practice of confession is directly grounded in Jesus' own command to His apostles "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

Moreover, it makes sense for priests to forgive sins because the priests carry on the work of the apostles, who were sent to further Christ's mission, Christ said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). An essential component to Christ's mission was the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, since Christ gave the apostles the ability to carry on His mission, this mission

includes the task to forgive sins. Jesus himself said, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). Just as the apostles were to carry Christ's message to the whole world, so they were to carry his forgiveness. Logically then, if the apostles have the ability to either forgive sins or not they first have to know what they are. This is why Catholics verbally tell their sins to a priest.

Sure, you might ask, but did the early Christians really take Jesus' words to mean what the Catholic Church teaches today? A brief look at the New Testament reveals that yes, confession was practiced even among the early Christian community. 1 John reads, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In addition, James teaches that Christians should "confess therefore your sins one to

another." (James 5:16). Also, St Paul writes of the awesome gift God gave us in confession, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

In summary, the Catholic Church's position on confession is firmly grounded in Christ's own words and seen in the earliest traditions of the Church.

CATECHISM QUOTE OF THE MONTH

The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1421



Are you a teen or young adult on the journey into the Catholic Church?

Quo Vadis exists to provide fellowship and support to all youth who wish to draw closer to Jesus Christ and His One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, especially the youth of converting Protestant clergy or lay people.

For more information please contact
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“I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.”

Psalm 40

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