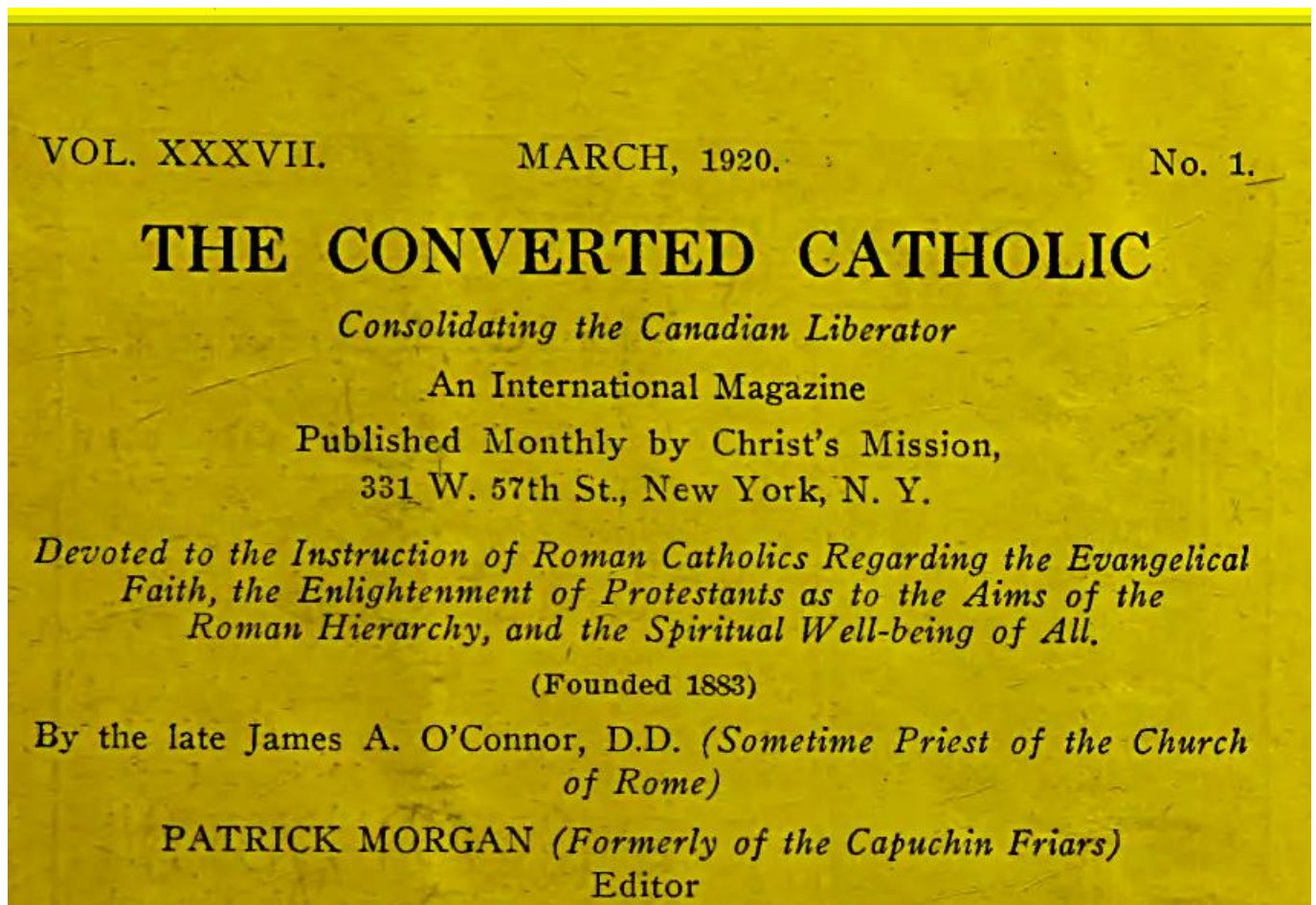


# Do You Confess Your Sins To A Priest?



This is from a March 1920 publication of the *Converted Catholic Magazine* which is not found in the Lutheran Library. If you were raised a Catholic like I was, I think you will enjoy this article because it contains some insights I never knew until today!



The cover of the 1920 Converted Catholic Magazine,

# **Do You Confess Your Sins To A Priest?**

BY G. R. MACFAUL, M.A., OTTAWA, CANADA.

Do you feel under obligation to confess your sins to a priest? Here are some sound reasons why you should not "go to confession." You should not confess to a priest.

## **Because You Have Not Sinned Against the Priest**

Think of how foolish a man would be who would come and kneel before you and ask you to forgive him when he had never wronged you. Should he not go and confess his sin to the person against whom he had transgressed? Think of the foolish position your priest puts you in when he obliges you to kneel before him and utter the following prayer, called the "Confiteor": "I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints, and to you, Father, that I have sinned exceedingly," etc.

The first part of this prayer is sound advice. It is right to confess one's sin to Almighty God, because all men have sinned against Him; but why should you confess your sins to Mary and Michael and John the Baptist, and the Apostles Peter and Paul, and to all the saints, and to the priest? If you have not sinned against all these, why should you confess to them? If you have, in any way, injured or wronged your priest, go and confess to him your fault, and if he is a Christian man he will forgive you; but sins you have committed against God, your Heavenly Father alone can forgive you.

## **Because Confession to a Priest is of Human Origin**

There are some old people in Canada. They accept the teachings that have been invented by men hundreds of years after the beginning of the Christian Church, but they refuse to follow the teachings of Christ and the apostles as found in the New Testament. They obey the commandments of men, but disobey the commandments of God. Are you one of this class?

The Roman Catholic Church declares that the priest has power to forgive sins. A Roman Catholic leaflet, entitled "The Priest," on pages 21-23, has the following declaration: "What is a priest? A man who holds the place of God, a man clothed with all the power of God. ... When the priest forgives our sins he does not say, 'God forgives you.' He says, 'I absolve thee.' ... If you were to confess your sins to the blessed Virgin, or to an angel, could they absolve you? A legion of angels, were they here with you now, could not absolve you from your sins. But the simplest and humblest priest of the Church can do it?? He can say to you, 'Go in peace, I forgive thee.'" Rome has based her claim chiefly on the following misinterpreted passages of Scripture:

1. Matthew 16:18, 19. She declares that the Church was built on Peter, and quotes this passage as a proof. Take up your Bible and read the whole context, beginning at verse thirteen. Jesus says nothing about appointing Peter as His successor. What is the question under debate? It is simply a question of faith. Jesus first asked the apostles whom the people thought He

was? Then He turned to the apostles and asked them what was their idea of Him? Peter answered for all by saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church."

Note that Christ did not say, "Thou art Peter, and on thee, Peter, I will build My Church," but "on this rock"; that is to say, on Christ Himself, the Son of the living God, which Peter confessed. This interpretation of this passage is upheld by other passages of Scripture. No verse of Scripture can be found stating that the Church had for its foundation Peter. Many passages of Scripture can be quoted declaring Christ to be the foundation of the Church. Paul said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11). "And did (the Israelites) all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 10:4).

**If Peter had been the foundation of the Church, the Church would have been built on a foundation of sand**—for Satan prevailed against Peter. Only a few minutes later (see Matt. 16: 23), Jesus said to Peter: "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me." Some people may be satisfied with such a foundation, but Jesus the Saviour against whom Satan never prevailed, is the foundation of the true Christian Church.

But what about the keys? Did not Jesus say to Peter: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"? etc. When Jesus spoke of giving Peter the keys, he was referring to a Jewish custom which would be very familiar to Peter, who was a Jew. The scribes of Israel were thought of as stewards of divine wisdom (Matt. 13:52). When the Jews made a man a doctor of the law, they put into his hands the key of the closet in the temple where the sacred books were kept and also tablets to write upon ; signifying by this that they gave him authority to teach and to explain the Scriptures to the people. Peter having understood and confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour, by this statement: **"I give unto thee the keys," etc., simply gave Peter the authority to teach others the truths he had himself learned.**

2. Again, Rome quotes John 20:19-23, especially verses 22 and 23: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The apostles, Rome says, received this power to forgive sins, and the priests are the successors of the apostles. Read verses 19 and 20, and compare them with Luke 24:33, and it will at once become evident that this power of forgiving sin was not only given to the apostles, namely the twelve, but to the disciples—hence to all believers. Therefore, **all God's children have the power to declare sins forgiven or sins retained.** As long as the apostles and others who were Christ's disciples exercised their powers according to God's will and God's way, in establishing His Kingdom on earth, their acts would be ratified in Heaven.

How did the disciples forgive sins? Here is the important question. Did they pretend to stand in God's place, clothed with all the power of God and compel people to kneel before them and confess to them their sins in detail, and then did they pretend to have power to grant absolution? **No, never!** How can

we find out how the early Christians forgave sins? By reading the New Testament, and especially the Acts of the Apostles. On reading we find: *That all men are born in sin and under condemnation*, (See such passages as John 1:18; Rom. 3:22, 23). That Christ alone can liberate or set free. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36). (See also John 3: 16, 18, 36; Acts 4:12). The disciples simply preached Jesus as Saviour, declaring that those who believed on Him would have their sins forgiven, and those who refused to repent and believe on Him, they would be left bound in their sins.

The apostles were sent to preach the forgiveness of sins, and not to confess the people. The reading of Luke 24:45-47; Acts 2:14-42; Acts 10:42, 43; Acts 13:38, 39, will make this plain.

3. John 21:15-18 is also quoted by Rome as proof that Peter was given special privileges over the other apostles because Christ said to him, "Feed My lambs," "Feed My sheep," three times. The explanation is simple; it does not indicate any peculiar power granted to Peter over the others; but as Peter had denied his Lord three times Christ asked him three times if he loved Him, and three times told him to care for His flock. Christ wanted Peter to understand that although he had denied Him three times, he was forgiven, and his labors would still be acceptable.

### **How Did Auricular Confession Originate?**

It was an outgrowth of several centuries of darkness and ignorance. Toward the end of the second century, when a member of the Church committed a grave sin he was requested to confess it before the whole Church, but in 450, under Leo I, Bishop of Rome, this public confession became private. It was only in 1215, at the Council of Lateran, called by order of Pope Innocent III., that auricular, or private, confession was declared an article of faith. Therefore, confession to a priest is purely human in its origin and development.

### **Because the Priest's Pretended Pardon is Worthless**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that if a person is dying and far away from any priest he can cry out to God for forgiveness, and God can forgive, although no priest is near. If God can forgive a man, say, away in the bush, where there is no priest, can He not forgive a man in his own home, though he does not send for the priest who is at hand? What God can do for a man in the woods He can do for him anywhere. Again, Rome teaches that if a man sincerely repents of his sins and makes a true confession of them God forgives him, even though the priest may refuse him absolution; and that a man may receive absolution from his priest without being forgiven by God, seeing he has not properly confessed and is not truly penitent. What conclusion can we come to but that the priest's pardon is valueless. If God pardons when the priest does not pardon, and God does not pardon when the priest does, it is surely evident that the priest's pardon is worthless. Frequently a person has gone to one priest, and that priest has refused to pardon him; he has then gone to another and obtained absolution. It is surely plain that God's pardon is the only one of value.

## Because Confession to a Priest is Immoral

Is it not absurd, yes, even shameful, for a married woman, or a young lady, to reveal all her sins by thoughts, by desires, by words and by actions, into the ears of an unmarried man? Religion does not consist in such indecent conversations. It is not by plunging into dirty water and by stirring it to its very depths that you can wash and be clean. **Confession to a priest has been frequently disastrous both for priests and their penitents.** The priest has no right to search out and discover all the secret sins of your life. **It is none of his business.** God knows your sins. Go to Him and confess them. The priest should not be allowed to interfere in your personal affairs. No man has a right to examine your conscience. (See 2 Cor. 13:5).

## Because God Alone Can Forgive Your Sins

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" This is what the Scribes and Pharisees said as they accused Jesus of speaking blasphemies, because He said to the man sick of the palsy, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." The Pharisees were right; God only can forgive sins; but they overlooked the fact that Jesus was God, and, therefore, had the right to forgive this man his sins.

Confession to God is the only true confession. God never gave to any man the power to forgive sins through the confessional. God never established the priest as a judge over your conscience. Peter forbade Cornelius to kneel down before him. (See Acts 10: 26.) **Jesus and the apostles never practiced auricular confession, nor did they ever teach it.** The forgiveness of sins can be obtained to-day exactly as it was obtained when our Saviour was on earth. By going directly to God in the name of Jesus. Listen: "And ye know that He (Jesus) was manifested to take away sins, and in Him is no sin. (1 John 3:5.) "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto Heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you this man went down to his house justified..." (Luke 18:13,14) Like the publican, go straight to God and receive His forgiveness.

The priest cannot answer for your sins. You are accountable directly to God. Paul says (Rom. 14:12), "So, then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

When Simon committed his great sin in trying to buy the gift of God with money Peter did not make him kneel at his feet and forgive him, but simply sent him to God for forgiveness. Read Acts 8:22, "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. ..' All true ministers today follow Peter's example; they do not pretend to forgive sins committed against God, but they send sinners to God for pardon.

If you confess your sins to the Lord the Saviour you can be sure they are forgiven. Listen: "If we confess our sins He (Christ) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) But now that Christ is exalted to the right hand of God, does He still forgive sins? Yes. Harken: "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Is- © rael and forgiveness of

sins." (Acts 5:31.)

"Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ;and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Isa.55:6, 7.)