

Is The Catholic Confessional A Cause Of Crime?



By Joseph Zacchello

This article is from a PDF file on LutheranLibrary.org written in 1944. It was published by *The Converted Catholic Magazine* and edited by former Roman Catholic priest, Leo Herbert Lehmann. If you see the word “recently,” just think it was recent relative to 1944. But I believe the subject of this article is still relevant today. If you’ve seen the film, “The Godfather,” I think you know what I mean.

Joseph Zacchello is a former Roman Catholic priest born in Italy in 1917. You can read his interesting life story and conversion to Christ from Roman darkness on, [The Priest Who Found Christ](#).

After studying the Bible for the first time in my life after hearing the Gospel in 1971, one of the things I rejoiced in was not having to confess my sins to a Catholic priest in the confessional box! Jesus is my High Priest! The Bible says,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9

MANY WERE STARTLED by the statistics from official Catholic sources in *The Converted Catholic Magazine* for January showing **the abnormally high percentage of Roman Catholics in our jails and penitentiaries**, as well as the disproportionate number of Catholics among young people arrested in New York as juvenile delinquents. Persistent Catholic propaganda by radio, press and pulpit had almost convinced Protestant Americans that all the crime in America was the result of our “Godless” American public schools, and that few, if any, Roman Catholics ever went to jail.

It is too much to expect that Catholic propagandists will publicize their own crime statistics and allow their Catholic people to find out who or what is responsible for the abnormally high rate of crime among Catholics.

There are priests in the Catholic church who place the blame on the fact that nuns are made the moral teachers of youth in Catholic schools. Nuns, they

say, because of their self-repressive, ascetic training are not fitted to teach and prepare Catholic children to face the real facts of life. Nuns regard every thought of sex, for example, as a mortal sin and feel guilty themselves even when they look at the nude image of Christ on the crucifix. But these days, when children have so many ways of discovering the facts of sex for themselves outside school, the influence of the nuns in this regard may be largely discounted.

In the January issue of *The Converted Catholic Magazine*, Mr. Lehmann points to **the unethical teaching of the Catholic Church on theft and robbery as a possible cause of the high rate of crime among Catholics**. This teaching, which gives the reasons that excuse from theft, should not be underestimated since, as he proves on good authority, more than 50% of all crimes among youth are connected with thievery. But such explanations are merely partial and still leave us to find some underlying cause in the Catholic church's whole moral system of the alarming rate of crime among Catholics. This root cause is the Catholic practice of confession, one of the seven 'sacraments' or foundation-stones upon which the entire superstructure of Roman Catholicism is built.

Protestants oppose **the Roman Catholic confessional** because it **is a purely Roman invention, is contrary to scripture teaching, and was never taught or practiced by Christ or his apostles**. But few, if any, have ever brought to light its evil effects in social and moral matters. These evil consequences flow from the fact that Roman Catholics are taught to believe that the priest, a mere man, has the power to absolve them from their sins, on the simple condition that they tell their sins in secrecy to him in the confession-box, and promise to perform a simple 'penance' that he imposes. The following should be noted with regard to the practice of confession:

1. The priest is a real judge.
2. He himself can forgive, or withhold forgiveness, of every kind, degree and number of crimes at his own discretion;
3. There are no witnesses;
4. The sinner is his own accuser;
5. No record of the proceedings is kept; a guarantee in fact is given the sinner that absolute secrecy will be observed;
6. **No public jail sentence or fine is imposed**, only a few minutes of prayers and a verbal promise of reform;
7. By this procedure **all effects of the crimes confessed are destroyed and the criminal instantly made "holy"** and a good citizen again.
8. This secret process of **forgiveness and hiding of crimes may be accomplished again and again as long as the sinner conforms to the regulations** set forth above and as laid down in Catholic Canon Law.

Canon 888 says:

"The priest has to remember that in hearing confessions he is a judge."

Again Canon 872:

"For the hearing of confessions there is required in the priest not only the

power of orders [the priesthood] but also a juridical investment."

As to the power of the priest as judge in confession, Canon 870 says:

"In the confessional the minister has the power to forgive all crimes committed after baptism."

The Council of Trent (Sess. VI. Chap. 7.D.B. 799) decreed that the priest not only forgives sins in confession, but has power to destroy them and thus make of the criminal a perfect citizen and a saint: "The crimes are not only forgiven but destroyed and the criminal made as a new person – a saint". To obtain pardon it is not necessary to be sorry for crimes committed because they are offenses against society or God, but it is sufficient if the criminal is sorry for fear he will go to hell forever if he does not confess them and obtain the forgiveness from the priest in confession. On this point the Council of Trent (Sess. 14, C.H.) says of the sinner: "It is sufficient if he is sorry for fear of otherwise burning in hell for all eternity."

All the decrees of the Council of Trent are binding on Catholics under pain of anathema and excommunication.

The main reason why crime is high in Catholic nations: Catholics have no deterrent to crime!

Anyone can understand that **this practice of the Catholic confession is no deterrent to crime**, and can easily, in fact, be made an excuse for continuing in it. Big-time criminals and racketeers, especially, generally can find ways to circumvent the civil law and its penalties. If they are Roman Catholics and believe in confession, they have assurance of an easy way of also escaping punishment in the next life.

Examples are plentiful of such big-time Catholic criminals and racketeers continuing in crime without any qualms of conscience. 'Big Tom' Prendergast of Kansas City who died recently after release from Federal penitentiary was one of them. Under his rule, Kansas City was a menace to the morals of young and old... Brothels flourished openly and criminal gangs enforced his dictates. Gambling houses were as commonplace as grocery stores, and he himself was the biggest gambler of his age. Political corruption abounded and Prendergast, as boss of it all, grew fabulously rich from the wealth that flowed into his pockets from this underground traffic in crime. Yet, when he died last January 26, Monsignor Thomas B. McDonald who preached his funeral sermon after solemn high mass, publicly proclaimed him "a man with a noble heart and a true friend," because *"he went to mass every morning at 7:30 for 30 years."*

Tom Prendergast, and other Catholic criminals like him, did not fear the penalties of the civil law, because he could escape them by bribing and corrupting judges and officers of the law whom he himself had appointed. As a Catholic, however, he feared the tortures of hell in the next life. But he was assured by his church's teaching that he could also escape God's punishment as long as he went to confession regularly, told his crimes to the priest and said he was sorry merely because he was afraid of going to hell. He was further assured that he could continue his life of crime with impunity

as long as he made sure of having a priest to absolve him before he died and to say masses afterwards for his soul in Purgatory.

Mayor Hague of Jersey City is another of many examples of 'devout' Catholic political bosses and racketeers who escape the punishment of the civil law by bribery and corruption, and at the same time have the assurance from their church's teaching that they can also escape God's punishment in the next life by obtaining pardon regularly from their priests in confession.

Why then should Catholic parents wonder if their wayward children, trained to confession in a Catholic school, refuse to heed their admonitions?

Forgiveness may be had in confession without any expression of sorrow to their parents. Nor should a Catholic wife wonder how her husband can remain unfaithful, even after going many times to the priest to tell him the details of his unfaithfulness. Each time his sin is blotted out and he again becomes the ideal husband – all by merely confessing to the priest and saying a few 'Hail Mary's' as a 'penance.'

Should we wonder why there are so many Catholic criminals? Perhaps we should wonder why there are not many more. That there are not many more may be due to the fact that not all 'judges' sit in confession-boxes, but on criminal court benches and send criminals to jail and penitentiaries, and even to the electric chair.

We former priests now know what true forgiveness of sins means in Christian teaching: that God alone forgives sins and with forgiveness comes a complete change of life. The Catholic practice of confession is merely a recital to a man of sins committed, with no guarantee of pardon from God, and nothing to prevent the repetition of the same sins over and over again. In true Christian teaching, forgiveness of sins is not just the wiping off of old sins from the soul and then going forth to soil it again with more of the same sins. It means the gift of a whole new soul, the rebirth to a new life for the sinner to whom sin becomes abhorrent and who remains sanctified and a true child of God thereafter. Then the sinner is really saved. He becomes not only a saint, but also a good citizen. Only this kind of religious teaching is a real deterrent to crime.