

CONNECTIONS WITH THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION



F R A N K A R U N D E L L

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“In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18

“Having faith means drawing support from the faith of your brothers and sisters, even as your own faith serves as a support for the faith of others.”

Benedict XVI

Cover: Nineteenth Century confessional

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“Closet” is an interesting word. Generally we casually take it as an innocuous space where we store stuff. Those of us who grew up in radio days happily remember “Fibber McGee’s closet, when opened, was accompanied by a ten second sound effect of a pile of junk crashing to the floor. Now, of course, television is more explicit, it leaves less to the imagination, too bad. Anyway, the etymology of the word means something other than a storage space you can buy at Ikea.

In late 14c., it meant “a small private room for study or prayer,” from Old French closet “small enclosure, private room,” diminutive of clos “enclosure,” from Latin clausum “closed space, enclosure, confinement,” from neuter past participle of claudere “to shut.” In the days when ornamentation was important, master craftsmen built artistic enclosures suitable for a priest to dispense the Sacrament of Penance in the churches, known as The Confessional.

The other small enclosure in every Catholic church “The Tabernacle” also has an interesting etymology. (In biblical use) it was fixed or movable dwelling, typically of light construction.

A tent used as a sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant by the Israelites during the Exodus and until the building of the Temple.

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In today's usage, an ornamented receptacle or cabinet in which the reserved Eucharist is placed; usually behind the facing altar.

These two holy spaces are inexorably entwined. From these two "closets" Sanctifying Grace is freely available to believers from God the Father through Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Spirit. First, by the forgiveness of sins, then by the distribution of the body of Christ, under the accidents of bread and wine for those believers in the "state of grace."

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person. As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me. This is the bread which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever" (John 6:56)

This could be a little scary for those who have never heard of the workings of the Holy Spirit and the concept of "transubstantiation," just as it was for those who took it literally at the synagogue in Capernaum in the gospel of John. The Apostles were finally enlightened at the last supper:

"Then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'"²⁰ He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you.' " (Luke 22:19)

The early fathers wrestled with the texts at the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215. The doctrine, which was first called "transubstantiation" in the 12th century, under the guidance of

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the Holy Spirit aimed at safeguarding the literal truth of Christ's presence while emphasizing the fact that there is no change in the empirical appearances of the bread and wine; entirely based on the Savior's own words.

Reconciliation or Penance is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church by which "sins committed after Baptism are forgiven." As for the origin of the sacrament, nothing explains it quite as well as an event in the gospel of (Matthew 9:2). All Catholic beliefs can be more or less traced to Jesus with biblical references as we have seen. Matthew writes:

"And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven.' And now some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is being blasphemous.' Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,'—then he said to the paralytic—'get up, pick up your bed and go home.' And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings."

In no uncertain terms Jesus literally transferred his authority to another human being; Simon Peter in (Matthew 16:18):

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say

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Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’¹⁵ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”

Again in (Matthew 18:18) Jesus reiterated:

“In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Most of us firmly believe these words as “gospel truth” similar to the way Peter believed them; through the grace “of the living God, our Father who is in heaven.” For those who do not believe them, for one reason or another, it is easy to see how they would consider these passages part of a two thousand year old fantasy. Without faith nothing much is possible in either science or religion. People know that by practical experience.

In a recent private e-mail we were able to focus on a few reasons why we believe faith fails many ordinarily good people, we will repeat them here for your discernment:

“No one can hate an atheist for not being able to see beyond his or her materialistic framework. Generally, we see three reasons why most secularists, atheists or agnostics cannot nor will not grant a spiritual existence extra materia (outside of materiality)”

“1. They have never been taught that anything could exist outside of the material world. All reality is practicality. All they know and can know is through the senses in a mechanistic way. Even imagination is a process of material origin. **Sense perception along with experience is the only course of human knowledge.** They believe we are all born ‘blank slates.’”

“2. If religion had been taught, for many, it was slowly but surely thought irrational as a function of real-life and promoted as false in most schools of higher education, a practical sounding creation superimposed over human existence for psychological reasons. **A false and childish cushion against the hard facts of existentialism. Moral skepticism opposed to religious conviction— thought of as simpleminded superstition and not viable.** Generally these folks are comfortable with secular Ethical Culture.”

“3. Devoid of religious understandings **they have not been able to comprehend ‘spirit’ as the life of the material body; here-to-fore called soul or a soul.** After the brain to mind transition of the species “Homo Sapiens,” humans were eventually able to transcend the mundane and understandably see their life, (consciousness) connected to **Being itself** in a “**supernatural**” way requiring certain personal responsibility. The great book of Genesis metaphorically and beautifully put

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this in simple but understandable terms, written about 1450-1400 BCE. The first of a salvific narrative from the monotheism of the Jews, followed by the messianic incarnation of Jesus Christ who revealed: “ God is Spirit.” (John 4:24) Believed by individuals through grace, pronounced and confirmed in Christian faith.”

A bit long but necessary at this point Wikipedia offers us an explanation of the root of “Spirit” as it was understood by the Jews in pre Christian times, and its transition carried on by (Yeshua) Jesus believed to be the Messiah by Christians.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The term in the Hebrew that is translated as ‘Holy Spirit’ is ‘Ha Ruach Ha Kodesh.’ There is a specific intention in the terminology “Holy Spirit” as compared to the reference to His Spirit without the definition of “holy”. The Spirit or ‘*ruach*’ by itself, is the breath of Yahweh which carries His life-force, but not necessarily the Presence of His Person.

When the term “holy Spirit” is used, it denotes the special emanation of the Spirit of God which originates from His throne into our physical world to convey His personal Presence and power. It is dispensed from Him so that He might achieve His purposes in fellowship with man, making His will known and performing His mighty acts in miracles, healings and various other interventions in the normal occurrence of events in the world. The holy Spirit is not a separate being, but an emanation. *(For the majority of Christian denominations, the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity—(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and is Almighty God. The Holy Spirit is*

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understood to be one of the three persons of the Trinity in the One God.) He or it is a power that proceeds from (goes out from, or exits) the Father, and is poured out upon His people (Isaiah 32:15, 44:3; Acts 2:17).

“But when the Helper (Paraclete) comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)

“But the Helper, the holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

The holy Spirit originates from the Father and is sent (proceeds) from both the Father and the Son. “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He (Yeshua) Jesus poured out this which you now see and hear ...” (Acts 2:33)

The Holy Spirit was with the believers before the resurrection, but not in them. He was able to send the holy Spirit after His ascension. which would take His place with and in them. “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” (John 14:16-18). Note that the disciples already knew the holy Spirit and that He dwelt with them, but they were to receive the Spirit within them after (Yeshua’s) Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:20-22) and later, on the day of Pentecost, they were immersed/baptized in the holy Spirit (Acts 2).

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Previously, the Holy Spirit had only moved upon men from without. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) The difference was in the Spirit being with them in what they did beforehand, and afterward being in them, empowering them from within. All of this indicating that there are differences of operation by the Holy Spirit “differences of ministries, but the same Lord and diversities of activities but the same God” (1 Corinthians 12:5-6)

The Holy Spirit takes the Son’s place in ministry on earth when Christ ascends in glory to heaven “If I do not go away the Helper will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7)

“I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.: (John 14:18)

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things ..” (John 14:26)

“ for He will take of mine and declare it unto you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that he will take of mine and declare it to you” (John 16:15)

“the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us” Romans (8:26,27)

“For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you.” (Matthew 10:20).

“as a many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14)

THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM THE FATHER - IN (YESHUA) JESUS - GIVEN TO THE BELIEVERS

(Yeshua) Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:20)

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As the Eternal Son, before the foundation of the world, He was brought forth from the Father. As the Son of Man, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit which emanated from the Father into this physical realm to impregnate (Mirium) the Virgin Mary with His seed. His 'seed' was the genetic identity of His Son. He was anointed by the holy Spirit for His ministry at His baptism, and perfected the prototype in Himself for those who would follow Him of a new race, a second "man".

"This is He (Yeshua) Jesus who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." (John 1:33)

Baptism is immersion - i.e. a complete immersion in the Spirit. "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9).

It is the Spirit of the Father which was in (Yeshua) Jesus that is now in the believers. "And because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6).

"the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16); (Romans 8:9)

The holy Spirit is the presence of the Father which was also in the Son; (John 14:19-23; John 17:21,23; 1 John 1:3).

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:4).

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13).

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Source: Hebrew Roots/Trinity/Holy Spirit, Origin of the Holy Spirit, Wikibooks. *(We have checked this Wikibooks entry several times and it appears to be theologically pretty sound. For most of us, our spirit, given by God, is the life of the body, – our soul, and can reasonably be considered how we are made free-willed in the image of God.)*

The Church, having received its mandate from Jesus through Peter, and passed on by him to the followers of Christ after him was the foundation of the Church—as of the “descent” of the Holy Spirit at the cenacle on the first Pentecost. (Acts 2:4)

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves.”

They may have remembered Jesus saying:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.”(Matthew 28:18)

The presumption at this point would have to be that those who have “faith” by the grace of God in the gospel are believers; and those without faith in the gospel are not. That surely is a reasonable conclusion. Not understanding the the concept of Spirit, particularly the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Blessed Trinity, would make it almost impossible to have anybody without faith to see a connection with the reality of a “sacrament”per se. Without the Holy Spirit there are no

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sacraments So we should access another source to trace how the Church, in faith, explains her “Apostolic Succession” within which the Holy Spirit is present and working in our lives.

From our essay on the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist we have extracted the following few paragraphs relating to apostolic succession, generally taken from recent church documents:

“The dominant note in our thinking is provided by the vision of the Church as willed by the Father, emerging from Christ’s Paschal mystery, **animated by the Holy Spirit**, and organically structured. We hope to set the specific and essential function of apostolic succession in the context of the whole Church, which confesses its apostolic Faith and bears witness to its Lord.”

“We rely upon Scripture, which has for us a twofold value as a historical record and an inspired document. Insofar as it is a historical record, Scripture recounts the most important events in the mission of Jesus and the life of the Church of the first century; insofar as it is an inspired document, it bears witness to certain facts and at the same time interprets them and reveals their inner significance and dynamic coherence. As an expression of the thought of God in the words of men, Scripture has a normative value for the thinking of Christ’s Church in every age.”

“But any interpretation of Scripture that regards it as inspired and therefore normative for all ages is necessarily an interpretation that takes place within the Church’s Tradition, which recognizes Scripture as inspired and normative. The recognition of the normative character of Scripture fundamentally implies a recognition of that Tradition within

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which Scripture itself was formed and came to be considered and accepted as inspired. The normative status of Scripture and its relationship to Tradition go hand in hand. The result is that any theological considerations about Scripture are at the same time ecclesial considerations.”

“This, then, is the methodological starting point of the document: any attempt to reconstitute the past by selecting isolated phrases from the New Testament Tradition and separating them from the way they were received in the living Tradition of the Church is contradictory.”

“The theological approach that sees Scripture as an indivisible whole and that links it with the life and thought of the early community that acknowledges and “recognizes” it as Scripture certainly does not mean that properly historical judgments are eliminated in advance by an ecclesiological a priori, which would make impossible an interpretation in conformity with the demands of historical method.”

“The method adopted here enables one to grasp the limitations of pure historicism: it admits that the purely historical analysis of a book in isolation from its effects and influence cannot show with certainty that the way Faith actually developed in history was the only possible way. But these limits to historical proof, which one cannot doubt, do not destroy the value and weight of historical knowledge. On the contrary, the fact that the early Church accepted Scripture as constitutive is something to be constantly meditated upon: that is, we have to think out again and again the relationship, the differences, and the unity between the different elements.”

“That also means that one cannot dissolve Scripture into a series of unrelated sketches, each one of which would be an

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attempt to express a lifestyle founded on Jesus of Nazareth, but rather that one must understand it as the expression of a historical unfolding path that reveals the unity and the catholicity of the Church. There are three broad stages along this path: the time before Easter, the apostolic period, and the sub-apostolic period, and each period has its own specific value; it is significant that what the dogmatic constitution "On Divine Revelation", *Dei Verbum*, calls "viri apostolici" (apostolic) should be responsible for some of the New Testament writings."

"This helps one to see clearly how the community of Jesus Christ solved the problem of remaining apostolic even though it had become sub-apostolic. This explains why the sub-apostolic part of the New Testament has a normative character for the Church at a later period, for it must build on the apostles, who themselves have Christ as their foundation. In the sub-apostolic writings, Scripture itself bears witness to Tradition and gives evidence of the Magisterium in that it recalls the teaching of the apostles (see Acts 2:42; 2 Pet 1:20). This Magisterium really begins to develop in the second century, at the time when the idea of apostolic succession is made fully explicit."

"Scripture and Tradition taken together, pondered upon and authentically interpreted by the Magisterium, faithfully transmit to us the teaching of Christ our Lord and Savior and determine the doctrine that it is the Church's mission to proclaim to all peoples and to apply to each generation until the end of the world. (see Matthew 28:18) It is with this theological perspective — fully in accord with the doctrine of Vatican II — that we have written this document on apostolic succession and

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evaluated the ministries that exist in churches and communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church.”

Source: INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION. CATHOLIC TEACHING ON APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION*. (1973)

A Brief History:

“Sacramental reconciliation has a complicated history. Understanding a little history can sometimes help with understanding current practice.”

“Baptism—the original sacrament of reconciliation:

The first thing to know is that the early church didn’t have any kind of ritual celebration that we would recognize as reconciliation. Baptism washed away all sin, and that was at first thought to be sufficient to reconcile people to Christ. It didn’t take too long to see the problem here. Not everyone who was baptized stuck to their baptismal promises with equal zeal. In the case of serious offenses (for example, adultery, murder, or apostasy), the offender would be kicked out or “excommunicated.” There was a simple solution. If you cannot keep your commitment to Christ, you cannot share in the eucharistic fellowship.”

However, imagine you are an early century bishop. You have tossed out an apostate because he denied Christ. A few months later, the guy goes all “Prodigal Son” on you and asks to be readmitted to the church. What do you do?”

“Second Baptism:

Sure, today, the answer seems obvious. But at the time it was a real crisis for the church. Some thought the sinners should be permanently excluded (e.g. Heb 6:4-8). Others argued they

should be re-baptized. The eventual solution was to impose a penitential practice that was very similar to the catechumenate. This practice was called a “second baptism,” not because the penitents were actually re-baptized, but because they were given a second chance to live up to the baptism they had already celebrated. The disciplines were very severe, and it was a one-time-only option. If a penitent sinned gravely again, there was no provision for him or her to return a second time. Only those guilty of capital sins were required to undergo this serious form of penance. As an ordinary practice, majority of the faithful engaged in daily, informal penance through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.”

“Private confession:

That worked for a while. But in the fourth century, the emperor of Rome (Constantine) converted to Christ, and the church went viral. Now the church was dealing with huge numbers of people who were signing up more out of allegiance to the emperor than allegiance to Christ. As a result, most people remained catechumens so that they wouldn’t have to undergo the severe penitential process after baptism if they happened to fall into serious sin. Saint Augustine was one of those lifetime catechumens until he had a true conversion later in life.”

“Around the seventh century, the monks of Ireland came up with a more pastoral process. Rather than making reconciliation a public, arduous, once-in-a-lifetime process, they began a practice of having the younger monks and the lay people they met with engage in a private, repeatable process of confessing one’s sins to a monk and then performing a penitential act that was considered appropriate to the level of

sin that had been confessed. This was the precursor to our modern practice of the sacrament of reconciliation.”

“Eucharist—the ordinary sacrament of reconciliation:

One thing that often gets overlooked in a discussion of reconciliation is that the celebration of the Eucharist is the principle way in which Christians experience sacramental reconciliation. The church teaches:

The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is “given up for us,” and the blood we drink “shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1393)

Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrament of Christ which has reconciled us with God. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1436)

In the complicated history of the practice of reconciliation in the church, this truth has been clearly and consistently taught since the time of St. Paul. We cannot be united with Christ and at the same time be slaves to sin. Our union with Christ, which we remember and renew at every Eucharist, reconciles us to the Father and frees us from sin.”

“Simplifying the history for the catechumens:

When we take baptism and Eucharist into account, the history of the sacrament of reconciliation becomes a little clearer.

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Baptism in Christ is the original sacrament that reconciles us to the Father. Eucharist is the regular, ongoing sacramental practice that renews and strengthens our baptismal reconciliation. When we do something to damage our union (“communion”) with Christ, the sacrament of reconciliation is where we turn to restore the relationship.

The way the sacrament of reconciliation has been implemented over the centuries has changed, but the core purpose has always been the same.”

Source: TeamRCIA Blog

Rarely are parents willing to explain sexuality to kids, for generations they’ve been hiding behind the (“Stork.”) Celibate priests and religious may also have problems with sexuality, so sadly demonstrated in recent years. The human sexual drive when it awakens in curious young minds is obviously very difficult to deal with in terms of the vagaries of sin. This is “nature” at war with human-nature; instinct versus correct reason.

In our opinion the most important confession in any Catholic life is the first one. Before Vatican II the Catholic school system was extensive, almost every parish had a school connected with it where children were enrolled at the age of six or seven. Readin’ Ritin’ and Rithmetic, the three R’s were standard for first graders but there was an even more important “R” being taught—Religion. and why not? If you can get the kids involved early, they will grow up with love for their Lord and their Church. That was the thinking in every Catholic diocese. Usually the kids were uniformed and armed with their very own Baltimore Catechism, the greatest, clearest little book

explaining the faith. In the 40's and 50's Catholic kids who were sent to public schools were released from classes for religious instruction scheduled for that purpose for a few hours every week.

“Released Time Education (RTE) is general nomenclature given to a little known aspect of religious education in the United States. RTE programs afford parents the opportunity to grant their school-aged children permission to leave public school campuses during regular school hours in order to receive religious instruction. A few states even allow students to receive academic credit. RTE programs are typically established by private, religiously-affiliated organizations.”

Source: Swezey, J. A., & Schultz, K. G. (2013). Released-time programs in religion education. Faculty Publications and Presentations. Liberty University

In this short essay we can't go into detail regarding the tumultuous aspects of the released-time programs or the saga of prayer in public education of the 60's; or the disappearance of many parochial schools after Vatican II, but we can say that because of the liberating elements of the Council “nuns (historically non salaried educators) quickly jettisoned their habits, and one order even consulted the design house of Christian Dior about what they should wear next. ...Many nuns who'd just given up their habits in favor of modern wear decided to give up the convent altogether, and membership in religious orders declined.” In our view many of the parishes could not afford to keep the schools open, sadly resulting in the sharp decline in Catholic religious education in our parish schools. “Progressing” out of “old time” catholicism cost Catholic education big time. With that , many kids lost their

faith growing up. That left it primarily up to the parents to teach their kids about their religion. In many cases, both mom and dad were working pursuing the American dream, which obviously left little time for religious education at home with the same enthusiasm of the dwindling nuns. The sixties was a devastating cultural time. President Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were all killed over a period of five years. Drugs destroyed young people, there were urban riots, college sit-ins, massive rallies, and everywhere all the time protests of some kind against the war in Vietnam, which was mishandled and finally lost. Everything was far left of center.

In 1977 The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education released a document, titled The Catholic School:

ITS CONCLUSION:

91. This document in no way wishes to minimize the value of the witness and work of the many Catholics who teach in State schools throughout the world. In describing the task confided to the Catholic school it is intended to encourage every effort to promote the cause of Catholic education, since in the pluralistic world in which we live, the Catholic school is in a unique position to offer, more than ever before, a most valuable and necessary service. With the principles of the Gospel as its abiding point of reference, it offers its collaboration to those who are building a new world - one which is freed from a hedonistic mentality and from the efficiency syndrome of modern consumer society.

92. We appeal to each Episcopal Conference to consider and to develop these principles which should inspire the Catholic school and to translate them into concrete programs which will

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meet the real needs of the educational systems operating in their countries.

93. Realizing that the problems are both delicate and highly complex, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education also addresses itself to the whole People of God. In the economy of salvation we poor humans must confront problems, suffer their consequences and work might and main to solve them. We are certain that in the last analysis success in any venture does not come from trust in our own solutions but from trust in Jesus who allowed Himself to be called Teacher. May He inspire, guide, support and bring to a safe conclusion all that is undertaken in His name.

Rome, March 19th, 1977, the Feast of St. Joseph
GABRIEL-MARIE Cardinal GARRONE, Prefect
Antonio M. Javierre, *Secretary* Titular Archbishop of Meta

We strongly doubt that many Catholic home schoolers took the opportunity. to read, no less understand, this more higher minded missive.

The Sacred Congregation of the Clergy; General Catechetical Directory, 1971

Let us have a look of what was and is expected of a child at his or her first confession.

CHILDHOOD AND ITS IMPORTANCE

79 When the child goes to school he enters a society wider than that of his family, and he is initiated into the society of adults in

an intensive way that absorbs a great part of his resources and concerns. He gets his first experience of working in school. Before this point, the family served a mediating role between the child and the People of God. But now the child is ready to begin sharing directly in the life of the Church, and can be admitted to the sacraments.

The child's intelligence develops gradually. Catechesis must be adapted to this mental development. The child seeks to understand the religious life of adults. Accordingly, the genuine Christian life of the adult community helps very much toward giving the children a solid formation, and it does this in a truly instructive way when it explains the religious life of adults and the activities of the People of God suitably in the light of salvation history.

The initial experience of working should not be thought unrelated to the aim of catechesis. The joy of doing things and doing them well, co-operation with others, discipline arising out of this as something easy to understand and reasonable—in all this one finds many experiences which are useful not only for sharing in social life but also for active participation in the life of the Church.

With these things in mind, catechetical pedagogy, whatever method it follows, should stimulate activity on the part of the children. If it should fail to do so, catechesis could not satisfy its obligation to teach the believer to give an ever more personal response to the word and the gift of God. This active pedagogy should not be satisfied with external expressions only, however useful they may be, but it should strive to bring forth a response from the heart and a taste for prayer. This

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interior education is indeed rendered more difficult, but also more necessary, because of the character of contemporary civilization which tends to disperse spiritual energies.

Co-operation between catechists and parents (sharing with one another their opinions about programs, about methods, and about difficulties which arise) is necessary if the education of the children is to proceed in a suitable and harmonious way. This kind of co-operation is useful for both the catechists and the parents and helps them in carrying out their own specific duties.

CHILDREN WHO DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL

80 There are also regions, even very large and sometimes heavily populated areas, in which there are not enough schools. Where this is so, earnest pastoral action should be directed to the families themselves, and, to the extent that it is possible, various associations should be set up to take care of the children. These associations should be set up in such a way that they can take account of the local circumstances and meet the spiritual needs of the children.

CHILDREN WHO GROW UP IN FAMILIES AFFECTED BY RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE

81 The difficulty of giving catechesis to children living in families who do not practice their religion at all or do so in an entirely inadequate way is becoming more and more marked. Sometimes questions are raised about the very possibility and appropriateness of giving them a catechesis.

Catechesis is certainly not to be omitted for such children; rather, it is to be planned and carried out in a way that fits in with actual circumstances and conditions. In these cases there is need to establish contact with the families and to study their mental attitudes and styles of life, so that some means can be found to open a dialogue with them. It is also necessary that catechesis present its material in a way that really responds to the concrete possibilities of these children.

ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD, AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

82 The period of adolescence and, in a larger sense, the so-called "phenomenon of youth" have very great importance. In pre-industrial societies which have only a smaller number of schools, the transition from childhood to the adult community takes place as it were directly. In our time the custom is spreading more and more of extending the time of education in schools for adolescents. This custom creates in society a generation which is not immediately occupied with gainful labor, and which, though it already enjoys physical and intellectual vitality, is engaged in no activity other than study and preparation for a future profession. This social class has a great impact on adult society; and this creates no small problem.

This problem is also found in the Church, and although it takes different forms here, it is just as serious. Adolescents and young adults are less exposed to the danger of violently opposing the Church than they are to the temptation of leaving it. The fact that it is often difficult for adults to acknowledge that adolescents and young adults can contribute anything

worthwhile is a further reason why this is a very serious problem in catechesis.

But the young will be less distrustful, the more the catechists show an ability to understand their roles and to accept them.

PRE-ADOLESCENCE, ADOLESCENCE, AND EARLY ADULTHOOD, AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

83 National directories should distinguish pre-adolescence, adolescence, and early adulthood.

Here it can only be pointed out that in sophisticated regions where the point is raised, the special difficulties of pre-adolescence are in practice not sufficiently nor always recognized. The educator can be tempted to treat pre-adolescents in the same way as children, and thus it is to be feared that he will not win their attention; or he can treat them as adolescents, and in that case give them themes and methods of working which presuppose a maturity of personality and of experience that they have not yet attained.

The age of pre-adolescence has as its peculiar note the troublesome beginning of concern with one's self. Hence it is important not to continue at this age the simple and objective kind of instruction which is appropriate for children; at the same time, however, one must be careful not to propose problems and themes that belong properly to adolescence.

A concrete type of instruction which would explain the lives and works of the Saints and of other outstanding persons, together with reflections on the actual life of the Church, could

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provide catechetical students of this age with wholesome nourishment.

The time of young adulthood, taken strictly, which follows adolescence, is also a period of life which has not yet been sufficiently studied and investigated, and its special characteristics are not yet sufficiently known.

Some think that theological instruction should begin at this age. Others believe that human and social questions should be presented for study, together with simple theological explanations and with certain encouragement's to Christian behavior. *The method that seems most desirable is that of treating fundamental problems and problems of most concern to this age with the serious, scholarly apparatus of the theological and human sciences, using at the same time a suitable group-discussion method. (Are diagrams of anatomical structure suitable?)*

Source: Sacred Congregation of the Clergy, Rome 1971

(No specific references about sexuality? Probably the most important aspect for young inquisitive minds. Do they understand puberty, at seven and eight years old. The process of physical changes through which their body is maturing into adulthood? The onset of puberty varies among individuals. Puberty usually occurs in girls between the ages of 10 and 14, while in boys it generally occurs later, between the ages of 12 and 16. In some African-American girls, puberty begins earlier, at about age 9, meaning that puberty occurs from ages 9 to 14, depending on the individual; just about the time of their early confessions.)

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One would presume that the above would provide guidelines for catholic parents whose children attend public schools, or for parents home-schooling religion.

As we mature many of our proclivities become easier to deal with regarding the confessional, but without the grace of God and a strong faith, built up as children, laxity and relativism can easily break the habit of the reception of this all important sacrament of Reconciliation, a direct source of the mercy of God through Jesus in the Spirit and always available in the Church. In recent years the drift away from this monumental option between heaven and hell (in some cases) is primarily a matter of the loss of faith in the Holy Spirit of God.

At the Epiklesis of every mass the priest, with hovering hands over the gifts of bread and wine, calls on the Holy Spirit: *“Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and ☩ Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This is followed by the Consecration of the bread and wine. The gestures and words of the priest are, in a similar way, those of Christ in real time in the upper room the night before he died. The same reality takes place with the absolution of the priest in the name of Jesus Christ in every confessional in the world The Holy Spirit at work among us!

If we are at all interested in the words of Jesus Christ we are instantly reminded of his saying:

“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against

the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come". (Matthew 12:30) As the soul is the life of the body, the Holy Spirit is the life of the Holy Trinity at work in the world.

This ought to be enough to give those who claim to be believers, pause for thought. What happens with non-believers to whom the sacraments are foreign? This is a subject which Karl Rahner (1904-1984, super-theologian) dealt with, around the time of the council. This piece may seem extraneous to our subject but it is important with regard to the reality and effectivity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, by which sins are forgiven.

Anonymous Christianity

Rahner accepted the notion that without [Christ](#) it was impossible to achieve salvation, but he could not accept the notion that people who have never heard of [Jesus](#) would be condemned.

For Fr, Rahner: “‘Anonymous Christianity’ means that a person living in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity. A Protestant Christian is, of course, ‘no anonymous Christian;’ that is perfectly clear. But, let us say, a Buddhist monk (or any other non-christian I might suppose) who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really

attains that goal, but simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. I cannot do that. So if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognized Jesus Christ, then there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity.”

According to Rahner, a person could “intellectually profess disbelief but [be] existentially ... committed to those values which for the Christian are concretized in God.”

“Karl Rahner's concept of Anonymous Christian was one of the most influential theological ideals to affect the Second Vatican Council.” In *Lumen gentium*, the council fathers stated:

“Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.” They went on to write, in *Gaudium et spes*, “Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

“Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation”

However, *Lumen gentium* states that those who know “*that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.*” This signals the huge importance of evangelization through ministry as well as through every believer.

14. “This Sacred Council wishes to turn its attention firstly to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself upon Sacred Scripture and Tradition, it teaches that the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.”

Many see this as arrogance in the part of the Church. They will believe what they believe; perhaps not understanding that the Church, on its own is nothing without the promises of Jesus Christ. One would sincerely hope that many who have “fallen away” have fallen for faulty reasoning and not for purposeful rejection of God, the Holy Spirit, third person of the Blessed Trinity.

“Before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In this role, he issued, with the approval of Pope John Paul II, a document called *Dominus Iesus*. This document asserts the supremacy of the Catholic Church, while reiterating

the Catholic Church's acceptance of a modified form of "Anonymous Christianity."

Benedict always a conciliator said: "Nevertheless, God, who desires to call all peoples to himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of his revelation and love, "does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression even when they contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors.' Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain."

After becoming Pope Benedict XVI Ratzinger corrected his own position on the theory: "Lately several attempts have been formulated in order to reconcile the universal necessity of the Christian faith with the opportunity to save oneself without it. ... the well-known thesis of the anonymous Christians of Karl Rahner... sustains that the basic, essential act at the basis of Christian existence, decisive for salvation, in the transcendental structure of our consciousness, consists in the opening to the entirely Other, toward unity with God. The Christian faith would in this view cause to rise to consciousness what is structural in man as such. So when a man accepts himself in his essential being, he fulfills the essence of being a Christian without knowing what it is in a conceptual way. The Christian, therefore, coincides with the human and, in this sense, every man who accepts himself *is* a Christian even if he does not know it. It is true that this theory is fascinating, but it reduces Christianity itself to a pure conscious presentation of what a

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human being is in himself and therefore overlooks the drama of change and renewal that is central to Christianity. Even less acceptable is the solution proposed by the pluralistic theories of religion, for which all religions, each in their own way, would be ways of salvation and in this sense, in their effects must be considered equivalent.”

“The critique of religion of the kind exercised in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and in the early Church is essentially more realistic, more concrete and true in its examination of the various religions. Such a simplistic reception is not proportional to the magnitude of the issue.”

Source: Wikipedia modified: *Anonymous Christian*.

It would be difficult to disagree with Benedict. Since all human beings are sinners and sense the need to be reconciled with Almighty God. The gift of the Holy Spirit in every Sacrament of the Catholic Church “instituted by Jesus Christ to give grace” is still the surest way to Salvation, provided, of course, the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the hearts and souls of all those who truly believe. However, it cannot be denied that over the years many a Shepherd upon whose shoulders the Lord placed the care of souls betrayed him for various worldly reasons as history shows; it started with Peter himself, the man who was given the very keys of the kingdom.

“Peter said, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘In truth I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times.’”

Enthusiasm, unfortunately is not salvation!

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'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers! (Mathew 7:21-23)

St. John Henry Newman gave all of us very good advise in his Sermon 14 on religious emotion:

"Let us take warning from St. Peter's fall. Let us not promise much; let us not talk much of ourselves; let us not be high-minded, nor encourage ourselves in impetuous bold language in religion. Let us take warning, too, from that fickle multitude who cried—first Hosanna, then Crucify."

By the gift of the Holy Spirit we have the seven sacraments including Reconciliation and the Eucharist with which we can recover the grace of God weakened or lost through selfishness, false pride, habitual infractions, or worse. One wonders what becomes of the sacraments in the case of "anonymous Christians." The mercy of God in every "closeted" confessional by faith, through God's grace is boundless and will bring us to everlasting life, depending, of course, on our heart-felt purpose of amendment each time we confess our sins. Will the anonymous Christian ever know the true joy of a penitent stepping out of a "closet" absolved from sin?

Gospel Acclamation:

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Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart, and yield a harvest through perseverance. (LUKE 8:15)

'No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light. So take care how you listen; anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.' (Luke 8:16-18)