

"Clear, brief and easily assimilated by all"

The Rise and Fall of the Third Rite

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THERE IS A NEW RELIGION in our southern land called "Australian Catholicism". It is a deformed clone of that real Catholicism described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It does not heed Christ's teaching, "**Repent** and believe in the Gospel," Mark 1:15; and "**Repent**, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," Matthew 4:17.

This new religion seems to have something in common with nature worship and the paganism of Baal in that **moral obligations are weakened** and there is **no need to repent of anything**. The old paganism of Baal required the regular offering of sacrifices to the nature gods; the new paganism requires feeling good about yourself, "I am special, I love me;" "I'm all right—you're all right;" and, "As a person of this commune in therapy, I must forgive myself." The consequences after three decades of self-worship are the offering of human sacrifice to the 'Australian Quality of Life-style' by aborting pre-born children and the increasing legitimization of drugs, suicide and euthanasia.

A FALL IN SEVEN STAGES

There are **SEVEN STAGES** in the abolition of Gospel repentance. In Australia, in 1999, we are up to number 6.

1. Contraception
2. Confession made complicated
3. Face to face therapy in the 1st Rite
4. A confused and corrupted 2nd Rite
5. An Illusory, Illegal and Invalid 3rd Rite
6. Simulating a Sacrament: a "4th Rite"!
7. Abolition of Repentance!

(1) CONTRACEPTION

THE REJECTION of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 was the turning point. Many married Catholics stopped going to Confession because they lacked any intention of trying to give up contraceptive practices.

From the early sixties onwards the crisis mounted. The use of marriage was increasingly directed by dissenting moral theologians — or immoral theologians — against the teaching of the Church. Early in 1967 the terrible falsehoods of the Papal Birth Control Commission were 'leaked' to the world press. For more than another year there were heightening expectations of a Church blessing on contraception. Finally Pope Paul VI rejected the report and with courage and compassion issued his great encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on 25th July, 1968. But the damage was done and the lost ground has not been reclaimed.

Even better priests and bishops chose **silence** — or were silenced by medical experts, superiors, colleagues and above all by the 'probable opinion' of dissenting theologians. Confused priests ranted from the pulpit

but said the opposite in the confessional. Penitents 'shopped around' for lax opinions. A curtain of cowardice and shame cloaked the corruption of souls.

Hence the evil situations so familiar over the past thirty years: entire hierarchies of bishops issuing devious statements offering loopholes from the Church's teaching; the inhuman attitude that a pregnant mother is the ultimate disaster; indiscriminate Holy Communion and sacrilegious communions in bad conscience; plus a growing rejection of many other items in the Church's teaching — which is escalating in 1999.

Nevertheless the 1999 situation is not all gloom and doom. There are more and more Catholic husbands and wives who will not bow the knee to Baal and contraception, or offer their infants to Moloch in abortion.

The surrender to contraception was closely linked with **giving up going to Confession** and thereby an effective abolition of this Sacrament in the lives of many Mass-goers. For them it was no longer a part of their Catholic lives, indeed, no longer a part of their Catholic faith.

(2) CONFESSION MADE COMPLICATED

CHANGES in the ritual of sacramental confession were introduced with a new liturgical book called *The Rite of Penance* in 1974/1975. It depended on Vatican II for its mandate: "The Rite and formulas of Penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament." *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (abbreviated SC) §72. A real plus was the new formula for absolution.

So far, so good. But facts are intractable. The liturgical changes since Vatican II have done little to arrest the contraceptive mentality or bring back the confused, the lapsed and the hardened sinners to sacramental confession and, thereby, forgiveness and sanctification.

Let us see how the new ritual has worked out in practice:

In *The Rite of Penance* the existing ritual for Sacramental Confession was enhanced and elaborated with alternatives, nuanced with options, and it became the First Rite of Reconciliation. So far, so good. It should have worked...

THE FIRST RITE managed both to enrich and to complicate the previous simple details for 'going to Confession'.

Further new nomenclature added to the confusion: **the Act of Contrition was renamed the Prayer of the Penitent**. Some priests proved ruthless in their enthusiasm for change, and harassed their penitents by *insisting* on them reading aloud a scripture passage. It tended to scare some people off... they had left their reading glasses at home, or couldn't read in the poor light, or read so badly it was a time-wasting

agony for both penitent and priest — and some couldn't read at all. Also it was pastorally insensitive to drop the traditional formula for getting started, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." Remember that, even with the old and simpler ritual, the priest often had to prompt nervous penitents. Now, charts, booklets and sheets of paper abounded, so that the confession, until then symbolically darkened, had now to be lit up like the General Judgement when all would be public on the housetops... The declining number of penitents who continued with regular or irregular attendance at this sacrament, and the priest-confessor, too, often chose the simplest options which left the rite more or less as it had been.

The Rite of Penance included a new buzz-word, 'reconciliation'. It is a six syllable word just like 'transubstantiation', but the former was 'in' and the latter 'out'. Of course, 'reconciliation' is a thoroughgoing Bible word, e.g. Matthew 5:24 and Romans 5:11; and it is mentioned many times in *The Rite of Penance*, in its headings and rubrics and prayers, including the new formula for absolution. Interestingly, and surprisingly, **the phrase 'sacrament of reconciliation' is never used in this new ritual.** Nor was there any suggestion of renaming this sacrament in Vatican II — even though Extreme Unction was renamed the Anointing of the Sick, SC §73 (see the monograph in the CNCC Newsletter no. 152/7 of 29th September, 1997). [*Handouts* n. 15]

But the inexorable fact of religious psychology still stands: renaming any sacred reality can be fraught with peril. Excessive zeal for the abolition of one name and ruthless insistence on a politically-correct new term can be destabilizing and confusing. **It can help destroy the mind's grip on the reality.** Is this a factor in the decline of sacramental confession? **Has too much talk about reconciliation reduced real repentance?**

Significantly, while Pope John Paul II has done more than anyone to popularize the phrase 'Sacrament of Reconciliation', he has also insisted that **all seven sacraments are reconciliation**, and that the old name, Sacrament of Confession, still stands. See *Reconciliatio et Pœnitentia* §27 of 1984. And see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (abbreviated CCC) §§1423-1424.

(3) FACE TO FACE THERAPY in the 1st Rite

WITH THE NEW *The Rite of Penance* in full swing in 1976, other changes were slipped in *as if* they were parts of the new rite: these involved extensive and expensive reconstruction of confessionals as 'confessional rooms', **with a chair for the penitent to sit face to face with the priest and without the grill between them.**

With the penitent no longer kneeling it seemed more like a therapy session and, in some places, the penitent was being persuaded to forgive himself... It was **the wrong body language** and the supernatural symbolism was gone. Further, some priests *insisted* on 'face to face' — that or nothing, (just as some insisted on Holy Communion 'in the hand', that or nothing!). It was very inconsiderate towards those confessing embarrassing sins. Canon 964 in the 1983 code was somewhat obscure in its more-or-less insistence on a fixed grill between priest and penitent:

its §2 on "confessionals *which the faithful who so wish may freely use* are located in an open place and fitted with a fixed grill" [*italics added*], but its §3 is quite clear: "Except for a just reason, confessions are not to be heard elsewhere than in a confessional."

(4) A CONFUSED and CORRUPTED 2nd Rite

A SECOND RITE of Penance, also called the Second Rite of Reconciliation for Sacramental Confession was included in *The Rite of Penance*. Pope Paul VI declared it the superior rite even while not the most basic — something like High Mass and Low Mass.

It was something entirely new, a communal penitential service, climaxing in the confessional box with the familiar individual confession of sins, the customary fatherly advice, assignment of satisfaction ('for your penance...') and the vital absolution.

It was good in theory but often amateurish in practice because so much had to be concocted by priest and liturgical committee, like a paraliturgy. There were long delays waiting for confession on top of the long preparation, and this put pressure on the priest to cut corners and 'process' penitents quickly. Then there were the distractions of makeshift liturgy. There was a bedlam of noise, and attempts to drown it in *unsacred* music.

A further confusion was that, when the penitent actually got into the Confessional, the priest was supposed to omit his blessing of welcome and the concluding dismissal, and the penitent was to omit the Act of Contrition, because these were all part of the communal framework.

Moreover, it did not help setting up two chairs in every nook and cranny from sanctuary and sacristy to the porches as though these constituted a proper confessional. Nor did it help requiring that every penitent wait for the communal blessing and dismissal. Further, the Second Rite was sometimes promoted *against* the First Rite, even for First Confessions of children.

Finally, with the lack of definite formulas and its sketchy structure, coupled with a growing confusion and error in sacramental doctrine, the Second Rite was increasingly prostituted by illegal and invalid directions to omit integral confession 'to save time': each priest stood at the head of a queue of penitents (akin to the queue for receiving Holy Communion standing up) and the penitents were instructed to "name only one sin" or "confess a general area of sinfulness".

This grave abuse of the Sacrament paved the way for the Third Rite as the ordinary procedure...

(5) An ILLUSORY, illegal and invalid 3rd Rite

A THIRD RITE was provided in *The Rite of Penance*. It formalized the traditional emergency provision of the Church for a priest to give absolution to a whole group of penitents simultaneously without hearing their confessions.

This Third Rite was meant for emergencies, such as imminent danger of death, e.g. a sinking ship or soldiers going into battle, or when penitents would in the circumstances be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long period of time. In

either case, it is **only justifiable if there is simply not enough time for the priest (or priests) to hear all the individual confessions properly.** In all such cases, there must be a sincere intention of making an 'integral confession' of mortal sins as soon as possible, **because such an integral confession remains an essential act of the penitent** — along with the other essential acts of the penitent, namely Contrition and Satisfaction.

Actually, there are other situations of physical or moral impossibility which justify postponing detailed confession of sins. An individual penitent who lacks the privacy to confess in detail without being overheard, e.g. in a crowded hospital emergency ward, can defer his spoken confession, as also must a sick or wounded or unconscious person who can no longer speak at all.

The intention of confessing one's sins as soon as possible is necessary for the absolution to be valid; without this intention the absolution does not count at all. The confession of sins is only *deferred*. This postponement of confession is akin to the more familiar deferral of 'doing one's penance' in the First Rite: it is deferred till some convenient time after the absolution, though in the early discipline of the Church such acts of satisfaction had to be done prior to absolution.

Priests have mostly ignored this requirement of integral confession and not informed the people of the intention they must have. Nor, in fact, have the people come back later to make their confession. So the absolutions were illusory. Indeed, in its lack of a firm purpose of amendment, the Third Rite has lapsed into something like the traditional Protestant misunderstanding of Indulgences, a "licence to sin".

Further, the original regulations on the use of the Third Rite *seemed* to have loopholes. These were increasingly exploited, sometimes with episcopal silence and sometimes with episcopal connivance. By the time the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* tightened things up, the illusory, illegal and invalid use of the Third Rite was endemic. Also, the consequent *Notitiae* tightening up the rubrics in *The Rite of Penance* were never published in English, either in Australia or USA. Were they published in English anywhere? If not, why not?

Thus the inadequacies and impracticalities of the Second Rite facilitated the slide into the Third Rite. Abuses of what had once been legitimate Second Rites now became the Third Rite. The vital element of auricular confession was replaced by such **bizarre ceremonies as writing out one's sins and burning them in portable incinerators, or lighting a candle and standing it in a tray** — a practice formerly associated with lighting candles at Our Lady's shrine. Did anyone think of having a scape goat as in Leviticus 16:21?

Since the strict conditions for the Third Rite were absent, its benefits were illusory and illegal and its effects invalid.

(6) SIMULATING a SACRAMENT: a "4th Rite"!

THE STATEMENT OF CONCLUSIONS, 14th December, 1998; plus Cardinal Medina's three page monograph on the *doctrinal necessity of auricular confession*, 19th March, 1999; and Cardinal

Clancy's "Letter on Behalf of the Australian Bishops", 14th April, 1999, show that General Absolutions were always forbidden, and hence must stop at once.

Just before Easter, 1999, dissenters set about getting round this obstacle. They began to develop **Penitential Services to take the place of the Third Rite.** These lack three essential elements of the **Sacrament of Penance, namely confession, satisfaction and absolution: THEY ARE NOT THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AT ALL.** Their professed aim is to arouse contrition and thereby attract the merciful forgiveness of God.

However, it must be added that if such Penitential Services concluded with priests hearing Confessions and giving Absolution in the First Rite, then all might be well. In fact, it would be a simplifying improvement on the Second Rite.

But the hard facts are that many of the faithful, already misled and confused, think that these Penitential Services are "a Fourth Rite" of the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins. They mistakenly think that 'the Fourth Rite' is yet another form of the Sacrament of Penance along with the First, Second and Third Rites, **or perhaps they no longer think that a sacrament is necessary.** Simulating a sacrament, i.e. pretending to confer it, is a grave sin on the part of the priest and incurs an automatic suspension from all priestly offices: Canons 1378 and 1379.

Old teaching about something called 'mortal sin' has been revived so it could be asserted that confession was *necessary only for mortal sin*, and it was implied that mortal sins were very rare! This makes the waiting outside of a confessional invidious indeed, a tacit but public admission of being a mortal sinner... and it encourages the popularity of penitential services without any confession at all, not ever.

CCC §1446 says, "Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance for **all sinful members** of His Church: **above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin...**" Note 'all sinners' and 'above all... grave sin'.

Unfortunately, some bishops, priests and laity seem no longer to believe in the power of sacraments to *do* things. This is classical Modernism [as on p. 7 of this old Newsletter] — and it was condemned by Pope St Pius X in 1907. *Modernism* means belonging to the present fashion. But the truth is that **sacraments are signs which do what they say**, they bring about what they signify, they act *ex opere operato*, 'by the work having been worked' — see CCC §1128.

Modernists reduce the sacraments to symbols, akin to the religious symbols of pagan rites, just as they reduce all supernatural beings including God and the angels, and supernatural realities and events like grace, Heaven and miracles, to mere symbols.

Thus for Modernists the Sacrament of Penance does not forgive sins but simply expresses the idea that we would like our sins to be forgiven, or gratitude that we believe they are already forgiven.

Are some bishops, priests and faithful going backwards into Protestantism? first into general absolution and then from general absolution to total abolition of the Sacrament of Penance?

(7) ABOLITION OF REPENTANCE!

THE FINAL STAGE is about to dawn, namely forsaking even the Penitential Services.

This Seventh Stage is characterized by the failure to make any examinations of conscience and any Acts of Contrition, or to form any purpose of amendment.

SIN is no longer serious enough to worry about! "Psychology and drugs will save us!" "There is no need for confession to a priest! It is a nasty medieval aberration!" There is no need for purposes of amendment — "God welcomes us just as we are..."

Yet "Forgive us our trespasses," is still a reminder and a reproach, as also is "Thy Will be done." But their meaning has been restricted and even stifled.

A religion in this debilitated state has lapsed not just into Protestantism but into Paganism. Protestantism 'protests' against the Pope and the Confessional. Paganism leaves life untouched by acts of repentance, by purpose of amendment, by the urgency of morality or freedom from sin or growth in holiness. And just as the heretics of old and the pagans sheltered under the protection of the Secular Power, the new heretics and the new pagans claims the protection of Modern Thinking, they avoid anything *unAustralian*, and they are 'politically correct'. All is tolerated — except Truth.

The 'way home' is conversion to the true Faith, and conversion of heart and life in the Sacrament of Penance, with integral confession of sins, humility and contrition and amendment and guaranteed forgiveness.

SEVEN WAYS FORWARD

1. Declare the present 1st Rite the only ordinary form of the Sacrament of Penance. Make its simplest form standard, while permitting elaborations: e.g. penitents reading a passage of Scripture.

2. Abolish the 2nd & 3rd Rites of Reconciliation.

3. Deny that the so-called 4th Rite is in any sense whatever a rite of the Sacrament of Penance.

4. However, encourage paraliturgies to precede the 1st Rite, at least before the big feasts. Call them "PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION" rather than Penitential Services. Such 'Preparations' have worked well in preparing groups of children for Confession.

But they should not use the Mass's "absolution" (thus named in the rubric of the penitential rite): "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen." It might be misunderstood. And any penitential service should always begin with some such disclaimer as this: "This public devotion is a preparation for Confession, NOT a substitute for it. It is not a Sacrament and no General Absolution will be given. But afterwards (or tomorrow etc etc) you are invited to confess your sins personally and privately, and to receive priestly absolution in the Sacrament of Penance."

Such arrangements would accomplish everything good already achieved by the present Second Rite

and would not be open to its abuses. In the rare circumstances when the Third Rite is justified, the priest would use his theological and liturgical knowledge to provide the essential elements.

5. Restore traditional confessions with grill. However, provide sufficient lighting, *not* for the priest to look at the penitent, but to avoid stumbling and to let the penitent read from a book or chart. Put a chair or bench beside the kneeler for the infirm.

6. Provide booklets and prayer charts to help penitents who so wish to make their own private preparation before entering the confessional. [See p. 16.]

These would include Scripture readings, litanies of repentance, hymns, psalms etc. They would also include several sets of examinations of conscience graded for ages and states of life. Such booklets would be kept on the seats outside the confessional.

7. Preach sermons on the great spiritual advantages of frequently confessing venial sins. [See page 8.]

ALL THE ABOVE IS UNEDITED from 20 years ago

5th Plenary Council, 2020-2021

A NUMBER of submissions for the coming Plenary Council contradict the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, e.g. on the desirability and even possibility of women priests and General Absolution as normative.

They propose we submit to worldliness and ignore the words of Our Lord. They want a new man-made Christianity without the Cross and arbitrated by no greater authority than themselves.

Moreover, they propose to continue and extend the failed procedures of the last 50 years which have left 90% of Catholics not adoring God on Sundays, and of the 10% at Mass many hold erroneous doctrines and practices such as contraception

IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE, YOU WON'T BEHAVE !

We need the Apostles' Creed and the Commandments (the Ten, the Two and the New).

GENERAL ASBOLUTION lacks the humility of confessing to a priest. Even St John the Baptist's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" sometimes included "confessing their sins" (Mark 1:4-5).

General Absolution in emergency situations still requires its subsequent completion by personal confession of sins (Canon n. 962 °1; CCC n. 1483), just as the deferment of the penance till later is still a part of the sacrament.

General Absolutions as was practised in Australia was mostly without mention of the necessity of a firm purpose of amendment and of restitution for those sins requiring it. It was fraudulent "cheap grace"

General Absolution lacks personalized counselling of spiritual guidance and encouragement to strive for holiness vital to living the Christian vocation..

May joy with peace, amendment of life, grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, and perse verence in all good works, be granted you by the Almighty and merciful God.

Father James Tierney