

# Did The Confessional of Roman Catholicism Originate With God?

## Bible Answers About Denominations

In Roman Catholicism, a confessor is an ordained priest who has power to hear sinners in the so-called sacrament of penance or Auricular (in the ear of the priest) confession. This confession takes place in the confessional booth where the priest and the penitent are separated by a curtain or partial wall. One may search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and find absolutely no indication of the practice of auricular confession. Although there are some indications that by the 5th century confession had been introduced into the church on a voluntary basis, it was not until the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215 A.D. under the leadership of Innocent III, that auricular confession was made mandatory for all Catholics.

The form of confession is quite interesting. After kneeling before the priest and asking and receiving his blessing, the penitent must repeat the first part of the Confiteor:

*"I confess to the Almighty God, to the blessed Virgin Mary, 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, in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."*

The penitent must then confess all his mortal sins, concealing nothing. The Catholic Church divides all sin into two classes, making an important and elaborate distinction between so-called "mortal" and "venial" sins, although there is no agreement among priests as to which sins are mortal and which are venial. Mortal sin is described as "any great offense against the law of God," and is so called because it is deadly, killing the soul and subjecting it to eternal punishment. Even after a penitent has received pardon a large but unknown amount of punishment remains to be expiated in purgatory. Venial sins, on the other hand, are "small and pardonable offenses against God, or our neighbor." Technically, venial sins need not be confessed since they are comparatively light and can be expiated by good works, prayers, extreme unction, purgatory, etc. However, the Baltimore Catechism (written by priests) says: "When we have committed no mortal sins since our last confession, we should confess our venial sins or some sin told in a previous confession for which we are again sorry, in order that the priest may give us absolution" (p. 329). As Lorain Boettner in his book, *Roman Catholicism*, continues, "What chance has a poor sinner against such a system as that?"

Canon Law 888 says: "The priest has to remember that in hearing confession he is a judge." Canon Law 870 says: "In the confessional the minister has the power to forgive all crimes committed after baptism." And a book, *Instructions for non-Catholics*, primarily for use by those who are joining the Roman Catholic Church, says: "The priest does not have to ask God to forgive your sins. The priest

himself has the power to do so in Christ's name. Your sins are forgiven by the priest the same as if you knelt before Jesus Christ and told them to Christ Himself." (p. 93).

This whole system of confession as taught by Roman Catholicism is contrary to God's word as recorded in the Bible. The Scriptures clearly teach that only God can forgive sins: "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" (Mark 2:7). Jesus also said, "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"-then He said to the paralytic-"Rise, take up your bed, and go home" (Matt 9:6). The reason that God alone has the power to forgive sins is because God is our Creator and Judge, and it is His law that has been broken. Jesus Christ also has this power to forgive sins because He is God.

When any man sins, that sin is against God. When Joseph was tempted to sin in adultery with Potiphar's wife by lying with her, Joseph rightly refused with the response, "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). King David committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, a sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, and himself; yet, in confessing his wrong to God, he said, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge" (Ps 51:4).

Since our sins are against God then we need someone to mediate for us with God in order to be forgiven. That Mediator is Jesus Christ as Paul stated, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). The reason He is the only mediator between man and God is because He was without sin and offered up Himself without spot to God (Heb. 7:27; 9:14) and therefore was both victim and priest! Therefore, Christ "ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-25).

The Jewish priests had sin (Heb. 5:1-3; 7:27; 9:7), and they offered sacrifice for their own sins as well as for the people. Even Catholicism admits that their priests have sins. Bishop Fulton J Sheen, after saying that "The Church asks that a priest who absolves a penitent be in the state of grace, a participant, himself, of the Divine Life," adds "This does not mean, however, that a priest in the state of mortal sin would not possess the power to forgive sins or that when exercised it would not be effective for the penitent" (Peace of Soul, p. 136; 1949; McGraw Hill Book Co.). Please tell me what need can be found then for a priest who is neither high nor holy nor harmless nor higher than the very heavens. There is absolutely no need for such priests as in the Catholic Church. Yet, Catholicism does not believe it is necessary to go to God through Jesus Christ to obtain forgiveness of sin! They contend that going to the priest in the confessional box is sufficient. They are not mindful that every Christian is a priest as Peter points out when he wrote, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5).

It is interesting that from their translation, The New American Bible (Confraternity Edition, New York: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1970 p. 1312) we have this statement: "Hence, declare your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may find healing" (James 5:16). This would indicate that if it is essential for the penitent Catholic to confess his/her sins in the ear (auricular) of the priest; then as he/she has done so then the priest should confess his sins to the penitent Catholic! If not, why not? Beloved, no Catholic priest has the power to forgive your sins. Only Jehovah God through our mediator Jesus Christ can forgive sin. That is why we are told "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).

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