

Confess Your Sins to One Another: An Exploration of the Biblical Validity and the Psychological Efficacy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Catholic Church

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Abstract : The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation has long been upheld, by the Catholic Church, as one of the Sacraments of healing, mainly due to the sense of peace, tranquility and psychological quiescence it accords the penitent upon receiving Sacramental absolution of sin through the action of the priest. This paper explores the Sacramental character of this practice and the psychological benefits of the celebration of the Sacrament. This is achieved in two parts: firstly, by the intellectual engagement of Sacred Scripture and the consolidated Sacred Tradition that the Catholic magisterium protects and, secondly, via a broad survey of the works of Carl Gustav Jung and Orval Hobart Mowrer regarding confession and forgiveness. The former will serve to demonstrate the Catholic belief of the divine institution of the Sacrament whilst the latter will demonstrate how this belief, coupled with the existing benefit of confessing guilt, collectively bolsters the Sacrament's overall psychological efficacy. Fundamentally, the analysis of Jung and Mowrer's works demonstrate that man, as a naturally religious being, has an inherent need for the confession of his wrong that he might be alleviated of psychological guilt in obtaining forgiveness of a (divinely ordained) minister who is sanctioned to absolve, i.e. the priest. The paper also presents the curative effect of the celebration of this Sacrament, illustrating how, without the act of confession, man remains in moral isolation from God and man; and, that with it, man is relieved of the mysterious feeling of guilt which lies at the root of his disquiet of mind and disturbance of will. Thus, the paper penultimately establishes how the Sacrament of Reconciliation is positioned in that place where psychology and theology meet: man's sense of guilt. It is Jung's views on confession and forgiveness that ultimately bridge the chasm between psychology and Christianity.

Keywords : Catholic, confession, Jung, Mowrer, penance, psychology, Sacrament of Reconciliation

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