

9/9/06

"God Squad" -
Penance

Can sins be forgiven without any penance?

On a couple of occasions at our church, we've had a "general confession." The priest told us to examine our consciences and then proceed to one of several priests situated in different parts of the church. He then told us to confess one of the sins we'd committed to the priest and return to our pew. All of our sins were forgiven. Also, twice when I was sick and in the hospital, a priest came to my bedside and did not ask me to confess my sins. He simply gave me absolution, saying, "Your sins are forgiven you." There was nothing said on any of these occasions about penance, retribution or reparation. Does that mean all our sins, no matter what, were completely absolved, or do I have to do more?

— A.M., Plattsburgh

Our daughter grew up in a Reform Jewish home, she became a bat mitzvah and attended Hebrew school through 10th grade confirmation. . . . Our daughter recently became engaged to her live-in boyfriend of four years, who is Catholic. At first, she told us their kids would be raised Jewish. Now, she tells us they will have no religion. Our daughter's fiancé is a

devout Catholic and has not said there will be no baptisms or christenings. His parents also are very religious, and, like us, cannot bear the thought that their grandchildren will not be raised in their religion. Our daughter wants to raise the kids Jewish but her fiancé does not.

She's compromising for him. Can kids really be raised without any religion?

— S., Parkland, Fla.

Welcome to the dark side of intermarriage.

Yes, it is possible for children to be raised with no religion. It's sad but definitely possible. In Jewish-Christian intermarriages, roughly four out of 10 kids are raised as nothing. Four out of 10 are raised as Christians, and two out of 10 as Jews.

We live in a secular society, and except for Christmas and Hanukkah and less so, Passover and Easter, for many people, there's really no need to make a choice. And if a family just has a token Christmas tree or Menorah and gives holiday gifts but does not attend a church or synagogue, they really are religious nothings. If this is your daughter and her fiancé's choice, there's nothing you or his parents can do about it except remain positive, loving and supportive through this spiritual chaos.

We urge couples to make a hard choice and try to have a single unified religious presence in the home. This causes pain, but it's better than raising a generation of nothings who are cut off from any religious roots and feel at home in neither a church nor a synagogue.



GOD SQUAD

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The four parts of the Catholic confession of sin include:

1. Sorrow for sin. The penitent must have genuine regret and must not just be looking for a spiritually cheap way of clearing the books.

2. Confession of sin. A sin must be named. A penitent cannot just have general regret, but must have clarity about what he or she has done to fall short of the mark God has set.

3. Absolution by a priest. Only a priest has the privilege and power to absolve a Catholic penitent of his or her sins. In a case of an emergency, or where death is imminent, a priest may grant absolution without all the other steps.

4. Acts of penance. If at all possible, recompense must be made for things stolen or harmed. There is a wide misconception that confession does not require any attempts to make whole what the sinner broke, but this isn't true.

Another misconception about confession pertains to what is to be confessed. Only mortal sins that imperil a person's soul need be confessed, and only mortal sins of which the person is aware. Smaller sins, called venial sins, are not generally the object of confession.

As for the practice of holding a general confession, we have no objection to this as long as they don't divide up the church by sins committed. The adultery line would be way too long!

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