

# RELIGION REDEFINED

Ronnie McBrayer is a nationally syndicated columnist writing about religion and faith. His approach to religion is unconventional, based on love and light instead of guilt and fear.



Photo Credit: Nancy Bea Miller



## Keeping the Faith Your Laundry is on the Line

By Ronnie McBrayer

My youngest son loves to go to the “Confession Stand.” He doesn’t want to make an appointment with the local priest, however. He wants a Slurpy and an order of onion rings. Since he first learned to put words together, the “Concession Stand” at any sporting event is referred to as the “Confession Stand.” Well “Amen” and pass the ketchup.

Actually, Confession Stands do exist, but they are not slinging cold drinks and hot food. With confession in steep decline in the traditions that employ the sacrament, some parishes now make it more readily available. You can find makeshift confessionals out and away from the steeple.

They are in shopping malls, at the food court, maybe even at a ball game. They are supplied with rotating priests who do the work of absolution in shifts. And some enterprising clergy are even offering confession online.

Yes, it is now possible for one to come clean via the internet, be pardoned by instant message, or to do penance just as soon as God answers his email. Just fill out the proper online form and wait for forgiveness to arrive in your inbox. I am as internet-friendly and as protesting a Protestant as they come, but this sounds suspicious even to me.

In my growing-up tradition confession to a priest was not required. Baptists just couldn’t bear the thought. That and I came of age out in the country where everyone had a clothes line rather than an electric dryer to dry their clothes. When your bloomers and holey socks (not holy socks) are swinging in the breeze for God and everybody to see, there’s not much left to hide. I think that is the point.

“Confess your sins one to another,” the Apostle James said, “that you may be healed.” These are hard words to practice when we have so privatized and individualized our faith that we prefer to hide our troubles, struggles, and failures from others. We keep our dirty laundry stuffed in a dark, putrid closet.

Yet, when we do not share our lives one with another – even the ugly parts – we miss out on the healing power the community of Christ can offer. I know the objection: “But I don’t want to be a burden to someone else!” Nonetheless, if we can’t burden one another with the confession of our shortcomings, then why continue to play the charade of calling each other “brother and sister?” We’re not being real.

Granted, in some communities of faith, confession will do you no good. As

soon as those in the pews know what you are wrestling with in the dark night of your soul, they will have your drawers hanging on the line for everyone to see. Still, we all need someone to whom we can bare our souls, someone who will help us carry the load and point us toward grace.

In the years I have spent in Christian ministry I have heard many confessions; at hospital bedsides, in coffee shops, in the church sanctuary, in the back rooms of funeral parlors, almost everywhere. I reckon I could get a job at one of those new improvised confessionals.

Rarely have these confessions been a burden. Yes, some have come as a surprise. At times I have been struck speechless, and many admissions have left me so broken hearted I thought I would need a priest to administer last rites for myself. But the overwhelming sensation I experience when someone pours out their pain is privilege.

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