



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

I will not confess!

When still a little boy, going to confession made me feel very much like the prodigal son; lost with a need to be found, forever made to think I have sinned and in need of indulgence because of my 'transgression' towards God.

must admit going to the Confessionary made me believe I'm iniquitous and impious. The expectations from my Catechism mentors at the time was to make sure I confess every week because I had to apologise to this 'deity' which only served to add to a sense of guilt, culpability and blameworthiness. Much as I wanted to feel I'm virtuous, I was systematically made to believe I wasn't a good boy, something I could never really understand when my wrongs didn't feel that bad. For example, how is having a scrap with my brother, after I had lost a game during Subbuteo, so mistaken it merited an apology to God?

How is the odd prank that made my mum and dad fume become such a massive issue that required a godly request for forgiveness; for example, when I was sent to the grocer and I secretly bought myself a packet of 'Love Hearts' or when I drilled into the warm 'qalba tal-hobza tal-Malti' when asked to buy fresh Maltese bread! How is not paying attention to boring teachers and as a result reverting to spitting papers out of a 'home-made' peashooter made of my blue Bic biro, so terrible it required having to apologise?

I remember struggling to understand why God would be so upset and irritated with my deeds considering 'he' is 'God' and must have had such a tall order!

I will not delve in the theology of it all because it is not my area of expertise and even though I have spoken with a couple of theologians on this issue prior to writing this column I still feel that I do not carry any proficiency. However, to date I still regard myself a Catholic and therefore I do have a God-given right to give my take on this issue.

In a context where secrecy is no longer commendable between children and adults, having a situation that attempts to give the impression that what you say to an adult you hardly know is fine, to me is inapt. It might be that the rules of engagement are different nowadays but a doctrine that eggs-on a hush-hush between children and the man sitting in the Confessionary is not fitting.

I've had occasions in the past when my own children would have been required by the priest during confession to keep the conversation 'secret'.

There is also another dimension to all of this.

I find it awfully confusing that we expect children to be repentant and obliged to confess when I feel the Church shouldn't be talking merely about 'obligations' but more on 'convictions'. The notion in itself that we will be sent to Hell because we don't go to Mass or to confess or the one hundred-



and-one other requirements that restrict us is simply ridiculous. This to me is nothing more than a prescriptive Church I do not pledge to.

To add to all of this, if you had to ask me, I don't believe that God is touchy! He doesn't want anyone to wiggle, wriggle and writhe - this in my eyes is the antithesis of what God and being 'sorry' is about.

If anything, pleading guilty is taking stock of what is happening in one's life.

I think the Church could do with reflecting on the way it does doctrine and localise it in practical and tangible ways. The Church needs to stop drilling into its faithful emotions of guilt and that life seems to start after death. This is ridiculous. We need a Church that needs to get away from its confessional mode and promote life, endorse justice and be a beacon of happiness - yes, I am referring to worldly contentment! It is a Church that should speak Jesus more than rules and decrees, a Church that articulates about a life of fulfilment rather than an existence

of denunciation, reproof and admonition.

I do not fear but esteem God. I do not subscribe to the dread I was brought up with and that my wrongs will make me lose eternal bliss. We are human and need a Church that doesn't teach but accompanies people in the choices they make.

We need a Church that is not made up of old stressed-out men and scruffy-looking women playing the guitar trying to convince us that they are all happy-clappy but we need a Church that commends life that is worth living here on Earth as is in Heaven. Guilt complexes do not please God. Remorse if anything should serve to replicate benevolence.

The Church has no right to sit on the moral high ground and pontificate how people should live their lives. The Church has its own dark corners, very shady angles it needs to clear up and I think that being grounded is one way of doing it. That is why the aura that most of the clergy try to instill with the intention of making us look up to them and

stand in awe irritates me big time.

I will not judge my neighbour but I wouldn't want anyone to judge me.

As I have claimed earlier on in this column I do not speak with any scholarly authority but as a person who even in the most rebellious phases of my life I believed that the Church is necessary for the well-being of society and its communities.

This remains an important institution and one I hope will be strengthened and not weakened by its dense way of interpreting Jesus. It needs to stop expecting people to come kneeling in front of it apologising to her and a God that is in no need of our humiliation, mortification and embarrassment. I believe in a God that wants to give sense to all we do, a God that wants to reach out to us, to be self-critical and realign the social imbalances.

So as far as I'm concerned, confessionary no more - I will only apologise to the people I hurt by trying to act well towards them.

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