

Session 6: Religion, deeper

Confession as the privileged place of formation. The sacrament we most often shrink.

Welcome back

Last week we worked Reason in correction. Today we return to Religion, but down a level. Specifically: **Confession** as the privileged place of formation. The sacrament we most often avoid, postpone, or shrink to a footnote. Bosco was unmovable on this.

Same contract. One specific moment, every week.

Opening prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. John Bosco, you took the hardest cases and formed them into men. Help us to take the souls God has placed under our care, our wives, our children, the men we sponsor, and form them with the same patience, the same reason, the same love that you used. Teach us to be present before we are productive, to be patient before we are pleased, and to lead with our hearts before we lead with our authority. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. John Bosco, ora pro nobis.

Today's scene

You're sponsoring another man through Exodus 90. You meet on Wednesday mornings at the coffee shop. You've been meeting for two months. You talk about the disciplines. You talk about how he's holding up under the cold showers and the no-screens. You talk about the books.

You have never once asked him about Confession.

He has never brought it up. You have never brought it up. The conversation has been about the program but not about the engine that makes the program work. You watched him stumble through the second month, watched the disciplines start to slip, and you offered him better strategies. Better habits. Better accountability. Everything except the one thing.

Last Sunday in the line for Communion, he wasn't there. He stayed in the pew. You noticed. You didn't ask.

That is the moment. That is what Bosco gives us words for.

Today's reading

From Don Bosco's Letter from Rome, 10 May 1884. Bosco asks Valfré how the old liveliness of the Oratory boys can be restored. The answer, and what follows, is the most concentrated theological statement Bosco ever made on what the sacraments actually do.

“But how can these dear boys of mine be brought back to life, so that they recover the old liveliness, joy, and openness?”

“With Loving-kindness (*carità*).”

“With Loving-kindness? But are my boys not loved enough? You know whether I love them. You know how much I have suffered for them and put up with for them across forty whole years.”

“I am not speaking of you.”

“Of whom then? Of those who take my place? Of the Rectors, the prefects, the teachers, the assistants? Don’t you see how they are martyrs to study and to work?”

“I see, I know. But that is not enough: what is missing is the best part.”

“What then is missing?”

“That the boys not only be loved, but that they themselves know that they are loved... Familiarity, especially in recreation, brings affection, and affection brings confidence. This is what opens hearts, and the boys lay everything open without fear before their teachers, their assistants, and their Superiors. They become honest in Confession and outside of Confession.”

And from the 1877 treatise:

Frequent Confession, frequent Holy Communion, and daily Mass are the pillars that must hold up an educational structure from which you wish to keep threats and the lash at a distance.

The concept in plain language

Confession is the central engine of the whole Preventive System. Not because the men perform piety; because the engine is what powers everything else. When YOUR own Confession is real and regular, you can offer it to the men and kids in your care without making it weird. When yours is slipping, you can’t. The session today is asking us to look at our own Confession rhythm without flinching.

Discussion questions

1. Valfré says the boys “become honest in Confession” when they know they are loved. What does it mean to be *honest* in Confession versus going through the motions? When were you last honest in a Confession?
 2. What’s your current Confession rhythm? When did it slow down, if it has? Why?
 3. For the men you’re sponsoring or leading: when did you last bring up Confession directly? If never, why not?
 4. Father Dalimata’s question, applied to Confession: do you experience the Father in Confession as one who is glad you came, or as one waiting to judge? Where does that image come from?
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The deeper theological move

The reason Confession is the engine is that it is where the Father actually does the work. We don't go to Confession to perform good behavior. We go because something in us needs to be touched by the Father directly, and Christ instituted this sacrament as the place He does it. Bosco couldn't form his boys without Confession because Confession is where the Father personally repairs the soul. Everything else is downstream. The Rector, the assistants, the patient correction, the loving-kindness, all of it sits on top of one fact: the boys are being met by the Father in this sacrament regularly.

The men around this table will form their kids only to the degree they let the Father meet THEM in this sacrament regularly. Skip Confession, and the engine isn't running. No engine, no formation. Just exhaustion.

Check-in: how did last week's commitment land?

Last week each of us committed to correcting one specific person on the behavior not the character, ending by naming our love for them. Around the table: did you do it? What happened?

Live application

Name one specific moment in the last 7 days where Confession (yours or another man's) was either avoided or absent from a conversation that needed it. One sentence.

Monday-morning commitment

This week, go to Confession. Yes, this week. AND tell ONE specific person you went. Make the sacramental engine visible.

The day this week I'll go to Confession:

The one specific person I'll tell:

What I'll say to them about why I went:

Closing prayer

Father, we thank you for the wisdom of your servant John Bosco, and for the brothers around this table. Send us back to our homes this morning ready to be the fathers, the husbands, and the brothers you have called us to be. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sancte Ioannes Bosco, ora pro nobis. Sancte Francisce Salesii, ora pro nobis.

The full 8-week arc, how to bring a moment, and the source translations are in the overview at <https://don-bosco.studiovellum.ai>.