

Kinda sorry: Banal expressions of contrition

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [February 10, 2004](#) issue

The Western world lost much when the confession-absolution dyad dropped God out of the equation. Vanished is the power of the purifying rhetoric that once gave voice to sinners in classic words and acts of contrition and confession. The banal phrases of today's transgressors, gathered from any recent week's newspapers or broadcasts, contrast drastically with the language of confession in the classic Book of Common Prayer and the Roman Catholic Act of Contrition, as the following examples show:

We have erred.

"I didn't think I'd get caught." —Baseball star Pete Rose after he was charged with outlawed sports gambling

We have strayed from our ways like lost sheep.

"I sincerely regret my actions in this case." —The *USA Today* executive who embezzled \$3.6 million

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.

"I am . . . just a man who made a terrible mistake." —Howard Donath, Illinois child pornographer convicted of sex acts against a little neighbor girl

We have offended against the holy laws.

"I'm sure that I'm supposed to act all sorry or sad or guilty." —Rose

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done.

"I was wrong in failing to truthfully address these issues." —Connecticut Governor John Rowland, after misusing state accounts and lying about it

We have done those things which we ought not to have done.

"If anyone was offended, I apologize." —California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, accused of groping women

"I'm sorry it happened and I'm sorry for all the people, fans and family that it hurt.

Now let's move on." —Rose

And there is no health in us.

"Give Mr. Rowland credit for at least saying he's sorry." —*Wall Street Journal* editorial

"My actions, which I thought were benign, called the integrity of the game into question And there's no excuse for that." —Rose

Have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.

"I've accepted that I've done something wrong." —Rose

Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults.

"I'm not going to break down and beg your forgiveness like a TV preacher." —Rose

We ask His forgiveness for our faults, our faults, our most grievous faults.

"I still enjoy gambling. . . . But I've learned to distinguish between the legal and illegal bets, which is what got me into trouble."—Rose

I detest all my sins.

"I apologize to anyone I might have offended." —Fuzzy Zoeller, after making racially insensitive jokes.

"I'm just not built to act all sorry or sad or guilty." —Rose

I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more.

"I am very sorry that [a "lame attempt at humor" about Gandhi] might have been interpreted in a way that causes stress to anyone." —Senator Hillary Clinton

And avoid the near occasions of sin.

"I screwed up." —The Chicago Cubs' Sammy Sosa, caught with a corked bat