

Author: Paul F. Bosch [pbosch@golden.net]

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KIDS AND KIERKEGAARD

Introducing Children to Holy Communion

1 Every now and then I'm asked to give the Children's Sermon at my home parish. My pastor doesn't call it that; he calls it "Opening the Word." (I have problems with that designation, as you might guess – Isn't the rest of the Service a kind of Opening the Word as well? But I'm not in charge of these things. "Just as well," I hear you muttering!)

2 In any case it's a moment for children. In our situation it comes after the reading of the Day's Gospel, and before the Sermon; kids are dismissed after it to their age-appropriate Sunday School – their own "sermon" I suppose you could argue.

3 I love to use these occasions with kids for mystagogy, partly on the principle that the grown-ups are listening in; See [Essay 162](#) above. My principle I derive from a friend and mentor who maintains there are only two things you can do in a Children's Sermon: A) Tell stories, and B) teach about why we do what we do in worship. No moralizing, please, with kids, no abstract theological speculations. Just A) stories, and B) helping kids to understand what we're doing when we worship.

4 So how do you introduce children to Holy Communion? To sacramental worship generally? I'm going to use this posting and the next to try to answer that question. Faithful readers of these Essays will recognize my allusion to Soren Kierkegaard's metaphor in the paragraphs that follow. I'd never try to explain his metaphor to kids – kids can't handle metaphors until they're at least eight – but adults should know him, if they don't already.

5 Kierkegaard is that 19th Century Danish Lutheran theologian and philosopher who suggests a stunning metaphor about Christian worship. He says most of us come into a church and right away the building itself betrays us. We see rows of seats in a kind of audience, facing an elevated platform – a kind of stage – with costumed performers. And we assume we're in a theatre, with the pastor and worship leaders and musicians presenting something for our entertainment or inspiration. God is in the prompters box whispering cues every now and then.

6 Disastrous for Christian worship! SK maintains. A better metaphor would be this: Everyone who comes in the door of a church ought to feel invited on stage. You're the

chief actors. It's the pastor and worship leaders who are in the prompter's box. And God is in the audience. (God is also chief actor on stage, but our metaphor disintegrates when we acknowledge that!)

7 So how can we get this across to children? We'll have to abandon the metaphors. See if the following comes close to our needs. I'll speak in the next few paragraphs as if I were talking to the children.

8 Gather around me, kids. I'll sit in this chair with arms because I'm an old man but you can sit on the chancel steps. Now: We're in church, right? Who do you think is the most important person here this morning? The pastor? She's up there dressed in these crazy clothes. Maybe she's the most important? Or how about the organist or choir? They've got to help us sing these songs and hymns. Maybe the choir, or the choir director is most important?

9 Nope. Guess who. You. You are the most important person here this morning. And you. And you. And your parents and all the grown-ups out there in their seats as well. All of you are most important. When you walk in the door on Sunday, we want you to feel you're the most important people here.

10 You, and you, and you, and your parents, and all the grown-ups: Only you can sing these songs and hymns. Only you can pray these prayers. The pastor and the choir? They're there to help you sing and pray. But only you can do it.

11 Same when church is over. Only you can live your life during the week as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus. The pastor can't do it for you. The choir can't do it for you. You have to do it. And if you don't do it, it won't get done.

12 The pastor and choir? We dress them up on Sunday to help you do your job. They're kind of like cheerleaders at a football game. They wear crazy clothes too, very often. But they're only there because they're cheering on the team on the field. (Aside: Yes I know: a metaphor. For the grown-ups!) But the team on the field: That's you. And you. And you. And all you grown-ups.

13 The most important people in church on Sunday? That's always the congregation, the people. You. And you. And you. And no one can take your place here. No one can take your place either, out there. At school, at work, at play, in your home, in your neighbourhood, in your world. All the rest of the week.

14 The pastor? The choir? The worship leaders? They have important jobs to do. To help you do *your* job. Being a Christian, a Jesus person. On Sunday. And the rest of the week as well. But you are the one who does it.

Well. It's time for your Sunday School, kids.

Next month, for children: Why sacraments? Why Holy Communion?

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