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THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION AS AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AND EXPERIENCE OF HIS MERCY

A b s t r a c t. In summary it should be stated that the right experience of sacrament of penance and reconciliation depends on meeting with God who is the merciful Father. Without this fundamental meaning this sacrament will be taking the form of less or more formal duty. The penitent will never experience undeserved mercy and love which obtains for free from the Father of mercy who is still looking him for. In order to reach an objective one should eliminated the wrong images of God as the ruthless or implacable guard and bookkeeper which is the obstacle in the sensitive experience of Father love. One should explain anew the problem of the free choice of the man and his freedom which in case of misunderstanding make him a tool of unconscious mechanism, impulses, and injured. The achievement of social sciences should be considered but the conclusions should be treated carefully, because they may exceed the scope their own competence. The Church should defend this difficult and at the same time constructive sacrament and its practice, showing its beauty and also both individual and community fruits.

Key words: confession; relation; mercy; Father; penitence; reconciliation; trust.

One of the toughest and most subtle sacraments celebrated in the community of the Church is the sacrament of penance.¹ It is associated closely with the attitude of both inner attitude and willingness conduct under the age of life. The essence of the new attitude is a radical turn away from sin and determined to return to God and to another human. This focus assumes the

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¹ This sacrament because of the acts of the penitent or its nature is described in different words: the sacrament of convert, the sacrament of penance, the sacrament of confession, the sacrament of forgiveness, the sacrament of reconciliation. Cf. CCC 1423–1424.

first awareness of sin, then his confession, and finally repentance and reparation which elements are the matter of this sacrament.²

In modern times sacrament of penance has become for many of the faithful a burden difficult to bear and it imposes the commitment,³ the fulfilment of which does not lead to spiritual growth. The heterodox proposals are presented that every individual Christian could stand it front of God and confess the sins, therefore he would obtain the grace of the moral evil weight release. Than, he would not need any intermediary in contact with God. In such an approach, the practice of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in the Church would be needless or even regarded as unnecessary obstacle.⁴ To this must be added, partially correct, concerns about whether the confessor will be able to understand the problems of the penitent, and if it he succeeds, would effectively be able to come to the rescue.

The problems and the question harder or less sustain in the Church of every age. Rightly notes Father Ignatius Bokwa that this sacrament “never enjoyed too much popularity in the Church. The Fathers of the fourth Lateran Council (1215 years) have committed even the faithful to annual confession and Holy Communion during the Easter season.”⁵ If in the every era there were difficulties, it seems that today this sacrament is experiencing a serious crisis. Many of the faithful, especially in Western Europe, resigned from his practice, giving different motives. It is worth to reflect on the central issue of the moment in the experience of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, which is the personal encounter with the merciful God and experience His infinite mercy. It is worth to reflect on the central issue of the moment in the experience of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, which is the personal encounter with the merciful God and experience His infinite mercy.⁶ This seems to be the central theme for the modern man who seeks un-

² Gunter KOCH, *Sakramentologia – zbawienie przez sakramenty* [Sacramentology – redemption through the sacraments], trans. W. Szymona, Treaty 10 (Kraków, 1999), 243.

³ Pope John Paul II encouraged to perform this sacrament in order to “the confession will not become the disgusting and unpleasant practice [...]”. “Posługa kapłańska w sakramencie pojednania” [The priestly service in sacrament of reconciliation], *L'Osservatore Romano* (pol. ed.) 1993, 5–6:44.

⁴ Cf. G. KOCH, *Sakramentologia* [Sacramentology], 245–246.

⁵ Ignacy BOKWA, “Sakrament pokuty i pojednania w aktualnych warunkach Kościoła w Polsce” [The sacrament of penance and reconciliation in the current Church in Poland conditions], in *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], ed. J. Augustyn, S. Cyran (Kraków, 2006), 123.

⁶ JAN PAWEŁ II [John Paul II], “Sakrament pojednania” [The Sacrament of reconciliation],

derstanding, listening and experiencing the acceptance of himself and his problems. He feels fear of misunderstanding and easy condemnation. Showing this perspective can remove the negative atmosphere created around this sacrament and reverse the negative trend to his practice.

Achieving this objective is to present a false image of God and of theories blur the sense of sin on the one hand, on the other hand the tendency to them is too much emphasized in the context of justice. The solution to the wrong image of God becomes present trend of evangelical image of the merciful Father who desires to give the man his mercy. It fully realizes himself in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, in which the Christian experience of God's mercy.

1. FALSE IMAGES OF GOD

A huge impact on the survival of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is the image of God, which the Christian bears in his heart. From images of God will depend on the attitude of the believer to the whole delicate yet complex reality of the sacrament. Or will the man pulled to the encounter with God, or he will try to avoid him, and even in panic to flee, rationalizing his behaviour. The latter attitude is conditional, false images of God Jesuit Karl Frielingsdorf described as powerful notion of "demonic" (dämonische Gottesbilder), because in fact it lead to accusations and hate of the true God and flee from Him.

One such false images is this of God as punishing judge who inspires great fear and confusion in the Christian's heart. The believer sees him as an implacable judge who does not penetrate into the motivations and circumstances, but merciless punishment as the smallest misconduct. Severe tyrant does not accept any translation or opposition, as there is not in his nature mercy, forbearance and compassion. To newly returned order, which was demolished misconduct, the sinner must be severely and ruthlessly punished.⁷

in *Listy na Wielki Czwartek 1979-2005* [Letters for Maundy Thursday 1979-2005] (Kraków, 2005), 258. Cf. Kazimierz FRYZEL, *Jak zadbać o swoją... spowiedź* [How to care about your ...confession] (Kraków, 2012), 30.

⁷ Karl FRIELINGSDORF, *Demoniczne obrazy Boga. Nieprawdziwe wyobrażenia Boga, ich powstawanie, rozpoznawanie i przewyciężanie* [Demonic images of God. False imaginations

In the history the image has been confirmed by preachers and teachers who have the sense of the sacrifice of Jesus portrayed as righteous anger satisfy the absolute God the Judge. French lecturer in dogmatic J. Corne in this way interpreted the abandonment of Jesus on the cross. "God no longer sees in him his beloved Son, but the sacrifice for sin, the sinner of all times and all places in which to impact the entire severity of God's justice. [...] God vent to his anger and his righteousness, it is completely satisfied."⁸ This is not conducive to the image of God and is not conducive to openness to the sacrament of penance.

The second false image of God is described in terms of an accountant and guardian of the laws. God is treated as devoid of feelings and heart robot that perfectly captures the smallest deviation and departure from the law or standards. Strictly guarded imposed regulations and notes the slightest evil deed which add to your account to provide at the time of the final judgment the evidence of your sin. He was seen by some as an "amazing spy", "policeman" or absolute "guardian of morality."⁹ This image inspires in believer a sense of continuous control, the results of which are used against him. This is accompanied by a feeling of fear and the belief not to hide, and achieving any sense of security before the all-pervading eye which x-rays every second of life. The believer has the feeling of being permanently under surveillance, and therefore can not experience the rest or save the space of intimacy. Such a Christian carries in his heart the feeling of constant danger, control and fear against which he would like to hide, but it is not able to do that.¹⁰ In this

of God, how to learn, recognize and overcome them], trans. K. Zimmerer (Kraków, 1997), 115–116. Cf. Raymond MOLONEY, "Rozważania o sakramencie pojednania" [Consideration the sacrament of reconciliation], trans. A. Nowak, in *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], 62.

⁸ I quote for: Dariusz KOWALCZYK, "Spowiedź, czyli przekonywanie o grzechu i miłości" [The confession that is persuading the sin and love existence], in *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], 87. In some people opinion, God was regarded even as blasphemous picture of tsar. Cf. Stanisław WITEK, *Duszpasterstwo w konfesjonale* [Christian Ministry in confessional] (Poznań, 1988), 15.

⁹ K. FRIELINGSDORF, *Demoniczne obrazy Boga* [Demonic images of God], 147–148. Cf. R. MOLONEY, "Rozważania o sakramencie pojednania" [Consideration the sacrament of reconciliation], 62.

¹⁰ Priest K. Wons declares that the fear of God causes that "a man begins to regard the God as the threaten and is begins to defend against Him". "Jak spotkać się z penitentem? Od przyjęcia prawdy o grzechu do przyjęcia przebaczenia i pokoju" [How to meet the penitent? From the truth of sin acceptance to the forgiveness and peace], in *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], 165.

perspective, some beautiful passages of the Bible, talking about the providence of God, are confirmation of this distorted image. Psalm 139, in which they are contained fine words about good and close to God, it becomes the strengthening of anguish: “Lord, you scrutinize and know me / You know when I sit down and get up. / From afar my senses, / see my action and my rest” (Psalm 139:1–2).

Synthetically described some of the false images of God not only have nothing to do with evangelical God, but result in growth of fear for Him. They make believers on the one hand wants to come to Him with their weaknesses, on the other hand runs away from him because of panic anxiety. Escape, in turn, is only apparent, because the burden of sin and guilt is like a huge, overwhelming stone. Christian is not being able to hear the silent voice of a loving and merciful Father. Pope John Paul II put it in this key characteristics of the two evangelical form of surviving their life dramas: Judas and Peter. The first after betrayal of Jesus felt remorse, which clearly says the gospel: “Then Judas, who betrayed him, seeing him condemned, repented [...]” (Mathew 27:3). However, it has not seen for himself other way out of this difficult situation, but taking his own lives. He was unable to bring himself to trust Jesus, who in a dramatic moment of betrayal came to him a unique word: “My friend [...]” (Mathew 26:50). Otherwise simply did Peter, who, after all, albeit in another dimension, but also betrayed Jesus, swearing that he does not know him. Otherwise simply he took Peter, who, after all, albeit in another dimension, but also betrayed Jesus, swearing that he does not know. After three Peter’s profession of love, the risen Jesus confirmed his ministry as his deputy.¹¹

2. MISUSE OF PERCEPTION OF SIN

Not only false images of God become an obstacle to meeting with him in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, but also a wrong understanding of sin. It’s about focusing on his weight and malice, accompanied by a feel-

¹¹ JAN PAWEŁ II [John Paul II], “Sakrament pokuty wielkim darem Bożego miłosierdzia” [Sacrament as a great gift of God’s mercy], in *Sztuka spowiedania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests]. Cf. CCC 1429.

ing overwhelmed and sort of infirmity referral to the tribunal merciful Father. We recognize sin in his aspect of the subject, in which the believer is experiencing as inadequate weight of committed an evil act. It may have the impression that the burden of sin is so serious, and thus offending God that takes away the right to go to the confessional and confession of moral falls. In the past it was connected with exaggerate, and sometimes demonizing sexual sphere, which was a difficult area for integration with higher values. It was also felt that a small number of people will be saved due to evil, which refers to majority of the population. St. Augustine saw mankind as the mass of the damned (*massa damnata*) of which it will be saved by the grace of God is small group of believers. St. Bonaventure, highlighting the weakness and sinfulness of human nature, claimed that will be more rejected than saved people. In turn, de Montfort based on the statements of some of the saints defended the thesis that only one person in ten thousand can count on salvation.¹² If with such a perspective is presented sin on the one hand, on the other hand its weight and malice, and it may raise a doubt in the possibility of forgiveness and fear to stand before God with such terrible deeds.

Next to occupy excessive burden of sin may be other threat that has its source in repeating the same falls. Feeling a great sense of sinfulness and inadequate response to the forgiveness of God, the Christian will try to avoid meeting the Sacrament of Penance.¹³ His emotional state that will have a big impact on the reasoning may indicate weak effort in the fight against the main drawback. Emerging sense of shame on the one hand, on the other, fear of rejection from God will result in internal conflict, which can lead to spiritual and moral confusion. Permanent fear of falling combined with a sense of overwhelming weakness that leads to sin, they become triggers neurosis.¹⁴ In past centuries it was believed that a more effective means to overcome sin and brought up in the Christian virtues was threatening eternal damnation and condemnation to eternal torment rather than the preaching of God's mercy.¹⁵

¹² D. KOWALCZYK, *Spowiedź* [Confession], 86.

¹³ Cf. Jan KUŹNIAR, *Między niebem a konfesjonalem. Poradnik nie tylko dla tych, którzy boją się spowiedzi* [Between heaven and the confessional. Not only for those who are afraid of confession handbook] (Warszawa, 2012), 178.

¹⁴ I. BOKWA, *Sakrament pokuty i "pojednania"* [Sacrament of penance and reconciliation], 126.

¹⁵ Cf. D. KOWALCZYK, "Spowiedź" [Confession], 87.

The response to the excessive emphasis on malice of sin and the frequency of committing is the other extreme, involving the fact that it is trying to bring people to believe in their sinless and innocence.¹⁶ The consequence of such a position, as you can imagine, is also avoiding the sacrament of confession, this time with the theme absence of further matter, or sins.

This reduction is carried out in the name of human freedom, which becomes the primary and unrestricted criterion of moral behaviour. There is no solid basis for ethics and the moral law governing human action. The principle in whose name it is done, what is possible, leading to total freedom, which is essentially lawlessness.¹⁷ Rejecting solid ethical principles deriving from human nature, people put themselves the ultimate norm of action. It allows him to make everything it deems appropriate and good, in spite of an objective moral evil deed.¹⁸

Relativizing values also occur when appears contradictions in religions. In different way resolve certain problems was seen at the ancient Greeks and Romans in yet another way. The same thing can present itself in the great religions: while one religion specified action will be qualified as sinful, in another no longer such a classification exist, for example what is a sin in Christianity is no longer classified as sin in the Islamic religion.¹⁹ Changes in this way trying to suggest perspective and believing that there is no reference to fixed and unchanging values. The impression is tried to be given that every religion establishes its own values freely, where human subject (most often a hierarch) is the fundamental criterion. Accepting such kind of reasoning there is no possibility of moral evil and sin definition, and the same every religion systems conscientiousness is devalued. As a consequence the sin becomes a contractual issue, established by authorities but the same it has no obligatory force.

The opposite position is belief that the man has got unlimited free choice or he does not have it at all because of the different reasons. The acceptance

¹⁶ Ibid., 88. J. Kasztelan thinks that, “the Christian denomination meet the society which insistently demand to get rid of thinking of guilt”. *Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty* [The Sacrament of penance performing] (Kraków, 1993), 9.

¹⁷ D. KOWALCZYK, “Spowiedź” [Confession], 88–89.

¹⁸ Seweryn ROSIK, “Formowanie sumienia chrześcijańskiego w relacji do normy moralnej” [The Christian conscience forming in relations to moral principles], in *Pokuta i sakrament pojednania we współczesnym Kościele* [The penance and sacrament of reconciliation in modern Church] (Poznań, 1985), 21.

¹⁹ D. KOWALCZYK, “Spowiedź” [Confession], 89.

of some empirical and Social Science conclusions can lead to the postulate of human freedom abolition. The psychology examines human behaviour, which can be determined by the childhood and youthfulness years experiences. The family situation and childcare conditions impact negatively or positively the child emotional development, which influence the next on making a choice in adult life. The unconscious defence mechanisms or injuries are the reason of improper and often unwanted interpersonal relations behaviour. The reasonable question arises, "Do the unknowing contents, which has been recorded in our subconscious, cancel human freedom?" Undoubtedly we must say, they can it eliminate but to propose a thesis that a man is a play of subconscious strength, seems not be right.²⁰ In perspective of recognition the man as a one unable to making up the free decisions, the whole law which is based on responsibility, loses its *raison d'être*, including sacrament of penance and reconciliation. The social science describes human functioning in a society and functioning of social groups among themselves, fixing the rules they are subjected to. The moral principles and a feeling of guilt would be the secondary consequence of social relations. The social context would be making a human choice decision.²¹ In the past, the slavery was regarded as an normal social relation order, justifying it even by the God's will. The material poverty very often leads to moral poverty, that is, wrong behaviour which is the result of lack of elementary needs satisfaction. The formation of some structures and ways of community or whole nation functioning, can create so-called: sin structures, which John Paul II described as a social sin.²² It creates favourable circumstances for evil increase, sometimes even they force people to commit the acts which are morally wrong. The acceptance of this reasoning without well-founded analysis, should abolish the sin and quilt category, because a man would not be free. In this context we cannot talk about a moral evil and the need of it absolving and compensation, because the man is not responsible for his action. The source of responsibility

²⁰ Ibid., 90. John Paul II warns against hasty waiving a man the responsibility of some immoral behavior: "At the same time we must say that some of modern ideas explain too hastily some kinds of behavior, meanwhile it should be remembered that at least at the beginning their character is voluntary [...]". *Posługa kapłańska w sakramencie pojednania* [The priestly service in sacrament of reconciliation], 44.

²¹ Cf. D. KOWALCZYK, "Spowiedź" [Confession], 89.

²² *Adhortacja apostołska* [The Apostolic Exhortation] *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (Rzym, 1984), no. 16. It must be underlined that the pope emphasized that the base of social sin is consisted of the sum of the individual sins. That is why they cannot be treated as the anonymous and unchangeable. Ibid.

and therefore — guilt, should be placed outside the subject: in psychological conditioning or in the context of social relations. The confession, as a sacrament, would be treated as a psychotherapy skill or a dialog used to atone and calming down the feeling in order to rebuild the unstable emotional balance.²³ The sacrament would absolutely lose the transcendent aspect and meaning of radical call to convert and reconciliation with brothers but it would become a sedative and spiritual “soporific” practice, closed in psychological aspect. The sin and guilt would be justified by getting rid of responsibility for inner sources.

3. MEETING THE MERCIFULL GOD, AS A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

The basic meaning in sacrament of penance and reconciliation practice is a meeting with transcendent God. This sacrament cannot be treated as a solipsistic meeting which aim is experience of nice feelings.²⁴ This is the sacrament which calls in unique way to transcend yourself to meet Somebody different and unique. This uniqueness consists in entering a relationship with the merciful God, who wishes to give the man a delight and happiness. The emphasis should be placed not so much on the God’s justice but on His merciful.

The beautiful picture, showing unlimited merci of Heavenly Father, is the parable of prodigal son (cp. Luke 15:11–31). However, the main hero is not the son who had left fatherly house, but the father who is waiting with a permanent hope for his son return. The younger son who is revolted against his father and seduced by the pleasant life mirages, is leaving his home with a due part of fortune. Life of revelry and wastefulness caused he lost not only financial resources but also his dignity. With a sense of shame and humiliation he missed the house of his father (cp. Luke 15:15), whose injured love had always accompanied him as the quiet call to right way return.

²³ D. KOWALCZYK, “Spowiedź” [Confession], 91. John Paul II protested against reduction of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation to the psychological or psychotherapeutic technique. *Posługa kapłańska w sakramencie pojednania* [The priestly service in sacrament of reconciliation], 44.

²⁴ G. KOCH, *Sakramentologia* [Sacramentology], 246–247.

Awaiting father welcomed returning son, showing respect and love. (Luke 15: 22–23). “What is the most striking in this parable is the ceremonial and full of love acceptance of son who is returning: a sign of merciful of God, who is always ready to forgive.”²⁵

Jesus not only teaches about the merciful Father but the merciful Father manifests Himself in the person and acts of Jesus. When they brought an adulteress who according to the law should be sentenced to death, He fights for her rescue (cf. John 8:1–11).

He confronts not no protect the sin and evil, but to protect the man. The sin because of the justice demands a punishment but Jesus stands as a merciful Lord whose mercy is bigger than justice. He does not make an allowances for sin because He requests and demands the woman to not sin any more in her life (cf. John 8:11). He saw her remorseful heart which had regretted the sins but it was not able to do anything for its rescue. The shown mercy which mitigates her sins brings blessed results. Another events which are described by St. Luke the Evangelist also shows the mercy attitude of Jesus towards this woman who was a sinner in the city (cf. Luke 7:37).²⁶ During the feast Jesus is accepting her service²⁷ which was consciously neglected or abandoned by the host of the reception but which were due to the excel-

²⁵ JAN PAWEŁ II [John Paul II], *Adhortacja apostołska* [The Apostolic Exhortation] *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, no. 5. Cf. CCC 1439. The document dedicated to preparing people to proper experience the anniversary of 2000 years of Christianity, the attitude of the father against the evil made by his son was characterized in the words: “The poverty and mercy. Not the offence and punishment but the offence and the mercy.” *Bóg, Ojciec miłosierdzia. Oficjalny dokument Papieskiego Komitetu Obchodów Wielkiego Jubileuszu Roku 2000* [God the Father of mercy. The official document of Papal Committee of Great Anniversary Celebration] (Katowice, 1998), 64.

²⁶ There is such explanation in *Grecko-polski Nowy Testament. Wydanie interlinearne z kodami gramatycznymi* [Greek-polish The New Testament interlinear edition with grammatical codes], trans. R. Popowski, M. Wojciechowski (Warszawa, 1993), 282. S.O. Abogunrin declares in the comment to the Gospel according to St Luke, that “this woman is an adulteress”. “Ewangelia według św. Łukasza” [The Gospel according to St.Luke], in *Międzynarodowy komentarz do Pisma Świętego. Komentarz katolicki i ekumeniczny na XXI wiek* [International comment to the Holy Bible. The Catholic and ecumenical comment for XX century], ed. W.R. Farmer, trans. M. Kulikowska (Warszawa, 2001), 1261. However the sin is classify there are no doubts that she was known in the city as a sinful woman. The serious evil act rested on her.

²⁷ The duties of the host were: give a kiss, tell the servant to clean the legs of guest with the cold water, tell to give some water to clean hand and face before the meal and give a few drop of oil to anoint the head to let the hair have a nice smell. Cf. S.O. ABOGUNRIN, “Ewangelia według św. Łukasza” [The Gospel according to St. Luke], 1261.

lent quest. Jesus lets the sinful woman to touch Him, to wash His foot with tears and dry with her hair and afterwards anoint Him with the fragrant oil (cf. Luke 7:38). The Pharisee and another guest who were scandalized by the fact of well known sinner service acceptance are being given the Jesus answer in the form of incredible and much more scandalized His act, that is showing mercy through remission of sins. When she could not expect even the understanding or a friendly gaze Jesus is giving her the biggest gift: love, which manifested itself in reinstate her the moral purity and reconciliation with the Father of mercy. “For the immensity of sins God is giving a response of height of forgiveness. The mercy will be always bigger than every sin and no one can stop the love of God, who forgives.”²⁸

Both the parables on the mercy and the acts towards the remorseful sinners manifest themselves in the nature of God as the merciful Father. That is why the teaching of Jesus is always full of content of hope and happiness, which liberate from devastating sin and a feeling of guilt.²⁹ Jesus Christ introduces God not only as the one who is waiting passively and accept the sinner but what is more as this one who is searching for him as the first one and calls him spiritual, similarly to the merciful father of parable. God the Father remains faithful to His paternity and love for every son who leaves.³⁰ His love “is able to bend over every prodigal son, every human poverty and above all — over moral poverty and sin. When He does it, this one who experiences the mercy does not feel humiliated but found and “appreciated.”³¹ This is moving and constant love fight of a good and happiness against sins and every enemies who tries to plunge Him into the abyss of evil. God never gives up, until He overcome the sins and evil by His compassion and merciful.³²

²⁸ FRANCISZEK [Francis], “*Misericordiae vultus*. Bulla ogłaszająca Nadzwyczajny Jubileusz Miłosierdzia” [The bull announcing the Special Anniversary of the Mercy], *L'Osservatore Romano* (pol. ed.) 2015, 5(371):4.

²⁹ Cf. Alojzy DROŻDŻ, “Kompetencja teologiczna w sakramencie pokuty” [The theological competence in the sacrament of penance, in *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], 119.

³⁰ The dynamism of love of Father, who search the lost son, in very interested was shown by Alessandro Pronzato: “God never gives up, does not accept the sinner lost. He spy him, follows him, hunts him with perseverance, keeps pestering him, does not give him a break.” *W ramionach Ojca* [In Father's arms], trans. L. Sędzimir (Kraków, 2002), 32.

³¹ JAN PAWEŁ II [John Paul II], *Encyklika o Bożym miłosierdziu* [The encyclical about the God's mercy] *Dives in misericordia* (Rzym, 1980), no. 6.

³² Cf. FRANCISZEK [FRANCIS], *Misericordiae vultus*, 7; Stefan SCHUDY, “Sakrament pojed-

It is not the coincidence that the words: “God the Father of merciful” are used in the formula of the absolution. They clearly point out that not the sin and the punishment are in the center of the sacrament but the good news of the merciful Father who sent His Son for human redemption, and in Him God gives repeated sins forgiveness.³³ If the sin is shown in this view as the law or the moral principles breaking, the faithful will not have an occasion to meet the real face of merciful Father. God will be associated rather with the one who limits the freedom and demands the obedience, that with—love which is bending over the man.³⁴ It does not mean that the justice which marks the proper framework for personal relation out, should be forgotten. However it is not the last and the most important word because God is raised over it by His merciful and forgiveness,³⁵ because “the main masterpiece of Father is the mercy.”³⁶

The God of mercy remains sensitive for His children whose lot penetrates Him deeply in the image of the worldly parents. Just like father and mother never leaves their child and they are not indifferently for its lot, the same merciful Father is aiming His full of love gaze to every son and daughter. Pope Francis wrote, that the Heavenly Father’s mercy is analogical to the love of father and mother who are “moved up to the viscera by the lot of their own child.”³⁷

Therefore, the loving God cannot be regarded only as the idea or imagination which has not significant impact our spiritual life depth, such assumption is the reason of “sending it to sleep”. Over seventy years ago, Dietrich Bonhöffer, well known German pastor, paid attention for this danger and developed the new concept of “cheap mercy”. He described it as the science or system which are abstract and have no connection with the personal God but only references to some general ideas of Him. The acceptance of this idea, with no deeper reflection and with no insight into the conscience, caused sins remission automatically. Pastor made a final conclusion which

niania w całości kształcie zadań duszpasterskich” [The sacrament of reconciliation in all pastoral tasks], in *Pokuta i sakrament pojednania we współczesnym Kościele* [The penance and sacrament of reconciliation in modern Church] (Poznań, 1985), 69.

³³ Cf. A. DROŹDŹ, “Kompetencja teologiczna” [The theological competence], 117.

³⁴ J. KASZTELAN, *Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty* [The Sacrament of penance performing], 28.

³⁵ Cf. FRANCISZEK [FRANCIS], *Misericordiae vultus*, 13.

³⁶ *Bóg, Ojciec miłosierdzia* [God, the Father of mercy], 68.

³⁷ FRANCISZEK [FRANCIS], *Misericordiae vultus*, 6.

was sad and prophetic: “In this Church, the world finds cheap justification, for its sins, which does not regret and does not want to free from them, at all.”³⁸

4. EXPERIENCE OF MERCY OF GOD AS THE CONDITION OF SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

It is necessary to underline constantly that every sacrament is a meeting of two persons but the sacrament of penance and reconciliation have the special meaning of matter and intimacy.³⁹ This is not a common meeting of the people who know each other superficially or even have a close relation but it is a meeting of people who are unique for themselves and unusually deeply involved. When the human relation can be realized on different level of involvement, the God's involvement is always bigger because it is the deepest and the fullest. In the sacrament of penance and reconciliation God is coming with this mercy to the sinner who offended Him and inflicted suffering.

If we look this sacrament as a deep interpersonal meeting it cannot be treated only as the act of psychological and moral analysis which aim would be only achievement of perfection. The repentance and sins confession cannot be sufficient but for the confession matter they are necessary. It is a need to talk and open the prospect of man and meeting the merciful God, who always has the forgiveness initiative as the first one.⁴⁰ The prospect of the mercy God meeting inseparable assumes the recognition of the own sin. The insight in the own personality and the weakness awareness allow to learn the truth that the man is the sinner who is capable and inclined to commit the sins.

³⁸ Dietrich BONHÖFFER, *Naśladowanie* [Imitating], trans. J. Kubaszczyk (Poznań, 1997), 9. He warned the Evangelic community in the forties of XX century: “Where are the Luter's warnings to avoid the Gospel preaching, which would give the people feeling of security, living at the same time godless life”. *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁹ The special sensitivity of this sacrament and showing the mercy of Jesus was written by pope John Paul II: “In this sacrament performing is maybe even much more than in the other ones, important that the faithful experience the face of Christ Good Shepherd,” *Sakrament pojednania* [The sacrament of reconciliation], 258.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. KASZTELAN, *Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty* [The sacrament of penance performing], 19.

It constitutes the necessary rule of the Mercy Source return.⁴¹ The faithful will not be able to release the huge need of improvement unless he realize his own weakness and sins tendency which pushes him to the wrong way. In the other words he will never attain the prodigal son level of consciousness without recognize himself as a sinner.

Every prodigal son takes the road which opens up to him the growing anger sin areas and its destructive results. He learns the huge scope of devastation which has been made by a mortal sin which destroys his relationship with God and the neighbour. He becomes an ungrateful person who is inflicting the deep wounds on the God who beloved him in the frantic and unlimited manner. The father suffers a lot when He sees that His love is scorn and He — himself is disregard and rejected. And he caused the moral, spiritual and material damage upon his neighbour who was allowed to expect kindness and good. Through his sin which is a big injustice he could cause the neighbour lost the confidence in the other men or hope. Finally he inflicted a wound on himself through good and love weaken, on the other hand through entering dangerous moral evil areas and “negotiate” with the personal evil.

The awareness of sin increases together with the desire of the redemption which is given in Jesus Christ. After realization the terrible sins result the Christian can see the meaning and value of love of God who did not spare his own Son (cf. Romans 8:32). Because the Jesus blood had to clear people of every sin (cf. 1 John 1:7), to let them be the God’s children anew.⁴² This price of redemption shows in a proper light the reality of sin which is intended and agreed hate of God.⁴³ The evil constitutes the depravation of a man who can realize the most cruel and terrible acts even to kill the incar-

⁴¹ Adhortacja apostolska *Reconciliatio et paenitenita* [The Apostolic Exhortation], *Reconciliatio et paenitenita*, no. 13. Cf. JAN PAWEŁ II [John Paul II], Encyklika [Encyclical] *Redemptor hominis* (Rzym, 1979), no. 20.

⁴² Cf. *Bóg, Ojciec miłosierdzia* [God, Father of mercy], 85; Stanisław WITEK, *Sakrament pojednania. Podręcznik dla duszpasterzy* [The sacrament of reconciliation. The pastoral handbook] (Poznań–Warszawa, 1979), 59–60. The meaning of the Heavenly Father suffering, which send His Son to the world, was beautifully described by the pope Benedict XVI: “I His death on the cross, the turning the God against Himself is performing, through this He gives Himself to raise a man and redeem – this is love in the most radical form.” *Encyklika* [Encyclical] *Deus caritas est* (Rzym, 2005), no. 12.

⁴³ Jan Kanty PYTEL, “Grzech w ocenie Pisma Św.” [Sin at the Holy Bible opinion], in *Pokuta i sakrament pojednania we współczesnym Kościele* [The sacrament of penance and reconciliation in modern Church] (Poznań, 1985), 11.

nate Love, Son of the God. The process of conscience erosion is astonishing, when the man takes consciously and voluntarily the road of serious moral evil. In such circumstances he is able to execute the most cruel acts which sometimes seem to be inhuman. In this context the unlimited Father's mercy is shown especially because the Father is able to forgive remorseful sinner and accept him again as a son.

The increase of sin consciousness contrasted with the face of merciful God makes that the Christian can note two dissimilar and distant realities: his sinfulness and unlimited mercy of Father. The real picture of God the Father causes the longing of close relation with Him, however the same it is hampered very often by a sin. Than the desire of leaving the state of sin emerges for meeting with the loving Father who makes him happy.⁴⁴ There is a rule of the spiritual life that the reality of sin is deeper experienced, the greater is the happiness and thankfulness for the grace of forgiveness.⁴⁵

When the penitent who is aware of his sins goes to the sacrament of penance, he expects the meeting with the merciful Father who will hear him out and show him love. The man confesses his sin only if he finds himself facing not he code of rights but the merciful and loving God.⁴⁶ The confession should comply with the personalization rules on God's mercy experience through the confessor service.⁴⁷ Comparing to the Western Europe countries, using the individual confession by a lot o Catholics it is a polish specific character.⁴⁸ This practice involve the analysis of the structural factors concerning relation between the penitent and the confessor. When, in Poland the aspect of God's mercy experience and the task of confessor in relation with a penitent during the confession is emphasized, in Western Europe the

⁴⁴ J. KASZTELAN, "Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty" [Sacrament of penance performing], 27.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Bóg, Ojciec miłosierdzia* [God, the Father of mercy], 85.

⁴⁶ A. PRONZATO, *W ramionach Ojca* [In Father's arms], 35.

⁴⁷ Cf. I. BOKWA, "Sakrament pokuty i pojednania" [Sacrament of penance and reconciliation], 132; Dariusz SKROK, "Ars celebrandi – szafarz sakramentu pokuty" [Ars celebrandi – the minister of sacrament of penance], in *Pokuta dzisiaj. Materiały sesji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne Oddział w Radomiu 27 kwietnia 2010* [The penance today. The materials of science session organized by Polish Theological Department in Radom 27 April 2010], ed. J. Wojtkun (Kraków, 2010), 72–73. This rule is underlined by O. Fryzeł, who invite the penitent to arouse the act of fight, which is the meeting with Risen Christ, and the confessor is a visible sign of His love. Cf. *Jak zadbać o swoją... spowiedź* [How to care about your ...confession], 32–33.

⁴⁸ The new initiatives appeared, which let the easier access to the confessors, e.g. the night of confessionals, the days of confession for this sacrament celebration during the retreat.

sacrament crisis and the trials of solution are being examined. It does not mean that our country is not affected by this last problem in a way, but it is not dominated in discussion, thanks to the existence of confession practice. As the priest Ignacy Bokwa mentioned, using the confession by a lot of Catholics is a capital which cannot be wasted.⁴⁹

Last years, not only the meaning of God's justice was underlined during this sacrament celebration, but the meaning of the God's mercy. Priest Alfons Skowronek presenting the sacrament of penance history, pays the attention that as the judicial system meaning was underlined last centuries, the fathers of Second Vatican Council do not mention it in any document.⁵⁰ The similar position is represented by a priest Alojzy Drożdż who declares that the sacrament "constitutes the most redeeming presence of God's mercy towards the remorseful penitent" and the confessor remains the personal servant of forgiveness.⁵¹ But if we would like to talk about the judicial meaning, we should not consider it in secular categories but in categories of God's judgment who is mercy and calls to penance and conversion.⁵² God does not concentrate on sins but He wants to show His unlimited merciful which the results is the reconciliation in His Son, Jesus Christ.⁵³

The God's mercy experience in the sacrament of penance has been always underlined by Popes teaching. The mercy priority over the justice is emphasized by the Pope Francis who has declared the rule of His disciples is going to be based on the priority of the mercy, since now. It does not annul the justice but the last word does not belong to this virtue but to the mercy. In the Bible horizon the God's justice is shown in His forgiveness which reality and the symbol is the cross of Christ.⁵⁴ John Paul II gave a beautiful rule

⁴⁹ I. BOKWA, "Sakrament pokuty i pojednania" [Sacrament of penance and reconciliation], 133.

⁵⁰ Cf. Alfons SKOWRONEK, "Historia pokuty kluczem do zrozumienia sakramentu pojednania" [The history of penance as a key to understand the sacrament of reconciliation], in *Sztuka spowiedzenia. Poradnik dla księży* [The confession skill. Handbook for priests], 106.

⁵¹ A. DROŹDŹ, "Kompetencja teologiczna" [The theological competence], 117. Pope John Paul II previously encouraged the confessors to be "the real servants of mercy." *Sakrament pojednania* [Sacrament of reconciliation], 258.

⁵² Cf. I. BOKWA, *Sakrament pokuty i pojednania* [Sacrament of penance and reconciliation], 132.

⁵³ Cf. J. AUGUSTYN, *Sakrament pojednania* [Sacrament of reconciliation] (Kraków, 2010), 20.

⁵⁴ FRANCISZEK [FRANCIS], *Misericordiae vultus*, 13.

which follows not only the Holy Bible but was present also in his heart: “let the mercy be the bigger, the bigger is the moral decline of the penitent.”⁵⁵

In the words of the absolution formula: “I absolve you from your sins [...]” the penitent should experience the mercy of Father who is accepting him again with love. The essence of sacrament of penance and reconciliation uncovers the unlimited mercy of God who, as the Pope Francis repeats: “is never getting tired with forgiving us.”⁵⁶ The statement of St. Augustine, the great father of the Western Church: “It is easier for God to stop the anger than the mercy”⁵⁷—shows very deeply the God’s essence. This truth was reminded in XX century in the simply words by the polish mystic — St. Faustyna, who was instructed in the following words: “Say to the souls, where they should look for the comfort, this is in the tribunal of mercy (sacrament of penance—S.Z.) [...] If a soul is as an decomposing corpse and if there is no raising from the death, from human point of view and everything is lost — it is not the God’s way, the miracle of God’s mercy is bringing this soul back to life in all it fullness.”⁵⁸

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⁵⁵ *Posługa kapłańska w sakramencie pojednania* [Priestly service in the sacrament of reconciliation], 44.

⁵⁶ FRANCISZEK [FRANCIS], *Boga nigdy nie męczy przebaczenie naszych win* [God is never tired of forgiving], [<http://www.opoka.org.pl/aktualnosci/news.php?s=opoka&id=46860>] [1.12.2015].

⁵⁷ *Objaśnienia Psalmów* [The psalms explanation] 76, 11, PSP, t. 39 (Warszawa, 1986), 365.

⁵⁸ Faustyna KOWALSKA, *Dzienniczek. Miłosierdzie Boże w duszy mojej* [Diary, the Mercy of God in my soul] (Warszawa, 1995), no. 1448.

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SAKRAMENT POKUTY I POJEDNANIA JAKO SPOTKANIE Z BOGIEM I DOŚWIADCZENIE JEGO MIŁOSIERDZIA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Analizując praktykę sakramentu pokuty i pojednania, należy stwierdzić, że właściwe przeżycie tego sakramentu przez chrześcijanina zależy od spotkania prawdziwego Boga, który jest miłosiernym Ojcem. Bez tego fundamentalnego wymiaru sakrament ten będzie przyjmował postać mniej lub bardziej formalnego obowiązku. Penitent nigdy nie doświadczy niezasłużonego miłosierdzia i miłości, które otrzymuje darmo od szukającego go nieustannie Ojca miłosierdzia. Aby osiągnąć ten cel, należy usunąć błędne obrazy Boga jako bezwzględного sędziego albo nieubłaganego strażnika i buchaltera, które stanowią poważną przeszkodę do doświadczenia czulej miłości Ojca. Na nowo należy tłumaczyć problem wolnego wyboru człowieka i jego wolności, które błędnie rozumiane czynią z niego albo kreatora dobra i zła, albo narzędzie nieświadomych popędów, mechanizmów i zranień. Należy brać pod uwagę osiągnięcia nauk humanistycznych, lecz traktować z pewną ostrożnością wnioski, które wychodzą nieraz poza ramy ich kompetencji. Kościół winien bronić tego trudnego a zarazem budującego sakramentu i jego praktykowania, ukazując jego piękno i owoce zarówno indywidualne, jak i wspólnotowe.

Słowa kluczowe: spowiedź; relacja; miłosierdzie; Ojciec; pokuta; pojednanie; ufność.