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## **CONFESSION AND PENANCE IN SELECTED WRITINGS OF POLISH SCHOLARS OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES**

### **Spowiedź i pokuta w wybranych pismach polskich uczonych późnego średniowiecza** **Abstract**

In their reflections, the eminent Polish scholars of the late Middle Ages: Jan Merkelin, Mateusz of Kraków, Stanisław of Skarbimierz, and Jakub of Paradyż, devoted much attention to confession and penance. Genuine acknowledgment of committing evil deeds, confessing them, expressing a will for contrition and remorse, zeal in doing penance, adherence to the Decalogue, and performing good deeds were the elements leading to remission from guilt and obtaining forgiveness. Confession and penance were intended to encourage reflection on one's life, serve the formation of conscience, the development of virtues, lead to the destruction of sin, find the right path, and provide hope for future salvation. At the same time, they sought to shape appropriate and favourable attitudes of clergy towards penitents, who were shaping the attitudes of the faithful. The priest's attitude towards the penitents should be responsible, individualized, marked by understanding, compassion, and a willingness to explain the mysteries of faith. On the one hand, the outstanding scientists and preachers presented these fundamental issues through the lens of theological reflection, and on the other hand, they presented them in such a way that they became an important and understandable element of religious life.

**Keywords:** Confession, Middle Ages, penance

### **Abstrakt**

W swoich rozważaniach wybitni polscy uczeni późnego średniowiecza: Jan Merkelin, Mateusz z Krakowa, Stanisław ze Skarbimierza i Jakub z Paradyża, wiele uwagi poświęcili spowiedzi i pokucie. Szczere przyznanie się do popełnienia złych czynów, wyznanie ich, wyrażenie woli żalu i skruchy, gorliwość w czynieniu pokuty, przestrzeganie Dekalogu i spełnianie dobrych uczynków były elementami prowadzącymi do odpuszczenia win i uzyskania przebaczenia. Spowiedź i pokuta miały zachęcać do refleksji nad własnym życiem, służyć kształtowaniu sumienia, rozwojowi cnót, prowadzić do zniszczenia grzechu, odnalezienia właściwej drogi i dawać nadzieję na przyszłe zbawienie. Jednocześnie starano się kształtować właściwe i przychylnie postawy duchownych wobec penitentów, którzy kształtowali postawy wiernych. Postawa kapłana wobec penitentów powinna być odpowiedzialna, zindywidualizowana, nacechowana zrozumieniem, współczuciem i chęcią wyjaśniania tajemnic

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wiary. Wybitni naukowcy i kaznodzieje z jednej strony ukazywali te fundamentalne zagadnienia przez pryzmat refleksji teologicznej, z drugiej zaś przedstawiali je w taki sposób, że stawały się one ważnym i zrozumiałym elementem życia religijnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** spowiedź, wieki średnie, pokuta

## Introduction

Since the beginning of Christianity, admitting to committing wrongful deeds, confessing them, expressing remorse and the desire to make amends for the wrong done have been considered elements leading to release from guilt and obtaining forgiveness. Confession and penance led to the destruction of sin, finding the right path, and reconciliation with God. The Church assessed human weaknesses with penitential judgments and punishments aimed at the prospect of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

The development and systematization of canon law in the 12th and 13th centuries contributed to the clarification of penitential discipline. Master Gratian pondered whether mere heartfelt remorse and secret reparation, without confessing sins to a priest, were sufficient for achieving harmony with God. In the first part of the canon, he maintained that no one could be absolved from sins without penance and confessing their sins vocally to the priest. In the second part of the same canon, he introduced a distinction between external and internal penance. He believed that public sins should be confessed to a priest, but in the case of secret sins, he did not resolve this issue unambiguously.<sup>3</sup> Gratian's contemporary, Peter Lombard (d.1160), asserted that sin could be forgiven before confessing sins to a priest if the sinner had the intention of receiving the sacrament of penance.<sup>4</sup> Alain de Lille (d. around 1200) distinguished between general and specific confession of sins. The former aimed at release from venial and secret sins, while the latter led to purification from mortal and manifest sins.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of mandatory Easter confession at the Fourth Lateran Council (canon 21: *Omnis utriusque sexus*) made the annual confession of sins a criterion of a Christian's fidelity and distinguished them from non-believers. This norm, incorporated into canon law, helped shape teaching and influenced medieval piety. As scholastic theology developed, penitential practice became the subject of theological reflections focusing on the significance and manner of confessing sins and sacramental absolution. The theological reflection most fully expressed by the thought of St Thomas Aquinas posited that contrition, confession, and satisfaction were integral parts of the sacrament of penance (the quasi-matter of the sacrament), while absolution was the form of the sacrament. Matter and form together formed a whole and

<sup>2</sup> C. Vogel, *Le pécheur et la pénitence au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1969; M. de Jong, *Transformations of Penance*, in: *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. F. Theuvs, J.L. Nelson, Leiden 2000, p.185-224; S. Bylina, *Spowiedź jako instrument katechezy i nauki współżycia społecznego w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*, in: *Spółczesność Polski średniowiecznej. Zbiór studiów*, vol. 5, ed. S.K. Kuczyński, Warszawa 1992, p. 253-265.

<sup>3</sup> *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. E. Friedberg, vol. 1, Graz 1955, *Decretum Gratiani*, part 3 – D.1.87 de poen., col. 1184-1187.

<sup>4</sup> Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1852, (hereinafter PL), vol. 192, lib. IV, dist.17, 1, col. 880-881.

<sup>5</sup> Alanus de Insulis, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, PL, t. 210, c.31, col. 172-173; idem, *Liber de paenitentialis*, PL, vol. 210, col. 279-304.

brought about forgiveness of sins.<sup>6</sup> The declarative formula (forma indicativa) “*ego te absolvo*”<sup>7</sup> expressed the action of the minister and was uttered by virtue of the authority of the “keys.” It expressed more explicitly the power of judging and absolving, referring to the legal nature of the sacrament of penance. In the matter of mortal sins, Thomas Aquinas believed that no mortal sin could be forgiven without grace and a formal act of sincere penance. He also noted that one mortal sin cannot be forgiven without another currently residing in the soul, as the grace of God would encounter an obstacle in its action precisely in that other unforgiven sin.<sup>8</sup> According to the Church, a sinner absolved by a priest became justified before God.

The sacrament of penance has evolved in the pastoral practice of the Church and in doctrinal reflection. Theologians and preachers began to focus on the preparation and attitude of the confessor and his approach to the penitent who was to stand before the tribunal of God’s justice. This issue also found reflection in Polish theological literature of the late Middle Ages.

### **Penance in the writings of Polish scholars of the late Middle Ages**

During the crisis of the Church in the 14th and 15th centuries, attention was drawn to the need to raise the level of preparation of the clergy for pastoral work and shape human attitudes.<sup>9</sup> Among the works of many outstanding Polish scholars, theologians, and preachers, attention is drawn to the treatises, sermons, and writings of Jan Merkelin (1325-1400), Mateusz of Kraków (1345-1410), Stanisław of Skarbimierz (ca. 1360-1431), and Jakub of Paradyż (ca. 1380-1464) addressed to clergy and devoted to the issue of penance. They contained advice and recommendations for confessors, aimed to promote moral virtues and the development of religious life, and fit into the Church reform in the late Middle Ages. The aforementioned theologians recognised the necessity of renewing Latin *Christianitas* and linked the success of structural transformations in the Church to the internal transformation of its members.

The handbook for the clergy by Jan Merkelin, written in 1388, mentioned two types of general confession (*confessio generalis*): one sacramental, characterized by the confession of sins, made in the presence of a priest, and the other, non-sacramental, said at the beginning of the Holy Mass. In both cases, the forgiveness of venial sins occurred for three reasons: the contrition of the penitent, the humility associated with confessing the sin, and the prayer of the priest. However, in the case of sacramental confession, absolution was the most important.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of confession, the penalties incurred due to sins were remitted. Eternal punishment was forgiven through contrition of the heart (*contritio cordis*), while temporal punishment was forgiven through *satisfactio exterioris*, but also through perfect contrition and

<sup>6</sup> St Thomas Aquinas considered the effects of the sacrament of penance in four questions of his *Summa Theologica*. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia*, vol.12: *Tertia Pars Summae theologiae a quaestione LX ad quaestionem XC cum Supplemento eiusdem Tertiae Partis*, Romae 1906, q. 86,87,88,89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, III, q. 84 a.3 c.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, III, q. 86.

<sup>9</sup> W. Bielak, *Devotio moderna w polskich traktatach duszpasterskich powstałych do połowy XV wieku*, Lublin 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Merkelin, *Liber de instructione simplicium sacerdotum*, ed. M. Borzyszkowski, Warszawa 1982, p. 270. On Jan Merkelin see S. Dobrzański, *Jan Merkelin*, in: *Słownik polskich teologów katolickich*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1982, p. 94; Z. Miler, *Jan Merkelin (przed 1325-okolo 1400) – teolog z klasztoru augustianów w Strzelcach Krajeńskich*, „Nadwarciański Rocznik Historyczno-Archiwalny”, 2002, t. 9, p. 233-237.

true contrition of the heart (*vera cordis contritio*). In the case of *attritio* – imperfect contrition, incomplete repentance, driven by fear of eternal punishment or awareness of the wickedness of sin without recalling the mercy of God did not bring forgiveness.<sup>11</sup> Confession and penance were supposed to foster humility and piety as well as the practice of virtues and the struggle against sin.

Mateusz of Kraków<sup>12</sup> emphasized important aspects of confession and penance. In his short treatise *De modo confitendi*, he stated that confession should be preceded by an examination of conscience based on the Decalogue, revealing the state of the soul and the intentions guiding one's moral actions. When confessing sins, it was necessary to determine whether the penitent was not subject to excommunication, especially greater excommunication reserved for higher ecclesial authority.<sup>13</sup> In his letter to confessors (*Epistola missilis ad confessores*), he reminded the clergy of their vocation to strengthen sinners, especially the weak. He pointed out that the confessor's relationship with the penitent should be based on love and gentleness, fostering in the sinner an inner need to fight evil and aiding in conversion. The faithful should not fear confession, as such fear could stem from overly strict confessors. Therefore, he recommended not to impose too severe penances but to apply the *vino iustitiae et oleo misericordiae*. Sinners were to become accustomed to penance rather than fearing it. He taught to convert with charity and piety (*pie et caritative corrigatis*).

He pointed out that conscience played a fundamental role in qualifying sins, as the internal conviction of the righteousness of one's actions and the disposition of the human will were more significant than the actions themselves. Mateusz devoted his work *De puritatae conscientia* to this issue, recommending daily examination of conscience as a condition for preparing for a good confession and a means to attain inner peace, revealing the truth about oneself. He suggested exercising the will, through which people can control their desires which often lead to wrongdoing. Mateusz listed six sins against the Holy Spirit that were difficult to forgive because they opposed the six attributes of God and led the sinner to reject penance, without which forgiveness could not be obtained.<sup>14</sup>

According to Stanisław of Skarbimierz,<sup>15</sup> *vera poenitentia* is as essential to a person as good faith and good life. In his XLI sermon, he compares true penance to a lifebuoy for a shipwrecked person. He emphasizes that priests should make the common folk aware that seeking justification for committing sins is unacceptable. It is necessary to instruct them to repent for their sins, make a resolution to confess, and avoid committing grave sins. He stresses that it is not enough to regret sins if one continued to commit them as this renders penance a false act. One must make a firm resolution to forever abstain from all mortal sins. Similarly, it is not sufficient to renounce only one sin while ignoring the rest because God forgives all sins in their entirety, not selectively. Stanisław explains that a confession is deemed false if the penitent does not regret the mortal sin committed for personal gain and does not intend to avoid it in the future. He emphasizes that genuine remorse and atonement

<sup>11</sup> Jan Merkelin, *Liber de instructione*, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> Mateusza z Krakowa, *Opuscula theologica dotyczące spowiedzi i komunii*, ed. W. Seńko, A.L. Szafrński, Warszawa 1974, p. 9-56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p.163-166.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 289. Grzechy przeciw Duchowi Świętemu: *invidia supernae gratiae, impugnationis veritatis agnitae, desperatio, praesumptio, obstinatio et finalis impenitentia*.

<sup>15</sup> R.M. Zawadzki, *Spuścizna pisarska Stanisława ze Skarbimierza. Studium źródłoznawcze*, Kraków 1979.

to one's neighbour are prerequisites for the forgiveness of sins. Stanisław of Skarbimierz regards certain actions as unworthy of the act of penance, including the practices of fortune-tellers, diviners, sorcerers, usurers, prostitutes, sellers of relics, and those who harbour hatred.<sup>16</sup> These categories of sinners are considered dangerous to the worship and faith in the true God.

In his XXV sapiential discourse, Stanisław of Skarbimierz highlights the duties of the clergy who should administer just judgments and prepare the people entrusted to them for salvation. He appeals to priests to embrace the light of God's wisdom, which will help them in judging the faithful, being strict or gentle as circumstances dictate, prescribing "penitential remedies," and rendering just verdicts. He demands from them an impeccable way of life, efforts for souls and their salvation, support for the oppressed and the poor, and teach about the punishment for sins.<sup>17</sup>

Wrongdoings and transgressions lead to the loss of God's grace that enables one to worship the Almighty worthily. In sermon X from the collection *Super Gloria in excelsis*, Stanisław of Skarbimierz suggests that everyone should recognize their departure from the grace they once possessed and consider what to do next. People should reflect on the thoughts that absorb them and whether they are not dominated by trivial matters, vain things, and whether they do not evade accepting revealed truth. At the beginning of conversion, one should only think about eternal, spiritual, and future matters. According to this desire, one can merit consolation, for as it is written, "the Lord hears the needy" (Psalm 10:17).<sup>18</sup>

The pursuit of departing from sin and regaining grace was combined by Stanisław of Skarbimierz with the restoration of piety in oneself. He referred to the admonitions in Revelation 2:5: "Remember then from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first." The admonitions to come to one's senses and return to a previous state should induce repentance resulting in concrete actions. Analysing this passage of the Revelation, the theologian prescribes a change in mindset, reflecting on oneself and the causes of sin. He advises against yielding to the promptings of those who deceive, attempt theft, murder, arson, reinforce wickedness, engage in immoral behaviour and injustice while considering themselves friends. Such behaviour displeases God and leads to the loss of divine grace. Hence, the necessity of internal conversion, a return to the original, sincere, and fervent piety, to the initial enthusiasm.<sup>19</sup>

The human soul, marked with the image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, should not be condemned to damnation. It is the counsellors, confidants, allies, servants and friends who, united as a community, should protect their member from the devil's influence. However, if a person has succumbed to his tyranny, only God can deliver him.<sup>20</sup> In the final part of the sermon, he calls for sobriety and cessation of the desire to sin. He urges for an examination of conscience: *suspend, list, and discern what you have done, what you have thought, what decision you have made, what you have established, or what*

<sup>16</sup> Stanisław ze Skarbimierza, *Mowy wybrane o mądrości*, ed. M. Korolko, Kraków 1997, p. 138-141, 148-153.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 63-75.

<sup>18</sup> Stanislaus de Scarbimiria, *Sermo X Glorificamus Te*, in: Stanislaus de Scarbimiria, *Sermones super „Gloria in excelsis”*, ed. R.M. Zawadzki, Warszawa 1978, p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 93.

*you have approved.*<sup>21</sup> He appeals to memory to recall the previous state of happiness, justice, and fairness. He juxtaposes these situations with the realities where the devil, perversity, and dishonesty prevailed. He encourages contemplation of places, times, moments, reflecting on encountered individuals and circumstances of sinning. He urges people to quickly distance from the devil, emphasizing that sins are heavier the longer they dominate the unfortunate soul.

He reminds that man fell from good to evil, and if he desires to return to good, he must abandon evil and its traits, distance oneself from sin, express remorse, have a firm resolution not to sin in the future, and perform good deeds. Only in this way, through true confession and penance, could the sinner return to the lost grace of God, and consequently to the lost eternal glory, to which the Holy Trinity leads.<sup>22</sup>

Stanisław of Skarbimierz, however, warns against an easy and quick separation from God. This occurs when a person falls into a state of sin, rebelling against the Almighty. This opposition to the will of God, instigated by the devil, condemns the human soul to damnation. Only a thorough and sincere self-assessment, delving into one's heart, departure from evil, overcoming one's weaknesses, and making the right decisions allow for turning away from sin and understanding the harmony between temporality and eternity. Appealing to accountability for one's own actions, feeling remorse and confessing guilt, the desire to repent and make amends serve as a guide for returning to the right path.

In his treatise *De erroribus et moribus christianorum modernorum*, Jakub of Paradyż called for repentance and conversion. He began his reflections by stating that proper penance erases sin. He believed that those should be considered truly penitent who renounce sins with strong determination, wholehearted commitment, and sufficient contrition. Repentance should not be undertaken out of habit or fear, but out of love for God. True penance evokes tears, accompanied by genuine contrition and a sincere promise to improve one's life. Jakub warned against the mockery and dishonesty of those who repeat sins they have confessed. He saw the dangers of undertaking penance amidst the turmoil and anxieties of the contemporary world, where some are led astray by pernicious persuasions and others by harmful examples, where on the one hand, illusory fame, and on the other, humiliations deprive the human mind of the ability to think. Therefore, he referred to Old Testament forms of penance: fasting, lamentations, ashes, sackcloth, and above all, humble prayer. He warned that not everyone obtains the grace of forgiveness of sins; especially not those who confess out of fear, shame, habit, or those who conceal some sins or belong to those who doubt God's justice. He viewed unfavourably the clergy who, endowed with many privileges, prerogatives, and honours, indulge in passions and promiscuity rather than devote due attention to their faithful. "For better is a layperson doing penance before God than a clergyman persisting in sins."<sup>23</sup> He

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem: *Quare respisce, voluntatem peccandi depone, appende, numera et distingue quae gessisti, cogitasti, consuluisti vel dictasti, scripsisti aut auctorizasti.*

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 93-94.

<sup>23</sup> "Lepszy jest bowiem człowiek świecki czyniący pokutę przed Bogiem, niż duchowny trwający w grzechach." Jakub z Paradyża, *Wybór tekstów dotyczących reformy Kościoła*, ed. S.A. Porębski, Warszawa 1978, p. 342: *Melior est enim laicus ante Deum agens poenitentiam, quam clericus permanens in peccatis.* J. Stoś, *Jakub z Paradyża*, Kraków 2004; B. Wojciechowska, *Refleksje o grzechu i pokucie w wybranych dziełach Jakuba z Paradyża (ok.1381-1465), dotyczących reformy Kościoła*, in: *Ecclesia semper reformanda. Kryzysy i reformy średniowiecznego Kościoła*, eds. T. Gałuszka, T. Graff, G. Ryś, Kraków 2013, p. 395-403.

believed that too few recognize and reflect on these issues, as most have been affected by blindness and mental dullness.

He appealed for penance primarily from robbers, plunderers, oppressors, and tax collectors. He counted them among those for whom granting absolution is futile and deceptive, and the imposed penance worthless, because they persistently repeat their sins, making all their actions superficial and saturated with hypocrisy. He compared the achievements of the Church to a fertile field, which at the beginning, when still new, yields great and very abundant harvests of honour, benefits, and significance, but as time passes, it ages and yields less fruitful crops, and finally, in the end, it becomes barren. In a figurative manner he suggested that if people wished to continue having a fertile field, they must renew it, overturn the plots, remove tree trunks and useless roots, cut and plough with a sharpened plough, carefully fertilize with manure and fertilizers, and sow good and properly selected seed. In this way, the Church should be cleansed from evil, vile, and pernicious customs, abuses, false teachings, and foreign traditions, from sins and transgressions, from wicked and perverse people, and above all, it should be strengthened by valuable penance. Hence, the advice for individual Christians to carefully cultivate their own field, i.e., to torment their body, uproot bad habits, nourish them not with pleasures, but with spiritual graces of God, teachings, observance of fasts, and tears in sufferings, mortifications, and bodily chastity, as well as acts of mercy, so that the thorns and thistles of sins may be eradicated. And when individuals feel cleansed from the mould of sins, let them not refrain from mercy, let them weep, lament, and grieve. These practices led to humbling oneself, to surrendering to Christ, to shaping one's own personality. Penitential practices were to purify the soul, form the virtue of humility, combat lusts, and ensure the purity of conscience.<sup>24</sup>

In his treatise *De bono morali et remediis contra peccata*, Master Jakub pointed out that individuals should shape themselves to either refrain from sins or to appropriately perform penance for their sins. The call to conversion is found in the Gospel of St Luke: "therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lk 3:9). These words indicate that one should not neglect efforts related to salvation to avoid the punishment of purgatory or hell. He stated that people commit numerous sins, but they rarely repent sincerely and sufficiently. He believed that penance was seen by contemporaries as child's play. Referring to biblical examples of Mary Magdalene, David, Peter, Pelagius, and John the Baptist, he pointed out the essence and severity of their penitential actions, manifested in modesty and simplicity of garments, abstinence from food, solitude, and distancing themselves from people. Their deeds were in harmony with their words, yet in modern times many preach penance but do not practice it.<sup>25</sup> For friars, frequent and sincere confession before a discreet and devout confessor should be extremely important. Religious superiors should be particularly concerned about such ministers due to the instructions they provide and the religious cleansing of consciences they administer. They too, in order to know the faces of their flock, should undertake the examination of consciences to prevent idleness. The earliest Church fathers warned against idleness, stating that an idle monk is susceptible to many dangers. Hence, the most important elements are nourishment for

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 340-347.

<sup>25</sup> Jakub z Paradyża, *De bono morali et remediis contra peccata*, in: Jakub z Paradyża, *Opuscula inedita*, ed. SA Porębski, Warszawa 1978 (Textus et studia historiam theologiae in Polonia excoltae spectantia, 5), p. 358-359.

the body, discipline to prevent lustfulness, and work, which opposes idleness. These three things were meant to serve both the body and soul.<sup>26</sup>

Master Jakub of Paradyż considered it necessary to avoid and punish soothsayers, sorcerers, fortune-tellers, priests who divine from the entrails of sacrificial animals, dream interpreters, persecutors with forbidden prophecies, those engaged in superstitious blessings and sorcerous practices of summoning the spirits of the dead. He cautioned against the construction of altars or churches in places of gatherings, in hopes of miracles or sacrificial rites for wicked gain.<sup>27</sup> He emphasized the importance of uniting people through faith and good manners. The aforementioned categories of sinners were dangerous due to their engagement in various forms of religious cults and magical practices. Within this variety of superstitious behaviours, there was no faith in the true God, but rather a cult of demons and human imaginings of the ability to predict the future and influence the surrounding reality. This led to the usurpation of the power of divine providence.

The theologian observed that people disregard the fear of God. He pointed out that one should remain in the fear of God, as everyone will be held accountable for their sins based on the penance they had done, so that they would not have to suffer later for transgressions.<sup>28</sup> The fear of God was seen as the fear of moral evil. The fear of God, induced by the greatness and majesty of God, should effectively deter from committing sin and prompt repentance.

According to Jakub, sins originate in thoughts, which are often susceptible to numerous temptations. He addressed this issue in a separate treatise titled *De cogitationibus et earum qualitate*,<sup>29</sup> analyzing admonitions found in Scripture. The theologian referred to the words of Matthew: "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this what defiles" (Matthew 15:18). He discussed the problem of guilt and punishment contemplated in human consciences. He referred to the role of reason, which prevents sins from occurring. He pointed out that the honesty of the penitent should involve acknowledging guilt and accepting punishment. Guilt is associated with the intensification of thoughts and their acceptance by reason. There are thoughts that condemn people to damnation, from which they can be redeemed by the sacrament of penance that is an atonement for sins.<sup>30</sup>

God knows all thoughts and intentions that are connected with actions. All these thoughts, in order to be saved, must be confessed openly in sacramental confession; otherwise, God punishes them severely. Anyone who reflects on their thoughts can determine which of them are sinful, which are venial or mortal sins, and accordingly cleanse their conscience during confession. It is important to recognize when and how thinking stops at mere sensuality and when there is a further continuation in the lower or higher sphere of reason. During confession, one must confess every kind of mortal sin accurately, and undertake appropriate and fruitful penance if one wishes to effectively care for their salvation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Jakub z Paradyża, *De reformatione claustrorum*, in: Jakub z Paradyża, *Wybór tekstów*, p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> Jakub z Paradyża, *De septem statibus Ecclesiae in Apocalypsi mystice descriptis et de auctoritate Ecclesiae et de eius reformatione*, in: Jakub z Paradyża, *Wybór tekstów*, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Jakub z Paradyża, *De malis huius saeculi per omnes aetates*, in: Jakub z Paradyża, *Wybór tekstów*, p. 267-268.

<sup>29</sup> S.A. Porębski, *Contribution à l'étude de Jacques de Paradyż*, "Mediaevalia Philosophica Polonorum", 21/1975, p.115-143; Jakub z Paradyża, *O myślach i ich jakości*, transl. S.A. Porębski, in: *700 lat myśli polskiej. Filozofia i myśl społeczna XIII-XV wieku*, ed. J. Domański, Warszawa 1978, p. 316-342.

<sup>30</sup> Jakub z Paradyża, *O myślach*, p. 317-318.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 328-331.



## Summary

In their reflections, the outstanding Polish scholars of the late Middle Ages devoted much attention to confession and penance. Sincere admission of wrongdoings, their confession, expression of remorse and regret, zeal in fulfilling penance, observance of the Decalogue, and good deeds were elements leading to liberation from guilt and obtaining forgiveness. Confession and penance were intended to encourage reflection on one's life, serve to form conscience, develop virtues, lead to the destruction of sin, find the right path, and give hope for future salvation. At the same time, they endeavoured to shape appropriate and supportive attitudes of priests towards penitents, who formed the attitudes of the faithful. The priest's attitude towards the penitents should be responsible, individualized, characterized by understanding, compassion, and a willingness to explain the mysteries of faith. These fundamental issues were presented by the eminent scholars and preachers, on the one hand, from the perspective of theological reflection, and on the other hand, in such a way that made them important and understandable elements of religious life.

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