

Sin, Penance And Confession From A Protestant Perspective*

People always realised their imperfect, sinful condition in the face of fragility and evil. Christianity, cherished with Divine revelation and believing in a permanent presence of Holy Spirit, formulated a mature and profound doctrine about human sin, and simultaneously created a penitential practice, in which a sinful man experiences Divine mercy, not to lose hope for salvation. The 16th century Reformation, as a result of which Christianity faced many divisions, simultaneously led to the creation of a vision of moral life, characteristic for itself, where there is space to understand sin, penance and grace of salvation. Viewing these issues from a protestant perspective, even if critically, may be educational and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the mystery of human existence and the last calling with which God addresses man. This text is an attempt of reading the more important aspects of Christian teaching from a Protestant perspective. What is assumed here are the assumptions and Lutheran practice, reformed and Anglican. The last will be analysed particularly comprehensively as it seems to exceptionally focus different assumptions and currents of the Reformation in itself, giving peculiar voice to them and preserving many aspects of Catholic teaching.

About the Issues of Protestant Sacramentology

The issue of sin, penance and reconciliation with God is related – in light of Christian tradition – to the sacraments and sacramental life. In the history of Christianity serious weakness, restriction, and sometimes even the marginalisation of sacramental practices is related to the Reformation as well as

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a radical emphasis of the singleness and exclusiveness of the authority of the Bible. Its testament may be found particularly in the confessions of faith, liturgical books and prayer books, which came into being in different Protestant fractions, from very Catholic in character, such as the Anglican High Church to extremely reformed, such as Calvinist or Presbyterian communities. Fierce criticism was included in the early writings of Martin Luther. They comprise: *Babylonian Captivity* of 1520, as well as the slightly earlier *The Tract on New Testament, or Holy Mass* of the same year. *Babylonian Captivity* is considered the most significant text of the creator of Reformation which influenced the shape of the Protestant vision and sacramental practice.

Luther, together with his distinct priority of the Word of God, assumed that the sacraments are evident Christly promises, which He himself connected with visible signs. This criterion led him to a conviction that sacraments are in fact only two – baptism and the Eucharist (Communion, the Lord's Supper). Because only these two signs of grace are based on clear-cut Jesus promises to absolve sins. A promise according to Luther is a key term and seems to converge, and even identical, with the Word of God. In this context we cannot regard penance as a similar sacrament, it is rather “a return to baptism” and appeals to its effectiveness. Luther emphasises in many cases that sacraments are given to absolve and thus to be saved. The Gospels confirm this clearly with relation to both sacraments¹. Penance, as the one rooted in baptism and deriving its fruitfulness from its presence is also effective in making a promise to free us from sins.

The sacraments were effective signs of the salvific promise of Christ in Luther's thinking, but Ulrich Zwingli made some modifications, and actually weakened their sense and meaning. He perceived them as indications or customs, which demonstrate if a man wants to be “Christ's soldier” and they somehow announce it to others. Although Zwingli admits that they support faith and build it, there is not such a distinct – as with Luther – indication of their salvific character, they are rather indications of communication and a transfer of information about faith and the approach of the one who accepts it. They have a rather customary character but not a clearly salvific one².

¹ Sacraments at heart are the offer of forgiveness of sin whether given in baptism or constantly repeated in the Eucharist. Thus, the sacraments are not ‘merely [...] marks of profession among men’. God acts in them.” J.F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, Nashville 1999, 19.

² Cf. U. Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, Durham 1981, 181-184; J.F. White, op. cit., 19f.

John Calvin, a Swiss reformer from Geneva, analysed sacraments from another perspective, although he did preserve Luther's and Melancthon's intuitions and teaching. He acknowledged their effectiveness and both the internal and external dimension. He also connoted the wording of St. Augustine of Hippo, that they are "a visible sign of invisible grace," but he justified them differently at the same time. He emphasised their significance and effectiveness because of the weakness and sinfulness of human nature. In the sacraments Christ confirms his promise of good will in man, to strengthen a man in his weak faith. In this way Lord "vouchsafes to lead us to him by means of these earthly signs [...], he gives us spiritual things in the form of visible signs."³ Calvin clearly emphasises also that the Holy Spirit opens the human heart to sacraments. A man would be blind and deaf without Him. These are effective and simultaneously necessary signs for man. Just such a pessimistic perception of human nature after original sin⁴ forced him to a radical emphasis of indispensable sacraments, in which Christ gives himself to man. It makes the Holy Spirit, who regenerates man, to be excused from signs before God for Christ's merits. Only then an excused and reborn man can become able for good deeds. A Christian should not concentrate on the very signs then, the sacraments, but on God who uses them for human salvation.

The Anglican *The Book of Common Prayer* also clearly indicates the origin of sacraments from Christ himself, particularly expressed in Article of the Faith 25 where one may find the thoughts of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. We need to remember that particular theses and wordings were modified in this book several times and were more or less emphasised. Simultaneously we need to stress that Reformational sacramentology preserved a clear continuity with scholastic teaching, however it occurred differently with particular reformers.

³ "Our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings [...]. Now, because we have souls engrafted in bodies, he imparts spiritual things under visible ones." J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Philadelphia 1960, 1277.

⁴ "[...] there remains always in us much imperfection and infinity, so that we always remain poor and wretched sinners in the presence of God [...]. Thus, we always have need of the mercy of God to obtain the remission of our faults and offences." [Geneva] *Confession of Faith* (1536), in: A.C. Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, Louisville 2003, 122. "And being blinded in mind, and depraved in heart, he has lost all integrity, and there is no good in him." *The French Confession of Faith* (1559), in: *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, op. cit., 147.

It concerned, as is known, the Eucharist and the number of sacraments. As sacraments are “the efficient signs of grace [...], they strengthen and confirm our faith in Him.” What is always important is the fact that they provide an efficient redemptive presence of the Saviour for the one who accepts it with faith. If there is lack of faith then man accepts it for his condemnation⁵. The famous Anglican theologian Father O’Donovan simultaneously points out that in this doctrine of reformers, and consequently with Anglicans as well, medieval individualism was not discontinued and the vision of the Church lacked, which would demonstrate a more community-based Christianity. We also notice an uncomfortable uncertainty in the Anglican *Articles of the Faith* which is based on an objective character of sacramental mercy and that which is subjective in the faith of the person accepting it⁶.

Calvinist heritage in Sacramentology consolidated and developed in several other trends of Protestantism. The Presbyterian Church (Kirk) of Scotland belongs to a denomination of people particularly faithful to reformed theology. Sacraments are efficient indications of Christly grace and promise, and simultaneously they point to those who were selected to take part in Christ. Baptism effectively inculcates in Christ, and the Lord’s Supper is the authentic food for the human soul⁷. Sacramentological concepts with English Puritans or Quakers formed similar Calvinist connections.

Such an outlined interpretation of the sacraments in different trends of Protestantism was significant for an understanding of penance, which lost its sacrament value for Protestants. This does not mean in any way a negligence of the serious situation of a man as a sinful being. Reformation, with its radical emphasis on the exclusiveness and effectiveness of God’s grace as the only way to salvation, profoundly emphasised the severity of sin and its disastrous

⁵ “[...] but they that receive them unworthily purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith.” Article XXV, in: *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662), Cambridge, 622.

⁶ Cf. O. O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, Carlisle 1993, 128f.

⁷ “These sacraments [...] were instituted by God not only to make a visible distinction between His people and those who were without the Covenant but also to exercise the faith of His children and, by participation of these sacraments, to seal in their hearts the assurance of His promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union and society which the chosen have with their Head, Christ Jesus. [...] we assuredly believe that by Baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness by which our sins are covered and remitted, and that in the Supper rightly used Christ Jesus is so joined with us that He becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls.” *The Scottish Confession of Faith* (1560), in: *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, op. cit., 179.

consequences for man: “original sin is not least an insubstantial, but such a profound corruption of human nature, that it does not leave anything healthy nor uncorrupted on the body and soul of a man, or rather in their internal and external strengths”⁸. In such a situation Christian life is a continuous way of repentance and penance, so that God could regenerate and free the sinner from spiritual captivity. Initially Luther’s thinking (in *Babylonian Captivity*) was that the absolution of sins (confession) deserves to be labelled a sacrament because it is based on a clear Christly promise. Subsequently, however, he expressed the belief that it is a rather desired and fruitful practice in Christian life, although it bears no rank of a sacrament. The very word of God works in absolution of sins and God’s promise is realised in such a way.

Referring repeatedly and critically to Catholic teaching on penance and confession, Luther admonishes, at the same time, that it cannot be regarded as encouragement to neglect confession or even abandon it. Confession is necessary for the sinful man, although – as in Roman practice – is not necessary for a detailed enumeration of sins. According to Luther we may talk about a twofold way to confession – mutual confession of sins with others to God and individual confession of sins towards a fellow man for their absolution. Each fellow man (not only a priest) may absolve sins. In both cases of confessing sins, teaching included in the Lord’s Prayer is fulfilled; Luther calls these forms of confession public, daily and necessary confession. A confession called “confidential” is also possible and useful, when a sinner seeks consolation and consolidation in worries and anxiety of the soul. If a public confession is a Christian obligation, a confidential confession towards only one brother is optional, and thus you may use it if necessary. We distinguish the human part in each confession; it is a confession of sins and the Divine when another man absolves sins by means of words of God. Confession for a Christian is then “a thing which is splendid, valuable and full of consolation.” Luther does not indicate a list of sins, which should be confessed. In a formula of absolution from *Luther’s Small Catechism* a confessor absolves from “all sins,” which is supposed to assure a sinner about the certainty of Divine forgiveness⁹.

In Anabaptist tradition the original Reformational thought deviated when the prohibition to participate in a community life was introduced there

⁸ *Formuła zgody (1577), cz. I (O grzechu pierworodnym)*, vol. 3, 2.

⁹ Luther’s longer dilatation on the sense, ways and the fruits of confession, cf. a chapter titled: *A Brief Admonition to Confession in Luther’s Large Catechism* [electronic pdf version, 52-54]. In *Luther’s Small Catechism* he restricts himself to a short instruction about confession before a priest as a confessor. Cf. *Luther’s Small Catechism* [electronic pdf version, 8-10].

after a threefold admonition of a sinner, which was not predicted by Luther. The degree of this prohibition and rigour with reference to a sinner could be and is different in different communities (such as Mennonites, Amishes, Hutterites, etc.), but it remains in force¹⁰. The connection of penance and some form of confession with the sacrament of the Eucharist was quite commonly consolidated in a trend of reformed Protestantism which may be perceived as a heritage of medieval practice, particularly of the Fourth Council of the Lateran. Because the penitential aspect in the Eucharist was emphasised to a great degree in the late Middle Ages, it became an integral part of the canon of Eucharistic prayer. It was particularly observable, for instance, with a reformer from Strasbourg, M. Butser, whose Eucharistic rites contained as many as three confessions. Calvin expressly calls for the examination of conscience and penance at the beginning of the Eucharist¹¹. Similarly, examination of conscience and contrition were required in Eucharistic Methodist rites or in Dutch rites. The sacrament of the Eucharist thereby possessed an evident penitential character. In the Anglican ceremony of the Holy Communion after offertory a priest recites the Ten Commandments, and the congregation while kneeling down after each commandment ask God for mercy for their sins and the grace of preserving His right¹².

Luther on Repentance, Suffering and Confession

Medieval theology, in its aspiration for clarity and the precision of a lecture, developed a distinction between guilt (*culpa*) and punishment (*poena*) as results of sin. The redemptive work of Christ freed the sinful man from guilt (which becomes man's participation through baptism), but it did not completely remove punishment for sins, whose element is the inclination to sin and suffering in this or in the future life. Sins committed after baptism may be extinguished

¹⁰ Menno Simons, Dutch reformer and one of creators of Anabaptism in Mennonite version, was writing about the necessity of a radical repentance and rejection of sin: "[...] the repentance we teach, is to die unto sin, and all ungodly works, and live no longer according to the lusts of the flesh [...]. Such a repentance we teach, and no other, namely, that no one can glory in the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, the merits of Christ, and count himself pious, unless he has truly repented." *A Foundation and Plamo Instruction of the Saving Doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ, w: The Complete Works of Menno Simons*, Elkhart 1871, 18.

¹¹ A very useful review of various liturgical rites, including the Eucharistic ones, cf. B. Thompson (ed.), *Liturgies of the Western Church*, Cleveland 1961.

¹² Cf. *The Book of Common Prayer*, op. cit., 237-239.

in the sacrament of repentance for which a Christian is called to avoid eternal condemnation. Absolution by a priest is then a way to regain true life in God, liberation from the effects of sin which is accompanied by a complete atonement of imposed repentance on the part of a penitent. In this context, late Middle Ages considered the meaning of suffering, also physical suffering, which accepted in humility and in a penitential spirit, a salvific one because it contracted or even removed purgatorial suffering as a result of sins. Additionally, it became similar to the suffering Christ in imitation of different saints.

Such understanding of repentance and its relation to suffering became a subject of Martin Luther's Reformation teaching. He rejected a medieval theology of repentance and his beliefs in this matter were gradually becoming increasingly radical¹³. Even though Luther initially accepted a traditional distinction of guilt and punishment, he gradually realised the necessity of a different understanding of human sin and its results, so the possibility of being free of them also. The reasons were attributable to the assumption of his Reformational soteriology. We need to also remember that with Luther (and in the subsequent Lutheran tradition) a sin did not mean specific sinful deeds, but rather *hubris*, the pride of a man, who wants "to be like God." In this sense, a man in sin, as a result of false relations to God, in his selfish way addresses himself. A being gets tempted to be like the Creator¹⁴. From a Protestant perspective, a Catholic understanding of sin situates it mainly in a (negative) relation to virtue, while in light of the assumptions of reformers we need to situate it rather in a (negative) relation to faith. Therefore, the implementation of the classification of sins is avoided, and the emphasis is on a sin as such, which causes a break in the basic relation of faith with God, loss of trust on the part of man¹⁵.

Particularly in the context of practice and abuses related to indulgences, Luther made a distinction into punishment for sin, which derived from God and from people. If a pope was powerful enough to pardon punishment for a sin, then just this one was imposed by the pope himself or by the Church based on a papal

¹³ Cf. R.K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, Cambridge (USA) 2004, 52-58.

¹⁴ "And this agrees with Scripture which describes man as turned in upon himself (*incurvatus in se*), so that not only in bodily but also in spiritual goods he turns to himself and seeks himself in all things. Sin consists in a failure to establish the right relationship to God. Which results in a wrong relationship to oneself. It is a form of egoism, a being cut off by oneself apart from God (whereas God should be the very foundation of oneself". D. Hanipson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, Cambridge 2001, 37.

¹⁵ Cf. J.F. Childress, *Sin(s)*, in: J.F. Childress, J. Macquarrie (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London 1986, 585.

decision (for instance in a sacramental confession). The pope, however, could not pardon God's punishment, or for souls suffering in Purgatory either. The souls of the dead are only in God's hands. This meant fierce criticism of indulgences, which according to Luther caused a false sense of peace of souls among those who received them; it weakened their faith in God's grace and led to a neglect of the Christly call for repentance and conversion. Indulgences opposed to the penitential character of the Christian faith, which is evidently demonstrated by the revealed God's word on the pages of the Bible. According to Luther the result was also the fact that Christians appeased at heart did not take the cross in accordance with the Gospel's words, and it was a distinct rejection of Christly teaching. God's punishment for sins, and for the cross given from God, suffering and each life effort should be accepted and patiently endured in humility, but not to see a chance to be freed from it¹⁶.

Luther's emphasis was moved from punishment for sins to guilt. Because a man had no influence on the punishment imposed by God, he should rather seek a way to obtain forgiveness of sins. Luther realised that it may be most efficiently achieved in individual forgiveness. Hence, individual confession took an important place in his vision. Because he regarded the very awareness of sin and fear before death related to them as the greatest punishment, then the certainty of forgiveness of sins acquired in the received absolution allowed one to free oneself from this awareness and fear. The understanding of suffering as a participation in the Christly cross was the result of this. In Luther's *theologia crucis* there is no ordeal or pain any longer but rather "joy in embraces." Suffering must be perceived as a Divine call for faith. We must always see the suffering Christ in all suffering, in which God himself manifests his paternal love in this way. Luther thought that we can find God only in suffering and in the cross. The approval of suffering opens up real access to God's heart before the sinner. Thanks to suffering alone is a Christian supposed to learn trust in God's goodness. This goodness becomes a sinner's participation, particularly during private confession when he becomes free from guilt through absolution

¹⁶ "Indulgences encouraged Christians to flee suffering and self-deprivation and therefore Luther thought them very dangerous [...]. There was no release from the divine penalty in this life, and, according to Luther, it was unchristian to seek one." R.K. Rittgers, *Embracing the "True Relic" of Christ: Suffering, Penance, and Private Confession in the Thought of Martin Luther*, in: A. Firey (ed.), *A New History of Penance*, Leiden-Boston 2008, 382. Cf. R.E. McLaughlin, *Truth, Tradition and History: The Historiography of High/Late Medieval and Early Modern Penance*, in: *A New History of Penance*, 21f.

and is ensured about God's goodness¹⁷. In this way Luther, not resigning from the practice of confession, modified it. In accordance with his salvific vision, it is not remorse, a detailed confession of sins or atonement that are significant but rather the absolution itself resulting in consolation. Faith is most important here, which, thanks to the word of absolution, gaining its power and efficiency from the Gospel, arouses certainty that sins become absolved because of Christ.

Together with other reformers, in particular with Philipp Melanchthon, Luther prepared a new rite of confession. *The Augsburg Confession*, the main Lutheran book of confessions of 1530, written and issued by Melanchthon, confirmed that a private confession must be preserved because obtaining absolution of sins committed after baptism is possible only by means of confession. This means that the power of the keys is used here, which Christ gave to the Church. The absolution of sins before receiving Holy Communion is, according to Melanchthon, obligatory which is predicted by the rite of the Lord's Supper, however, an individual confession and absolution are optional, however, recommended as giving particular consolation¹⁸. If it was not yet evident in *The Augsburg Confession*, then in *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1530) Melanchthon is clearly in favour of the sacramentality of confession since it is clearly revealed by Christ: "Absolution may also be called a sacrament of repentance in the true meaning of this word"¹⁹. However, eventually Luther, although in *Babylonian Captivity* he was still writing about the sacramental character of individual absolution, he accepted the existence of only two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion²⁰.

This new rite of confession was quite quickly popularised in the developing Protestant communities. Despite certain modifications, it preserved its two-part structure – first it was an examination (verification) of faith (but not conscience), and subsequently a confession of sins and absolution. The first part was supposed to replace a traditional examination of conscience, and it was about

¹⁷ "The remission of guilt calms the heart and takes away the greatest of all punishments, namely, the consciousness of sin [...]. Private confession provided both release from a guilty conscience and confidence of God's goodness in the face of other divine chastisements." R.K. Rittgers, *Embracing the "True Relic" of Christ*, 389.

¹⁸ "The power of the keys is respected, and it is reminded how big consolation it brings for frightened conscience. It is reminded that God demands faith, so that we could believe in such voice as voice resonating from heaven and that this faith truly causes and receives absolution of sins." *The Augsburg Confession* art. XXV [electronic pdf version, 14]. Cf. R.K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of the Keys*, 119.

¹⁹ *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, art. XII *About penance*, 41 [www.luteranie.pl].

²⁰ Cf. R.K. Rittgers, *Embracing the "True Relic" of Christ*, 392, footnote 61.

the verification of the familiarity of Lutheran catechism. It was thought that the assertion of its significant unfamiliarity made it impossible to participate in the Lord's Supper. In a confession it was obligatory to admit one's sinful nature and confess public sins. It was not necessary, however, to confess very personal sins, a penitent could decide himself what to confess to a confessor, and what should not be mentioned, keeping it a secret. A confessor, on the other hand, did not have the right to infringe on a penitent's conscience. Such comprehended and practised individual confession also aimed at strengthening a Christian in his readiness to accept a suffering, which is revealed in his life in various ways. It should be interpreted as the fatherly goodness of God, who wants to be similar to man in this way – by his faith – to the suffering Christ himself²¹.

This Lutheran practice, clearly supported and preached by reformers in a primary period of Reformation, was fading over time, and was even rejected. In the subsequent centuries, mainly under the influence of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and the popularisation of rationalism in Lutheran theology, individual confession declined in most Lutheran churches. In the middle of the 19th century attempts at its restoration occurred, which, however, faced many obstacles. Even Lutheran priests themselves were not its proponents because it seemed not very demanding. Because a confession was also a sign distinguishing Lutherans from Calvinists, some treated it even as a peculiar Reformational anomaly which should be abandoned. Even if sporadic attempts at its restoration occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, contemporarily Lutheranism almost has resigned from it²².

²¹ “Luther, for example, denounced mandatory, sacramental confession yet continued to insist that confession was necessary for an individual's consolation. Calvin was reluctantly willing to hear parishioners' confessions but used such discussions as opportunities to explain that his counsel was not a sacrament nor should it be.” L. McClain, *Troubled Consciences: New Understandings and Performances of Penance among Catholics in Protestant England*, “Church History” 82(2013)1, 121.

²² Cf. Mc Laughlin, *Truth, Tradition and History*, 35-37. A remarkable 19th century study on Lutheran private confession cf. G. Steitz, *Die Privatbeichte und Privatabsolution der Lutherischen Kirche aus den Quellen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt 1854. J.F. White notices that some Protestant communities currently notice the return to sacramental practices, including confession. Cf. op. cit., 9f.

Anglican View of Contrition and Repentance According to T. Cranmer

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury since 1533, was a prominent leader of English Reformation and an associate of Henry VIII in the rejection of papal authority in the Anglican Church. He is regarded as the main author of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the Anglican liturgy, *Articles of the Faith* and *The Books of Homilies*, which formed the Church, particularly theological and liturgical, and Anglicanism at its very beginnings. Together with T. Cromwell he brought about the popularisation of the Bible in the native language in England.

The theological Christian vision, in which Cranmer was growing up, emphasised the sacramentality of repentance and distinguished three important parts to it – remorse, confession of sins and atonement²³. His personal beliefs, forming increasingly more a form of Anglican theology, were subject to different impacts and were changing under the influence of a traditional theology, as well as under the theological assumptions of 16th century reformers. During studies in Cambridge, Cranmer was under the great influence of the prominent theologian J. Fisher, a subsequent bishop and cardinal, a martyr for faithfulness to the Catholic Church. His Augustine and humanistic vision of repentance and Christian life emphasised that the goodness of deeds and a man himself are the result of grace, and deeds help and facilitate a man in rising in goodness in God's eyes. Cranmer rejected this opportunity over time, so that deeds (penitential) could make a sinner worthier of God's forgiveness. This impossibility was supposed to result from truth that a deed cannot be good before its creator becomes good as well.²⁴ These changes occurred, among others, under the influence of the thoughts of Erasmus of Rotterdam²⁵.

Although Erasmus of Rotterdam, earlier than Luther, preached views similar to him, there were differences between them. These discrepancies were revealed at the anthropological level and concerned the seriousness of the results

²³ Cf. A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love*, Oxford 2000, 35ff.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 84f.

²⁵ Erasmus of Rotterdam was a professor of theology at Queens' College in Cambridge from 1511 and it is possible that Cranmer was attending his lectures during his studies. Cf. A.F. Pollard, *Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation, 1489-1566*, London 1926, 16f. "[For Erasmus] the heart of Christianity was a pragmatic programme of love in action which sprang from a scriptural understanding of the human condition and the virtues and vices pertaining to it." A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, 86. More on Erasmus' views on sin, conversion and repentance, in the light of his *Exomologesis sive modus confitendi* (1524), cf. *ibid.*, 85-93.

of the original sin which had impact on Cranmer's views. When for Erasmus of Rotterdam, in compliance with the scholastic view, original sin weakened but did not eliminate the natural tendency of a human soul to goodness (although unsettled feelings oppose to reason), Luther (based on the reading of letters by Saint Paul) was convinced that after original sin human nature was overwhelmed by egoism. Because man had opposed to God, all his desires and deeds had become internally sinful²⁶. Despite his recognition for Erasmus of Rotterdam, Cranmer declared rather for Luther in his conviction about the profound and entire corruption of human nature after original sin. We may think that Erasmus' influence on Cranmer was mainly based on making him aware of the significance of the Bible and its priority before scholastic theology. However, the reading of works by Saint Augustine of Hippo and the influence of the teachings of Luther and Osiander led him to a conviction that only justification by faith means that human deeds become good in God's eyes. A man cannot do good by himself because the prior action of the Spirit of God is necessary here. Goodness is then the aftermath of justification and its result, not something which precedes it and leads to it²⁷.

At the beginning of the 1530s, when he was to become archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer expressly declared for the Protestant doctrine about justification by faith, and for Luther and Osiander at the same time. It was the Protestant clarification of Saint Augustine of Hippo, when the justification of a sinner by the power of *sola fide* was accompanied by granting an internal presence of the Spirit of God. It was significant for the current teaching and Christian practice of absolving sins committed after baptism in a sacrament of repentance. It is worth

²⁶ Cf. P.S. Watson, *The Lutheran Riposte*, in: E.G. Rupp, P.S. Watson (ed.) *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, Louisville 1969, 12-28.

²⁷ "Thus, by faith in Christ's redeeming work a sinner was justified, and because he was in right-standing with God he was then granted the gift of the Holy Spirit in his heart which brought forth good works in his life." A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, 105. The dispute over the place and role of love in releasing sins between Osiander and S. Gardiner, an English politician and a bishop, faithful to the traditional Catholic teaching reflects the fact how gradually the Protestant understanding of justification from sins was forming, and thus *de facto* of salvation: "Osiander summarized his differences with Gardiner as a dispute over the role of love in justification. Was godly love something which penitents had to make themselves worthy to receive from God and then use worthily to be right with him, as Gardiner argued? Or was godly love something Christians received because God had already made them right with him, as Osiander argued? In part, this divergence reflected a fundamental difference about the nature of salvation. For Gardiner, Christians were to spend their lives seeking to fulfil the scriptural conditions necessary so that they might be saved. For Lutherans, the Christian life was lived as a grateful response to the assurance of the free gift of salvation." *Ibid.*, 112f.

emphasising that the theology of the autonomous English Church forming then, after a formal severance with Rome in 1534, was not clear-cut and was subject to diverse tendencies. The influential theologians close to Henry VIII comprised on the one hand the ones more faithful to the Catholic tradition – S. Gardiner, Bishop Winchester and T. Howard, Prince of Norfolk, and on the other hand supporters of Reformation – Archbishop T. Cranmer and T. Cromwell, the main adviser to the king and “general vicar” of the Church of England. The dispute concerned, among others, the necessity or freedom of individual confession and (priestly) absolution for freeing from sins. Not necessarily negating the very practice of an auricular confession, supporters of a reform emphasised the personal, subjective, trustful faith as decisive about the justification of a sinner in God’s eyes thanks to the merits of Christ’s torments.

The Bishops’ Book (Institution of a Christian Man) of 1537, whose main author was Cranmer, was the first official lecture of the theological beliefs of Anglicans. It gave voice there of a Reformation belief about the undeserved justification of man by God. Man remains sinful and can never regard himself before God as a good person. His justification occurs entirely thanks to Christ therefore and only God the Father accepts such a justified man. Such a belief was close to Luther’s thesis, expressed by Melancthon in the wording about *reputatio iustitiae Christi alienae*²⁸. In the same book, and subsequently in commentaries and explanations, made in reaction to the remarks of the king himself, Cranmer declared repeatedly for the Protestant interpretation of the theology of grace and soteriology deriving from Saint Augustine of Hippo. This Protestant reading of the teaching of Saint Augustine of Hippo, who was discussed salvation as *sola fide et gratia* was characteristic for other reformers as well²⁹.

The justification of a sinful man is an entirely free Divine work and takes place only thanks to trustful faith, which is accompanied by the renewal of will as a fruit of a gift by the Spirit of God. Cranmer was a proponent of a pessimistic vision of man called *post lapsum*, a man totally corrupted by sin, and hence unable for goodness. True goodness exists only in God and may be only a fruit of His undeserved grace, which involves man’s participation only by salvific merits of Christ.

Following Lutheran teaching, Cranmer realised that repentance comprises two elements – contrition and faith. If contrition is a painful experience and

²⁸ Cf. A.E. Mc Grath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Cambridge 1998, 285f; M. Hint from, *Etyka ewangelicka i jej wymiar eklezjalny. Studium historyczno-systematyczne*, Warsaw 2007, 56f.

²⁹ Cf. A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 211.

a struggle in conscience with the awareness of one's sin, then faith, on the other hand, brings hope and certainty of peace because it opens the human heart to a fully free grace of forgiveness³⁰. This teaching, however, was not defined in *De sacramentis*. On the one hand, we recall here the current understanding of repentance as consisting of three elements (which was also clearly mentioned by Melanchthon) – contrition, confession of sins and atonement, and on the other hand, also its new, Reformational view, stressing contrition and faith is indicated. The comparison of *De sacramentis* with *Ten Articles* (1536), which became part of the *Bishops' Book* denotes these uncertainties and underspecifications of the Anglican teaching. In *Ten Articles* three sacraments (baptism, the Eucharist and repentance) are expressly mentioned, which is a clear Lutheran accent. In the case of repentance it is claimed that an auricular confession is certainly derived from Christ (and thus is a sacrament) and it is at the same time necessary for the absolution of sins committed after baptism. Slightly different accents appeared in *De sacramentis*. The need to confess sins and contrition has certainly a biblical origin (e.g. 2 Corinthians), and the will of Christ himself is behind it. Cranmer points out that there is no doubt as to the necessity to confess sins before God and before the Church to be absolved from sins. Such a confession is the best place to verify and build faith which is necessary to receive Holy Communion. But the very confession cannot be regarded as obligatory, taught by the Fathers of the Church, which are repeatedly referred to by Cranmer. Within this meaning, the absolution of sins is not only related to a sacramental absolution in confession. The assertion of a detailed confession of all sins before a confessor is inappropriate as well. It is to take place before God but faith is always more important than such a confession. Faith leads to a confession and strengthens man in his meeting with God. The release from sins occurs by means of the power of Christ's blood, and not by atonement on the part of the penitent. Cranmer expressly rejects here the practice of indulgences granted by the pope, which were supposed to release souls from purgatory³¹.

³⁰ A small treatise *De sacramentis* is particularly valuable (interesting) here, it is anonymous, but congruently attributed to Cranmer, stored in a library of archbishop of Canterbury in Lambeth Palace in London. Cf. G. Jeanes, *A Reformation Treatise on the Sacraments*, "The Journal of Theological Studies" 46(1995)1, 149-190. Original Latin text *De sacramentis* on p. 167-180.

³¹ Together with his increasingly more antipapal approach at the end of his life, Cranmer accused the pope ("Roman Antichrist") that he was controlling "discipline over each Christian in the western Church by means of an army of confessors," or that "the traditional priestly power of the keys is only an extension of the false authority of papacy." Confession became a tool of oppression and control, which was rather surprising not only regarding his previous view, but also regarding the consideration of confession by M. Luther. This inconsistency of Cranmer's

Atonement granted by Christ, through which man becomes selected (a clear Calvinist accent) is the only source of hope for a sinner. “Complete forgiveness requires only a confession [of sins] in faith and repentance,” and a changed life and deeds, which cannot be regarded as atonement for sins, must be its result. These Lutheran and Calvinist accents – in the spirit of solifidianism – were occurring increasingly more expressly with Cranmer³². In this sense his main writings from this time – *Annotations* (remarks to commentaries and questions of Henry VII to the *Bishops’ Book*), *Great Commonplaces* (a list of numerous reference to patristic writings for the confirmation of the Protestant theses) and *De sacramentis* – provide evidence for an increasingly more Protestant understanding of penance with Cranmer, the result of which was the popularisation of such a doctrine in the developing Anglican theology of salvation and the practice of Christian life.

Despite the reluctance of Henry VIII for Luther, Lutheran questioning of the necessity of an auricular confession for the receipt of absolution was becoming increasingly more commonly accepted, proven by a new version of the confession of faith in the form of *The Thirteen Articles* (1538) and in *The Six Articles* (1539). Cranmer managed to convince the king and parliament that an individual confession is a useful and salvific practice, and we cannot resign from it but it is not necessary for absolution of sins. What is more, his belief was becoming increasingly more reformed because he was accepting Calvin’s thesis more often, rejecting the sacramentality of confession and the non-identity of faith and repentance³³. On the other hand, a partial return of the initial Anglicanism to the Catholic teaching took place in the *King’s Book* (*The Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man*, 1546), attributed to Henry VIII himself. In its light, the deeds performed even in the state of deadly sin (before

views was demonstrated and by the fact that he saw the practice in it, which made it impossible for the congregation to make use of “benefaction of Christ’s ordeal,” which the bishop of Rome was said to restrict access to. The falsity of such a (Roman) vision of release from sins was also because it did not grant “complete absolution,” because what remained was a temporary suffering in purgatory, which on the other hand, “could be absolved after this life by the Roman Antichrist and his priests.” Cf. A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 94.

³² Cf. G. Jeanes, *A Reformation Treatise on the Sacraments*, 184-187; A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 148-150.

³³ “Calvin, however, denied the Lutheran definition of *poenitentia*, cutting the crucial link between the sacrament and solifidianism as a result [...]. Cranmer eventually adopted the Reformed approach and decided to seek to free justification entirely from sacramental penance.” A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 155f. More on contacts and the impact of Calvin’s theology on Cramer cf. B. Gordon, *Calvin*, New Haven-London 2009, 251-259.

justification) could be regarded as good if they derive to some degree from faith and grace, which was rejected by Cranmer and the proponents of Protestantism. They claimed that only a justified man, thanks to pure and trustful faith, can do good. It is not faith that is the reason for justification but rather a means to receive absolution of sins thanks to the worthy death of Christ. It is not faith, however – as human work – that justifies, but God by Christ's merits. At the time of justification, salvific grace renews his will in man and qualifies it to love expressed in deeds, although post-sinful weakness and a tendency for sins lasts in man³⁴.

To emphasise the plenitude of Christ's merits for the justification of sinful people, and at the same time his independence from human deeds, Cranmer noticed a true sign of justification made by God in contrition. Because it is forgiveness of sins that renews the will for goodness in man, any good deeds – including penitential deeds, fast, prayer and charity – are the fruits of justification but not something which leads to it. There is an analogy to baptism here, a man's sin is forgiven without merits but not as a result of remorse. Hence any fasts, pilgrimages, prayers, etc. for pleading for God's forgiveness, so common in medieval times, for Cranmer are just human fabrications. All these good deeds, as well as penitential behaviours, flowing from a repentant heart, are the result of the Divine absolution of sins, and not deserving it. Contrition and repentance in this sense are certainly signs of salvation which develop in man. However, it is not because they proclaim that there is good will in a sinner and his readiness to return to God but they are the assurance about the will of salvation on the part of God³⁵. In order to confirm his thesis, Cranmer invokes the words of Jesus that "nobody can serve two Lords" (Luke 16:13). A man in sin cannot simultaneously do good because he is not in a state and power of grace. If he does good, it means that he was justified, and thus he is no longer influenced by the power of sin. Divine forgiveness occurs immediately when a man expresses his readiness to change his life. When David admitted he had sinned, a prophet

³⁴ "And these works which follow our justification, do please God, forso much as they proceed from a heart endued with pure faith and love to God [...]. For after our justification only begin we to work the law of God requireth. Then we shall do all good works willingly, although not so exactly as the law requireth, by mean of infirmity of the flesh." T. Cranmer, *Annotations*, in: J.E. Cox (ed.), *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, Cambridge 1846, 114.

³⁵ "Thus, Cranmer considered repentance the sure sign of salvation not because it demonstrated the penitent's good will towards God, but rather because it was evidence of God's good will towards the penitent." A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*, 204. Cf. *ibid.*, 245f.

responded at once: “Lord remits your sin as well” (2 Samuel 12:13). Cranmer invoked this biblical text to indicate that David received Divine forgiveness before he started his (external) repentance.

Repeatedly referring to St. Augustine’s writings, Cranmer was increasingly more coming to the conclusion that a sacramental confession becomes unnecessary in such a view, however, justification begins in man from internal remorse, and results in faith and repentance in practice. The recognition for God’s glory simultaneously requires a recall that forgiveness of sins has its complete source in God but never in man’s will³⁶. The teaching on remorse and repentance in the life of a justified Christian became an important tool of a priestly formation of the faithful for Cranmer. The permanent readiness to the repentance of a justified man because of God’s love for man and because of love for God assured man his selection and eternal salvation. Such an explanation of Cranmer’s solifidianism was newly expressed in *Notes on Justification* (approx. 1545) and in the first *Book of Homilies* (1547), with several homilies by Cranmer himself. Good deeds and repentance in daily life confirm a genuine liberation of man from sin thanks to the salvific merits of Christ, and this means a lively and truly Christian faith, preserving the commandments and life with God. As he was repeating in the homily on faith, there is always a danger that man may deceive himself and not truly believe, only with words, but not with deeds and repentance³⁷.

In his belief in predestination, and a free, previous Divine selection comprising people intended for salvation, Cranmer was evidently closer to Calvin and Butser than to Luther. Because affiliation to a group of the selected was based on God’s will, loss of salvation was only hypothetical. However, loss of a state of grace was possible because the justified were still able to commit a sin. In this context, Divine punishment, which is experienced by a sinner, is the call to repentance and change of life. Cranmer warned at the same time

³⁶ “It is the work and glory of God alone to justify the ungodly, to forgive sins, to give life freely out of his goodness, not from any merits of ours. Satan desires that divine honour be paid to him. Therefore, the one who has attributed either justification’s beginning or its pardon to his own works, does he now blaspheme his Creator with satanic wickedness?” As cited in: A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 195. Cf. *ibid.*, 189-193.

³⁷ “A man may soon deceive himself and think in his own phantasy that he by faith knoweth God, loveth him, feareth him and belongeth to him, when in very deed he doth nothing less [...]. But he that casteth away the yoke of God’s commandments from his neck and giveth himself to live without true repentance, after his own sensual mind and pleasure, nor regarding to know God’s word, and much less to live according thereunto, such a man clearly deceiveth himself.” T. Cranmer, *Homily of Faith*, in: *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, 139.

that if, however, a man maintained his impenitent heart and did not convert to God before his death, God “will cross him out from his book.” Because a sin accompanies a man throughout his entire life, it is repentance that is such a sign of true seriousness and truth of life in compliance with Divine commandments and Divine mercy³⁸. Such beliefs were confirmed in *Forty-Two Articles*, another version of the dogmatic wordings of Church of England of 1553.

Earlier, when Cranmer was increasingly more often resigning from the obligation of auricular confession and individual absolution, still in *Catechism* of 1548, issued with his effort, priestly absolution is one of two – except for excommunication – ways of exercising the power of the keys deriving from Christ. At the same time in a rite of the Holy Communion general confession is sufficient, although an individual one could be possible. In the subsequent versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 and 1552 there is a liturgical formula of a general absolution before the Holy Communion with an increasingly more visible Reformation accent, that sincere remorse and true faith on the part of a sinner are needed to absolve sins, and the result of this remorse is not to be atonement but improvement and restoration of life; although, individual confession of sins and absolution was not excluded there, e.g. during the visitation of the ill³⁹. In the *Book* of 1552 Cranmer considerably modified several wordings during the rite of individual confession: when he earlier names

³⁸ “Wherefore now let us repent whil we have time; for the axe is laid ready at the root of the tree to fell it down. If we will harden our hearts, and will not now be repentant of our misdoings, God will surely strike us clean out of his book.” T. Cranmer, *A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion*, in: *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, 201.

³⁹ In *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 Cranmer introduced the possibility of confession during the visitation of the ill and gave a formula of absolution but it was deleted in the version of 1552. Cf. J. Gordon, *Cranmer and Common Prayer*, in: C. Hefling, C. Shattuck (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, Oxford 2006, 36f. R. Hooker, “an architect of Anglican theology” was writing about the peculiarity of the Anglican approach to confession and repentance: “It is not to be marvelled that so great a difference appeareth between the doctrine of Rome and ours when we teach repentance. They imply in the name of repentance much more than we do. We stand chiefly upon the true inward conversion of the heart; they more upon works of external show. We teach above all things that repentance which is one and the same from the beginning to the world’s end; they, a sacramental penance of their own devising and shaping. We labour to instruct men in such sort that every soul which is wounded with sin may learn the way how to cure itself; they, clean contrary, would make all sores seem incurable unless the priest has a hand in them.” Cf. R. Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1648), vol. 6, no. 5, 9. Cf. R. Ingalls, *SM and Grace*, in: T. Kirby (ed.), *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, Leiden–Boston 2008, 151-184; D. Kernan, *Jurisdiction and the Keys*, in: *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, 435-480.

a confessor learned in “God’s law,” now he is learned in “God’s word”; a penitent is to express not his “sin and repentance,” but his “repentance”; absolution and consolation becomes a contribution of a sinner not from a priest as “a servant of God and the Church,” but “by service of God’s word.” The call for repentance and contrition were added several times, including the act of repentance in daily morning and evening prayers, when – in accordance with Protestant teaching – we ask for repentance of sins for the one for whom they were absolved. The analogical modifications in the Protestant spirit occurred in the structure of Holy Communion. In this way the *Book of Common Prayer* in the version of 1552 is regarded as the most liturgically successful attempt at expressing Protestant teaching about justification by faith⁴⁰.

Repentance Yes, Confession (rather) Not

The diversity of reformers’ views on sin, its results and a vision of repentance was demonstrated in various aspects of this doctrine and had a different bearing on specific pastoral instructions and Church practice. The evocation of Reformational ecclesiology is important for the better understanding of the Protestant theology of sin and repentance, where – together with a radical accent on *sola Scriptura* and *sola fides* – the Church appears as a reality in the service of God’s word. Its result is the weakening of the theological significance of sacraments, a radical limitation in their number and the weakening of their role in the life of the Church and a Christian. These Lutheran accents had their evident repercussions in the wording of the English Reformation, particularly in *Articles of the Faith*. For example, Article 19 states explicitly that the Church is “the congregation of the faithful, in which pure God’s word is preached.”⁴¹ Although Article 19 states further about the exercise of sacraments in the Church, in a rite of ordinations (*Ordinal*), apart from other changes, there is a significant modification of a previous rite in a gesture of the bishop, who gives the ordained

⁴⁰ Cf. A. Null, *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance*, 240-245. “As a piece of liturgical craftsmanship, it is in the first rank [...]. It is not a disordered attempt at a Catholic rite, but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.” G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London 1945, 11. The peculiar Anglican (episcopal) criticism of the practice of auricular confession, expressed in a form of letters may be found in anonymous work: *Auricular Confession in the Protestant Episcopal Church*, New York 1850.

⁴¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, op. cit., 619.

not the Eucharistic vessels – chalice and paten – but the Bible book⁴². We may notice here a change in the understanding of the sacraments, which are perceived as “a visible form,” which the preached God’s word takes, sacraments in this sense are included in “service of the word.” Similarly, an apostolic service is not a service of sacraments but a service of a proclamation of God’s word⁴³. In this way the understanding of human sinfulness and the justification of a sinful man is related not to the sacraments administered by the Church but rather with the faith of an individual believer who opens to God’s preached word. Luther emphasised that the acceptance of the word makes a believer a participant of everything⁴⁴. While attempting to understand a Protestant (including Anglican) approach to the issue of sin and repentance (and even the entirety of Christian moral life) we need to take into consideration a traditional accusation and suspicion of Protestants to the Catholic moral teaching related to its legalism and excessive severity. Thus, for example, English ethical or theological-moral textbooks (studies) were in principle not to discipline believers in their handling the principles of moral life but rather to be a guide and adviser to them. Even if – as in the period of the Oxford movement – the restoration of the interest of the practice of confession took place (sacramental – although Anglicanism and other currents of Protestantism reject a sacramental character of such pious practice), the stress was on the avoidance of severity in the judgment on guilt and a degree of sinfulness among penitents⁴⁵. The belief is and was behind it that it is rather the interested Christian himself who is supposed to analyse and evaluate his behaviour in the dimension of his sinfulness but not to expect such judgements from a confessor or even from the Church itself. The Church is rather an environment of prayer and understanding, which is supposed to assist and

⁴² “Then the Bishop shall deliver to every one of them kneeling the Bible into his hand [...]” *The Book of Common Prayer*, op. cit., 582.

⁴³ Cf. A. Nichols, *The Panther and the Hind: A Theological History of Anglicanism*, Edinburgh 1993, 28f.

⁴⁴ “If a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this most tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word. This, then, is how through faith alone without works the soul is justified by the Word of God, sanctified, made true, peaceful and free, filled with every blessing and truly made a child of God [...]” M. Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in: J. Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, Garden City 1961, 58.

⁴⁵ Cf. T.F. Sedgwick, *Revising Anglican Moral Theology*, in: P. Elmen (ed.), *The Anglican Moral Choice*, Harrisburg 1983, 122f. Although the Oxford movement did not particularly deal with moral theology, E. Pusey, one of its founders and leaders, himself issued *Manual for Confessors* (Oxford 1878) of the French theologian J. J. Gaume as assistance for Anglican confessors.

accompany a man in his individual way of faith and moral life, and thus his acceptance of sin and conversion in mere relation to God. At the same time, it is worth observing that a rite of the visitation of the ill in the Anglican *The Book of Common Prayer* predicts that the ill person will confess their sins, being absolved from their sins by a priest⁴⁶. It is worth emphasising that the stress on *sola fide* resulted in a kind of replacement of a confessional by one's own conscience as a place of meeting and acceptance the salvific love of God to free oneself from sins⁴⁷. This confirms how broad the changes became in not only the very doctrine but also in the practice of Christian life of a wide circle of believers. They were the result of radical ideas and the theses of the Reformation.

Despite the old accusation towards Anglican Eucharistic teaching (and because of this, also the understanding of Christianity) related to the lack of a sacrificial dimension, the famous theologian Father O'Donovan claims that it may be read from the Anglican *Articles of the Faith*. In his comment to 39 *Articles* O'Donovan indicates the presence of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist (the Holy Communion), for instance in Article 2 Christ is mentioned as the "true God and a real man," who "was genuinely suffering, was crucified, died, was buried to reconcile God with us, and to become a victim" for human sins⁴⁸. The result of such an approach to a hamartiological issue was, for instance, a clear-cut negation of the differentiation of everyday and deadly sins, which was particularly expressed in the theology of the Carolingian period⁴⁹.

The confession of sins as an individual confession, as it was already and previously emphasised, was recognised by M. Luther, although with a different accent. A confession as "the extension of baptism" is called "the third sacrament" there. Luther even advised teaching small children how to confess. A confession should always be optional and "free from papal tyranny." He expressly emphasises contrition and the confession of sins, but he definitely rejects the practice of atonement by deeds. Justification, at its assumption, and absolution of sins

⁴⁶ The formula of absolution is to a large extent concurrent with the Catholic version, although the Protestant accent is evident here when sinners are mentioned, who "truly repent and believe:" "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." *The Book of Common Prayer*, op. cit., 317.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics*, Washington 2003, 18.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Articles of Religion*, II: *Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man*, in: *The Book of Common Prayer*, op. cit., 612. Cf. O. O'Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, Carlisle 1993, 30f.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. Nowosad, *Odnowa anglikańskiej teologii moralnej w XX wieku*, Lublin 2001, 33f.

is given to a man for free and we should not talk about “the attempts” of a man by fulfilling deeds or practices given by a confessor. Going to confession should be willing, so that we could receive a God’s gift from Him, but not to offer Him anything⁵⁰.

Unlike Lutheranism, reformed Protestantism definitely rejected different penitential practices, popular in the medieval period, such as the monastic life, pilgrimages, fasts, indulgences, etc., but also such truths as purgatory because they were related to a false concept of deserving it/them (before God), but they also encumbered the human conscience. In some Calvinist confessions of faith an auricular confession is expressly indicated as the practice devised by people which should be unequivocally rejected⁵¹. Simultaneously, it is observed that together with the rejection of an individual confession, the fight with sin is transferred in a certain way to a public and a national forum. A secular authority is assigned the “saint” character and tasks which also comprise a fight with human sins. Christians as citizens thus have (also religious) an obligation to reconcile with the authority, to follow a national law, to pay taxes, etc. Secular judges have “a sword from God in their hands, so that they could counteract the crimes against the first and the second board of Divine Commandments.”⁵²

The former archbishop of Canterbury, R. Williams, emphasises that Christian theology still searches for the more profound and relevant understanding of its subjects, and thus the very sin and a situation of a sinner, who needs the grace of God, the Saviour. In the history of theology, exceptionally abundant and remarkable writings of this kind derive from the Carolingian period. George Herbert, a priest and a poet, was one of those writers who in his profoundly

⁵⁰ “Who reluctantly goes to confession and not to receive absolution, he should leave it alone. Even more, who goes believing that he will do a good deed by a precise confession, he would rather abandon it. We admonish, however, so that you could confess and reveal your poverty not to do a good deed but so that you could hear what God orders you to say.” *Large Catechism*, 53.

⁵¹ Finally, we consider purgatory as an illusion proceeding from the same shop, from which have also sprung monastic vows, pilgrimages, the prohibition of marriage, and of eating meat, the ceremonial observance of days, auricular confession, indulgences, and all such things by which they hope to merit forgiveness and salvation. These things we reject, not only for the false idea of merit which is attached to them, but also because they are human inventions imposing a yoke upon the conscience.” *The French Confession of Faith* (1559), in: *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 152f. This French confession of faith was prepared most probably by Calvin himself for new communities of reformed Protestants developing first in Paris and subsequently in other places in France.

⁵² *The French Confession of Faith*, in: *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 158.

metaphysical and religious poetry among others portrays God redeeming humanity from its sins, thus only He “knows the value of human soul.”⁵³

The Anglican *The Alternative Service Book*, issued in 1980, contains a list of liturgical rites analogically to *Book of Common Prayer*. The act of repentance is included in two suggested forms of the Holy Communion (mass), with a possible recital of, among others, the Ten Commandments and a mutual act of repentance⁵⁴. We may notice here the wording about the confession of sins with “remorse and faith,” which is important for a Protestant view. However, the possibility of an individual confession and individual absolution are not mentioned. In the Anglican *Common Worship*, the newest series of liturgical books, the publication of which commenced in 2000, in the volume *Christian Initiation*, the formulas of penitential rites are provided⁵⁵. Both a penitential communal celebration and an individual confession with absolution are given there. An individual confession is not obligatory but advisable particularly when a believer expresses such a will. Six formulas of absolution are also provided. It is emphasised that sins are confessed before a bishop or a priest, and the act of repentance should take place after that, before absolution is received.

Although the reality of evil and moral weakness belongs to the most common human experience, only rational analysis does not allow for the rightful understanding of these aspects of the human condition. Christianity comes to man’s aid here when it sheds supernatural light on its essence and Divine origin, and at the same time on weakness and the need of grace. In view of the entire Christian tradition, Protestantism appears as an important and serious tradition, however evaluated sometimes as unilateral or extremely pessimistic. The Reformational assumptions and multi-century subsequent history of theological thought and sacramental-pastoral practice, particularly in Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican tradition, demand careful studies and analyses, so that this aspect of human fate and supernatural destiny should be comprehensively understood.

⁵³ Cf. R. Williams, *Anglican Identities*, London 2004, 66f.

⁵⁴ Cf. *The Alternative Service Book 1980*, London 1980, 120ff and 186ff.

⁵⁵ *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, London 2006, 227-289.