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SUNDAY IN THE LIGHT OF THE HANDBOOKS OF PENANCE

INTRODUCTION

In his apostolic letter *Dies Domini*,¹ John Paul II emphasised at the very outset that “the Lord’s Day – as Sunday was already referred to in apostolic times – has always enjoyed a special reverence in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very essence of the Christian mystery” (no. 1). In the conclusion of the letter he added that “the Lord’s Day has marked the rhythm of the entire two-thousand-year history of the Church” (no. 30). In addition, in 1999, the year in which the cited apostolic letter was published, the Polish pope encouraged the faithful to “strive with renewed zeal and fervour to discover the meaning of Sunday: its ‘mystery’, the purpose of its celebration and its significance for Christian and human life” (no. 3).

Responding to the pope’s call, which is still relevant, and perhaps especially so now, when so many people relegate the celebration of the Christian Sunday, which is linked to the fundamental truths of the faith and remains a key element of Christian identity, to the margins of life or forget this duty altogether, prioritising other values and treating Sunday

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¹ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski “Dies Domini” Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II do biskupów, kapłanów i wiernych o świętowaniu niedzieli*, Wydawnictwo Biblos, Tarnów 1999.

often exclusively as a day off work, emphasising only the corporeal and not the spiritual aspects.

The following article analyses the meaning and place of Sunday in Christian life in the light of the handbooks of penance (*libri poenitentiales*), also called penitentials, which, together with the sacramentaries, are part of the collections of so-called special law and are one of the indirect sources of knowledge of canon law, especially criminal law, written in late Christian Antiquity and the early Middle Ages [Subera 1977, 62-65]. Their origin is associated with monastic communities in Ireland, Britain and Scotland. Monks carrying out missionary activities brought them to the continent, where new books were written based on them, reflecting penitential practice in Spain and Gaul [Boguniowski 2001, 268-69].

Interestingly, the catalogue of sins included in the *libri poenitentiales* refers mainly to the second table of the Decalogue. Both the Irish and British penitentials devote little space to the first tablet. Indeed, there is no direct reference to the first or second commandment, although this does not imply the complete absence of human misbehaviour in this dimension [Nawracała 2016, 84].

The handbooks of penance stressed that when giving a specific penance, the penitent's education, social status and function needed to be primarily considered,² also the time he had persisted in the sin in question, whether he showed sorrow and contrition for the sin he had committed, and "under the influence of what emotion he had acted and what force had led him to sin."³ True penance, on the other hand, had as its purpose "to mourn for the wrong done, to grieve and with all one's might to beware of sins in future,"⁴ so that the one who repents would not commit them again.

² *The Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean* imposes the following penance for drunkenness: "1. Should a bishop or other ordained person drink frequently, he shall either cease to do so or be dismissed. 2. Should a monk vomit because of drunkenness, let him do penance for 30 days. 3. Should it be a presbyter or a deacon, let him do penance for 40 days. 4. Should a layman vomit on account of drunkenness, let him do penance for 15 days." *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne. Tekst łaciński, grecki i polski*. Vol. V: *Synody i kolekcje praw*, Wydawnictwo WAM. Księża Jezuitów, Kraków 2005 [hereinafter: *Księgi pokutne*], p. 88.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴ *Księga pokutna z Merseburga*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 304.

Returning to the question posed, which is simultaneously the aim of this article, it cannot be overlooked that Sunday in its various aspects, especially in the perspective of the Eucharist⁵ in the first millennium of Christianity has already been analysed [Benedict XVI 2008; Janicki 2000, 205-19; Idem 2015, 95-126; Pietras 1992]. However, there is still a lack of studies on Sunday in the context of the handbooks of penance. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the penitentials refer to *Dies Domini* in a very perfunctory and, one might say, incidental way, especially if we compare this to other issues addressed and discussed in these handbooks. In the oldest penitentials, attention was paid primarily to major offences such as murder, fornication or sacrilege.

1. WORKING ON SUNDAY

For the Christians of the first centuries, Sunday was first and foremost a day of reliving Christ's Pascha with reference to the truth about creation and eternal life (*Dies Christi, Dies Domini*). From the beginning of the Church, Eucharist was at the centre of Sunday celebration and thus Sunday was a day of gathering of the Christian community (*Dies Ecclesiae*). Sunday for the ancient Church was also a day of joy, solidarity with those in need and a day of rest (*Dies hominis*) [Janicki 2011, 44].

However, before turning to the question of working on Sunday in the context of the handbooks of penance, and in particular the penance to be assigned for working on that day, it is worth noting that it was not until the 4th century that Sunday, owing to Emperor Constantine's decrees of 3 March and 3 July 321,⁶ became an official feast day in the Roman empire and a public holiday. In a letter of 3 March 321, Emperor Constantine

⁵ The penitentials provided for various situations in which abuse of the Eucharist could occur. These concerned the conditions that had to be met in order to celebrate the Mass properly, the celebration itself and the reception and storage of the Eucharist [Pałęcki 2012, 127-55].

⁶ Emperor Constantine wrote to the prefect of Rome A. Helpidius: "Just as it was by all means undignified on the venerable day of the sun, on account of the worship it was given, to deal with the consideration of the disputes and quarrels of the litigants, so it is pleasing and glorious on this day to fulfil pledges. Therefore, all are given permission to perform emancipation and liberation of slaves on the sacred day, and it is not forbidden to undertake related activities" [Pietras 1992, 127].

wrote to the Prefect of Rome A. Helpidius: "All magistrates and the urban population and craftsmen of all kinds are to abstain from work on the venerable day of the sun (*venerabilis dies solis*). The rural population, however, may freely and without hindrance engage in cultivation, for it often so happens that on another day it is not possible to sow grain or to work a vineyard so conveniently; therefore a convenient opportunity given by heavenly Providence must not be lost" [Pietras 1992, 127].⁷

In civil law, Sunday was thus made a day off, and starting with the Synod of Orléans in 538 Sunday rest became an obligation sanctioned also by ecclesiastical law.⁸ However, it should be emphasised that the Christians of the ancient Church positively and happily welcomed state legislation recognising Sunday as a day off work, a day of rest, but did not want

⁷ Emperor Constantine also granted the legionaries time off on Sundays so that the soldiers could also participate in the Eucharist: "1. Constantine decreed that the day which is honoured and first, the day of the Lord and of salvation, should be considered a day of prayer. His servants, and at the same time men consecrated to God, admirable for their lives and all virtue, responsible for the conduct of the whole house, and the praetorians, the faithful personal guard, armed with a benevolent and faithful character, taking the emperor as a teacher of the laws of piety, honoured no less the Lord's day of salvation by raising on that day the prayers favoured by the emperor. 2. To this practice the blessed man encouraged all, for he vowed to bring all men to piety. He therefore commanded by law that all citizens of the Roman Empire should abstain from work on the day called the Lord's day, and also that they should celebrate the day before the Sabbath, in order to commemorate, I believe, the remembered fulfilment of the salvation that took place on that day. 3. Desiring to teach soldiers reverence, on this day of salvation, which is rightly called the day of light and sunshine, he exempted those who had come to faith in God, so that they could go faithfully to church and pray without hindrance." Furthermore, subsequent feast laws dating from the 4th century issued by the following emperors: Valentinian, Theodosius and Arcadius, stipulated that circus fights should be completely forbidden on Sundays, so that participation in these spectacles would not distract anyone from the venerable mysteries of the Christian religion [Pietras 1992, 127 and 133].

⁸ "Since people are convinced that on the Lord's day one should not make journeys by horses, oxen, and carts, nor prepare anything to eat, nor undertake anything at all for the adornment of a house or a person, and this would be more in accordance with the Jewish than with the Christian practice, therefore we decree that on the Lord's day it is permitted to perform what was permitted before. We believe that one should refrain from rural work, that is, ploughing, cultivating vineyards, pruning bushes, harvesting, shucking fruit, ploughing, repairing fences, so that people may come to church and devote themselves to prayer without difficulty. If, therefore, one were found to be indulging in the above-mentioned but forbidden activities, he is to be corrected accordingly, but this shall be the responsibility of the bishop and not of the layman" [Pietras 1992, 135-36].

to conceive of this freedom as idleness or a mere waste of time [Janicki 2011, 60].⁹

In Irish and British penitentials, the issue of Sunday work appears, for example, in the *Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean*, dating from the 8th century, also known as *Excarpsus Cummeani*.¹⁰ This penitential defines penance as a remedy for the soul and indicates it through specific references to the books of Scripture.

Regarding work on Sunday, Pseudo-Cummean firstly points not only to the prohibitions concerning this day, but also emphasises what the faithful were allowed to do on Sunday, including: riding on horseback, sailing, using a cart when it was used to get to church and taking care of their own hygiene by, for example, washing their heads and “washing their feet in soap.”¹¹ Only then does the examined penitential highlight the activities forbidden on Sunday, which involved receiving penance if performed.¹²

According to *Pseudo-Cummean*, the faithful were forbidden to bake bread and take a bath on the day commemorating Christ’s Resurrection. In addition, it was prohibited to write in public places [Łapaj 2015, 249].¹³ This activity was only allowed in one’s private home for one’s own needs.

⁹ Thus, for example, St. Jerome testifies that the nuns in Palestine used to sew clothes after returning from the Sunday Eucharist, and St. Benedict, in his Rule, recommends that on Sunday monks should not only devote themselves to reading and meditation, but should also engage in work so as not to be idle.

¹⁰ Both of these names sometimes appear under the same title. See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 86.

¹¹ “Lavacrum capitis potest esse in Domenica, et in lixivio pedes lavare licet”. See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 109.

¹² By comparison, according to the Mishnah, which is a collection of Jewish legal teachings, the following activities were prohibited on the Sabbath: 1. Sowing the field with grain; 2. Ploughing the field; 3. Harvesting; 4. Tying the sheaves; 5. Threshing grain; 6. Sifting grain; 7. Selecting grain; 8. Grinding; 9. Sifting through a sieve; 10. Making dough; 11. Baking; 12. Shearing; 13. Bleaching (cleaning); 14. Combing raw wool; 15. Dyeing; 16. Spinning thread; 17. Preparing the loom for weaving; 18. Making loops; 19. Weaving; 20. Separating into single threads; 21 and 22. Tying and untying knots; 23. Sewing; 24. Tearing; 25. Trapping an animal; 26. Slaughtering; 27. Skinning an animal; 28. Salting/tanning the skin; 29. Marking lines; 30. Cutting off unnecessary pieces; 31. Cutting out the right shapes; 32. Writing; 33. Erasing writing – scraping, wiping, chemically removing letters; 34. Building; 35. Demolishing; 36. Putting out fire; 37. Lighting a fire; 38. “The last blow of the hammer”; 39. Moving objects [Łapaj 2015, 247-48].

¹³ Any activity involving the drawing of marks that are fixed for some time on a particular substrate, even briefly, such as writing on sand, was to be avoided.

In the case of working on Sunday, the author points out that such a man had to be first admonished and implicitly shown that his behaviour was inappropriate, and if this did not help, the second step was to punish him financially by taking away part of his property. And in the third step, there were two options for punishing a person who persisted in working on Sunday – a financial penalty and a punishment of flogging or seven days of penance. The confessor was to choose one of these two possible options.¹⁴

Identical solutions concerning Sunday work can be found in other penitentials written at the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries in the British Isles, especially in works referring to Theodore, Bishop of Canterbury:¹⁵ *Capitula Dacheriana*¹⁶ and *Discipulus Umbriensium*¹⁷ and in the *Penitential of St. Egbert*, Archbishop of York.¹⁸ In addition, in the penitentials *Capitula Dacheriana* and *Discipulus Umbriensium* we can find very clear wording referring to the tradition of the Greeks and Romans that working days are all days except Sunday.¹⁹

Among penitentials created in the British Isles, the only handbook of penance that interprets Sunday work in a slightly different way is the penitential *Canons on the Remedy of Sins*, dating from the late 8th century.²⁰ Its author, when writing about the issue of Sunday work, relied on the penitential *Discipulus Umbriensium* and it must be assumed that he was also familiar with the earlier works. Compared to the penitentials analysed earlier, the *Canons on the Remedy of Sins* contains only one point devoted to work on Sunday, situated in a chapter entitled “On unclean meat”. In contrast to the *Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean* and the *Discipulus Umbriensium*, a person who committed work on Sunday was to be punished immediately with penance, which was to last for seven days. Thus, there is no prior admonition here, or subsequent steps

¹⁴ See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 109.

¹⁵ Bishop Theodore was born in Tarsus, studied in Athens and in 668 was sent by pope Vitalian to England to reorganise the Church there and introduce Roman customs in opposition to Celtic customs following the recommendations of the synod of Whitby in 663/664 convened at the behest of King Oswiu of Northumbria.

¹⁶ *Capitula Dacheriana*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 116.

¹⁷ *Discipulus Umbriensium*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 142.

¹⁸ *Penitencjał św. Egberta arcybiskupa Yorku w pięciu księgach*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 214.

¹⁹ “Graeci et Romani dant servis suis vestimenta et laborant excepto dominico die”. *Capitula Dacheriana*, p. 116, *Discipulus Umbriensium*, p. 141.

²⁰ *Kanony o lekarstwach na grzechy*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 199.

in the infliction of penance, or the confessor's choice of one of two possible penances, as was the case in penitentials dating from the early 8th century in the British Isles.²¹

From the 8th century onwards, the influence of the Celtic monks and their penitential practice can be seen in the territories of Gaul and Northern Italy, and over time various penitential books began to be used there [Pałęcki 2012, 129].

In the penitentials that originated in the territory of Gaul, it is difficult to find mention of penance for Sunday work. The oldest handbook of penance from France – the *Handbook of Penance of Burgundy*,²² dating back to around 700/725, also remains silent about it. The same applies to the *Handbook of Penance of Florence*, written at the end of the 8th century in Italy.²³

By contrast, the *Handbook of Penance of Merseburg*, compiled at the same time in Northern Italy, which incorporates the content of the *Book of Penance of Burgundy* as well as Celtic and Anglo-Saxon elements in a very explicit way, forbids undertaking work on Sunday. A person who disobeyed this prohibition or indulged in bathing on Sunday was to repent for seven days and, if one transgressed the prohibition again, one was to repent for as many as forty days. Moreover, if one did so for reasons which were due to “the condemnation of the day of the Lord, one shall be cast out of the Church as a Jew.”²⁴ Thus, we can see that doing work on Sunday and making this, in a sense, a manifesto, a conscious display of disregard and disrespect for the Lord's day, which could also take a public form, resulted not only in severe penance but also in a punishment in the form of exclusion from the Church community.

Interestingly, this strict practice found no extension later in Northern Europe. According to Bishop Burchard of Worms (965-1025), a penitent who undertook work on Sunday should repent for three days on bread and water. Thus, we see that the penance for working on Sunday was reduced and this sinful act did not entail exclusion from the Church community. A higher penance, according to the Bishop of Worms, could be given for,

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Księga pokutna z Burgundii*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, pp. 261-65; *Księga pokutna z Paryża*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, pp. 271-76.

²³ *Księga pokutna z Florencji*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, pp. 277-84.

²⁴ *Księga pokutna z Merseburga*, p. 298.

inter alia, failing to at least visit the sick or the imprisoned, for which the penance was to repent for ten days on bread and water.²⁵

As in Gaul and Northern Italy, from the 8th century onwards penitentials were also known in the Spanish territory [Pałęcki 2012, 129].²⁶ Regarding Sunday work, various penances have been preserved that correspond to those given in the territory of Britain. The *Handbook of Penance of Cordoba*, written in the early 11th century, based on three British penitentials: the *Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean*, *Capitula Dacheriana* and *Discipulus Umbriensium*, introduces a three-stage process of imposing a penance for Sunday work. The first time one confessed to be working on Sunday, the penitent had to be admonished, the second time the penitent had to be punished materially by depriving him of part of his property, and the third time the penitent had to be deprived of one third of his property.²⁷ A more lenient punishment was applied by the *Handbook of Penance of Silos*, which was written around 1060/1065 at the monastery of St. Dominic of Silos in the Diocese of Burgos. This penitential, based on the *Handbook of Penance of Cordoba*, limited the imposition of penance only to depriving the penitent of a precisely unspecified property.²⁸ By contrast, according to the *Penitential Canons of Pseudo-Jerome*, penitents who worked on Sunday were to repent for seven days or flog themselves.

2. TRAVELLING ON SUNDAY

Living in the 6th century, St. Martin of Braga, who was Bishop of Dumio and later Archbishop of Braga, explained the issue of travelling on Sunday in one of his works, noting when and under what circumstances it was al-

²⁵ *Dekrety Burcharda, biskupa Kościoła w Wormacji*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 399. There was also a greater penance for lack of hospitality towards visitors to the house: "Have visitors come to you in time of necessity, and you have not received them into your house and been merciful towards them, as the Lord has commanded? If you have not done so, repent for five days on bread and water."

²⁶ Some of the most widespread and preserved ones are the *Paenitentiale Vigilantium* or *Albeldense* (second half of the 9th century), *Canones paenitentiales Ps.-Hieronimi* (9th/11th century), *Paenitentiale Cordubense* (early 11th century) and the *Paenitentiale Silense*.

²⁷ *The Handbook of Penance of Cordoba*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 441.

²⁸ *The Handbook of Penance of Silos*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 458.

lowed, and when it was forbidden: "It is permitted on Sunday to go to nearby places, but not with evil but with good intentions, for example, to go to holy places, to visit a brother or a friend, to console the sick, to offer advice to the oppressed and provide help in a good cause" [Pietras 1992, 136-37]. It was meant to signify respect and veneration of the Lord's Day, thus named because on it Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead.

The Synod of Orléans of 538, presided over by the Archbishop of Lyon, also mentions the issue of travel on Sunday. It rejects the application of Jewish prohibitions to Sunday, including the ban on travel. In addition, it justifies the ban on working in the fields by the need to leave farmers – generally people dependent on landowners – free time for prayer. This is specified in detail in Can. 31: "since people are convinced that on the Lord's Day one should not make journeys by horses, oxen and carts, nor prepare anything to eat, nor undertake anything at all for the adornment of a house or a person, and this would be more in accordance with the Jewish than with the Christian practice, therefore we decree that on the Lord's Day one is allowed to do what was allowed before."²⁹

The penitentials that originated in the British Isles speak unequivocally and uniformly on the subject of travelling on Sunday. The *Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean*, *Discipulus Umbriensium* and *Capitula Dacheriana* state that it is permitted to ride on horseback and sail on Sunday, the only thing forbidden is to travel on a cart, unless one uses this means to get to the temple, particularly for Mass or prayer.³⁰ The subject of travelling on the Lord's Day, however, is not addressed by the penitentials produced in France and Italy. On the other hand, the penitentials written in the Spanish territory discuss this matter: *The Handbook of Penance Vigilantium* of Albelda, written around 850-900, and the later *Handbook of Penance of Cordoba* and the *Handbook of Penance of Silos*, which date from the 11th century. All three of the above books included in the

²⁹ Can. 31 of the Synod of Orléans stipulated: "We consider it necessary to refrain from rural work, that is, ploughing, cultivating vineyards, pruning bushes, harvesting, shucking fruit, ploughing, repairing fences, so that the people may come to church and devote themselves to prayer without difficulty. If, therefore, someone were found to be indulging in the above-mentioned but forbidden activities, he is to be corrected accordingly, but this will be the responsibility of the bishop and not of the layman" [Pietras 1992, 135-36].

³⁰ See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 109; *Capitula Dacheriana*, p. 116; *Discipulus Umbriensium*, p. 142.

volume *Księgi pokutne*, edited by A. Baron, H. Pietras, were translated into Polish by the same authors: A. Baron, J. Łukaszewska-Haberko, H. Pietras; also interestingly, the Latin verb *ambulare* was translated by them as ‘to travel, to wander, to roam’. Thus, according to the Spanish penitentials and depending on the translator, on Sunday we have the prohibition of: travelling,³¹ wandering³² and roaming.³³ For travelling and roaming³⁴ on Sunday one had to repent for seven days and for wandering four days.³⁵ Thus, it can be concluded that the most appropriate translation was to use the word wandering or roaming rather than travelling, because, in reference to St. Martin of Braga, it was permissible to travel, while it was forbidden to waste time on useless or pointless wandering or roaming.

3. FASTING ON SUNDAY

The assembly of bishops at Nicaea in 325, gathered at the invitation of Emperor Constantine the Great, who wished to commence the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of his reign in a solemn manner, was recognised as the First Ecumenical Council [Pietras 2013, 137].³⁶

The aforementioned Council, in its last canon, introduces the principle not to pray on one’s knees on Sunday, but that prayer was to be brought to God in a standing posture.³⁷ The above-mentioned Canon 20 of the Council of Nicaea was alluded to, among others, by St. Martin of Braga, who emphasised that one must not fast on the Lord’s Day or during Pentecost, and if a priest, because of having received public penance from the bishop,

³¹ *Księga pokutna z Vigilantium*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 406.

³² *Księga pokutna z Kordoby*, p. 441.

³³ *Księga pokutna z Silos*, p. 458.

³⁴ *Księga pokutna z Vigilantium*, p. 406; *Księga pokutna z Silos*, p. 458.

³⁵ *Księga pokutna z Kordoby*, p. 441.

³⁶ In addition, Emperor Constantine intended to solemnly proclaim at the Council the reconciliation of all the feuding parties of the ongoing doctrinal conflict between Arius and Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, as well as to proclaim the Paschal calendar and the basic formula of the Christian faith. For more details concerning the convening of the Council of Nicaea, see J. Grzywaczewski [Grzywaczewski 2014, 139-68].

³⁷ *Sobór Nicejski I (325)*, Polish text in: *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych. Tekst łaciński, grecki i polski*. Vol. I: *Źródła Myśli Teologicznej*, Wydawnictwo WAM. Księży Jezuitów, Kraków 2001, p. 88.

or for some other reason, should fast on Sunday under the pretext of piety, “like the Manichaeans,³⁸ let him be accursed” [Pietras 1992, 136-37].

The issue of fasting on Sunday is addressed by *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, written in Gaul around 480, issued for the sake of asceticism, pastoral care and good morals of Christians, especially the clergy. The *Statuta* categorically stipulate that whoever fasts persistently on the Lord’s Day, despite the prohibitions of many synods and the teachings of numerous Church Fathers, cannot be considered a Catholic [ibid., 133].

The issue of the prohibition of fasting on Sunday in the handbooks of penance is discussed quite extensively particularly in the territory of Britain. There, the penitentials of *Pseudo-Cummean*, *Discipulus Umbriensium* and the *Canons on the Remedies of Sin* remind confessors that a penitent who negligently fasted on Sunday should keep a whole week’s fast, and if the situation was repeated, he was to keep the fast for a further twenty days, and should one commit the same act for a third time, the penance increased to forty days. Furthermore, if the penitent fasted in order to humiliate a feast day, “like the Jews, let all the Catholic Churches despise him.”³⁹ However, the penitential *Capitula Dacheriana*,⁴⁰ which discusses other issues related to Sunday and its meaning for those who have received the sacrament of baptism and belong to the community of the Church, is silent about the above penances.

The above issue is completely omitted in France and Spain. Only in Italy, the *Handbook of Penance of Merseburg*, which has as its source, among others, *Discipulus Umbriensium*, stipulated that a person who fasted on Sunday had to repent for seven days, and if he did so a second time, the penance would last for forty days. In addition, a clause is retained that if one did so to “condemn the Lord’s Day, one shall be cast out of the Church as a Jew.”⁴¹

³⁸ In his Letter to Cassulanus, in reference to the customs of the Manichaean sect fasting on Sunday, St. Augustine wrote: “Fasting on Sunday is a great scandal, especially since the emergence of the condemnable heresy of the Manichaeans, which is openly opposed to the Catholic faith and divine Scriptures, as they made this day an obligatory day of fasting for their adepts” [Pietras 1992, 115].

³⁹ See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 109; *Discipulus Umbriensium*, p. 142; *Kanony o lekarstwach na grzechy*, p. 199.

⁴⁰ *Capitula Dacherianas*, p. 116.

⁴¹ *Księga pokutna z Merseburga*, p. 298.

4. INTERCOURSE ON SUNDAY

The penitential books, on the one hand, encouraged and, on the other hand, even commanded the spouses to observe sexual abstinence on certain days of the week and of the year. It was emphasised that a marriage without abstinence was not based on law but on sin, since it was believed that God allowed marriage “and they shall be two in one flesh” not because of lust and carnal desire, but being in the “unity of the flesh” for the bearing of children.⁴² Sexual abstinence had thus to be observed each year so that the spouses could find time to pray for the salvation of their souls. Spouses who abstained from intercourse on Saturday evening and Sunday could receive Holy Communion on the Lord’s Day. In addition, the penitentials assured that spouses who, in addition to this, obey God’s commandments and perform works of mercy by distributing alms and “rooting out sins” in their lives would merit the reward of eternal life.⁴³

The *Handbook of Penance of Pseudo-Cummean* stipulated that spouses were obliged to exercise sexual abstinence during certain periods of the liturgical year (Lent and the Easter octave) and on certain days, especially on Sunday and the three days before receiving Holy Communion, furthermore during pregnancy and during menstruation.⁴⁴ A penitent who confessed that he had intercourse on Sunday had to repent by fasting for three days.⁴⁵ The penitential *Discipulus Umbriensium* also recognises intercourse on Sunday as a sin and according to it, as part of penance, one had to first of all ask God for forgiveness and, in addition, the confessor at his discretion was supposed to order the penitent fast for one, two or three days.⁴⁶ According to Bishop Theodore of Canterbury, spouses should abstain from intercourse not only on Sunday, but also on Wednesday and “when the woman is pregnant, that is, from the day she feels the move-

⁴² *Księga pokutna Finniana*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 95. “Women during menstruation are forbidden to enter the church or receive Communion, whether nuns or laymen. Should they dare do so, let them repent for three weeks. Similarly, let her who enters the church before she has purified herself after childbirth, that is, forty days, do penance. Whoever has sexual intercourse during this time, let them repent twenty days.”

⁴⁵ See *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 95. St. Egbert, Archbishop of York, claims similarly. See *Penitencjał Egberta*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 209.

⁴⁶ *Discipulus Umbriensium*, p. 145.

ments of the child until the birth for 33 days if it is a son, and 56 days if it is a daughter.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, according to this penitential, those who disobeyed the prohibition of intercourse on Sunday were to ask God for forgiveness and repent for four days.⁴⁸ In addition, this penitential contains an interesting call to the secular authorities to support and encourage their subjects through appropriate proclamations for sexual abstinence on Sunday.⁴⁹

The French and Spanish penitentials remain silent on the question of sexual intercourse by spouses on Sunday. However, the issue is addressed in Italian penitentials, such as the *Handbook of Penance of Florence*, according to which one had to ask God for mercy and repent for two or three days,⁵⁰ and the *Handbook of Penance of Merseburg*, which orders the confessor to encourage the penitent to ask God for forgiveness and tells him to repent for three days.⁵¹ The *Handbook of Penance of Gregory III*, on the other hand, points out that one who had intercourse on Sunday must ask God not only for mercy and forgiveness but also for grace and then repent for one or three days.⁵²

The strictest rules on the lack of sexual abstinence on certain days are found in a penitential from the monastery of St. Hubert in the Ardennes, dating from around 850, which states that if spouses were to have intercourse on Sunday, during Lent or on a day when there is a liturgical commemoration of a martyr: “they must not make a sacrifice on that day, let them do repent forty days twice and give alms daily.”⁵³

⁴⁷ *Rozdziały Teodora*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 173.

⁴⁸ The four days of penance with bread and water are also mentioned by Bishop Burchard of Worms. See *Dekrety Burcharda, biskupa Kościoła w Wormacji*, p. 379.

⁴⁹ *Rozdziały Teodora*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ *Księga pokutna z Florencji*, p. 284.

⁵¹ *Księga pokutna z Merseburga*, p. 301.

⁵² *Księga pokutna Ps. Grzegorza III*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 359. The analysed penitential explains in the introduction: “Penance derives from repenting, which means one who repents in his heart and is ashamed before God that he has sinned. With God’s help, the devil in his wickedness can do nothing against us if we want to perform pure penance, that is, we do not heal wounds with wounds, we do not cripple the crippled, because new wounds are worse than the former ones.”

⁵³ *Księga pokutna ze Świętego Huberta*; Polish text in: *Księgi pokutne*, p. 359.

CONCLUSION

The Archbishop of York, St. Egbert, in a penitential he wrote himself, gives instructions on the attitudes which he believes should be actively pursued in one's daily life, especially after the sacrament of penance, and thereby affirming one's faith and love for God. In addition to the encouragement of fasting, generous almsgiving and prayer, there is a call to come to church every Sunday, attend Mass and pray for oneself, for all the baptised, for one's confessor and for all people. At the same time, a clear message is given that a person who did not take Communion for three consecutive Sundays was to be excommunicated.⁵⁴

In the light of the handbooks of penance, Sunday was supposed to be a holy day, different from other days, a day with an impact on the whole week, with a view of sanctifying it. From the beginning of the Church, at the centre of the celebration of the Lord's Day was the Eucharist. For the early Christians, it was unthinkable not to attend Mass and receive Communion on Sunday. In addition, Sunday for the ancient Church was also a day of rest, a day on which work was not to be undertaken, especially work that would interfere with celebrating and respecting the nature of the day. Hence, it was forbidden to waste time on this day on worthless or pointless wandering or roaming. Sunday, for the ancient Church, was also a day of joy because of the One who had risen from the dead on that day, and this was expressed externally by two customs in particular – fasting and kneeling prayer were not practised on Sunday as they were contrary to the joy of the resurrection. The joy of Sunday was portrayed as a spiritual joy, juxtaposed with any disordered bodily joy. Therefore, the penitential books emphasised the prohibition of sexual intercourse on Sunday and strongly encouraged sexual abstinence for spouses.

There still remains the task of which pope John Paul II spoke, namely to rediscover the meaning of Sunday, which, in the perspective of the penitential books, was lived as a day of the Eucharist, a day of rest and a day of spiritual joy, experienced through the fact of the Resurrection and the liberation of humanity from sin.

⁵⁴ *Penitencjał Egberta*, p. 214 and 239; *Księga pokutna Pseudo-Kummeana*, p. 112; *Capitula Dacheriana*, p. 117; *Discipulus Umbriensium*, p. 142.

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**Sunday in the Light
of the Handbooks of Penance**

Abstract

Handbooks of penance created in the late ancient Christianity period and early Medieval times are evidence of a formative practice of penance in the Church. The aim of this article is to discuss the role that Sunday played in the lives of particular followers of Jesus, and how it was celebrated in the light of the handbooks of penance. In the 21st century, when Sunday, the Lord's Day, is often treated only as a day off by those who were included into the Church through the sacrament of Baptism, and while many people are concerned only with the things of the flesh and not with spiritual well-being – can we use the handbooks of penance as a source of wisdom in discovering

the meaning of Sunday, its celebration and importance for the human and Christian life?

Keywords: penance; handbook of penance; Sunday; fast.

Niedziela w świetle ksiąg pokutnych

Abstrakt

Księgi pokutne, które powstały w epoce późnej starożytności chrześcijańskiej i wczesnego średniowiecza, są świadectwem kształtowania się praktyki pokutnej w Kościele. Celem artykułu, jest odpowiedź na pytanie, jaką rolę w życiu poszczególnych wyznawców Chrystusa odgrywała niedziela i jak przeżywano ten dzień w świetle wspomnianych ksiąg pokutnych. Czy w XXI w., kiedy to Dzień Pański przez wiele osób, które poprzez sakrament chrztu zostały włączone do wspólnoty Kościoła, traktowany jest często wyłącznie jako dzień wolny od pracy czy też okazywana jest wyłącznie troska o to, co cielesne a nie duchowe, czytając księgi pokutne możemy z nich czerpać wiedzę w odkrywaniu sensu niedzieli, celu jej świętowania i jej znaczenie dla życia chrześcijańskiego i ludzkiego?

Słowa kluczowe: pokuta; księga pokutna; niedziela; post.

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