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## CONFESSION OF MEN. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

**Abstract.** The issue of men's confession is very little developed, although it is seen as an important research problem. Contemporary conditions of experiencing masculinity include changes in civilisation and the development of various types of therapies which, despite revealing wounds, do not always help to overcome them. Interdisciplinary research on confession of men shows that their motivation to recourse to the sacrament of penance includes the desire to meet an understanding confessor who will help them regain confidence and self-reliance. Willingness to overcome weaknesses lies at the heart of seeking help in mastering one's lusts and sins. Men's different approach to moral problems consists of their willingness to solve the problem quickly, or of resorting to illusory escape from the experienced difficulty. It is important to show the theological aspect of confession which is an encounter with Christ who defeated sin and death in the mystery of the cross and resurrection.

**Key words:** moral theology; sacrament of penance; confession of men.

The difference in the approach to the sacramental confession of men and women is an important research problem demonstrating the diversification of gender influences on the perception of the relations with God, other people and oneself. Men treat moral challenges in a different way than women, and experience their imperfections in this respect differently. The analysis of men's individual developmental stages in terms of their concern for spiritual and moral life reveals the specificity of male gender in reflecting on the most intrinsic determinants of attitudes and bearing. Detailed outline of the basic difficulties experienced by men in the pursuit of moral perfection allows to see the most common forms of sin and their andrological specificity. Advancing and proving the thesis about the difference of men's

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attitude towards confession reveal the necessity to work out the theory of adequate treatment of the male penitent by the confessor.

### 1. CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS OF EXPERIENCING MASCULINITY

There are no particularly male sins because both genders show similar sinful behaviors regarding the same scopes of moral life.<sup>1</sup> An important difference lies, above all, in the different approach of men to their own experience and moral sins, which is revealed in the approach to the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. A male is more willing to belittle his experience and therefore has less sensitivity to the committed sins.

Depending on the stage of puberty and the advancement in spiritual development, males display different degrees of readiness to take responsibility for their behavior. Problems with the integrity of one's own dreams and projects in the light of experienced failures may lead a male to undertake internal work on self-improvement, but they may also stimulate resorting to defense mechanisms in the form of repressing the problem and replacing it with the temporary ways of easing frustration through sinful behavior. The dynamics of the undertaken spiritual work, understood as a challenge and a task to be accomplished, is dependent upon family upbringing and encountered role models, and is conditioned by one's personal predispositions. Important determinants of male behavior also include paying attention to the range of his moral responsibility resulting from age, social role and unique personal history combined with an individual approach to life challenges.

Events from man's life can modify significantly his approach to confession, both in terms of the elements of conversion and awakening in faith, and wounds caused by other people. These events can also include the experience of one's own falling into sin as well as the enslavement by the evil to which one feels addicted and/or dependent. It is also important to pay attention to the social dimension of sin, determined by John Paul II as the structures of sin that create particular determinants facilitating or even persuading one to commit an act of evil.

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<sup>1</sup> A. RYBICKI, *Wąż i gołębica. Męska osobowość i męska duchowość* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Gaudium, 2011), 162–163.

It can be noticed in the modern world that the crisis of masculinity is growing due to the lack of appropriate role models in family and social life. At the same time there are numerous books written which contain advice on what a man should be like, and what ideals young boys and men should follow. The increasing number of publications in this field may result in the greater confusion of men, because the abundance of instructions is not accompanied by the possibility of a simple perception of the proposed development paths. Moreover, many of these publications only indicate what should be achieved and what features should characterize a mature male. They do not show practical ways to implement the proposed ideals. It is not uncommon that someone who has more knowledge uses it to justify oneself or feels even more torn between known and shared ideals, moral weakness and a lack of resistance to temptation experienced in everyday life.

There is an urgent need to investigate the way and the scope of influence of various handbooks and *manuals* that heighten expectations, but do not provide the possibility to fulfill oneself due to too high standards and too idealistic proposals for self-development.<sup>2</sup> Their anthropological basis referring to a particular vision of human person should be analyzed above all else. While observing the ideal of a macho proposed by mass culture, that is, an image of a “tough guy” promoted by violent films and supported by the successes of outstanding athletes, we can notice an increasing frustration among the growing number of men who find it difficult to manage the fast social life. At the same time, they do not have easy access to and cannot find a trusted adviser, and are unable to open their hearts to instruction. Life in the environment of constant rivalry, described in popular culture as rat race or participation in a casting, increases the number of socially ill-adapted men and enlarges the group of people who feel socially excluded. The fashion for coaching and mentoring, propagated by the culture of the upper classes, is not accessible to all men, both due to economic barriers and the lack of access to qualified staff, as well as obstacles in the form of a culture of exclusion which rules out a tough man using the help of a psychologist or makes it difficult for him to go to a specialist in personal development. The male specificity of this problem lies additionally in the fact that a man is more willing to supplant knowledge of his own weakness and does not give up to external control easily. Pretending to be someone who does not need

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<sup>2</sup> Grzechy w kratkę. O spowiedzi z ojcem Piotrem Jordanem Śliwińskim rozmawiają Elżbieta Kot i Dominika Kozłowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2008), 52.

help, many men resort to the counseling services in a situation on the verge of a social exclusion or due to horrors caused by auto-destructive thoughts. The specific stigmatization of people in need of specialized psychological therapy or psychiatric treatment leads to a situation in which the only person that has a chance to reach man's shattered heart is a confessor who, with his pastoral and psychological preparation, must meet the highest demands.

The impact of coaching and psychological counseling on the well-being of men looking for a figure of someone who is strong and resistant to stress is an interesting research issue. It is even a more important issue when we consider the fact that a contemporary young man is faced with the lack of a father in the family, which leads to the lack of self-esteem, because he has not experienced the confirmation of his sense of dignity from a loving father while growing up. A generation without a father is more susceptible to manipulation but it is also more intensely looking for role models of integrated strength in a man who at the same time provides a sense of security and tenderness.<sup>3</sup>

Also, great social responsibility of the confessor arises as he becomes a trustee of difficult, often painful, matters of a man who would rather hide them than speak of them in public. In confession, the penitent describes the negative side of his life and does not praise his own successes. For many men, confession is a form of unburdening experience associated with moral failures, as well as the form of a quick and ultimate coming to terms with the past they would like to close and not to return to. Such an approach is typical of male nature in which things do not relate to one another so closely as in the reception of the world by women. The delusion of male approach is that by not linking many of their own behaviours by means of cause and effect principle, men are often defenseless against the growing dependencies, which are also called addictions in moral theology. By repeating the same unacceptable behaviors, many men cannot recognize their weakness and delude themselves that they will mobilize themselves next time and will not fail, because they are convinced that they have a sufficiently strong will.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, there are a lot of risks resulting from the lifestyle of social consumption, which can lead man to experiencing one's moral weakness and a sense of loss in a way that infects thinking and deprives one of joy and resistance to stress. The increasing knowledge of addiction mechanisms, due

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<sup>3</sup> P.J. CORDES, *Zagubione ojcostwo*, transl. J. Koźbiał (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2005), 88–89.

<sup>4</sup> R. ROHR, *Od mężczyzny dzikiego do mężczyzny mądrego. Refleksje na temat męskiej duchowości*, transl. G. Baster (Kraków: WAM, 2009), 31–33.

to the discoveries in the brain's biochemical work and the influence of neurotransmitters on the human behaviour, does not, however, provide us with more freedom; for, although we know how we can become addicted to psychoactive substances, we cannot effectively oppose addiction.

## 2. INTERDISCIPLINARY CHARACTER OF RESEARCH ON THE CONFESSION OF MEN

Reflection on confession belongs to the field of moral theology and concerns not only the conditions of human life but also the content of the liberating evangelical message.<sup>5</sup> The theological nature of the research in this field indicates the value of Christ's redemptive activity. Not only does Christ give a good example of fight against evil to the believing Christians, but also provides particular spiritual help in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Resurrection of Christ, understood as His ultimate victory over death, hell and Satan, gives Christians hope for an ontic transformation of a man who gains a new identity by rebirth in the sacrament. Existential experience of a penitent leaving the confessional, who not only feels relieved of the burden of their sins by confessing them to the confessor, but also experiences the lightness and joy of someone who is free from them, cannot be compared to other experiences of this kind. Experience of an honest and truly experienced confession has a supernatural value that does not give only a religious sanction to definitively overcome the sin the penitent does not have to return to.

There is a serious need for a more comprehensive study in the field of psychology, pedagogy and communication theory related to the sacrament of penance and reconciliation because, with the development of electronic media, the mentality of people belonging to information society and growing in the visual culture has changed. In spite of the fact that people are gaining more and more insight into their own internal life, the verbalisation of this insight in a communicative way is an increasing problem, also due to the lack of an adequate vocabulary resulting from the lack of reading literature. However, the most important obstacle in the ability to communicate with others seems to lie in the individualistic concept of man who remains in-

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<sup>5</sup> J. BRAMORSKI, *Wyzwalająca moc pokuty chrześcijańskiej. Studium teologicznomoralne* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2004), 54.

troverted and cannot recognize the complementation of one's own existence in other people.<sup>6</sup>

Contamination of contemporary anthropology with reductionisms which diminish a person to one dimension of their existence and, above all, isolate them from transcendence, causes a person to close in a narrow horizon of one's own limitations.<sup>7</sup> Confession is therefore an essential experience in human life because it reveals the relational dimension of a person who confirms his or her value and sense of self-fulfillment through authentic and sincere entering into relationships with other people. The required sense of security and assurance about the unconditioned love is possible in the context of the sacrament of penance, which, when experienced with faith, enables an encounter with unlimited love of Jesus Christ, the merciful Savior of humanity.

Acknowledgement of this fact in male's life must consider many factors determining the way it is experienced. These are external and internal factors. External factors include, among others, contemporary cultural trends and specific mentality of our time based on scientific discoveries concerning man and the way social sciences and technologies, especially information technology, change the world. It is important to notice the influence of anthropological concepts and theological assumptions accepted by contemporary men who are simultaneously intensely formed by mass culture. The way of a person's functioning in the community is dependent upon his or her personal history and the attitude to life resulting from the genetic and family determinants as well as professed beliefs and the degree of involvement in social life of lay and ecclesiastic communities. Personal choices made by man have indelible influence on his Life. Person's maturity increases with the awareness of the extent of the conditions that an individual is subject to, but above all maturity manifests itself in inner freedom influencing the response to the challenges of everyday life.

The existence of a male in mass culture saturates him with multiple models of masculinity which are characterized by two extremes of evaluating the role of a male human being. On the one hand, a model of a tough man is promoted. A man who is immune to stimuli and frustrations, and who can remain strong in the face of challenges and extreme hardships. This type of

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<sup>6</sup> G. BUSANI, "Kontekst sakramentu," in *Spowiedź, nie wiem co powiedzieć...*, transl. K. Kozak (Kraków: Salwator, 2010), 162–163.

<sup>7</sup> J. NAGÓRNY, "Antropologia moralna," in *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, ed. J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna (Radom: Polwen, 2005), 48.

man, referred to as *macho*, is popular in the media and is portrayed in movies that shock with brutality and showing off masculinity. Most often, however, even if this type of man is a bandit slayer and conqueror of hearts and bodies of many women, he cannot solve his everyday problems, because he is impervious to what is invisible, subtle and delicate.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, man is presented as an effeminate representative of the group of individuals who are dependent and harmed by life, who are losers and need constant support. A man who has no control over his life is oversensitive and perceives a stimuli from the world as a threat to his existence. Escape into defense mechanisms such as alcohol, drugs or sexual addiction is not only an element of cultural creation promoted by its creators, but also the experience of millions of families stating the failure of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers to cope with life.

There are not many examples of men able to combine strength with gentleness, or male courage with patient perseverance. Focusing on oneself in striving for perfection often does not go hand in hand with the necessity to care for the closest people and to take responsibility for one's surroundings. Selfish self-reflection or egocentric narcissism are today strengthened by individualism that prevails in intellectual culture and is somehow justified by the mentality of finding a solution with the help of specialists. A person shifting responsibility for one's own health onto a doctor and burdening a psychologist with the task of dealing with the problems of adapting to difficult situations, would sometimes like to burden God or a priest with responsibility for his moral life.

It is therefore important to subject models of masculinity functioning in mass culture and influencing an average man to scientific reflection. Reference to the extensive literature in the field of spiritual and psychological advice on how to realise one's masculinity is the next stage of the research aimed at determining the image of a man fed to the representative of this gender and contrasting it with the image man carries in himself. It is also important to refer to literary fiction which promotes certain spiritual and psychological image of men.

After presenting anthropological and social conditions, it is crucial to use properly the current teaching of the Church about confession, especially pertaining to the confession of men. Treating confession as something more

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<sup>8</sup> J. AUGUSTYN, "Wychowanie do ojcostwa," in *Oblicza ojcostwa*, ed. D. Kornas-Biela, (Lublin: TN KUL, 2001), 240–241.

than just an element of popular therapy should lead to an indication of its theological character implying a belief in the supernatural character of the Paschal Mystery, which is the main source of the Church teaching about the establishment of the sacrament of penance by Christ. Presentation of the Church teaching about the necessity of confessing one's sins in the confessional is connected with the Church's demonstration of the drama of the sins that destroy the vitality of the ecclesiastic community and contribute to the degradation of the dignity of the human person.

The issue of specific moral transgressions of a man (a male), which are the most frequent element of self-accusation in the confessional, should be the subject of scholarly study. It concerns both the systematisation of sins according to the threefold distinction (theological, generic and numerical), applied in moral theology and the distinction of certain categories of sinners from whom the confessor can expect to hear the standard list of sins and offenses. In the examination of conscience, a threefold reference to God, oneself and other people is also used.<sup>9</sup> The distinction of age, status and profession categories will be helpful in distinguishing and treating different categories of penitents and their weaknesses in maintaining moral compass.

In this aspect, the following should be taken into account: sociological research, relevant psychological approach and theological teaching, in particular, moral theology, spiritual and pastoral theology. It might be useful to refer to the experience of various movements and ecclesiastic communities showing how the practice of the sacramental confession of men is manifested there. Building a specific structure of the spiritual treatment of confession by men on the basis of this data may be an essential element in the description of the penitent spirituality of men who aim at the personal greatness by serious work on one's spirituality.

The interdisciplinary nature of scientific reflection on the confession of men must be based on a homogeneous research method that gives consistency and coherence to the final synthesis of the data. On the one hand, such consistency is provided by theological and moral anthropology, which is the key to the proper interpretation of the statements made by human sciences. On the other hand, the guarantee of methodological coherence lies in the approach to the topic from the theological and moral perspective which indicates both the agapetological and obligatory dimensions of the findings

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<sup>9</sup> Z. SOBOLEWSKI, *Pojednajcie się z Bogiem. Teologicznomoralne i pastoralne aspekty sakramentu pokuty i pojednania* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2015), 207–209.



made. The point here is to consider the indication of different authors from the perspective of good and evil and to evaluate the proposed solutions and undertaken actions. In addition, it is also important to point to the scope of responsibility of people who are conscious and free to choose specific behaviors, and should be ready to bear the consequences of their choices.

Another important issue that is the subject of reflection on the confession of men is the presentation of the specific role of the confessor: as someone who, in the name of Christ and the Church, represents the court of mercy, but also is this specifically encountered person whose reaction based on knowledge, character and experience is essential for the perception and efficiency of the sacrament.<sup>10</sup> In searching for a method of presenting this issue, the following elements should be taken into account: parallel presentation of the penitent's confession and the theological–moral dimension of his sins, as well as the simultaneous indication of the confessor's role in the due treatment and instruction of the penitent who comes with a particular problem connected with moral life.

The studied aspect should include the determination of how the confessor should deal with a man who, as a penitent, neither expects too much lecture, nor is he ready to accept judgment resulting from the evaluation of his behavior. The ability to reach man's heart requires proficiency in understanding male soul and indication of the essential elements of spiritual life, which not only attract man's attention and make him interested, but are also capable of stirring his feelings, making him undertake corrective action. It is, therefore, worth exploring and systematizing the profile of professional training that candidates for priests complete in their preparation for the service at confessional, and indicating the magnitude of expectations directed at them.

The ability to adequately and properly treat a man in a confessional by avoiding the trivialization of evil but also not torturing the penitent, requires the confessor to empathize with the penitent's expectations and give an adequate answer to his desire to be understood and embraced in the entire complexity of the condition of his moral life. The confessor must be able to assess the subjective situation of the penitent in the objective light of moral demands and to find the key to his heart, so that the instruction and the intentions of the priest to encourage the man to resolution to better oneself will be understood and accepted. Therefore, part of the research should

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<sup>10</sup> Z. SOBOLEWSKI, *Pojednajcie się z Bogiem*, 167–169.

indicate the scope of theological, pedagogical and communication skills of the confessor, so that his attitude may be compatible with the psychological and spiritual needs of the penitent.

### 3. MEN'S MOTIVATION FOR MAKING CONFESSION

Another interesting issue covers the presentation of various aspects of the motivation that leads men to the confessional. It might seem quite strange that in the era of a significant activity of the media which undermine the legitimacy of priests' ministry in the confessional, thousands of men in Poland take up the task of examining their conscience and decide to confess their sins and transgressions in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> The very phenomenon of confession, related to the therapeutic dimension of the encounter, does not explain the popularity of confession, nor does it point to sufficient motives to undertake this practice. Indeed, human being needs to "ventilate" their inner self and looks for a safe spiritual space to shed the burden of their inconsistency and not living up to the ideals set for oneself. However, this is not enough to make someone who, according to the canons of contemporary culture, wants to be independent, reveal to a stranger sitting in a special room called a confessional, some of the most intimate problems and accuse oneself of what affects the deepest parts of conscience.

The existence of confession also cannot be explained by means of the oppressive attitude of the Church forcing one to make confession in the pre-holiday period and on the occasion of receiving other sacraments, because it is, above all, the priests as the ministers of this sacrament and representatives of the Church who are often the victims of numerous hours of tedious listening to the confessions of the anguished penitents. However, the Church in Poland maintains the so-called confession cards, determining the need to get the priest's signature in the confessional in order to get access to some of the sacraments. It does not, however, explain confessions of men who confess their sins in a regular confession which is a determinant of their adherence to the teaching of the Gospel.<sup>12</sup> The retreat confession popular in Poland, made in the Advent and the Lent as well as in preparation for the

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<sup>11</sup> J. AUGUSTYN, "Wprowadzenie," *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży*, ed. J. Augustyn, S. Cyran (Kraków: WAM, 2005), 14–15.

<sup>12</sup> P.J. ŚLIWIŃSKI, *Spowiedź nie musi bardzo boleć* (Kraków: WAM, 2015), 24–25.

largest holidays and anniversaries of family life, is certainly a part of the practiced tradition for many Catholics. And yet, it remains an important element in the lives of millions of people and deserves to be investigated by the scientists.

Confession is also an element of formation for some movements and Church communities, and is a valued element of spiritual work and self-improvement through the use of spiritual guidance and the advice of someone experienced in conducting an intense religious life. Sometimes, confession is recommended by experienced therapists who see that their patients' problems are not just psychological and somatic, but have a spiritual character and require the intervention of a confessor or even an exorcist.

Confirmation of the beneficial influence of confessions on the intensity of Catholics' lives can be found in ecclesiastical experience in Belgium and the Netherlands, where, resigning from confession, the priests themselves have led to the rapid secularization of the society and their breaking-up of ties with hierarchical Church. Popes of the last decades have often indicated the connection between confession and the vitality of church communities<sup>13</sup>.

In its essence, confession is a specific combination of the spiritual needs of humans and pastoral instructions of the Church who sees in this sacrament a privileged tool for the use of God's grace, deepening one's own spirituality and achieving moral perfection through growth in love and ancillary availability. Men making confession grant special credibility to the sacrament, because if they do it in a conscious and voluntary manner, they confirm the value of a sacramental meeting. By allowing men to admit to their weaknesses, confession urges them, even more powerfully, to desire to be strong and righteous. Confession is not only about safe and painless cleansing of one's sins. In fact, in confession, a man must decide on a spiritual battle in order to change his life. Scientific study of the phenomenon of male confession and the indication of the deepest motives for the conscious and fruitful use of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation reveal the essence of this encounter with God in the confessional and gives an image of its authentic value.

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<sup>13</sup> A. DERDZIUK, "Wypowiedzi Stolicy Apostolskiej na temat znaczenia praktyki spowiedzi w odnawianiu żywotności wiary Kościoła," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 63 (2016), 3: 107–121.

#### 4. SPECIFICITY OF MALE APPROACH TO CONFESSION

The presentation of a male approach to confessing sins is an important element of the study on confession. The specificity of male approach to confession results from his different spiritual and psychological structure and is based on pragmatism and a certain schematism in approaching the problems of spiritual life. Male unwillingness to accepting his sinfulness is not only due to the lesser sensitivity of the conscience, but it is also the result of a more intellectual approach to life and a lack of attention to detail. In his perception, a man does not connect different kinds of his own behavior and does not associate various events in a logical sequence which would incline him to acknowledge his guilt.

Treating his sins somewhat incidentally, a man does not see them as tedious as women often do. Approaching reality through its aspects usually allows a man not to connect several different acts. Also, man does not see them in the light of achieving perfection. Male sinner recognizes and admits that he did not succeed but there is no general tendency to exaggerate problems. Sometimes, men simply flee from their problems because they do not know how to admit that there is a problem and how to deal with it. They are ready to shift off responsibility on others or to see sin only as an unfavorable coincidence. Research on the condition of male confessions must therefore take into account both the phenomenon of minimizing and morbidly exaggerating the sense of guilt that occurs to people who experience scrupulosity.<sup>14</sup>

Among the determinants of man's confession, one must point to external elements such as the mentality of the society, theological culture and the practices of individual local communities. The personal predispositions of an individual and his/her experience of confession are also important. Sometimes meeting a good confessor helps to solve the needs and reveals a special touch of God which the believer experiences as grace adequate to his/her expectations. In another case, the experience of wounds or discouragement caused by an unkind or incompetent priest encountered in a confessional may, for years, push one away from this sacrament and close one to the grace of God's mercy.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes at the root of the problems of confession lies the behavior of the penitent, who, being afraid of the consequences of

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<sup>14</sup> W. JUSZCZAK, *Psychoterapeutyczny aspekt sakramentu spowiedzi* (Kraków: Homo Dei, 2008), 174–175.

<sup>15</sup> *Grzechy w kratkę*, 37–38.

his sins, chooses to reject God and the perspective of his judgment, believing that this way he will avoid confrontation with the truth about condition of his conscience. Escape into defense mechanisms in the form of denial, displacement, accusation or even perverse justification of one's own behaviour can be an effective obstacle to enjoying the fruit of the sacrament. Similarly, superficial and ritualistic treatment of confession may lead to discouragement with repeated self-accusations of sins, which has no effect on improving life.

An important condition for a deeper understanding of the mystery of reconciliation with God and oneself that takes place in sacramental penance is constituted by faith linked with readiness to enter real bond with the resurrected Christ. Christian Revelation does not belong just to the domain of psychology of religion and sociology of totemic behaviour or one conditioned by attachment to folklore or venerable tradition, but it is a historical and redemptive event that is based on specific events in the history of mankind and becomes part of the individual choice of every person who is ready to take the side of the truth they accept. The decisions and style of everyday life, marked by trust in the possibility of receiving divine help, are confirmed by the real and realistic experience of millions of people who have experienced change of their life and gained a completely new insight into the current stages of their existence. An interesting subject of the study is also constituted by the diversity of experience of a man making confession depending on age, stage of education and position in social life. Research regarding men's confession cannot stop at a static determination of the average attitude of a contemporary man, but should take a dynamic form of showing different categories of penitents who, practising specific professions and experiencing encounters with different people and situations, have different moral problems. Marital status, family conditions and the type of undertaken activity influence person's behavior and have their repercussions in the confessed sins.<sup>16</sup>

The confession of people who experience different types of addictions and enslavement by sin as well as those wounded by other people is an important research challenge. Apart from theological competences in spiritual matters, as well as psychological and pedagogical skills, confessors should have the right knowledge of canonical and secular law that will allow him to

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. PŁATEK, *Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty i pojednania* (Częstochowa: Paulinianum, 2001), 427–428.

act properly in the face of harm or a confirmed offense. Sins with a social dimension have wide repercussions and influence the penitent not only by providing bad example, but also by sometimes causing a specific mental and spiritual trap and forcing one to sin. In spite of the fact that every sin is a result of one's own personal decision, external situation that becomes a stimulus of sin should be taken into account.

Treating confession in a responsible way and being aware of the demands placed on a man who values his independence and self-control are elements of learning to bear consequences of one's own conduct. Confession is, in fact, the act of accusing oneself of one's sins in the confessional; sins which are understood as conscious and voluntarily chosen conduct contrary to moral norms and breaking the covenant with God. Ultimately, in confession, man discovers the truth that he himself takes the blame for his conscious deeds and is ready to confront the truth about himself. The courage to admit to oneself requires courage and hope that can move male heart towards the effort to transcend oneself and discover one's own value, manifested in the ability to take up the challenge posed by the events of life.

Perceiving confession only as a frustrating reality, forcing man to reveal the worst part of his soul to another man does not take into account the liberating character of Christian penance, which refers to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> Merciful love of the Redeemer does not force anyone to stand before the tribunal of mercy, but indicates that man will not run away from the truth about himself and his life because chosen actions in the form of evil and sin lead to the eventual degradation of personal dignity and death in earthly and eternal sense. The desire to open up in trust and sense of security is a natural need of man entering close relationships with people he loves and expects understanding and help from them.

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Collection and selection of data on male confession does not end the research because we should strive to show the mutual relationship between various factors and suggest a system of references that could constitute the starting point for the development of the penitentiary pedagogy program. One of the postulates should be to propose a new way of presenting con-

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<sup>17</sup> Z. SOBOLEWSKI, *Seks, małżeństwo i rodzina. Vademecum spowiednika* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2013), 12–13.

fession which cannot be described only as a duty and a command, but as an offer directed to free people seeking ways to preserve their hopes for realizing the ideals stored in the heart.

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