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## **The Dynamism of the Sacraments of Healing in the Service of Church Community Building**

In his apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte* Pope John Paul II said: “To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.”<sup>1</sup> The issue of commitment and planning on the part of the Church of the domain of communion was pointed out as an important aspect, since it “embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church.”<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the prophetic vision of Blessed John Paul, the pastors of the Church in Poland took up works to make the Church a real home for her children. The statement became the keynote of the Polish Pastoral Program at the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Building the church community is of key importance for creating a common sense of fraternity, unity and peace in the world. John Paul’s successor, Benedict XVI, made a clear statement concerning this issue: “In a multiethnic society that is experiencing increasingly disturbing forms of loneliness and indifference, Christians must learn to offer signs of hope and to become universal brethren, cultivating the great ideals that transform history and, without false illusions or useless fears, must strive to make the planet a home for all peoples.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Message for the World Mission Sunday 2010.

In the life and mission of the contemporary Church the sacrament of penance and reconciliation as well as the sacrament of anointing of the sick play an important role. The two sacraments are referred to as the Sacraments of Healing<sup>4</sup> – and, as the arguments presented in this paper show, bringing the immense grace of the Lord, partake in the process of building the unity of the Church. Fulfilling all moral obligations in the Church community deriving from the sacraments of penance and anointing, Christians may become symbols of “a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>5</sup> That is why the sacraments of penance and anointing should be perceived as a huge gift of Christ for the sake of the whole Church. Many issues presented in this paper aim at reviving the charisms received in the sacraments of penance and anointing.

## 1. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in the Service of Church Community Building

Pope Benedict XVI in his post – synodal exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* reminds that an important pastoral duty nowadays is “promoting [...] a reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist, and [...] encouraging frequent confession among the faithful.”<sup>6</sup> Worthy and frequent confessions have an important role in shaping Christian life and building the Church community. It is therefore important to try to achieve greater understanding of the healing power of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation among the members of the Church community, and, in the celebration of this sacrament, greater maturity among Christians. This would help to draw the faithful “into

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 61.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 21.

ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”<sup>7</sup>

The sacrament of penance is the sacrament of double reconciliation: through absolution man is reunited with God whom he had insulted, and with the Church that had been wounded by his sin.

If the celebration of the sacrament of penance is not to become some fashionable psychological or psychotherapeutic act in which the disposition of the penitent becomes the most important aspect, it is necessary to present it as a salutary act in which God, the Merciful Father, makes it possible for man to reconcile with Him through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. God confirms His love to man constantly looking for man, lost due to his sins. The salvific will of loving and merciful God is made visible in the sacrament of reconciliation. The centre of the reconciliation work is Jesus Christ, who embraces man with His salvific love embodied in His Passion, Death and Resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

Showing the sacrament of penance as a salutary act indicates a close relation of the sacrament to the truth of divine mercy. A Christian called for the recognition and confession of his sins is at the same time introduced to the world of divine mercy.<sup>9</sup> It was in God’s mercy that the greatest truth of love was revealed, and the symbol of this merciful love is Christ, who gave his life on the cross to make atonement for sin.<sup>10</sup> In the same manner that God manifests his mercy towards man, man is obliged to manifest mercy towards others. It is the only way to raise to full and constant imitation of Christ.

A Christian becomes a true man of God when he celebrates the sacrament of penance and reconciliation with faith, hope and love. Thanks to

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<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. Góralczyk, *Wyzwolenie człowieka z grzechu*, „Communio” 10 (1990) no. 1, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Drożdż, *Kompetencja teologiczna w sakramencie pokuty*, [in:] *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży*, red. J. Augustyn, S. Cyran, Kraków 2005, p. 103–105; J. Nagórny, *Sakrament pokuty w kontekście miłosierdzia*, [in:] *Wierzę w Boga Ojca. Program duszpasterski na rok 1998/99*, Katowice 1998, p. 210–244.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in misericordia*, 12.

the gift of faith bestowed upon man through baptism, he can celebrate the sacrament of penance as if he was standing under the cross, in order to prepare himself for the gift of atonement, washing in the blood of Christ and answering with love to the gift of love itself. The fruits one receives during the confession: the experience of divine mercy, inner peace and multiplication of graces, have a direct influence on shaping the virtue of hope, which expects the fulfilment of God's promises of eternal life. In the sacrament of penance man answers to God's mercy with faith, hope and love.<sup>11</sup>

The Good News of salvation leads us to another conclusion: not only is a sin the offence committed against God, but it also wounds the Church.<sup>12</sup> "Sin," says Benedict XVI in the aforementioned exhortation "is never a purely individual affair; it always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through Baptism."<sup>13</sup> As we can see, sin is not only a form of rejecting the love of God, it is also the rejection of the Church being the manifest of reconciliation and mercy. Consequently, the act of reconciliation can only take place in the Church and by means of her ministry.<sup>14</sup> The Church is the sacramental symbol of atonement and reconciliation. There is no atonement without the Church. It is worth mentioning that in order to form a reconciling community, the Church needs to be reconciled and set an example of reconciliation. One of the ways to achieve this goal is a true participation of the members of the Church in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, which is synonymous with subjecting oneself to the unifying works of Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

The celebration of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in the ecclesial dimension seems to be an especially contemporary challenge

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Nagórny, *Sakrament pokuty drogą do wewnętrznej harmonii*, „Pastores” 4 (1999), p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and penance*, 10–11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. Ciccola, F. Targoński, *Poradnik spowiednika*, tłum. B. A. Gancarz, M. Wszolek, Kraków 1999, p. 21–24.

for the Church in Poland, since there is considerable evidence of its desacralisation. The faithful who often confess run the risk of getting into a routine and moralism in the process. Many of them do not fully understand the core of this sacrament, that is why celebrating it has a merely formal character. This kind of approach neither brings spiritual growth, nor leads to conversion. Others, in an attempt to find some motivation for practising the sacrament of penance, want to make it a kind of meeting or a psychological consult, forgetting about its religious character or even rejecting the perspective of the encounter with the merciful God. Among many other indications of the process of desacralisation of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, there are some pastoral practices, which obscure the ecclesial importance of penance and reconciliation as well as the personal dimension of good and evil, putting this sacrament at risk of becoming merely a common ritual.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that the desacralisation of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is caused by the fundamental phenomenon of the loss of the sense of sin. If one does not recognise sin, and cannot admit to having committed it, and every presentation of the sense of sin is treated by him as a false and excessive sense of guilt, he will not perceive penance as the road to atonement of sin, but rather as a means of freeing himself from the sense of guilt and responsibility for his actions.<sup>17</sup> The loss of the sense of sin is strongly connected with an obscured sense of God, which proves the presence of the aforementioned secular tendencies. It also reflects the loss of the moral conscience and the search for truth.<sup>18</sup>

The main way of overcoming these desacralising tendencies in the approach to the sacrament of penance is making constant efforts to improve the understanding of what the sacraments are, especially the one leading to the reconciliation with God and the Church. The times of popular missions and spiritual retreats are perfect occasions for that, so it is really important to organise penitential celebrations at those times.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and penance*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. Orzeszyna, *Wezwanie do pojednania*, [in:] *Wyzwania moralne przełomu tysiącleci*, red. J. Nagórny, A. Derdziuk, Lublin 1999, p. 44–51.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and penance*, 18.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasises such a need in the exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “When possible, it would be good that at particular times of the year, or whenever the opportunity presents itself, individual confession by a number of penitents should take place within penitential celebrations as provided for by the ritual.”<sup>19</sup> It is true that the faithful usually respond well to penitential celebrations. If the examination of conscience is conducted in a proper way, considering the characteristics of the group it concerns (children, adolescents, adults) the range of issues that need to be reflected upon before the individual confession can be broadened. Confessors can easily notice the difference between the confession of a penitent who was prepared through the penitential celebration and the one who was not.

Penitential celebrations help understand the communal dimension of the sin and the necessity of communal satisfaction as the final act which crowns the sacrament. They build the sense of perception of the Church as a community, and not as a formalised institution. The sacrament of penance is not some reality taking place in a shamefully hidden confessional, but it becomes a common and public event. The sin committed by man is not a problem between him and God, but an issue truly concerning the Church the holiness of which is lessened by the sin committed, the Church that man is a part of. Before man asks God for the forgiveness of the sin, he asks the community first, apologising for the lack of love and responsibility.<sup>20</sup> It is also advisable to invite the faithful to participate in the appropriate common catechesis, so that the involvement in the mutual forgiveness and reconciliation could grow. Common celebrations make the ecclesial aspect of reconciliation more real.<sup>21</sup>

Deepened celebration of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in the Church community is the answer to the appeal of John Paul II for the renewal of consciences. The Pope, following the teaching of Saint Paul, said that “conscience in a certain sense confronts man with the law, and thus becomes a ‘witness’ for man: a witness of his own faithfulness or unfaith-

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<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. W. Słomka, *Pokuta jako kontestacja w życiu chrześcijańskim*, [in:] *Miłość większa niż grzech*, red. A. J. Nowak, W. Słomka, Lublin 1996, p. 79–84 (*Homo Meditans*, 13)

<sup>21</sup> Cf. C. Squarise, *Istota spowiedzi*, tłum. T. Homa, [in:] *Sztuka spowiadania. Poradnik dla księży*, red. J. Augustyn, S. Cyran, Kraków 2005, p. 80–81.

fulness with regard to the law, of his essential moral rectitude or iniquity. Conscience is the *only* witness, since what takes place in the heart of the person is hidden from the eyes of everyone outside. Conscience makes its witness known only to the person himself. And, in turn, only the person himself knows what his own response is to the voice of conscience.”<sup>22</sup>

John Paul II emphasises that since “conscience is like God’s herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God’s authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. [...] conscience has binding force,”<sup>23</sup> which is why it is crucial to follow one’s conscience and listen to its voice, by multiplying the good and rejecting the evil, following Saint Paul’s advice: “Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good” (Rom 12:21). Being the teacher of the nation, the Church is faced with an enormous effort of shaping the human heart, which is harder and harder to reach and address effectively. The sacrament of penance and reconciliation celebrated in the right way may become an opportunity for the Church. It is undoubtedly true that people in Poland confess regularly. It is a great wealth that cannot be wasted. Popular missions and spiritual retreats are supposed to facilitate the process of discovering the importance of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Their internal dynamism aims at the conversion of the participants, both the priests and the listeners present. This conversion is initiated by the sacrament of penance.

The group of the faithful who regularly go to confession, e.g. every first Friday of the month, constitute the perfect ground for the work to enhance the participation in the sacrament of penance and make it more fruitful. In their case, we must not make do with the level of freedom from grave sins that they have already reached, as what they need is true spiritual guidance. It is in spiritual guidance that the process of conversion can find the space and the means necessary to shape men and heal the ‘wounds’ in the life of Church community.

Whilst considering the ecclesial dimension of moral obligations deriving from the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, we must remember

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<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 58.

not to narrow the notion of forgiveness down to the sacramental absolution only. The notion needs to be broadened to other practices, especially the ones concerning the forms of social life, in the light of which the sacramental absolution can gain deeper meaning. One of the means of forgiveness in the Church is faithful and loving openness to the Word of God. The word of God, which has a significant position in penitential celebrations, aims at proclaiming God who loves and forgives, who appeals for conversion when He exposes sin. Benedict XVI emphasises the importance of the word of God as a means of reconciliation in the exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “We ought never to forget that ‘the word of God is a word of reconciliation, for in it God has reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2 Cor 5 : 18–20; Eph 1 : 10). The loving forgiveness of God, made flesh in Jesus, raises up the sinner’. ‘Through the word of God the Christian receives light to recognize his sins and is called to conversion and to confidence in God’s mercy’. To have a deeper experience of the reconciling power of God’s word, the individual penitent should be encouraged to prepare for confession by meditating on a suitable text of sacred Scripture and to begin confession by reading or listening to a biblical exhortation such as those provided in the rite. When expressing contrition it would be good if the penitent were to use ‘a prayer based on the words of Scripture’, such as those indicated in the rite.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we can state that the word of God prepares for the conversion, points to the ways of achieving it, makes one more sensitive and helps to shape the conscience.

Another way of reconciliation in the Church is compensation. It does not necessarily need to follow the sacramental absolution, it can precede it, being a proof of contrition and an honest willingness to convert. Active love of your neighbour, the ability to face marriage, family or professional challenges, or the ones connected with any kind of specific calling that one might have, are accepted and appreciated forms of reconciliation in the Church. Any form of participation in the cross of Christ is the participation in the act of reconciliation, manifested by God through the cross.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Orzeszyna, *Wezwanie do pojednania...*, op. cit., p. 46–50.



In this context we can talk about the sacramental reconciliation through the Eucharist, as well as the connection between confession and the Eucharist.<sup>26</sup> And it is not only the question of confessing before approaching communion. The Eucharist itself has the power of freeing from venial sins, so it can be perceived as the source of absolution of sins. The penitential attitude of a Christian is also expressed through the Eucharist. In this light we must see the fact that daily conversion and penance find their source in the Eucharist, and are therefore connected with the sacramental act of confession.<sup>27</sup>

We can conclude that every baptised man who wants to participate in the process of building the Church community fully needs to celebrate the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. The sacramental dimension of penance and reconciliation needs to be seen in the context of the truth about human sinfulness. In the same way as the theology of sin emphasises the communal aspect of sin, which has its reference to the Church community, the communal and, most importantly, ecclesial aspect of the sacrament of penance must be stressed. The communal and ecclesial character of the sacrament of penance reveals itself through the truth that it is a means of reconciliation not only with God, but also with people, especially within the Church community. The communal character of the sacrament of penance brings the fruits of unity among people, especially in the Church community.

## 2. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick in the Service of Church Community Building

According to Church teaching, which emphasised the connection of the two, the sacrament of penance and reconciliation has a lot in com-

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1436.

mon with the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.<sup>28</sup> The anointing of the sick, similarly to the sacrament of penance, has a salutary value, both for an individual and the Church community. It is the source of Christ's grace for the suffering man and for the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI in the exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* teaches that "Jesus did not only send his disciples forth to heal the sick (cf. Mt 10:8; Lk 9:2, 10:9); he also instituted a specific sacrament for them: the Anointing of the Sick. The *Letter of James* attests to the presence of this sacramental sign in the early Christian community (cf. 5:14–16)."<sup>29</sup> Talking about the anointing of the sick, Saint James gives specific indications to the suffering, in whom the sense of salvation is revealed, both for them and the whole Church community.

Most importantly, it needs to be pointed out that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is, as any other sacrament, a personal meeting with Christ, who heals man from different ailments and gives the strength to live a holy life.<sup>30</sup> Receiving it is synonymous with the unification with Christ carrying the cross, but at the same time with Christ who was adored and victorious. In this sacrament Christ helps to give in to God's will and accept the physical and spiritual suffering. In their suffering the sick become like Christ, and the suffering they have to endure gains salutary value, therefore, through gaining deeper sense, it becomes easier to bear. The anointing of the sick is also a source of strength helping to endure in faith and love while experiencing hardship in sickness, as well as the source of hope for the future glory of salvation with Christ.<sup>31</sup>

In the sacrament of the anointing, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, God provides help for the sick man by absolving him of sin, comforting,

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. W. Kasper, *Kościół jako miejsce przebaczenia grzechów*, tłum. L. Balter, „Communio” 10 (1990) no. 1, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. B. Glinkowski, *Sakrament namaszczenia lekarstwem dla chorych chrześcijan*, „Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeskie” 8 (2003), p. 255–272.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Decyk, *Chrześcijański wymiar choroby i cierpienia*, „Homo Dei” 62 (1993) no. 3, p. 75; S. Rosik, *Tajemnica ludzkiego cierpienia, a moc Chrystusowego krzyża*, [in:] *Cierpienie i śmierć*, op. cit., p. 77–82.

and, God willing, bringing back to health.<sup>32</sup> The man struggling with sickness is visited by Christ himself, who comes to ease his suffering, absolve him and give him strength. The sacrament of the anointing can therefore be seen as a kind of medicine for the sick. It helps to discover the sense of the suffering, as well as notice the sense of existence while struggling with the illness, since finding answers in the pursuit of the sense and value of life<sup>33</sup> is one of the deepest aspirations of man.

Christ called for accepting and enduring the suffering on numerous occasions. He stated clearly that anyone who wishes to follow him, must take up his cross daily (cf. Lk 9:23). For Christ the suffering is the test of one's adherence to Christ. Therefore, a condition of becoming His disciple is denying oneself. If a man takes up his cross, spiritually unifying with Christ, the suffering he endures becomes comprehensible. One can find his inner peace, and, at times, even the joy that results from it. The sick person becomes spiritually more mature, is enriched with goodness, patience and love. From this perspective it is easier to understand the words of Pope Benedict XVI from the encyclical letter *Spe salvi*, that "It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love."<sup>34</sup> "Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful."<sup>35</sup> Christ is the origin of all the light that shines upon human suffering and gives it the meaning it has. John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* encourages us to 'use' the suffering for the sake of salvation. He calls it the deepest need of the heart and the imperative of faith.<sup>36</sup> Suffering must not be made a primary goal, but needs to be interpreted properly.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Wprowadzenie teologiczne i pastoralne*, [in:] *Sakramenty chorych. Obrzędy i duszpasterstwo*, Poznań 2010, no. 6.

<sup>33</sup> More on the subject of understanding the sense of human suffering in: J. Wróbel, *Człowiek i medycyna. Teologicznomoralne podstawy ingerencji medycznych*, Kraków 1999, p. 137–194.

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, 4.

The sacrament of the anointing unites the sick with Christ, giving them the grace of enduring the suffering and directing it at Christ.<sup>37</sup>

For Christ suffering is also the test of adherence to the Church, which is His Mystical Body. It needs to be remembered that the sick constitute 'the Church of Suffering'. They are not useless or redundant in the Church and the community. They have their unique place and their indispensable role in the Church.<sup>38</sup> They also have their own sacrament, the aim of which is to work for the common good of the Church community as well as the good of the suffering man. Pope John Paul II perceived suffering as God's grace bestowed on man. Recalling the tragic events on 13 May 1981 (an attempt at his life) he pointed out that the suffering he experienced and the danger he was exposed to helped him realise that God's grace for him as a man, as well as the whole Church community, was revealed through this ordeal. He stressed that in his suffering, John Paul could bear witness to the love and truth of the Lord.<sup>39</sup> Pope's words clearly indicate that when the suffering is connected with the cross of Christ, its salvific sense, not only for himself but for the whole Church, is revealed. That is why the sick man, according to Saint Paul, rejoices in his sufferings for his own sake and for the sake of others, in his flesh filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church (cf. Col 1:24).<sup>40</sup>

At the same time John Paul II emphasises that the Church sees the ones receiving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as the Christ Himself, being the source of the miraculous strength: "Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person [...] in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption [...] is *serving*, like Christ, *the salvation of his brothers and sisters*."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cf. M. Pyc, *Znaki Trynitarnej Bliskości. Teologiczny wymiar sakramentów świętych*, Poznań 2007, p. 171.

<sup>38</sup> *Wprowadzenie teologiczne i pastoralne*, op. cit., no. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II, General Audience of 14 October 1981.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. B. Testa, *Sakramenty Kościoła. Podręcznik teologii katolickiej*, vol. 9, Poznań 1999, p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, 27.

Christ summons the sick to work with Him towards the salvation of the world, which Pope Benedict XVI points out in *Sacramentum caritatis*: “the Anointing of the Sick, for its part, unites the sick with Christ’s self-offering for the salvation of all, so that they too, within the mystery of the communion of saints, can participate in the redemption of the world.”<sup>42</sup> A sick man anointed with oil in the name of the Lord (cf. Jas 5: 14) is not only encouraged to incorporate his own pain in the Passion of Christ, he is also expected to share with others the strength of renewal and joy of the Risen Christ.<sup>43</sup> Through receiving the sacramental grace, the sick person partakes in the consecration of the whole Church community. Due to the faith one has receiving the sacrament, the suffering person acts for the benefit of the whole Church community, so the anointing of the sick has formative character: it helps to build both the sick man and the Church community.

The anointing of the sick, similarly to other sacraments, indicates the need of solidarity in suffering. On the one hand, the whole Church’s intercession in favour of the sick, as well as all kinds of help are expected from the community; on the other hand, the suffering of the sick is incorporated in the service of universal salvation due to the sacrament received. In this way, the sacrament of the anointing becomes an opportunity to discover the communal sense of suffering, as it is not only Christ that comes to man in his suffering, it is his Church as well. This Church, which is called to the ‘Good Samaritan’ work, at the same time suffers with one of its members in a mysterious way.

Looking at the contemporary reality, it seems obvious that with all our means we must try to renew the pastoral care for the sick and the suffering, which was also one of the stipulations made by John Paul II in his exhortation *Christifideles laici*: “It is necessary that this most precious heritage, which the Church has received from Jesus Christ, ‘Physician of the body and the spirit’, must never diminish but always must come to be more valued and enriched through renewal and decisive initiatives

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<sup>42</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 53.

of *pastoral activity for and with the sick and suffering*.”<sup>44</sup> The Pope added in the encyclical letter *Redemptor hominis* that every man is “the way for the Church,”<sup>45</sup> and emphasised in *Salvifici doloris* that: “[...] man in a special fashion becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life.”<sup>46</sup> In order to keep her identity, the Church is obliged to serve the sick. It is a crucial aspect of the pastoral care.

The ecclesial character of the suffering is revealed in the way of experiencing it, which often brings the sense of communion with others who are suffering: “The world of suffering possesses as it were its *own solidarity*. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation, the trial of their destiny, or through their need for understanding and care, and perhaps above all through the persistent question of the meaning of suffering. Thus, although the world of suffering exists ‘in dispersion,’ at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge to *communion and solidarity*.”<sup>47</sup>

However, the aforementioned sense of solidarity is not limited to the community of the suffering. It encompasses the universal solidarity of all Church members, which means a special appeal to the healthy to open up to the sick.<sup>48</sup> It is expressed by the ‘Good Samaritan’ attitude, the key aspect of which is compassion (meaning co – suffering), as it is not always possible to physically ease the suffering: “The name ‘Good Samaritan’ fits *every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others*, who ‘is moved’ by the misfortune of another. [...] Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to *compassion* towards a suffering person. Sometimes this compassion remains the only or principal expression of our love for and solidarity with the sufferer.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 54.

<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. D. Człapiński, *Współczesny świat wobec spotkania Chrystusa i człowieka w sakramencie namaszczenia chorych*, „Studia Włocławskie” 4 (2001), p. 86–94.

<sup>49</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, 28.

John Paul II points out that the most important aspect of the 'Good Samaritan' approach is personal involvement in the help for the neighbour who is suffering. It is a crucial point to be made nowadays, when so many people want to burden charitable organisations with this obligation: "The eloquence of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and of the whole Gospel, is especially this: every individual must feel as if *called personally* to bear witness to love in suffering. The institutions are very important and indispensable; nevertheless, no institution can by itself replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative, when it is a question of dealing with the sufferings of another. This refers to physical sufferings, but it is even more true when it is a question of the many kinds of moral suffering, and when it is primarily the soul that is suffering."<sup>50</sup>

The communal sense of suffering is most fully revealed when perceived as the revelation of love and the call to love. With his pain, the suffering man can bear witness of his love to his neighbours and God, and at the same time his suffering is the call for the people around him to open up to him with love. Pope Benedict XVI shows this point of view in the encyclical letter *Spe salvi*: "The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society."<sup>51</sup> And later he adds: "To suffer with the other and for others [...], to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves – these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself."<sup>52</sup>

The mystery of suffering is expressed in sickness and physical pain, but is not exhausted by them. That is why it remains a mystery. Can the suffering one must endure be interpreted as a gift of love, like we interpret life itself? Although it seems extremely difficult, impossible for some, with the power of faith in Christ, one may recognise a special gift of love in his suffering. Love, which is always a selfless gift, in the suffering is recognised as sacrifice. Love with no sacrifice is one of the greatest illusions of men of all times, but sacrifice without love seems to be almost

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, 39.

absurd. If suffering is the gift one must accept, it is because there is no other way, no other means to give the proof of love. That is why “Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations [...]. In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must open ourselves wide to the human subject in his manifold potentiality.”<sup>53</sup>

John Paul II strongly emphasises this ecclesial character of suffering as being a call to love. In this way the salvific sense of suffering is revealed: “In the messianic programme of Christ, which is at the same time the programme of *the Kingdom of God*, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a ‘civilization of love’. In this love the salvific meaning of suffering is completely accomplished and reaches its definitive dimension.”<sup>54</sup> He also points out that: “Following the parable of the Gospel, we could say that suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order to *unleash love in the human person*, that unselfish gift of one’s ‘I’ on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer.”<sup>55</sup>

There is no doubt that nowadays there are many opportunities for the communal celebration of this sacrament. Especially in hospital environments and during parish services for the sick (e.g. to celebrate the World Day of the Sick). It is a good opportunity to show that the sacrament itself is not directly connected with immediate death, and, most importantly, a chance to show the communal sense of suffering and sickness. The World Day of the Sick connected with the sacrament of the anointing gives an opportunity to sensitize the healthy to the Samaritan service they owe to the sick. At the same time the Church can offer the sick the gift of the Eucharist, which is the source of human solidarity and the centre of the moral life of Christians, which is clearly shown in *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a li-

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<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, 29.



turgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons. It is very fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's Passover. If circumstances suggest it, the celebration of the sacrament can be preceded by the sacrament of Penance and followed by the sacrament of the Eucharist. As the sacrament of Christ's Passover the Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the 'viaticum' for 'passing over' to eternal life."<sup>56</sup> The participation of the sick in the Eucharist deepens their relationship with Christ and Church, tightens the covenant with God and reminds about the obligations that result from other sacraments. Its specific character conveys a moral call to love, sacrifice, building the community and the spirit of unity, giving thanks and adoration.<sup>57</sup>

It all boils down to the fact that one of the most difficult experiences in life, which is sickness, is not experienced alone. The sick person is surrounded by special love and solidarity on the side of the Church community, which is always present and gives support in different forms of services. As Benedict XVI points out, the "Attentive pastoral care shown to those who are ill brings great spiritual benefit to the entire community, since whatever we do to one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus himself (cf. Mt 25:40)."<sup>58</sup>

The aforementioned conclusion confirms both the teaching and the practices of the Church that brings spiritual guidance to the sick through indicating the deepest sense of human suffering if it is connected with the cross of Christ and offered for the Church and the salvation of the world. Accepting the suffering and finding an intention for it raises it to the status of a value. Moreover, the anointing of the sick and the prayers

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<sup>56</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1517.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. J. Nagórny, *Eucharystia – we wspólnocie i dla wspólnoty*, [in:] *Eucharystia – miłość i dziękczynienie*, red. W. Słomka, A. J. Nowak, Lublin 1992, p. 123–140 (*Homo Meditans*, 9); J. Charytański, *Eucharystia centrum życia chrześcijańskiego*, „*Ateneum Kapłańskie*” 75 (1983) vol. 101, p. 397–405.

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 22.

of the Church help the suffering discover the important truth that the ultimate sense of human existence lies beyond their earthly lives.

## Conclusions

Salutary works of Christ are realised in the Church through the sacraments. It would be difficult to imagine the life of the Church without these holy signs. The sacraments are strongly connected with Christian life. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council *Sacrosanctum concilium* emphasises that the purpose of all the sacraments is “to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God.”<sup>59</sup>

Among all Church sacraments the Sacraments of Healing, namely the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, have an important role, being an inseparable element of the Church identity. These two sacraments are crucial for the process of building and strengthening the Church community, which is a proof of their ecclesial character. That is why faithful fulfilment of all the obligations resulting from the sacrament of penance and the anointing of the sick is raised to evangelical value, which makes the community of unity, love and peace present in the Church. Being faithful to one’s calling and bearing witness to life, a man reconciled with God through the sacrament of penance and strengthened by the sacrament of the anointing of the sick contributes to the growth of the whole Church and her holiness. Every important aspect of the life of Church and what gives her the true meaning and dimension, can be found in the sacraments of penance and the anointing of the sick.

This paper shows how relevant the issue is with relation to the contemporary world and the contemporary situation in the Church. A problem of finding the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of the anointing is still open and needs to be explored. One can only

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<sup>59</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59.

hope that the observations presented in this paper will serve as a form of invitation to further and deeper analysis of the issues mentioned, and will be able to present how important the role of the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of the anointing is, both in the process of shaping the moral aspects of Christian life and building the whole Church community.

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## Summary

### The Dynamism of the Sacraments of Healing in the Service of Church Community Building

Inspired by the prophetic vision of Blessed John Paul, the pastors of the Church in Poland made huge efforts to ensure that the Church is becoming a real home for her children. The statement became the keynote of the Polish Pastoral Program at the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Building the Church community is of key importance for creating a common sense of fraternity, unity and peace in the world. The sacraments play a fundamental role in enhancing the process. Among all the sacraments, the so called Sacraments of Healing, namely the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the sacrament of anointing of the sick, are of crucial importance, since they constitute an indispensable element of ecclesial identity. The article aims at showing the clearly ecclesial character of the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of the anointing. It also points out that faithful Christian fulfilment of all obligations arising from the sacraments of penance and anointing becomes the leaven of the Gospel, making the community of unity, love and peace present in the Church. Man reconciled with God in the Sacrament of Penance and strengthened in the Sacrament of the Anointing contributes to the growth of the whole Church and her holiness. Therefore, every important aspect of the life of the Church, and all that gives it the true dimension and meaning, can be found in the Sacraments of Healing.

## Keywords

Church, communion, sacrament, penance and reconciliation, anointing of the sick

## Streszczenie

### Dynamizm sakramentów uzdrowienia w służbie budowania wspólnoty Kościoła

Pasterze Kościoła w Polsce – inspirowani proroczą wizją błogosławionego Jana Pawła – podjęli się na początku trzeciego tysiąclecia zadania urzeczywistniania Kościoła, aby był domem dla swych dzieci. Taka jest myśl przewodnia trzyletniego Ogólnopolskiego Programu Duszpasterskiego na początku drugiej dekady XXI wieku. W budowaniu wspólnoty Kościoła fundamentalną rolę pełnią sakramenty święte. Spośród wszystkich sakramentów Kościoła ważną rolę spełniają tak zwane sakramenty uzdrowienia, czyli sakrament pokuty i pojednania oraz sakrament namaszczenia chorych. Stanowią one nieodzowny składnik kościelnej tożsamości. Są to sakramenty w szczególny sposób odpowiedzialne za tworzenie i budowanie wspólnoty Kościoła. Z publikacji wynika, że pokuta i namaszczenie mają wyraźnie charakter eklezjalny. Dlatego wierne wypełnianie przez chrześcijan wszystkich zobowiązań płynących z sakramentu pokuty i namaszczenia chorych staje się zaczynem ewangelicznym, który sprawia, że w Kościele uobecnia się wspólnota jedności, miłości i pokoju. Poprzez wierność swojemu powołaniu i świadectwo życia człowiek pojednany z Bogiem w sakramencie pokuty i umocniony przyjęciem sakramentu namaszczenia przyczynia się do wzrostu całego Kościoła i do jego świętości. Wszystko zatem, co istotne w życiu Kościoła i co nadaje mu prawdziwego wymiaru i znaczenia, można odnaleźć w sakramencie pokuty i namaszczenia.

## Słowa kluczowe

Kościół, wspólnota, sakrament, pokuta i pojednanie, namaszczenie chorych