

Various People, Different Penances. Diversification of the Penitential System in Early Medieval Europe as Reflected in 'Libri Poenitentiales'

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Abstract

In the early Middle Ages (from the sixth century) penitential books - 'Libri poenitentiales' began to appear in the Church in Ireland and Britain. This phenomenon is considered the beginning of individual and repetitive penance in the Catholic Church. Earlier, many authors thought that there was only one possibility to forgive sins committed after baptism (baptism was the first penance, the second was possible only once after baptism and often lasted for the rest of life). Penance Books included penances imposed on Christians for committed sins. They were like penitential tariffs. The type of penance depended on various circumstances, including who the sinner was (status, occupation, age, etc.). The diversity of penance was shown when discussing individual sins or was left to the confessor to decide. Sometimes the differences in the amount or type of penance were very large depending on who committed the sin. The presentation aims to show how the variety of penance imposed looked depending on the situation of the person who committed the sin, on the example of a few selected sins. The source for presenting the topic will be Irish and British penitential books.

Keywords: Church history; Church in Ireland and Britain in middle Ages; confession; penance; penitential books