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Comparative Confession: A Comparative Study of Confession in the Writings of Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva

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This paper comparatively analyzes confession of sin across three Christian and Buddhist texts. Specifically, the paper compares the diverse ways in which confession is presented in Tertullian's De Paenitentia*, St. John Cassian's* Conferences*, and Śāntideva's* Bodhicaryāvatāra*. In so doing, the paper not only highlights the multiplicity of forms confessional practices may take (both between religious traditions and within a particular tradition), but also underscores the common theme among all three authors of confession's fundamental role in personal transformation. After analyzing each author's understanding of confession and its effects (encompassing spiritual, moral, and emotional domains), the paper concludes with a discussion of theological and ministerial implications.*

Keywords: confession, sin, personal transformation, Buddhist-Christian studies, Tertullian, John Cassian, Śāntideva, ministry

Introduction

As Annemarie Kidder observes at the beginning of her history of confession in Western society, a work written "on confession may seem like an archaic undertaking. It conjures up images of monastic self-chastisement and penance, darkened confessionals with a concealed priestly penance, and a trembling and squirming sinner waiting to be absolved."[1] Laden with a host of such negative associations and tending to evoke such unpleasant imagery, the practice of confession may often be viewed as an historical relic in Western society, a practice no longer necessary or relevant for modern individuals, even those who self-identify as spiritual and/or religious. The rejection of this spiritual practice points as well to the broader repudiation in contemporary Western society of the notion of sin. As discussed explicitly in Karl Menninger's 1973 monograph, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, the concept of sin[2] has been reinterpreted through a variety of alternative descriptors (e.g., character flaws, personal weaknesses) such that its use within modern discourse has waned significantly.[3] In this haste to distance ourselves from "sin-heavy" expressions of religious faith or spirituality—and the confessional practices that may accompany them—I wonder

[1] Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), xi. Kidder proceeds to counter this charge in her book's introduction by contending that confession is not the bizarre, awkward experience it occasionally is caricatured to be, but instead is an emotionally healthful practice that appears in a variety of forms in contemporary society, ranging from admissions of guilt in informal conversations with friends to self-help groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) to formalized, religious rituals.

[2] Sin is defined, for example, in the catechism of the Catholic Church as "an offense against God," a willful "revolt against God" marked by "self-exaltation…diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus." This descriptive overview precedes a division of sin into moral and venial types, along with a discussion of different kinds of sins (e.g., "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness," and so on) based on St. Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*. See http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P6A.HTM (on the definition of sin) and http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P6B.HTM (on the different kinds of sin).

[3] Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), 13.

if an important, even essential, component of the spiritual life is being lost. At what cost do we neglect to confess moral failures? Or, to cast the issue positively, what does a person in the contemporary world stand to gain by rediscovering the long-lost practice of confession?

In addressing this fundamental question throughout the following paper, I will comparatively analyze presentations of confession advanced by three moral thinkers whose insights tout confession's many benefits: from the paradox of morality resulting from immorality via confession, to the experience of joy created by the confessional act. Such benefits will be examined through a close reading of texts by the following authors: Tertullian, a prolific late second/early third-century CE Christian apologist, whose treatise, *De Paenitentia* (*On Repentance*), considers the function and importance of confession within Christian churches; St. John Cassian, a prominent late fourth/early fifth-century CE Christian theologian, whose *Conferences* discusses principles of the religious life, including the practice of confession within monastic communities; and Śāntideva, an eighth-century CE Indian Buddhist monk, whose poetic presentation of the "way of the Bodhisattva" (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) portrays confession as integral to progress along the Bodhisattva's path.

Each of these individuals' respective conceptions of confession is rooted in a particular understanding of sin. For Tertullian, sin was perceived to be a "disobedience of the will," encompassing any "act of rebellion of the creature against the will of the Creator."[4] Tertullian argues in *De Paenitentia* that such disobedience occurs when a person, having been "admitted to [an acquaintance with] the divine precepts" (which in Tertullian's view happens "immediately" upon one's conversion, as God directly enables a new Christian to recognize sinful versus righteous conduct[5]), chooses to act in ways that violate the prohibitions of these precepts against certain behavior.[6]

This view of sin as deliberate acts of disobedience sharply contrasts the perspective held by St. John Cassian. As will be discussed at greater length below, Cassian views sin not fundamentally as the disobedient actions one does but most basically as tempting thoughts suggested to one's mind, without one's awareness, by Satan. While Cassian notes in his *Conferences* eight "principal faults" that encompass a range of behaviors and emotional states,[7] he emphasizes, in contrast to Tertullian, that these sins "attack" humans through Satan's efforts to penetrate one's mind, rather than resulting from humans' willful rebellion. In particular, Cassian contends that the root of these

[4] Gerald L. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 89–90.

[5] Tertullian's discussion of how one comes to understand what counts as "sin" refers only to Christians and does not include non-Christians, possibly because, in Tertullian's perspective, such individuals already live in a state of sin, not having been baptized, and therefore the possibility of living righteously does not yet even exist for them. See Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 1 and 2 on the need for conversion prior to any consideration of repentance for individual sins.

[6] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, trans. Sydney Thelwall; ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm, Chapter 3.

[7] These eight "faults" include: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, boastfulness, and pride. See John Cassian, *The Conferences of John Cassian*, trans. Edgar C.S. Gibson (Christian Classics Ethereal Library Edition), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.ccel.org/c/cassian/conferences/cache/conferences.pdf, 135.

various types of sin are "secret thoughts" subtly sown in the mind by Satan, which eventually yield sinful actions.[8]

In Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the term for conduct that requires confession is *pāpa*. In his historical overview of confession in Indian Buddhism, Christian Haskett briefly defines *pāpa* as "general evil, sin, or wrongdoing."[9] Other scholars choose instead to understand *pāpa* as deeds that are "unsalutary, unwholesome, or nonvirtuous,"[10] deeds of poor quality (as in "wool that is poorly spun"[11]), or as non-virtuous actions tied to "correspondingly negative effect[s]."[12] This relationship between *pāpa* and its effects links this concept to the notion of *karma*, underscoring that a full appreciation of *pāpa* must encompass the unpleasant consequences resulting from the negative *karma* produced by immoral deeds. While some scholars understandably resist translating *pāpa* as "sin" due to potentially misleading connotations,[13] I will at times translate *pāpa* as "sin" in this paper because I believe there is enough overlap between what Tertullian and Cassian describe as "sin" and the immoral conduct confessed by Śāntideva to justify such a translation.[14]

Having briefly introduced the understandings of sin held respectively by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, I would like to address very succinctly my selection of these three specific figures for this comparative study, before delving into an analysis of their views on confession. First, I have chosen to pair Tertullian and Cassian because these two particular thinkers, while both self-identifying as Christians and voicing a similar emphasis on the importance of one's spiritual community in the confessional act,[15] nevertheless present remarkably different accounts of when, where, and how confession ought to be practiced. Because of their notable divergence with respect to the mechanics, and even the underlying nature and theology, of confession, analyzing Tertullian and Cassian in light of each other offers modern practitioners a rich array of ways to understand, and possibly even to practice, confession.

But why include Śāntideva? Śāntideva's voice in this analysis of confession is particularly important because of how he shows that the process of transformation via confession is not an

[8] Ibid., 53–54.
[9] Christian P. B. Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs: A History of Confession in Indian Buddhism" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), 190. See also Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 55, where Dayal equates *pāpa* simply with "sin."
[10] Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 620.
[11] Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 101. Haskett notes that such usage of *pāpa* appears primarily in Vedic sources, well before the time of Śāntideva.
[12] This emphasis on *pāpa* as "non-virtuous acts" appears in Prajñakaramati's commentary of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (see Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 101). For *pāpa* defined in relation to its negative effects, see Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism*, 620.
[13] Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., for example, argue that such a translation is "misleading because there is no divine being in Buddhism whose commandments can be broken" (Buswell, Jr. and Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism*, 620).
[14] Specifically, the conceptions of wrongdoing held by all three authors share a common sense of violating standards of behavior, which produces harmful consequences both for oneself and for the community in which one lives. Moreover, as will be discussed below, in admitting his *pāpa*, Śāntideva explicitly confesses to having "transgressed" the Buddhas' "command" (chapter 2, verse 54)—an admission of violating rules established by divine beings, which undercuts the objection highlighted in the previous footnote to translating *pāpa* as "sin." See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.
[15] In contrast to a figure like St. Augustine, whose probing, self-reflexive presentations of confession center largely on an individual's own experience of this practice.

exclusively Christian phenomenon, but thrives as well in a very different religio-cultural setting. Śāntideva's insights thus suggest that regardless of adherence to a particular religious affiliation, confession exists more broadly as a human ethical practice that highlights a ubiquitous need for moral accountability. Moreover, because of the prominent influence of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* upon the practice of Buddhism in Tibet and beyond,[16] Śāntideva occupies an especially significant role in the spread of Buddhist confessional rituals, shaping their practice even among contemporary Buddhist communities.

Motivated for these reasons to focus my analysis of confession around these three moral thinkers, I intend to argue below that for Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, confession is an essential spiritual-ethical practice because, most fundamentally, it plays an integral role in the process of personal transformation. Specifically, in each of these authors' discussions of confession—understood as the presentation of one's moral faults to a spiritual authority (e.g., a priest, the Buddha)—the confessional act produces a fundamental inner change. In addressing the mechanics of this transformation below, I will first discuss how the confessional act is understood by each of the three figures. Then I will highlight the effects (spiritual, moral, and emotional) believed by each to be secured via confession. Finally, in my conclusion, I will briefly underscore several theological and ministerial implications relevant not only to contemporary spiritual leaders and practitioners but also to religious scholars and academicians.

Defining Confession

Tertullian

First, in the view of Tertullian, confession is a public, one-time act made by a Christian before her church community that marks her with a particular (and temporary) "penitential" status within the Church. Discussed in detail in his treatise on repentance (*De Paenitentia*), Tertullian describes confession as "publishing oneself" (*publicatio sui*[17]) through self-mortifying acts that reveal to others (particularly one's church community) that one has committed sin. Before considering Tertullian's theological interpretation of repentance specifically, it may be instructive to look at a particular example of this "self-publishing" repentant behavior. Although this specific example occurred a couple of centuries after Tertullian, the illustration (recorded in a letter by St. Jerome[18]) reflects the type of penitential practice advocated by Tertullian and thereby illuminates his penitential theology. The illustration can be seen in the case of St. Fabiola, a lady who had divorced her husband and married another man prior to the death of her previous spouse. St. Jerome notes that, moved by contrition over her sin of adultery,

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[16] Michael J. Sweet, "Mental Purification (*Blo sbyong*): A Native Tibetan Genre of Religious Literature," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 245. Sweet contends here that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is the single "most important source" for the entire "mind purification" (*blo sbyong*) genre of Tibetan religious literature.

[17] A term that commonly appeared in its Greek form (i.e., *exomologesis*) among early Church Fathers, contrasted later with confession as *exagoreusis* ("permanent verbalization") by St. John Cassian. On this, see Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 17–18.

[18] Though St. Jerome lived approximately two hundred years after Tertullian, Taylor notes that a "continuity" exists among these "penitential performance[s] over several centuries," stretching from the time of Tertullian through that of Jerome, at least as far as the fifth century; see Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 19. Thus, while the account related in St. Jerome's letter may have occurred well after Tertullian's lifetime, this continuity of practice makes St. Jerome's example relevant, particularly in the absence of a concrete example in the writings of Tertullian himself.

> [Fabiola] put on sackcloth to make public confession of her error. It was then that in the presence of all Rome (in the basilica which formerly belonged to that Lateranus who perished by the sword of Caesar) she stood in the ranks of the penitents[19] and exposed before bishop, presbyters, and people—all of whom wept when they saw her weep—her dishevelled hair, pale features, soiled hands and unwashed neck.[20]

Through this public ritual of self-abasement, one who had sinned, like Fabiola, could enter an order of penitents, described as a specific class of individuals within the Church "distinct from catechumens and [the] faithful."[21] By entering this class through the performance of the penitential ritual described above and then adopting the lifestyle of a penitent—marked by almsgiving, fasting, and "enduring [the] public humiliation" of one's willing, ongoing self-mortification[22]—a sinner could, after a certain period of time, rejoin the ranks of "the faithful" within the Church.

Tertullian describes the theological underpinnings of both the content of, and motivations for, public confession in two extended passages from the seventh and ninth chapters of his *De Paenitentia*:

> [A]though the gate of forgiveness has been shut and fastened up with the bar of baptism, [God] has permitted it still to stand somewhat open. In the vestibule He has stationed the second repentance for opening to such as knock: but now once for all, because now for the second time; but never more because the last time it had been in vain.[23]

> This act . . . is ἐξομολόγησις, whereby we confess our sins to the Lord, not indeed as if He were ignorant of them, but inasmuch as by confession satisfaction is settled, of confession repentance is born; by repentance God is appeased. And thus *exomologesis* is a discipline for man's prostration and humiliation, enjoining a demeanor calculated to move mercy. With regard also to the very dress and food, it commands (the penitent) to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body in mourning, to lay his spirit low in sorrows, to exchange for severe treatment the sins which he has committed; moreover, to know no food and drink but such as is plain—not for the stomach's sake, to wit, but the soul's; for the most part, however, to feed prayers on fastings, to groan, to weep and make outcries unto the Lord your God; to bow before the feet of the presbyters, and kneel to God's dear ones; to

[19] In his lecture on this event, Michel Foucault underscores the significance of this phrase: that those marked as "penitents" are grouped together, "probably standing at the church door in ranks," physically separated from the rest of the church community—and that this separation constitutes part of the performative element in the confessional act; see Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France, 1979–1980*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 207.
[20] Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus (St. Jerome), "Letter 77," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 6, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley; ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), accessed August 21, 2017, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001077.htm.
[21] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 5.
[22] Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 18.
[23] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

> enjoin on all the brethren to be ambassadors to bear his deprecatory supplication (before God). All this *exomologesis* (does), that it may enhance repentance; may honour God by its fear of the (incurred) danger; may, by itself pronouncing against the sinner, stand in the stead of God's indignation, and by temporal mortification…expunge eternal punishments. Therefore, while it abases the man, it raises him; while it covers him with squalor, it renders him more clean; while it accuses, it excuses; while it condemns, it absolves. . . . [24]

Thus for Tertullian the "act" of confession, as illustrated in Jerome's example of St. Fabiola, and presented theologically through the above selections from his treatise on the topic is understood to be a set of behaviors that express contrition, employed to provoke mercy from God. Constituting a "second repentance," and covering aspects of one's appearance, diet, and emotional condition, this penitential behavior seeks to abase oneself so as to avoid much harsher penalties from God. Applying "temporal mortification" (e.g., fasting, kneeling, wailing), the penitent seeks via these external signs of contrition to indicate the depth of one's repentance and thereby to honor God and avoid his punishment against sin. This external repentance thus is utilized, at least in part, to "expunge [the] eternal punishments" of suffering in hell that await those who die outside God's grace.

For the purposes of this paper, three notable points can be highlighted regarding this presentation of confession. First, this so-called "second repentance" can occur only once in the life of an individual. As Tertullian describes in *De Paenitentia*, an individual's sins are cleansed in the "first repentance" of baptism that marks one's entrance into the Church.[25] If one should fail morally after becoming a Christian, the penitential process offers an opportunity to be forgiven a second time. However, if a Christian were to sin again, after undergoing a second repentance, no further options existed for cleansing, and he was permanently excluded from the Church.[26] In Tertullian's view, God has allowed access to forgiveness of sin committed after one's baptism, but "never more" for those who seek forgiveness after already using up the "second repentance." As quoted in the passage above, the second repentance is accessible as a means to forgiveness for those who "knock." But this method of accessing God's grace should be regarded as enjoyed "once for all," since once one has exhausted the option of this second repentance, in Tertullian's view, "because the last time it had been in vain" (i.e., because one's second repentance failed to curb future sin), there remains "never more" any further opportunities for repentance and forgiveness.[27]

Second, the ritual of confession, as well as the lifestyle of one marked by penitential status, is largely nonverbal. Constituting a kind of "physical" confession, Tertullian's penitential ritual is a public, performative, nonverbal presentation of one's sin, contrition, and acceptance of penitential status. As seen in the example of St. Fabiola, confession occurs through the public "self-publishing" performance of one's guilt, characterized by self-abasement and the adoption of a status that sets one apart (not only in a spiritual sense but also in a physical sense, as seen in St. Fabiola grouping herself with the "ranks of the penitents") from the rest of one's church community until the period of one's penitence concludes.

[24] Ibid., 9.
[25] Ibid., 6.
[26] Taylor, *Culture of Confession*, 18.
[27] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

Finally, for an accurate understanding of Tertullian's conception of confession, it should be noted that he seems to make a distinction at times between confession and repentance, not always using the two terms synonymously. For example, in the lengthy passage cited above, Tertullian comments that "of confession repentance is born; by repentance God is appeased." This expression suggests that confession marks an initial step along a broader path of repentance and that only by fulfilling the entire penitential process—not by confession alone—is divine punishment averted. At the same time, however, even within the same passage quoted above, Tertullian equates the penitential process of self-mortification with "confess[ing] our sins to the Lord," a process of confession that "enhance[s] repentance" and moves God to act mercifully towards the confessant. Thus confession for Tertullian seems both to represent the first step of a larger process of repentance, while at the same time he occasionally uses the term "confession" to refer to the process as a whole.

Cassian

The characteristics seen in Tertullian of confession as a one-time, public, performative act, constituting the acceptance of a new status within the church community, highlight the significant differences between Tertullian's understanding of confession and the form advocated by St. John Cassian just a couple of centuries later. Describing techniques of self-examination practiced by monks in Egypt and Palestine, Cassian diverges sharply from Tertullian by presenting a form of confession that is primarily concerned with one's thoughts (rather than immoral actions), and also is verbal, intimate (practiced in the company of usually just one other person, rather than before one's entire religious community), and ongoing. Cassian uses three brief metaphors and one short story to illustrate this understanding of confession. First, in his *Conferences*, Cassian describes the threat posed by thoughts when he writes that the human mind must be like a miller, a military officer, and a moneychanger. All three must carefully examine the content passing before them—whether grains, soldiers, or coins—to ensure that only those of good, authentic quality are allowed through.[28] The last metaphor is developed at length by Cassian when he writes:

> We ought . . . with wise discretion to analyze the thoughts which arise in our hearts, tracking out their origin and cause and author in the first instance, that we may be able to consider how we ought to yield ourselves to them in accordance with the desert [i.e., virtue] of those who suggest them so that we may … become good money-changers, whose highest skill and whose training is to test what is perfectly pure gold and what is commonly termed tested, or what is not sufficiently purified in the fire … this we can do, if we carry out the Apostle's advice, "Believe not every spirit, but prove [i.e., test] the spirits whether they are of God."[29]

Here Cassian surpasses concern for the morality of one's actions to focus instead on the origin of the thoughts that undergird those actions. Believing that beneath actions lie thoughts and behind thoughts lie the "spirits" that incite them, Cassian teaches that a Christian must diligently verify the authenticity of one's thoughts—"testing the spirits" that plant them within one's mind—

[28] Cassian, *Conferences*, 29, 32, 201.
[29] Ibid., 32.

to determine whether they truly come from God, rather than arising from Satan. This careful discerning of the origin of one's inner thoughts constitutes for Cassian an ongoing confession that progressively purifies the self. The process by which this purification occurs is illustrated by Cassian in the following story that appears in the eleventh chapter of his second *Conference* about a young monk who, unable to maintain a fast, had stolen bread to satiate his hunger:

> [W]hen after supper the spiritual conference had begun to be held, and the old man [i.e., the monastery's abbot] . . . was speaking about the sin of gluttony and the dominion of secret thoughts, and showing their nature and the awful power which they have so long as they are kept secret, I was overcome by the power of the discourse and was conscience stricken and terrified, as I thought that these things were mentioned by him because the Lord had revealed to the old man my bosom secrets; and first I was moved to secret sighs, and then my heart's compunction increased and I openly burst into sobs and tears, and produced from the folds of my dress which shared my theft and received it, the biscuit which I had carried off in my bad habit to eat on the sly; and I laid it in the midst and lying on the ground and begging for forgiveness confessed how I used to eat one every day in secret, and with copious tears implored them to intreat [*sic*] the Lord to free me from this dreadful slavery. Then the old man: "Have faith, my child," said he, "Without any words of mine, your confession frees you from this slavery. For you have today triumphed over your victorious adversary, by laying him low by your confession in a manner which more than makes up for the way in which you were overthrown by him through your former silence. . . ." The old man had not finished speaking when lo! a burning lamp proceeding from the folds of my dress filled the cell with a sulphureous [*sic*] smell so that the pungency of the odor scarcely allowed us to stay there. . . . [30]

Several important aspects of Cassian's understanding of confession are evident in this passage. First, underscoring the metaphors mentioned above, the root of the sins of theft and gluttony is shown to be the "secret thoughts" harbored within the young monk until the point at which he reveals his "bosom secrets" through verbal confession. In contrast to Tertullian, sin here is primarily a problem within the mind that must be purified not through a set of self-debasing actions but through verbalizing one's inner thoughts. In commenting upon the confessional aspects of this story, Michel Foucault observes that the decisive moment in which Satan (symbolized through the sulphurous odor lingering about the novice) leaves the young, repentant monk occurs neither because of the abbot's sermon nor when "the young monk reveals his act and restores the object of his theft," but finally through the "verbal act of confession, which comes last and which makes appear . . . the truth, the reality of what has happened."[31] Verbalization here serves to "drag" Satan from the inner recesses of one's impure thoughts out into "the light," from which he, being "incompatible with the light," is forced to flee.[32]

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[30] Ibid., 53–54.
[31] Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178.
[32] Ibid.

Second, this purifying verbalization occurs neither privately nor before the entire monastic body but is presented primarily as being facilitated by the intimate presence of one's spiritual leader. While Tertullian interpreted confession as an act made publicly before one's church community, confession in Cassian occurs as an interpersonal encounter between a young monk and his abbot. For the repentant novice, the abbot exists as the "image of God" before whom the verbalization of thoughts reveals, as in the metaphors of the miller, military officer, and moneychanger, whether one's thoughts derive from God or Satan.[33]

Third, this encounter between the monk and the abbot has expelled Satan from the monk's inner self in only one sense—the thoughts that undergird the young man's sins of theft and gluttony—and presumably he remains in need of purification from other types of sinful thoughts. Thus the exorcising confession, operating through the verbal presentation of one's thoughts to one's spiritual master, must occur repeatedly. As in the metaphor of the moneychanger, one must examine constantly the "coins" passing through one's mind, in order to ensure that no "false," corrupting thoughts, originating from Satan, take root. Thus, as illustrated by the above metaphors and anecdote, Cassian's understanding of confession contrasts that of Tertullian in a number of notable ways: by being primarily thought-focused, verbal, intimate, and ongoing.

Śāntideva

Third, confession of sin as presented in the second chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* both complements and diverges in specific ways from the respective understandings of confession espoused by Tertullian and Cassian. In particular, confession for Śāntideva results from two apparent motivations: an explicit fear of karmic retribution in the next life, as well as a desire to cultivate the "Awakening Mind" (*bodhicitta*). Also, like confession for Tertullian, confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is communally practiced, though this community is presented by Śāntideva as a spiritual rather than temporal one. These aspects of confession are presented by him through the following sections of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s chapter on confession: 1) worship (verses 1–25); 2) taking refuge (verses 26, 46–54); and 3) confession of misdeeds (verses 27–45, 55–66). These three practices mark the opening sections of a Mahāyāna liturgy known as the "Supreme Worship" (*Anuttara-Pūjā*, also called the "seven-limbed prayer"), a ritualized liturgy characterized by seven components[34] that developed as early as the late second century CE as a means for purifying sin and cultivating the Awakening Mind.[35] As Crosby and Skilton contend in the introduction to their translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s second and third chapters, since this cultivation of the Awakening Mind is also the primary goal of Śāntideva's text, it is likely that he intentionally

[33] Michel Foucault, "Christianity and Confession," in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 186.
[34] As Haskett explains, these seven were configured into different possible arrangements, all of which typically included confession, from the following pool of ten possible liturgical components: 1. worship (*vandanā*), 2. offering (*pūjanā*), 3. triple refuge (*triśaraṇagamana*), 4. confession (*pāpadeśanā*), 5. rejoicing in merits (*puṇyānumodanā*), 6. requesting the Buddhas to teach (*adhyeṣanā*), 7. asking the Buddhas not to pass into *nirvāṇa* (*yācanā*), 8. giving up one's self (*ātmatyāga*), 9. generating the Awakening Mind (*bodhicittotpāda*), and 10. dedication of merit (*pariṇamanā*). See Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 116.
[35] Barbra R. Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's* Śikṣāsamuccaya: *Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 2006), 138. Cf. Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 54, who places the development of this liturgy in the fifth to sixth centuries CE.

modeled part of his work on the structure of the popular *Anuttara-Pūjā* liturgy.[36] By analyzing the presentation of each of the three sections of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s second chapter (i.e., worship, taking refuge, and confession), I aim to draw out the most salient features of Śāntideva's understanding of confession and how this understanding compares to those held by Tertullian and Cassian.

Śāntideva opens his second chapter with an extended section of praise to the Buddhas who possess the Awakening Mind that he so earnestly seeks. Śāntideva begins this section with an explicit statement of the reason why he worships the Buddhas when he writes in the first verse: "That I might fully grasp that Jewel, the Mind, I worship here the Tathāgatas, and the flawless jewel, the true Dharma, and the sons of the Buddhas, who are oceans of virtue."[37] He thus establishes in the opening verse that his overarching motivation in this chapter is to "grasp" the Awakening "Mind," the *bodhicitta*, or in other words, the mental state (*citta*) characterized by enlightenment (*bodhi*).[38] After stating the reason for the worship that follows, Śāntideva then praises those beings who are enlightened ("the Tathāgatas"), the teaching that produces enlightenment ("the true Dharma"), and those who, following the Buddhas' teachings, have become enlightened ("the sons of the Buddhas"). Imagining himself in the presence of these three entities, Śāntideva offers them a host of gifts (including "blossoms," "fruits," "jewels," and various kinds of "plants" (verses 2–6)) before offering his "entire self" (verse 8), requesting that the Buddhas and their sons "take possession" of him. This section of worship and self-offering then culminates several verses later in Śāntideva seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and the "assembly of Bodhisattvas" (verse 26). The fundamental importance of this act for Śāntideva and for all who seek spiritual advancement according to his Buddhist tradition is underscored in the commentary on this passage by Patrul Rinpoche, a prominent nineteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist lama, who states: "Taking refuge opens the door to all the Buddhist teachings. It is the basis of all the vows and the source of all excellent qualities. It marks the difference between those who are inside the Dharma and those who are outside it; and through it one joins the ranks of those who are within. Refuge is therefore of the greatest importance, for it is the entrance to the entire Dharma."[39]

Thus desiring the Awakening Mind accessed through the Buddhas and their teachings, Śāntideva worships the Buddhas, Dharma, and sons of the Buddhas, gives them (in meditation) a host of offerings, including himself, and then requests to take refuge in them. However, immediately upon seeking this refuge, Śāntideva recognizes with new clarity the depth of his own moral faults. Crosby and Skilton summarize this effect of taking refuge upon Śāntideva when they note that "this act of commitment has a reflexive effect upon the individual, namely the perception of one's own shortcomings."[40] Far from an experience of blissful unity or awakened transcendence, Śāntideva's decision to seek refuge in the Buddhas sparks instead a profound awareness of the "cruel evil I have wickedly done" (verse 31). This awareness then provokes a powerful experience

[36] Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, "Introduction: Chapters 2 and 3," in Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 9–12.
[37] All verse references are taken from: Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[38] For an extended discussion of the meaning of *bodhicitta* in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* see Francis Brassard, *The Concept of* Bodhicitta *in Śāntideva's* Bodhicaryāvatāra (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).
[39] Kunzang Pelden, *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's* Way of the Bodhisattva, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 81.
[40] Crosby and Skilton, "Introduction," 12.

of terror at the thought of the punishment to be incurred upon death by all of this accumulated evil. Referencing the foundational Buddhist notion of *karma*, along with the belief that the quality of one's next lifetime is determined in large part by the degree to which one's *karma* upon death is good or bad (which in turn depends upon whether one has lived morally or immorally in this and previous lifetimes), Śāntideva describes himself as "continually in a state of alarm," and begs the Buddhas to "let death not come too soon to me, before my mass of evil is destroyed" (verse 32). After lamenting the inescapability of death, Śāntideva continues, "For one seized by the messengers of Death, what good is a relative, what good a friend? At that time, merit alone is a defense and I have not acquired it. By clinging to this transient life, not recognizing the danger, heedless, O Lords, I have acquired great evil" (verses 42–43).

Stricken in this manner with "feverish horror" (verse 45) at the thought of the suffering he stands to face if he dies without somehow negating the karmic debt incurred by his sin, Śāntideva confesses having "transgressed" the Buddhas' "command" (verse 54). Though Śāntideva does not detail his moral errors specifically, he nevertheless admits in a general statement of culpability any and all "evil" he has "done or caused" (both in this and all previous lifetimes), including any "harm" done to the "Three Jewels" (which refer in Śāntideva's text to the Buddhas, Dharma, and Bodhisattvas), his parents, or "others worthy of respect" (verses 28 and 30). He then summarizes both the specific motivation of fear behind his confession, as well as the general content of his confession at the very end of this chapter when Śāntideva writes, "Whatever evil I, a deluded fool, have amassed, what is wrong by nature and what is wrong by convention, see, I confess all that as I stand before the Protectors, my palms together in reverence, terrified of suffering, prostrating myself again and again…" (verses 64–65).

Thus the image of the confessant depicted by Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is of a person motivated most immediately by fear of long-term suffering but also by a desire for the Buddhas' Awakening Mind, who admits her culpability for acts of "evil" to these Buddhas in the context of seeking refuge in them. This presentation of confession both mirrors and diverges from confession as depicted by Tertullian and Cassian in a number of ways. For example, as seen also in Tertullian's presentation of "second repentance," confession is presented by Śāntideva as an effective method for avoiding much more painful punishment after one dies. While such punishment for Śāntideva lacks the eternal quality of Tertullian's conception of such suffering—and also results not from God but from the processes of *karma*—both Śāntideva and Tertullian present confession as a critical tool for negating the harmful consequences engendered by sin that, apart from being confessed, would otherwise fall upon oneself.

In addition, both Tertullian and Śāntideva underscore the communal nature of the confessional act. Though Śāntideva does not state explicitly whether he intends this ritual to be observed by a community of Buddhist monks or a solitary practitioner, he nevertheless highlights the essentially communal character of confession by portraying it as an interaction between a confessant and the exalted beings before whom she supplicates.[41] Confession as presented by Śāntideva is neither a solitary ritual within one's own mind, nor as in Cassian's depiction an intimate spiritual practice involving just two individuals. Instead, confession occurs in the presence

[41] Significant to this theme of confession's communal nature is the fact that such "exalted beings" are typically understood to include one's own lama, before whom monks often confess even today.

of a host of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the very beings whose Awakening Mind one seeks to cultivate. These beings play essential roles throughout the entire process of one's confession: stimulating Śāntideva's awareness of moral fault, in turn provoking his sense of remorse and fear, and finally offering a source of compassionate protection by receiving his requests for refuge. While this communal dimension differs from Tertullian's understanding, in which a confessant admitted her sin before her specific church community through a nonverbal act that changed her spiritual status in the eyes of other Christians, confession as a communal act nevertheless is espoused also by Śāntideva, in the sense that the Buddhas before whom one confesses play fundamental roles in one's confessional act and thereby make confession for Śāntideva an inherently interpersonal process.

In regard to other characteristics of the confessional act readily apparent in Tertullian and Cassian, such as whether the act is verbal or nonverbal and whether it occurs only once or many times, Śāntideva remains largely silent. He does not state explicitly whom he expects to follow the confessional ritual he outlines, nor how often it is to be practiced, nor whether it is to be verbalized. However, given that the ritual described by Śāntideva mirrors the confessional component of the "Supreme Worship" (*anuttara-pūjā*) liturgy,[42] these characteristics are likely already implied within the established ritual. In particular, as discussed above, such a ritual was composed of seven different parts, of which confession (*pāpadeśanā*) was one, and would have been recited verbally according to an established formula by a monastic practitioner for the cultivation of a certain goal, which in the context of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is the development of the Awakening Mind.[43]

Effects of Confession

Having considered in the previous section the meaning and general characteristics of confession for Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, we can now examine in greater depth each author's view of the diverse benefits and effects caused by confession. Each writer presents certain transformative benefits as stemming directly from the confessional act, without which such effects cannot be experienced. These benefits overall can be grouped into three different categories: intrapersonal transformations that occur on spiritual, moral, and emotional levels.

Spiritual Effects

In a spiritual sense, all three authors present confession as occasioning transformative effects upon the spiritual status or condition of one who confesses wrongdoing. For both Tertullian and Śāntideva, these spiritual effects are closely related to suffering and punishment after death on account of sin performed in one's earthly life (along with previous lives, for Śāntideva). Tertullian, for example, depicts sin as "sickness" and confession of sin as "medicine" for its cure when he writes, "Let not to repent again be irksome: irksome to imperil one's self again, but not to be again set free…Repeated sickness must have repeated medicine. You will show your gratitude to the Lord by not refusing what the Lord offers you. You have offended, but can still be reconciled…"[44] Spiritually speaking, in Tertullian's view sin is a potentially deadly illness that "imperils" the sinner because of how it eventually provokes God's eternal punishment. But repentance exists as a form

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[42] See footnote 34.
[43] Haskett, "Revealing Wrongs," 115–116, 196–197.
[44] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

of spiritual "medicine," a method of alleviating God's anger over sin and experiencing reconciliation with him. Tertullian explains this spiritual effect of repentance in the ninth chapter of *De Paenitentia*, when he describes public self-mortification to express contrition over sin as a particular "demeanor calculated to move mercy," and a practice that "stand[s] in the stead of God's indignation, and by temporal mortification…expunge[s] eternal punishments."[45] Thus one of the primary effects of confession for Tertullian is a spiritual one: the confessant, by virtue of her repentant public self-mortification, moves from a state of spiritual illness in which one is subject to eternal punishment to a state of spiritual healing and reconciliation (both with God and with her religious community, whom she rejoins as a full participant after the period of her penitential status concludes) where God's mercy has replaced impending, eternal suffering.

Similarly for Śāntideva, one of the primary effects of confession is alleviation of future suffering to be incurred because of one's moral failures. In this sense, confession for Śāntideva is closely linked to the process of seeking refuge in the Buddhas. As depicted in the second chapter of his text, seeking refuge is the procedure that in the first place awakens Śāntideva to the profound depth of his moral failures and to the suffering he is likely to experience after death on account of them. Motivated by terror over this impending karmic punishment, Śāntideva confesses his moral wrongdoing (in a general sense) to the Buddhas and once again seeks refuge in them, with this second act of taking refuge motivated not primarily by a desire for the *bodhicitta* that they possess but by a need for protection. This contrast can be seen by comparing his requests for refuge near the beginning and end of his chapter. His first request, which appears in verse 26, is motivated entirely by his desire for "Awakening," as he writes that he seeks refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and assembly of Bodhisattvas "as far as the seat of the Awakening"—a phrase meaning "for the essence of Awakening" or "until I become a Buddha."[46] By contrast, by the end of his chapter, his motivation for seeking refuge is purely fear of retribution. This terror is conveyed, for example, in verse 54, where addressing a particular Bodhisattva (Vajrapāṇi), Śāntideva confesses wrongdoing and immediately requests refuge: "I have transgressed your command. Now, at seeing the danger, terrified, I go to you for refuge…" In between these two requests for refuge, Śāntideva repeatedly confesses his faults and bemoans the punishment that he may suffer. Thus for Śāntideva, refuge for *bodhicitta* leads to confession, which in turn leads to refuge for protection. Taken together, these two interlinked practices are presented by Śāntideva as the sole antidote for the karmic retribution moral wrongdoing incurs. While Śāntideva never expresses with certainty that his confession has been effective in warding off future suffering, his portrayal of confession, connected to taking refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma, and Bodhisattvas, nevertheless depicts this practice as essential for realizing the spiritual benefit of alleviating karmic punishment.

Related to this spiritual benefit and mirroring the impact of confession evident in Tertullian, the procedure of moving back and forth between seeking refuge and confession suggests that another spiritual effect of confession for Śāntideva is a deepening relationship between oneself and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to whom one confesses. Echoing the reconciliation aspect of Tertullian's text, in which a penitent's confession not only frees her from punishment but also fosters a renewed relationship with God,[47] confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* involves a deepening

[45] Ibid., 9.
[46] Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 148.
[47] See, for example, Tertullian's discussion of the possibility of reconciliation with God through repentance in Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 7.

of one's dependence upon the exalted beings who receive one's admission of sin and request for refuge. Bridging Śāntideva's two requests for refuge, confession functions as a mechanism that propels Śāntideva from seeking the Buddhas purely for their *bodhicitta* to seeking them out of a desperate, terrified fear. Confession thus produces a spiritual effect upon the relationship between Śāntideva and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As in Tertullian, confession for Śāntideva plays an essential role in deepening the relationship between the confessant and the one hearing the confession, moving to a much more emotionally charged level of desperate dependence.

In Cassian, however, in contrast to the emphasis on freedom from future punishment as seen in Tertullian and Śāntideva, the presentation of the spiritual effects of confession suggests that confession for Cassian leads not so much to alleviation of future suffering as to the spiritual effect of exorcising the influence of Satan within one's life in the present. This effect is seen, for example, in Cassian's story of the young monk who confesses his theft of bread to his abbot. Upon hearing the monk's confession, the abbot commends him for openly revealing his sin, not because such disclosure of wrongdoing fosters freedom from eternal punishment but because by confessing, the monk experiences freedom from spiritual "slavery" in this life, dramatically depicted by the "sulphureous" odor (symbolizing Satan's influence upon the monk) leaving the monk after his confession.[48] By verbally admitting his wrongdoing to his abbot, the young monk experiences a kind of exorcism, freeing him from demonic influence. Cassian furthermore enjoins his readers to view their minds as a "moneychanger," carefully sifting through one's multitude of thoughts—like a moneychanger searching out false coins—bringing each thought to light via the practice of ongoing, verbal confession that reveals the source of each thought.[49] Through this process, the confessant is enabled to recognize whether one's thoughts come from God or from Satan and, by rejecting the latter, to experience freedom from Satan's influence in their present lives.

Moral Effects

In addition to the spiritual effects presented by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva as stemming from the confessional act, these three authors also relate confession to a series of moral transformations in the lives of confessants. Specifically for Tertullian, a moral dimension of repentance is suggested by the way he writes of evil ceasing once one repents of it. For example, in a passage on the benefits of public, penitential self-mortification, Tertullian writes:

> It is a miserable thing thus to come to *exomologesis*: yes, for evil does bring to misery; but where repentance is to be made, the misery ceases, because it is turned into something salutary. Miserable it is to be cut, and cauterized, and racked with the pungency of some (medicinal) powder: still, the things which heal by unpleasant means do, by the benefit of the cure, excuse their own offensiveness, and make present injury bearable for the sake of the advantage to supervene.[50]

Here Tertullian continues the medical imagery discussed above in regard to the spiritual benefits of confession. While spiritual effects may be interpreted from this passage, a moral dimension to the benefits of *exomologesis* is also evident. In this passage, Tertullian concedes that the self-

[48] Cassian, *Conferences*, 53–54.
[49] Ibid., 32.
[50] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 10.

mortification and public exposure of *exomologesis* is a "miserable" process, but nevertheless strongly exhorts his readers to practice this "second repentance" because of its powerful and "salutary" effects upon evil. Specifically, in Tertullian's view, repentance causes the "misery" of evil to cease: functioning like a medical technique, referenced by Tertullian through the imagery of cutting, cauterizing, and utilizing a strong medicinal powder, repentance "heal[s] by unpleasant means," curing the penitent from evil, an effect that suggests both the spiritual dimension discussed above and the moral one of being strengthened to avoid future evil. Just as a wound when cauterized ceases to fester in one's body, evil when confessed ceases to grow in one's soul.

A similar moral effect appears in Śāntideva's chapter on confession. In addition to the spiritual benefits discussed above of alleviation of karmic punishment and a closer relationship with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas before whom one confesses, confession in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also fosters a life of greater moral conduct. While Śāntideva does not state as explicitly or descriptively as Tertullian confession's efficacy in promoting a desire for moral living, the final verse of his chapter suggests that confession plays an important role in leading one from immoral to moral behavior. After fearfully confessing his wrongdoing before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and begging them for protection from punishment for the negative *karma* he has incurred, Śāntideva concludes his chapter with a commitment to a life of greater morality, as he writes, "Let the Leaders [i.e., Buddhas and Bodhisattvas] accept my transgression for what it is. It is not good, O Protectors. I must not do it again" (verse 66). Thus the final words of a chapter devoted to confession are Śāntideva's personal resolve not to commit future wrongdoing. Through the processes of worship of the Buddhas, fearfully recognizing personal moral faults, refuge-taking, and confession of these faults Śāntideva has reached a place morally where he not only recognizes the immorality of past behavior but also discovers a determination to chart a new moral course. By thus tying together in this verse admission of "transgression" and a commitment to a life of greater morality, Śāntideva's text suggests this renewed moral resolve as a possible effect of the process of recognizing and confessing one's sin.

For Cassian, the moral effects of confession overlap closely with the spiritual ones described above. Because confession both enables one to recognize thoughts that result from Satan and also frees one from this demonic influence, confession produces the morally transformative effect of enabling the confessant to follow only those thoughts that come from God and thereby to live a morally upright life. Lacking the verbalization of one's thoughts before a spiritual leader (e.g., abbot), one often fails to understand where they ultimately originate, and therefore one is prone to thinking—and in turn behaving—in ways that run contrary to God's moral ways. But through the progressive purification of one's thoughts that occurs via confession, one is enabled to recognize the sources of specific thoughts, reject those from Satan, and follow only those that originate from God.

Moreover, confession not only helps one to recognize the sources of thoughts and retain only those that are godly, but it also changes one's desires. Cassian refers to this transformative effect when, in relating the story about the young monk who confesses his sins of theft and gluttony in stealing bread, he includes the following observation at the end of the anecdote: "the sway of that diabolical tyranny over [the monk] has been destroyed by the power of this confession and stilled for ever [*sic*] so that the enemy has never even tried to force upon [him] any more the

recollection of this desire."[51] Confession of sins thus releases the monk not only from the influence of Satan ("that diabolical tyranny") but also affects his desires such that Satan no longer attempts even to remind him of his previous attraction to the sins of theft and gluttony. In this way, confession exerts a positive influence upon moral desire, freeing one from immoral attractions. Thus confession in Cassian's view both enables one to discern moral (divine) versus immoral (demonic) sources of thoughts, and also reduces Satan's influence over one's moral desires. In turn, these effects enable one to make behavioral choices in accordance with only those thoughts that stem from God and to experience freedom from desires that result from Satan, thereby making possible a lifestyle characterized by increasing moral purity.

Emotional Effects

Besides the various spiritually and morally transformative effects of confession suggested by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva, positive emotional benefits tied to confession also can be identified, particularly in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. In this text, the emotional transformation from gloomy fear to joy, through the process of confession, appears most clearly when examining the sharp contrast in the emotional tenor of the final verses of Śāntideva's chapter on confession and the first verse of the following chapter (i.e., chapter 3, "Adopting the Awakening Mind"). Specifically, while in the process of realizing the depths of his wrongdoing and admitting this failure before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Śāntideva describes himself with a range of dark emotions and feelings, including being gripped by "feverish horror" (verse 45), "confusion" (verse 47), "fear" (verse 50), and "terror" (verses 51, 54, and 65). But once his confession is complete, in the very first verse of the following chapter, Śāntideva's emotional state has completely changed, as he opens the chapter by stating, "I rejoice with delight at the good done by all beings. . . . " (verse 1). Having discarded the terror brought on by awareness of moral failures through the related processes of confession and taking refuge, Śāntideva is quite suddenly able to rejoice and experience "delight" over the moral actions of both himself and others ("the good done by all beings"). Emotionally transformed by the process of confession, Śāntideva moves from fear to joy, from terror to delight.

While such an explicit presentation of the emotional transformation of the confessant is absent from the works of Tertullian and Cassian, Tertullian does reference such transformation in *De Paenitentia*, though not in regard to the confessant but with respect to God and the angels. While in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, confession produces a profound emotional change in the confessant, in *De Paenitentia*, confession produces such a transformation in God. Not only are "the heavens" and "the angels" described by Tertullian as "glad" at a person's repentance, but even God himself, though initially "offended" by a person's sin, is moved out of "paternal love" to respond with "joy" over a sinner who repents of her sin.[52] In support of this contention, Tertullian references three parables from Luke 15,[53] which describe the joy experienced by God when someone who has sinned repents and returns to live according to God's ways.

[51] Cassian, *Conferences*, 54.
[52] Tertullian, "De Paenitentia," 8.
[53] These are the parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7), lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), and prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

Conclusion

This paper has briefly compared the respective understandings of confession as promulgated by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva. By analyzing the diverse ways in which confession is presented in Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*, Cassian's *Conferences*, and Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the paper not only has sought to highlight the multiplicity of forms confessional practices may take (both between religious traditions and within a particular tradition), but also has attempted to underscore the common theme among all three authors of confession's fundamental role in personal transformation. Each author directly connects moral self-accounting with an array of profound benefits (spiritual, moral, and/or emotional), casting confession as a critical practice for the realization of meaningful personal change.

In addition to these personal benefits, the respective presentations of confession by Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva also yield a variety of larger theological and ministerial implications. Theologically, one of the primary insights advanced by these authors relates to the communality of sin and confession. While an individual's wrongdoing and confession may seem to be among the most private of practices, influencing only one's own spiritual welfare, the three authors contend, by contrast, that sin and confession affect one's entire religious community. In addition, Cassian and Śāntideva in particular underscore confession's essential role in the paradoxical conversion of immorality into morality: confession as a mechanism that takes a life characterized by wrongdoing and transforms it into one of moral purity.

Furthermore, all three authors emphasize the critical importance of spiritual authority, as they depict confession as occurring between an individual and a figure (or figures) who holds some degree of spiritual power over that individual. The essential role played by these authorities suggests that for these moral thinkers cultivating recognition of the ways in which one is spiritually subservient to certain others is a necessary and beneficial endeavor.

One final theological implication, seen particularly in Tertullian's largely nonverbal confession, is the role of the body in confession: confession as a physical act, which addresses the intersection of spirituality and physicality. As illustrated, for example, in the repentance of St. Fabiola mentioned above, the confessant in the penitential form advocated by Tertullian communicates her contrition through physical acts rather than words. Contrasting the ongoing verbalization that characterizes Cassian's understanding of confession, for example, Tertullian teaches that confession is best expressed physically through acts of self-mortification (e.g., abstaining from bathing, failing to comb one's hair, fasting). By utilizing one's body in ways that silently deprive it of common pleasures, a particular spiritual condition (namely contrition) is communicated and a desire for forgiveness is expressed. Thus the body for Tertullian functions in confession as a kind of window into one's contrite soul, expressing one's inner emotions and spiritual desires in a manner that reveals a body-centered spirituality, a way of practicing the spiritual tradition of Christian confession without necessarily needing words.

In addition to these diverse theological implications, the depictions of confession offered by Śāntideva, Cassian, and Tertullian also carry various implications for ministry leaders. Briefly stated, the essential role played by confession in the cultivation of the spiritual life, as discussed by these authors, suggests that religious ministers could greatly benefit their congregants by

encouraging the practice of this oft-neglected ritual. Specifically, Buddhist ministers may consider the value of aiding their practitioners in rediscovering the benefits of confession as presented by Śāntideva. Particularly in the case of Western Buddhists who may embrace Buddhism as an alternative to the "sin-heavy" traits of certain Judeo-Christian traditions, helping such practitioners recognize both the importance placed upon confession by figures as eminent as Śāntideva and the benefits that result from confession may assist these individuals in rediscovering a spiritual practice which, when cultivated appropriately, can foster a life marked by the joys of moral and emotional transformation.

Christian ministers may also consider reacquainting their congregants with the practice of confession in light of the numerous benefits presented by Tertullian and Cassian. Besides simply exhorting practitioners to confess sin, however, ministers of Christian congregations might also take into account the diversity evident in Tertullian's and Cassian's contrasting depictions of confession as they consider how to present this spiritual practice in a way that is meaningful to Christians today. Just as confession in Cassian's context differed noticeably from the *exomologesis* advocated by Tertullian, contemporary Christian ministers might look to the contextualizations and reinterpretations of confession's form as described by Cassian as a starting point for their own innovations in making confession more relevant for their particular religious communities.

In sum, Tertullian, Cassian, and Śāntideva present the practice of confession in a variety of forms, yet collectively underscore the critical importance of this spiritual practice for personal transformation. Contrasting the common, contemporary discomfort with notions of sin and confession, as highlighted in the works of Kidder and Menninger, these three religious writers suggest that confession is neglected only to one's own loss and that a rich array of benefits exists to be enjoyed by those who do not avoid, when necessary, to confess wrongdoing. Moreover, their respective presentations of confession, particularly when read alongside each other in a comparative way that highlights the unique features of each text, offer a stimulating variety of ways to rethink traditional interpretations of sin and confession, providing contemporary individuals (and religious communities) fresh paradigms through which to re-engage the ancient practice of confession.

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