



## **Medicine and Religion in Irish Penitentials, 550-1215**

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*Contents*

Acknowledgements	3
Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies	4
Introduction	5
I.    A dog eats the consecrated bread you just vomited: What next?	5
II.   On the usage and scope of the sources	12
Chapter 1: Medicine and Religion	15
I.    The classical background	15
II.   The closed system	20
Chapter 2: Sin and Ingestion	28
I.    Kinds of sin	28
II.   You are what you eat	35
III.  Ingestion and vomiting of consecrated bread	38
Chapter 3: Penance and Death	45
I.    Penance and Original Sin	45
II.   The final split and reunification of the self	48
Conclusion	52
Bibliography	55

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Josh Berenzweig.

...Lord, since at the hour of my death I will be separated from this world, detached from all things, alone in your presence, to be subject to your justice with every movement of my heart, make it so that in this illness now I should feel like a sort of death, separated from the world, detached from all objects of my attachments, alone in your presence, to implore of your mercy the conversion of my heart; this way I will have the extreme consolation of what you send my way *now*, a sort of death to exercise your mercy, before you send true death to exercise your judgement. Do so, O Lord, so that as you have given me a foreshadowing of my death, I will be prepared for the rigor of your sentence, and will examine myself before your judgement to find mercy in your presence.<sup>1</sup>

Blaise Pascal, *Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies* (1662)

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<sup>1</sup> ...Seigneur, comme à l'instant de ma mort je me trouverai séparé du monde, dénué de toutes choses, seul en votre présence, pour répondre à votre justice de tous les mouvements de mon cœur, faites que je me considère en cette maladie comme en une espèce de mort, séparé du monde, dénué de tous les objets de mes attachements, seul en votre présence, pour implorer de votre miséricorde la conversion de mon cœur; et qu'ainsi j'aie une extrême consolation de ce que vous m'envoyez maintenant une espèce de mort pour exercer votre miséricorde, avant que vous m'envoyiez effectivement la mort pour exercer votre jugement. Faites donc, ô mon Dieu, que comme vous avez prévenu ma mort, je prévienne la rigueur de votre sentence, et que je m'examine moi-même avant votre jugement, pour trouver miséricorde en votre présence.

## Introduction

.1.

*A dog eats the consecrated bread you just vomited: What next?*

The relationship between medicine and religion in European history has its origins in the Greek philosophers, who characterized themselves as physicians of the soul, “often administering necessarily painful means for effecting a cure.”<sup>2</sup> In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus says: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus explains his mission through the analogy of medicine, comparing sin to illness. The early theologians of the patristic period, effectuating a synthesis of Greek philosophical and Biblical references, described Christ as the Great Physician.<sup>4</sup> Christ was the *verus medicus, solus medicus, veus archiater, ipse et medicus et medicamentum* - Himself both the physician and the medication. The understanding of religion as medicine continued into the medieval period, during which a remarkable corpus of texts on the healing of souls was composed in Ireland. I argue in this thesis that in these Irish penitentials, the relationship between medicine and religion went beyond a simple analogy, but converged into a single enterprise.

A modern reader presented for the first time with the following passage from a penitential would probably be struck, first by the grotesque scene it presents, and then by the fact that seems to assign punishments without obvious crimes or guilt. In the following, the “host” refers to the consecrated bread or wafer consumed in the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which it is considered

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<sup>2</sup> Darrel W. Amundsen “Medicine and Faith in Early Christianity,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56:3 (1982), p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version. Mark 2:17.

<sup>4</sup> Amundsen, 331. See also Rudolph Arbesmann, “The concept of ‘Christus Medicus’ in St. Augustine,” *Traditio*, 10 (1954), pp. 1-28; A.S. Pease, “Medical allusions in the Works of St. Jerome,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 25 (1914), pp. 73-86.

that this bread is transformed (by a miraculous process called transubstantiation) into the body, or flesh, of Christ, and wine is transformed into the blood of Christ, which is then eaten by the congregation. The following is an excerpt from the Bigotian Penitential, a passage which happens to be given a title: “Of those who vomit the host.”

He who vomits the host because of greediness, [shall do penance] forty days, but if with the excuse of unusual and too rich food, and from the fault not of over-saturation but of the stomach, thirty (days). If by reason of infirmity, he shall do penance for twenty (days). Another (authority) says differently: If by reason of infirmity, seven days; if he ejects it into the fire, he shall sing one hundred psalms; if a dog laps up this vomit, he who has vomited shall do penance for one hundred days.<sup>5</sup>

This passage, or “canon,” as they are called in the penitential genre, is not unique to the Bigotian Penitential. Another of its kind, the Penitential of Cummean, also addresses the issue of vomiting the consecrated bread and the potential for a dog eating that vomit. In fact, it addresses it twice.<sup>6</sup>

The question this canon immediately raises to any modern reader would likely be: Why would you be punished for vomiting the host, if you’re sick? That’s not your fault! Nor is it your fault if a dog laps up that vomit. Certainly, you could not even be accused of transgressing by *intending* that to happen.

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<sup>5</sup> Bieler, *The Irish Penitentals*, pp. 214-5. *Qui sacrificium euomit causa uoracitatis, .xl. diebus. Si uero obtentu insoliti cybi pinguioris et non uitio saturitatis sed stomachi, .xxx. Si infirmitatis gratia, xx peniteat. Aliter alius dicit : Si infirmitatis causa, .vii. diebus ; si in ignem proiecerit, .c. psalmos canet ; si canis lambuerit talem uomitum, .c. diebus qui euomit poeniteat.*

<sup>6</sup> The Penitential of Cummean repeats itself on the issue of vomiting the host. This is the “other author” referred to by the Bigotian Penitential. The first mention of vomiting the host can be found in Bieler, p. 112: *Si uero sacrificium euomerit, .xl. diebus. Si autem infirmitatis causa, .vii. diebus. Si in ignem proiecerit, .c. psalmos cantat. Si uero canes lambuerint talem uomitum, .c. diebus qui euomit peniteat.* The second, on p. 130: *Sacrificium euomens grauatus saturitate uentris, si in ignem proiecerit, .xx. diebus, sin autem, .xl. Si uero canus comederint talem uomitum, .c. Si autem dolore, et in ignem proiecerit, .c. psalmos canant.*

This canon would appear no less strange in the company of the other topics covered in a regular, early Irish penitential. A broad portion of the scope of penitentials covers transgressions like murder, lying, and adultery. Also, from the Bigotian Penitential is the following canon: “A layman who defiles his neighbor’s wife or virgin daughter shall do penance for a year on bread and water and without his own wife.”<sup>7</sup> Upon first reading, this canon seems to make more sense. A married man having an affair with his neighbor plausibly deserves some sort of “punishment” (even if a modern mind wouldn’t necessarily leap straight to a year on bread and water). In short, vomiting the consecrated bread and committing adultery do not, on first appearance, seem to belong together in one text.

In order to demonstrate why both of these canons belong in a penitential, I must first turn to the purpose of this sort of text. Penitentials are a genre of texts concerning the Christian sacrament of penance. True penitentials all shared the following characteristics, as described by Thomas Oakley: (1) confession and the assignment of penance was private (rather than earlier practices, which were public), (2) it was administered by a priest (rather than a bishop), and (3) it was “tariffed,” i.e. specific penances were prescribed dependent on the kind and degree of sin. Each individual tariff, or rule, is generally called a canon. Penitentials, in the narrow sense of the term,<sup>8</sup> originated in sixth century Wales and Ireland. The first penitentials were written in Wales and Ireland, then from the seventh century forward these early penitentials were adapted, imitated, and edited into new versions in the British Isles, the Continent, and Iceland. In the early ninth century, penitentials met some opposition. The Councils of Chalon (813) and Paris (829) called

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<sup>7</sup> Bieler, 222-23. *Laicus maculans uxorem uel uirginem proximi sui uno anno cum pane et aqua et sine uxore propria paeniteat.*

<sup>8</sup> Oakley, “The Origins of Irish Penitential Discipline,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 1938, 19(3): 320-321.

for the end of use of penitentials, going so far as to call for the burning of penitential materials. They cited the unclear authorship and dubious authority of the penitentials as reasons to condemn them. Although the 9<sup>th</sup> century institutional condemnation of penitentials seems to have been fierce, it is unclear whether the execution of these orders was carried out diligently. Not only do 9<sup>th</sup> century copies of penitentials survive to this day, later copies do as well, indicating that not only were penitentials not destroyed, they also continued to be copied.<sup>9</sup>

The penitentials stemmed from a broader discussion of penance beginning in the fifth century, which was in turn the response to a patristic development of the formula of penance. In the Roman Catholic Church, penance is the sacrament<sup>10</sup> by which wayward Christians gain absolution for the fallout of Original Sin.<sup>11</sup> In the simplest of terms, Christians who sin must do penance to eventually achieve salvation after the resurrection.

The initial strangeness of assigning penance to vomit, and intuitiveness of assigning penance to adultery, stems from the misconception that fasting is intended as a punishment for a transgression. There is a common misconception that penitentials assign cruel, extreme bodily punishments for sins, or rather, cruel “cures.” This may be the case in later penitential texts, but is

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<sup>9</sup> Oakley, *Origins*, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church, a sacrament is a religious ceremony or ritual considered to impart divine grace. In other words, sacraments are the moments in a Christian’s life when God’s influence is most strongly felt. Many sacraments existed in the Middle Ages, but today, the seven sacraments are: baptism, confirmation, eucharist (or Communion), penance, matrimony (or marriage), holy orders (or ordination into the diaconate, priesthood, or episcopate), and anointing of the sick (in the medieval context called Extreme Unction, the final prayers said for a person before their death).

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, I, 16. See also Ernesto Bonaiuti, 1917. “The Genesis of St. Augustine’s Idea of Original Sin.” *Harvard Theological Review* 10:2 (1917) pp. 159–75.

not the case in the Irish penitentials.<sup>12</sup> The most common penance assigned is fasting. Penitentials are not legal texts, and fasting is not assigned as a sort of retribution. Adultery and vomiting are both being assigned penance, not as a punishment, but for the purpose of healing. The seeming incongruity between the two begins to fall away when examined through the lens of the true purpose of penitentials.

Penitentials generally articulate their purpose through the use of analogy to medicine. “Here begins the prologue on the medicine for the salvation of souls,”<sup>13</sup> begins the penitential of Cummean. Much like Christ “healing” his followers, priests administering penance heal the wounds caused by sin, using penitentials as their guide.

John T. McNeill introduced the medicine metaphor to scholarly debate in his 1932 article “Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials.” He describes what he calls “the medical analogy” as “characteristic of the Penitentials as a whole,” establishing the idea that the purpose of penitentials is healing. McNeill describes the “medicine” of penance as a “severe and protracted course of treatments” with the “objective of an inward moral change” so that a sinner could once again “function as a normal person, and his sense of personality was restored,” be in “harmony with himself,” and in “right relations with the church, society, and God.”<sup>14</sup> McNeill also was the first to establish that the penitential authors appropriated the writings of the fourth-century theologian John Cassian. McNeill traces the penitential authors’ use of the classical notions of the

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<sup>12</sup> The only instances when the penitentials assign bodily harm, in the form of lashes (likely self-flagellation), is in two unique canons: Cummean assigns fifty lashes to a priest who stumbles over a certain Bible passage in reading out loud (100 if he stumbles twice) (Bieler, p. 133), and touching food with unclean hands warrants 100 lashes (Bieler, p. 131). These are the only instances of bodily harm prescribed in the penitentials.

<sup>13</sup> Bieler, p. 110. *Incipit prologus de medicinae salutaris animarum.*

<sup>14</sup> McNeill, “Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Irish Penitentials,” p. 21.

eight principal vices, twelve remissions of sins, and law of contraries back to Cassian.<sup>15</sup> George Christian Anderson's 1963 article "Medieval Medicine for Sin" extends McNeill's analysis of the penitentials' appropriation of Cassian's theories. Anderson states that "as one reads the penitentials, it is evident that an individual who committed a sin was regarded as sick."<sup>16</sup> He gives as reason, and for the constituent use of a medical metaphor throughout the penitentials, the fact that the penitential authors adapted Cassian's theological use of the law of contraries, which was a medical principle into their tariffed construction (penances varying as a function of the severity of the sin and of the identity and condition of the sinner).

But the authors of the penitentials went much further than the adaptation of Cassian's theology. It is true that to deal with the organization of kinds of sins in their texts, they used his version of the eight principal vices, and they connected the application of penance to the application of contraries. What McNeill and Anderson do not clearly show is that there is a systematic application of *actual* contraries to every sin, contraries based not only on Cassian's eight principal vices but also on his twelve remissions of sin. The penitentials also formulated the effectiveness of their penitential remedies around the Cassianic construction of the body, soul, and self. The penitentials don't just use a medicine metaphor, as McNeill describes; they actually take the medical theories present in Cassian's theology and turn them to practical use. In doing so, the penitential authors created texts that were not only theological, but medical in nature, or, to put it differently, texts in which the theology and the medicine work hand in hand and cannot be separated.

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<sup>15</sup> This idea is found throughout the penitentials. See especially Penitential of Finnian (Bieler, p 85) and Penitential of Cummean (Bieler, pp. 110-111).

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, "Medieval Medicine for Sin," p. 156.

Thus far, penitentials have been limited in the historiography to characterizations as documents meant to heal the soul; they have not been studied as texts inherently interested in the maintenance of the body. If penitentials were just about the soul, that would not account for the messy, often grotesque, addressment of bodily accidents and illness: moments where penance is assigned for vomiting consecrated bread, or being ill, or eating rotten food. These passages, read with the erroneous assumption that the prescriptions such as fasting are punishments, make little sense to a modern reader. But the penitentials are practical theological texts based on medical principles; in this light, their interest in the body and its ailments demonstrates that they were interested in the maintenance of the body as well as the soul.

.2.

*On the usage and scope of the sources*

The contents of penitentials are varied, and not always in agreement. However, the scope of this thesis is limited to the characterization of early Irish penitentials, which despite some idiosyncrasies, are mostly in agreement. This is due principally to the nature of the penitential genre, which is characterized by adoption and adaptation. The earliest penitential, that of Finnian, is conclusively the source material for the Penitential of Columbanus.<sup>17</sup> The penitential of Cummean also uses Finnian as source material, as well as a “proto”-Penitential text, the Welsh Canons.<sup>18</sup> The Bigotian penitential, in turn, is based on Cummean.<sup>19</sup> Some variations crop up in each penitential, likely due to the author’s own insertions or to edits or mistakes made in copying.

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<sup>17</sup> This is the scholarly consensus, see Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland : Ecclesiastical : An Introduction and Guide*. New York: Octagon Books, 1979, p. 240 and Bieler p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Bieler, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Bieler, p. 10.

But overall, due to the nature of the genre, in response to a certain question, Irish penitentials tend to agree.

The variation in penitentials come more from difference in interest, scope, or organization, than from actual discrepancies in prescriptions. What's more, the purpose of penitentials, even in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, seems to have been to provide guidance for those administering the sacrament, but the users were encouraged to account for the identity or intention of their penitents and adapt the penance accordingly. This is evidenced in the preface of the Bigotian Penitential, which calls the user of the penitential to take into account the mitigating factors of identity and circumstance:

Hence those who take care to heal the wounds of others are to observe carefully what is the age and sex of the sinner, what instruction he has received, which is his strength, by what trouble he has been driven to sin, with what kind of passion he is assailed, how long he remained in sinful delight, with what sorrow and labour he is afflicted, and how much he is detached from worldly things...Wise men, in regulating penance, are to look carefully also to this: not to punish with the rod a crime worthy of the sword and to smite with the sword a sin worthy of the rod; and according to Gregory, great care is to be taken by pastors lest they carelessly bind what ought not to be bound and loose what ought not to be loosed.<sup>20</sup>

I will often in this thesis generalize my points to characterize Irish penitentials as a genre, even when using evidence from an individual penitential, due to the cohesiveness which I believe accompanies this tradition of adoption and adaptation.

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<sup>20</sup> Bieler, p. 198-99. *Hinc procurantibus aliorum sanare uulnera solerter intuendum est cuius aetatis et sexus sit peccans, qua eruditione inbutus, qua fortitudine exstat, quali grauatione compulsus est peccare, quali passione inpugnatur, quanto tempore in diliciis remansit, quali lacrimabilitate et labore affligitur et qualier a mundialibus separatur... Et hoc sapientibus in penitentia moderanda intuendum est, ne dignum scelus gladio ferula uindicent et dignum peccatum ferula gladio percutiant ; et secundum Gregorium magnopere pastoribus procurandum, ne incauti alligauerint quod non alligandum et non soluerint quod non soluendum.*

My thesis does not cover the whole history of penance, nor does it cover the whole penitential genre, but rather the earliest Irish penitentials, and only those written in Latin (for there are a few early penitentials written in Old Irish). I will not always specify the early Irish nature of my sources, sometimes referring to them simply as “penitentials” for the sake of brevity. The scope of my thesis is as narrow as its source material necessitates. The Penitential of Finnian is the earliest penitential used in this study. The author, although named in the text as Finnian, is unknown, and attempts to conclusively attribute it to the abbots St. Finnian of Clonard (d. 549) and St. Finnian of Mag-Bile (d. 579) have thus far failed. The Penitential of Finnian can only be dated as having been composed earlier than the Penitential of Columbanus, which mentions Finnian as a source. The Penitential of Columbanus likely dates from around 575 CE, and is generally agreed to have been written by Saint Columban, one of the first and principal Irish *peregrini* to go to the continent to proselytize and set up monasteries. The most influential early Irish penitential is that of Cummean, composed in Ireland around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is also the most comprehensive Irish Latin-language penitential. It relies somewhat on Finnian. The latest penitential that this thesis uses, the Bigotian Penitential, is not entirely Irish in nature, because it is only attested in one copy which seems to have reached the Continent and been adapted before being written down. It is, however, closely related to the Penitential of Cummean, and a notable Old-Irish penitential, and contains material from other Irish texts. Although it demonstrates the influence of Continental material, notably, the Rule of St. Benedict, Bieler notes that it is “far less contaminated with English or continental matter than the ‘mixed’ penitentials of eight- and ninth-century France,” and includes it in his anthology of Irish penitentials. Consequently, I have decided to include it in the present study. All four penitentials are attested only in continental manuscripts which range from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. These manuscripts range from English, to

French, to Italian production. The chronological and geographic scope of these attestations demonstrate that although the time and place of production was relatively narrow, the influence of these texts was widespread and lasted a long time, although the extent of that influence cannot be quantified with any precision. The widespread influence of Irish monks in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, paired with the eventual popularity of the Irish penitential genre and its adaptation into a larger Continental penitential tradition, indicate that the ideas found in these texts do not just represent the thought of a small or isolated group.

Chapter 1  
*Medicine and Religion*

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.1.

*Medicine: The classical background*

According to McNeill, the penitentials characterize their purpose as *healing* or medicine, through an analogy. Although McNeill points out that the medical principle of “contraries healing contraries,” also known as the law of contraries, is the governing principle of the penitentials, McNeill limits the medical reference to that of a useful metaphor used by the penitential authors and mainly uses it to explain their organization into tariffs, or canons. Anderson notes that the penitentials call their users “physicians,” just as the classical philosophers and church fathers did, but does not address the actually *medical* nature of the application of penance.<sup>21</sup>

McNeill and Anderson primarily point out that the penitentials adapted their use of the law of contraries from Cassian, especially his work *Conference of the Abbot Serapion*. Cassian is present in the penitentials especially in the preface to the Penitential of Cummean; in Finnian’s formulation of its remedies; and in the organization of Cummean, Columbanus, and Bigotian. In the latter, Cassian is mentioned by name. In the Penitential of Cummean, penances are assigned to the following sins based on the idea that bringing in an opposite is the cure:

Those who are drunk with wine or beer... if they have taken the vow of sanctity shall expiate the fault for forty days with bread and water; laymen, however, for seven days.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson, p. 157-8.

<sup>22</sup> Bieler, p. 110-13. *Inebriati igitur uino siue ceruisa contra interdictum Saluatoris... is uotum sanctatis habuerint, .xl. diebus cum pane et aqua culpam deluant, laici uero .vii. diebus.*

He who is not able to sing psalms, being benumbed in his tongue, shall perform a special fast.<sup>23</sup>

He who anticipates the canonical hour (for eating),<sup>24</sup> or takes something more delicate than the others have, only on account of appetite, shall go without supper, and live for two days on bread and water.<sup>25</sup>

These canons all come from the section on gluttony in the penitential of Cummean. Each sin is assigned fasting as a penance; fasting, or the reduction of consumption, is the opposite of gluttony, which is the sin of excess. While Cassian applied the law of contraries to discuss the theory of sin, the penitential authors applied it practically; the principle became practice, and so medical in nature, not just symbolically.

The law of contraries is originally a medical principle, formulated by the Ancient Greek physicians, notably Themison of Loadicea (c. 50 BC).<sup>26</sup> By the late antique period, it became part of the theory of humors, the predominant conception of health at the time (a conception which persisted until the early modern period).

The theory of humors has its roots in Greek philosophy (much like the relationship between religion and medicine) with the physician-philosopher Hippocrates (d. c. 380 BCE). Hippocrates may be most famous to moderns as the author of the “Hippocratic Oath,” an oath of ethics historically taken by physicians to “do no harm.”<sup>27</sup> According to this theory, the body is composed of four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile; and the method of healing is balance,

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<sup>23</sup> Bieler, p. 112-13. *Qui psallere non potest stupens elinguis, superponat.*

<sup>24</sup> That is, the mealtime laid down by the Rule. See Bieler, p. 246. The Rule is the code of behavior for monastic living.

<sup>25</sup> Bieler, p. 112-13. *Qui anticipat horam canonicam uel suauiora ceteris sumat gulae tantum obtentu, cena careat uel duobus diebus in pane et aqua uiuat.*

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, p. 159.

<sup>27</sup> Boylan, “Hippocrates.”

or the right proportion and mixture of these humors. Illness is caused by irregular or improper proportion.<sup>28</sup> One of the most influential sources for medical theory in the Middle Ages was the Greek physician and philosopher Galen (d. c. 200 CE).<sup>29</sup> Galen characterized himself as an eclectic belonging to no school, but scholars have placed him somewhere at the conjunction of the Empiric, Dogmatic, and Methodic schools.

The Greek Methodic School of medicine, of which Themison was a prominent thinker, considered the principle of contraries one of its basic axioms. The principal conditions of a body were (1) its dryness, (2) its fluidity, and (3) the mixture of the two. The method of healing was to track the phenomenological manifestations of these conditions. The underlying assumption was that the body's pores allowed atoms to enter and exit the body—when they came and went freely, health was the result. When there was blockage, caused by imbalances in the flow due to pore constriction or dilation, it caused illness.<sup>30</sup> Galen synthesized the Methodic theories of medicine with the theory of humors; the balance of the principal conditions of the body (its dryness and fluidity) affected the excesses or shortages of the humors, which caused ill health. According to Galen, imbalances in the dryness or fluidity were caused by outside factors, due the fundamental composition of matter which could be distilled into the four elements.<sup>31</sup> Atoms, of which there

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> Boylan, "Galen." See also Boudon-Millot, And Alessia Guardasole, and Caroline Magdelaine, eds. 2007. *La science médicale antique: nouveaux regards: etudes reunites en l'honneur de Jacques Jouanna*. Paris: Beauchesne; Boylan, Michael. 1985. "The Hippocratic and Galenic Challenges to Aristotle's Conception Theory" *Journal of the History of Biology* 15.1: 83-112; Hankinson, R.J. 2008. *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Boylan, "Galen."

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle had earlier interrelated the theories of contraries and four-elements in *Generation and Corruption*, but "it was Galen who attempted to create a more gradated form by making quasi-quantitative categories of the contraries to describe the material composition of the mixtures (*On Mixtures*). Boylan, "Galen."

were four major sorts, one for each element, would pass through the pores and create imbalances. Over-exposure to substances therefore increased or decreased the dryness and fluidity of the body: water was cold and wet; earth, cold and dry; fire, hot and dry; and air, hot and wet. All matter, including the body, was made of these basic elements, meaning that as external substances passed through the body they were soluble with it, causing cold, hot, wet, or dry symptoms. An imbalance due to a substance with watery qualities would result in cold and wet symptoms, which could be healed with something hot and dry.<sup>32</sup>

Cassian wrote his *Conference of the Abbot Serapion* based on the conversations of abbots in the Egyptian desert. It is in this text that he discusses the law of contraries, the twelve remissions of sins, and the eight principal vices, which are the principal ideas appropriated from Cassian by the penitentials.<sup>33</sup> Cassian spent time in Palestine and Egypt at the turn of the fourth century, and in 399 CE had to flee Alexandria due to a theological controversy that caused the exodus of over 300 Origenist monks. Some years afterwards, (c. 420-35 CE), he wrote *Conference*. The time Cassian spent in Egypt is significant, because the Eastern monasteries not infrequently functioned as hospitals.<sup>34</sup> It was in fact common for monasteries to serve as hospitals, supplementing local midwives and folk doctors, until the professionalization of medicine with the establishment of universities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> It would be very surprising if Cassian was not exposed to the law

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<sup>32</sup> Boylan, "Galen." An example of a cold and wet illness would be an upper respiratory infection, and hot and dry remedy may for instance have been certain molds or fungi. As an aside, Boylan notes the coincidence that a mold remedy for an upper respiratory infection is reminiscent of penicillin and strep/staph infections!

<sup>33</sup> Cassian, *Conference of the Abbot Serapion*. Eight principal vices: coll. 5. Twelve remissions of sins: coll. 20 ch. 8. Contraries: coll. 20 ch. 11.

<sup>34</sup> McNeill, p. 17. See also Moon, R. O. 1909. *The Relation of Medicine to Philosophy*. New York. p. 65; also Budge, E. A. W. 1917. *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*. London, Vol. 1. p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Gaczowska, "Medications of Medieval monasteries"; also Flemming, "The medical aspects of the mediaeval monastery in England."

of contraries in a medical context during his time in Egypt, and he may even have been introduced to it there; it is also particularly significant in a text likely based on his time in Egypt, or at least set there for rhetorical purposes.<sup>36</sup> And the physicians of Cassian's time would have broadly agreed with Galen and the Methodists; disagreements between physicians were about subtler points than the broad strokes I laid out above.

The penitential authors' appropriation of Cassian is not only significant due to their inclusion of the law of contraries; it was medical in nature, because penitentials also treated the porosity of the body and its assimilation of outside substances. Physicians dealt with the hot and cold, wet and dry symptoms of bodily imbalances, and prescribed blood-letting or herbal remedies. But the penitentials dealt with other repercussions of the body's susceptibility besides illness and the assimilation of impure substances: sin. The porosity and changeability of the body, however, was of principal interest to the penitentials, which is why they address and assign penance for such strange occurrences as a dog lapping up vomited consecrated bread. Medical explanations for the porosity of the body were fundamentally compatible with the theological view of it: saturated with Original Sin (so much so that it was passed on through generation), but also susceptible to the effects of Gods' grace, either of which might affect its constant flux. The belief in the possibility of divine intervention in the body is clearly present in the New Testament. A notable example is John 9:1-7, when Jesus meets a man blind from birth and cures his blindness. In the early Middle Ages, the intervention of God in medical issues was gained through prayer; especially through the

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson, 160.

cult of relics. Saints' relics were believed to increase one's chance of miracles (the intervention of God, aided by the saint at God's side whose relic one had prayed near or touched).<sup>37</sup>

.2.

*The closed system*

Paul refers to the perpetual decay of the body in contrast to the intransience of the soul: "...though the man outward of us is being brought to decay, the man inside of us is being renewed day and day."<sup>38</sup> The original Greek illuminates the meaning of this passage well: διαφθείρεται (*diaphtheiretai*, literally "brought to decay") emphasizes *physical* change; the changing, decaying outer aspect of the individual ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*, "man") is contrasted with the internal aspect, while still being part of the same unit, ἡμῶν (*hemon*, the personal pronoun "of us").

Today we think of our bodies as a relatively closed system. Our skin is a clear border between what is *us* and what is *not*—there is a clear inside and out. The remnants of humoral theory remain in our expressions of feeling 'not quite right' or 'slightly out of balance'; but today we think of our bodies more as a machine needing to function optimally, prevented from doing so by any cause between nutritional deficiency, infection, or genetic predisposition.

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<sup>37</sup> For more on the early cult of relics, see Cronner, Estelle. 2015. *Les inventions de reliques dans l'Empire romain d'Orient (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> s.)*. Turnhout: Brepols. Also, C. Hahn. 2012. *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-c.1204*; Freeman, C. 2011. *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the history of medieval Europe*.

<sup>38</sup> II Corinthians 4:16. The version of the Bible I am using elsewhere in this thesis (ESV) translates this line differently, with "outward self wasting away" and "inward self." I provided this particular translation upon reading and Greek: Διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται ἀλλ' ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα. Here is the Latin (Vulgate Bible): sed licet is qui foris est noster homo corrumpitur tamen is qui intus est renovatur de die in diem. See also Chadwick, *Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body*, 86-7.

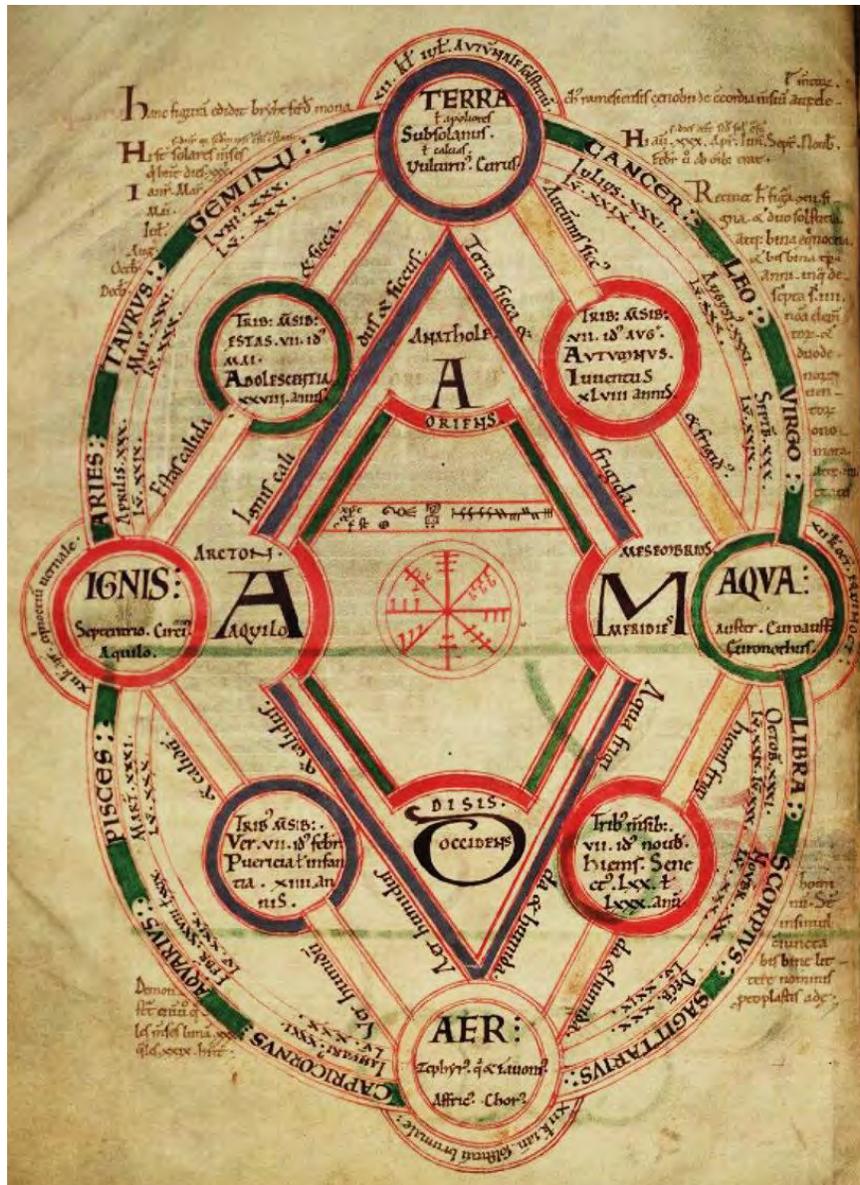


Figure 1. A diagram representing the elements (*terra, aqua, aer, ignis*) connected by lines labelled with the contraries (*calidus* and *frigidus, siccus* and *humidus*), encircled by the months, the seasons (which are associated with the elements: autumn is dry and cold, like earth; winter is wet and cold, like water; spring is wet and hot, like air; and summer is dry and hot, like fire), the zodiac, the winds, the lunar cycles, and the ages of man. The first letters of the Latin names for the four cardinal directions are made to spell out the name 'ADAM,' placing mankind at the center of this network.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The Thorney Computus. Bodleian Library, Oxford. St John's College MS 17, ff. 7v. A 12th century computistical miscellany put together at Thorney Abbey in Cambridgeshire. One of the most celebrated examples of this genre, it comprises numerous texts, diagrams and tables associated with the reckoning of time and the construction of calendars, touching on math,

The mechanistic philosophy of the body is ancient and has its root in Stoicism, a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Universal mechanism, which is more similar to the contemporary image of the body as machine, was most famous systematized by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651). René Descartes was also a significant and staunch mechanist, writing in his *Treatise on Man* (1633): “I should like you to consider that these functions (including passion, memory, and imagination) follow from the mere arrangement of the machine’s organs every bit as naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the arrangement of its counter-weights and wheels.” This is a far cry from the sixth-century conception of the porous body, soluble with the world around it. Figure 1 represents all of the worldly systems that were considered to affect mankind: the elements, seasons, zodiac, and winds, all interlaced around the central letters, “ADAM.”<sup>40</sup>

Although the sixth-century fleshy body was subject to the winds and stars, the Middle Ages stood in contrast to Antiquity in the sense that it operated with a conception of individuality that we can recognize as modern. The closed system of the Middle Ages was that of the self, divided from the rest of matter by its unique relationship to God.<sup>41</sup> The self, according to Cassian, was composed of one body and one soul; two components of a whole, distinguishable and yet not separate. In his discussion of “covetousness” in *Conference*, Cassian writes that it stems from “something outside our nature,” it does not have “its first starting point inside us, nor does it

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astrology, cosmology, medicine, history and many other key areas of medieval knowledge. <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/ad8e91ff-94f1-43cd-a51a-84dadd07ebf>.

<sup>40</sup> See Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Taylor makes the argument in Chapter 7 of *Sources of the Self*, in which he analyzes Augustine’s assertion that one should look inward to find God as evidence of a conception of individuality, qualifying the widely-held assumption that the Enlightenment invented the self and individuality.

originate in what contributes to keeping body and soul together, at to the existence of life.”<sup>42</sup> This external affliction, the wind and stars with which the penitentials concern themselves, comes from *outside* of the body to wreak havoc on the self. The self, or “whole,” as Cassian describes it, includes the body *and* soul. Furthermore, the mechanism by which sin causes harm to the self is by splitting the body and soul, which is implied by Cassian when he aimed to keep the body and soul together. This is what Caroline Walker-Bynum calls the “psychosomatic unity” of the self in her book, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*. Based on this, we can argue that for someone like Cassian, there is a very close relationship between illness and sin, not because illness is a punishment sent by God to the sinner, but because, as we shall see later, illness and sin are both caused by a split between body and soul. Penance is meant to remedy that split and make the self whole again.

Despite the common belief today that medieval Christians fundamentally mistrusted the body—its hunger and lust, its tendency to decay and produce waste—and glorified the soul, in fact, they construed the self not as a dual entity (soul separated from body), but as a *psychosomatic unity*.<sup>43</sup> The term “psychosomatic unity,” coined by Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Resurrection of the Body*, is useful for our purposes even though Bynum does not discuss medicine very much and does not cover the early Middle Ages. Bynum understands psychosomatic as “relating to the interaction of mind and body”; in other words, unity in the interaction between mind and body, or unity *of* the mind and body. The term “psychosomatic” in its modern usage comes from medicine; it is an adjective that refers to a physical illness or other condition *caused* (or aggravated) by a mental factor (such as stress). Psychosomatic medicine is an interdisciplinary

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<sup>42</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 5 ch. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, p. 11.

medical field concerned with the relationship between social, psychological, and behavioral effects on bodily processes, including illness.

Bynum asserts in *Resurrection of the Body* that, despite the necessary “philosophical incoherence, theological equivocation, or aesthetic offensiveness” of accounting for an embodied self in resurrection, medieval theologians clung to it as necessary, even self-evident.<sup>44</sup> Their concept of a self “was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body,” explains Bynum, “it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity—and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation.”<sup>45</sup> If your *whole* self was to be resurrected, it had to have a body.

Bynum’s assertion that medieval theologians construed the self as a psychosomatic unity comes from her analysis of patristic and high medieval sources—her study skips the period that mediated the early Christian constructions of the self to the twelfth century. Her study does not account for Irish penitentials, nor for the period in which they were composed. It does, however, account for the patristic sources adapted by the authors of the penitentials, namely Origen.<sup>46</sup> Origen’s works were readily available to Irish monks and are cited in a number of early Irish texts.<sup>47</sup> He is particularly used in the Penitential of Cummean.<sup>48</sup> Bynum studies Origen as a source on resurrection and the construction of the self, but Amundsen studies the connection Origen makes between religion and philosophy—the Alexandrian school, which he was a part of, was “motivated by a firm conviction that a faith corroborated by philosophical reasoning was

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, p. 64-66, 142.

<sup>47</sup> Graham, p. 126-129.

<sup>48</sup> Bieler, p. 6.

preferable to a simple faith.” Philosophy, like medicine, is in a sense conflated with religion. However, Amundsen limits this conflation to that of allegory.<sup>49</sup> The conflation of religion and medicine in the penitentials is total. The penitentials also draw a great deal upon John Cassian, but he is not discussed by Bynum.

Cassian was an Origenist—when he fled Alexandria in 299 CE, it was during the First Origenist Controversy, when certain church authorities deemed Origen’s theology to be heretical. From Cassian’s *Conference*, it is clear that he assumed Origen’s psychosomatic unity of the self. This construction of the self is crucial to understanding the medical nature of the penitentials, because it is the theological connection between the medical conception of a porous body and the spiritual concerns of sin. A body in which body and soul are inextricably linked is subject both to the winds and stars through its pores, as well as the effects of sin and the grace of God through its participation in the self. Penance, in the penitentials, *is* a form of psychosomatic medicine. It is based on the interaction between spiritual and bodily states. The conflation of body and soul explains the connection between penance and medicine and allows us to understand why penitentials address the vomiting of consecrated bread.

The evidence of construction of the self as a psychosomatic unity in the penitentials comes from their characterization of an absolved person as whole; when penance, or the cure, has been applied, the healed sinner is *whole again*. The passage that uses Cassian’s twelve remissions of sin in the preface of the Penitential of Cummean describes the “amendment of one’s ways, that is, the renunciation of vices,” as making someone whole: “Now thou art *whole*, sin no more, lest some

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<sup>49</sup> Amundsen, p. 329-330.

worse thing happen to thee.”<sup>50</sup> The first two canons of Finnian conclude with the assertion that, after performing penance, the penitent will be whole:

If anyone has sinned by thought in his heart and immediately repents, he shall beat his breast and seek pardon from God and make satisfaction, and (so) be *whole*. But if he frequently entertains (evil) thoughts and hesitates to act on them, whether he has mastered them or been mastered by them, he shall seek help from God by prayer and fasting day and night until the evil thought departs and he is *whole*.<sup>51</sup>

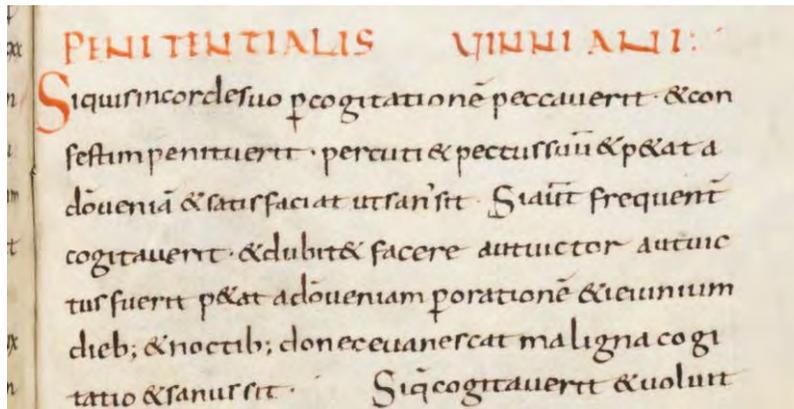


Figure 2. The first lines of the Penitential of Finnian.<sup>52</sup>

“Whole” in the original Latin is *sanus*, otherwise translated as healthy, safe, well, or “sound in body and mind.” The verb form of *sanus*, *sanare*, literally means to heal or cure, and figuratively, restore, repair, or correct. *Sanus* is derived from the Proto-Indo-European *\*swā-n-*,

<sup>50</sup> Bieler, p. 108-110. ...*emendatio morum, hoc est abrenuntiatio uitiorum... iam sanus factus es, noli ultra peccare, ne quid tibi deterius accedat.*

<sup>51</sup> Bieler, p. 75. *Si quis in corde suo per cogitationem peccauerit et confestim penituerit, percutiat pectus suum et petat a Deo ueniam et satis faciat et sanus sit. Si autem frequenter cogitat et dubiat facere, aut uictor aut victus fuerit, petat a Deo adiutorium per orationem et ieiunium diebus ac noctibus donec euanescat maligna cogitatio et sanus sit.*

<sup>52</sup> St. Gall Stiftsbibliothek 150, p. 365.

meaning healthy, whole, active, vigorous; and related to the Greek adjective *σῶς* (*sos*) meaning safe, whole, unwounded (physically or mentally).<sup>53</sup>

Its variety of meanings taken into account, *sanus* paints a broader picture of the goal of penitentials. It implies the goal of health, which may be applied to the soul but just as easily to the body. Bieler's translation as "whole" is illuminating, for it implicates the psychosomatic unity of the self and the idea of reunification of split parts. The idea of *sanus* as "sound in body and mind" implies the psychosomatic unity as well, *sanus* being the state of both parts of the whole self.

The aim illuminates the issues at hand: The goal of the penitentials is to make an individual whole *again*. This implies that what the penitentials *cure* is a splitting of the self. By tracking *what* the penitentials heal we are able to reconstruct what the penitential authors thought split the self.

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<sup>53</sup> Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short. 1879. "sanus" in *A Latin Dictionary*. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Accessed online March 2020. <https://www.latinitium.com/latin-dictionaries?t=Isn42553,do450>

Chapter 2  
*Sin and Ingestion*

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.1.  
*Kinds of sin...*

Against the splitting of the self, the penitentials prescribe contraries. “Here begins the prologue on the medicine for the salvation of souls,” begins the preface of the Penitential of Cummean, which details twelve different means of having sins absolved, based on patristic and scriptural sources. The remissions, given by Cassian, include baptism, the emotion of charity, alms-giving, shedding tears, confession of crimes, affliction of heart and body, amendment of one’s ways, the intercession of saints, the mercy of God, the conversion of others, pardon by God, and martyrdom.<sup>54</sup> After listing the twelve remissions and their sources, the preface concludes:

And so they determine that the eight principal vices contrary to human salvation shall be healed by the eight remedies that are their contraries. For it is an old proverb: *Contraries are cured by contraries*. For he who without restraint commits what is forbidden ought to restrain himself even from what is permissible.<sup>55</sup>

This passage is closely modelled on Cassian.<sup>56</sup> *Contraria contrariis sanatur* is noted as an old proverb.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it was an old proverb even to the authors of the penitentials—centuries old, for the penitentials were composed at minimum two centuries after the death of Cassian.

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<sup>54</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 20, ch. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Bieler, p. 110-11. *Statuunt itaque ut octo principalia uitia humanae salutis contraria his octo contrariis remediis sanatur. Uetus namque prouerbius est: Contraria contrariis sanatur. Qui enim illicita licenter commisit, a licitis licet cohercere se debuit.*

<sup>56</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 20, ch. 8. See also Bieler, p. 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> McNeill, p. 19.

The penitentials drew upon a variety of sources, many of them scriptural, classical, and patristic. The penitential authors would have had access to a wide range of theological source texts to draw from. Graham partially reconstructs what an Irish monastic library must have included from the manuscripts and texts written or copied by Irish monks from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Scriptural texts included the Psalms and Epistles of St. Paul. There are also hymns, saints' Lives, and Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England. Evidence from the monastery at Bobbio, founded by Columbanus (the generally agreed-upon author of the penitential of his name) indicate that texts by the following classical authors were in circulation: Terence, Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Lucian, Martial, Juvenal, Claudian, Cicero, Seneca, the Elder Pliny, Persius, Flaccus, Horace, Demosthenes, Ambrose, Eusebius, and Aristotle. A partial reconstruction of the patristic sources available to the Irish by Stokes and Stratham lists: Origen, Isidore, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Hilary of Poitiers, Primascius, Virgilius, Ambrosius, Boethius, Cassian, Dionysus, Thrax, Gaudentius, Baeda, Orascius, Cicero (not the orator, but an obscure grammarian), Hieronymus, Lactantius, Maximanus, Pairinus, Polibius, Medicus, and Promus.<sup>58</sup>

Cassian wrote two sections on sin in *Conference*, one classifying the eight principal kinds of sin, and the other on penance. Both sections are saturated with the law of contraries, but in the latter especially, Cassian delves into examples of this principle applied to the kinds of sin he has classified. He gives the examples of a man who may have fallen into various sorts of sin:

If through dangerous familiarity with a woman he has fallen into fornication or adultery, he must take the utmost pains to avoid even looking on one;

Or if he has been overcome by too much wine and over-eating, he should chastise with the utmost severity his craving for immoderate food.

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<sup>58</sup> Graham, *The Early Irish Monastic Schools*, p. 115-30; Stokes and Strachan, op. cit. II., pp. xxiii., 415.

And again if he has been led astray by the desire for and love of money, and has fallen into perjury or theft or murder or blasphemy, he should cut off the occasion for avarice, which has allured and deceived him.

If he is driven by the passion of pride into the sin of anger, he should with all the virtue of humility, remove the incentive to arrogance.<sup>59</sup>

In order, he says, to heal sin, one must apply its opposite. By this “curative treatment,” as he calls it, we can root out these vices which have taken hold of the sinner. The sins given above are, in order: lust, gluttony, avarice, and wrath. These are the principal vices; the root of all other sins. Each of them may result in a variety of different related sins. Here, lust has led to adultery, and avarice has led to perjury. The penitentials appropriated this conception of sin—the principal eight, from which stem all other sins.

Cassian translated the works of the fourth-century monk Evagrius Ponticus, who listed the eight evil thoughts (λογισμοί, *logismos*) as γαστριμαργία (*gastrimargia*, gluttony), πορνεία (*porneia*, prostitution, fornication, lust), φιλαργυρία (*philargyria*, avarice, greed), ὑπερηφανία (*hyperēphania*, pride – sometimes rendered as self-overestimation, arrogance, grandiosity), λύπη (*lypē*, sadness – in the *Philokalia*, this term is rendered as *envy*, sadness at another's good fortune), ὀργή (*orgē*, wrath), κευοδοξία (*kenodoxia*, boasting), ἀκηδία (*akēdia*, acedia – in the *Philokalia*, this term is rendered as dejection). Cassian translated these (the following are listed in the same order) as *gula* (gluttony), *fornicatione* (fornication, or lust), *filargiria* (avarice, or greed), *ira* (wrath), *tristitia* (dejection, or sloth), *accidia* (languor), *iactantia* (boasting in Evagrius, but traditionally translated as vainglory), and *superbia* (pride).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 20, ch 11.

<sup>60</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. v.



Figure 3. A depiction of the seven deadly sins (left to right: pride, dejection, envy, lust, avarice, wrath, and gluttony) outside the walled Garden of Pleasures. The *seven* deadly sins recognizable to moderns was introduced by Pope Gregory in 590 CE, revised from the Cassianic list of *eight*. Gregory combined languor with dejection and vainglory with pride, and added envy.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> London, British Library, Yates Thompson MS 21, f. 165.

Cassian was particularly well known in the Irish church. His handling of what Aquinas called the “capital” sins is reflected in all of the Irish penitentials.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Aquinas uses Gregory’s list of *seven* deadly sins, but the term “capital” comes from Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*; they are the head and form of all the others. Indeed, the Bigotian penitential begins by explicitly listing the “eight chief vices, from which arises a copious multitude of vices.” The text cites the classification of eight and their ensuing sins from Cassian directly: from gluttony comes reveling, drunkenness, foolish gaiety, excessive talk, dullness of sense, and uncleanness; from lust, filthy speech, scurrility, stupid talk, blindness of mind, inconstancy, love of the present world, horror of the (world) to come; from avarice, lying, fraud, thefts, perjuries, greed of filthy gain, fake testimonies, acts of violence, inhumanity, rapacity, enmities; from wrath, murders, clamor, indignation, quarrels, pride of mind, insults, reproaches; from dejection, rancor, smallness of mind, bitterness, despair, malice, and indifference about commands; from languor, idleness, drowsiness, unreasonableness, restlessness, wandering about, instability of mind and body, verbosity, curiosity; from vainglory, contentions, heresies, boasting, taking up with novelties, hypocrisy, obstinacy, discords, hatred; from pride, contempt, envy, disobedience, blasphemy, murmuring, detraction, and witchcrafts.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> McNeill, p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Bieler, 206-209. *De gastimargia nascuntur commessiones, ebrietates, inepta letitia, multiloquium, hebetudo sensus, inmunditiae. De fornicatione : turpiloquia, scurilitates, stultiloquia, cecitas mentis, inconstantia, affectus praesentis saeculi, horror futuri. De filigaria : mendacium, fraudatio, furta, periuria, turpis lucri appetitus, falsa testimonia, violentiae, inhumanitas, rapacitas, inimicitiae. De ira : homicidia, clamor, indignatio, rizae, tumor mentis, contumiliae, oppropria. De tristitia : rancor, pusillanimitas, amaritudo, desperatio, malitia, torpor circa praecepta. De accidia : otiositas, somnolentia, inportunitas, inquietudo, peruagatio, instabilitas mentis et corporis, uerbositas, curiositas. De cenodoctia : contentiones, heresses, iactantia, presumptio nouitatum, hipocrissis, pertinatia, discordiae, odium. De superbia : contemptus, inuidia, inobedientia, blasfemia, murmuratio, detractio, ueneficia.*

These "evil thoughts" were then categorized into three types by Cassian and the penitential authors: lustful appetite (gluttony, fornication, and avarice), irascibility (wrath), mind corruption (vainglory, languor, pride, and dejection).<sup>64</sup>

These "evil thoughts" were then categorized into three types by Cassian. "A complicated disease needs a complicated remedy," Cassian argues in *Conference*. He distinguishes between remedies to lustful appetite (gluttony, fornication, and avarice), irascibility (wrath), mind corruption (vainglory, languor, pride, and dejection).<sup>65</sup> He says, of the first two, that penance must be "carried into effect by the aid of the flesh," and especially requires "bodily abstinence as well as spiritual care of the soul," because these sins come from outside temptations, and so the "determination of the mind is not in itself enough to resist their attacks" and "but those which are carnal can only be cured... by a double remedy." Therefore, he prescribes bodily chastisement through fasting and vigils and acts of contrition, and a change of scene. On this front, the penitential authors are consistent with Cassian, assigning a mix of physical and spiritual penances. Columbanus lists many sins with their contraries: "The talkative is to be punished with silence, the restless with the practice of gentleness, the gluttonous with fasting, the sleepy with watching, the proud with imprisonment, the deserter with expulsion."<sup>66</sup> Sins stemming from lustful appetite are generally met with fasting. Irascibility, which covers most violent crimes, usually combines fasting with other remissions, as in the case of Finnian's prescriptions for homicide with fornication.

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<sup>64</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 5. Ch. 8. See also McNeill, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 5. Ch. 8. See also McNeill, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Bieler, p. 99. *Uerbosus uero taciturnitate damnandus est, inquietus mansuetudine, gulosus ieiunio, somnolentus uigilia, superbus carcere, destitutor repulsione ; unusquisque iuxta quod meretur quoequalia sentiat...*

For spiritual sins, however, Cassian requires only a spiritual remedy; “a single medicine for the heart.”<sup>67</sup> Vainglory and pride, he says, “can be consummated without any assistance from the body.” The soul has no need of the actions of the flesh, because it is destroyed without the involvement of the body. Cassian separates the effect of sins on the soul and body—some affect both, and some just one.<sup>68</sup> This is the position in which the penitential authors *diverged* in their adaptation of Cassian. The penitentials *do* assign physical penance for sins of mind corruption. Of dejection, the Bigotian penitential says:

For when (someone) harbors bitterness in his heart he shall be healed by a joyful countenance and a glad heart; but if he does not quickly lay it aside he shall correct himself by fasting according to the judgement of a priest; if he returns to it he shall be cut off until, on bread, he willingly and gladly acknowledges his fault.<sup>69</sup>

This penance prescribes a combination of spiritual remedies, joy and humility, with fasting. Columbanus prescribes a mixture of separation (which Cassian calls a physical penance) and fasting for the sin of pride. The penance below concerns two different kinds of sins, the first interacting with heretics unknowingly, and heresy is a result of pride; the second is derision, or contradicting authority, which is a different result of pride.

If any layman in ignorance has communicated with the followers of Bonosus or other heretics, let him rank among the catechumens, that is, separated from other Christians, for forty days, and for two other forty-day periods in the lowest rank of Christians, that is, among the penitents, let him wash away the guilt of his unsound communion; but if he did this in derision, that is, after he was warned and forbidden by the priest not to pollute himself with the communion of an evil faction, let him do penance for a whole year and three forty-day periods, and for two other years let

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<sup>67</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 5 ch. 8

<sup>68</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 5 ch. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Bieler, p. 233-5. *Cum enim amaritudinem in corde retinet, hilari uultu et lecto corde sanetur; si autem non cicto eam deponat, ieiunio sacerdote iudicante se emendat; si autem iterauerit, abscidatur donec alacer letusque in pane agnoscat delictum suum.*

him refrain from wine and meat, and thus after imposition of hands by a Catholic bishop let him be restored to the altar.<sup>70</sup>

The assignment of physical penance for spiritual sins in the penitentials indicates that the penitential authors disagreed with Cassian's assertion that only spiritual remedies could affect spiritual sin. They thought that bodily penance affected the soul; or that spiritual sin affected the body. Ultimately, this is because the penitential authors did not distinguish between things that affected the soul or body; they are actually concerned with things that split the *self*. The consequence of this is that anything that affects one part, affects the other. This conception of healing the self is characteristic of psychosomatic medicine—which is where the penitentials depart from Cassian's application of medical theories to theology, into actually practicing medical theories in the practical healing of the self.

.2.

*You are what you eat*

The consequence of the penitentials' aim of healing things that split the self is that they are interested in more than just sin as we would understand it today; they are also interested in what you consume. The medical understanding of ingestion from the period dictated that ingested materials become *part of* the body through their assimilation into the body's tissues. The idea of ingested substances being assimilated into the body was not unique to medical theory. It was adopted by theologies, just as was the theory of contraries, to conceptualize resurrection. Notably,

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<sup>70</sup> Bieler, p. 104-7. *Si quis laicus per ignorantiam cum Bonosiacis aut ceteris haereticis communicauerit, stet inter catecuminos, id est, ad aliis separatus Christianis, xl diebus et duabus aliis quadragesimis in extremo Christianorum ordine, id est, inter paenitentes, insanae communionis culpam diluat; si uero per contemptum hoc fecerit, id est, postquam denuntiatum illi fuerit a sacerdote ac prohibitum, ne se communionem sinistrae partis maculet, anno integro peniteat et iii xlmis, et duobus aliis annis abstineat se a uino et carnibus et ita post manus inpositionem catholici episcopi altario iungatur.*

Origen, the theologian most often appropriated by Cassian, contemplates the implications of decay or consumption of the body's matter before the resurrection. If a corpse is eaten by wild beasts, Origen says, it becomes *part of* them; just as the food we eat is "absorbed by the veins and becomes part of the constitution of our body." Our bodies are "transformed in carnivorous birds and beasts and become parts of their bodies," Origen describes, contemplating the cycle of ingestion and digestion of matter that will occur before the Last Judgement, "and again, when their bodies are eaten by men or by other animals, they are changed back again and become the bodies of men or of other animals."<sup>71</sup>

The penitential adaptation of this concept extends the purview of penance to the things you *eat*. In the penitential authors' view, imbalances in the body caused by ingested substances would also affect the *self*, splitting the body from the soul. The changeability of the body and its tendency to decay were what made the body and soul distinguishable after all. Augustine says, "Take away death," in this context, corruption or decay, which are the constant process which leads us to death, "and the body is good." The body in itself is not "bad," and although it is made possible by its physical nature, it is *specifically* the decay *itself* which causes the body to veer away from the self.

Consuming foods that were impure—rotten foods, road kill, drink whose color has gone funny, milk in which you've found a dead mouse—meant that you absorbed that impurity into your body. A Galenic physician would have been concerned with these issues too; but a penitential physician would have been concerned *specifically* with the way that this decay caused your body to separate itself from the soul. For this reason, the remedy to be applied was penance. The penitentials provide an extensive catalogue of foods that will require penance if ingested. The

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<sup>71</sup> Chadwick, p. 89.

Penitential of Cummean lists: eating a dead thing unaware; liquor in which a mouse or a weasel is found dead; the flesh of a dead animal (of whose manner of death is unknown); the skin of one's own body, scabs, or lice; your own excreta; any dry food, porridge, or curdled milk in which vermin are found; discolored liquor; and food that has been tainted by a cat. To this already long list of foods of various kinds and in various states of decay, the Bigotian penitential adds: human urine or blood; sperm; animal urine; unclean flesh, carrion, or flesh torn by dogs or beasts; beverage that has been contaminated by a dog; or contaminated by an eagle, magpie, cock, or hen; liquor in which a mouse has drowned; and liquor in which there has been the carcass of a beast.

The convergence between religion and medicine may seem strange to us today, but it is arguably relevant for us moderns to the extent that addressing the decay of the body would be a principal concern for both. And although their cures are different, their methods are not necessarily. The penitential cure applied to ingesting impure foods—usually decayed, sometimes contaminated by animals—is penance. But the religious nature of this cure, and its interest in affecting both parts of the self, does not make it any less medical. Even in medicine today, a medical professional's job does not stop at the administration of antibiotics or pumping of the heart, it also includes reassuring patients; not to mention psychiatrists, who deal with the mental well-being of a patient, which may include depression and anger, which are another way of looking at dejection and wrath. Galenic physicians, who would have applied cures like herbal remedies or blood-letting, *shared* their understanding of the body with the penitential authors, who simply had different cures for physical imbalances. The users of the penitentials were not just allegorically physicians, but holistic doctors of the body *and* soul.

## .3.

*Ingestion and vomiting of consecrated bread*

The ideal condition of the self to medieval theologians was the complete reconciliation of body and soul. This was not possible during this life, but the next. The final “victory” was the “eating that does not consume, the decay that does not devour, the change that transmutes only to changelessness.”<sup>72</sup> Due to the body’s decaying nature, this reversal of process and reconciliation of body and soul was only fleetingly possible in one way during this life: the partaking of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a Christian sacrament, along with penance. It involves eating bread, or a Eucharistic wafer, and wine; these are considered to *be* the flesh and blood of Christ, echoing the Last Supper which Jesus had with his followers before he died, in which he said of eating bread, “Take, eat; this is my body,” and of drinking wine, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood... which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>73</sup> The Eucharist is intimately connected to penance, because it is both what *allows* for the redemption of sinners, but it can only be taken once penance has been performed.

Seen through the Galenic understanding of assimilation through ingestion, the consumption of the Eucharist had significant theological implications. By 1215, orthodox Roman Catholic theology conclusively stated that the Eucharist was not metaphorically God’s flesh and blood—it was *literally* transformed into *flesh* and *blood* from bread and wine by the miracle of transubstantiation. This was codified in the Fourth Ecumenical Council at the Lateran Palace of the Vatican.<sup>74</sup> It became common for the officiating cleric to raise the Eucharistic bread aloft at the point of transubstantiation. This liturgically climactic moment was thought to imbue those who

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<sup>72</sup> Bynum, 42.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew 26:26-29.

<sup>74</sup> Hartnell, p. 168.

witnessed it with all sorts of miraculous powers, notably including protection from spontaneous death.<sup>75</sup> The fleshiness of the Eucharist was taken quite literally. One fourteenth century Frenchwoman took it so literally that it actually made her queasy; the Holy Blood reminded her of the “disgusting afterbirth that women expel in childbirth,” which made her extremely uncomfortable in church.<sup>76</sup> In fourteenth century Wilsnack, in northern Germany, Eucharistic wafers were found in the rubble of a church after battle—and the wafers were said to have shed a tiny, real drop of blood at their very center.<sup>77</sup>

The eleventh century theologian Guibert of Nogent described Christ as a synecdoche, in which the *parts* (the many Eucharistic hosts which are all his flesh) all *contained* the whole. He asserted that in each Eucharistic host was not only a part of Christ, but also the *universitas* of the substance: when we eat the *totus Christus*, we receive the *whole* Christ, while he loses no part. His argument echoes those put forth as early on as the second century, by Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, that eating Christ is a reverse cannibalism, in the sense that when we eat his flesh, we do not assimilate him, but *he* assimilates *us*.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hartnell, p. 168.

<sup>76</sup> Hartnell, p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> Hartnell, p. 173.

<sup>78</sup> Bynum, p. 149.



*Figure 4.* Pages painted black with red drops of blood, representing the blood of Christ, worn, likely as the result of kissing.<sup>79</sup> Although the blood on this page is a *depiction*, due to the deterioration of the pigment it is clear that the owner(s) of this manuscript would have literally touched or kissed the page, as a sort of relic. This is another example, besides the Eucharistic host and the worship of relics, in which physical contact creates a spiritual connection.

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<sup>79</sup> London, British Library, Egerton MS 1821, ff. 1v-2.



Figure 5. Detail of a historiated initial 'G' (of *gula*, gluttony), depicting a glutton vomiting into a bowl and two other men.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> London, British Library, Royal MS 6 E VII, f. 195.

In order to receive the Eucharist, the penitentials assert that you cannot be spiritually *or* physically impure, further cementing the fact that the body and soul are equally implicated in matters of the self, even when it concerns something so spiritually-based as the assimilation into Christ's body. The Bigotian Penitential dedicates a passage to explaining why no one ought to receive the host, unless "he is clean and perfect and nothing mortal is found in him."

Of the fact that no one ought to receive the sacrifice unless he is clean and perfect and nothing mortal is found in him. When Christ had raised up the young girl He commanded to give her to eat, that is, after she had been perfect, whole, and not infirm, that is, made whole by Christ in the presence of Peter and James and John and her father and mother; that is to say, every one, after confessing his faults and destroying them, and after the grace of God has come and the heavenly Father and the Church are present with him, shall then, being whole in good works, receive the sacrifice.<sup>81</sup>

Nothing "mortal" refers to the decay of the body, rather than the body itself; indicated in the above passage by the fact that Christ does not rid the young girl of her *body* for her to eat. Christ rids her of her infirmities (in Latin, *infirmia*, which refers both to general infirmity but also specifically illness) and makes her whole, so that she can eat. The usefulness of this passage in a penitential is to establish one of the stakes of penance: you cannot take the Eucharist unless you have performed penance for your sins. This is because you cannot assimilate into Christ's body in an impure state.

The penitentials specifically preclude sinners from receiving the Eucharist in certain canons, which they phrase as approaching the altar. The altar, according to Columbanus, is "Christ's throne," and "His Body there with His Blood judges those who approach unworthily."

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<sup>81</sup> Bieler, p. 230-33. *De eo quod nemo debet accipere sacrificium nisi sit mundum et perfectum et nihil mortale in eo inuentum. Christus autem cum surrexit puellam, sibi iusit dari manducare .i. postquam perfecta sana esset et non infirma .i. sana a Christo praesente Petro et Iacobo et Iohane et patre et matre, id <est> unus quisque postquam confessus fuerit uitia et postquam ea subplantauerit et postquam gratia Dei uenerit et pater celestis et aecclesia fuerint praesentes ei, tunc sanus in bono opere accipiat sacrificium.*

Therefore *both* “mortal and fleshy sins” must be dealt with before we can take the Eucharist; lest, the penitential specifics, we enter into it with “interior vices and sicknesses of the ailing soul.”<sup>82</sup>

The theology of the Eucharist is intimately connected to the medieval medical understanding of how digestion affects the body. Whereas digesting rotten foods causes a split in the self because it further decays the body, digesting the Eucharist reconciles the self with the body of Christ. This is the final element to explaining the strangeness of the first penance introduced in this thesis, assigned to the vomiting of consecrated bread, and its possible lapping up by a dog. Although I have explored the medical aspects of the assignment of penance itself, the medical understanding of the body is further implicated in understanding just how profane it would be to vomit the Eucharistic host.

There are a few situations in which one might vomit the host, which have different implications. In the first situation, you vomit the host because you got drunk or over-ate. For this offence, Bigotian, Columbanus, and Cummean assign forty days of penance.<sup>83</sup> Bigotian adds that this was because the food was unusual or too rich, the penance is mitigated, and is thirty days.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bieler, p. 106-7. *Confessiones autem dari diligentius praecipitur maxime de commotionibus animi antequam ad missam eatur, ne forte quis accedat indignus ad altare, id est, sic or mundum non habuerit; Melius est enim expectare donec cor canum fuerit et alienum a scandalo ac invidia fuerit quam accedere audacter ad iudicium tribunalis. Tribunal enim Christi altare, et corpus suum inibi cum sanguine iudicat indignos accedentes. Sicut ergo a peccatis capitalibus et carnalibus cauendum est antequam communicandum sit, ita etiam ab interioribus uitii et morbis languentis animae abstinendum est ac abstergendum ante uerae pacis coniunctionem et aeternae salutis conpaginem.*

<sup>83</sup> Bigotian: Bieler, p. 214-15. *Qui sacrificium euomit causa uoracitatis, .xl. diebus.* Columbanus: Bieler, p. 96-7. *Si quis autem inebriauerit se et uomuerit aut saturates nimis sacrificium per hoc euomerit, xl diebus paeniteat.* Cummean: Bieler, p. 130-31. *Sacrificium euomens grauatus saturitate uentris, si in ignem proiecerit, .xx. diebus, sin autem, .xl.*

<sup>84</sup> Bieler, p. 214-15. *Si uero obtentu insoliti cybi pinguioris et non uitio saturitatis sed stomachi, .xxx..*

This is the combined offence of vomiting the host itself, and gluttony; therefore, the penance is heavier. But there is still a penance assigned for vomiting the host, even without the sin of gluttony, because you are sick. For this, Bigotian, Columbanus, and Cummean assign seven days of penance.<sup>85</sup> It is not a sin to be sick; it is the fact of vomiting the host that requires penance. Vomiting the host is profane because it means your body has rejected assimilation into the body of Christ. The bodily reason why is that you're sick; it may also have spiritual reasons, such as taking the Eucharist when your body is impure. But the reason is not important, because the act in itself is damaging to the self, and therefore requires a penitential remedy. The host's consumption by a dog makes it worse. Bigotian and Cummean assign one hundred days of penance to the person in question whose vomit a dog has eaten.<sup>86</sup> There is an additionally reprehensible profanity to having a dog—a lower creature, contact with which even makes food impure—eating vomited consecrated bread, compounding the failed digestion of the body of Christ.

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<sup>85</sup> Bigotian: Bieler, p. 214-15. *Si infirmitatis gratia, xx peniteat.* Columbanus: Bieler, p. 96-7. *Si uero per infirmitatem sacrificium uomere cogatur, vii diebus paeniteat.* Cummean: *Si autem infirmitatis causa, .vii. diebus.*

<sup>86</sup> Cummean: Bieler, p. 112-13. *Si uero canes lambuerint talem uomitum, .c. diebus qui euomit peniteat.* Bigotian: Bieler, p. 214-15. *sic canis lambuerit talem uomitum, .c. diebus qui euomit peniteat.*

Chapter 3  
*Penance and Death*

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.1.  
*Penance and Original Sin*

The scope of the penitentials goes beyond just sin as one would understand it today; it prescribes penance for eating rotten food, or for vomiting the consecrated bread, whether due to gluttony or illness. The passage on receiving the Eucharist in the Bigotian Penitential asserts that one cannot receive the Eucharist if one is infirm, that is, sick or in a state of sin. The contrary of infirmity, *infirmia*, is described another way: *sana*, or healthy and whole. The penitentials address impurities, sin and illness, which drive a wedge in the self, between body and soul.<sup>87</sup>

Sin and eating impure foods are the main wedges covered by the penitentials. Illness comes in rarely, mostly mentioned in eating the Eucharist. The three, however, constitute the scope of the penitentials. The common source of these three afflictions, according to Cassian, is Original Sin. The condition of life, in which the “flesh lusts against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh,” where they are “opposed to each other,” goes back to the “substance of human nature, since the fall of the first man.”<sup>88</sup> Augustine, who was influential in Origen’s time, and whose writings would have been available to the penitential authors in Irish monasteries, described and systematized the theology of Original Sin. His description of it, notably in *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* and the collection *De LXXXIII Quaestionibus*, is one of the most influential

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<sup>87</sup> Bieler, p. 230-33. *De eo quod nemo debet accipere sacrificium nisi sit mundum et perfectum et nihil mortale in eo inuentum. Christus autem cum surrexit puellam, sibi iusit dari manducare .i. postquam perfecta sana esset et non infirma .i. sana a Christo praesente Petro et Iacobo et Iohane et patre et matre, id <est> unus quisque postquam confessus fuerit uitia et postquam ea subplantauerit et postquam gratia Dei uenerit et pater celestis et aecclesia fuerint praesentes ei, tunc sanus in bono opere accipiat sacrificium.*

<sup>88</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 4, ch. 7.

theological sources on Original Sin. Augustine posits that from the first bite of the apple from the tree of life, mankind became “infected” with sin.<sup>89</sup> If Adam and Eve had not defied God—if they had not committed the first sin—human bodies would not have been condemned to decay.<sup>90</sup>

From original sin stem two more consequences in this life: having to eat food of the earth, and pregnancy and menstruation. These consequences do not have to be mediated here through theologians because they are present in *Genesis* itself. In *Genesis* 3, after the Fall, God cursed Adam with having to eat “in pain,” of the ground, and it will bring him “thorns and thistles” as he eats “plants of the field” and bread. And God condemned women to bear children, and everything that comes along with it: “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.”<sup>91</sup>

The food that Adam eats “in pain,” which brings him “thorns and thistles,” is not unlike the food that penitentials prescribe penance against for the way in which it causes the body to decay. The penitentials address pregnancy and menstruation too, which their authors considered to be impure states; ‘afflicted’ women were unfit to “approach the altar,” or receive the Eucharist. In other words, a pregnant or menstruating woman is *infirma*. The Bigotian Penitential says that “During their monthly period women should not enter a church nor receive holy communion. He who has intercourse with his wife during her monthly period shall do penance for twenty

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<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, I, 16. See also Bonaiuti, *The Genesis of St. Augustine’s Idea of Original Sin*, pp. 163-64

<sup>90</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, p. 96.

<sup>91</sup> Genesis 3.16-19.



*Figure 6. Detail of a miniature of the Fall depicting Adam and Eve eating of the Tree of Life.<sup>92</sup>*

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<sup>92</sup> London, British Library, Royal MS 6 E VI, f. 2.

days.”<sup>93</sup> Additionally, food prepared by a pregnant serving woman, or a cleric who lives with one, warrants forty days of fasting on bread and water.<sup>94</sup>

The penitentials cover all of the impurities which are the fallout of Original Sin; not just sin itself, but illness, eating the impure food of the earth, and pregnancy. Original Sin is the root of the decay of the body; it is the theological *reason*, explained by Scripture, given to the *nature* of the body as described in Galenic medicine. This is the axis of the penitentials’ synthesis of religion and medicine.

.2.

*The final split and reunification of the self*

The purpose of the penitentials is to address the symptoms of Original Sin, which is the root illness. The purpose of medicine is to rid one of illness. This would not be possible in this life, because Original Sin is indelibly inscribed in the body of every person. Penance is part of the larger cure that is Christianity and the economy of salvation.

Penance is restricted to this life; as the penitentials themselves indicate, there is no doing penance after death. The Penitential of Finnian in particular twice refers to the time frame of penance: *so long as we are in this body*.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, penance is restricted to the self’s possession of

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<sup>93</sup> Bieler, p. 222-23. *De mulieribus menstruis. Mulieres menstruo tempore non intrent in ecclesiam nec communicent. Qui menstruo tempore coierit, xx dies peniteat.*

<sup>94</sup> Bieler, p. 216-17. *Penitentia bibentis quod intinxerat glangella in utero habens filium uel cohabitationis cum ea .xl. cum pane et aqua.*

<sup>95</sup> The first instance: Bieler, p. 92-3. *Si quis fuerit cuius paruulus absque babtismum abscesserit et per neglegentiam perierat, magnus est crimen animam perdere, sed per penitentiam redimi potest, quia nullum crimen quod non potest ridimi per penitentiam quamdiu sumus in hoc corpore; annum integrum peniteant parentes cum pane et aqua et non maneant in unum lectum.* The second instance: Bieler, p. 86-9. *Si qui<s> laicus maculauerit uxorem proximi sui aut virginem, annum integrum peniteat cum pane et aqua et non intret ad uxorem suam propriam et post annum penitentiae tunc recipiatur ad communionem et det elymosinam pro anima sua*

the body, no matter what the spiritual implications or nature of the sin committed is. Despite the perpetuity of the need for penance, “there is no crime which cannot be expiated through penance,” Finnian promises.<sup>96</sup>

Finnian addresses the possibility of sins which you take with you in death, without having had the chance to perform penance. More specifically, he addresses the sin of an oath to God broken by the coming of death. Of a deathbed vow to God, taken with the intention to fulfill upon recovery, but broken by the onset of death, Finnian says:

(the consequences) will be on his own head, and we will not refuse what we owe to him: we are not to cease to snatch prey from the mouth of the lion or the dragon, that is of the devil, who causes not to snatch at the prey of our souls, even though we may have to follow up and strive (for his soul) at the very end of a man’s life.<sup>97</sup>

In the case of a sin carried into death without the opportunity to do penance, it falls upon God to judge whether to forgive the individual or not. The judgement by God of souls is described in the Bigotian Penitential as the smelting and weighing of ore, gold representing virtue, and lead representing vice. The exact ratio to attain salvation is unknown to any man, for, as Bigotian says, “Who can understand sins?” But there is a balance between sins which will cause death of the soul,

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*et non intret amplius fornicari cum extranea femina quamdiu fuerit in hoc corpore; uel si uirginem, duorum penitentia est annorum, primo cum pane et aqua, in alio xlmas ieiunet et abstineat se a uino et a carnibus et det elemosinas pauperibus et fructum penitentiae in manu[s] sacerdotis.*

<sup>96</sup> Bieler, p. 92-3. *quia nullum crimen quod non potest ridimi per penitentiam.*

<sup>97</sup> Bieler, p. 86-7. *Si qui<s> in ultimo spiritu constitutes fuerit uel si qua constituta sit licet peccatrix uel peccator fuerit et exposcerit communionem Christi, non negandum ei dicimus si promiserit uotum suum Deo et bene agat et accipiat ab eo. Si conuersus fuerit in hunc mundum, impleat quod uouerit Deo; sin autem non impleat uotum quod uouerit Deo, in campum suum erit et nos quod debemus non negabimus ei. Non cessandum est eripere predam ex ore leonis uel draconis, id est de ore diabuli, qui pregam nostre anime deripere non desinit, licet in extremo line uite hominis adfectandum <et> nitendum sit.*

and those which will cause harm, or “loss.”<sup>98</sup> A purely gold soul will be saved by the fire of judgement, because it will be smelted into gold which is soluble with heaven, which is also made of gold; since, Bigotian writes, “since *the gold of that land* which the saints are to inhabit is said to be *good gold*; and as *a furnace tires gold*, so *temptation tries righteous men*.”<sup>99</sup> But those with too much lead will be smelted and found wanting, and sink to hell: “*He is plunged into the deep as lead in a mighty sea*.”<sup>100</sup>

Cassian discusses the end of penance in life. He says there is none, “for those small offenses in which, as it is written, the righteous falls seven times and will rise again penitence will never cease.”<sup>101</sup>

There is a close conceptual connection, and arguably a synonymy between all that splits the self, and death. Sin is just as decay: the slow manifestation of death over time. The condition of life is death, and sin and illness are the presence of death throughout life. In Latin, death (*mors*) is even named from bite (*morsus*), an etymology which illuminates the way that process—infirmary, eating rotten food, the flux of the body—defines life: it is a process of destruction.<sup>102</sup> This is the central anxiety of medieval theologians explored by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Resurrection of the Body*: the way resurrection of the body will be achieved, once we are dead and our soul is split from our body, and the latter decays, is eaten by animals, and fades to dust.

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<sup>98</sup> Bieler, p. 200-201. *Unde credo et Iohannis in epistola sua dicit quaedam esse peccata ad mortem. Quae uero non ad mortem sed ad damnum, non puto facile a quoquam homine posse discerni.*

<sup>99</sup> Bieler, p. 200-201. *Igitur qui saluus erit, per ignem saluus erit, ut si quis aurum per ignem plumbis mixtum indignis dequocat et resoluat, ut efficiantur omnes aurum bonum, quia aurum terrae illius aurum bonum esse dicitur quam habitaturi sunt sancti, et sicut fornax probat aurum ita homines iustos temptatio.*

<sup>100</sup> Bieler, p. 200-201. *Demergitur in profundum tamquam plumban in aqua ualidissima.*

<sup>101</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, coll. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, 149.

The ultimate promise of Christianity is the reconciliation of the soul with the body after death. This is what the Eucharist and penance are, as understood in the penitentials, but rehearsals for: the triumph over the food chain, over decay, over the splitting of the self.<sup>103</sup> Penance is the balm applied to the self as it slowly decays through life, but it is only effective in healing the root illness, Original Sin, when the body and soul are reconciled through salvation.

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<sup>103</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, 149.

## Conclusion

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### .1.

#### *Psychosomatic medicine*

The penitentials are essentially about *self-maintenance*, maintenance of the wholeness, or *sanus*, of the self. The *literal* nature of the connection of religion and medicine, healing and penance, body and soul, is characteristic of penitentials, and characteristic of the early Middle Ages. The application of medical principles in penitentials is to be distinguished from the more metaphorical application of them in the patristic source material. Penance existed already in the patristic period, when the idea of healing the soul already existed. Christ was described as a healer. But with penitentials came the creation, or at least codification of, actual *soul-healers*, who used manuals for the healing of the soul as a *practical* matter. The medicine metaphor became practicable and with that, its implications became quite literal.

In addition, the relationship found here is to be distinguished from later periods, in which medicine emerged as a formal body of knowledge, distinguished from theology.

The literal consequences drawn from the notion of psychosomatic unity and penitential healing are crucial to understanding the penitential genre, especially the idiosyncratic canons that make the least sense to modern readers. The ideology behind this spread far and wide with the proselytizing Irish monks, starting with Columbanus, that went to England, and then the continent, who established many important monasteries. Columbanus, who himself authored a penitential, also authored the Rule of Columbanus that was the equivalent of the Benedictine Rule in Irish monasteries, which ranged from Luxeuil in France to Bobbio in Italy to St. Gall in Switzerland.

## .2.

*Questions for further study*

Cassian writes about medical principles and psychosomatic unity but does not explicitly make the connection to psychosomatic medicine. For Augustine too, the relationship between medicine and religion is metaphorical. In any case, the practical, literal application of *penance* to heal both the body and soul seems to be a particularly penitential idea, or at least, characteristic of sixth and seventh century Ireland. This development may have to do with the milieu in which penitentials were composed, namely monasteries. In the early Middle Ages, people went to monasteries to seek treatment for their illnesses.<sup>104</sup> Hildegard Von Bingen (d. 1179), a German Benedictine abbess, wrote on the Greek physicians and actually treated the sick herself. The formal study and professionalization of medicine did not occur until the establishment of the first universities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, when their local healers could not help, people sought treatment in monasteries. This was likely the case for early Irish monks, who, charged with the literal care of bodies as well as souls, must have grappled with their connection. Unlike penitential authors, the later physicians trained in medieval universities explicitly separated sin and illness. They considered the cause of the latter to be external and physical, the only sin involved being Original Sin, which provided only the genesis of illness. They would have rejected the notion that sin and illness were intimately related in the way they affected the self, body and soul, or that penance could affect illness. Analyzing a broader scope of later medieval sources to see whether this belief

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<sup>104</sup> Flemming, Percy. 1928. "The Medical Aspects of the Medieval Monastery in England." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 12: 722-782. Also, Gackowska, Katarzyna Mądra, Marcin Gackowski, Emilia Głowczewska Siedlecka, Zygmunt Siedlecki, and Sylwia Ziółkowska. 2018. "Medications of Medieval Monastery Medicine," *Journal of Education, Health and Sport* 8(9): 1667-1674.

persisted past the vogue of penitentials would be a different study entirely; so would making any conclusions about the *reason* penitentials so literally conflated medicine and religion.

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