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## **Philip Rousseau. 'Cassian, Contemplation, and the Coenobitic Life', Journal of Ecclesiastical History 26. [photocopie]**

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### **Présentation de la fiche**

Coteb022\_f0509

SourceBoite\_022-14-chem | Cassien

LangueFrançais

TypePhotocopie

RelationNumérisation d'un manuscrit original consultable à la BnF, département des Manuscrits, cote NAF 28730

### **Références éditoriales**

Éditeuréquipe FFL (projet ANR *Fiches de lecture de Michel Foucault*) ; projet EMAN (Thalim, CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne nouvelle).

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Notice créée par [équipe FFL](#) Notice créée le 21/10/2020 Dernière modification le 23/04/2021

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## CASSIAN, CONTEMPLATION AND THE COENOBOITIC LIFE

of God's providence.<sup>1</sup> 'Caro' and 'spiritus' in this context have no particularly substantial quality, but refer rather to human inclinations. Cassian's concern was with a conflict in the sphere of 'voluntas' and 'desideria'.<sup>2</sup> It was a conflict that could be interpreted further as a process of change—a shaking off of the past, a movement forward to a more perfect state: 'et idcirco si carnales concupiscentias de cordibus nostris desideramus extrudere, spiritales in earum locis plantemus protinus voluptates'.<sup>3</sup> Although 'carnalis' and 'spiritualis' are here sharply distinguished—one negative, the other positive in quality—they are also closely linked at a common level, referring as they do to a single-minded effort towards human perfection; an effort that concerns, in both its carnal and its spiritual aspects, the one arena of the human heart.

So far we have only defined our terms, or rather found that definitions are difficult to achieve. Bringing together now these two elements in Cassian's thought, inwardness and vision, it is possible to see with what rich effect he balanced one with another in the setting of the monastic life. In another passage, for example, that examines the connexion between the exterior and the interior life, he shows again how they form a unity, but this time with a clearer reference to contemplative terminology: 'Sicut enim nullum ferme ab eis [the fathers of Egypt] otii tempus excipitur, ita ne meditationi quidem spiritali finis inponitur. Nam pariter exercentes corporis animaeque virtutes exterioris hominis stipendia cum emolumentis interioris exaequant, lubricis motibus cordis et fluctuationi cogitationum instabili operum pondera velut quandam tenacem atque immobilem anchoram praefigentes'.<sup>4</sup> Many of the points mentioned above are here sharply recalled; and Cassian continues: 'ita ut, quid ex quo pendeat, haud facile possit a quoquam discerni, id est utrum propter meditationem spiritalem incessabile manuum opus exerceant, an propter operis iugitatem tam praeclarorum spiritus profectum scientiaeque lumen adquirant'.<sup>5</sup>

There is an apparent merging of activities here that could be misleading: Cassian also considered it expedient that work and prayer should be assigned different and definite periods in the monastic timetable.<sup>6</sup> Yet there is a significant element in the passage: the now familiar distinction between 'exterior' and 'interior' is matched by another, that between 'opus' and 'meditatio'. It is entirely characteristic of Cassian that he was not content to leave distinctions as they stood, but wished rather to combine them in a more vivid picture of asceticism and its aims. He makes the emphasis already noted: that manual labour is ordained entirely for the advantage of spiritual mediation, and that spiritual freedom and the insight of the man of prayer give work its dignity and sense of purpose; but now, since his description refers not only to the types of activity that

<sup>1</sup> *Con.*, iv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Con.*, iv. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Con.*, xii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Inst.*, ii. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Inst.*, iii. 1.



## MANUSCRIPTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE CORRESPONDENCE

of God's creation, and 'the whole world' of which 'the whole world' is the entire globe, the entire universe, the entire creation. The author of the present paper has, however, chosen to limit his discussion to the 'whole world' of which 'the whole world' is the entire globe, the entire universe, the entire creation. The author of the present paper has, however, chosen to limit his discussion to the 'whole world' of which 'the whole world' is the entire globe, the entire universe, the entire creation.

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