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PHILIP ROUSSEAU

His hope is that, 'excoctis ad purum in congregatione fratrum vitiis',¹ he may be numbered among those 'iamque in actuali conversatione perfecti'.² He is concerned with a 'carnalis conflictus'³ that demands many years in community life,⁴ ensuring that the 'letale et intestinum virus', instead of remaining within him, eating away at the roots of his spirituality, may be brought to light, clearly seen and more easily cured.⁵ The hermit, on the other hand, is 'pugnae hominis interioris expertus'.⁶ He chooses the 'solitudinis . . . secreta',⁷ leaving his community in order to enjoy 'divina contemplatio' and the 'intuitus sublimior . . . qui non nisi in solitudine a perfectis solummodo poterit adprehendi'.⁸

Contemplation, therefore, was clearly one of the ideals of the solitary life. Paul and Antony, hermits *par excellence*, were drawn into the desert 'desiderio sublimioris profectus contemplationisque divinae'.⁹ The example of Christ himself was enough to prove, for Cassian, that a withdrawn life was at once more perfect in itself and more in accord with man's purpose as a creature of God: 'per hoc scilicet nos instruens suae secessionis exemplo, ut si interpellare nos quoque voluerimus deum puro et integro cordis affectu, ab omni inquietudine et confusione turbarum similiter secedamus'.¹⁰ It was no less clear, however, that such an ideal, even for those living as hermits, could not be fulfilled in this life. The solitary is condemned to a vocation of longing, which looks beyond the body, of which he cannot but remain aware: 'Ut in hoc corpore conmorantes ad similitudinem quandam illius beatitudinis, quae in futuro repromittitur sanctis, vel ex parte aliqua nos aptare possimus. . . . Haec igitur destinatio solitarii, haec esse debet omnis intentio, ut imaginem futurae beatitudinis in hoc corpore possidere mereatur'.¹¹ The effort to realise these ideals, even imperfectly, will demand in the hermit a practical discipline. In the very conference concerned with the distinction between *πρακτική* and *θεωρητική*, Cassian mentions life in the desert (distinct from life in a monastic community) as one among various ways in which his readers may put practical ascetism into effect.¹² Even when he praises hermits for their complete dedication to the contemplative life, he describes their vocation as 'maior actuque sublimior'.¹³ Such a phrase undermines the contrast he had just made between 'contemplatio' and 'actualis vita'. Clearly, the contempla-

¹ *Inst.*, viii. 18.

² *Con.*, xviii. 4.

³ *Inst.*, v. 19.

⁴ *Inst.*, v. 36; *Con.*, xviii. 8.

⁵ *Con.*, xviii. 8.

⁶ *Con.*, v. 9.

⁷ *Con.*, xviii. 4.

⁸ *Inst.*, viii. 18.

⁹ *Con.*, xviii. 6, although it is striking that their new endeavours against evil were to be pursued '*aperto certamine ac manifesto conflictu*'; at first sight a strange contrast to the 'hidden' disciplines of the coenobitic life.

¹⁰ *Con.*, x. 6.

¹¹ *Con.*, x. 6-7.

¹² *Con.*, xiv. 4.

¹³ *Con.*, first preface.



