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

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inner and personal benefit that prompted his closest attention. He praised the abbot Paul, for example—remote from society, his needs entirely supplied by his own oasis; praised him for making baskets 'pro sola purgatione cordis et cogitationum soliditate ac perseverantia cellae vel acediae ipsius victoria et expugnatione'. These baskets, once made, Paul burnt; and the fruit of his labour was almost entirely interior.[1]

It was this interior effect that gave the life of a monk its meaning. The conquest of gluttony, for example, (like the cleansing of soul referred to by Christ in his parable on the seven devils, in Mt. xii. 43–5) would be fruitless unless, having overcome that vice, the ascetic hurried to establish virtue in his purified heart, before it was possessed by other vices 'more evil than itself'.[2] The conquest of vice was to be effected in this case by the exterior discipline of 'ieiunium corporale'; but full triumph came only with the acquisition of virtue, to some extent at least an inner achievement. The distinction here (as with contemplation) was not one of time. The link between mortification and perfection was not a matter of hard work followed ('quasi in praemio') by years of moral security. 'Ad integritatem mentis et corporis conservandam abstinentia ciborum sola non sufficit, nisi fuerint ceterae quoque virtutes animae coniugatae'.[3] 'Virtus animae' here is not a state, but is linked with 'abstinentia ciborum' as an ascetic method of acquiring perfection. Interior discipline was to be joined with visible self-denial, both mutually dependent means towards one end; and that one end demanded success at the more hidden level of motive, or of an ideal of the self, as well as at the level of visible improvement. The whole passage contains the classic emphasis of the school of Origen, that visible asceticism must be matched by inner perfection; and yet no statement could more forcefully declare the mutual dependence of interior and exterior, as regards both methods and aims.

There were qualities of a special excellence in men, therefore, that could be classified as interior, but were not imprisoned or inaccessible within them. The inner man, like the contemplative, was involved in activity, and in the visible world.

It is instructive to examine how Cassian handled related distinctions, such as that between spirit and flesh. Familiar contrasts occur. In the process of human generation, 'caro' springs from the semen, while the spirit 'peculiariter a deo solo tribuitur'.[4] The early ascetics, Cassian suggested, did not eat until evening because the needs of the body were associated with darkness: the period of light was to be reserved for the task of spiritual mediation.[5]

In assessing the force of such statements, it is important to avoid reading into Cassian's work the more detailed or neater psychology of a

[1] Cassian, *Institutes*, ed. J.-C. Guy (Sources chrétiennes, cix, Paris 1965), x. 24.
[2] *Con.*, v. 25.
[3] *Inst.*, v. 10.
[4] *Con.*, viii. 25.
[5] *Inst.*, ii. 5.

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