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

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concern the ascetic (work and prayer) but also to the areas of personality that become engaged in the activity we gain a much stronger impression of the single purpose, of the complete identification of the individual, body and soul, in every aspect of ascetic endeavour.[1]

Cassian's descriptions of prayer, especially in the *Conferences*, do much to draw these threads together. When he discusses prayer in the context of a relation between interior and exterior, he presents it very rarely as an inward-looking process. The closeness to God that prayer effects is not interpreted as a withdrawal, either from bodily experience or from the companionship of men: it is more an ascent of the spirit. Even in what appear to be ecstatic passages, this is made clear: 'Ita mens quoque nostra si accedentibus vitiis curisque mundanis adgravata non fuerit noxiaeve libidinis umore corrupta, velut naturali puritatis suae beneficio sublevata levissimo spiritalis meditationis adflatu sublimabitur ad superna'.[2] Moreover, the whole process of schooling in prayer is not only intensely energetic, but also dependent on immense and protracted labour. Cassian is most insistent on the active quality of the human mind: 'Haec igitur pro condicione naturae numquam potest otiosa consistere, sed necesse est eam . . . propria mobilitate discurrere et per omnia volitare, donec longo exercitio usuque adsuefacta diuturno, quo vos in cassum dicitis laborare, experiatur et discat quas memoriae suae materias debeat praeparare, erga quas circumagat indefessos volatus et inmorandi robur adquirat, et ita praevaleat adversas inimici suggestiones quibus distrahebatur extrudere atque in illo quem desiderat statu et qualitate durare'.[3] Cassian repeats an earlier assertion, that men have the power to control this movement of the mind: 'quamobrem sicut in illis est instigationis copia, ita in nobis virtus respuendi sive adquiescendi libertas est adtributa'.[4]

This emphasis on discipline is made with reference to every aspect of the ascetic life, every activity, every stage of development. Contemplation itself has a clear function in the vigorous bid of the ascetic for sanctity and perfection: it is defined at first as a careful fixing of the attention upon what Cassian calls the 'scopos' of the monastic life. His explanation of 'scopos' has at first sight an interior quality: 'finis quidem nostrae professionis ut diximus regnum dei seu regnum caelorum est, destinatio vero, id est scopos, puritas cordis, sine qua ad illum finem inpossibile est quempiam pervenire'.[5] Yet 'regnum dei', and even 'regnum caelorum', have an equally interior ring about them, recalling the familar emphasis of Christ, 'regnum dei intra vos est'. This Cassian does in a later sentence: 'intra vos vero nihil aliud esse potest quam scientia aut ignoratio veritatis et vel vitiorum amicitia vel virtutum, per quae aut diabolo aut Christo

[1] See Marsili, *Giovanni Cassiano*, 29.
[2] *Con.*, ix. 4.
[3] *Con.*, vii. 4.
[4] *Con.*, vii. 8, recalling *Con.*, i. 17. For the link with Evagrius, see Marsili, *Giovanni Cassiano*, 94.
[5] *Con.*, i. 4.

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