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# Exercising Obedience: John Cassian and the Creation of Early Monastic Subjectivity

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Exercising Obedience:  
John Cassian and the Creation of Early Monastic Subjectivity

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and  
the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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In Partial Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Joshua Daniel Schachterle

June 2019

Advisor: Gregory Robbins PhD

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### **Abstract**

John Cassian (360-435 CE) started his monastic career in Bethlehem. He later traveled to the Egyptian desert, living there as a monk, meeting the venerated Desert Fathers, and learning from them for about fifteen years. Much later, he would go to the region of Gaul to help establish a monastery there by writing monastic manuals, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. These seminal writings represent the first known attempt to bring the idealized monastic traditions from Egypt, long understood to be the cradle of monasticism, to the West.

In his *Institutes*, Cassian comments that “a monk ought by all means to flee from women and bishops” (*Inst.* 11.18). This is indeed an odd comment from a monk, apparently casting bishops as adversaries rather than models for the Christian life. In this paper, therefore, I argue that Cassian, in both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, is advocating for a distinct separation between monastics and the institutional Church.

In Cassian’s writings and the larger corpus of monastic writings from his era, monks never referred to early Church fathers such as Irenaeus or Tertullian as authorities; instead they cited quotes and stories exclusively from earlier, venerated monks. In that sense, monastic discourse such as Cassian’s formed a closed discursive system, consciously excluding the hierarchical institutional Church. Furthermore, Cassian

argues for a separate monastic authority based not on apostolic succession but rather on what I term apostolic praxis, the notion that monastic practices such as prayer and asceticism can be traced back to the primitive church.

I supplement my study of Cassian's writings with Michel Foucault's analysis of the creation of subjects in order to examine what I believe to be Cassian's formation of a specifically Egyptian form of monastic subjectivity for his audience, the monks of Gaul. In addition, I employ Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and pastoral power to demonstrate the effect Cassian's rhetoric would have upon his direct audience, as well as many other monks throughout history.

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Next I would like to thank my fellow student and the sole other member of my writing group, Rob Heaton. Without his invaluable help, this dissertation would not only have remained unfinished but would only have been half as good.

Finally, I reserve my greatest thanks for my family. My wife Lisa is responsible for encouraging me to start this doctoral program. Thereafter, she kept me afloat more times than I can count with her love and support. This is her PhD, too. In addition, my sons, Ben and Aidan, have been endlessly patient as I spent long hours away from them in libraries and my office rather than spending time with them. You both have my heartfelt gratitude.

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
The Journey of John Cassian	1
A Brief Survey of Cassian Studies	8
Outline of Chapters	12
Chapter Two: Cassian's Context and Asceticism as Basis for Valid Authority	16
Cassian in Egypt and the Origins of Monasticism	17
Cassian's Sources: Origen of Alexandria and Evagrius Ponticus	24
Cassian's Context: Fifth-Century Gaul	30
Asceticism as Mark of Authority	35
Rhetorical Authority of the Desert Fathers	48
Conclusion	51
Chapter Three: Foucault, Cassian, and the Creation of Subjects	53
Foucault and the Formation of Subjects	54
Foucault's Three Methods for the Creation of Subjects	56
Cassian and Foucault's Three Methods for Creating Subjects	58
Disciplinary Power	60
Cassian and Disciplinary Power	64
Pastoral Power	72
Cassian and Pastoral Power	75
Biopower	77
Cassian and Biopower	78
Conclusion	80
Chapter Four: Conflicts Between Monasticism and the Church	82
Subordination of Clergy to Monks	84
Attempts at Forced Ordination of Monks	86
Hagiography as Rhetorical Weapon	90
The Origenist Controversy	96
Conclusion	100
Chapter Five: Cassian's Rhetorical Attempts to Separate Monasticism from the Church	103
Cassian and Castor	107
Monastic Exemplars: Prophets and Apostles	109
Appeals to Distinct Monastic Traditions	117
Subtle Denigration of Church Hierarchs or their Theological Heroes	128
The Eucharist: A Case Study for a Closed Monastic System	135
Conclusion	137

Chapter Six: Conclusion	141
Synthesis	141
Implications for Further Study	155
Bibliography	161

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **The Journey of John Cassian**

At the end of the fourth century CE, a war had been ignited between two factions of Egyptian monks. The alleged subject of the dispute was the corporeality (or incorporeality) of God. According to the fifth century Church History written by Socrates Scholasticus, the less educated monks all posited that God had a body, that in fact this body was the divine image in which humans had been created (Gen. 1:26). Socrates also notes that the more educated monks believed the opposite: God, as an unlimited being, could not be circumscribed by a body or subject to the passions unfailingly associated with bodies.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the controversy had been stirred up not by the monks themselves but by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria.

Socrates notes that Theophilus had originally been “expressly teaching that the Divine Being is wholly incorporeal.”<sup>2</sup> This apparently enraged a sizable group of uneducated monks who then essentially rioted outside Theophilus’s home, even threatening to put him to death.<sup>3</sup> Theophilus, fearing for his life, approached the monks

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<sup>1</sup>Socrates, translated by Henri de Valois, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates: Comprising a History of the Church in Seven Books, from the Accession of Constantine, A.D. 305, to the 38th Year of Theodosius II, Incl. a Period of 140 Years*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 6.7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

and contritely offered to change his mind on the matter. The monks then demanded that Theophilus explicitly condemn not only his previous position on the issue, but also the works of Origen, the third-century scholar and theologian these monks viewed as the source of the notion of a disembodied divinity. Indeed, Socrates quotes Theophilus as saying “I will readily do what you require: and be not angry with me, for I myself also disapprove of Origen's works, and consider those who countenance them deserving of censure.”<sup>4</sup> Theophilus’s life was saved and the monks were appeased. However, this was not the end of the controversy.

There were, during Theophilus’s time as bishop, four monks, known collectively as the Tall Brothers, who were well-respected in and around Alexandria. Theophilus himself admired them, both for their holiness and their learning. This resulted in his forcibly ordaining one of them, Dioscorus, as bishop of Hermopolis against his will (as this dissertation will discuss later, this was a common practice among Egyptian bishops).<sup>5</sup> Theophilus also asked two of the other monks to work in the church with Dioscorus, which the brothers reluctantly agreed to do. However, Socrates writes that the monks “were dissatisfied because they were unable to follow philosophical pursuits and ascetic exercises” and that in addition, “they thought they were being spiritually injured, observing [Theophilus] to be devoted to gain, and greedily intent on the acquisition of wealth.”<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the monks were sufficiently frustrated with this

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<sup>4</sup> Socrates, *EH*, 6.7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

behavior and returned to their cells in the desert. In retaliation for their abandonment of him, Theophilus sent out a letter to the surrounding monasteries, telling them that the Tall Brothers, in direct conflict with his official decree, believed God to be incorporeal and that therefore no monk should listen to or credit any doctrines they espoused.<sup>7</sup> The result, according to Socrates, was that “the more ignorant [of the monks] who greatly exceeded the others in number, inflamed by an ardent zeal and without knowledge, immediately raised an outcry against their brethren.”<sup>8</sup>

The end to this conflict came when Theophilus, having armed the uneducated monks for use as his henchmen, marched with them out to Nitria, the monastic settlement of the Tall Brothers and their faction in the Egyptian desert, and forcibly evicted them from the area.

A division being thus made, both parties branded each other as impious; and some listening to Theophilus called their brethren 'Origenists,' and 'impious' and the others termed those who were convinced by Theophilus 'Anthropomorphitæ.' On this account a violent altercation arose, and an inextinguishable war between the monks. Theophilus on receiving intimation of the success of his device, went to Nitria where the monasteries are, accompanied by a multitude of persons, and armed the monks against Dioscorus and his brethren; who being in danger of losing their lives, made their escape with great difficulty.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Socrates, *EH*, 6.7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, *EH*, 6.7.

The Tall Brothers escaped to Jerusalem with approximately eighty other monks. To this day, the Eastern Orthodox Church mourns this occasion on July 10.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that among those fleeing was John Cassian.<sup>11</sup>

Cassian was born around 360 C.E., probably in the region of Scythia Minor (now Romania and Bulgaria) and well-educated in Latin and Greek. He started his monastic career at a monastery in Bethlehem where he spent three years as a novice.<sup>12</sup> He later traveled with a friend and fellow monk, Germanus, to the Egyptian desert, visiting well-known monasteries, living there as a monk, meeting some of the most eminent senior monks, and learning from them for about fifteen years.<sup>13</sup> Much later, he secured his place in the history of monasticism when he went to the region of Gaul to help establish a monastery there by writing monastic manuals, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. These seminal writings represent the first known attempt to bring the idealized monastic traditions from Egypt, long understood to be the cradle of monasticism, to the West. Eventually, they became the basis of the *Rule of St. Benedict* and subsequent Western monastic rules. Cassian is venerated as a saint by both the Roman Catholic and the

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<sup>10</sup> The Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates this occasion as the “Myriad (10,000) Venerable Fathers of the desert and caves of Nitria, martyred by the impious Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria.” Socrates, however, says nothing of any monks being killed in this altercation. Moreover, even if some were martyred, the number 10,000 is almost certainly hyperbolic.

<sup>11</sup> Although we know that Cassian lived and practiced in Scetis at the time of the Tall Brothers’ expulsion, he does not write of his exit from Egypt explicitly. However, the next time he is referred to in ancient writings he is with the Tall Brothers in Constantinople under the protection of John Chrysostom. He then goes to Rome to advocate for Chrysostom in Sozomen, *Eccl. Hist.*, VII.26.

<sup>12</sup> John Cassian and Boniface Ramsey, translator, *The Conferences*, (New York: Newman, 1997), I.1. All English quotations from *The Conferences* will be from this translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>13</sup> Cassian, John, *The Institutes*, translated by Colm Luibheid, *Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). See Introduction to translation of *Conferences*, written by Owen Chadwick, 1.

Eastern Orthodox Churches. His monastic writings continued to have an immense influence on other Christian writers well into the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup>

One of the first things a reader notices in Cassian's writings is his insistence on the practice of solitude, increasing gradually and systematically throughout a monk's life, as necessary for the achievement of spiritual and moral perfection. He writes, for example, that solitude allows the monk "to have a mind bare of all earthly things and, as much as human frailty permits, to unite it thus with Christ."<sup>15</sup> Such prescriptive solitude shapes the subjectivity of individual monks by purging all human influence from monastic selves, and then reconstituting them with only the divine as a formative source. However, Cassian's recommendation for individual perfection, which he had no doubt learned from his Egyptian elders, had a far more ambitious aim.

By the beginning of the fifth century when Cassian was writing, monks in Egypt and Palestine could refer to a veritable litany of their own monastic traditions, both oral and written, which appear to have all but ignored much of earlier Christian theological tradition. In Cassian's writings, as well as the larger corpus of monastic writings from his era, monks never referred to early Church fathers such as Irenaeus or Tertullian as

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<sup>14</sup> "Already in the fifth century two abridgments of *The Institutes* were made in Gaul and Africa, the former of which, by Eucherius of Lyons and entitled *Epitomes operum Cassiani*, has survived and appears in PL 50.867-894. In the sixth century Benedict prescribed the reading of *The Conferences* (in *Reg.* 42.3) and of both *The Institutes* and *The Conferences* (in *Reg.* 73.5), while Cassiodorus recommended *The Institutes* to his monks at Vivarium in his work *De inst. div. litt.* 29 (PL 70.1144). Cassian inspired, sometimes without even being mentioned by name, such major Western thinkers as Gregory the Great (d. 604), Alcuin (d. 804), Rhabanus Maurus (d. 856), Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129), and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who cites him more than a dozen times in the section on moral theology of his *Summa Theologiae*." Cassian, John and Boniface Ramsey, translator, *The Conferences*, (New York: Newman, 1997), preface, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIX.8.4. "Heremitae vero perfectio est exutam mentem a cunctis habere terrenis eamque, quantum humana inbecillitas valet, sic unire cum Christo."

authorities; instead they cited either scripture – almost always in allegorical interpretations – or quotes and stories exclusively from earlier, venerated monks.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, monastic discourse such as Cassian’s formed a closed system, consciously excluding the hierarchical institutional Church. Thus, the thesis of this dissertation is that Cassian insisted on the maintenance of monasticism as a closed discursive system so that it could achieve autonomy, becoming separate from, rather than subject to, the institutional church. That is, all of monastic discourse would ultimately refer only to itself, even if this meant stretching the definition of “monastic” to include prophets from the Hebrew Bible and the apostles. In this sense, I believe that the solitary monk may have been, for Cassian, a kind of synecdoche for a larger, ideal monastic system.

I would add that I do not argue for Cassian as a revolutionary. I find no evidence that he was looking to destroy the institutional church. Rather, I believe he wanted to establish monasticism and the institutional church as parallel tracks, both fully functioning toward the *telos* of salvation, but not overlapping in terms of authority. In fact, I will argue that Cassian establishes the basis for monasticism’s authority in a manner paralleling that of the church’s authority. I have chosen to call this basis *apostolic praxis*.<sup>17</sup> In short, Cassian will place far greater emphasis on practice than

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<sup>16</sup> “This emphasis on principles, on techniques that had little reference to the personalities involved, shows how the discipline of the spiritual life had come to depend less on the insight and authority of holy men, and more on a sense of corporate tradition, custom, and experience.” Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the age of Jerome and Cassian*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 198. One monk tells a novice “If you can’t be silent, you had better talk about the sayings of the [monastic] Fathers than about the Scriptures; it is not so dangerous.” Benedicta Ward, translator, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), Poemen, 4.

<sup>17</sup> I would like to thank my colleague, Rob Heaton, for the neologism, suggested to me while he was reviewing a draft of this dissertation.

belief, surely a dangerous undertaking in post-Nicene Egypt where heresiology was reaching its peak. In addition, just as the institutional church traces its authority back through each successive bishop to the apostles, Cassian will trace the practices he defines as proper monastic living back to the apostles and the primitive church. Ideally, this would give monks an autonomy that, as is clear from the conflict above, was not bestowed upon them and never would be.

It is beyond the scope of this project to make an argument about the entire institution of early Christian monasticism. In fact, because there is such a large corpus of writings both by and about early monastics, I will limit myself to Cassian's writings principally the *Conferences* and the *Institutes*, with additional contributions from the *Apophthegmata Patrum (AP)*, and other monastic documents from roughly the same era (late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). My intent is not to argue that all monastics saw themselves as ideally separate from the Church. Rather, I plan to show that Cassian and the group of educated monks with whom he had associated saw such a separation as an ideal form of Christianity. The violent conflict between the bishop of Alexandria and Cassian's monastic community, based as it was on the bishop's apparently self-serving political machinations, could only have confirmed his desire to separate monks from an errant Church hierarchy. Perhaps this explains his assertion that "a monk ought by all means to flee from women and bishops."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Cassian, and Boniface Ramsey, translator, *The Institutes*, (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), XI.18. All quotations from *The Institutes* will be from this translation unless otherwise noted. "[O]mnimodis monachum fugere debere mulieres et episcopos."

## A Brief Summary of Cassian Studies

In order to situate my research in the field and justify its scope, I offer here a brief survey of significant studies on John Cassian. The standard for Cassian studies was set in 1998 by Columba Stewart's *Cassian the Monk*. This monograph begins with a solid biographical sketch of Cassian, based though it is on the scanty source material available, followed by an analysis of his theology. This analysis includes confronting the accusations of Semipelagianism rendered against him by Augustine's follower Prosper of Aquitaine, a charge Stewart competently argues is nonsense. Instead, Stewart establishes clearly that while Cassian's ascetical theology required that monks put forth effort toward perfecting themselves, such effort would never be sufficient for salvation without that divine grace over which no person has control.<sup>19</sup> While Stewart does an admirable job connecting Cassian's life and theology, he does not address the political implications of Cassian's theology viz a viz the power dynamics inherent in the type of monastic system advocated for in both Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences*.

Another well-researched work addressing Cassian's theology is Robert Rea's dissertation *Grace and Free Will in John Cassian*. Like Stewart, Rea confronts the erroneous notion that Cassian rejected the necessity of divine grace in order to protect his robust conception of free will. Rea goes on to explicate Cassian's writings, finding that for Cassian, grace and free will are both necessary and coexistent. In fact, Rea concludes that Cassian finds grace and free will interacting in two distinct but compatible ways.

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<sup>19</sup> Columba Andrew Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 78.

Sometimes grace acts directly on the heart, with the human will responding in kind. Other times, grace acts by waiting for human effort and then assisting it to come to fruition. In both cases, however, Cassian sees the entire process overseen by God in the best interests of each human being.<sup>20</sup> As with Stewart's work, though, Rea's writing does not address or even acknowledge issues of power and subjectivity I find inherent in Cassian's writings.

One book that does address these dynamics, albeit in a different way from my own research, is *Tradition and Theology in St. John Cassian* written by Augustine Casiday. In particular, Casiday begins his book by acknowledging that while many monastic writers in Cassian's time wrote extensive histories of the monks of Egypt, Cassian's purpose was completely different. Cassian instead was attempting "to influence the history of the monks of Gaul" and indeed "acknowledged that in his writings he aimed to propagate a certain tradition."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the tradition of the book's title was the monastic way of life Cassian had learned in Egypt and was attempting to establish among existing monasteries in Gaul. This approach toward Cassian's goal in his writings aligns with my own in that it recognizes that Cassian was in a position of rhetorical power, having lived with and learned from the widely respected monks of Egypt. However, while Casiday looks carefully at Cassian's attempt to shape the subjectivity of Gallican monks he ignores what I find to be at least as important: relations between monasticism and the institutional church.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert F. Rea, "Grace and Free Will in John Cassian," (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Louis University, 1990), 152-205.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St John Cassian*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 4.

Finally, in a work I found both revealing and useful to my own work, Richard Goodrich's *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-century Gaul*, elucidates the Gallican sociopolitical context into which Cassian brought his Egyptian monastic teachings. While most books on Cassian deal primarily with his background as a monk in Egypt, Goodrich notes that attempting to reform already-established monasteries in Gaul was akin to stepping into a minefield. Monks and clerics in Gaul were generally drawn from the upper classes, and the whole notion of asceticism and renunciation which was *de rigueur* in Egypt was anathema to a culture in which the wealth and status into which one had been born continued to carry weight even in the monastery.<sup>22</sup> Goodrich's research exposes the conflicted world into which Cassian was attempting to bring reforms from an alien culture and theology. In other words, Cassian was not merely struggling to correct monks' behavior like a strict teacher entering an unruly class; rather, he was confronting an entire power dynamic in which his ideas of renunciation and asceticism as the *sine qua non* of monastic life would have seemed ridiculous if not heretical. In order to achieve his goal, Cassian used rhetoric which situated him as the latest in a long line of venerable ascetics, beginning with the apostolic age and continuing through Anthony and the monks of Egypt with whom he had lived and studied.<sup>23</sup> While Goodrich's book addressed these power dynamics and the role they played in Cassian's attempted reformation in Gaul, he kept his study strictly delimited

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<sup>22</sup> Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-century Gaul*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 6,

within monastic circles, all but ignoring power relations between monks and clergy/bishops.

While this is hardly an exhaustive list, I believe that my research fills a gap in Cassian studies, one that addresses power dynamics in Cassian's writings while also confronting Cassian's history and, I will argue, antipathy toward the place of bishops and clergy in authority over monastics.

Cassian was a man haunted by a ghost. Since the Alexandrian bishop Theophilus had expelled the more meditative sect of monks like Cassian from the Egyptian desert, he would likely have viewed that form of contemplative monasticism – the right kind of monastic practice, in his opinion – as dead, a murdered corpse to which he could not help but cling mournfully. After his sojourn in Constantinople with John Chrysostom and subsequent travels to Rome and elsewhere, he traveled to Gaul, a place where according to him, monasticism and its accompanying asceticism were being atrociously practiced.<sup>24</sup> It is at this point, when bishop Castor asked Cassian to write practice manuals for the monks of the region, that Cassian saw the opportunity to resurrect, to re-incarnate the corpse of his beloved Egyptian monasticism.<sup>25</sup> He would start by embodying this form himself as an example to Gallican monks, showing them correct practice as fulfilled in his own aging, ascetic body. From there, with Cassian's knowledgeable instruction in writings, this embodiment could only spread through the bodies of other monks. Through

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<sup>24</sup> In the preface to his *Institutes*, Cassian writes that his patron's "wish is to establish in [his] own province, which lacks such things, the institutes of the Eastern and especially of the Egyptian cenobia." Cassian, *Institutes, preface*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> There is no extant evidence for why Cassian traveled to Gaul. He may have been summoned there from Rome by bishop Castor or sent there by the bishop of Rome at the time. Either way, the evidence stops at Cassian's journey to Rome and only picks up again with the writings he accomplished in Marseilles.

this training, a stronghold of what Cassian clearly believed to be the proper form of monastic life could proliferate, apart from any meddlesome and destructive influence of priests and bishops who had never been monks. Many of these hierarchs didn't understand the ins and outs of reforming one's self, of breaking the old self down until nothing remained and then recreating that self according to divine sources only. This dissertation is the story of Cassian's attempt, through his writings, to recreate the heaven on earth he believed he had experienced in the Egyptian desert with his monastic mentors, to reinvigorate the cadaver of the way of life that would truly lead monks to salvation. In order to make my case, this dissertation will proceed in the following order.

### **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter two's purpose is to establish the context within which Cassian is writing. I begin with his Egyptian context, the place and time in which he learned how to be a monk from the men he considered masters of the monastic vocation. This includes the backgrounds for Cassian's seminal monastic writings and their sources.

I then skip ahead to the context in which Cassian wrote both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. This is relevant because while I argue that Cassian is trying to separate the institution of monasticism from that of the church, it is necessary to formulate a picture of what the church of Gaul actually was in the early fifth century. This picture includes the turbulent politics of the time in which Rome had lost the province to Germanic invaders and had only reconquered the region a few years before Cassian's arrival. This instability in turn had thrown the elite of Gaul into confusion, making it difficult to know whether to support the various usurpers to the throne or to continue to advocate for Roman control in the region. This turmoil among the wealthy had, strangely, convinced many wealthy men

of Gaul to become monks, believing that if they “stored up treasure in heaven,” then heaven would preserve their social rank in the world to come. Finally, we must look at the ways in which Gallican monasticism (and asceticism) differed greatly from that of Egypt, causing Cassian to accuse the Gallican monks of grave errors in their practice and eliciting suggestions, not to say commands, from him in order to right the listing ship of Gallican monasticism.

The aim of chapter three is to establish how Cassian’s creation of monastic subjectivity creates monks for whom monastic identity is necessarily separate from other parts/roles within the institutional Church. Thus in chapter two, I use Michel Foucault’s notion of the creation of subjects to analyze Cassian’s formation of a specifically Egyptian form of monastic subjectivity for the Gallican monks. In discussing Foucault, I detail his three modes of subjectification: First, modes of investigation create subjects as objects of knowledge; second, practices and procedures divide subjects both from within, and from other subjects according to standards of norm and deviance; and third, practices and procedures of self-management encourage subjects to transform themselves as subjects in order to meet an ideal. After establishing examples of these three modes from Cassian’s own writings, I discuss how Cassian’s use of subjectification is geared toward the creation of self-governing monks who, even in total solitude, police themselves. In addition, I argue that Cassian’s rhetorical shaping of monastic subjectivity uses three of Foucault’s principal modalities of power: disciplinary power, achieved through surveillance and the creation of particular forms of knowledge around monastic and ascetic practice, pastoral power, in which Cassian himself plays the role of shepherd to the monasteries’ flock and biopower, in which power is exercised

through the gathering of data about a population. The interplay and overlap of these three forms of power will then inform my analysis of Cassian's rhetorical aims and methods.

In chapter four I establish that conflicts between the Church and monasteries or individual monks were not simply figments of Cassian's (or my) imagination but rather matters of historical record which I argue could have easily induced a type of monastic separatism in Cassian's writings. These conflicts include the Origenist Controversy which resulted in Cassian and his faction being ousted from the monastic community of Scetis in Egypt, frequent attempts by the Church to ordain monks forcefully, due to the monks' overwhelming popularity among laypeople, the extraordinary lengths to which monks would go to avoid ordination (running away, self-mutilation, purposely ruining their own reputations, etc.), and the *Life of Antony* written by a bishop and portraying Antony as a heresy fighter on the side of bishops vs. Antony's letters which portray him as a contemplative focused on right practice over against right belief. This last analysis will establish that bishops, aware of the popularity as well as the reputation for holiness and wisdom the monks had among laypeople, attempted in myriad ways to coopt the lives of these monks, from forcing them to become part of the institutional church to rewriting their histories with a bias toward church hierarchies.

Chapter five will verify that Cassian is explicitly advocating for a clear separation between monasticism and the Church. In this chapter, I appeal to evidence from Cassian's writings where he envisions an increasing distance between monasticism and the Church. Cassian writes, for example, that monks should "flee from women and bishops;"<sup>26</sup> both are a temptation and distraction to the ascetic monk. Theophilus, bishop

of the church of Alexandria, expelled Cassian and his fellow monks from their monastic paradise ostensibly because of specific theological differences, specifically those around the Church's official decree that God was embodied. Cassian also encourages total dependence on the traditions and practices of his monastic predecessors, excluding other Church fathers and theologians. In addition, he writes that monks should treat their ascetic way of life as the Christian norm – only ascetics are truly living the ideal Christian life. Finally, Cassian and other monastic writings quote only two authoritative sources: Scripture and the sayings/stories of other monks.

To conclude, chapter six will sum up the case I have made, arguing that indeed Cassian's intention was not simply to correct a well-intentioned but ill-informed Gallican monastic practice, but rather to gather the monks of Gaul together in order to create a correct and separate institution, uncorrupted by the church's whims, both political and theological. I then discuss the implications of such a conclusion (the "so what," if you will). First, had this been executed as Cassian may have intended, it very well may have created a very early "reformation," in which the church was split between monastics and clergy. In this scenario, the popularity of monks among lay people might easily have caused the decline of clergy-centered Christianity, causing a complete turnabout in church orthodoxy. Had this occurred, with monasticism's emphasis on ascetic practice, it is safe to say that the wealth of the church might never have accrued in the way it did, quite possibly lessening church political power and influence.

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<sup>26</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XI.18. "Omnimodis monachum fugere debere mulieres et episcopos."

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Cassian's Context and Asceticism as Basis for Valid Authority**

I begin this chapter with an analysis of Cassian's former context in the monastic culture of Egypt. It was this culture that shaped his views and convinced him of the correct way to live the monastic life which he would attempt to pass on to the monks of Marseilles. I then move on to the formative sources of Cassian's thought and writing, namely Origen of Alexandria and Evagrius Ponticus. Next, I move on to the church of fifth-century Gaul, whence Cassian writes both his *Institutes* and *Conferences*. Since my ultimate argument is that Cassian wanted a monasticism separate from the institutional Church, as I stated in the introduction, we must determine what the "institutional church" was in the sociopolitical context in which Cassian was writing. Thereafter, I discuss Cassian's conception of asceticism as the mark of true authority. This section demonstrates that Cassian's definition of asceticism differed markedly from that of the Gallican monks to whom he was writing. Gallican monks seemed to share the Church's notion of asceticism as occasional – perhaps even optional – but certainly secondary to participation in the sacraments. Cassian, again playing the role of expert on Egyptian monasticism, outlined the true practice of asceticism which would indeed confer authority on monks who practiced correctly. These practices included a moderate rule of fasting and prayer – though strictly adhered to – by which monks could mark themselves

and their bodies as worthy of authority. Ascetics both transform themselves internally and give visible evidence through emaciated bodies, lack of sleep and few or no possessions, that they are perfected. Since the Church did not value or enforce asceticism strictly like monks, Cassian would have viewed its institutional aspects, including hierarchs, as therefore less authoritative than the traditions and practices of Egyptian monasticism.

### **Cassian in Egypt and the Origins of Monasticism**

Alexandria was an anomalous city in the Roman Egypt of the third century. For one thing, it was a Greek-speaking city surrounded by a sea of Coptic-speaking Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> More significantly for my purposes, its citizens considered themselves set apart from the rest of Egypt by virtue of their cosmopolitan way of life. Ancient documents refer to Alexandria as if it were next to Egypt, rather than part of it (*Alexandria ad Aegyptum*).<sup>2</sup> Throughout the centuries, it could boast of a sophisticated and varied intellectual environment, including the Great Library which was destroyed during the civil war there (48-47 BCE), as well as well-known intellectuals and philosophers such as Euclid, Ptolemy, Philo, and Plotinus. It is thus no surprise that the vast majority of monastic literature, connected as it was to the city of Alexandria, was composed in Greek.<sup>3</sup> As Christianity began to spread into the majority of the Roman Empire, monastics would become its new philosophers.

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<sup>1</sup> Harmless, William, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Three distinct types of monasticism formed in Egypt: eremitic, or the solitary life; cenobitic, or large communities living in monasteries; and small groups of monks called ‘lavras’ or ‘sketes,’ usually formed around a senior monk or teacher. While there is no unambiguous historical record of who the first Christian monk was, Antony (c. 251-356 CE) has traditionally been named father of Christian monasticism, and specifically, eremitic monasticism, at least since Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote his hagiography in the fourth century. I will discuss Antony and his significance for Egyptian monasticism in a further chapter. For now, suffice it to say that Antony was a hermit, living entirely alone in the Egyptian desert for at least the first twenty or so years of his monastic career. As a celebrated monk, Antony thus became the first model for monks, many of who followed his example, moving to the desert and inhabiting caves, abandoned temples or mausoleums, or simple cells made from mud bricks.<sup>4</sup> Later, a former Roman soldier named Pachomius formed the first cenobitic monastery (ca. 318-323) at Tabennisi in the Thebaid, going on to form several more thereafter.<sup>5</sup> Finally, though there is no such origin story about lavras, there are ample examples of stories and sayings coming out of such small communities in the monastic literature of the time.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>4</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 433. See also *Apophthegmata Patrum (AP)*, Sisoës, 32 and Phocas, 1 for explicit mention of lavras.

As noted before, Cassian began his monastic career in Palestine, living in a monastery in Bethlehem.<sup>7</sup> After living there for several years, he departed sometime in the mid-380s CE<sup>8</sup>, with another monk named Germanus, for the Egyptian desert, first the Nile Delta and then subsequently to Kellia and Scetis, to meet some of the monastic heroes he had heard about from a traveling Egyptian monk. Besides leaving Bethlehem in order to meet the Egyptian monks, Cassian writes also that his cenobitic community in Bethlehem was deficient in its discipline, a foreshadowing of the polemic tone he would later take with the Gallican monks.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Cassian writes that monks liked to go to sleep after the night office and at the same time, were inflexible in their rule of fasting, refusing to meet the far more important requirements of hospitality for travelers on fast days.<sup>10</sup> That is, they were too lenient on some aspects of practice and too strict on others, a clear problem of incorrect priorities.

Arriving in Egypt, Cassian and Germanus visited some of the most eminent monks, and eventually put down roots there, staying for about fifteen years. Columba

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<sup>7</sup> Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6. Cassian specifically writes of “our own monastery, where our Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and deigned to go through the states of his human infancy” (*Inst.*, 3.4.1)

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 7. Cassian’s lack of detail about his own past, while perhaps an admirable sign of humility in the ethos of monks in Egypt, is often frustrating for Cassian scholars.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Cassian writes that the monks in Bethlehem would go back to sleep after morning prayers rather than doing some kind of manual labor as they should. Cassian, *Institutes*, III.4.2).

<sup>10</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, V.24.

Stewart writes that Cassian left Bethlehem for Egypt some time in the 380's CE and, because Cassian mentions the festal letter of Theophilus which started the Origenist Controversy and ended with Cassian's exile, we can reliably date the controversy to approximately 399-400 CE.<sup>11</sup> Choosing neither the eremitic nor the cenobitic way of life, Cassian apparently lived in a small community which included the aforementioned Tall Brothers and, more significantly, Evagrius Ponticus. Evagrius had abandoned a promising ecclesiastical career for the rigors of desert asceticism. His ideas, though Cassian never mentions him by name, would have a profound effect on Cassian's own notions of what correct monastic practice meant.<sup>12</sup>

The most important mandate of Egyptian monasticism was renunciation. This was the key concept intended to completely remake the individual and thus included several levels. First, the monk was to renounce all social ties, including family, friends and village, town, or city. The *Apophthegmata Patrum (AP)* contains several stories in which distraught family members venture out into the merciless Egyptian desert in an attempt to reclaim a monk, only to find that the monk is unwilling to return, indicating that the transformation beyond his original social identity was already complete.<sup>13</sup> In short, to renounce social ties was to undergo a kind of living death, as Peter Brown puts it, "the self-imposed annihilation of [one's] social status."<sup>14</sup> Next, monks were expected to

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<sup>11</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 8. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, *Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, *AP*, Poemen, 76 and Mark, Disciple of Abba Silvanus, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 214.

renounce all personal possessions, including the security of wealth and any other physical objects to which they might be attached. Again, the point of such renunciation was untying the thread that bound the monk to a worldly identity.<sup>15</sup> Monks were to depend on God alone for their needs.<sup>16</sup> Finally, monks were to renounce their very lives, no longer valuing their survival above all, but rather acting as if they were the least deserving of all creatures. In monastic parlance, this extreme renunciation of self was called humility (Greek: ταπεινότητα; Latin: *humilitas*). This was the final renunciation and was considered by many to be the *sine qua non* of true monastic life.<sup>17</sup>

It was this theme of total renunciation that undergirded everything Cassian would attempt to teach Gallican monks in both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. As we shall see below, Gallican monks had not been required to renounce much of anything and must therefore have seemed all but heretical to Cassian for even taking the name of monk.<sup>18</sup> Having shown the Egyptian monastic culture and values from which Cassian drew his ideas, we now turn to the context in which he was writing and the monks for whom he wrote.

Here, a bit of background information about the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, Cassian's two principal writings, is appropriate.<sup>19</sup> The full Latin title of the *Institutes* was

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *AP*, Gelasius, 5.

<sup>16</sup> See *AP*, Bessarion, 1.

<sup>17</sup> See especially *AP*, Antony, 7; Arsenius, 36; Euprepus, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Cassian also wrote *De Incarnatione Domini Contra Nestorium* (translated into English as *On the Incarnation*) as a defense against accusations that he was a Semipelagian. These accusations were made by a follower of Augustine's, Prosper of Aquitaine.

*De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Principalium Vitiolorum Remediis Libri XII*. The Latin word *institutata*, plural *institutum*, is derived from the verb *instituere*, best translated as “to establish” or “to lay down.”<sup>20</sup> This is entirely apt because the intention of the *Institutes* is to establish the correct form of monastic life in Gaul by laying down the specific rules for such an establishment. The word “institutes” also carries pedagogical weight, such that Cassian is not simply laying down rules and regulations but also teaching what he was taught by the monks of Egypt. He says, for example,

I shall faithfully attempt to explain, as well as I can with the Lord’s help, just the institutes (institutata) of these men and the rules of their monasteries and, in particular, the origins and causes and remedies of the principal vices, which they number as eight, according to their traditions.<sup>21</sup>

Here, Cassian demonstrates the multivalent use of the word “institute”: it is a teaching, meant to lay down the proper rules for the establishment of a proper monastery.

As for the Conferences, the original Latin title was *Conlationes XXIV*. The Latin word “conlatio” means “to bring or gather together,” whether people or objects.<sup>22</sup> In Cassian’s parlance, the word means a gathering together of monks, usually to listen to the wisdom of an elder monk.<sup>23</sup> This indeed defines the entire genre of the *Conferences*. Each

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<sup>20</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, preface, 7. “Institutata eorum tantummodo ac monasteriorum regulas maximeque principalium vitiolorum, quae octo ab eis designantur, origines et causas curationesque secundum traditiones eorum quantum domino adiuuante potuero, fideliter explicare contendam.”

<sup>22</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> For Cassian’s use of the term “conlatio” in this sense, see *Inst.* 5.29, 5.31, 12.27.2-4; *Conf.* 2.5.2, 2.15.3, 16.12.

conference starts with young Cassian himself (as both narrator and infrequent speaker) and his friend Germanus as principal interlocutor, asking a question of a more experienced and better known elder monk. The bulk of each conference is given to the answers of these elder monks. The form is Platonic as well in that each conference, is in the form of a dialogue, as opposed to the unilateral direction of teachings in the *Institutes*.

Finally, I have classified both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences* as works of rhetoric, and as such I will frequently refer throughout this dissertation to Cassian's rhetoric. By rhetoric, I mean first that the works are meant to persuade their audience. In this case, while Cassian's patron, Bishop Castor of Apt. Julia, will certainly read the final results, Cassian's intended audience is the monks of Gaul themselves. He is not only laying down rules, but also attempting to persuade them that following such rules will make them as holy and eventually perfect as their counterparts in Egypt. Second, I use the term rhetoric to emphasize that, although Cassian seems to have a disdain for classical learning, he is clearly well-educated himself, an education which, in the fourth century when Cassian grew up, consisted in large part of training in rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while Cassian is establishing the proper life of the monastery, he is also using his classical training to persuade his audience that what he says is true. His principal rhetorical tool, as I discuss below, is the use of the venerated Desert Fathers as his mouthpieces in the *Conferences*, thus lending his discourse the force of holiness that his own name might not have inspired. While the *Institutes* are written from his own perspective, he refers constantly to the fact that he learned these rules and traditions from the eminent monks of Egypt. In other words, he does not speak on his own behalf but rather passes down what he learned from the holy men with whom he lived and practiced.

## **Cassian's Sources: Origen of Alexandria and Evagrius Ponticus**

In order to elucidate further the conflict known to scholars as the Origenist Controversy, and Cassian's place within it, this dissertation turns here to the two most influential of Cassian's sources: Origen of Alexandria (184-253 CE) and Cassian's monastic contemporary and teacher, Evagrius Ponticus (345-399 CE). It is far beyond the scope of this dissertation to make a full study of these two instrumental Christian thinkers.<sup>25</sup> However, their influence on Cassian's thought and writings was profound, making an overview of the two essential to understanding Cassian's unique perspective on both theology and ascetic monasticism. While it is true that Cassian never mentions either Origen or Evagrius by name, this is likely for political reasons (which this dissertation will explain later).

Concerning the so-called Origenist Controversy, the most significant and controversial of Origen's opinions would prove to be on the nature of divinity. He begins *On First Principles* (Greek - Περὶ ἀρχῶν, Latin – *De principiis*), his *opus magnum*, with a discussion of the immateriality of God in reference to scriptural references. He notes first that some of his contemporaries argue that, following certain biblical passages such as

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<sup>24</sup> George A Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric & Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 167.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to reading the voluminous works of Origen – especially *On First Principles* – I would recommend that anyone interested in an overview of Origen's life and thought read *Origen* by Joseph Trigg (London: Routledge, 1998). For a similar overview of Evagrius' life and thought, I recommend *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy*, by Augustine Casiday (Erscheinungsort Nicht Ermittlbar: Verlag Nicht Ermittlbar, 2013).

“For the LORD your God is a consuming fire (Deut 4:24),” God is embodied. Origen views this and other bodily descriptions of God in scripture as metaphors, employed to explain divinity to less sophisticated readers. He argues therefore that “although many saints partake of the Holy Spirit, he is not on that account to be regarded as a kind of body, which is divided into material parts and distributed to each of the saints, but rather as a sanctifying power.”<sup>26</sup>

After addressing God in the beginning of the world in the first chapter, in chapter 6 of *On First Principles*, Origen writes about “the end and consummation of all things.”<sup>27</sup> He writes “the highest good, towards which all rational nature is progressing, and which is also called the end of all things... is to become as far as possible like God.”<sup>28</sup> However, this is far from a mere *Imitatio Christi* preached in later eras. In fact, Origen quite clearly believes that in the end, humans will attain union with God. He infers this from Genesis 1:26 in which God is said to have made man in his own image, concluding that while this indwelling image grants man the possibility of achieving the perfection of God, “he

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<sup>26</sup> Origen, G. W. Butterworth, and Henri De Lubac, translators, *On First Principles*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). I.1.3. “Sed et cum de Spiritu sancto multi sancti participant, non utique corpus aliquod inteligi potest Spiritus sanctus quod divisum in partes corporales percipiat unusquisque sanctorum: sed virtus profecto sanctificans est.” There is no complete extant copy of *On First Principles* in the original Greek. There are, however, Greek fragments preserved in an anthology of Origen’s writings, the *Philokalia*, compiled by Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen. The vast majority of English translations are made from a Latin translation made by Rufinus of Aquileia in 397. For this reason, and for consistency, I will take all my translations here from Rufinus’ Latin. For more on this manuscript history see John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, III.6.1. “De fine vero mundi et consummatione omnium.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, III.6.1. “Igitur summum bonum ad quod natura rationabilis universa festinate, quod etiam finis omnium dicitur... quia summum bonum sit, prout possibile est, similem fieri Deo.”

should in the end... obtain for himself the perfect 'likeness.'"<sup>29</sup> Intimately entwined with this idea, however, is what this conception of perfection will present. Will human beings become perfect physical specimens in imitation of an embodied God, or will that perfection be uninhibited by physical limitations? Origen's opinion is clear: "We are also led to believe that the end of all things will be incorporeal by the statement of our Savior, in which he says 'That as I and thou are one, so they also may be one in us.'"<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, he goes on to state that this putative union with the divine must signify God's lack of corporeality, not only at the end of days, but eternally. He writes, therefore, that this quotation on union with God from John 17:21 leaves us

compelled to accept one of two alternatives and either despair of ever attaining the likeness of God if we are destined always to have bodies, or else, if there is promised to us a blessedness of the same life that God has, then we must live in the same condition in which God lives.<sup>31</sup>

Origen clearly believed that God was incorporeal, and that incorporeality was a higher state of being, fit only for God and those with whom God united. This notion, among many others, would go on to heavily influence the monk who was likely John Cassian's

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<sup>29</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, III.6.1. "... in fine demum per operum expletionem perfectam sibi ipse similitudinem consummaret."

<sup>30</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, III.6.1. "Nos quoque ducitur ad finem omnia credere quae a te dicitur Salvatoris nostri passus esse dicatur, in qua dicit, 'quod sicut ego et tu unum sumus, ita et ipsi in nobis unum sint ut.'"

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, III.6.1. "cogimur accipiunt duorum vel desperatione impetrandi similitudinem Dei sumus futuri semper corpora vel si promissum est nobis beatitudo illa vita Deum possumus, vivunt in tali statu in quo Deus habitat."

primary monastic teacher, Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>32</sup> Equally significant for Cassian's thought was Origen's conception of the various levels of reading and interpreting scripture. For Origen, there are three ways of interpreting scripture, each appropriate to the level of spiritual attainment of individual readers.

Each one must therefore portray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may be edified by what we may call the body of the scriptures...while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of scripture; and those who are perfect... may be edified by that spiritual law which has 'a shadow of the good things to come', as if by the Spirit. Just as a man, therefore is said to consist of body, soul and spirit, so also does the holy scripture, which has been bestowed by the divine bounty for man's salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Cassian would employ a similar scheme of scriptural interpretation, designating the first and lowest level as tropology (tropologia) which was useful for moral and ascetic instruction, the second as allegory (allegoria), related to revelations from scripture conferred upon one who has spiritual understanding, and anagogy (anagogia), which

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<sup>32</sup> While Evagrius' influence on Cassian is undeniable in both style and content, for reasons I will discuss shortly, Origen's influence is less obvious in both style and content. For this reason, I am unsure whether Cassian had actually read the works of Origen or if Origen's pervasive influence on certain types of monasticism were already so powerful by the fifth century that they merely formed the *habitus* in which Cassian lived, moved, and had his monastic being.

<sup>33</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, IV.2.4. "Idcirco unumquemque sensum exprimat divinis tripliciter in animam suam qui cum ei motus fuerit parum proficere, et redire possunt percipere quam quod sit aliquid animae erit aedificati sermonibus Scripturarum testimoniis innititur et eos, qui sunt ... perfectus sit quod aedificationem ex lege spirituali, quae est est bonum quae sunt umbra futurorum, tamquam a Domini Spiritu. Quemadmodum ergo dicitur consistere in corporis, animae et spiritus, sic quoque non scripturam sacram, liberalitatis divinae, quae cum tibi sive adsalus hominis."

goes above and beyond even allegory to sacred mysteries not easily through ordinary uses of language.<sup>34</sup>

While Cassian may or may not have actually read the works of Origen, he clearly read the works of Evagrius Ponticus and may even have learned from him personally. Evagrius had been a monk in Egypt for several years before Cassian arrived. Despite that fact that he never mentions Evagrius's name, Cassian borrows liberally from him in his own writings. First, he uses the Evagrian system to outline what Cassian calls the eight principal vices (*octo principalium vitiorum*). Evagrius, writing years before Cassian, calls them the Eight Evil Thoughts (*τῶν ὀκτὼ λογισμῶν*). While the word Cassian uses, translated as “vices” may seem more active than Evagrius's “thoughts” a quick read of Cassian's version shows that every one of the vices is a form of dangerous or tempting thinking, which may or may not lead to bad conduct but will certainly prevent the attainment of ascetic perfection. Second, in appropriating Evagrius's system of vices, Cassian even uses Evagrius's Greek names for four of them, although he transliterates them into the Latin alphabet.<sup>35</sup> He also makes liberal uses of Evagrius's Greek words, written in Greek in this case, for monastic practice (*πρακτική*) and mystical contemplation (*θεωρητική*).<sup>36</sup>

Evagrius's method of scriptural interpretation follows in the footsteps of Origen and certainly presages that of John Cassian. Unlike Origen and Cassian, Evagrius

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<sup>34</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.8.2-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Gastrimargia* (*γαστριμαργία*) for gluttony, *filargyria* (*φιλαργυρία*) for avarice, *acedia* (*ακηδία*) for listlessness, *cenodoxia* (*κενοδοξία*) for vainglory.

<sup>36</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.1.2.

divides scripture into only two categories, literal (αισθητα) and allegorical (αλληγορια). However, he still divides his interpretive scheme into three categories like Origen, namely those scriptures that pertain to practice or asceticism (πρακτική), those which pertain to the contemplation of nature or creation (φυσική), and those that pertain to theology or higher contemplation (θεολογική) and this generally corresponds with both Origen's and Cassian's notions of scriptural exegesis.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Evagrius fully accepted Origen's conviction that God was incorporeal. His writings on contemplation make this abundantly clear. For example, he writes that although many who pray look for visible signs of divinity, this is both ill-advised and ultimately impossible because "God is without quantity and without all outward form."<sup>38</sup> In addition, he cautions praying monks to beware of trying to limit God by placing him within an imagined physical state: "Vainglory is the source of the illusions of you mind. When it exerts its influence on the mind it attempts to enclose the Divinity in form and figure."<sup>39</sup> It is clear that both Evagrius and Origen held tight to an incorporeal God. This explains much in the historical context of Egyptian monasticism at the turn of the fifth century when Cassian and the Tall Brothers were exiled for espousing

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<sup>37</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, Ο ΓΝΟΣΤΙΚΟΣ Η ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΑΤΑΞΙΩΘΕΝΤΑ ΓΝΩΣΕΩΣ, *The Gnostikos*, ed. A. & C. Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique, Le Gnostique ou A celui qui est devenu digne de la science, Sources Chrétiennes* n° 356, (Paris, 1989) 88-193.

<sup>38</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, and John Eudes Bamberger. *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), Chapters, 67. "ἄποσον δὲ τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἀσημάτιστον."

<sup>39</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*, 116. " Ἀρχὴ πλάνης νοῦ, κενοδοξία, ἐξ ἧς κινούμενος ὁ νοῦς, ἐν σχήματι καὶ μορφαῖς περιγράφειν πειρᾶται τὸ Θεῖον."

this belief. However, it does not explain why Cassian would mention neither Origen nor Evagrius in his own writing.

After Theophilus of Alexandria condemned Origenism, symbolized by his specific condemnation of the notion of an incorporeal deity, it became increasingly dangerous to align oneself with Origen or anyone else, like Evagrius, who had a similarly Origenist theological inclination. Many of Origen's teachings would later be anathematized in 553 at the Second Council of Constantinople and anyone else who seemed to follow in his theological footsteps such as Evagrius similarly fell out of favor.<sup>40</sup> Thus Cassian prudently avoided mentioning his sources and/or mentors while employing their ideas to the fullest.

#### **Cassian's Context: Fifth-Century Gaul**

Early fifth century Gaul was a turbulent place in which to found a monastery or a start a monastic career. Between the years 406 and 413 CE, Rome had lost the province to Germanic invaders.<sup>41</sup> The end of almost five hundred years of Roman rule in the province created a particular turmoil for the Gallican elite, who, long established as friends of Rome, were suddenly unsure of their positions in relation to the several Germanic kings who had divided Gaul among themselves. It should be observed, however, that while these political changes may have seemed drastic and unforeseen through the eyes of Cassian and other outsiders, the battle for control of Gaul between

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<sup>40</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>41</sup> Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-century Gaul*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

Germanic tribes and Rome had actually gone on for centuries.<sup>42</sup> In fact, control by the Germanic tribes was actually a return to the state of Gaul before Rome's conquest of the province. Gaul was well-known by the Romans for supporting usurpers and had done so several times already since Rome's takeover of the province. The fact that the majority of Gallicans could always be counted on to support dissident coups against Rome was a common theme in Roman literature, and authors from Julius Caesar to the fourth century historian Ammianus Marcellinus had written extensively on this topic.<sup>43</sup> When the Germanic tribes invaded and reconquered the province in 406, the Roman-friendly elite were apparently of two minds about where their loyalties should lie, as they had been during all such coups in their history.<sup>44</sup> While many hoped that the Empire that had sponsored and protected them from Germanic tribes would continue to do so, others saw the new conquest as a means to gain even more power through participation in the takeover and by seeking roles as courtiers in the new leaders' courts.

One strategy to ensure their continued wealth and status in the province was for these late-Roman elites to embrace ecclesiastical careers, usually as either monks or bishops.<sup>45</sup> As unusual as this may sound given the history of monasticism in Europe and its well-known vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Gallic monasticism had already begun, in the fifth century, to create its own typology of ecclesiastical careers. These

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<sup>42</sup> Raymond Van Dam, 'The Pirenne Thesis and Fifth-Century Gaul,' in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* edited by John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 332–3

<sup>43</sup> Ralph Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>44</sup> Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats*, 13-14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

religious roles, as Cassian remarked, differed greatly from those of his monastic heroes in Egypt. For this reason, several Gallican ecclesiastical writers, contemporaries of Cassian, would write impassioned rhetoric aimed at convincing these elite men to adopt ecclesiastical careers. Goodrich writes that the basis of this endeavor was a series of hagiographies of local saints which demonstrated the compatibility of ecclesiastical careers with a patrician style of life. Goodrich writes that:

hagiographic] [w]orks such as the *Vita Martini*, *Vita Honorati*, and *Vita Germani* were prescriptive as well as descriptive... They advanced the argument that a well-born nobleman would not have to abandon social standing should he accept one of these offices; to the contrary, life as a bishop or monk was simply a continuation of the status into which one had been born.<sup>46</sup>

This point was driven home, for example by the biographer of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius Severus, who, as Goodrich reports, asserted that the “[s]ocial order was preserved in heaven, just as it was on earth; the convert, despite having renounced his claims to an earthly elite status, continued to move among the best men.”<sup>47</sup>In his *Dialogi*, Sulpicius makes several instructive references to the subject of his biography, Martin of Tours. First, he writes that while Martin did not come from the elite classes, becoming a cleric did ennoble him, putting him essentially on equal footing with the privileged. For example, Sulpicius narrates an episode in which Martin, who had just become a bishop, decided to seek an audience with the Emperor Valentinian I. He was refused, but after he spent days in prayer and fasting, divine intervention assured his admission. The Emperor,

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<sup>46</sup> See Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 21-22 as well as Raymond Van Dam, & American Council of Learned Societies, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 154

<sup>47</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 24.

however, unimpressed with the lowly bishop, refused to stand to greet Martin. Suddenly, Valentinian's throne was engulfed in flames, forcing the Emperor to stand and greet him. From this point on, Sulpicius states that Valentinian was cordial and deferential to Martin.<sup>48</sup> The message is clear: joining the church hierarchy, in Gaul, could actually elevate one from one of the great unwashed to the status of nobility. But what of those who were already members of the elite in good standing? Although in the unstable political and social world of Gaul there was no guarantee that one could keep one's wealth and status, "by seeking a career with God, mortals could become courtiers to the Emperor of Heaven."<sup>49</sup> In other words, the elite would remain elite within the church and in the next world. Well-known Gallican saint Honoratus (350- 429 CE), for example, founded a monastery to which, according to his biographer, Hilary of Arles, nobles and kings would visit. For those visitors, Honoratus, in the middle of the wilderness, somehow provided rich, delicate dishes fit for kings.<sup>50</sup> In addition,

Honoratus clearly remained enmeshed in the social round, and in the middle sections of Hilary's panegyric, we find him doing the things that any aristocrat would do as a matter of course: constructing buildings, welcoming guests, dispensing patronage in the form of money.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, Ed. Charles Halm, *Sulpicii Severi: Libri Qui Supersunt*, CSEL 1, (Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1866), 2.5.

<sup>49</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Hilary of Arles, *Sermo de Vita S. Honorati*, Ed. Marie-Denise Valentin, *Hilaire D'Arles: Vie de Saint Honorat*. SC 235, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977), 20

<sup>51</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 27.

Clearly, Cassian's Egyptian-flavored notions of total renunciation, in which all but the most necessary possessions are given up, did not apply in Gaul. On Honoratus' deathbed, the saint was visited by a profusion of the chief men of the province, as well as the governor.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, at the funeral of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius describes in a letter the great procession, including the entire town and the surrounding countryside.<sup>53</sup> To give his addressee an idea of the grandeur of the funeral procession, he compares it to "an imperial triumph, that most cherished of ancient Roman honors when a victorious general was allowed to parade through the streets of Rome, following his soldiers, captives, and spoils."<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he remarks that while an emperor, despite all his wealth and honor, could still end up in hell, Martin, though born poor, "entered heaven wealthy."<sup>55</sup>

As Goodrich says,

[w]ith the possible exception of John Cassian, very few fifth-century thinkers would have seen any value in severing connections with the ruling class. It was this very sense of interconnectedness, of being plugged into the network of influential Romans, that made an elite bishop such a great catch for a city or town.<sup>56</sup>

Cassian's notion of total renunciation of position and property would be a hard sell in Gaul, to say the least. In order to argue for the correctness and righteousness of true

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<sup>52</sup> Hilary of Arles, *Honoratus*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Epistulae tres*, Ed. Charles Halm, *Sulpicii Severi: Libri Qui Supersunt*. CSEL 1, (Vienna: C. Geroldi, 1866), Epistle 3.

<sup>54</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 30

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

renunciation, Cassian would have to depend upon establishing authority in an entirely different way, one which would still appeal to those who knew, for example, the famous *Life of Antony* well. With that in mind, I turn to Cassian's notions of asceticism and authority.

### **Asceticism as Mark of Authority**

Philip Rousseau notes that in the fourth and fifth centuries,

[a]scetics of all types were convinced, first of all, that their leaders belonged to an historical tradition, to a religious group whose place could be clearly identified, not only in the history of the church, but also in the longer and more general history of God's dealings with mankind.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, one of Cassian's most explicit arguments for the authority of his ascetic regimen over against that nominal asceticism practiced by monks in Gaul can be found in the *Conferences*: "The cenobitic life came into being at the time of the apostolic preaching."<sup>58</sup> Cassian's mouthpiece in this section, Abba Piamun, goes on to quote from the book of Acts: "There was one heart and one mind among the crowd of believers, nor did anyone claim as his own whatever it was that he possessed, but all things were held in common among them" (Acts 4:32, *NRSV*). The claim to authority here is neither subtle, nor imprecise. Cassian is claiming that the ascetic and monastic way of life, specifically that of renouncing all individual ownership of property, goes back in a direct line to the apostles. This is a startling claim against the institutional church. Why? Because the divine authority was believed to have passed from Jesus to the apostles to

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<sup>57</sup> Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (2nd ed.), (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press), 22.

<sup>58</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.5.

the bishops in an unbroken line. The bishop of Rome, for example, was supposed to have gone back in a direct line to the apostle Peter. If instead the monastic way of life were said to go back to the original apostles in Jerusalem, including Peter before he went to Rome, then Cassian was claiming that monastics had a far more direct claim to apostolic authority. This is both a bold claim for the authority of the ascetic way of life and possibly a shot across the bow of the institutional church for any clergy member or hierarch who might have read it. Remember that the clergy in Gaul, as well as the monks, were mostly drawn from the wealthy elite who had lost none of their status or wealth – and had perhaps even gained some – by officially joining the church. For Cassian, as we will see, this refusal of renunciation, this hollow asceticism, is a kind of heresy, especially for those who take on the name of monks.

Asceticism for Cassian and his Egyptian teachers has several levels, beginning when one enters a monastery. The ultimate point of all asceticism, in Cassian's thought, is the renunciation of both worldly identity and personal will, to be replaced by a union of the individual soul with God and total surrender to the divine will.<sup>59</sup> The progression of this set of renunciations is described in detail by Cassian in the *Institutes*. The first level of disavowals concerns the most superficial level of the monk's appearance. Cassian writes that it is best to begin with the clothing of the monk for "it is proper for a monk always to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle, his loins girded."<sup>60</sup> In other

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<sup>59</sup> Cassian writes "the Lord promises an hundredfold in this life to those whose renunciation is perfect... [a]nd therefore our Lord and Savior, to give us an example of giving up our own wills, says: "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me;" and again: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Cassian, *Conferences*, XXIV.26.

<sup>60</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, I.1

words, one must first look like a monk to become a monk. The first step, therefore, to renouncing one's worldly identity is to relinquish one's previous garb and to take on the habit, or robe, of the monk. The reference to the scriptural metaphor of the soldier is apt here (cf. Eph. 6:11-20, 1 Thess. 5:8). The monk, like the soldier, puts on the uniform of his regiment in order to merge with the unit and to give up the individuality of the world for a group identity that helps to focus one on the task ahead.<sup>61</sup> In addition, Cassian notes that the monk's garb connects him with such biblical and prophetic luminaries as Elijah the Tishbite who was recognized "by his belt and by the hairy and unkempt aspect of his body," and the similarly-attired John the Baptist.<sup>62</sup> Cassian also writes that the aspect of communal ownership of garments has a purpose here since:

whatever is arrogated by one or a few within the household of God and is not owned universally by the whole body of the brotherhood is superfluous and overweening and hence must be judged harmful and a token of vanity rather than a display of virtue.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, all this initial transformation of the bodily appearance aims at the eventual transformation of the soul as well. Cassian goes on to write of the symbolic nature of the garb, a rhetoric he borrows from his monastic teacher Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>64</sup> In a later institute, Cassian writes that the clothing removed by the novice is kept by the

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<sup>61</sup> "There are many psychological implications of military uniforms...[Uniforms] contribute to togetherness, orderliness and discipline, and add to the soldiers' sense of camaraderie, cohesion, and esprit de corps." Col. G.P. Krueger, "Psychological Issues in Military Uniform Design." In *Advances in Military Textiles and Personal Equipment*, 64- 78, Chapter 4, (Philadelphia, PA: Woodhead Publishing, 2012), 64

<sup>62</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, I.3.

<sup>63</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.2.

<sup>64</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, R. Sinkewicz, translator, *Evagrius of Pontus the Greek Ascetic Corpus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), *Praktikos*, 1-9.

monastery's bursar until such time as the novice clearly shows spiritual progress. However, "if they notice that he has committed the sin of complaining or is guilty of an act of disobedience, however slight, they strip him of the garb of the monastery... and, dressed once more in what he used to wear... they drive him out."<sup>65</sup> Notable here is the fact that changing clothes is not naively considered a real change of heart or soul. Rather, the novice's previous clothing, his literal, physical tie to a worldly identity, are kept until the novice has proved himself, at which time, the previous clothing is given to the poor.<sup>66</sup> Not only is his clothing initially taken from him, but indeed everything he possesses as well: "Thus he may know not only that he has been despoiled of all his former things but also that he has put off all worldly pride and has stooped to the poverty and want of Christ."<sup>67</sup> The first step of renouncing the old identity and taking on the new is physical, the putting on of different clothing and surrendering all other physical possessions that would tie him either to his previous worldly identity or to the grasping nature of his individual self. Once a novice has proven that he is no fly-by-night convert but is committed to the monastic life, the donation of his previous clothing then bestows upon him the first hints of authority, again based upon his willing renunciation of the primary vestiges of his worldly self.

In the second *Institute* Cassian begins to discuss the nuts and bolts, as it were, of correct ascetic practice according to his Egyptian progenitors. After the relinquishment

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<sup>65</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.5.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.5.

of superficial identity through clothing and possessions, the next renunciation is that of control over one's time and actions. Cassian thus begins the second *Institute* with a discussion of the canonical prayers and psalms; twelve psalms are to be chanted every night because this number is "maintained throughout all of Egypt and the Thebaid."<sup>68</sup> He emphasizes this, as if to make a meta-analysis of his own discourse and its sources, by noting that these particular canonical prayers and psalms and their designated number were "determined in times past in the regions of the East by the holy fathers."<sup>69</sup> Again, it is significant that Cassian here both instructs the monks of Gaul and models humility for them in that he refuses to take credit for the ordering of canonical prayers and their number and time, attributing them instead to the Egyptian fathers who trained him. This also, incidentally, ascribes a spiritual weight to Cassian's discourse: he is not inventing these methods as a detached, saintly genius. Rather, he sees himself as simply a miniscule link in a methodological chain going back, as we have seen, to the apostles and, by implication therefore, to Christ himself. This establishes his personal authority in the matter, but also, from the vantage point of history, demonstrates the profound influence a representative of a venerable and long-standing tradition could have.

We know, incidentally, that Cassian's works, whether or not they accomplished what he was attempting to accomplish in his time, did have an enormous influence, principally through Benedict of Nursia's use of Cassian's material for his own

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<sup>68</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, II.1.

highly influential monastic rule.<sup>70</sup> Cassian establishes this historical and authoritative weight again by noting that while some persons – he is undoubtedly referring to the errant Gallican monks here – “have established different models and rules for themselves,”<sup>71</sup> he himself is providing readers with “the most ancient constitution of the fathers... in the most time-trying (*antiquissimorum*) customs of the most ancient fathers.”<sup>72</sup> Cassian then writes that the number of prayers, “which was set in the distant past and which is inviolate in the monasteries of those regions even until now,” has been established, not merely by “human whim (*arbitrium hominum*), but was given to the fathers from heaven by the teaching of an angel.”<sup>73</sup> If there were any doubt about the divine sanction and authority of the methods Cassian describes here, such doubt is surely erased by invoking a messenger of God as the revealer of this specific numbers of canonical prayers. Cassian goes on as well to tie these canonical prayers to the evangelist Mark, establishing ties not only to the apostles – Mark is traditionally said to have been Peter’s interpreter and/or secretary<sup>74</sup> - but to scripture as well. This is further validation of his methods and his rhetoric in general. It is also another clear jab at the institutional church in general, whose sole claim to authority for themselves is that of apostolic

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<sup>70</sup> Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, II.2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, II.4.

<sup>74</sup> Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Tertullian all identify Mark as Peter’s scribe. See, for example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1, in which Mark is said to have passed Peter’s teachings down in written form and Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14, in which Papias is quoted as saying that Mark had simply written his gospel from Peter’s dictation.

succession through the hierarchs. While the apostle Peter is said to have been the first bishop of Rome, Cassian here ties his teachings not to just to eminent monks, as he will in the *Conferences*, but also to older bishops; Mark is also said, by tradition, to have been the founder and first bishop of Alexandria.<sup>75</sup> There is an implicit assertion in this connection, that despite its failings now, the church in the past was legitimate, coupled, as are the monks of Egypt, to the prayers and practices established by the apostles and their followers.

Cassian even provides a historically dubious but no doubt rhetorically powerful origin story for the correct liturgy of monks: When “the perfection of the primitive church (*ecclesiae illius primitivae*) remained inviolate and was still fresh in the memory of succeeding generations,” the “venerable fathers, reflecting with unceasing concern (*peruigili cura posteris*) on those who would follow them, came together to discuss what form daily worship should take throughout the whole body of the brotherhood.”<sup>76</sup> Note that the liturgy here is both created and maintained from the “primitive church” not by clergy but rather by the true pious agents of divinity, monks, or at least proto-monks, for the benefit of true Christians of later generations. Indeed, Cassian specifies with an almost tiresome precision, how the actual number of psalms was finally decided on, a mythology well-planned to appeal to the vanity of monks who would perhaps prefer to see themselves as descended from this early church through the venerable monks of Egypt. Cassian writes that in an early nighttime service, (despite his specificity as to the

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<sup>75</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, II.16.

<sup>76</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.5.3.

details of the liturgy, he is vague as to the time period to which he refers) someone stood up to chant the psalms. The cantor,

sang eleven psalms that were separated by the interposition of prayers, all the verses being pronounced in the same tone of voice. Having finished the twelfth with an Alleluia as a response, he suddenly withdrew from the eyes of all, thus concluding the both the discussion and the ceremony.<sup>77</sup>

In case the reader has missed the ultimate point here, Cassian states again that “a universal rule had been established for the groups of the brothers through the teaching of an angel.”<sup>78</sup> While divine authority is established through the deity’s messenger here, there is also a parallel to the biblical story of the road to Emmaus; the angel, acting in the place of Christ, opens the eyes of the monks to the correct practices, then disappears, his sudden absence leaving no doubt of the approval of divinity he represented. The clergy, conversely, has dangerously diverged from these methods, leaving only the monks – at least those who practice correctly according to the ancient rule – to practice correctly.

Cassian here makes yet another implicit jab at the lax nature of Gallican monasticism, noting that what he calls the first monks, initiated by Mark the Evangelist “went off to quite secluded places on the outskirts of the city and led a strict life of such rigorous abstinence that even those who did not share their religion were astonished at the arduous profession of their way of life.”<sup>79</sup> Given what we know of Gallican asceticism at this time, an asceticism that at best belonged in scare quotes for Cassian in that it involved only the slimmest of renunciations and the retention of all one’s social status and wealth, this

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<sup>77</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.5.5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, II.6.

<sup>79</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.5.2.

insistence on the true way of life as one of rigorous renunciation and prayer can only be a remonstrance. Remember also that the monasteries of Gaul were initially founded by the local bishop, not a monk. As if to drive this point home, along with his own personal basis for authority in these matters, Cassian notes that in Egypt, “no one is allowed to rule over a community of brothers, or even over himself, unless he not only gets rid of all his possession but also recognizes that he is in fact not his own master and has no power over himself.”<sup>80</sup> Such a description of the devout monk, given the lack of renunciation by Gallican monks and the ostensible leadership of monasteries at this point by the bishop, can only be applied in such rhetoric to Cassian himself.

Continuing on in his description of how the desert fathers of Egypt conduct their prayers, Cassian makes the first of his many notes about moderation. As it turns out, however, the purpose of keeping a moderate number of prayers for the group meetings is simply so that for “those of more ardent faith there might be kept a space of time in which their virtue could run its tireless course without lengthiness also creating tedium for bodies that are exhausted and weary.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the correct procedures strike a balance between group prayer requirements and the space and time required, if a monk is committed enough to forego large amounts of sleep, to continue in solitary prayer.

Cassian writes that after canonical prayers have finished, each monk returns to his own cell (shared at most by two people) where he can “again celebrate the more eagerly a service of prayers as their own particular sacrifice.”<sup>82</sup> Given the earlier reference Cassian

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, II.3.2.

<sup>81</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.12.2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, II.3.

makes to people behaving crudely in church,<sup>83</sup> this is likely another upbraiding of the Gallican monks for not only giving scant attention to canonical prayers, but for then rushing back to their beds to catch a few winks. Cassian here emphasizes that both a commitment to the group, displayed in correct behavior at group prayer services (which he calls *synaxis*, transliterating the Greek into Latin), and a commitment to individual prayer and practice are necessary for the making of a monk. Implicit here is the fact that in the monks of Gaul, Cassian sees neither, or at least insufficient quantities of either. These two commitments are described in the language of theological anthropology when Cassian writes that the monks of Egypt “practice equally the virtues of body and of soul, balancing the profit of the outer man with the gain of the inner.”<sup>84</sup> This sentence provides a kind of ideal orientation by which Cassian can judge the conduct of the Gallican monks. It would seem, given the lack of commitment to abandonment of possessions among the monks of Marseilles, that the Gallican monks have been taught to privilege the inner over the outer. While prayer and belief may be important to them, their outer conduct, dress, and manner of speaking is based more upon aristocratic Roman etiquette, in which the elite have free rein to do what they want merely by virtue of their exalted status. As monks, Cassian points out, this is unacceptable. During the communal chanted prayers, for example, Cassian notes that in Egypt, if one of the monks sings louder than he ought, “the cantor is interrupted in mid-course by the elder, who claps his hands from the place where he is seated and makes everyone rise for the prayer” (*Inst.* 2.11.2).<sup>85</sup> As

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, II.10.1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, II.13.3.

<sup>85</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.11.2

a monk, one is to blend in during all activities. The power of the elder in this example carries with it Cassian's earlier point that only one who had significantly humbled himself is allowed to take charge of a group of monks. One must be obedient first in order to be worthy of the authority of being obeyed.

Yet another aspect of the Egyptian ascetic regimen outlined in Cassian's *Institutes* is the relinquishment of what most would consider a normal social life. This, like the changing of the garb, is an enormous part of how Cassian and his monastic forebears attempt to annihilate the previous or worldly identity of each new monk, leaving them to create a new identity based upon their own Egyptian monastic models. This begins at the very moment when a potential monk arrives at the door of a monastery. Cassian writes that no one is admitted to a monastery until, "by lying outside [the door] for ten days or more, he has given an indication of his perseverance and desire as well as of his humility and patience."<sup>86</sup> This humility and patience are demonstrated by the novice silently tolerating the disdain of all the other monks for days on end. Cassian writes that "by putting up with taunts [the novice shows] what he will be like in time of trial."<sup>87</sup> Cassian here reiterates that every possession, down to every coin on the novice's person, is then taken away because otherwise "when the first disturbance arose for any reason... [he] and the stripping away of all possessions is a kind of self-emptying, mirroring that of

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<sup>86</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.3.1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.3.1.

would flee the monastery as fast as a whirring slingstone.”<sup>88</sup> This acceptance of insults Christ in the famous hymn quoted by Paul (Phil. 2: 5-11).

One who will not defend himself against insults or disdain and who has no personal possessions apart from the other monastics has his identity entirely wrapped up with the other monks. The stripping of his clothing, by the way, is done in front of all the other monks according to Cassian, a solemn and yet poignant ritual emphasizing one’s own abject quality apart from those of the monastery who are receiving the novice.<sup>89</sup> However, even now, the novice has not finished cutting off of his previous identity.

As a new monk, he is set apart from the others and assigned to an elder who will initially act as his mentor.<sup>90</sup> In this capacity, the novice and his elder will be in charge of hospitality for visitors to the monastery, serving them for one year in order to learn the humility necessary to become a monk.<sup>91</sup> After this, if there are no complaints from him or from his elder about him, he is assigned to a different elder along with a small group of other novices.

From the moment the postulant enters the monastery, he is cut off from all his previous social ties, including the family, a drastic move in the ancient world in which, as Peter Brown has noted, one’s entire identity was based upon one’s family and village ties.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., *IV*.3.2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., *IV*.5.

<sup>90</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, *IV*.7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., *IV*.7.

Indeed, “the desert was thought of as the... zone of the nonhuman.”<sup>92</sup> However, as noted again by Brown, one did not, in “fleeing the world” abandon all social ties but rather one left “a precise social structure for an equally precise and... social alternative.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Rhetorical Authority of the Desert Fathers**

Cassian’s claim to authority indeed rests on the correct practice of asceticism. However, behind this claim is his other constant and implicit claim: he learned this correct practice from the original ascetic icons, the Desert Fathers. Attention to the speakers of Cassian’s *Conferences* reveals many of the names famous from other ascetic literature such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, *The Lausiac History*, and *The History of the Monks in Egypt*. What’s more, despite all the redactions scholars generally agreed happened before much of this literature was widely published later in the fifth century, the practices and the ethos present within the sayings and stories of Cassian’s fabled interlocutors, as well as other revered monks who are discussed but not present in the *Conferences*, seem to be consistent with the stories and quotes by the same figures in the monastic literature.<sup>94</sup>

Below, I demonstrate this congruence for two reasons. First, I intend to show the rhetorical significance of Cassian’s use of these revered figures, regardless of whether, after twenty

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<sup>92</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 218

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 217

<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, Zachary Smith says that the compiler of the *AP*, through his rhetorical and redactional choices, presents, among other things, a picture of “monks consistently weaponized by various sides in the heated theological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries.” Zachary B. Smith, *Philosopher-Monks, Episcopal Authority, and the Care of the Self: The Apophthegmata Patrum in Fifth-Century Palestine*, (Turnhout, Belgium; Brepols Publishers, 2017), 31. This certainly agrees with the portrayals of conflicts between monks and church hierarchs which I will address in chapter three.

years, it was likely that he clearly remembered such conversations in detail. Second, in adding these other voices to Cassian's – or, rather, his to theirs – I show that Cassian was not a lone voice crying in the wilderness and signifying nothing, but rather one representative of a type of monastic thought pervasive in early monastic circles in Palestine and Egypt. A few cases in point will suffice to demonstrate this.

Cassian focuses through one monk on the virtue of obedience, also known as renouncing the personal will. One of the monks mentioned as an exemplar of the renunciation of self-will necessary to become a true monk is called Abba John by Cassian. The same story is told of him in the *Conferences* and in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP) in which he is called Abba John the Short or, in some translations, Abba John the Dwarf. In the story, John, as a novice monk is given a task by his master. The master picks up a dry stick and plants it in the ground several miles away from John's cell. He then orders John to water the stick every day until it bears fruit. Cassian notes that elders would often assign such useless and seemingly foolish tasks to novices simply in order to teach them the value of total obedience (*oboedientia*). In Cassian's version of the story, John accomplishes this arduous and senseless task without complaint for one year after which, since John had clearly proven his obedience, the elder pulls up the stick and throws it away, declaring the task finished.<sup>95</sup> By the time of the earliest version of the *AP*, the story has become mythologized. After three years, the elder discovers that the stick has actually begun to bear fruit, after which he takes the fruit to a meeting of the elders and entreats

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<sup>95</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.24.

them to “[t]ake and eat the fruit of obedience.”<sup>96</sup> Despite the fabled resolution in the *AP*, it is clear the same virtue, total obedience, is emphasized in both versions. Abba John is thus referred to reverentially throughout the *Institutes* and *Conferences*.

Cassian’s first interlocutor in the *Conferences* is Abba Moses, a well-known monk of apparently Ethiopian descent and a former criminal, according to the literature.<sup>97</sup> In the *Conferences*, Moses says that the sparing diet of the monk has the purpose of

preserving both body and soul in one and the same condition, and not allowing the mind either to faint through weariness from fasting, nor to be oppressed by over-eating, for it ends in such a sparing diet that sometimes a man neither notices nor remembers in the evening that he has broken his fast.<sup>98</sup>

In the *Lausiatic History*, the same Moses is remembered by its author Palladius as practicing “asceticism... zealously, and especially in regard to food. He partook of nothing but dry bread, meanwhile saying fifty prayers daily.”<sup>99</sup> The emphasis on asceticism as a necessary set of practices for achieving holiness is stressed in both sources regarding Abba Moses. As with Abba John above, Moses is portrayed as an ideal monk, one whose practices were learned from eminent monks and subsequently imitated by Moses’ monastic descendants.

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<sup>96</sup> *AP*, John the Short, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Palladius, and Robert T. Meyer, translator, *Palladius, the Lausiatic History*, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), Moses, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.23.

<sup>99</sup> Palladius, *Lausiatic*, Moses, 6

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the monastic culture of Egypt from which Cassian learned his notions of monastic practice and purity. This type of monastic practice included severe renunciations of a monk's previous identity, including clothing, possessions, and all previous family and social ties. These required renunciations not only aimed at the transformation of each individual monk, but also at the creation of a group subjectivity, in which all would strive together to meet the monastic ideals presented by Cassian. Since the larger, hierarchical Church did not require such renunciations from each parishioner or even from bishops and clergy, I argue that Cassian is implicitly setting up a duality between Egyptian monasticism as the highest practice of Christianity and Church hierarchs as examples of inferior representatives of a spiritually and ascetically deficient institution. Monks clearly were more deserving of authority than bishops.

In addition, the Gallican monastic system into which Cassian attempted to assert his Egyptian rules was anemic in its asceticism by the measure of those rules. Monastics were not required to surrender any of their wealth or status, and in fact, as the story of Martin of Tours demonstrates, may have even increased in both by joining a monastery. Gallican monasticism was part and parcel of the Gallican church, in which the majority of both monks and clergy were from the upper classes and saw themselves as maintaining their wealth and status in the afterlife. This, of course, would have been entirely unacceptable to Cassian. In order to correct these errors, Cassian would effectively have to create a new monastic culture with new types of monastic subjects, by separating them from the hierarchical church.

In the next chapter, I turn to Cassian's creation of subjects by analyzing

Foucault's notions of subjectivity and its formation and how such notions might effectively apply to Cassian's rhetoric in the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Foucault, Cassian, and the Creation of Subjects**

In the *Conferences*, Cassian explains that the practice of solitude, while not available to everyone in that it is a higher practice for those who have eradicated most of their sinful characteristics already, is solely for those monks who have “the desire for greater perfection and a more contemplative route.”<sup>1</sup> Such monks, according to Cassian, “long to join in open combat and in clear battles against the demons. They are not afraid to push into the great hiding places of the desert.”<sup>2</sup> In suggesting that anchorites or solitary monks are both higher in perfection and more proficient in demonic combat, Cassian creates a consistent scheme of Foucauldian governmentality that I will be investigating in what follows.

The writings of Michel Foucault, specifically his theory of the creation of subjects, provide great help in analyzing the function of the writings of Cassian (and other concurrent monastic literature). A close reading of Cassian’s writings through the lens of Foucault reveals that Cassian is a) trying to shape the individual subjectivity of monks and b) trying in turn to form a larger, unified, collective

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.6.

monastic subjectivity which may ultimately replace the authority of the clergy This chapter begins with a discussion of Foucault's theory on the creation of subjects, including the three principal means for the successful deployment of this operation. From there, the chapter proceeds to a definition of the three types of power, among several described by Foucault, which I believe Cassian uses in attempting to manipulate the subjectivity of monks in Gaul: disciplinary power, pastoral power, and biopower. Finally, I use Cassian's own writings to demonstrate how these types of power are operative within his discourse.

### **Foucault and the Formation of Subjects**

Foucault began discussions on the formation of the subject by introducing what he called "governmentality." For Foucault, governmentality is present wherever systems of authority trickle down into an internalized embrace of rules governing an individual's conduct. This makes Foucault an appropriate parallel reading partner with Cassian. Often defined tersely as "the conduct of conduct," governmentality in Foucault's definition is "where the way individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves," a "versatile equilibrium... between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself."<sup>3</sup> Referring to these interweaving processes of external coercion and work on the self or self-formation, Foucault summarized his entire body of work, noting that his

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, Graham Burchell, translator, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 19-37. Original Publication: *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi: Conférences prononcées à Dartmouth College*, (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1980).

overall objective was “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.”<sup>4</sup>

The subject, in Foucauldian terms, is not the autonomous actor or agent often idealized in modern thought, an individual whose self is merely the result of her own well or poorly made choices. Instead, Foucault believed the subject to be a social construction whose specific vantage point is the result of the constant interplay of multiple forms of power – including that of the subject herself.<sup>5</sup> What interested Foucault, then, was the specific mechanisms or techniques by which such subjects were formed.

In a 1980 lecture published and translated under the title “Subjectivity and Truth,” Foucault notes that the history of the formation of subjects is best undertaken by acknowledging both techniques of domination and techniques of the self.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Foucault saw that the formation of subjectivity was far more complex than a simple heavy-handed exercise of top-down, controlling power. Rather, it occurred through an intersection of the exercise of domination and the self-construction of potential subjects. Foucault’s ultimate question, then, was how techniques of control, especially those

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power” In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, (2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208-226. Original Publication: *Le Sujet et le Pouvoir* (Gallimard, D&E Vol.4 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 208. Foucault writes “This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *About the beginning*, 25. Foucault writes that one who wants to study a genealogy of the subject must “take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination.”

reinforced through discourse, were used to convince subjects to work on themselves in order to form themselves into an ideal which in turn might serve the governing forces.

### **Foucault's Three Methods for the Creation of Subjects**

Foucault identified three means by which subjects are created: First, modes of investigation create subjects as objects of knowledge. Second, practices and procedures divide subjects both from within, and from other subjects according to standards of norm and deviance. Third, practices and procedures of self-management are introduced, by which subjects transform themselves as subjects in order to meet an externally imposed ideal.<sup>7</sup> I find Foucault's analysis useful for investigating Cassian's rhetoric as the creation of certain subjectivities. Indeed, in Cassian's writings, I find all three of Foucault's modes of subjectivation present. This grants great explanatory and analytical power in understanding how Cassian aims at the creation of a very specific type of subjectivity which, if realized at the necessary critical mass of individuals, would result in the realization of Cassian's vision for an ideal, powerful, and separate monastic institution. That is, these individual subjects would ideally form a collective subjectivity as the building blocks of a monasticism outside of the strictures, as well as what Cassian believed were the moral and spiritual failings of the Church.

In fact, Foucault spent time and analysis on Christian monasticism as a particular mode of subjectivity formation, even mentioning Cassian's writings.<sup>8</sup> Foucault writes that

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault, "Subject and Power," 208.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Michel Foucault, edited by Henri-Paul Fruchaud, Daniele Lorenzini, and Laura Cremonesi, Translated by Graham Burchell, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 64-71.

[e]very Christian has the duty to know who he is, what is happening in him. He has to know the faults he may have committed: he has to know the temptations to which he is exposed. And, moreover, everyone in Christianity is obliged to say these things to other people and hence to bear witness against himself.<sup>9</sup>

Foucault goes on to talk about the virtue of obedience as the principle framework of subjectivity in which monasticism is contained. Obedience, in short, applies to all aspects of the self because “everything that one does not do on order of one’s director, or everything that one does without his permission constitutes a theft.”<sup>10</sup> Foucault thus notes that this obedience, far from being the instrumental and thus temporary condition that it was for disciples of pagan philosophers, is a permanent condition for the monk, “a permanent sacrifice of his own will.”<sup>11</sup> In constantly and faithfully divulging all his thoughts to another, the monk is doing a sort of externally imposed self-examination of his own thoughts which are liable to deceive him if they are not confessed. Foucault notes that Cassian characterizes this act of confession as a manifestation of truth; the distinction between good and evil thoughts is that evil thoughts can only be spoken of with difficulty and/or shame. Bringing forth an evil thought by verbalization to one’s superior makes the thought “lose its venom.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>12</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.10.

## Cassian and Foucault's Three Means for Creating Subjects

Cassian begins his *Institutes* with the assumption that certain monks in the Egyptian desert, monks with whom Cassian himself lived and studied, live in the correct monastic way. This way includes correct, moderate asceticism – as opposed to either luxuriant living or extreme asceticism, both of which must be eschewed<sup>13</sup> – as well as precise daily behaviors, including work, prayer, and study, literally accounting for the behavior of each monk during every hour of every day.<sup>14</sup> I argue that Cassian's description of how correct monks behave forms a specific type of knowledge, a kind of standard of correct behaviors by which Cassian himself, as self-appointed arbiter of proper monasticism, could measure the spiritual progress (or lack thereof) of the monks of Gaul for whom he was writing. Cassian writes as if before his arrival in Gaul, the Gallican monks who make up his intended audience have not had access to the 'science' (*scientia*), or knowledge of living a correct monastic and ascetic life. In his preface to the *Institutes*, for example, he assures his patron that in working toward instituting the Egyptian monastic norms among the Gallican monks, "[i]f I ascertain that something is perhaps not in conformity with the model established by the immemorial contribution of our forebears... you can rely on me to include it."<sup>15</sup> He reiterates this later in the preface, noting that "I do not at all believe that a new constitution in the West, in Gaul, could be

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<sup>13</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.17. Cassian writes "too much restraint can be more harmful than a satisfied appetite. Where the latter is concerned, one may, as a result of saving compunction, move on to a measured austerity. But with the former, this is impossible."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. See especially Books 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>15</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, preface, 8.

more reasonable or indeed more perfect than what has already been instituted” in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Among other methods, he solidifies this form of knowledge by using well-known and well-respected monks as his mouthpieces, in the same way that Plato used Socrates in his dialogues: to lend rhetorical authority to his ideas, in this case Cassian’s particular formation of monastic subjectivity.

Through the building of this body of knowledge, this ‘science’ of proper monastic practice, Cassian implicitly forces his audience to choose between only two options: the correct, established methods he outlines or failure to meet these exalted standards. This in turn divides individual monastic subjects within themselves, for if they aspire to become proper monks, they must work on themselves, striving to attain the standard set by Cassian’s invocation of the lives of well-known and revered monks. At the same time, the Gallican monks are divided, both from laypeople in that they are set apart and above the lay population, but also from clergy and errant monks. That is, true monks, as delimited by Cassian’s list of correct behaviors, are established as the norm, implicitly establishing all others who fail to reach this lofty standard as deviant.

Finally, as mentioned before, Cassian’s list of proper monastic behaviors includes a strict daily routine, control of appetites – both alimentary and sexual – and frequent confession of one’s most shameful thoughts to one’s spiritual master; in other words, the conduct of conduct.<sup>17</sup> These practices, or “technologies of the self,” in Foucauldian parlance, then intersect with Cassian’s rhetorical techniques of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., *preface*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*. See especially book 2 in which Cassian writes of the necessity of confession and gives very specific instructions on fasting, the correct amount of food, and precise times for eating.

domination to create a unique form of monastic subjectivity, one which will serve both Cassian's spiritual goal of the achievement of ideal, individual monks and his political goal of a separate and authoritative monasticism not subject to the whims of bishops.

It now remains to discuss Foucault's notions of the operation of power and which modalities of power are involved in Cassian's rhetorical efforts aimed at the Gallican monks. There are four principal modalities of power in Foucault's taxonomy of power: Sovereign power, disciplinary power, pastoral power and bio-power. Two principal modes fit Cassian's writings to the monks in Gaul: Disciplinary power and pastoral power.

### **Disciplinary Power**

Foucault outlines the operation of what he calls disciplinary power most fully in his monograph *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. While the monarchic form of power – sovereign power, in Foucault's idiom – is exercised almost exclusively through explicit punishments and rewards – witness the failed assassin of the king being drawn and quartered at the beginning of Foucault's book<sup>18</sup> -- disciplinary power is achieved chiefly through surveillance and the creation of forms of knowledge (Latin: *scientia*). Foucault illustrates the power of surveillance through Jeremy Bentham's design of the panopticon, a prison with a central watchtower from which all prison cells can be seen but whose surveilling agent cannot himself be seen clearly by individual prisoners.

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, Sheridan, Alan, translator, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 3-6, 9. Foucault goes on to note that the spectacle of punishment, in the service of sovereign power, was meant "to equal in savagery of the crime itself."

While the supervisors and guards of the prison may certainly watch each prisoner from the all-seeing watchtower, their actual supervision ultimately becomes unnecessary because of the effect the mere notion of constant surveillance has upon prisoners, according to Bentham. Since the prisoners cannot see their supervisors, they must assume that they are always being watched by one of the authorities. In fact, guards need no longer watch prisoners since the prisoners regulate their own behavior under the imagined supervision of the opaque watchtower.<sup>19</sup> This is the very definition of Foucault's disciplinary power: those in power inculcate their surveilling power into the prisoners who then police themselves, as it were, out of fear of the watchful eyes and on behalf of the authorities.

The other principal technique of disciplinary power involves the gathering and/or construction of particular forms of knowledge, principally through the sciences, about potential subjects. In fact, academic forms of knowledge come to be known as "disciplines," precisely because they separate knowledge into discrete domains, which then separates objects studied into equally separate realms based, as Foucault argues, upon what are ultimately arbitrary characteristics.<sup>20</sup> Such academic disciplines construct and then provide standards for the general public by which they may judge what is good

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Foucault writes "The fundamental codes of a culture... establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general... and why this particular order has been established and not some other." xx.

or, more to the point, what is “normal.” It is on the basis of such norms, for example, that people exercise regularly, arrive at their places of work or school on time, and complete assignments given to them in those capacities. The disciplines, however, like the implied surveillance above, have a power to coerce individuals to regulate their own behavior.

For example, no overlord need force people to exercise since the knowledge of the benefits of exercise and the norms of public body image are assumed broadly enough to make most people exercise on their own authority. These norms of knowledge, disseminated through mass channels, ensure that most people will fall in line and exercise regularly; or, perhaps they won’t exercise and will pay the price of feeling “out of step” with or excluded from the world around them and thus threatened with a punitive isolation.

At this point, I must acknowledge that a third aspect of Foucault’s disciplinary power, that of production, may not fit as easily within the mode Cassian uses discursively. The entire notion of production and/or commodification was itself a product of a much later age (Foucault locates it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century along with the widespread birth of the prison,<sup>21</sup>) and thus it would be anachronistic at best to assume that Cassian had this notion in mind as he created his monastic subjects. However, I would note that Foucault’s definition of production within the exercise of disciplinary power leaves some room here for ambiguity. Specifically, he writes that the labor of convicts is “intrinsically useful, not as an activity of production, but by virtue of the effect it has on the human

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 231-240.

mechanism... [I]t must be of itself, a machine whose convict-workers are both the cogs and the products.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Foucault notes that if the work of the prison has any real economic effect, “it is by producing individuals mechanized according to the general norms of an industrial society.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, In this sense, I believe that even the notion of production can at least marginally apply to Cassian’s creation of monastic subjects, given that capitalism and even its predecessor mercantilism were not to come for another 1,400 years. Like Foucault’s inmates, monks are also constantly occupied as a disciplinary measure. As one writer cited by Foucault puts it, “by occupying the convict, one gives him habits of order and obedience... with time he finds in the regular movement of the prison, in the manual labors to which he is subjected... a certain remedy against the wanderings of his imagination.”<sup>24</sup> As in the prison, Cassian’s end products were the monks themselves, formed according to the ideal he learned and imitated from monastic Egypt.

While monks, in Cassian’s ideal formation, are not given a quota for the work they do (as might be done in a piecework factory setting much later in history) the understanding is that any time they are not praying or sleeping, they are performing some type of manual labor. He thus writes that “the fathers throughout Egypt in no way permit monks, and especially the young men, to be idle. They measure the state of their heart

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 242.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 242.

and their progress in patience and humility by their eagerness to work.”<sup>25</sup> He reinforces the significance of manual labor for monks by quoting several passages from the Pauline and Pseudo-Pauline canon, emphasizing the value the apostle placed on the practice of manual work (2 Thess 3:11, Ephesians 4:28). The point of work in Cassian’s scheme was certainly not to produce economic value, although some Egyptian monks clearly wove reed baskets in order to earn money.<sup>26</sup> It was, rather, to produce docile minds and bodies who would obey unquestioningly. This form of production was producing submissive subjects, monks who understood the value of reducing their individual egos in service to the community.

### **Cassian and Disciplinary Power**

One of the principle ways Cassian demonstrates the modality of disciplinary power is through mandating the act of confession to an elder monk. Monks are required to confess their deeds and, more importantly, all their thoughts, becoming, in effect, entirely transparent to another; in this way, Cassian establishes the disciplinary effect of surveillance. In order for a monk to achieve the perfection which is defined as salvation for monastics according to Cassian, he must never hold any thought or past action back from his superior. Through the mouth of Abba Moses, an eminent Egyptian monk, Cassian says that

true discernment is obtained only when one is really humble. The first evidence of this humility is when everything done or thought of is submitted to the scrutiny of our elders. This is to ensure that one trusts one’s own

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<sup>25</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, X.22. “Per Aegyptum patres eruditi nullo modo otiosos esse monachos ac praecipue iuuenes sinunt, actum cordis et profectum patientiae et humilitatis sedulitate operis metientes.”

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, *AP*, John the Short, 30 and 31.

judgment in nothing, that one yields to their authority in everything, that the norms for good and bad must be established in accordance with what they have handed down.<sup>27</sup>

While no human agent is explicitly outlined as physically watching the monk as in the panopticon, I argue that the injunction to make one's mind and actions transparent in order to become like the eminent elders of monasticism serves much the same function. With the assumption that each individual monk knows his own thoughts and actions, Cassian sets up a system whereby those who are completely forthcoming about every one of their thoughts and actions are rhetorically placed closer and closer to becoming holy heroes such as Abba Moses. Monks will therefore police their own thoughts and actions in order to reach this high spiritual level and to reach a harbor of safety from demonic forces. To reinforce the absolute necessity of this confession, Cassian writes that "an evil thought sheds its danger when it is brought out into the open... Its dangerous promptings hold sway in us as long as these are concealed in the heart."<sup>28</sup> This rhetorically establishes each monk as his own policeman, guarding his own mind and actions in order to secure the reward of holiness and salvation promised to the monk who follows obediently the traditions of the renowned elders Cassian uses as his mouthpieces.

To illustrate this point further, Cassian writes of another well-respected monk, Abba Sarapion, who, as a novice, made the ethical error of taking extra bread after each meager monastic meal and concealing it in his cloak to savor later. He emphasizes how the guilt of this infraction burned within him, both compelling him to continue doing it

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<sup>27</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, II.10.

and torturing him with guilt. After Sarapion breaks down and tearfully confesses, the elder monk first tells him that simply bringing this infraction to light has vanquished the devil within him. The more direct and telling result however is told in more colorful language. As soon as the elder has uttered these comforting exhortations, Sarapion says that “a lamp was lighted in my breast and it so filled the cell with its sulphurous smell that its fierce stink barely allowed us to remain.”<sup>29</sup> This noxious odor is the physical manifestation of the demonic influence exiting the renewed and sanctified body and soul, expelled by the forced transparency of confession before one’s master (and in this case, before other monks as well). Sarapion goes on to note that because of the dangers of hidden thoughts and deeds, “the footsteps of our elders must always be followed with the utmost care and every thought in our hearts must be submitted to them, stripped of the cover of false modesty.”<sup>30</sup> The reason for constant self-revelation to one’s superior is that “the spiritual life is unseen and hidden, open to only the purest heart.”<sup>31</sup> Note first that this confession, long before any institutional church had made this action an official sacrament, renders visible that which is invisible. This necessity of bringing forth all one’s thoughts and actions is a kind of surveillance inscribed upon the monk’s body and mind. Cassian is able thus to connect this kind of frequent confession to the ideal state of being for which monks strive through asceticism and obedience. By bearing the shame of admitting one’s sinfulness through thoughts and deeds, one acquires the humility (*humilitas*) necessary for the conversion of oneself from diabolic to deific. In addition,

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<sup>29</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II.11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, II.11.

Cassian surely uses the phrase “purest heart” (*corde purissimo*), akin to his ideal “purity of heart,” (*puritatem cordis*) to tie together clearly the purificatory process of purging oneself of sinful thoughts and deeds through willing revelation, such that each unholy thought or deed revealed to one’s elder brings one closer to that purity of heart associated with Evagrius’ ideal *apatheia*, the state in which the passions within are subdued.

The geography of the monastic cell has an undeniably panoptic effect on the conduct of each monk as well. The monastic space is often characterized as imbued with the authority of older, wiser monks or even God such that staying within the cell’s confines constitutes an experience of allowing oneself to be shaped correctly by a divine source. This is a common theme in the monastic literature. In one saying, for example, Abba Moses, coincidentally one of Cassian’s mouthpieces in the *Conferences*, tells a struggling monk “Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”<sup>32</sup> This ethos, in which the cell itself watches and teaches the monk who obeys its confines, is found in Cassian’s work, especially in the section on acedia (ἀκηδία), perhaps best translated as listlessness or despair. Cassian, following the writings of Evagrius, says that one of the principal symptoms of this form of thought is that it agitates the monk so that he can’t remain in his cell (*cellula*) and convinces him that he’s wasting his time by staying within its borders.<sup>33</sup> In addition to manual labor, Cassian writes that the other remedy for this vice is to simply force oneself to remain in the cell.<sup>34</sup> The functions of the cell in this case are manifold. First, its borders define the identity of the monk, and one

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<sup>32</sup> *AP*, Moses, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, X.2.1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, X.25.

who abandons its boundaries equally abandons his vocation. Second, the cell, if its confines are obeyed, will serve a pedagogical function, teaching the monk holiness. Third, it plays the panoptic part of God, watching the monk's conduct. If the monk cannot stay within his cell, he cannot achieve the perfection toward which all monastic practice ultimately aims. In addition, staying inside the monastic cell will ensure that one behaves correctly and thus, through the specific practices taught and then facilitated by the authority of the cell, becomes an ideal monk.

Cassian also displays that other aspect of Foucault's disciplinary power, that is, the production of a certain form of knowledge. Cassian, for example, has clearly established both the ways and means of the venerable Egyptian monks who function as his ideal, and those of the Gallican monks to whom he is writing, who function as his example of what not to do in order to reach monastic perfection. By contrasting these two groups and their disparate ways of life, Cassian grants himself a rhetorical power over the Gallican monks, noting that they do not meet the ascetic or spiritual standards he establishes through his Egyptian mouthpieces.

In the preface to his *Institutes*, Cassian writes to his patron, Pope Castor, that his purpose in writing is to “establish in [Castor's] own province, which lacks such things, the institutes of the Eastern and especially the Egyptian cenobia.”<sup>35</sup> While Cassian modestly argues that he himself is “lacking in word and knowledge (*scientia*),”<sup>36</sup> he agrees to write about the correct way of monastic life because “the whole of it consists in

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<sup>35</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, *preface*, I.3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, *preface*, I.3.

experience and practice alone.”<sup>37</sup> Note first that Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power involves the construction of forms of knowledge, principally the sciences, which is why he argues that this form of power does not come into play until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the very fact that the Latin word for knowledge (*scientia*) is the predecessor to our word science gives a semantic foreshadowing of what Cassian will do in his writings. This includes the rule governing the monks’ daily schedule.

The first four books of the *Institutes* give a rudimentary schedule for the cenobitic monks, a rule exemplified later in Benedict’s notion of *ora et labora*. Cassian doesn’t provide us with any information on exactly when the monks are expected to rise in the morning. However, based on later monastic rules influenced by Cassian’s writings, we know that they likely arose very early, likely at sunrise, for their first communal prayer of the day, later known as Matins, although this word is not used in Cassian’s writing.<sup>38</sup> This morning prayer is said to consist of the chanting of three Psalms and prayers.<sup>39</sup> The monks are dismissed after this to return to their cells. Cassian denounces those in Gaul who go back to sleep after Matins, prescribing instead a regimen in the cell of manual work, reading, and unceasing interior prayer.<sup>40</sup> There are three other prescribed communal prayers throughout the daytime hours: Terce, so named because it is at the third hour (9:00 AM), Sext, at the sixth hour (12:00 PM), and None, at the ninth

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., *preface*, I.4.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict of Nursia, Timothy Fry, O.S.B. translator., *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, (New York: Vintage, 1998), 16.

<sup>39</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, III.4.2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., III.4.2.

hour (3:00).<sup>41</sup> While Cassian doesn't prescribe a mealtime for monks, he does recommend two small loaves of bread per day and the minimum water necessary to maintain health.<sup>42</sup> Other monastic literature from Egypt suggests that this was to be taken in one meal every day at the ninth hour.<sup>43</sup> Although Cassian doesn't mention the type of manual labor in which the monks are supposed to engage, it is likely weaving baskets or plaiting ropes, the typical type of labor for Egyptian monks who would sell the baskets and ropes in order to make a living.<sup>44</sup> While self-sufficiency in making a living was important for Egyptian monasticism, the clear function of manual labor was to remain occupied, never allowing the mind or body to give way to distraction. Finally, there is the last communal prayer of the day in which twelve Psalms are chanted and there are two scriptural readings, one from the Old Testament and one from the New.<sup>45</sup>

Note that each part of every day is meticulously scheduled, such that only the three or four hours of sleep allowed the monks leaves unstructured time. In terms of disciplinary power, this daily timetable allowed the head monk to maintain control, both through a type of surveillance – each monk had to be seen at scheduled prayers and then

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., III.1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XII.15.2, XIII.6.2.

<sup>43</sup> See for example *AP*, Macarius the Great, 3.

<sup>44</sup> See *AP* Antony, 1, John the Short, 11, 30, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.4.

return to his cell – and through the discourse which emphasized the rewards of following the schedule faithfully.

It is instructive that while Cassian claims modestly that he is lacking in knowledge, what knowledge he does have has been acquired first-hand by living and practicing with the esteemed monks of Egypt who will henceforth be his models and spokesmen. The very phrase “the whole of it consists in experience and practice alone,” gives an indication of the forthcoming contents of the *Institutes*: Through experience living and practicing with the Desert Fathers of Egypt, rather than merely reading hagiographical literature about these venerable monks, Cassian has gathered knowledge of the practices and procedures necessary to achieve a kind of Christian perfection.

Indeed, the *Institutes* will begin with technical descriptions of how the Egyptian monks live, including their dress, prayer times and content, food and fasting, and other seeming minutiae. The monks of Gaul to whom Cassian writes can simply copy these ways, whether or not they fully comprehend their significance. Again, this is a knowledge acquired through practice and experience, not reading or deduction. Finally, in the second half of the *Institutes*, Cassian writes of the eight principal vices (the predecessor notion to the seven deadly sins) which all monks who live in the correct manner can expect to confront, and gives simple instructions on how to face such demonic influences. These methods constitute a very specific body of knowledge gathered together by Cassian through years of experience among others who had practiced similarly for years. However, it is equally clear that Cassian has formed the Gallican methods as its own body of knowledge through observation, and will use the body of knowledge gathered from Egyptian monks to mark the discrepancies between

the correct practices and methods of the Egyptians and the insufficient practice of the same by the Gallicans. He notes, for example that during silent prayer in Egypt “there is no spitting, no annoying clearing of throats, no noisy coughing, no sleepy yawning emitted from gaping and wide-open mouths, no groans and not even any sighs to disturb those in attendance.”<sup>46</sup> This is a clear rebuke of the Gallican monks; there would be no need to so specifically detail such infractions during prayer time had Cassian not seen them in the Gallican monastery. He goes on to say that in Egypt, the prayers are “brief, but frequent,”<sup>47</sup> likely another implicit criticism of the methods in his new province. The concept is clear: Cassian, who learned what he goes on to call the Egyptian Institutes (*Aegyptia Instituta*) through imitation and practice, is now constructing a model of the faults and lacks of Gallican monastic practice through careful comparison with his Egyptian exemplars. The effect of this would be twofold. First, it provides models and methods for the Gallicans to improve themselves and their practices by comparing themselves with Cassian’s outlined knowledge. Second, it divides the Gallican monks themselves as individuals into that which is deficient in correct monastic knowledge (*scientia*) and that which attempts to correct these faults through following the authority of Cassian’s experience-derived knowledge.

### **Pastoral Power**

While Cassian makes use of disciplinary power in his rhetorical shaping of monastic subjects, he clearly also makes use of what Foucault terms pastoral power. This modality of power is tied intimately to the rise of Christianity with its notion of a

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<sup>46</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, II.10.

ruler and/or deity as shepherd culled originally from ancient Judaism (cf. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Psalm 23:1). Foucault points out four ways in which this mode of power differs greatly from that of ancient Greek political thought. “First, the shepherd wields power over a flock rather than over a land.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, the ruler or deity does not control a land and everything within that land (people, resources, governance, etc.) but rather is responsible for a flock, or specific group of people, no matter the land within which that people dwell. That is, the relationship between ruler and people is paramount, rather than, in the case of the Greek city-state, for example, the relationship between the ruler and the specific territory. “Second, the shepherd gathers together, guides and leads his flock.”<sup>49</sup> Because the shepherd’s primary relationship is to his flock or people, he first gathers them together, since without specific ties to a land the flock may be dispersed, then he guides them to right behavior and, more importantly, to whatever resources they need. As their shepherd, the ruler is not simply an overlord, but rather has a responsibility for the well-being of his flock. This leads to the next aspect of pastoral power: “Third, the shepherd’s role is to ensure the salvation of his flock.”<sup>50</sup> Foucault thus notes that this responsibility entails not simply saving the flock from impending danger. Rather, the shepherd must also constantly monitor the flock, both as a whole and as individuals, and attend to both levels of needs. This last aspect of the individualization of care is where Foucault sees the greatest difference between pastoral

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault with Jeremy Carrette, translator, *Religion and Culture*, (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 137.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

power and Greek political thought. While the Greek god, for example, was asked to provide “a fruitful land and abundant crops... he was not asked to foster a flock day by day.”<sup>51</sup> Fourth and finally, wielding power is for the shepherd not a privilege, but a duty. Foucault notes that “shepherdly kindness is much closer to ‘devotedness’.”<sup>52</sup> Here, the notion of watching over the flock is important: “First, [the shepherd] acts, he works, he puts himself out, for those he nourishes and who are asleep. Second... he pays attention to them all and scans each one of them. He’s got to know his flock as a whole, and in detail.”<sup>53</sup> The shepherd is constantly vigilant to the needs of the entire flock and those of each individual member. One can begin to see how this notion of leadership, far more than that of the Greek, could be mapped onto the later Christian context of antiquity. We will see that Cassian, while writing instructions – theological and practical – for a monastic community is clearly concerned with both the needs of the community and those of the individual.

In combining most facets of disciplinary power (possibly excluding that of production which would have been an economic anachronism in fifth-century Europe)<sup>54</sup> with pastoral power, Cassian sets up a mode of specifically monastic subjectivity in which he, as monks’ rhetorical shepherd, is both authoritative guide and watcher and in which individual monks are his concern. However, individual monks also regulate their own behavior out of concern for their own salvation.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>53</sup> Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 138.

## Cassian and Pastoral Power

In addition to the displays of disciplinary power in Cassian's rhetoric, we clearly find examples of pastoral power as well. First, the superior monk is responsible for his group of monks, rather than for a certain land. Eremitic monks and those living in small groups, for example, are often said to have moved about searching for resources and safety from roving gangs of bandits. However, this did not change the responsibility the superior monk had for the well-being and salvation of the novice monks. Cassian writes in one *Conference* that novice monks "must with all humility follow whatever you see our Elders do or teach."<sup>55</sup> While this quote exhorts the younger monks to act in accordance with the actions and words of the elders, it also implicitly states that the elders are responsible for providing that good example to their novices, their flock. The elder's responsibility is always to the group of monks within his community, and includes modeling correct practices and behaviors. In addition, Cassian writes that for those individuals who join the larger cenobitic communities

there is no providing for the day's work, no distractions of buying and selling, no unavoidable care for the year's food, no anxiety about bodily things, by which one has to get ready what is necessary not only for one's own wants but also for those of any number of visitors.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See especially Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault notes the increasing formation of "docile bodies" into useful functions and/or production. For example, "by the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed." 135.

<sup>55</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.6.

In the larger community, the superior of the monastery is responsible for both the physical and the spiritual needs of his flock.

Next, the shepherd both gathers and leads his flock. In the case of the head monk of a community, the shepherd is responsible for keeping the flock together through a litany of collective practices, as well as the assumption of a monastic identity conferred upon each novice as he joins. As Goodrich notes, “those [Gallican monks] who would not submit” to their superiors merely “demonstrated that they had yet to make progress in obedience, a virtue that was a certain prerequisite for progress toward spiritual perfection.”<sup>57</sup> Since total obedience was enjoined upon every monk, the superior had the responsibility both to lead by example and to keep the community together.

Third, the leader of the community had to work for the salvation of all monks in his charge. As stated above, the first way he did this was by enforcing total obedience on every member of the community. As Foucault notes, this includes the very safety of the community through providing material resources but also “constant, individualized and final kindness.”<sup>58</sup> In the case of monks, this meant being ready at all times to hear the individual confessions of the monks’ faults in thought, word and deed. As long as monks were diligent in confessing all of their internal evils, their salvation was assured. Finally, the wielding of power in the case of the superior monk was a duty rather than a privilege. Cassian notes this when he writes

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<sup>57</sup> Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul*, (New York: Oxford university press, 2007), 60.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 138.

it is not anyone who likes who is of his own wish or ambition promoted to this office, but only he whom the congregation of all the Elders considers from the advantage of his age and the witness of his faith and virtues to be more excellent than, and superior to, all others.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Cassian writes that “no one is chosen to rule over a community of brothers unless... he has learned by obedience how he should command those who will be subject to him and has understood from the institutes of the elders what he should pass on to the young.”<sup>60</sup> Note in this latter quotation that not only is the leader of a monastery to rule over a community, but also to pass on traditions and knowledge to the young. It is clear here why elder monks would have the name “father” attached to them, since it was not any kind of benefit to be in authority of a community, but rather a duty to continue the unbroken line of correct monasticism. This type of rule entails far more work and far less privilege than that of a typical monarch. It is obligation, not license.

### **Biopower**

Near the end of his life, Foucault introduced yet another term in his typology of power: biopower. While biopower, like disciplinary power, does not fit Cassian’s mode of subjectification perfectly, it is possible to read a kind of proto-biopower into his discourse and systematic treatment of ideal monastic life.

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<sup>59</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XXI.1.2. “Non enim ad hunc gradum quilibet propria voluntate aut ambitione provehitur, sed is quem cunctorum seniorum coetus aetatis praerogativa et fidei atque virtutum testimonio excellentiorem omnibus sublimioremque censverit.”

<sup>60</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.3.3.

Biopower is defined by Foucault as “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.”<sup>61</sup> Principally, Foucault sees the rise of biopower in the eighteenth century with the appearance of demography and the assessment of the association between resources and people.<sup>62</sup> He goes on to say that biopower consists of “techniques of power... guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony,” specifically by working through institutions such as the military and the schools.<sup>63</sup>

### **Cassian and Biopower**

The notion of biopower might cross into Cassian’s territory when one considers again the requirement for all monks to confess all thoughts and deeds that might be considered sinful or otherwise harmful to the soul on a frequent basis. Besides, ensuring that monks will watch and regulate their own behavior and even thought patterns, this requirement can also be read as a kind of proto-demography, in which each time the monk confesses an wayward thought or deed, the monastic superior has collected data on that monk. How frequently does the monk confess such things? What categories of thoughts/deeds does he confess? Have his confessions become more or less frequent recently? In short, while this is certainly not demography in the modern sense which Foucault documents, it is a kind of precursor in which the economy of salvation may be regulated by keeping in mind which monks are experiencing more errant thoughts and

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<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley, 1st Vintage Books ed., (New York: Vintage Books), 140.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 141.

deeds and which are experiencing fewer. Keeping track of such data, even if not in writing, is indeed an exercise of power.

In another sense, the control of the monks' time, in which monks are required to follow a set daily schedule recalls Foucault's reference to biopower as "taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, [which] gave power its access to the body."<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, this control, combined with the required confessions, "brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life."<sup>65</sup> The knowledge gathered through these techniques made the monastic superior, the *hegemon*, the controller of the very lives of his subordinate monks. Had Cassian progressed from writing about these techniques to actually practicing them at a working monastery – we have no evidence whether he did or did not – he himself would have become that all-knowing, all-seeing *hegemon*.

Finally, before concluding this chapter, I would like to acknowledge that first, none of these forms of power described by Foucault fits perfectly as an analysis of Cassian's rhetoric. Foucault was, for the most part, analyzing emerging forms of power in what he called "The Classical Age" – roughly 1660 to 1900 CE. While I find his typology of power useful as a tool for analyzing what I believe Cassian is doing with his rhetoric and systematization of the monastic life, one cannot ignore that Foucault is investigating the emergence of capitalism and other modern developments of which Cassian and those of his time could never have dreamed. However, I would argue that

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<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

using his notions on the creation of subjects and the uses of different types of power helps elucidate what I will argue is Cassian's intention and the outcome of his efforts.

In addition, despite my linear layout of the types of power and their correlations to Cassian's rhetoric and ideas, it must be said that forms of power frequently overlap and, therefore, do not occur in a linear fashion. While I believe that it is accurate to say that Cassian's codification of monastic life can be designated a form of disciplinary power, it is, at the same time, a form of biopower. When Cassian insists that the superior of a monastery must compassionately care hear and reassure the monk confessing disobedient thoughts or actions, it is both an example of pastoral power and disciplinary power. In other words, I see these three forms of power functioning simultaneously, weaving in and out of each other in the interplay of Cassian's writing and the daily operation of the monastery.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, Foucault's descriptions of how subjects are created was explained, including the three principal criteria for the successful deployment of this discursive operation. From there, the chapter proceeds to a definition of the two types of power, among several described by Foucault, which I believe Cassian uses in attempting to manipulate the subjectivity of monks in Gaul: disciplinary power and pastoral power. Finally, I use Cassian's own writings to demonstrate how these types of power are operative within his discourse.

By comparing Foucault's descriptions of disciplinary power, pastoral power, and biopower with Cassian's own rhetoric in the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, clear patterns emerge. First, Cassian is attempting both to secure his own position as authority on

correct monastic practice. He does this by using eminent monks as his mouthpieces, thus preserving the appearance of the necessary humility while simultaneously reinforcing his authority to teach monastic method by placing his own writings within the tradition of the teachings of the venerable fathers of Egypt, monks he personally knew and of whom the monks of Gaul had only heard heroic tales. Second, Cassian establishes a kind of surveillance through mandating the frequent act of confession of thoughts among Gallican monks. By doing so, he effectively talks these monks into submitting themselves to his authority, making their secrets known if indeed they want to reach the spiritual heights of an Antony or Abba Moses. Finally, Cassian makes it clear that one who wants to advance to become head of a community of monks, must first prove that he is humble enough to be completely obedient. The effect of this might be that only he who uncomplainingly does whatever his superior tells him, including following the rules and regulations laid out by Cassian in his writings, would gain the advantage of being named superior of a monastic community. These methods are all clearly evidenced in Cassian's injunctions, as well as in his comparisons of the Egyptian monks to the Gallican. While the Gallicans are kept scrambling to try and meet the high bar of Egyptian monasticism as described by Cassian, Cassian establishes himself as the one who sets the bar.

In the next chapter, I show the conflicts between monastics and church hierarchs in Egypt, verifying that these conflicts were both real and deeply consequential, especially for monks. By so doing, I plan to begin building a case for why Cassian, as an inheritor of Egyptian tradition, might have wanted to separate monasticism from the institutional Church.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Conflicts Between Monasticism and the Church**

In this chapter, I establish the historicity of conflicts experienced by Cassian and others between monks and the institutional church as represented by bishops and other clergy. These conflicts were not unique to Cassian and his faction of monks. Indeed, the monastic literature is full of stories of antipathy between monks and bishops. This was a pervasive problem, which sometimes produced disastrous results. While Cassian's writings refer briefly to the conflict he and his fellow monks in the settlement of Scetis had with a bishop, other concurrent monastic discourse (*AP*, *Lausiac History*, etc.) makes abundantly clear that there were many such conflicts and several types of conflict involved. While there was clearly a power differential between monks and clergy, the bitter conflict between Cassian's faction of monks and the bishop of Alexandria actually turned violent and would result in the exile of Cassian and his fellow monks.

First, this chapter will provide examples of laypeople often viewing monks as wiser and more righteous, indeed as having a more direct line of communication with God, than the clergy.<sup>1</sup> This was repeatedly played out in instances in which bishops and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61, (1971): 80-101. Brown notes that in late antiquity, monks were often consulted by

other clergy members were subordinated or even felt pressure to subordinate themselves to the power of monks, as we will see below. Second, I will examine how, in retaliation for this perceived usurpation of power, or simply in order to coopt the power of monks for the institutional church, clergy would often attempt to forcibly ordain revered monks.<sup>2</sup> While some of these monks reluctantly accepted their ordination, it is clear in the early monastic discourse that many declined ordination, either by escaping to other locations or, in more extreme examples, mutilating themselves in order to make themselves unfit or unable to fulfill ecclesiastic duty. I will discuss some examples of these below and proffer an explanation for this reticence to accept what would, for many, have been considered a great honor.

Finally, I will demonstrate that there were, in some cases, extreme theological differences between certain groups of monks and the ruling clergy. While redactors of much of monastic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries may have tried to force all Egyptian monastics into the same theological bubble, it nevertheless remains clear that there was a wide variety of practices and beliefs among different factions of Egyptian monks.<sup>3</sup> However, it is equally clear that many of these monks disagreed with the theology and practice of their diocesan clergy. In the case of Cassian, such a disagreement ended with his exile from Egypt and, in a sense, another exile from

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laypeople in order to mediate disputes both personal and legal, to foretell the future, to increase fertility in women, and to bless and curse. Their authority was often more revered than that of either clergy or government officials.

<sup>2</sup> See *AP*, Macarius 1, Matoes 9 and especially Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, Ammonius 2.

<sup>3</sup> “[T]he story of the relationship between this ascetic milieu and the Church leaders shows a variety of attitudes, alliances and conflicts, as exemplified by the Greek Christian literature flourishing in the fatherland of Eastern asceticism. Essentially normative in their aims, these writings are reliable

Constantinople later. While Cassian refers only cursorily to the conflict which likely resulted in exile from his beloved desert, other writers refer to the conflict, and others, in much more detail. It is with these writers, particularly those of the *AP* and other collections of sayings and stories that we begin.

### **Subordination of Clergy to Monks**

In the Egypt of the fourth and fifth centuries, “average Christian believers... were encouraged to draw comfort from the expectation that, somewhere... a chosen few of their fellows... had achieved, usually through prolonged ascetic labor, an exceptional degree of closeness to God.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, “the holy man,” writes Peter Brown, “was a ‘servant of his God’. He was also a ‘patron’ in that he offered petitions to God on behalf of others.”<sup>5</sup> No such power was ascribed to clergy in the lay imagination of the late antique period in Egypt and Palestine. Rather, monastic discourse often has bishops subordinating themselves to the wisdom of monks. Whether or not the historicity of these encounters can be verified, it is important to note that monastic writers, of the fourth century and beyond, discursively portrayed monks as superior to clergy. Many of the monks, in turn, displayed a kind of disdain, or at least indifference, toward members of the clergy in this literature. When one archbishop went with a prominent magistrate to visit a renowned hermit, Arsenius, to ask for a word of wisdom, “after a short silence [Arsenius] answered him, ‘Will you put into practice what I say to you?’ They promised

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witnesses of the very difficult and long-term process leading to the incorporation of ascetic practise (sic) into the pastoral life of the Church.” Marcella Forlin Patrucco, "Bishops and Monks in Late Antique Society," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum* 8, no. 2, (2004): 332-45, 337.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*, Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57-58.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

him this. ‘If you hear Arsenius is anywhere, do not go there.’<sup>6</sup> The audacity of a monk not only denying his wisdom to the premier hierarch in the area but furthermore ordering him to never visit him again displays keenly the power that monks were perceived to have over clergy and even representatives of political power such as magistrates.<sup>7</sup> Not only would church hierarchs defer to monks in terms of spiritual wisdom, but they would also obey the orders of such monks without question.

In another story, a well-respected monk, Abba Gelasius, is approached by a bishop embroiled in theological argument. The bishop pleads with Gelasius to advocate for his side of the argument in order to lend it credence. Gelasius, however, is unimpressed. “If you want to argue about the faith, you have those close to you who will listen to you and answer you; for my part, I have not time to hear you.”<sup>8</sup> This condescending dismissal of the bishop causes the bishop at last to order his followers to decide to burn Gelasius at the stake. However, after Gelasius is bound to the stake and surrounded with kindling, the bishop’s followers, “seeing that even that did not make [Gelasius] give in nor frighten him and fearing a popular uprising, for he was very celebrated (all this had been given him by Providence from above), they sent our martyr... safe and sound away.”<sup>9</sup> Note that while in this story the bishop is depicted as divisive, if not heretical, Gelasius, the powerful holy man, has received this power from God. The monk was perceived, as Brown notes, as having achieved nothing more than

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<sup>6</sup> *AP*, Arsenius, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Moses, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Gelasius, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Gelasius, 4.

intimacy with God by which his power far exceeded that of clergy members.<sup>10</sup> In yet another example, Abba Sisoës receives some hungry traveling monks and sets some food before them of which he also partakes. A bishop arrives, accusing the monk of eating on a designated fast day. However, when he realizes that Sisoës is providing hospitality to the hungry monks, a sacred duty for monks despite the requirement of fasting, “the bishop did penance before [Sisoës] saying, ‘Forgive me, Abba, for I reasoned on a human level while you do the work of God’.”<sup>11</sup> The bishop’s prostration before the monk clearly delineates the superior power of the monk over the office of bishop. What is truly striking here, however, is the fact that the bishop acknowledges that while he, as representative of the institutional church, is thinking on a “human level,” which certainly includes the honor and power granted to clergy, Sisoës the monk is doing “the work of God.” Not only is the power of the monk superior, but it is granted by a superior source.

### **Attempts at Forced Ordination of Monks**

There are many stories in the monastic discourse of the fourth and fifth centuries in which clergy attempt to effectively kidnap monks and force ordination upon them. This seems to be an attempt to coopt the monks’ rhetorical power over the lay population. What is most interesting here, however, is the fact that monks must generally be forced to accept ordination and often go to extremes to avoid it. Despite the fact that joining the priesthood was a sure means to increased status within towns and villages, David Brakke

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Authority*, 94.

<sup>11</sup> *AP*, Sisoës, 15.

notes that becoming a clergy member is presented as highly problematic in the monastic literature, since

ordination to the priesthood provides the quintessential opportunity for vainglory: it appears repeatedly as a problem for the vainglorious monk, often accompanied by scenarios in which admiring laypeople force the “reluctant” monk to accept clerical leadership.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, as we will see below, Cassian sees monastic life, with its separation from the normal, settled life of the populated city or village, as exemplary for the Christian; becoming a bishop or priest necessarily takes one away from the holy way of monastic life. A story from the *AP* illustrates this point:

They used to say of a bishop of Oxyrhynchus, named Abba Apphy, that when he was a monk he submitted himself to a very severe way of life. When he became a bishop, he wished to practice the same austerity, even in the world, but he had not the strength to do so. Therefore he prostrated himself before God saying, ‘Has your grace left me because of my episcopate?’ Then he was given this revelation, ‘No, but when you were in solitude and there was no one else it was God who was your helper. Now that you are in the world, it is man’.”<sup>13</sup>

Note that what has been lost in the transition from monk to bishop is intimacy with God and its attendant dependence upon God alone.

In another story, a bishop orders the ordination of a monk named Ammonius, one of the Tall Brothers from whom Cassian learned his monastic practice. When the bishop’s envoys surround Ammonius, he hurriedly cuts off his left ear in front of them,

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<sup>12</sup> David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 67.

<sup>13</sup> *AP*, Apphy, 1.

stating that this makes him ineligible for the priesthood according to Levitical laws. When the envoys return empty-handed, the bishop says such laws are only for Jews and that he will still ordain him. The envoys go yet again to ordain Ammonius, however, and he tells them that if they compel him to accept ordination, he will cut out his tongue.<sup>14</sup> While stories of monastic reluctance to accept ordination abound in the literature, the violence of this one is particularly striking. Why is Ammonius so unwilling to accept holy orders that he will permanently mutilate himself in order to escape it? I contend that in this story and those to follow, monks are unwilling to become part of the established church hierarchy because they see it as spiritually inferior to monasticism. If they were to become part of it, they would lose their own intimacy with God and become simply functionaries in a corrupt and inferior system.<sup>15</sup>

In further stories of this type, monks simply ran away, often far away, and established solitary cells for themselves in other places when bishops came to ordain them.<sup>16</sup> Still other stories portray the monastic view of bishops and clergy as contemptuous, further clarifying why some monks would want to escape ordination. In one, a priest, judging several monks harshly for bathing, a practice often

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<sup>14</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, Ammonius, 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> In his *Church History*, for example, Socrates Scholasticus writes of the Tall Brothers, a group of four well-known monks who had been forcibly ordained by the bishop Theophilus, that while in his service, “in process of time, they thought they were being spiritually injured, observing the bishop to be devoted to gain, and greedily intent on the acquisition of wealth, and according to the common saying 'leaving no stone unturned' for the sake of gain, they refused to remain with him any longer.” Translated by A.C. Zenos. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.), VI.7.

<sup>16</sup> Ward, *AP*, Isaac 1 and Macarius the Great 1. monk, Poemen, tells the priest, “Look, you are just like the brethren yourself; if you

considered to be too hedonistic for monks, takes away their monastic robes, effectively stripping them of their newly cultivated identities as monks. A venerable have even a little share of the old Adam, then you are subject to sin in the same way.”<sup>17</sup> The priest is thus forced to admit that he himself is ultimately, like the “old Adam,” no better than the monks he condemned. Here, the monk Poemen shows himself to be morally and/or spiritually superior to the priest by being both forgiving and non-judgmental with the errant monks, while the priest is presumably protecting or establishing his own reputation for holiness by denouncing them in public. Perhaps this explains Cassian’s bold assertion that “a monk ought by all means to flee from women and bishops.”<sup>18</sup> The equation of women with bishops is telling given the sharp devaluation of women in post-Pauline Christian thought. However, the Christian notion of women as a temptation makes this equivalence clear. Brown notes that for an Egyptian monk, the temptation to fornication was not simply a biological fact, but rather a social one for, “it was part of a far greater effort to sever the umbilical cord that linked him to his village” and that “the struggle to overcome [their] sexual needs, therefore, was a necessary byproduct of the self-imposed annihilation of [his] social status as a whole.”<sup>19</sup> Cassian goes on to say that “neither [women nor bishops] permit [the monk], when once they have bent him to familiarity with themselves, to devote himself any longer to the quiet of his cell or to cling with most pure eyes, through insight into

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<sup>17</sup> *AP*, Poemen, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XI.18.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 214.

spiritual matters, to divine *theoria*.”<sup>20</sup> By ordaining monks, bishops presented a challenge to the self-negation, also known as humility, toward which the monks were required to aspire. The problem which linked in Cassian’s mind the temptations of women and bishops, was the danger of abandoning the monastic life and returning to normal social roles, whether husband and father or bishop.

### **Hagiography as Rhetorical Weapon**

Antony, ostensibly the father of Christian monasticism.<sup>21</sup> This biography, although certainly not a biography in the modern sense, became an international bestseller in its time. In the *Confessions*, for example, Augustine of Hippo, just before his dramatic conversion experience, discusses the *Life* with his friend Ponticianus, comparing himself and his learned friends unfavorably with the unlettered and pious depiction of Antony.<sup>22</sup> The *Life of Antony* reads more like an adventure story than a biography, with Antony as the action hero. After defeating the demons and achieving perfection, Antony becomes livid about the heresies of the day, heresies against which Athanasius was

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<sup>20</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XI.18.

<sup>21</sup> For a dissenting opinion, arguing that the *Life of Antony* was originally written in Coptic, rather than the Greek of Athanasius’ version, by a close disciple of Antony’s, see T.D. Barnes, “Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate? The Problem of the Life of Antony”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, xxxvii (1986), 353-368. Barnes’s argument in short is that first, the language describing Antony after his emergence from his long sojourn in the tomb is not characteristic of Athanasius, and second, that Athanasius would never have been so modest as to avoid mentioning his own part in the events described in the *Life*. I must admit, I am unconvinced by these arguments, especially given the zealous, anti-Arian theology of the *Life* which at the very least suggests the strong possibility of Athanasian authorship.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, and Henry Chadwick, translator, *Confessions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.15. The portrayal of Antony as an unlettered peasant puts Augustine, an educated rhetor, to shame, and he exclaims to his friend Alypius “What is wrong with us? What is this that you have heard? Uneducated people are rising up and capturing heaven, and we with our high culture without any heart – see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood.”

fighting tooth and nail. Several scholars have made the case that the entire purpose of the hagiography was for Athanasius to be able to claim Antony's not-inconsiderable authority for his own Nicene position.<sup>23</sup>

In the book, Antony, an illiterate, orphaned peasant, goes into the desert alone, fights against hordes of demons and defeats them, lives a life of asceticism that is difficult to imagine as real, and finally, like Athanasius himself, becomes a zealous heresy-fighter. While Athanasius' story certainly fired the imagination of many at the time and made a case for the highly-revered Antony as being on his side in the many theological conflicts of the day, there is good reason to believe that much of Athanasius' portrait of Antony is a rhetorically useful fiction.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I agree with this suggestion about the *Life of Antony's* rhetorical purpose. As Samuel Rubenson writes, "the aim of the *Vita [Antonii]* was less to propagate the ideals of the Egyptian monks, than to correct them and enlist the support of the monks for the author's ecclesiastical policy. Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 131. See also B. Brennan, "Athanasius' Vita Antonii: A Sociological Interpretation," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 39(3), 209-227; M. Williams, "The Life of Antony and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom," in *Charisma and Sacred Biography*, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Thematic Studies Series, 48:3, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), 23-45; R. Gregg and D. Groh, *Early Arianism--a View of Salvation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 142-153.

<sup>24</sup> See Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*. I remain convinced of the letters' authenticity by Samuel Rubenson's vital study. Rubenson shows that the letters are well-attested in other sources, that the originals were most likely written in Coptic, and that said originals can be reliably dated to the first two decades of the fourth century, placing them well within the lifetime of the historical Antony. In addition, having established with a reasonable degree of certainty that the letters can authentically be traced back to the historical Antony, Rubenson makes clear how the Antony of the letters is vastly different than the image of him as portrayed in the *Life of Antony*: "The letters show that the purpose of the *Vita* was neither to 'humanize' a charismatic teacher nor to 'elevate' a simple monk, but to use the influence of Antony to depict the victory of Orthodoxy over pagans and heretics, the victory of the cross over the demons, of *gnosis* by faith over *gnosis* by education, of the 'man taught by God', the *theodidaktos*, over the philosophers." (emphasis added) 187.

First, it is highly unlikely that Antony was illiterate. William Harmless notes that many ancient sources cite Antony as a writer of epistles.<sup>25</sup> Jerome, for example, counted Antony as one of the luminaries of Christian thought in his *On Illustrious Men* and comments that Antony wrote seven letters in Coptic and that these had been translated into Greek.<sup>26</sup> In fact, while there is a general tendency after the *Life of Antony* becomes popular, to assume that most, if not all, Egyptian monks are from illiterate peasant stock, Harmless and others have shown the folly of this assumption.<sup>27</sup> In addition, there are several versions of the letters, including versions in Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Arabic, and Greek. It is thus certainly plausible that Jerome's assumption of a Coptic original is correct. However, Athanasius might have more easily portrayed his Antony as humble and unassuming (and particularly deferential toward himself and other clergy) by portraying him as illiterate. The portrait that emerges from Antony's letters, however, differs in several key ways. Second, Antony seems to have a very Platonic or Neoplatonic view of the importance of knowing the self in order to know God: "Truly, my beloved, I write to you "as to wise men" (1 Cor. 10:15), who are able to know themselves. I know that he who knows himself knows God and his dispensations

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<sup>25</sup> William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, (Oxford: New York, 2007), 78.

<sup>26</sup> Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, translated by Thomas P. Halton, (Fathers of the Church ; v. 100), (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999). Richardson, E., Gebhardt, O., Gennadius, & Jerome, (1896). *Hieronymus Liber De Viris Inlustribus; Gennadius Liber De Viris Inlustribus / hrsg. von Ernest Cushing Richardson. Der sogenannte Sophronius / hrsg. von Oscar von Gebhardt* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur ; Bd. 14, Heft 1), (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1896), LXXXVIII.1.

<sup>27</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 78. See also Pachomius, *Praecepta* 139 (Boon, 49–50; trans. Veilleux, CS 46:166), in which cenobitic monks who are illiterate must go three times a day to a literate monk to learn to read scripture.

for his creatures.”<sup>28</sup> “A wise man has first to know himself, so that he may then know what is of God, and all his grace which he has always bestowed upon us and then to know that every sin and every accusation is alien to the nature of our spiritual essence.”<sup>29</sup>

Compare this notion with the Neoplatonic writing of Plotinus, for example:

How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop “working on your statue” till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see “self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.”<sup>30</sup>

In both cases, self-knowledge, or soul knowledge, is necessary for the ethical development of the soul. Self-knowledge reveals what is divine and/or beautiful in the soul, allowing oneself to then “cut away” or separate from all that is not divine and/or beautiful. Third, Antony seems to draw directly from the writings of Origen for his cosmology and other ideas, including the pre-existence of souls (or minds):

As for those rational beings in whom the law of promise grew cold and whose faculties of the mind thus died, so that they can no longer know themselves after their first formation, they have all become irrational and serve the creatures instead of the Creator.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Rubenson and Anthony, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), *Ep.* 3: 39–40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, *Ep.* 7: 58.

<sup>30</sup> Plotinus, Translated by A. H. Armstrong, *Ennead, Volume I: Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus*, Loeb Classical Library 440, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). I.9.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Rubenson and Anthony, *The Letters of St. Antony*, *Ep.* II.4-5.

Antony's view is Neoplatonic in that its cosmology and worldview include, like that of Origen, the preexistence of souls who had fallen away from God or the One and into incarnation.<sup>32</sup> The end or *telos* of human life was to return to the Unity from which they'd originally come. This was done through contemplation and self-knowledge.<sup>33</sup> In addition, asceticism was considered a key step for the Neoplatonist in effecting the ascent of the soul to the One.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the soul had only two possibilities of movement: ascent toward the One and descent away from the One. According to Plotinus, the descent of souls into bodies occurs when the attention of the individual soul is turned toward the physical world. This includes the pursuit of bodily comfort and pleasure, something the monastics always mistrusted.<sup>35</sup> The antidote to this descent into bodies is for the soul to ascend toward unity with the One. Ascent, the highest purpose of the soul according to Plotinus, involves turning the attention away from the physical, including pleasure and comfort, and toward "the beauties of soul, virtues and kinds of knowledge and ways of life and laws," finally arriving at "the ultimate which is the first, which is beautiful of itself."<sup>36</sup> Plotinus writes of this as "invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out

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<sup>32</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.9.6.

<sup>34</sup> William Turner, "Neo-Platonism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911). Retrieved May 17, 2019) from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10742b.htm>

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *AP*, Daniel, 4. "The body prospers in the measure in which the soul is weakened, and the soul prospers in the measure in which the body is weakened."

<sup>36</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.9.2.

with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone.”<sup>37</sup> Thus when Antony writes that a person must “know himself,” he refers not to knowing the personality, but rather to knowing and/or turning the attention to one’s knowing the personality, but rather to knowing and/or turning the attention to one’s deepest essence, the soul. When one turns away from the world and toward the soul, the soul begins to ascend, ultimately attaining union with the One/God. Fourth, while Athanasius’ Antony establishes the great monk as a fighter and classifier of demons, many of whom he physically fights in his early days, Antony’s demonology in which demons need human bodies through which to manifest themselves is quite different in the letters:

Truly, my children, [the demons] are jealous of us at all times with their evil counsel, their secret persecution, their subtle malice, their spirits of seduction, their fraudulent thoughts, their faithlessness which they sow in our hearts every day, their hardness of heart and their numbness. And if you seek, you will find [the demons'] sins and iniquities revealed bodily, for they are not visible bodily. But you should know that we are their bodies, and that our soul receives their wickedness.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, in discussing the heresy of Arius, against which Athanasius’ Antony fought so zealously, Antony’s letters, while they do disagree with Arius’ position, take a very different, and much more compassionate tack:

As for Arius, who stood up in Alexandria, he spoke strange words about the Only- begotten: to him who has no beginning, he gave a beginning, to him who is ineffable among men he gave an end, and to the immovable he gave

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. V.I.6

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Ep. VI.23, 27-32, 50-51.

movement. That man has begun a great task, an unhealable wound. If he had known himself, his tongue would not have spoken about what he did not know. It is, however, manifest that he did not know himself.<sup>39</sup>

These letters portray Antony as very different from the popular depiction of him in the *Life*. I would argue that this was done because Athanasius, like the bishops who forced ordination upon revered monks, wanted to coopt the popularity and the perceived wisdom of Antony for the institutional church and his own theological position. Such rhetorical choices, designed to make monks and bishops appear to be completely aligned despite the complexity and variety of monastic positions and practices, would build into a critical mass that would ultimately result in violent incidents between monks and clergy such as the Origenist Controversy to which I turn next.

### **The Origenist Controversy**

The historical lesson of the Origenist Controversy, so named because the monks who did not anthropomorphize the deity were associated by their enemies with Origen who likewise did not believe in God's corporeality, was that in the fourth and fifth centuries, theological debates could have severe real-world consequences. It would end with the destruction of the small settlement of monks in which Cassian and his cohort lived and the exile of Cassian and other prominent monks from Egypt. However, the controversy had more history and theological debates at its root. The complicated nature of these debates warrants a bit of background information, if only to demonstrate that it

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel Rubenson and Anthony, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Ep. IV.7-18.

exemplified the type of theological issues raging in the Christianity of the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

In many ways, the controversy had its origins in the pre-Nicene era and its references to the resurrection of the body, as well as orthodox reactions against the devaluation of materiality in Gnosticism.<sup>40</sup> In this era, there was a concern in some congregations that persecutors of Christians could completely destroy the body, thus making the resurrection of the body impossible. Orthodox presbyters assured their congregations that while the body could be killed by persecutors, it could not be destroyed.<sup>41</sup> These concerns around the value or lack of value of materiality and/or the body would be reenacted in debates around the significance of asceticism, especially among fourth century monks in the Egyptian desert.

For ascetics, the self could be transformed by an ascetic refashioning of the body. Opponents of this approach decried an exclusivity they perceived in that not all Christians were capable of rigorous ascetic practice and thus were precluded from the spiritual heights claimed by desert monks.<sup>42</sup> This focus on the body also sparked debates on the nature of the deity, including the meaning of “the image” with which humans were said to be created by God (Gen 1:26). Did this image signify a body, such that God was, like human beings, embodied? Or did it signify instead a noncorporeal essence which nevertheless connected humans in some way to God,

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

despite the Fall? These debates led eventually to the violent confrontation between Theophilus and the monks of Scetis.

Cassian alludes to the beginning of this controversy in the *Conferences*. As usual, the bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus, had sent Easter letters to all churches, cities and monasteries in his diocese. In this particular festal letter, Theophilus had decried the heresy of the anthropomorphizing of God. However, Cassian makes it clear that many monks were sent into distress by denunciation such that “this was received very bitterly by almost every sort of monk throughout all Egypt, monks who, in their simplicity, had been ensnared by error” (Conf., 10.4). This remark about the “simplicity” of many of the monks is likely an indication of a class system among the monks based on previous education or lack thereof. It would seem that Cassian viewed the majority of the Egyptian monks as being uneducated while his teachers Evagrius and the Tall Brothers, as well as Cassian himself, were all well-educated. Cassian also writes that one unlettered monk, Serapion, cried out “They have taken my God away from me. I have no one to hold on to, and I don’t know whom to adore or to address.”<sup>43</sup> Cassian writes that another educated monk, Abba Isaac, explained to him that this error is due to the simplicity of Serapion and monks like him which causes them to incorrectly interpret the image in which scripture says humans were created.<sup>44</sup> Socrates, in his fifth-century church history, notes that the more educated monks believed the opposite: God, as an unlimited being, could not be circumscribed by a body or subject to the passions

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<sup>43</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, X.3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, X.5.

unfailingly associated with bodies.<sup>45</sup> However, when many of the anthropomorphic monks arrived in protest at the bishop's residence, their anger convinced Theophilus that he had been wrong (or perhaps that it was safer to agree with an angry mob). Theophilus then sent out a letter asserting the opposite: God indeed had a physical body. Socrates goes on to say that Theophilus' letter kindled a violent feud between the two monastic factions. The end to the conflict came when Theophilus, having armed the uneducated monks for use as his henchmen, marched with them out to Nitria, the monastic settlement of the Tall Brothers and their faction in the Egyptian desert, and forcibly evicted them from the area.<sup>46</sup>

The next time we see Cassian emerging from the dark depths of history, he is in Constantinople under the protection of the ill-fated John Chrysostom. The attacks upon Chrysostom are, according to the writings we have, initiated by the very same bishop, Theophilus, who had expelled Cassian and his cohort from Egypt. Thus, Cassian twice experienced the malice and vengeance of church politics. In fact, before Chrysostom's ultimate exile and death, Cassian is one of those who goes to Rome to advocate for the beleaguered bishop of Constantinople.<sup>47</sup> First exiled with his teachers and monastic models, then representing the sorely-oppressed Chrysostom to the bishop of Rome, Cassian has experienced firsthand the wrath and horror of the powers of the church. It seems reasonable, therefore, to surmise that he may have felt a certain antipathy toward,

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<sup>45</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI.7.

<sup>46</sup> Socrates, *EH*, VI.7.

<sup>47</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII.26.

if not an outright fear of the intrusive powers of bishops and a corresponding idealization of monasticism, often attacked by the wide-reaching powers of bishops and other representatives of the church in any region.

## **Conclusion**

The significance of these conflicts for Cassian's thought cannot be understated. The monastic corpus of writings shows that monks and bishops/clergy often disagreed, that bishops, in an attempt to coopt the popularity of the monks as arbiters of wisdom, would often forcibly ordain monks who often did everything in their power to escape this fate, and that the lives of monks were often rhetorically coopted as well in an effort to take the power and popularity of monks for the clergy. In addition, Cassian himself also experienced the violence of disagreement between monks and clergy, finally being ousted from his beloved Egyptian desert because of a theological disagreement. In this chapter, I have established that conflicts between monks and clergy are well-attested. Such conflicts, I believe, formed the basis for Cassian's rhetorical attempt years later to separate monasticism from the institutional church. Indeed, his likely distrust of clergy probably helped him to surreptitiously form a plan to make those monks who followed, like him, the dictates of the Egyptian Institutes, an autonomous entity.

Several of the above conflictual episodes fall under what Foucault would term sovereign power. According to Foucault, sovereign power is power exercised through visible, dominant agents, usually some type of ruler.<sup>48</sup> This is certainly the case with

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<sup>48</sup> “[Sovereign] power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time boides, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it.” Michel Foucault, and Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990),

forced ordination, in which monks were often physically coerced, at the behest of bishops (Greek: *ἐπίσκοπος* or “overseer”), into accepting positions of authority within the institutional church. Similarly, the theological decree of Theophilus, which ended with the expulsion of Cassian and others from Egypt was the exercise of sovereign power. The subordination of clergy to monks and the rhetorical manipulation of Antony’s subjectivity, however, falls squarely under the banner of disciplinary power. One plausible reading, for example, is that by subordinating themselves to the superior power of monks, bishops were merely attempting, in a subtler way, to convince the monks (and perhaps laypeople as well) that they and the monks were united with a single ethos and purpose. The creation of a specific form of subjectivity in the *Life of Antony*, meanwhile, can be read as an attempt by Athanasius both to shore up his own theological position with the help of Antony’s mighty reputation and also to shape the subjectivity of future monks, such that they too would be strident advocates for the Nicene position. While I don’t argue for any certainty behind these theories, I do contend that such a reading may have influenced Cassian in his attempts to shape monastic subjectivity later on. First, he would choose what Foucault would call a disciplinary approach as both more effective than sovereign power and more in line with the monastic way of training under which he had learned. Second, while the bishops can be said to have employed a disciplinary approach as well, it was key for Cassian that the subjectivity of present and future monks be shaped not by outsiders to monasticism, but rather by what he considered to be the truest insiders: the desert fathers of Egypt.

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136. In the case of Gelasius above, the bishop claimed the right to take Gelasius’s life for refusing to take his side in a dispute. In the case of forced ordination, monks’ bodies were often seized and certain rites performed over them in order to coopt their power for the clergy.

In the next chapter, I will examine evidence that Cassian truly advocated for monasticism and the Church to function in separate spheres. This evidence will demonstrate that he wanted more autonomy for monastic theology and practice unhindered by bishops or other clergy members.

## Chapter Five:

### Cassian's Rhetorical Attempts to Separate Monasticism and Church

By the time John Cassian started writing *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*, he had completed a long journey, both physically and theologically. As a novice, he had learned from his first Palestinian monastery the ways of cenobitic monasticism and endured the trials and tribulations of living with a group of men under strict rules and regulations. Having believed that he had exhausted the possibilities of this life in the three years he was there, he had then gone on to travel to Egypt to meet the legendary Desert Fathers, learning from them about solitude, ascetic practice, and the theological implications of both. While many of these notions may have been based upon the writings of third-century theologian and scholar Origen, Cassian never acknowledges this debt and in fact, may have been completely unaware that his type of monasticism was so heavily indebted to Origen.<sup>1</sup>

However, he had also learned that this Origenist way of life was not universally practiced or accepted, even in Egypt. His expulsion from the Thebaid, forced him to look for shelter in the massive cultural center of Constantinople with John Chrysostom.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian's teacher, Evagrius Ponticus, also makes no explicit mention of Origen, possibly signifying that Origen's influence on monastic theology and practice had become so pervasive by the end of the fourth century that many were unaware of its source.

Becoming ordained as a deacon there, he surely learned the basics of formal liturgy and perhaps even pastoral care. Nevertheless, by the time Cassian arrived in Gaul, his final destination whether or not that was his intention, he had clearly prioritized his collected knowledge. While he could easily have become a member of the clergy in Marseilles, he chose instead to inspect and write about the monastic practices he had learned in Egypt as a young man. While much of this included what the layperson might see as tedious minutiae, it also included, surreptitiously perhaps, his view that the clergy had little to nothing to offer monks who practiced correctly. For this reason, I argue that he sought a very real separation between clergy and monastics, such that monastics could be their own authority, free of theological and practical meddling by bishops.

In this chapter I argue that in the *Institutes* and *Conferences*, Cassian is advocating for a separation between monasticism and the Church. As noted before, Cassian writes provocatively that “a monk ought by all means to flee from women and bishops.”<sup>2</sup> This is indeed an odd comment from Cassian if he does not intend to set up bishops, the ultimate authorities within the institutional church in his time, as a sort of adversary. At the end of the chapter, I address one possible objection to the notion of monks living without the services of clergy: The Eucharist.

Returning to the Origenist Controversy, we must remember that Cassian was expelled from his beloved Egyptian idyll because of the Church’s meddling in the theological affairs of the monks, principally the Tall Brothers whom Cassian revered. The next time we see Cassian emerging from obscurity, he is in Constantinople under the

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<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XI.18. “Omnimodis monachum fugere debere mulieres et episcopos.”

protection of the ill-fated John Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup> The attacks upon Chrysostom are, according to the evidence available, initiated by the very same bishop Theophilus who expelled Cassian and his cohort from Egypt. Thus, Cassian twice experiences the malice and vengeance of church politics. In fact, before Chrysostom's ultimate exile and death, Cassian is one of those chosen to go to Rome to advocate for the beleaguered bishop of Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> First exiled with his teachers and monastic models, then representing a bishop unjustly deposed, Cassian has experienced firsthand the wrath and injustice of the powers of the church.

In the *Conferences*, Cassian writes "Whoever lives not by his own judgment but by the example of our forebears (*maiorum*) will never be deceived."<sup>5</sup> As usual in his writings, Cassian invokes the authority of elder monks, rather than bishops. Indeed, bishops and the clergy begin to seem obsolete, superseded, even, in Cassian's total omission of them in the context of gaining the wisdom of discernment. I argue that given the above context of the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History*, Chrysostom was exiled from his position as archbishop of Constantinople by the machinations of two people: the aforementioned bishop Theophilus, who was angry that after he had exiled the Tall Brothers from Egypt, John had taken them in in Constantinople, and the empress Eudoxia, wife of the emperor Arcadius of the eastern Roman empire, who perceived John's homiletic denunciations of luxury as aimed directly at her. John was exiled from Constantinople and then recalled by the emperor because the people of the city agitated for him. However, the recall was short-lived. Eudoxia had a silver statue of herself erected in Constantinople, and John unsurprisingly denounced her in one of his homilies. He was once again exiled and soon after died in the city of Comana Pontica (*EH*, 8.13-28).

<sup>4</sup> Sozomen's *EH* reproduces a letter from Innocent, bishop of Rome, affirming that two people, "Germanus the presbyter and Cassianus the deacon" came to Rome to apprise the bishop of John Chrysostom's persecution. Sozomen, *EH*, VIII.26.

<sup>5</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, II.10.2.

Church in Roman Gaul of the fifth century, such an exclusion cannot be a mere oversight on Cassian's part.

Accordingly, this chapter will examine Cassian's monastic writings, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, for evidence that he truly wanted monasticism and the institutional church to operate in separate spheres. As noted above, The *Institutes* were written about and for cenobitic communities. They were, in general, manuals for correct monastic practice within communities based on what Cassian had learned as a monk in Egypt. The *Conferences*, on the other hand, are more inner-focused and theological in scope, and aimed at solitaries or small groups of monks. I separate the evidence here into three distinct categories. First, Cassian presents a number of monastic exemplars, including prophets, apostles, and even Christ himself. I argue that Cassian's intention with this category is to show not only that monks are the rightful spiritual heirs of these revered biblical figures, but also that monks, rather than bishops and clergy, actually are contemporary versions of these figures. Second, Cassian makes repeated appeals to distinct monastic traditions. Through this category, Cassian intends to show how truly holy figures should behave by codifying correct monastic practice and emphasizing the vast importance of asceticism in this quest for holiness. Implicitly, he makes clear that bishops and clergy, especially when compared with monastics, do not follow the correct way of life. Third, Cassian writes subtle denigrations of Church hierarchs or their theological heroes, especially those who write of monasticism with only hearsay as a source. While on the one hand Cassian shows how monks behave correctly through ascetic practices, he also delicately disparages bishops, clergy, and some of their

theological champions for not measuring up to the monastic and ascetic standards he defines.

In addition, this chapter will provide an analysis of how all three categories of evidence intersect with Foucault's notions of disciplinary power and pastoral power. In this sense, Cassian's writings create a specific type of monastic subjectivity, one in which monks are both shepherded as a group by Cassian and taught to police themselves in regard to correct monastic practice.

In all three categories of evidence presented, I argue that Cassian is not only drawing a clear, bold line between monastics and bishops, but also that the line he draws is meant not merely to separate the two, but rather to exclude bishops and clergy from the sphere of monasticism. He is not merely defining "us" vs. "them", but more accurately circling the wagons. In this way, he creates a closed system in which monastics are to be informed and led only by other monastics, past and present. This is true, regardless of how far he has to stretch the definition of monastics rhetorically, as we see below.

### **Cassian and Castor**

Before introducing the evidence, I must address the elephant in the room: the relationship between Cassian and Castor. How could Cassian, in advocating for separate spheres for monasticism and the institutional church, be on such seemingly good terms with Castor, bishop of Apta Julia? Castor seems to have requested that Cassian write the *Institutes* and *Conferences* and I do not find, in Cassian's writings, any explicit evidence that Cassian either resented Castor himself nor that he had any resistance to fulfilling that request. However, I believe that the relationship was more complicated than Cassian's

ancient and educated notions of humility and politeness would have allowed him to demonstrate.

First, I see no reason to believe that Cassian had a personal grudge against all bishops. Indeed, he both accepted the protection of and then advocated for the bishop John Chrysostom of Constantinople after he had been exiled from Egypt by another bishop, Theophilus of Alexandria. What I find, instead, in Cassian's writings is not a general antipathy toward all bishops, but rather the notion that bishops generally are ill-equipped to both found and advise monks. Cassian says as much when, in the preface to his *Institutes*, when he says that Castor's province lacks anything resembling the holy cenobia of Egypt and that despite his prodigious virtues, Castor needs Cassian to teach Gallican monks the sacred ways of Egyptian monasticism.<sup>6</sup> In other words, there is nothing wrong with what the bishop himself does *within his own realm*. The problem comes when, like Theophilus, a bishop dares to overstep his authority by presuming to tell monks how to live, believe, or worship. In Cassian's view, monks are not superior to bishops except that, unlike bishops, they know correct monastic practice. There is little reason, therefore, for bishops to cross the line into polemicizing monastic belief or praxis. In this sense, Cassian likely views Castor as both a good bishop and a good patron in that he seems to entrust Cassian completely with instructing monks while he himself merely facilitates this process of learning by bringing in an experienced monk as leader and teacher.

Second, even if Cassian had felt a general aversion to bishops as a result of his exile, he was not stupid. Having already experienced a violent expulsion at the hands of

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<sup>6</sup> Cassian, *Institutes, preface*, II-III.

Theophilus, Cassian certainly had no doubts about either the power or the malice of some bishops. If he were to insult a bishop at whose request he was writing, he might not only have been similarly treated, but might also have lost the opportunity to train Gallican monks in the ways of Egyptian monasticism. His mission was not to insult or conquer bishops, but rather to maintain correct monastic practice. He could best do this by treating bishops respectfully and, to the extent possible, excluding them from the monastic realm.

### **Monastic Exemplars: Prophets and Apostles**

Having suffered exile at the hands of a bishop and watched as John Chrysostom fell victim to a similar fate, Cassian would no doubt be wary of explicitly confronting the hierarchs of his time and region. However, as Zachary B. Smith notes, there was, among Cassian's idealized monks of Egypt, a definite ethos, displayed prominently in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, of separating monasticism from the institutional church. According to this notion, questions of both monastic theology and practice should be made only by the authority of fellow monastics.<sup>7</sup> The references to this separation are thus subtly and cleverly inscribed in Cassian's writings.

Cassian begins his preface to the *Institutes*, addressed to Castor, the bishop of Apt in Gaul, by alluding to the Hebrew Bible. He notes that Solomon, the king of Israel renowned for his wisdom, nevertheless took on a poor foreigner, Hiram of Tyre, as his

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<sup>7</sup>“The violent realities of monk-bishop and monk-monk relationships in Egypt with Theophilus and Cyril, and in Palestine after Chalcedon, do not appear in the *AP*. Instead, the compiler offers tacit suggestions that bishops and monks should operate in two largely separate spheres of concern and authority.” Zachary B. Smith, *Philosopher-monks, Episcopal Authority, and the Care of the Self: The Apophthegmata Patrum in Fifth-century Palestine*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 46.

proxy in overseeing the building of the Temple. Cassian thus compares himself and his role to that of Hiram:

If, therefore, the princedom that was loftier than all the kingdoms of the earth, and the noble and excellent scion of the Israelite race, and the divinely inspired wisdom that surpassed the skills and institutes of all the people of the East and all the Egyptians by no means disdained the advice of a poor foreigner, rightly also do you, most blessed Pope Castor,<sup>8</sup> instructed by these examples, deign to summon me in my utter want and poverty to collaborate in your great work. You are setting out to construct a true and spirited temple for God not out of unfeeling stones but out of a community of holy men.<sup>9</sup>

Note here how Cassian uses the Hebrew Bible reference to assert his own significance in building “the Temple” of a new monastery. Hiram in the story of Solomon’s construction of the Temple, is the intermediary between Solomon’s admittedly significant idea to build the magnificent Temple and the men and processes of actually building it (1 Kgs 5:1-18). While Hiram is not a prophet as such, he is crucial to the construction of Solomon’s Temple, acting as an agent without whom the Temple could not be properly built. This seems to hint at Cassian’s notion of his own role as well as the role of monks in general: they are those who show the way, who actively build the edifice of Christian life while bishops, represented by Solomon, simply wield power passively without true knowledge. Given that Cassian directly

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<sup>8</sup> The term “pope”, which Cassian uses to address Castor the Bishop of Apta Julia in Gaul can be misleading for modern readers. While this is indeed the term that developed later into the word now used for the bishop of Rome alone, it was, at the time of Cassian’s writing, simply another honorific term for bishop. See for example Tertullian, *De Pudicitia*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, preface, II.

addresses bishop Castor in this preface, this characterization of bishops includes Castor as well.

Entitled *The Garb of the Monks*, Book 1 of the *Institutes* indeed begins with a description of how monks should dress and the spiritual reasons and implications of this type of clothing. While this could be read simply as a rote description or instruction on how to dress in proper monastic fashion, it is notable how differently a monk and a priest or bishop dressed in fourth and fifth century Roman provinces such as Gaul. Ecclesiastical dress had just begun to be somewhat standardized in the Western Church at the time of Cassian's writings. Priestly vestments included the *alba*, a long flowing robe of white linen, the *orarium*, a long scarf worn around the neck, the *planeta*, an outer cloak that covered the torso and would later develop into the more elaborate chasuble.<sup>10</sup> The richness of clerical dress was in stark contrast to the intentional poverty of monastic clothing.

The monk, like the priest, had to look the part. Unlike the priest or bishop, however, the monk was not expected to reflect through merely liturgical garments, the very glory of God. Instead, he was to express the humility of Moses, the prophets, and even Christ himself. Thus "it is proper for a monk always to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle."<sup>11</sup> A soldier dresses like his compatriots in arms, trying not only to fit in but to literally blend in with both the purpose and the esprit-de-corps of his fellow combatants. One had to look like a monk to become a monk. Cassian states that

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, *Ecclesiastical Vestments: Their Development and History*, (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 1896), 37-45.

<sup>11</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, I.1.

beginning his discussion with the “outward appearance... we shall then be able to discuss... their inner worship.”<sup>12</sup> While Cassian may very well privilege the inner being, the soul, the outer was significant to the inner’s development.

Cassian goes on in this section to compare monks with the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, writing that those “responsible for the beginning of this profession namely Elijah and Elisha – went about dressed in this way.”<sup>13</sup> In addition he writes in the *Conferences* that “some people are completely set upon the remoteness of the desert and on purity of heart, as we know Elijah and Elisha were in times past and the blessed Antony and others were in our own day.”<sup>14</sup> Here, by invoking and connecting biblical prophets and the legendary father of Christian monasticism, Antony, Cassian has converted the celebrated prophets into monastic progenitors, granting authority both to the prophets themselves in this role and to their successor monks as a continuation of prophetic roles. In addition, he writes that in relation to prophetic dress, “the leaders and authors of the New Testament – namely John, Peter, and Paul and other men of the same caliber – behaved likewise.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, solitary desert monks lived their lives

in imitation of John the Baptist, who spent his whole life in the desert, and of Elijah and Elisha and the others whom the Apostle recalls thus: ‘They went about in sheepskin and in goatskin, in distress, afflicted, needy, the world

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<sup>12</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, I.1.1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1.2.

<sup>14</sup> Cassian, *Conference*, XIV.4.1.

<sup>15</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, I.1.2.

<sup>16</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.6.2. Citing Heb 11:37-38.

unworthy of them, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and caverns of the earth'.<sup>16</sup>

Not only are monks the legitimate heirs of a type of apostolic succession, as asserted earlier, but they are also inextricably interwoven with the writings of sacred scripture.

I will hereafter call this form of authority “apostolic praxis”, based as it is upon correct practice over mere institutional authority or belief. The very fact that Cassian implies this biblical connection to those of his own profession and not to bishops or clergy leaves little doubt about who has the authority to sanction correct practice. It is important to Cassian that monks be recognizable *qua* monks, not simply through their behaviors, but also by their dress and habits. He thus tells the story of how the king recognized Elijah by a simple description of his hirsuteness and leather belt (2 Kgs 1:1-8), comparing descriptions of John the Baptist to this ideal as well. Bishops and laypeople must quickly be able to recognize a monk when they see him, as the king recognized Elijah, and therefore know that this is no mere man of the village but rather a dedicated soldier of Christ. In other words, a monk must never be mistaken for a bishop or clergy member, and the ascetic nature of the monk’s appearance is key to recognizing his asceticism, humility and wisdom.

In Books 2 and 3 of the *Institutes*, Cassian, once again invoking the authority of the Egyptian fathers, discusses prayers and how they are to be conducted. Without going into too much unnecessary detail, Cassian prescribes the number of prayers to be said, the number of Psalms to be sung or chanted, and the frequency on different days during which these need to be accomplished. As he attempts to shape monastic subjectivity to his ideal, he delineates correct prayer practices, excluding those he has already seen in Gaul which do not conform with what he saw and learned in Egypt. In this way, he

creates a definite line between real monks as those who follow Egyptian practices, and false or non-monks who do not. These inauthentic monks of Gaul are sanctioned primarily by regional bishops rather than the monks or traditions of Egyptian monastics. In order to define true monks, and thus establish his ideal, Cassian will once again go beyond simply invoking his precious desert fathers by also tying their traditions to the authority of biblical figures.

Cassian writes, for example, that while there are formal prayer and chanting services for the monks, outside of these the monks “almost never omit meditating on the psalms and on other parts of Scripture, and to this they add entreaties and prayers at every moment.”<sup>17</sup> Why is this significant in contrast to the way bishops and clergy might practice? Cassian says, in reference to the monks’ constant meditation, that “what is unceasingly offered is greater than what is rendered at particular moments, and a voluntary service is more pleasing than functions that are carried out by canonical obligation.”<sup>18</sup> While Cassian appreciates the liturgical forms of both the church and monasteries, different though they may be, he honors monks for voluntarily and on an individual basis following Paul the Apostle’s injunction to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). This is clearly understood as an obligation for monks, outside of their group worship and prayer, while such is not the case, or at least not explicitly, for the bishop or priest.

As for prayer and worship at the end of the week, Cassian once again ties monks explicitly to Christ’s original apostles and the primitive church:

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<sup>17</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, III.2.

In the time of the apostolic preaching, when the Christian religion and faith was founded, it was determined throughout the Orient that a vigil should be celebrated at the start of Saturday, because when our Lord and Savior was crucified on a Friday... his disciples stayed awake the whole night and gave no repose at all to their eyes. Hence from that time on a vigil service has been assigned to this night, and up to the present day it is observed in similar fashion throughout the Orient.<sup>19</sup>

As historically dubious as this explanation may be, Cassian's concern lies elsewhere. As before, while the practice – in this case the Saturday night vigil – is important, what is more essential is the link to the original church, a connection implicitly superseding that of the institutional church. Perhaps many of the church's teachings have been passed down along with bishops, but again these dogmas go largely unmentioned by Cassian. Instead, he notes simply that since the original Christians practiced this way, monks continue to do so; Cassian continues to invest monks with more authority than bishops. In the *Conferences*, he makes this assertion even clearer: "The discipline of the cenobites took its rise at the time of the apostolic preaching."<sup>20</sup> Thus the entire system of cenobitic traditions and practices are generally tied to the authority of the apostles and the primitive community, where "the multitude of believers had one heart and one soul, and none of them said that what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them" (Acts 4:32).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, III.9.1.

<sup>20</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.5.1. "Itaque coenobitarum disciplina a tempore praedicationis apostolicae sumpsit exordium

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.5.1.

Here I would like to revisit Foucault's notions of subjectivity and power and briefly analyze the intersection of this notion with Cassian's monastic exemplars above. The purpose of this analysis is to elucidate my thesis, namely that Cassian was advocating for a separation of authority between monastics and the institutional church by rhetorically creating a specific type of monastic subjectivity. Remember that Foucault outlines three methods by which subjects are created. First, modes of investigation create subjects as objects of knowledge. Second, practices and procedures divide subjects both from within, and from other subjects according to standards of norm and deviance. Third, practices and procedures of self-management are introduced, by which subjects transform themselves as subjects in order to meet an externally imposed ideal.

First, Cassian creates monastics as objects of knowledge by creating a monastic history, beginning with the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, continuing through the apostles and the primitive church, and ending with the monks of Egypt whom he repeatedly idealizes in his rhetoric. In doing this, Cassian draws a line around those he sees as monks, circumscribing them through their practices, procedures, dress, schedules, forms of prayer, and work. He then turns this edifying history upon the monks of Gaul, implicitly asking whether they are indeed monks, whether they, through their own practices, fit within his circle of true monastics.

Second, this definition of true monks divides the monks from within. Every virtue of Elijah, the apostles, and the monks of Egypt implicitly points at faults in the monks of Gaul. The monks are thus divided within as they are encouraged to work on themselves,

becoming more and more like these monks of old. In other words, the highest part of each monk works on his lower part in order to bring it up to Cassian's lofty standard.

Third, this transformation is understood to be accomplished by frequent comparisons with the monastic ideals Cassian outlines. Cassian's rhetoric provides the ideal practices of true monks. With these practices so well-defined, the monks of Gaul will police their own practices, comparing themselves with the ideal Cassian provides and changing or eliminating behaviors that do not fit with this ideal. Thus Cassian, with his well-established role as arbiter of correct practice, shapes the monastic subjects of Gaul into his ideal.

### **Appeals to Distinct Monastic Traditions**

The second category of evidence Cassian employs concerns monastic rituals and customs. While strictly outlining the nuts and bolts of these traditions, Cassian strangely never says that these traditions are only correct for monastic practice. Instead, he uses these to delineate between monks and those of the institutional church who generally do not practice in the way he describes. It would thus seem that Cassian, while not explicitly denying the institutional church's link to the authority of apostolic succession through bishops, draws a different line to monastics, one of apostolic praxis. The bishops may have inherited position and authority in one sphere, but only monastics of the Egyptian variety practice Christianity correctly.

Cassian thus writes of "the system of the canonical prayers and Psalms which was long ago arranged by the holy fathers in the East."<sup>22</sup> Significantly, and characteristically,

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<sup>22</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.1.

the number and type of prayers and Psalms are traced not to any figure in the institutional church, but rather to the desert fathers of the past. After establishing this as the measure of correct prayer practice, Cassian, using the commanding “royal we”, says “we have found different rules appointed in different places, and the system and regulations that we have seen are almost as many in number as the monasteries and cells which we have visited.”<sup>23</sup> Having just noted the existence of one correct canonical method of prayer, this disparagement of the lack of accurate prayer rules can only be a slight against the monks of Gaul, a sign that they have yet to connect their lives and practices to the venerable fathers of the past. This is significant in that, although Cassian himself is writing these instructions, it is at the behest of a bishop. It seems too farfetched to be coincidence that the monastery organized and instituted by a bishop is, according to Cassian, doing almost nothing correctly according to the monastic traditions of Egypt. Cassian’s entire purpose, as an inheritor of these rituals and customs, is to correct such errors. He writes that he thinks it

necessary to set forth the most ancient constitution of the fathers which is being observed by the servants of God even until now throughout Egypt, so that the uninstructed infancy in Christ of your new monastery may be initiated in the most time- tried customs of the most ancient fathers.<sup>24</sup>

Not only was the correct prayer rule created long ago by the ancient desert fathers, but it continues to be practiced today in an unbroken line of tradition, such that any monk who went to Egypt in Cassian’s time would find a uniform practice among all monks. This, of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., II.2.

<sup>24</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.2.2.

course, is a highly unlikely claim, but once again feeds directly into Cassian's rhetorical method. In addition, Cassian conspicuously calls the Gallian monks "uninstructed" and implies that they are mere "infants" in the faith. This is a question of authority: who has sufficient authority to set up the rules and regulations of a proper monastery, a bishop or a monk properly trained in Egypt? Cassian's answer is clear.

In addition to the regular prayer and chanting prescribed by Cassian, frequent meditation upon scripture is also paramount. As usual, Cassian explicitly connects this practice to biblical authority, using metaphors referring to well-known biblical stories and symbols. For example, in encouraging each monk to meditate continually on scripture, Cassian says a monk should "do this until continual meditation fills your mind and as it were forms it in its likeness, making of it a kind of ark of the covenant."<sup>25</sup> The ark is said to have contained the stone tablets of Moses, which Cassian compares to the Old and New Testaments, a golden jar, which he compares to the monk's memory of scripture, and manna, which he compares to the Origenist understanding of scripture.<sup>26</sup> In other words, this continual meditation upon scripture forms the monk's mind into a spiritual treasure chest, something intimately connected with God, much like scripture itself.

While the ideal monastery of which Cassian writes is not entirely without hierarchy, Cassian writes that the leader of a monastery is not "allowed to preside over the assembly of the brethren, or even over himself, before he has not only deprived

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<sup>25</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.10.2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.10.2.

himself of all his property but has also learnt the fact that he is not his own maker and has no authority over his own actions.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore,

he must also be obedient to all, so as to learn that he must, as the Lord says, become again a little child, arrogating nothing to himself on the score of his age and the number of the years which he now counts as lost while they were spent to no purpose in the world.<sup>28</sup>

First, in speaking of this humble, ideal hegemon, Cassian can only be describing himself. Having seen the monasteries of Gaul and clearly judged them deficient in comparison with those of Egypt, Cassian here sets himself up as the ideal monastic leader. Second, Cassian implicitly differentiates between the monastery, where the leader can only become a leader by first serving all and being humble, and the institutional church, where one can be promoted to a bishopric simply at the whim of political and social forces.<sup>29</sup> The leader of a monastery, as depicted by Cassian, is clearly the superior moral subject.

As important as it is for Cassian to enumerate the correct number of Psalms and prayers for monastic worship, it is equally important that each monk comport himself correctly during worship. He writes, therefore, that during the worship services in Egypt “everyone is so silent that, even though such a large number of brothers has gathered, one would easily believe that no one was present apart from the person who stands to

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<sup>27</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, II.3.

<sup>29</sup> In an article on Origen and the election of bishops, E. Ferguson writes that bishops generally chose their own successors who were then approved or disapproved by priests and other prominent people: “From the fourth century, there comes definite evidence of bishops choosing and ordaining their own successors. Theodoret records that at Alexandria itself Athanasius chose Peter II as his successor.” E. Ferguson, “Origen and the Election of Bishops,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 43(1), (1974), 27.

sing the psalm in their midst.”<sup>30</sup> One wonders if this silence is the opposite, not only of monastic services Cassian has witnessed in Gaul, but also of services for laypeople presided over by bishops. The head monk, or even simply the monk whose turn it is to chant the psalms, has greater authority in that he commands the silence apposite to worship. As usual, however, both the silence of the monks and their superior authority derive from their asceticism. Cassian writes that the monks keep the worship service purposely brief and perform the majority of it seated as opposed to the lay practice of standing during worship “for they are so worn out from fasting and from working the whole day and night that, if they were standing and were not helped by this kind of rest, they would in fact be unable to get through the number [of prayers] in question.”<sup>31</sup> Asceticism’s authority derives from the monk emptying himself of all worldly and sinful things, because “unless the vessel of our heart has first been cleansed of every foul-smelling vice it will not deserve to receive the oil of blessing...”<sup>32</sup> This reference to the purification of the heart, is in accordance with Cassian’s all-important and oft-repeated notion of “purity of heart,” the only state in which union with God can occur. Since bishops and clergy are not required to practice such rigid asceticism, ridding themselves of impurity, monks are clearly more authoritative and, even closer to God.

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<sup>30</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.10.1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, II.12.1.

<sup>32</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.14.2.

Finally, Cassian writes that this silent discipline is not merely a function of the group context in which the monks worship. In fact, after worship:

none of them dares to linger or to chat for a while with anyone else... Once they have gone outside they accomplish [manual labor] in such a way that hardly any conversation is carried on among them, but each one does his assigned task while going over a psalm or some scriptural text by memory.<sup>33</sup>

Manual labor is essential for monastic practice because monks follow the example of Paul, who “although he should rightly have been provided for because he was laboring for the sake of the Gospel, nonetheless... preferred to work day and night in order to earn his daily bread.”<sup>34</sup> For Cassian, the fact that the monks individually practice this silent work and prayer is far more indicative of their ascetic authority. By contrast, lay congregations, perhaps less impressed by their less-than-ascetic bishops than monks by their hegemon, seem often to have viewed the commands of their bishops as mere suggestions trumped by tradition, secular or at least non-Christian though it may be. In one of his sermons, for example, Cassian’s contemporary, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, quoted one of his parishioners as pleading in reference to taking a concubine “‘Surely I can do what I like in my own house?’ I tell you, no: you cannot. People who do this go straight to Hell.”<sup>35</sup> While the bishop played an important role within lay society, some laymen clearly felt free to choose their own behavior regardless of the bishop’s injunction. This, Cassian may be implying, is a function of the clergyman’s lack of

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<sup>33</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, II.15.1.

<sup>34</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XVIII.11.3.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *Sermons*, CCXXIV.3.

authority earned through correct practice. The monk, however, had no such split between private and public life. He was to surrender and submit himself completely to the authority of the head monk even when he was entirely alone. The hegemon had vastly more authority simply by having proved himself to be a successful practicing ascetic. He thus refers to a verse from the New Testament: “In watching, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in gentleness, in the Holy Spirit, in unfeigned love” (2 Cor 6:5-6). Cassian interprets this verse as both instruction and description of the order in which ascetic virtues are correctly acquired. He writes that the monk “proceeds from watching and fasting to chastity, from chastity to knowledge, from knowledge to long-suffering, from long-suffering to gentleness, from gentleness to the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Spirit to the reward of unfeigned love.”<sup>36</sup> It is significant that Cassian invokes the authority of scripture to undergird the authority of asceticism. By proceeding through these successive levels of ascetic virtue, one arrives at love, which is God (1 John 4:8).

Book 4 of the *Institutes* concerns mainly the novice’s entrance to the monastery and all the various renunciations involved. Cassian takes special pains to remind his readers that “whoever seeks to be received into the discipline of the cenobium is never admitted until, by lying outside for ten days or more, he has given an indication of his perseverance and desire as well as of his humility and patience.”<sup>37</sup> As harsh as this may sound to modern ears, it is only the beginning of the process of being allowed to become a monk. The potential novice must prove, by tireless striving and a conspicuous show of

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<sup>36</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.16.8.

<sup>37</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.3.1

utter humility, not to say abjectness, that he is ready to commit to the arduous life of a monk. This is yet another example of Cassian's implicit jabs at the Gallican monks who, remember, joined various clerical and monastic offices principally because renunciation of wealth and status was not required. For Cassian, however, the monk newly joining a monastery should gain no honor or status from his new affiliation. Rather, unlike the newly-ordained bishop of a city or village, whose status as such would increase powerfully, the monk should become nobody, losing all honor and fortune for the sake of becoming a monk.

Once the initial period of apparent rejection has been withstood, the monk is now asked "if, from his former possessions, the contamination of even a single copper coin clings to him" because if so, it is feared that "when the first disturbance arose for any reason whatsoever, he would be encouraged by the security of that sum and would fell the monastery as fast as a whirring slingstone."<sup>38</sup> In addition to stripping the new monk of all money, Cassian tells us that "all his former possessions are removed from him, such that he is not even permitted to have the clothing that he wore."<sup>39</sup> The significance of depriving the novice of all belongings, including his clothing which will be replaced by a standard monastic robe, is found in discarding the monk's worldly identity. A person does not solely consist of thoughts and beliefs, but identity is also often built upon the foundation of clothing and possessions, signals of one's social status in the ancient world as now. Furthermore, this act is symbolic of the stripping

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., IV.4.2.

<sup>39</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.5.

away of all self-reliance, and the resulting total dependence on God for one's needs.

Thus, Cassian writes that the new monk,

knowing that he will be clothed and fed from [the monastery] ... will learn both to possess nothing and never to be worried about the morrow, according to the words of the Gospel, and he will not be ashamed to be on a par with the poor... among whom Christ was not ashamed to be numbered and whose brother he did not blush to call himself.<sup>40</sup>

It is notable here that Cassian first of all sees monks in solidarity with the poor of the world, although in the case of monks the poverty is voluntary. However, it is significant as well that this voluntary poverty tacitly opposes them to bishops, for whom poverty was not only not required, but who could, in Cassian's time, expect to have a significant amount of money as a result of their status. To illustrate this, it is important to note the relation between wealth and the bishop as representative of the church in Cassian's time.

Within the Roman Empire after Constantine, a law had been written in the Theodosian Code stating "at death, people shall have the right to leave property to the Church."<sup>41</sup> While this ability for wealthy individuals to bequeath money would certainly have been a boon to those churches which had formerly had no legal rights, it left ambiguous the line between church and bishop. To whom did the money from such a legacy actually belong? Was the bishop merely the steward of the money on behalf of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., IV.5.

<sup>41</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, XVI.2.4.

church, or was he able to use it for his own personal purposes as well? Peter Brown notes that although “Roman law had recognized the existence of corporate bodies... Roman lawyers did little to define how these bodies should act in relation to their wealth.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, the difference between the money belonging to the church as a corporate body and belonging to the bishop alone was not legally delineated. Therefore, “faced by the problems raised by ambiguously worded legacies, Roman lawyers instinctively... favored the bishop” as the official devisee of any monetary bequest.<sup>43</sup> As one might imagine, this tended to foster a certain amount of corruption by some bishops.<sup>44</sup> Thus, at the very same time that monks were ceremonially stripped of all clothing and possessions in front of all the other monks,<sup>45</sup> bishops had money flowing into their coffers. Of course, not all bishops were so avariciously inclined. However, the very fact that we have historical documentation of bishops being accused of stealing funds intended to support the church and its aims, shows that such theft was always possible. For the proper cenobitic monk, no money at all ever belonged to him as long as he remained a monk. It is difficult to imagine that in highlighting the importance of monks renouncing all

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), 486.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye*, 487.

<sup>44</sup> In addition to the aforementioned bishop Theophilus’ corrupt financial practices in Sozomen’s *EH*, there is another case in 475 CE in which Pope Simplicius ordered that the money from a particular bequest be divided equally among the bishop, the clergy, church building maintenance and the poor. However, from the Pope’s letter, we know that the clergy claimed that one bishop kept three years of this money all to himself. Simplicius, *Letter*, 1.1, ed. A. Thiel, *Epistolae Romanarum Pontificum Genuinae*, (Braunsberg: E. Peter, 1867; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1974), 1:176.

<sup>45</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.5.

possessions that a thinker as astute John Cassian would have been unaware of the vast gulf separating these two prominent modes of Christian living. I would thus argue that Cassian is purposely, if subtly, drawing attention to the lack of virtue – specifically the total lack of ascetic virtue – required, let alone practiced, in the day to day life of a bishop.

The monastic traditions outlined in Cassian's writings above, are both evidence of his desire for separate spheres of influence between monasticism and the institutional church and evidence of his rhetorical power in shaping the subjectivity of the monks who are ultimately his intended audience. In Foucauldian terms, one can see in this category of evidence that Cassian is exercising pastoral power over the Gallican monks. This is evident when we revisit Foucault's criteria of pastoral power.

First, Cassian clearly establishes himself as the rhetorical leader of the monasteries in Gaul, not because they are Gallican but because they are monasteries. In other words, Cassian sets himself up as a leader of monks, regardless of their regional origin or any other identitarian factors. He is a leader of all who wish to properly call themselves monks. Second, he gathers, or even rallies the monks around the theme of Egyptian monasticism as the ideal, or indeed the only form of true monastic practice. As such, he is leading them as his flock to the perfect practices of genuine monks and away from the danger of those practices he sees as jeopardizing their salvation. Third, this leads to the responsibility Cassian takes for the salvation of Gallican monks. He outlines both practice and ascetical theology in order to assure the monks of the salvation he himself has earned thanks to his tenure as a monk in Egypt. Fourth, while he is wielding power over these monks, there is no privilege involved for him. That is, Cassian, as one

who received the blessing of living and learning with the monks of Egypt, makes it clear that he is passing along this information and training as an obligation. As a monk clearly dedicated to asceticism, Cassian is unlikely to take on any sort of honor or benefit from this position. Remember that Cassian noted that humility was the one real requisite for a monastic leader.

### **Subtle Denigration of Church Hierarchs or their Theological Heroes**

While Cassian's jabs at church hierarchs are certainly indirect, this does not subtract from their power. Indeed, as an educated man, Cassian had likely studied the art of rhetoric, and his subtle digs at bishops, clergy, and their literary supporters are arguably more effective and less likely to produce punishment for himself than would a more direct approach.<sup>46</sup>

In his preface to the Institutes, Cassian writes that Castor wants the temple built "out of holy souls that shine in the fullness of innocence, righteousness, and chastity and that bear within themselves the indwelling Christ the king."<sup>47</sup> In addition, Cassian writes that Castor wants "to establish in your own province, which lacks such things, the institutes of the Eastern and especially, Egyptian cenobia."<sup>48</sup> Cassian here implicitly admits his superior knowledge of such things. However, he makes an important distinction in this section of the preface between the bishop and the monk. Cassian

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<sup>46</sup> In *Conferences*, XIV.12, Cassian gives an indication that he came from wealth and was thus well-educated. He complains to an elder monk, Abba Nesteros, that his knowledge of literature, constantly drilled into him as a youth by his teacher, often causes him to daydream about "silly fables and narratives of war" while he attempts to pray or sing the Psalms.

<sup>47</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, preface, II.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, preface, III.

writes that while Castor himself is “accomplished in every virtue and knowledge,” Cassian himself is “rude and wanting in word and knowledge.”<sup>49</sup> While this may seem insignificant, it builds on a common theme in both the *AP* and Cassian’s own writings: knowledge, based on a rich, academic education, is entirely different and far less spiritually valuable than wisdom, which is only gained through the long and arduous practice of asceticism.<sup>50</sup> Cassian is establishing that while clergy and bishops may be more classically educated than some monks – although this is apparently not true in the case of Cassian and at least some of his Egyptian cohort – monks are still superior in wisdom, not through the status of a title as is the case with clergy, but rather through commitment to ascetic practice. As if to reiterate this point, Cassian goes on to write that Castor is “not looking for a pleasing style, with which you yourself are particularly gifted; rather, you are concerned that the simple life of holy men be explained in simple language to the brothers in your new monastery.”<sup>51</sup> Again, contrasting the monk’s knowledge with that of an institutional church hierarchy, Cassian notes here that while bishops may be both erudite and eloquent, monks attain their wisdom regardless of their previous level of education. In fact, Cassian writes that all of a monk’s knowledge “consists in experience and practice alone”, by which he likely indicates the practices of proper asceticism.<sup>52</sup> Cassian also writes that “to such an extent is [the] true and spiritual

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., *preface*, III.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *AP*, Arsenius, 5 and 6. In the first of these, Arsenius, a former Roman scholar now living as a monk in the Egyptian desert, says that “we indeed get nothing from our secular education, but these Egyptian peasants acquire the virtues by hard work.”

<sup>51</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, *preface*, III.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., *preface*, IV. “totum namque in sola experientia usque consistit.”

knowledge removed from that worldly learning, which is stained by the filth of fleshly vice, that we know that it occasionally flourishes in wondrous fashion in some rustic and nearly illiterate persons.”<sup>53</sup> Lest the reader forget, Cassian also reminds us that the original apostles were uneducated men.<sup>54</sup> Although Cassian was likely well-educated himself, his point is well-made. In contradistinction to most bishops and clergy, monks need not be similarly educated to achieve holiness; indeed, such an education may interfere with the monk’s ability to achieve the necessary humility to truly attain intimacy with God.

Cassian is not unaware of other prominent writers who have addressed the topic of the proper monastic and/or ascetic life. The difference, he says, is that those “men of outstanding character, endowed with speech and knowledge” have no actual practical experience of the practices of which they write.<sup>55</sup> Rather than leave the identities of such men hidden, Cassian writes “I refer to the holy Basil, to Jerome, and to several others.”<sup>56</sup> Note that the similarity highlighted by Cassian between Basil, Jerome, and Bishop Castor is that all are learned in the classical sense and eloquent in both speech and writing.

Cassian has already differentiated this type of knowledge, and even this type of person, from himself and the wisdom of the monks of Egypt. At this point, it is almost

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<sup>53</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, XIV.16.6. “In tantum vero ab illa eruditione saeculari, quae carnalium vitiorum sorde polluitur, vera haec et spiritalis scientia submouetur, ut eam in nonnullis elinguis ac paene inlitteratis sciamus nonnumquam admirabiliter viguisse.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.16.7.

<sup>55</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, *preface*, V.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, *preface*, V.

difficult to tell if Cassian is indeed being sarcastic in these references to Basil and Jerome, implicitly questioning their bona fides. He reiterates the vast gulf of learning, probably specious, between himself and such men of learning: “Coming after these men’s overflowing rivers of eloquence, I would not unjustifiably be considered presumptuous for trying to produce a few drops of water were I not spurred on by my confidence in your holiness...”<sup>57</sup> Not in question, however, is the bold boundary Cassian draws between “men of learning” and monks, tacitly asserting that the type of knowledge monks possess and attain through ascetic practice is far more significant than that learned through traditional study.

To be sure, both Basil and Jerome were highly educated men. Ignoring, however, the fact that Cassian, given his knowledge of both Greek and Latin, was probably just as classically educated, his insult of the two well-known Christian authors is difficult to comprehend. Basil, or Basil the Great as he is often called, was born to a wealthy Christian family. After a youth spent studying and then teaching law and rhetoric, Basil met a bishop, Eustathius of Sebaste, who inspired him to abandon these secular activities in favor of a life devoted to God.<sup>58</sup> At this point, after studying monasticism and asceticism by visiting monks in Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia, Basil settled into an ascetic life of solitude near the city of Pontus, a

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<sup>57</sup> Cassian, *Institutes, preface*, VII. “Post quorum tam exuberantia eloquentiae flumina, possem non immerito praesumptionis notari, si aliquid stillicidii hujus inferre tentassem; nisi me ad haec fiducia tuae sanctitatis animaret...”

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea: Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 19-20.

sojourn which proved short-lived.<sup>59</sup> However, based upon those studies and his own ascetic life in Pontus, Basil wrote a set of writings now known merely as *The Ascetic Writings*, meant to encourage and order the ascetic life for those interested.<sup>60</sup>

Afterwards, Basil started a monastic community on his family's estate at Annesi, writing on the communal life. These writings would eventually help form the basis of Eastern monasticism.<sup>61</sup> We have no knowledge of interactions between Cassian and Basil. Therefore, one can only imagine that Cassian had read both Basil's ascetic and monastic writings and had either found them insufficient compared to his own ideas, or conversely had found them excellent which had inspired him to jealousy. The case is similar with Jerome.

Jerome converted to Christianity while a student in Rome. He soon after left for the Syrian desert to take up the ascetic life.<sup>62</sup> Jerome wrote an enormous corpus of letters, commentaries, translations, and other polemical writings. On the one hand, Jerome was a contentious personality and, as one author puts it, "his penchant for polemic did little to win him new supporters in his own day and strained the friendships he already had."<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, it is undeniable that Jerome was committed to the

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 21.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Rousseau & American Council of Learned Societies, *Basil of Caesarea*, (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), 190-232.

<sup>61</sup> Donald Attwater and Catherine Rachel John, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993), 203.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Payne, *The Fathers of the Western Church*, (New York: Viking, 1951), 91.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Cain, *Letters of Jerome*, 2.

ascetic life; in fact he was a vehement champion of a severe asceticism which even his long suffering friends found off-putting.<sup>64</sup> This tendency toward extremism in the ascetic life, along with his fervent and frequent polemicism, may have rubbed Cassian the wrong way, resulting in his dismissal of Jerome as an authority on asceticism.

None of this information about Basil and Jerome means that Cassian's attack on their authority regarding asceticism and experience is warranted. Both practiced asceticism rigorously and wrote of it to others. Given this, it is fair to assume that this may simply be a rhetorical strategy with Cassian intended to bolster his own authority as a monastic and ascetic. Regardless, this emphasis on knowledge through experience comes into play when Cassian addresses these and other writers who have also attempted to offer advice to monastics but, apparently, without Cassian's vast experience (or at least without the correct experience). Having drawn this line as clearly, if politely, as he can, Cassian pledges to write of "things that have been left utterly untouched by our predecessors, because they tried to describe what they heard rather than what they experienced."<sup>65</sup>

In addition, Cassian notes that while many of these predecessors have written of amazing miracles performed by eminent monks, he will not do so, "although we have not only heard of many of these and other incredible doings from our elders but have even seem them produced before our very eyes."<sup>66</sup> Not only has Cassian met and practiced

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<sup>64</sup> Cain, *Letters of Jerome*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., *preface*, VII. "...et ea quae omnimodis intacta relicta sunt ab anterioribus nostris..."

<sup>66</sup> Cain, *Letters of Jerome*, *preface*, VII. "...signorumque narrationem studebo contexere: quae quamvis multa per seniores nostros et incredibilia non solum audierimus, verum etiam sub obtutibus nostris perspexerimus impleta."

assiduously with these honored monastic heroes, but he claims he has also seen their reputed signs and wonders for himself. He establishes himself here as not only a follower of such monks but a very member of their fraternity, one who has the authority to teach proper practice because he has lived it himself, unlike Jerome, Basil, and other authors he names who have written from mere hearsay. Having acknowledged his own firsthand experience with the Desert Fathers of Egypt, Cassian writes that he won't include any of these miraculous tales because his particular purpose in the *Institutes* is "the improvement of our behavior and the attainment of the perfect life, in keeping with what we have learned from our elders."<sup>67</sup> In other words, miraculous deeds and their accompanying fame and power are insignificant and immaterial to achieving spiritual perfection.

As a final analysis of this category of evidence, I find Foucault's notion of disciplinary power to be a useful tool. As a reminder, Foucault defines disciplinary power as being exercised through surveillance and the creation of new forms of knowledge. How do these criteria manifest in the area of Cassian's subtle insults to clergy and their theological heroes? Furthermore, what does reading Cassian through a Foucauldian lens reveal about Cassian's underlying rhetorical purpose?

First, in addition to the more obvious surveillance enacted upon monks by requiring them to reveal their innermost thoughts and impulses to their superior, I argue

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<sup>67</sup> Cassian, *Institutes, preface*, VIII. "Propositum siquidem mihi est, non de mirabilibus Dei, sed de correctione morum nostrorum et consummatione vitae perfectae, secundum ea quae a senioribus nostris accepimus, pauca disserere."

that the establishment of ideals and, as in this category of evidence, anti-ideals, functions as a kind of surveillance. In the case of monastic ideals established in the first category, the ideal itself serves to give the monks constant feedback on their own monastic practice. Are you living up to the ideals of your forbears? In a similar way, the examples given of how bishops, clergy, and non-monastic theologians fail to practice correctly, the monks are implicitly made to compare themselves with such anti-heroes. Are you behaving like a bishop, comporting yourself with pomp and circumstance? Are you flaunting your learning as a way to increase your status among your fellow monks? If so, you know from Cassian's writings the correct way to behave as a true monk. Second, having established the behavior of ideal monks (and their putative progenitors in the prophets and apostles), Cassian establishes a second category of knowledge: the less-than-ideal behavior of bishops, clergy, and their theological heroes. These two forms of knowledge function as correctives to monastic behavior. Monks must steer clear of the behavior of the latter category while doing their best to emulate the former.

### **The Eucharist: A Case Study for a Closed Monastic System**

One possible sticking point in my argument that Cassian is advocating for a separation between monasticism and the institutional church is the celebration of the eucharist. Since, it might be argued, only the ordained can confect eucharist, how could a monastic system get along without the ordained? First, as mentioned above, I am not arguing that Cassian is claiming that the clergy are obsolete. Rather, I contend that he viewed the monastic calling as a separate sphere which therefore should not be subjected to the authority, theological or otherwise, of bishops or clergy. Second, there is ample

evidence that, in the fourth and fifth centuries, clergy were not seen as entirely necessary for the celebration of the eucharist. In other words, monks (and even laypeople) could serve both themselves and others communion.

One piece of evidence here is written by Basil of Caesarea (303-379 CE), bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor. In an epistle to a nobleman, Basil writes

it is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of a priest or minister is not a serious offense, as long custom sanctions this practice from the facts themselves. All the solitaries in the desert, where there is no priest, take the communion themselves, keeping communion at home.<sup>68</sup>

This practice of giving oneself communion, then, was sanctioned by no less than a bishop. How much less would receiving the eucharist from the hands of a fellow monk be?

Next, Cassian himself seems to contradict himself in that he speaks both of daily communion<sup>69</sup> and weekly communion<sup>70</sup> as customs among the monks of Egypt. However, despite this seeming discrepancy, Adalbert de Vogüé points out that these two explanations need not conflict: the daily communion refers to private communion, whether self-administered or given by another monk, while weekly communion is that given by an ordained minister on Saturday or Sunday.<sup>71</sup> Given that both alternatives were

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<sup>68</sup> Basil of Caesarea, translated by Blomfield Jackson, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), Ep. 93.

<sup>69</sup> Cassian, *Institutes* VI.8; *Conferences* IX.21 and XIV.8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, III.2 (Saturday and Sunday) and XI (Sunday), both in cenobitic surroundings; *Conferences* XVIII.15 (Saturday and Sunday) and XXIII.21 (Sunday).

allowed at the time of Cassian's writing, it is clear that the monks could serve themselves communion. That is, the distribution of the eucharist was a function that monks could take on themselves rather than relying on an ordained minister.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined three types of evidence that John Cassian indeed idealized separation between monasticism and church hierarchs. As with earlier examples in this dissertation, much of Cassian's rhetoric refers to the notion of monasticism as a continuation of apostolic praxis. This is differentiated from the notion of apostolic succession upon which the hierarchy of the institutional church was based. While apostolic succession merely passed on dogma, title, and authority to each succeeding bishop, apostolic praxis, as established in Cassian's rhetoric, passed on the way to live Christianity, to practice the daily rituals and procedures that gradually transformed a human being into one who could truly unite with God.

First, Cassian presents a number of what he deems monastic exemplars, in order to draw clear lines between these earlier revered characters and the contemporary monks he so admires. These include biblical figures from the Hebrew Bible, specifically iconic prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, New Testament figures such as the original apostles and John the Baptist. However, he makes no claim for an abstract authority passed down from these figures to unnamed or elected monks. Rather, he notes the similarities in the way of life between the biblical figures and his exemplary monks of Egypt: their dress, reflecting poverty and humility, their unceasing prayer,

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<sup>71</sup> Adalbert De Vogüé, "Eucharist and Monastic Life." *Worship* 59, no. 6 (November 1, 1985), 498-509.

including both canonical collective prayers and individual meditation on scripture, and their vigils, which he traces back to biblical stories. Perhaps more significantly, Cassian begins the *Institutes* by identifying himself, and thus all monks, with Hiram, the foreign agent through whom Solomon is able to build his temple. This example alone demonstrates Cassian's emphasis of the passing down of practice over that of abstract belief or dogma.

Next, Cassian makes appeals to distinct monastic traditions, differentiating them sharply from the traditions of hierarchs and clergy. He first denotes the canonical number and character of prayers and Psalms chanted by Egyptian monks together, then notes that the Gallican monks do not follow this standard. This is significant for Cassian because the rule of prayers, according to him, was established long ago by earlier, venerable monks in Egypt. For this reason, there is only one correct canon of prayer for all true monks, leaving the Gallican monks the choice of either following Cassian's dictates or being incorrect, excluded from the true monastic fraternity. In addition, Cassian tells monks to meditate constantly on scripture, in order to allow their minds and souls to be formed into the "ark of the covenant," worthy of unity with God. This reinforces not only the monk's closeness to scripture, but also his intimacy with the deity. Finally, Cassian notes that the only way for a monk to become the hegemon or leader of a group of monks is to show total humility. This is in stark contrast to the way bishops were chosen in his time, dependent as it was on political maneuvering and familiarity with the previous bishop who would then appoint his own successor. While becoming a bishop would only add status and wealth to a person, becoming a hegemon was the result of emptying oneself, making oneself lower than everyone, the servant of all.

Finally, Cassian disparages the office of church hierarch and those writers whose theology often informs and supports it. He does this by distinguishing between the knowledge of a classical education which most hierarchs and their theological heroes had, and the wisdom gained, despite such an education or its lack, through the proper practice of asceticism. In Cassian's writings, this ascetic wisdom is far superior to any sort of academic learning, which may even be a hindrance to those trying to attain wisdom. He also subtly disdains theological writers like Basil and Jerome for their eloquence, a characteristic that in his view shows their lack of wisdom and correct practice. This extends to the basis for their writing: mere mental reflection and observation, rather than true, direct experience. Cassian writes that Jerome and Basil write of asceticism and monastic living though both lack the proper experience to speak of these with any authority, unlike Cassian himself.

What all three of these types of evidence have in common is that they are based not upon dogma or orthodoxy, but rather orthopraxy, correct practice. Cassian seems willing to recognize the orthodoxy of the institutional church, or at least never denigrates it, while correct practice is far more significant for him. For this reason, the notion of a bishop ruling over or even getting involved in the affairs of monastics is anathema to him. Monks are ideally their own closed system, based upon correct practices that Cassian traces back to the Hebrew Bible and the original church just as surely as the authority of bishops can be traced to the authority of Peter. Cassian is ready to allow that episcopal authority to stand, as long as the bishops do the same for the practice of monks. It makes little difference that even in his beloved Egypt, different communities of monks in different regions practiced differently. Cassian has built the image of a monolithic

monasticism in Egypt which must be evangelized throughout the known world. In order for this to happen, monks must be properly trained by experienced monks like himself and, more importantly, must be left to their practices by the institutional church.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Conclusion**

My analysis of Cassian's writings acknowledges the subtlety of his advocacy for monastic separation which may leave many wondering what greater impact or import this study might have. Cassian was no violent revolutionary trying to effect a coup within the church. I argue simply that he was shrewdly trying to fashion the subjectivity of the monks of Gaul who made up his intended audience. He wanted to give those monks a shape, familiar to him from his cherished time as a monk in the deserts of Egypt, into which monks could pour themselves and thus embody the true, ascetic ideal he championed. In order to do this completely, he wanted to ensure as much as possible without incurring the wrath of bishops, that monks were allowed to operate their own systems of practice without any meddling from the institutional church. Is this simply a mildly interesting look at an arcane writer about whose life we know very little? Are there, within my argument, any implications for further avenues of study? I believe there are, and, after a brief recap and synthesis of my principle argument, I discuss these below.

#### **Synthesis**

This dissertation discussed the context in which John Cassian wrote both of his best-known works, *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*. The milieu in which these were written was vastly different from the Egyptian context in which his ideas on monasticism

were first formed. This would prove to be an obstacle for the elder Cassian in trying to institute the type of reforms that would, in his mind, make the Gallican monasteries to and for which he was writing true examples of correct practice.

In his Egyptian monastic life, Cassian learned what was to be the bedrock of correct monastic practice for him: asceticism. A true monk was one who renounced all social and family ties, all personal possessions, and even the very identity these ties had ultimately helped to form. That is, a monk was one who lived only for God and thus abandoned every connection to earthly life. It was this concept of renunciation which would undergird every idea, theological and otherwise, that Cassian wrote. Those who did not practice such committed asceticism – the monks of Gaul, for example – were not worthy of the name monk.

Fifth-century Gaul had long been something of a political minefield within the Roman Empire. Local Germanic kings had rebelled against the Roman empire and even achieved a measure of autonomy for a brief period. Even in the centuries leading up to this successful revolt, Roman writers had often written of the Gallican tendency to support usurpers. It was a province that valued its independence. However, the culmination of this uprising left the Gallican elite in a bind: to whom should they give their loyalty in order to maintain their privileged status? Oddly, for modern sensibilities, one way to maintain wealth and status was to enter an ecclesiastical career.

Several well-known Gallican hagiographies aimed at showing the compatibility of monastic/ecclesiastical careers and prodigious wealth and status. In his hagiography of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius Severus wrote that the heavenly world was simply a continuation of the earthly distribution of wealth and status. In both worlds, the wealthy

Christian convert continued to live and interact with his social equals. For those monks and clerics who could boast of elite origins, their status was maintained here and in the world to come. Renunciation of wealth, property, and status was completely unnecessary. This brought the monks of Gaul into sharp contrast with the Egyptian notions of asceticism and total renunciation as the mark of authority which Cassian espoused.

In Cassian's writing, as well as other early monastic literature, renunciation was the foundation of holiness and influence. Cassian made this argument primarily by tying asceticism to the primitive church. If indeed Egyptian monks' ascetic practice was merely following the example of the apostles in the Bible (Acts 4:32), then monastics, as defined by Cassian's Egyptian ideal, had a special claim to a level of authority normally due only to the institutional church and its representatives in the bishopric. Given this, Cassian could only have taken a dim view of the way wealth and status were maintained by the so-called monks he encountered in Gaul.

Essential to my analysis of Cassian's thought is a discussion of the formation of subjects driven by the thought of Michel Foucault. One consistent and overarching notion Foucault employed is governmentality, the conduct of conduct. For Foucault, governmentality consists of the myriad ways in which individuals are controlled, specifically by manipulating those individuals into controlling themselves. In fact, Foucault actually wrote that his entire oeuvre consisted of investigations into the way human subjects are thus formed.

Subjects, for Foucault, are not self-directed agents, but rather socially constructed individuals, matrices of different forms of power. Foucault's interest then was in the techniques by which such subjects were formed. He wrote that this formation was not

simply an authoritarian exercise on the part of those in whom power is concentrated, but rather an intersection between such techniques of power and techniques of self formation. Accordingly, he identified three methods by which subjects were formed.

First, certain types of analyses create subjects as objects of knowledge. In this dissertation, I have argued that Cassian's establishment of the Egyptian monks as the norm by which every other monk is measured in turn creates the Gallican monks who are his intended audience as objects of knowledge. That is, Cassian can use the standards he codifies from the monks of Egypt to measure the spiritual and practical progress of the monks to whom he writes. As we see often in Cassian's monastic writings, specific descriptions of Egyptian monastic behavior are then compared with the same (usually deficient) behavior by Gallican monks. This creates the monks of Gaul as subjects in two simple categories. True monks are those who conform completely with those standards, while the others are portrayed as mere pretenders who fail to meet the standards required. Cassian, of course, is the arbiter of these subjective categories, the authority who, based on his experience in Egypt, decides both the behaviors necessary for true monks and who is adequately meeting those standards.

Second, practices and procedures divide subjects both from within, and from other subjects according to standards of norm and deviance. Cassian places all these behavioral standards in the mouths of well-known Egyptian monks, a rhetorical strategy which lends his notions further weight. The ideas are portrayed as not merely Cassian's; they are instead part of the long-standing traditions of holiness established by the most accomplished and well-known desert ascetics. The monks are thus given the choice to form themselves as subjects according to these venerable standards or to be excluded

from this superior realm. In this sense they are divided internally: monks must work on themselves, as if one wise, partial self were working on the other, unwise self, in order to achieve an acceptable level of correct practice. At the same time, they are divided from society in that the more correct their practice, the less they resemble laypeople and bishops/clergy. Monks undertake very specific types of behavior and Cassian establishes that one is either a monk or not – there is no middle ground.

Third, practices and procedures of self-management are introduced, by which subjects transform themselves in order to meet an externally imposed ideal. Again, the superlative model imposed by Cassian includes meticulous regulation of behaviors and even thoughts by which subjects must regulate themselves. In other words, Cassian provides the template for becoming a correct monk, while setting up the monks as self-regulators, such that his external supervision becomes superfluous.

In Foucault's writings, there are four principal modalities of power. Two of these, disciplinary power and pastoral power, are most appropriate for analyzing the interplay of Cassian's rhetoric.

Disciplinary power is enacted chiefly through surveillance and the creation of certain types of knowledge. By surveillance, however, Foucault does not necessarily mean that subjects must be meticulously watched at all times; rather, subjects must believe they are watched. Foucault's analysis of Bentham's panopticon illustrates this. The panopticon is a type of prison architecture with a surveillance tower in the center surrounded by cells. Certainly the guard can see all prisoners from the tower; however, if the windows of the tower are opaque, the prisoners, believing they might be watched at all times, will police themselves.

In terms of the gathering and creation of forms of knowledge, subjects are themselves studied as objects of knowledge. This knowledge is then used to form benchmarks of behavior by which subjects can measure themselves as either normal or deviant. The risk of deviance, then, is the risk of exclusion from the majority, and thus the majority are effectively controlled.

In this dissertation, I have argued that Cassian's rhetoric is appropriately, if partially, explained and analyzed by the notion of disciplinary power. Cassian repeatedly emphasizes the behavioral standards of a true monk, including and especially those of total obedience and total mental transparency to one's superiors. By outlining these standards against which a monk may measure himself, he ensures both that the monk will regulate himself – the standards themselves acting as a kind of supervisory agent – and that any secret thoughts will be revealed to the monastic leader, such that everything about the monk will be known and thus ordered. That is, Cassian creates the monastic subject as self-regulating and self-revealing, such that only a certain type of self-created subject will be allowed the honor of being called a monk.

The other type of power evident in Cassian's rhetoric is Pastoral power. Pastoral power is noted by Foucault as coming principally out of Christian tradition. He notes that it differs from the ancient Greek political thought contemporary with the rise of Christianity in four ways. First, the shepherd's power relates to a people, rather than a land. Wherever the people dwell, the shepherd's power follows them without borders. Second, as a result of this relationship to a people, the shepherd gathers his people together and helps them to adhere as a people. This includes guiding their behavior and helping them find necessary resources. Third, the shepherd's duty is to effect the

salvation of his people. In the most basic sense, this means saving them from danger and/or lack of resources. This also involves paying attention to and monitoring the needs of both individuals and the collective. Fourth, unlike for a king or other autocrat, power for a shepherd is a duty rather than a privilege. He is responsible for the well-being of the whole group as well as each individual.

All four of these characteristics apply equally well to Cassian's rhetoric. First, the superior monk, played expertly by Cassian in the sense that his monastic writings are meant to instruct from a place of experiential authority, is responsible for monks, wherever they are. Cassian is responsible both for the instruction of monks but also for being an example for them. Second, Cassian, through his writings, gathered and attempted to lead the Gallican monks. He described and emphasized the correct modes of practice while reinforcing their monastic identities. Third, Cassian worked for the salvation of those monks who were his charges. He did this first by emphasizing the necessity for total obedience to their elders (himself included, presumably). However, for monastic leaders this also meant being ready at all times to listen to individual monks' confessions. This transparency effected the kenosis or self-emptying which would assure the monks' salvation. Finally, Cassian emphasized that exercising power as a superior monk was an obligation rather than a privilege. For this reason, Cassian noted that if one is to lead a community of monks, one must first prove one's total humility through obedience to others. Having proven this, as Cassian himself did by obeying his Egyptian fathers, the superior monk becomes at last worthy of leading others.

Having established Foucault's thought as a good lens through which to read Cassian's rhetoric, this dissertation appealed to the ample evidence that there were

very real conflicts between early monastics and the institutional church. This was not an innovation on Cassian's part but, like all of his ideas on monasticism, a reflection of the monks from whom he had learned and the experiences he had undergone as a monk in Egypt.

Laypeople, in much of the monastic literature, often believed monks to be fountains of both wisdom and virtue while clergy were often disdained on this front. For this reason, examples abound in which clergy are actually subordinated to monks, despite the fact that clergy clearly held the upper hand in church authority. This belief, this transfer of authority to monks and away from hierarchs and clergy, was generally due to a belief in asceticism as a mark of religious authority. Monks were ideally quite ascetic, while bishops, for example, did not suffer this requirement for their office. This ascetic practice was perceived as having created a particular intimacy between the monk and God, conferring a divine wisdom upon monks to which hierarchs were not (necessarily) privy. In many monastic stories, in fact, bishops and/or clergy members subordinate themselves to monks, recognizing the superior spiritual acumen of ascetic monks. Monks, in turn, often display a kind of disdain for bishops. This superior monastic authority subjugates even secular authorities such as magistrates.

Another type of evidence occurs in the monastic literature where monks are often abducted and forcibly ordained by bishops. While for the layperson, ordination into the priesthood would certainly have provided a dramatic increase in status and sometimes wealth, the monks often seem to run for their lives rather than be ordained. One clear problem with monks being ordained was that monks viewed this inevitable boost in status to be dangerous to their humility. They were wary of the vice of vainglory and knew that

such a change in status would become a mighty temptation. In addition, a key component of monastic identity was the renunciation of family and social ties. Ordination would certainly change the tenor of those ties, but would nevertheless entangle the clergy member or hierarch all the more.

Yet another sort of evidence emerges from monastic hagiographies, especially that of Antony, the nominal father of Christian monasticism. Athanasius, the powerful and contentious bishop of Alexandria, wrote his biography of Antony, not as a historical document, but rather as a rhetorical weapon in his never-ending war against those he perceived as heretics. His portrayal of Antony, therefore, was likely less than accurate. However, it was also highly influential, a bestseller of its day, and thus provided many who had never met the monks of Egypt with a heroic portrait of monks which coincidentally accorded with the Nicene theological position.

Letters of Antony however, problematize this portrait substantially. First, if the letters are indeed genuine, they severely problematize the notion in Athanasius' biography that Antony was illiterate. Several other ancient authors seem to have known of the letters of Antony and thus the general assumption was that Antony was indeed literate and had a rather sophisticated theology, informed mostly by the writings of Origen (although as in Cassian's writings, Origen's name was never explicitly referenced). The general assumption that most Egyptian monks were uneducated peasants has been substantially debunked by William Harmless and others. The notion of monks as humble illiterates could only have supported Athanasius' view of them as his subordinates and as purely ascetic, rather than theologically erudite agents.

According to Antony's letters, Antony held a very Neoplatonic view of the significance of knowing the self in order to know God. This does not easily agree with Athanasius' Nicene position. Even Antony's reference to Arius, Athanasius' theological arch-enemy, is compassionate in that he notes that while Arius may be wrong about his view of Christ, it is only because he did not know himself sufficiently that he had such incorrect views, not because of willful disobedience.

Finally, while the Antony of Athanasius' *Life* fights embodied demons physically, being almost beaten to death in the process, Antony in his letters describes the demons as disembodied and needing humans in order to embody their wrong thoughts and emotions. In short, the conflict lies here between the way Antony was used as a rhetorical soldier in Athanasius' fight against Arianism and the way that monks themselves, Antony among them, tended to avoid theological conflicts of the day, preferring instead to focus on ascetic practice and achieving intimacy with God.

The ultimate example of conflict between the institutional church and monks pertains more directly to John Cassian. The Origenist Controversy would cause the exile of Cassian and his mentors, while likely cementing his views on the relation between church hierarchy and monastics. When Theophilus, the bishop of Alexandria, declared that the God was embodied, effectively making this the *de facto* church position, he automatically anathematized the contrary position held by Cassian and the monks of his Egyptian community, a position largely influenced by Origen. While in our own time, such an argument might remain in the rhetorical realm, in Cassian's time, such divergences had real-world consequences. Cassian and his fellow monks were virtually chased from the Egyptian desert while their cells were burned to the ground. Had Cassian

not had a definite opinion on the relation between monks and the institutional church at this time, this incident, as well as others such as the exile of his Constantinopolitan protector John Chrysostom by the same bishop, surely gave him pause when considering how monks should relate in terms of authority to the leaders of the church. I argue that this episode was not an anomaly, but rather the culmination and result of conflicts that had long been building between monasticism and the institutional church.

Finally, this dissertation examined evidence from Cassian's own rhetoric that he indeed believed that a separation of authority between monasticism and the church was necessary. Cassian's monastic writings were the finale of a long voyage from privileged, educated son to novice monk and ultimately, to monastic master. His authority on all matters monastic had been hard-won, and he used it to attempt to bring the new monasteries of Gaul into line with those of Egypt. Rather than let the ascetic way of life he had learned and loved die with his exile from Egypt, he brought it to the Western Empire, and ultimately, to the world. However, this dissertation argued that Cassian fully believed that for this to happen, monasticism would have to be separated from – safe from – the meddling of bishops and other clergy. Monks would have to be given free reign over their own affairs, both practical and theological. Only in this way could they truly live the correct life and achieve the necessary intimacy with God that would ensure salvation. Of course, having suffered exile at the hands of an unscrupulous bishop, Cassian knew better than to overtly challenge the church hierarchy in his writings. Rather, he included many subtle references which could be read by future monks as advocating for such a separation.

One way in which Cassian shrewdly argued his case was by including frequent references to the almost ancestral tie he saw between monks and the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the apostles of the new. He began *The Institutes* by drawing an analogy between Solomon during the building of the Temple and Castor, the bishop to whom this preface was addressed. While the bishop was admirably attempting to build a new “temple” by constructing Gallican monasticism the way it should be, like Solomon, he had to rely on the work and expertise of a foreigner. In the case of Solomon, the foreigner was Hiram, whom Cassian compared directly to himself. Again, a bishop may wield the power and resources to begin such a project, but only one truly steeped in the building of such things, only a true monk, could get the job done.

Cassian showed how the clothing and the ascetic lifestyle of monks could easily be traced back to such towering prophetic figures as Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist. Like these biblical luminaries, monks dressed poorly but were intermediaries between God and human beings. Their intimacy with God allowed them to intercede for others and also to impart divine wisdom to them, which is why monks were so often visited by laypeople and clergy alike looking for “a word.” In the same passages where Cassian compared prophets and monks, he also compared the apostles and monks, explicitly claiming that all or most of the traditions of genuine monasticism were passed down by such biblical figures. Implicit in this was a challenge to the institutional church. While there is no indication that Cassian wanted to deny orthodoxy or the authority of apostolic succession to the bishops, he declared what to monks was far more significant: orthopraxy or, what I have called in this dissertation apostolic praxis. The methods of asceticism and prayer, he claimed, were passed down just as surely as the authority of the

apostolic sees. However, since practice was far more important to monks than mere orthodoxy, Cassian was implicitly making a rather grandiose claim: monks are the true possessors of correct Christian living.

This authority was, he stated, passed down through the ages to the Desert Fathers of Egypt from whom Cassian himself had learned. Thus, this knowledge not only tied him and all correctly practicing monks of the future to the venerable monks of Egypt, but indeed to the earliest church. The claim is astounding in its audacity. It is as if Cassian is claiming that those who practice as the Egyptian monks do are the truest form of the church. He stops short of saying that laypeople and hierarchs/clergy are not part of the church. Rather, there are apparent levels to one's involvement in Christ's church, with monks occupying the highest levels.

Cassian goes further on this claim in reviewing and outlining the specifics of monastic practice and traditions. He never explicitly says that these practices are only for monks. That is, he differentiates between monks, those who practice correctly, and hierarchs and clergy, who do not. Again, Cassian draws the line from the primitive church to the monastic practices of Egypt, focusing again not on apostolic succession, the purview of the institutional church, but apostolic praxis, which grants authority to monks.

In outlining the correct number and order of prayers for monks, Cassian defines the canon of practices for monks. In doing so, he makes several clear references to the Gallican monks and how their practice is incorrect, whether by the wrong number or type of prayers or by their irreverent conduct during prayer. This is significant for two reasons. First, remember that Cassian is writing his treatises at the behest of Castor, bishop of Aptia Julia in Gaul. The monasteries of Gaul Cassian criticizes were, so Cassian tells us,

founded by this bishop. Therefore, a bishop's authority and leadership are clearly insufficient to create an acceptable community of monks. Second, only an experienced monk who learned and practiced in the idealized deserts of Egypt is capable of establishing an adequate monastic community of practice. Cassian, though professing humility, notes that his bona fides are impeccable and that he, not the bishop, should be in charge of telling monks how best to practice prayer and asceticism. Gallican monks under the mere authority of the bishop are "uninstructed infants." Only a true father, an *abba*, can form such monks into mature Christian practitioners.

Throughout this discussion of monastic practices, what is constantly evident is the authority that asceticism confers upon monks. Asceticism is an emptying of the self, such that the monk is purified, attaining at last, in Cassian's familiar parlance, purity of heart. As this dissertation established, this seemingly vague phrase is Cassian's translation and/or paraphrase of his teacher Evagrius Ponticus's *apatheia* or passionlessness. When a monk has practiced renunciation, he is left with the absence of passions which allows him to access both the wisdom of the divine and intimacy with that divine. Since such strict asceticism is not required for bishops or clergy, the implication is that monks are far closer to God and thus possess in greater quantities God's wisdom. In other words, correct practice ultimately allows the practitioner to participate in the divine whereas the title and authority conferred upon bishops and clergy are no guarantee of such holiness. Monks, through practice, have greater spiritual authority than representatives of the institutional church.

Finally, Cassian throughout his writings subtly denigrates church hierarchs and their theological heroes. In the preface of *The Institutes*, for example, Cassian writes

that his benefactor, Castor, Bishop of Aptia Julia, is accomplished in both virtue and knowledge while Cassian himself is lacking such knowledge. Forgetting that Cassian was most likely well-educated as a young man, the distinction here is more significant than is initially apparent. Cassian here makes the first reference to the difference between knowledge, the result of education and wisdom, the far more important result of ascetic and monastic practice. In his writings, church representatives are often said possess the former while monks possess the latter. He goes on in the same preface to note that Castor is blessed with a gift of eloquence, Cassian himself will explicate the wisdom of monastic life in simple words. He further notes that even those who are illiterate are often capable of great wisdom. This is true because, as Cassian says, a monk's wisdom comes only from experience and practice, not from books or reflection. The apostles, he reminds us, were themselves uneducated men. Indeed, too much education can be an obstacle to true wisdom.

Cassian goes on to write of some of the most prominent Christian writers of his day, Jerome and Basil. While he notes that their eloquence is so impressive that he is afraid to write anything that might be compared with it, he makes it clear that what monks gain in experience and practice is far superior to anything learned in a classical education. Such articulate writers nevertheless write of things of which they have no direct experience, while Cassian is writing only of that which he has himself experienced. Experience, for the monk, trumps mere speculation every time.

### **Implications for Further Study**

Despite the primitive state of technology in the fifth century CE, I would argue that Cassian had a sophisticated sense of how to create certain types of subjects. Foucault,

meanwhile, decades before the invention of the internet, developed a complex, nuanced analysis of the type of subject creation of which Cassian's writings are an example. Fast forwarding to today, I believe that we have not appreciably improved upon Cassian's ability to shape subjects or Foucault's analysis of this process.

In our own time, ubiquitous television networks and social media accounts have, depending on their particular orientations, done a marvelous job of shaping the subjectivity of their viewers. Both TV networks and social media, for example, define what it means to be an American. They provide this definition not through simple platitudes but by defining what Americans should believe, how they should appear, and what they can and cannot do with her bodies.

My first question, therefore, is how one can resist such explicit and implicit shaping of one's identity? The too-obvious answer, of course, is to disconnect from these technologies. In our current milieu, however, disconnecting has consequences. If one does not watch Fox or CNN news, one may be excluded from much of the social interaction around the watercooler. Furthermore, not having any social media accounts may actually prevent an applicant from being hired these days.<sup>1</sup>

Having established the power of shaping subjectivity, I believe there should be further scholarly attention paid to forms of resistance. In Cassian's milieu, for example, did anyone resist his definition of the ideal monk? Did anyone contradict his

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Parris, "Why No Social Media Presence Is Bad for Job Seekers," *Flexjobs* (blog), January 20, 2015, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/no-social-media-presence-is-bad-for-job-seekers/>. This blog claims that having no social media accounts signal to a potential employer that an applicant may be hiding something or may be technologically inept, apathetic, or simply have nothing to offer.

prescriptions for monastic behavior and/or ascetic purity? As I've shown in this dissertation, Cassian defined his authority and used it successfully to shape not only fifth century monks from Gaul but subsequent monks throughout history. Resistance to his authoritative fashioning could very well have changed the history of monasticism and thus the church in general. Moreover, examples of such resistance might give scholars a window into our own time, in which the shaping of subjects is even more omnipresent.

Another of my queries at the inception of this study was whether Cassian had conceptualized a larger, overarching basis for this separation he sought, a line that could easily be drawn between monks and most bishops/clergy. The obvious answer, not just within Cassian's oeuvre but within the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the whole corpus of monastic writings of the fourth and fifth centuries, was asceticism. Indeed, in some of the monastic literature there are examples revealed to monks of laypeople and bishops who, merely by virtue of their exceptional ascetic practices, are as worthy of intimacy with God as any good monk. Two examples clarify this emphasis on ascetic practice:

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the angels.<sup>2</sup>

In another example, two monks are sent to a married couple, a shepherd named Eucharistus and his wife, who God says have exceeded the two monks in righteousness. The married couple, out of humility, are loath to reveal their way of life to the monks, but when the monks insist, Eucharistus says

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<sup>2</sup> *AP*, Antony, 24.

Here are these sheep; we received them from our parents, and if, by God's help we make a little profit, we divide it into three parts: one for the poor, the second for hospitality, and the third for our personal needs. Since I married my wife, we have not had intercourse with one another, for she is a virgin; we each live alone. At night we wear hair-shirts and our ordinary clothes by day. No one knows of this till now.<sup>3</sup>

This may also explain how there are bishops included in the *Apophthegmata* as well as Cassian's advocacy for John Chrysostom, himself an ascetic bishop. What truly divided the sheep from the goats was not status or title but ascetic practice.

In the Late Antique period in which monasticism began and flourished, we see the beginnings of heresiology as well as fights over Christology and the Creeds. What ties these well-known conflicts together is the notion of orthodoxy or correct belief. Orthodoxy was emphasized in this period of Christian thought, often at the expense of correct practice. While monks such as Cassian would no doubt have agreed that orthodoxy mattered – and Cassian certainly never contradicts that notion – what was clearly more significant for them was correct practice. A monk had to pray, both in the liturgical group setting and frequently on his own. A monk had to fast, preferably every day until the ninth hour (3 PM). A monk had to meditate on scripture until scripture became part of his very constitution.

What is more, these practices in Cassian's writing were all explicitly linked to the larger history of the church. The monks dressed like Elijah and John the Baptist. They renounced all personal possessions like the apostles in the book of Acts. They prayed without ceasing as Paul had encouraged. They were a community of practice emphasized

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<sup>3</sup> AP, Eucharistus the Secular, 1.

over belief. Because these practices had, according to Cassian, been passed down from the apostles, I coined a phrase in this dissertation: apostolic praxis. While the bishops could and did lay claim to their authority by virtue of its being passed down from the apostles to each successive bishop, Cassian on the other hand laid claim to authority based on the fact that he and other monks continued to employ the holy practices of the early church which he claimed had likewise been passed down from prophets to apostles to monks.

While there has been ample discussion of the notion of apostolic succession and its conferral of authority upon bishops, I see a further avenue of exploration, principally but not only in the field of monastic studies, in exploring the notion of apostolic praxis. How does the picture of early and even later monasticism, since Cassian's writings were the basis of much of further monastic history in Europe, change when we view it through the lens of apostolic practice? While Christian theology throughout history is normally constructed from orthodoxy, what happens when it is viewed through orthopraxy as mark of authority? On a larger scale, can Christianity throughout the ages be interpreted as a series not only of developing beliefs, but developing practices? If so, how does this affect our interpretation of the schism between East and West, between Catholicism and Protestantism, between monk and bishop, between any and all Christian groups with respect to the authority of practice? I think this could be a fruitful avenue for further exploration.

Finally, a third question I think could inform future scholarship is historical. Given the enormous wealth developed by the Western church and its subsequent influence on the sociopolitical milieu in which it thrived, what effect would a true

separation between monasticism and the institutional church have had? To wit, if monasticism had indeed formed its own institutional body on par with the church of the Late Antique period, would its emphasis on asceticism and renunciation have made it, and perhaps Christianity in general, less powerful, less influential than it became? Put another way, might the lack of emphasis on material acquisition in monasticism have changed the development of a European economy? Would something like the apostoloic ideal in Acts 4:32 have been attempted on a larger scale in villages, towns, cities, and perhaps even nation states? Or conversely, would such a development have merely downgraded the significance of Christianity in economic affairs, such that it eventually died out like Buddhism in India in the 12th century?

While merely speculation, I think such questions might lead us as scholars to pay more attention to the interplay throughout the course of history between religious forms and economic forms. Do the two indeed influence each other equally or do economies, practiced often on such large scales, merely dominate whatever types of religion are present? Again, I hope such questions will guide my further work on monasticism and perhaps inspire further scholarly work for others.

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