

Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul. By RICHARD J. GOODRICH. Pp. x + 298 incl. 11 figures and 4 tables. (Oxford Early Christian Studies.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. ISBN 978 0 19 921313 9. £65.

THE fifth-century monastic writer John Cassian, the subject of this enterprising monograph by Richard J. Goodrich, is likely to be a very familiar name to anyone interested in the history of Western asceticism; but he has rarely emerged as a personality in his own right. This is partly because, unlike his contemporary Jerome, who left a trail of opinions wherever he went, Cassian is known to us almost exclusively through his two major works: his *Institutes* (*De institutis*) and his *Conferences* (*Collationes patrum*). The primary aim of this study is to place these writings in the context of the church in Gaul—and in the process, to recapture something of their original intentions and force. As Goodrich reminds us, the first audience for these works will have received them very differently from most modern and medieval readers, for whom Cassian survived as a monastic authority recommended (and yet effectively superseded) in the *Rule of St Benedict*. Only a century before Benedict, however, Cassian had been faced with a Gallic audience increasingly willing to embrace Christian asceticism—but whose ascetic leaders were largely Romanized aristocrats who did not regard an ascetic devotion as requiring them to give up the finer things in life. To a hard-liner such as Cassian this was unacceptable, and his works set out to exhort and excoriate his contemporaries in equal measure.

Goodrich makes this attractive argument extremely well, and his overall thesis is entirely persuasive. All the same, there are times when the structure of the work seems to distract from the originality of the argument, and my sense is that a different ordering of the main chapters might have made for a clearer progression. As it stands, this is a book best read from the outside in. Thus chapters 1 and 5, taken together, make a compelling case for the radical nature of Cassian's proposals for the ascetic life—and, importantly, they do so not by a mere consideration of the proposals in themselves, but by directly contrasting them with what can be gleaned from Cassian and elsewhere about the prevailing norms described in the works of Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus, among others. This is the contextualizing that Goodrich has set out to achieve, and it is a real success. To take a single example, Cassian deliberately returns to

the ascetic imperative in Matt. 19:21, and demands that the renunciation of all worldly goods should be a prerequisite for even seeking entry to the monastic life—with no guarantee that one would not fail at the very first hurdle. This was not calculated to appeal to pampered Gallic aristocrats, who might understandably have preferred an asceticism more closely resembling the traditional model of *otium* on a country estate; and it was a point on which most ascetic writers (including another contemporary, Augustine) were prepared to compromise, while even Jerome and Paula retained control of their wealth throughout their lifetimes. It is a telling reminder of how radical Cassian's prescriptions really were, and of what a task of persuasion he had on his hands.

This point, then, prepares the way for the three middle chapters, which seem to provide the most important and original argument: that Cassian is best approached in terms of the strategies by which he sought to persuade his audience. The ways in which he does this are not unfamiliar, but are well worth teasing out. Cassian makes much of his claim to have experienced the monastic life for himself, unlike most other writers on the subject and in direct contrast to the novices setting up their own monasteries in Gaul at the time. He also makes much of the fact that his ascetic training was in Egypt, and that this was the only source of true monasticism, which (he argued) had remained unchanged since the early church and indeed could be traced as far back as the Scriptures. What is most striking, however, is that Cassian's need to prove his own *bona fides* meant that he was forced to generalize regarding the practices he recommended. Thus, to take the example of fasting, Cassian was forced both to provide a theoretical and theological explanation of why such a discipline was necessary, and at the same time to allow some flexibility in how it should be followed under varying circumstances. In the absence of a monastery of his own, Cassian could not give orders but could only seek to persuade. The result was a theory of ascetic practice which found little parallel elsewhere.

This may explain Cassian's later importance. Goodrich comments in his conclusion that 'we will search in vain for any instances of monasteries organized around *De Institutis* in the west' (p. 210)—but what survived of Cassian was the attention he paid to the theoretical underpinnings of asceticism. By placing his writings in context, Goodrich is able to cast light both on Cassian's immediate failures and also on his lasting influence.

There are two appendices included in the work: the first discusses the tradition that assigns Cassian to Marseilles and

concludes (rightly, it seems to me) that his writing life at least must instead have been spent elsewhere in Gaul. The second appendix deals with the authenticity of a short section of the *Institutes*, and is notable chiefly for Goodrich's use of stylometric analysis to make his case. This latter appendix in particular might have stood alone as a journal article, and I wonder if in this form it will reach those with little interest in Cassian, but who might well benefit from such a clear demonstration of such a valuable technique. Similarly, Goodrich's book as a whole provides an excellent example of how careful attention to historical context can shed new light on an unglamorous text. I hope it receives the wide audience it deserves.

doi:10.1093/jts/flp181

Advance Access publication 12 January 2010

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Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church.

By GEORGE E. DEMACOPOULOS. Pp. x + 274. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. ISBN 978 0 268 02590 8. Paper \$30.

THE subject matter of this book is the pastoral oversight exercised by the bishop, and the increasing influence of the monastic model on episcopal practice in the fourth to sixth centuries. The five models discussed are Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Augustine, Cassian, and Pope Gregory I, each representing a different response to the ascetic pattern. It is necessary to explain this, as it is hardly clear from the book's title, given that 'spiritual direction' is now defined as 'the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey', the focus being on 'spiritual experiences' (quoted from the website of Spiritual Directors International). True, it might be argued that the forerunner of this was the one-to-one relationship between a monastic and his disciple, but the 'postmodern' reading of 'spiritual journey' is a far cry from the asceticism and authoritarian shepherding explored here. The culmination of the book lies in the chapter on Gregory I, summed up in the sentence 'By modelling the lay priest on the image of the spiritual father, Gregory prepared the transformation of the parish into a semi-ascetic community'. A footnote, which perhaps should have been in the text, explains