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# Cassian on Sinlessness

STUART SQUIRES

## INTRODUCTION

IN THE EARLY fifth century, men such as Pelagius, Cælestius, the Anonymous Sicilian, and Julian of Eclanum—often called Pelagians—claimed that one could be sinless if one truly wanted to be. Because they rejected any notion of *peccatum originale* because they felt that it smacked of Manichaeism, they believed that nothing prohibited Christians from living a life without sin. This claim for possibility of a sinless life was rejected by all their opponents, such as Augustine, Jerome, Orosius, and Cassian. This article will analyze Cassian's responses to the claim for the possibility of sinlessness as part of the Pelagian controversy, and not simply as a part of his ascetic agenda.

Our analysis will proceed in five steps. First, we must review Evagrius's thought on *πρακτική* and *θεωρητική* because his ideas of pure prayer and contemplation of the Trinity are the foundation for Cassian's critique of Pelagius that will be found in Conf 23. Second, we will explore Cassian's Conf 22 to see that Cassian rejected the possibility of sinlessness because only Christ is sinless.<sup>1</sup> Third, we will assess Cassian's argument in Conf 23. In this Conference Cassian defines sinlessness as the ability to remain forever in contemplation of God. Permanent contemplation of God is impossible, however, because every monk is inevitably distracted by the needs of the flesh. Fourth, we will turn to Cassian's *De incarna-*

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1. While Augustine would certainly agree that Christ was sinless, this was not one of Augustine's arguments against Pelagius in the way that it would be for Cassian.

*tione*. This text is crucial for our purposes because it removes any doubt that Cassian's anonymous criticisms in Confs 22 and 23 were directed at Pelagius, since the latter is explicitly named in this treatise and is equated with Nestorius. Finally, we will see how the argument against sinlessness in *De incarnatione* reveals the anonymous target of criticism in Cassian's famous Conf 13.

#### EVAGRIUS

IT IS WIDELY acknowledged by scholars that Evagrius was the most important influence on Cassian's intellectual development.<sup>2</sup> Cassian probably had read Evagrius's work, and the two men may have met when Cassian went to Cellia.<sup>3</sup> We must take a fresh look at Evagrius's thought because, while many scholars have pointed to the Evagrian influence of the concept of ἀπάθεια<sup>4</sup> (a term that Cassian never used, but the spirit

2. Many scholars have noted Evagrius's influence on Cassian: Salvatore Marsili, *Giovanni Cassiano ed Evagrio Pontico* (Rome: Herder, 1936) 103–5; Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 92; Peter Munz, "John Cassian," *JEH* 11 (1960): 1; Juana Raasch, "The Monastic Concept of Purity of Heart and its Sources," *SM* 8 (1966): 8; Richard Byrne, "Cassian and the Goals of Monastic Life," *CSQ* 22 (1987): 5; Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 11; Steven Driver, *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture*, ed. Francis G. Gentry, *Studies in Medieval History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 11; Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: the Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2003) 120.

3. Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge UP, 1950) 26; Ogliari 120.

4. Juana Raasch, "The Monastic Concept of Purity of Heart and its Sources: Symeon-Macarius, the School of Evagrius Ponticus, and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *SM* 12 (1970): 7–41; Nicholas Groves, "Mundicia Cordis: A Study of the Theme of Purity of Heart in Hugh of Pontigny and the Fathers of the Undivided Church," *One yet Two: Monastic Tradition East and West*, Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium. Oxford University: 26 August–1 September 1973, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1976) 304–31; David Alan Ousley, "Evagrius' Theology of Prayer and the Spiritual Life," Ph.D. diss., U of Chicago, 1979; Mark Sheridan, "The Controversy over Ἀπάθεια: Cassian's Sources and His Use of Them," *SM* 39 (1997): 287–310; Róbert Somos, "Origen, Evagrius Ponticus and the Ideal of Impassibility," *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1999) 365–73; Jeremy Driscoll, "Apatheia and Purity of Heart in Evagrius Ponticus," *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature: Essays in Honor of Juana Raasch, O.S.B.*, ed. Harriet Luckman and Linda Kulzer, (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999) 141–59; Benedict Guevin, "The Beginning and End of Purity of Heart: From Cassian to the Master and Benedict," *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature 197–214*; Augustine Casiday, "Apatheia and Sexuality in the Thought of Augustine and Cassian," *Saint*

of this idea may be found in his use of the biblical term *puritas cordis*),<sup>5</sup> no scholar has yet drawn a connection between Evagrius and Cassian's rejection of Pelagius's idea of the possibility of sinlessness. In this section, we will discuss Evagrius's understanding of the passions, thoughts, memories, demons, senses, ἀπάθεια, pure prayer, and goal of prayer: contemplation of the Trinity.

The two main problems that hinder monks on their ascent towards God are passions and evil thoughts. It is the goal of πρακτική, the first stage of the practical life, as Juana Raasch says, to achieve the "purification of the mind from the passions."<sup>6</sup> These passions "are one type of distraction, a base one at that: the presence of passion disrupts the stability and calm which are necessary for the mind to ascend to God in prayer."<sup>7</sup> Evil thoughts, the other distraction, constantly disrupt the mind from pure contemplation of God and anchor the monk to this world.<sup>8</sup>

Although passions and evil thoughts are similar and both hinder the monk's progress, the relationship between passions and thoughts for Evagrius is not entirely clear. On the one hand, Raasch claims that "the passions are set in motion by demons and give rise to thoughts, *logismoi*, within the soul."<sup>9</sup> David Ousley, on the other hand, says that "passions are aroused by thoughts."<sup>10</sup> Evagrius himself claims that there have been two schools of thought<sup>11</sup> but never sides with either argument; sometimes he leads his audience to believe that the passions are prior, while at other times he concludes that evil thoughts come first.<sup>12</sup> Evagrius is not concerned with the order of the passions and evil thoughts, however, because they both need to be harnessed. This harnessing of the passions and evil

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*Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 45 (2001): 359–94; Christoph Joest, "The Significance of *Acedia* and *Apatheia* in Evagrius Ponticus: Part II," *ABR* 55.3 (2004): 273–307.

5. Raasch, "Symeon-Macarius" 32.

6. Raasch, "Symeon-Macarius" 31.

7. Ousley, "Evagrius" 308.

8. Evagrius, *Sententiae ad virginem* 38; *Evagrius Ponticus*, trans. Augustine Casiday (New York: Routledge, 2006) 170.

9. Raasch, "Symeon-Macarius" 31.

10. Ousley, "Evagrius" 213.

11. Evagrius, *Praktikositikos* 37; *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 104. See also 253–54 and n. 46.

12. Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 76.

thoughts may be achieved through a series of rigorous ascetic endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

While Evagrius is not clear whether passions cause the evil thoughts or the thoughts cause the passions, he is quite certain about the three culprits that elicit both passions and thoughts: memories, demons, and the senses.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes these three act independently of each other; other times, they act in concert to cause the monk to become distracted from prayer.

Memory, the first cause, distracts the monk by bringing images into the mind that impede the monk's progress. Evagrius exhorts his audience to shun such memories. "When you pray," he says, "guard your memory strongly so that it does not present you with its own passions, but instead moves you toward knowledge of the service—for by nature the mind is too easily pillaged by the memory at the time of prayer."<sup>15</sup> With constant ascetic practice, however, one may begin to control these distracting memories so that they will not disrupt prayer.<sup>16</sup>

Evagrius spends much more time talking about demons, the second cause, than the other two causes. For him, demons pose the greatest threat to the stillness of the mind because they directly subvert it by acting "through the stimulation of a specific area of the brain, causing the appearance of a phantasm, which the monk, if he is deceived, takes to be an image of God, or at least an apparition of him."<sup>17</sup> More insidiously, they also are indirectly disruptive by forcing the monk's memory to recall images to the mind.<sup>18</sup> Either by causing new phantasms or by the recall of memory, demons are the most pressing enemy.

Senses, the third cause, are the least important of the three, and Evagrius says very little about them.<sup>19</sup> Even though the senses draw images from the external world into the mind, the monk's true struggle remains in the interior life. "Evagrius," as David Brakke says, "urges his reader to become not merely a 'monastic man,' that is, someone who has

13. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 3; Casiday, *Evagrius* 92.

14. Clark 76.

15. Evagrius, *De oratione* 45; Casiday, *Evagrius* 191.

16. Evagrius, *De oratione* 62; Casiday, *Evagrius* 192.

17. Ousley, "Evagrius," 300–01.

18. Evagrius, *De oratione* 47; Casiday, *Evagrius* 191.

19. Evagrius, *Praktikostikos* 38; Sinkewicz, *Evagrius* 104.

withdrawn from committing sins in action, but rather, a 'monastic intellect' that is, someone who is free even from thoughts of sin."<sup>20</sup> The senses, then, must not be allowed to distract the mind of the monk from its immediate objective, ἀπάθεια.

The final stage of πρακτική, which may also be seen as the beginning of the θεωρητική, is ἀπάθεια.<sup>21</sup> Because there has been much confusion about this term, it is important that we specifically define how Evagrius used it. Ousley offers the best definition of Evagrius's understanding of this term when he says "for Evagrius, then, *apatheia* is not a matter of man becoming a stone or a God [*contra* Jerome]: rather it is the reordering of the parts of the soul so that the rational is dominant, and thus the rational creature can act in accordance with its true (rational) nature. It does not differ materially from the goal of the *via purgativa* of the more classical terminology."<sup>22</sup> This "reordering" can only be achieved through ascetic endeavors.<sup>23</sup>

Evagrius, however, does not simply claim that a monk may achieve ἀπάθεια. Rather, he makes a distinction between imperfect ἀπάθεια and perfect ἀπάθεια. Christoph Joest has articulated the difference between the two by stating that "imperfect *apatheia* belongs to a man who still experiences temptations, but once he has overcome all demons, then is perfect passionlessness attained."<sup>24</sup> Evagrius himself tells us that perfect ἀπάθεια may be achieved only when the monk is able to overcome the

20. *Talking Back* [Antirrhētikos]: *A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. David Brakke, CS 229 (Collegeville: Cistercian, 2009) 26.

21. Raasch, "The Monastic Concept" 31; Clark 83; Ousley, "Evagrius" 222.

22. Ousley, "Evagrius" 223. There are two other definitions that may help clarify this term according to Evagrius: "For Evagrius *apatheia* is the goal of monastic ascesis. *Apatheia* is a state of integration 'where enemies cannot trouble, where anxiety cannot disturb, where injury is met with patience, where the changes and chances of mortality do not shake, where the will is detached and unwavering because it is set on God.' The term describes the monk who is free to love and therefore open to receive the direct knowledge of God or *gnosis*. In Evagrius's scheme, therefore, *apatheia* is the gateway to love, which is the gateway to contemplation" (Byrne, "Cassian" 11). "Thanks to his fondness for gnomic utterances, we have several pithy definitions of *apatheia* from Evagrius. Thus, '*apatheia* is the tranquil state of the rational soul framed by meekness and prudence,' it is also 'the health of the soul' and 'the blossom of ascetic struggle.' 'The passions that fall upon the heart are vices, on account of the deprivation of which one is called 'passionless.' 'The kingdom of heaven is *apatheia* of the soul with true knowledge of reality.' Evagrius presupposes that ascetics can possess *apatheia* here and now" (Casiday, "Apatheia" 368).

23. Raasch, "The Monastic Concept" 7–41; Ousley, "Evagrius" 217–19; Clark 67.

24. Joest "The Significance, Part II," 280–81. See also Clark 83.

temptations of demons.<sup>25</sup> Only once the monk is able to remain undisturbed by passions and thoughts stirred by demons, memories, and senses has he obtained true ἀπάθεια.

This experience of ἀπάθεια, however, is only the necessary precondition that allows the desired state of pure prayer.<sup>26</sup> Pure prayer is the target at which the monk aims. Elizabeth Clark says that Evagrius

identifies [pure prayer] with contemplation, requires that worshipers rid themselves of both emotions and images from the sense world. Prayer demands a kind of "purgation" that entails a moral, spiritual, and (we would say) psychological discipline. The time of prayer serves as a kind of "mirror" through which we can judge the condition of our own souls: it is, he posits, a "state" (*katastasis*).<sup>27</sup>

When the monk has reached this "state," all internal and external distractions fail to disrupt the monk's focus. Evagrius offers an amusing and powerful image of a monk who had reached this state of pure prayer: "there was," he says, "another of the saints living in stillness in the desert, vigorous in prayer, whom the demons, when they attacked, played with like a ball for two weeks: they tossed him in the air and caught him in a rush-basket, but they were not in the least able to lead his mind down from its fiery prayer for even a moment."<sup>28</sup> This saint was only able to remain in prayer during this ordeal because his mind was no longer cluttered with thoughts and passions.<sup>29</sup>

Pure prayer itself, however, is not the end; if it were, Hans Urs von Balthasar would be correct when he claims that Evagrius's thought was closer to Buddhism than Christianity.<sup>30</sup> The true end is the mind's ability to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity, which is only made possible through ἀπάθεια and pure prayer. Evagrius says that "a monastic intellect is one who has departed from the sin that arises from the thoughts that are in our intellect and who at the time of prayer sees the light of the Holy

25. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 60; Sinkewicz, *Evagrius* 108.

26. Evagrius, *De oratione* 71; Casiday, *Evagrius* 193; Ousley, "Evagrius" 305-7; Clark 67.

27. Clark 66-67.

28. Evagrius, *De oratione* 111; Casiday, *Evagrius* 197.

29. Evagrius, *De oratione* 71; Casiday, *Evagrius* 193.

30. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus," *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystik* 14 (1939): 38.



Trinity.”<sup>31</sup> With pure prayer, as Owen Chadwick claims, “*Nous* has become the temple of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>32</sup> Only once the monk has been able to reach this level of contemplation of the Holy Trinity does he achieve his aim. Unfortunately, the monk cannot remain contemplating the Holy Trinity indefinitely, as “it is not within our power to prevent thoughts from troubling our mind.”<sup>33</sup>

#### CONFERENCES 22 AND 23

CASSIAN’S ARGUMENTS AGAINST Pelagius begin in Confs 22 and 23.<sup>34</sup> They were written sometime around the year 427 and were dialogues held between Cassian and his travelling companion Germanus and Abba Theonas.<sup>35</sup> Theonas probably lived in Scetis.<sup>36</sup> The beginning of Conf 21 tells us that his parents made him marry at a young age because they were concerned about his chastity, believing that marriage would prevent him from falling into sin. He had been living with his spouse for five years when he went to Abba John—who was in charge of alms for the poor—to offer him a tithes.<sup>37</sup> After listening to John’s teaching, Theonas decided

31. Evagrius, *Antirrhētikos* Prol. 5; CS 229:51.

32. Chadwick, *John Cassian* 85.

33. Steven Driver, “From Palestinian Ignorance to Egyptian Wisdom: Jerome and Cassian on the Monastic Life,” *ABR* 48 (1997): 311.

34. Rebillard claims that Conf 11 was written against Pelagius. Cassian’s only brief mention of sinlessness (11.9.5.), I argue, leads to the conclusion that Cassian had probably only heard of Pelagius’s argument through Augustine or Jerome at that point; it was not until later that he actually read Pelagius’s own writings. Éric Rebillard, “*Quasi funambuli*: Cassien et la controverse pélagienne sur la perfection,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994): 197–203, 209.

35. We cannot know exactly when they were written, but Rebecca Harden Weaver says that we can be certain that the third group “would have been completed between Honoratus’s accession in late 426 and his death, probably early in 429. Because of the close relation among the three groups, it seems reasonable that the third group was composed soon after the first two, thus probably 427” (Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, North American Patristic Society: Patristic Monograph Series [Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1996] 94).

36. Stewart suggests that “the evidence seems to converge on Scetis, rather than either Panephis or Diolcos, as Theonas’s monastic home” (Stewart, *Cassian* 137). See Stewart’s analysis of the available data on Theonas’s geographic location.

37. Cassian, Conf 21.1.1; John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, ACW 57 (New York: Newman, 1997) 719.

that he must leave his wife and devote himself to the ascetic life.<sup>38</sup> Cassian would meet him years later in the desert and sit at his feet.

In Conf 22, Cassian offers the first of his two critiques of the idea that one may live a sinless life. He rests this first on a Christological foundation, a point that we will see again in his *De incarnatione*. It is Christ, and Christ alone, whose life was lived without falling to temptation. “But,” Cassian says, “what would be the meaning of what the Apostle says—namely, that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh—if we too could have a flesh unpolluted by any stain of sin? For he says this of him who alone is without sin as if it were something unique: ‘God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh’ [Rom. 8:3].”<sup>39</sup> For Cassian, one can never claim that one may be sinless because, sinlessness is reserved only for Christ, and anyone who claims such a place with Christ is anathema: “Whoever [*quisquis*] dares to say that he is without sin, therefore, claims for himself, by a criminal and blasphemous pride, an equality in the thing that is unique and proper to him alone.”<sup>40</sup> To whom does this *quisquis* refer? It cannot be Germanus, because he never made any claim that sinlessness is possible. He only asked about those who are permitted to “participate in the mysteries of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> If all are sinful and only those who are “free of wrong doing” may receive the sacraments, Germanus did not understand who could ever partake in them.<sup>42</sup> Cassian, then, must be arguing against someone outside of the dialogue between Theonas and Germanus. He most certainly was referring to Pelagius. We will see later that this conclusion is confirmed by Cassian’s *De incarnatione*.

The main focus of Conf 22 is the problem *de nocturnis illusionibus*. A discussion about sinlessness was a tangent leading away from this stated goal. Theonas, therefore, did not wish to pursue the topic of sinlessness and stopped the dialogue before going any further.<sup>43</sup> He resumed his discussion—and introduced a second critique of Pelagius—in Conf 23, the “companion” to Conf 22.<sup>44</sup>

38. Cassian, *Conferences* [hereafter Conf] 21.9.7; ACW 57:726.

39. Cassian, Conf 21.11.1; ACW 57:727.

40. Cassian, Conf 22.12.3; ACW 57:775.

41. Cassian, Conf 22.8.1; ACW 57:772.

42. Cassian, Conf 22.8.1; ACW 57:772.

43. Cassian, Conf 22.16.1; ACW 57:778.

44. Stewart, *Cassian* 86.

Conf 23<sup>45</sup> does not receive the properly scholarly attention it deserves, at least not compared to others such as Confs 12, 13, or 16.<sup>46</sup> Scholars often believe that it is tedious and offers little for a greater understanding of Cassian's thought. Boniface Ramsey, for example, dismisses it when he states that it "is little else than a lengthy and somewhat repetitive commentary."<sup>47</sup> We will see that it is much more than that.

Conf 23 begins as a close analysis of Romans 7:19–23 ("the good that I want to do I do not do, but the evil that I hate, this I do. But if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin dwelling in me . . . I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see another law in my members at war with the law in my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members") introduced at the end of Conf 22. In Conf 23 Cassian uses this particular passage from Paul's epistle as a springboard to criticize Pelagius's understanding of sinlessness. Éric Rebillard has argued that Conf 23 is "*au cœur de la controverse pélagienne*."<sup>48</sup> Stewart has suggested that it should be understood as a reaction to Jerome.<sup>49</sup> Neither Rebillard nor Stewart constructs arguments to support his statement; they only make their claims in passing. I believe that both Rebillard and Stewart are correct, and I will offer evidence to show that it was written against both Pelagius and Jerome.

Germanus believes that Paul was speaking about sinners in Rom 7:19–23.<sup>50</sup> Because Paul was *beatus*, Germanus could not bring himself to believe that the Apostle would ever refer to himself in such a vulgar fashion. Theonas counters Germanus, saying that Paul was, in fact, talking

45. Julien Leroy and Ansgar Kristensen argue that this conference was intended for a cenobitic audience (Julien Leroy, "Les préfaces des écrits monastiques de Jean Cassien," RAM 42 [1966]: 171–74; Ansgar Kristensen, "Cassian's Use of Scripture," ABR 28 [1977]: 271). Stewart, however, argues that "there is no geographical reference in them that fixes Theonas' location, though the milieu seems to be anchoritic" (Stewart, *Cassian* 137).

46. Terrence Kardong, "John Cassian's Teaching on Perfect Chastity," ABR 30 (1979): 249–63; D. J. Macqueen, "John Cassian on Grace and Free Will with Particular Reference to *Institutio* XII and *Collatio* XIII," RTAM 44 (1977): 5–28; Adele Fiske, "Cassian and Monastic Friendship," ABR 12 (1961): 190–205.

47. ACW 57:785.

48. Rebillard, "*Quasi Funambuli*" 198.

49. Casiday, "Cassian Against" 23; Stewart, *Cassian* 28, 159 n.4. Stewart states that this conference was written in response to Jerome's Ep 133.

50. Ramsey claims that Germanus was following Origen's exegesis here and that Theonas's contradiction to this claim goes against Origen (ACW 57:783).

about those who are perfect.<sup>51</sup> For Theonas, sinners would never claim that they do not want to do evil.<sup>52</sup> In a rhetorical style typical for Cassian, Theonas offers a laundry list of biblical quotations (Gn 8:21 LXX; see Phil 3:19; Jer 9:4; Rom 7:25b; Mt 15:19) in order to show that sinners revel in their misdeeds.<sup>53</sup>

Theonas claims that Germanus should not look at the bare signification of Paul's words. Rather, he says,

we shall be able to grasp the words that were uttered under the inspiration of God, consonant with his intention and desire, when we have considered not in word but in experience the condition and dignity of those by whom they were put forth and arrived at the same disposition, in accordance with which all these meanings were without a doubt conceived and these words uttered.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Paul *appears* to be speaking about sinners, but we must understand that he intends to speak about himself and anyone else who is, in Cassian's terms, "perfect" (see Conf 23.1.1). One cannot know, however, exactly what Paul's failures were until one has become, like him, "full and perfect" in virtues (see Conf 23.2.2). Although he certainly had "splendid and precious jewels"<sup>55</sup> that few other men could obtain, he would give them all up to reach the perfection that had eluded him.

What is this perfection? Theonas used the biblical example of Mary and Martha<sup>56</sup> to indicate that even though Paul (with the other apostles) was virtuous in chastity, abstinence, prudence, hospitality, sobriety, temperance, mercy, and justice, the perfection that he sought was *θεωρία*, or *contemplatio Dei*.<sup>57</sup> Thus, while it is good to possess all virtues, permanent contemplation of God is superior to everything else.<sup>58</sup> He insists that it will only be in the future, when the corruption of this life has been

51. Cassian, Conf 23.16.2; ACW 57:807; Cassian, Conf 23.1.1; ACW 57:789.

52. Cassian, Conf 23.1.3; ACW 57:789.

53. Ramsey, ACW 57:814.

54. Cassian, Conf 23.2.1; ACW 57:790.

55. Cassian, Conf 23.2.4; ACW 57:791.

56. This story of Mary and Martha would become the standard story recited by monks throughout the medieval period to indicate the superiority of the contemplative life over the active life. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300): The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine* vol. 3 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 119–20.

57. Cassian, Conf 23.2.2; ACW 57:791.

58. Cassian, Conf 23.4.4; ACW 57:793–94.

replaced by grace, that one will be able to bask ceaselessly in the beatific vision.<sup>59</sup>

No matter how virtuous one is in this life, or how much one wants to devote oneself to contemplation, one inevitably must act. Even when one is able to have a quiet mind for a time, the needs of the flesh inevitably force the mind to lose focus. Not even Paul, blessed with many gifts, was able to sustain his gaze upon God, because of his earthly responsibilities.<sup>60</sup> Cassian does allow for an individual (even someone as holy as Paul) to be perfectly virtuous. In other words, one may be *sanctus*, but not *immaculatus*.<sup>61</sup> No one is entirely sinless, however, because one cannot remain vigilant in prayer.<sup>62</sup>

To common sinners, the inability to maintain unceasing prayer seems like an insignificant problem, but for people who, like Paul, strive to keep their gaze on God's splendor and ignore the trials of daily life, it is no trivial matter.<sup>63</sup> These holy ones understand that the briefest lapse from contemplation is a great offense against God because to turn away from Eternal Beatitude to the finitude of the sensorial world is a sin of impiety. Theonas tells Germanus why Paul took this seemingly insignificant problem so seriously, saying, "rightly will a person be guilty not only of no insignificant sin but in fact of the very serious crime of impiety if, while pouring forth his prayer to God, he suddenly goes after a vain and immoral thought and abandons his presence, as if he neither saw nor heard."<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, those who "cover the eyes of their heart with a thick veil of vice" are constantly running from pleasure to pleasure in hopes of finding fleeting moments of happiness.<sup>65</sup>

The problem with sinners, Theonas says, is that they are unaware that they should even strive for the perfection of sinlessness. Sinners are only capable of realizing the severity of the "capital crimes" that they commit and feel that it is only the worst sins that need to be avoided.<sup>66</sup> When such sins are successfully averted, the sinner feels that he has done his duty

59. Cassian, Conf 23.3.4; ACW 57:792.

60. Cassian, Conf 23.5.1; ACW 57:794; Conf 23.5.3; ACW 57:794; Conf 23.5.5-6; ACW 57:795.

61. Cassian, Conf 20.12.2; ACW 57:703.

62. Cassian, Conf 23.5.9; ACW 57:796.

63. Cassian, Conf 23.6.2; ACW 57:797.

64. Cassian, Conf 23.6.4; ACW 57:797.

65. Cassian, Conf 23.6.5; ACW 57:797-98.

66. Cassian, Conf 23.7.1; ACW 57:798.

and has achieved a state of sinlessness. Such a false sense of spotlessness precludes the sinner from seeking forgiveness from God.<sup>67</sup>

It is in this definition of sinlessness as *θεωρία* or *contemplatio Dei* that we can best see the Evagrian foundation for Cassian's rejection of Pelagius. Evagrius, as we saw in the previous section, claimed that the monk's goal was to achieve a state of pure prayer after having gone through a rigorous ascetic process that harnessed the mind. This pure prayer leads to the contemplation of the Trinity. While Cassian does not use the exact same vocabulary as Evagrius (Cassian often avoids Evagrius's vocabulary),<sup>68</sup> the Evagrian ideal is present in Conf 23. Cassian's rejection of Pelagius's belief in the possibility of sinlessness, then, is clearly rooted in Evagrian soil.

In chapter eleven, Cassian shifts his discussion from articulating the problem of the impossibility of permanent contemplation of God to the cause of this problem: a postlapsarian humanity where the flesh is constantly at "war with the law of [the] mind."<sup>69</sup> One is forced to abandon *contemplatio* because the human condition, after the fall of Adam and Eve, no longer has the capacity to remain forever turned towards God. The necessity of sin is "inserted in the nature of the human condition . . . which leads captive their understanding by the violent law of sin, forcing it to abandon the chief good and to submit to earthly thoughts."<sup>70</sup> Pelagius often argued that God gave humanity the capacity to choose either good or evil, that "it was because God wished to bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice, by implanting in man the possibility of choosing either alternative [good or evil]."<sup>71</sup> Cassian rejects the idea of the unadulterated free will in Conf 23 because every descendent of Adam suffers from this condition.

God, of course, could have prevented Adam and Eve from turning to contingent reality so that they would not have faced punishment. But, Theonas says, this would unjustly have suspended the autonomy of the

67. Cassian, Conf 23.7.2; ACW 57:798.

68. Stewart, *Cassian* 42.

69. Cassian, Conf 23.11.1; ACW 57:801.

70. Cassian, Conf 23.11.1; ACW 57:801.

71. Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem* 3.2; trans. B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, vol. 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998) 38.

free will given to our first parents; it was just of God to honor their choice to obey the serpent.<sup>72</sup> God knew that “He could have saved them then, but he did not wish to, because justice did not permit breaking sanctions imposed by his own decree.”<sup>73</sup> Instead, God “was reserving his salvation for future ages, so that the fullness of the set time might be attained in the proper order.”<sup>74</sup> That “proper order” would come about generations later through Jesus.<sup>75</sup>

Humanity is certainly fallen, Theonas insists, and, although we cannot permanently remain clean because of the law of sin, the way that we know that our condition is flawed is our ability to contrast our experience of sin with the sweetness of contemplation. To stress this point, he quotes Isaiah: “woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips (Is. 6:5).”<sup>76</sup> How would Isaiah even know that he is unclean? Theonas asks. Isaiah understood his impurity in light of the fact that he had earned purity through *θεωρία*.<sup>77</sup> One then may earn the “purity of perfection” through the efforts of *contemplatio Dei*. It is because of human efforts that one may know the “true and integral purity of perfection,” but, Cassian insists, this merit does not earn salvation, because that “thanks to the grace and mercy of the Lord, they [sinners] presume upon the complete justification that they despair of being able to attain due to the condition of their human frailty.”<sup>78</sup>

Towards the end of Conf 23, Cassian directly connects this second criticism back to the criticism we saw in Conf 22. Theonas says,

whoever [*quisquis*], then, ascribes sinlessness [*anamartetos*]<sup>79</sup>—that is, impeccability [*impeccantia*]<sup>80</sup>—to human nature must go against not empty words but the witness and proof of his own conscience, which

72. Here Augustine and Cassian would agree about postlapsarian humanity. Cassian writes that “we are most salutarily chastened when he deigns to visit us, that we are often even against our will drawn to salvation by him, and lastly, that when he visits and moves us, he turns even our free will itself, which is readily inclined to vice, to better things and to the path of virtue” (Cassian, Inst 12.18; John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, ACW 58 [New York: Newman, 2000] 264–65).

73. Cassian, Conf 23.12.6; ACW 57:803.

74. Cassian, Conf 23.12.5; ACW 57:803.

75. Cassian, Conf 23.12.6; ACW 57:803.

76. Cassian, Conf 23.17.2; ACW 57:808–9.

77. Cassian, Conf 23.17.3; ACW 57:809.

78. Cassian, Conf 23.17; ACW 57:808–10. See also Inst 12.14; ACW 58:261–62; 12.17; ACW 58:263–64; and Conf 3.10; ACW 57:129–31; Conf 3.15; ACW 57:133–34.

is on our side, and he may declare that he is without sin only when he feels that he has not been violently torn away [*avellere*] from the highest good. For, indeed, whoever looks into his own conscience, to give but one example, and sees that he has attended even one synaxis without having been interrupted [*interpellatio*] by any word or deed or thought may declare that he is sinless.<sup>79</sup>

I would suggest that Cassian has in mind the same *quisquis* that we saw earlier in his Conf 22; he is referring to Pelagius, although Cassian does not mention him by name.

It is not only Pelagius whom Cassian criticizes. He also takes Jerome to task for his statements on the possibility of being sinless in the short term. Jerome said, "we maintain, however, that perpetual freedom from sin is reserved for God only, and for Him Who being the Word was made flesh without incurring the defects and the sins of the flesh. And, because I am able to avoid sin for a short time, you cannot logically infer that I am able to do so continually. Can I fast, watch, walk, sing, sit, sleep perpetually?"<sup>80</sup> Cassian would certainly agree with Jerome's assessment that the ultimate ability to be sinless is "reserved for God only." He, however, criticizes Jerome for stating that one may be sinless "for a short time." Theonas says that "although they [the holy] have not only uprooted all of their vices but are even attempting to cut off the thought and the recollection of their sins, they nonetheless profess daily and faithfully that they cannot be free from the stain of sin for even a single hour."<sup>81</sup> Earlier, Cassian had also asked if there is anyone "so close to him that he may rejoice to have carried out the Apostle's order, in which he commanded us to pray without ceasing, for even a single day?"<sup>82</sup> We can see with these two quotations that there is a disagreement between Cassian and Jerome about the potential to avoid sin in the short term.

79. Cassian, Conf 23.19.1; ACW 57:811. I have changed Ramsey's translation here from "snatched away" to "violently torn away" to indicate the severity of the force at hand.

80. Jerome, *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* 3.12; Jerome, *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, NPNF vol. vi, second series (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004) 478–79.

81. Cassian, Conf 23.20.1; ACW 57:812.

82. Cassian, Conf 23.5.9; ACW 57:796.



## DE INCARNATIONE

WE NOW MUST turn to the last text relevant to our question, Cassian's *De incarnatione*. It was written around 429/30 and is Cassian's third and final surviving work.<sup>83</sup> *De incarnatione* was commissioned by Leo, who, at the time, was archdeacon but later would become the Pope.<sup>84</sup> After having finished his two great works, Cassian had hoped to "remain in the obscurity of silence"<sup>85</sup> but was forced (*compellere*) to condemn the Christology of Nestorius who was still the bishop of Constantinople.<sup>86</sup> Cassian attacked Nestorius, but probably had little knowledge of Nestorius's thought, and few traces of his Christology can be found in *De incarnatione*.<sup>87</sup> This text has been heavily criticized by such scholars as Chadwick, Grillmeier, Rousseau, Stewart, and Ogliari as theologically sloppy.<sup>88</sup> Casiday, however, has defended it as "theologically sound."<sup>89</sup>

While *De incarnatione* is a popular text among scholars because of its Christological offerings, it is rarely mentioned in discussions about Pelagius.<sup>90</sup> Weaver, for example, never references it in her *Divine Grace and Human Agency* and does not even include it in her bibliography.<sup>91</sup> Although a discussion of Cassian's Christology and his understanding of Nestorius's Christology would be outside the bounds of this article, I believe that *De incarnatione* reveals much about Cassian's position against Pelagius. The first important point for our purposes comes at the beginning of the text. As we saw in our earlier sections, Cassian never uttered Pelagius's name in his *Conferences*. *De incarnatione*, however, explicitly

83. Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St John Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 229.

84. Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 61; Gennadius, *De viris illustribus*, trans. Ernest Richardson, NPNF, vol. 3, second series (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004) 395–96.

85. Cassian, *De incarnatione* [hereafter *Incar*], Preface; Cassian, *De incarnatione*, trans. Edgar Gibson, NPNF, vol. 11, 2d series (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004) 549.

86. Casiday, *Tradition* 229.

87. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2d revised ed., vol. 1. (Atlanta: Knox, 1975) 468.

88. Chadwick, *John Cassian* 153–67; Grillmeier, *Christ* 468–72; Philip Rousseau, "Cassian: Monastery and World," *The Certainty of Doubt: Tributes to Peter Munz*, ed. Miles Fairburn and W. H. Oliver (Wellington: U of Victoria, 1996) 84; Stewart, *Cassian* 31; Ogliari 123–24.

89. Casiday, *Tradition* 254.

90. A notable exception to this is Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978) 174, n. 31.

91. Weaver, *Divine Grace* 241.

mentions the "Pelagians." Cassian states that "they actually went so far as to declare that men could also be without sin if they liked. For they imagined that it followed that if Jesus Christ being a mere man was without sin, all men also could without the help of God be whatever He as a mere man without participating in the Godhead, could be."<sup>92</sup> Shortly after this, Cassian accuses Nestorius of believing this same idea, which, he says, Nestorius learned from Pelagius,

Whence this new author [Nestorius] of a heresy that is not new, who declares that our Lord and Saviour was born a mere man, observes that he says exactly the same thing which the Pelagians said before him, and allows that it follows from his error that as he asserts that our Lord Jesus Christ lived as a mere man entirely without sin, so he must maintain in his blasphemy that all men can of themselves be without sin.<sup>93</sup>

This explicit connection between Pelagius and sinlessness, I argue, proves that Cassian's earlier refutations of sinlessness in Confs 22 and 23 were primarily written against Pelagius.<sup>94</sup> They were not written against any anonymous Gallic authors, nor were they written simply as a theological exercise.

The connection that Cassian attempted to make between Pelagius and Nestorius has always perplexed scholars.<sup>95</sup> These two men never met each other, Pelagius was condemned for his anthropological and soteriological ideas, while Nestorius was condemned for his Christological ones, they never lived in the same area, and they never cite each other as an authority. What, then, would lead Cassian to make such a claim? Chadwick says that Cassian was not the only person to make such a connection. He states that Marius Mercator had done so, but Chadwick admits that Cassian probably had no knowledge of Mercator's writings.<sup>96</sup> The more probable reason for the link is that, before his condemnation, Nestorius had written to Rome and—in the same letters that condemned the idea of the *Theotokos*—he inquired about Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum, who had taken refuge in Constantinople. Because of his relationship with

92. Cassian, *Incar* 1.3; NPNF 11:552–53.

93. Cassian, *Incar* 1.3; NPNF 11:552–53.

94. Although Cassian's arguments were against Pelagius, we saw earlier that Cassian also disagreed with Jerome's understanding of sinlessness.

95. Stewart, *Cassian* 22.

96. Chadwick, *John Cassian* 143.

Rome, Cassian most likely had heard about Nestorius's letters (although Cassian never had access to a complete copy of Nestorius's writings) and made the connection by this flimsy evidence.<sup>97</sup>

A second point from this explicit connection between Pelagius and sinlessness relates to the hotly contested question about Cassian's intended target of his Conf 13. Many arguments have been made. Chadwick, following the tradition established by Prosper of Aquitaine,<sup>98</sup> claims that it was written against Augustine.<sup>99</sup> He never raises the possibility that Conf 13 was written against Pelagius or Prosper. Chadwick is clearly in Cassian's camp and wants to retrieve this Conf from the taint of "semi-Pelagian errors,"<sup>100</sup> saying that it is a "*tour de force*" and a "fair-minded and good-spirited piece of controversy."<sup>101</sup> Cassian, Chadwick insists, understood that Augustine was not a heretic to be condemned (as were Pelagius and Nestorius) and, therefore, it was written in a tone that was "gentle and irenic."<sup>102</sup> Most importantly, the differences between them were minimal. He believes that Cassian "aligned himself with Augustine"<sup>103</sup> concerning humanity's dependence on God. "Perhaps," he concludes, "the amount of agreement between them is more surprising than the disagreement."<sup>104</sup> Although, as we will see shortly, I ultimately agree with Chadwick that it was written against Augustine, Chadwick's disregard of the differences between them is troubling. It shows that he does not respect the gravity of the situation. The *initium* of grace is foundational to the question of salvation, and to casually dismiss the differences between Augustine and Cassian cheapens the issue.

Markus has challenged this standard view and argued that Conf 13 was written against "Pelagian views apparently held in Gaul."<sup>105</sup> He be-

97. Chadwick, *John Cassian* 142–43; Stewart, *Cassian* 22; Frances M. Young, *From Nicea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, second ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 292. See also Jean Plagnieux, "Le grief de complicité entre erreurs Nestorienne et Pélagienne d'Augustin à Cassien par Prosper d'Aquitaine?," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 2 (1956): 391–402.

98. Prosper of Aquitaine, C. Coll. 2.4; Prosper of Aquitaine, *Defense of St. Augustine*, trans. P. de Letter, ACW 32 (New York: Newman, 1963) 74–75.

99. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1969) 119–27.

100. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1968) 126.

101. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1968) 120, 126.

102. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1968) 119.

103. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1968) 126.

104. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (1968) 127.

105. R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 178.

believes that one should not automatically assume that Cassian was writing against Augustine and that, if we ignore "assumptions encouraged by centuries of received opinion,"<sup>106</sup> we will conclude that we have been wrong all along. His first argument is that this conference has "close links" to the one immediately preceding it and that it "purports to be an attack on Pelagian views."<sup>107</sup> Secondly, he argues that it is more "natural" to see this conference in light of views already condemned in Gaul because there is no evidence to suggest that Augustine's writings had yet to be under attack there. In light of such an absence, he says, one must inevitably reject the historical consensus.

There are several problems with Markus's claims. He is certainly correct that Confs 12 and 13 are intimately linked, but this does not preclude the possibility that Conf 13 was written against one particular author or school of thought. I have shown in this article that the end of Conf 22 and all of 23 were written (anonymously) against Pelagius. The first half of Conf 22, which we have not discussed, addressed the problem of nocturnal illusions, a subject that has nothing to do either directly or indirectly linked with Pelagius. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that Conf 13 was intended both to be linked to Conf 12 and also to address (anonymously) an author or authors. Cassian always embedded his arguments against specific people within the context of his larger ascetic interests; they were never separated.

Markus's argument that Augustine's views had yet to be scrutinized in Provence is also problematic. While he may be correct that no precedent of critiquing Augustine has been established, that fact does not prohibit Cassian from being the first to do so. Markus does not believe that Augustine's work (specifically his *De correptione et gratia*) was known in Gaul at the time that Conf 13 was written.<sup>108</sup> Three years after Markus wrote *The End of Ancient Christianity*, however, Ramsey demonstrated that Cassian was well versed in Augustinian thought and that he knew *De correptione et gratia* at the time he penned his *De protectione Dei*. Ramsey claims that an allusion to (and reaction against) Augustine's idea that few people will be saved<sup>109</sup> may be detected in Cassian's "optimistic

106. Markus 178.

107. Markus 178.

108. Markus 178.

109. Augustine, *De correptione et gratia* 14.44; Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, trans. Roland

and almost universalist view of salvation."<sup>110</sup> Ogliari also has shown convincingly that *De correptione et gratia* was written before Conf 13 and that Cassian was well aware of its content.<sup>111</sup> It is very likely, then, that Cassian's Conf 13 was the first Gallican critique of Augustine.

Casiday suggests several people whom he believes Cassian had in mind when Cassian wrote Conf 13. He claimed that Conf 13 was written against "unwritten ideas" "current among his peers."<sup>112</sup> He believes that Conf 13 shows little evidence that it was written against Augustine but that it is filled with criticisms of Pelagius and his followers. Cassian's refusal explicitly to quote Augustine's *De correptione et gratia* also deeply troubled Casiday and used this refusal to support his thesis that Cassian was unaware of the text. The absence of any citation, he says, means that scholars may only make an educated guess that Conf 13 was written against Augustine; there is no irrefutable evidence that it was. Casiday also agrees with Chadwick that one should not read Conf 13 as a work that was intended to be strictly against Pelagius and his followers but should read it in the context of Cassian's larger ascetic goals. Finally, Casiday insists that Cassian was writing against anonymous Gallic authors because external evidence from Vincent of Lérins, Faustus of Riez, Arnobius the Younger, Gennadius, and an item from the *Gallic Chronicle* (417-18), shows that predestinationist arguments were already swirling around Gaul at the time.<sup>113</sup>

There are two serious flaws to Casiday's argument. He claims that "the Antipelagian trends that recur right across Cassian's writings are particularly dense in Conf 13; it is the notoriously Antiaugustinian bits that are unusual. They do not recur, for example, when Cassian returns to the question of grace and freedom in Conf 23."<sup>114</sup> Casiday is correct that there is no trace of an antiaugustinian sentiment in Conf 23, because, as this article has demonstrated, that Conference was written against Pelagius primarily and Jerome secondarily; we should not expect that there

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Teske, Works of Saint Augustine vol. 4 (Hyde Park: New City, 1999) 139.

110. Boniface Ramsey, "John Cassian: Student of Augustine," CSQ 28 (1993): 6. See Cassian Conf 13.7; ACW 57:488-89.

111. Ogliari 91-97.

112. Casiday, *Cassian against* 20.

113. Casiday, *Cassian against* 18-20.

114. Casiday, *Cassian against* 19.

would be any hint of Augustine there, because Cassian had his sights set on Pelagius. The failure of Casiday's example causes us to become suspicious of the validity of his overall argument.

The second flaw in Casiday's argument deals with Cassian's refusal to name the object of his criticisms. "Cassian," he says,

never actually quotes Augustine's *On admonition and grace*. . . . What we find in Conf 13 are at best paraphrases that approximate to an Augustinian view. Now, we know Cassian was capable of unacknowledged direct quotation (e.g., he cites Evagrius Ponticus in this way)—so, if he in fact intended to chip away at Augustine, why did he not quote the offending treatise without acknowledging his source?<sup>115</sup>

Casiday is correct that Cassian does not name Augustine, but this fact should not come as a surprise. Cassian did include unacknowledged direct quotations from Evagrius, but he did so as a source, not as an object of criticism. The reason Cassian did not want to name Augustine was that he disagreed with him. This instance was far from Cassian's only anonymous criticism. His entire ascetic corpus was written as a rebuttal to ascetic texts circulating in Gaul. Goodrich has shown that Cassian was fighting models of asceticism from Jerome, Pachomius, Basil, Rufinus, and Sulpicius Severus that he felt misrepresented the traditions of the desert fathers.<sup>116</sup> To answer Casiday's question "why did he not quote the offending treatise without acknowledging his source?": Cassian did not acknowledge his source because, as Ahl has pointed out, anonymity provided safety for classical authors.<sup>117</sup> Cassian undoubtedly had seen what happened when Augustine was crossed, and he did not want to suffer the same fate as Pelagius.

Three years after having made his argument, Casiday offered a very confusing revision of his own position. At first, in regards to the sections in Conf 13 that are "supposedly anti-Augustinian remarks," he repeats himself almost word for word: "when we try to make sense of *Conference* 13, our attention ought to be devoted to the preponderate objections

115. Casiday, *Cassian against* 19.

116. Richard Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 78–116.

117. Frederick Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 174–208.

to Pelagius, rather than the incidental corrections of Augustine—if indeed that is what they are.”<sup>118</sup> Just two pages later, however, Casiday goes against his own argument and claims that Conf 13 was written against Prosper, not Pelagius. He bases his new argument on a passing statement from Prosper. “I offered up to Your Blessedness’s teachings,” Prosper said, “written with countless, strong proofs from the sacred Scriptures and I crafted one, following the style of your arguments, by which they would be silenced.”<sup>119</sup> In the paragraph immediately following this, Casiday allows that even if it wasn’t written against Prosper, it was most likely written against some “homespun Augustiniana”<sup>120</sup> found in Gaul.

Although Prosper may not be eliminated entirely as a possibility, Casiday’s argument is weak and not particularly well argued. He had dismissed the possibility that Prosper had read Cassian’s works and then contacted Augustine, asking “why should we suppose that Prosper immediately received a copy of Cassian’s works and, having read them through voraciously, wrote to Augustine at once to advise him of the content?”<sup>121</sup> In the same vein, why should we suppose that Cassian had read Prosper’s “fiery attack”<sup>122</sup> and assume that Conf 13 was Cassian’s rejoinder? Using Casiday’s standards, we have no evidence to support a claim that Cassian had read Prosper. Moreover, why would Cassian limit himself to the “amateurish theological blathering” of Prosper or other anonymous Gallic “Predestinationist tracts”<sup>123</sup> when he could focus his attack on Augustine, Prosper’s acknowledged intellectual superior?

All of these scholars analyze Conf 13 itself to find an answer but ignore clues found in *De incarnatione*. By turning now to *De incarnatione*, we may come to a clearer sense of Cassian’s object of criticism. Cassian, as we have seen, makes two criticisms of Pelagius in this text: a flawed understanding of sinlessness and a deficient Christology. He, however, never once criticizes Pelagius on the relationship between grace and free will.<sup>124</sup> When he did discuss the importance of grace in *De incarnatione*

118. Casiday, *Tradition*, 114–5.

119. Casiday, *Tradition* 117, Casiday’s emphasis. See also Prosper *Epistola ad Augustinum* 3; ACW 32:39–41.

120. Casiday, *Tradition* 117.

121. Casiday, *Tradition* 117.

122. Casiday, *Tradition* 117.

123. Casiday, *Tradition* 117.

124. This fact, of course, does not mean that he agreed with Pelagius on grace and free will.

(2.5-6.), Cassian avoids any reference to Pelagius. If Conf 13 was written against Pelagius, we should expect that Cassian would mention—even if only in passing—Pelagius's corrupt understanding of grace. Since he does not, we can conclude that it was not written against Pelagius. Three other options remain. Casiday is correct when he states, referring to the possibility that Cassian was writing against unwritten ideas, that "it may not be satisfactory to posit a non-literary source" as Cassian's intended target.<sup>125</sup> We should, then, regard this as an unfruitful option. Of the remaining two possibilities, Augustine and Prosper, there are no clear signs that point to one over the other. Casiday leans towards Prosper because both Prosper and Cassian lived in Gaul. Although geographic proximity should not be ignored, Augustine's international reputation, earned years before this debate, as O'Donnell has pointed out, and Cassian's intimate knowledge of Augustine's work, as we have already seen, makes Augustine the more probable target.<sup>126</sup> It is because of his reputation at this time—and because of Prosper's lack of a reputation—that I believe Cassian wrote against Augustine in his most famous Conference.

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125. Casiday, *Cassian against 20*.

126. James J. O'Donnell, "The Authority of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 14–17.