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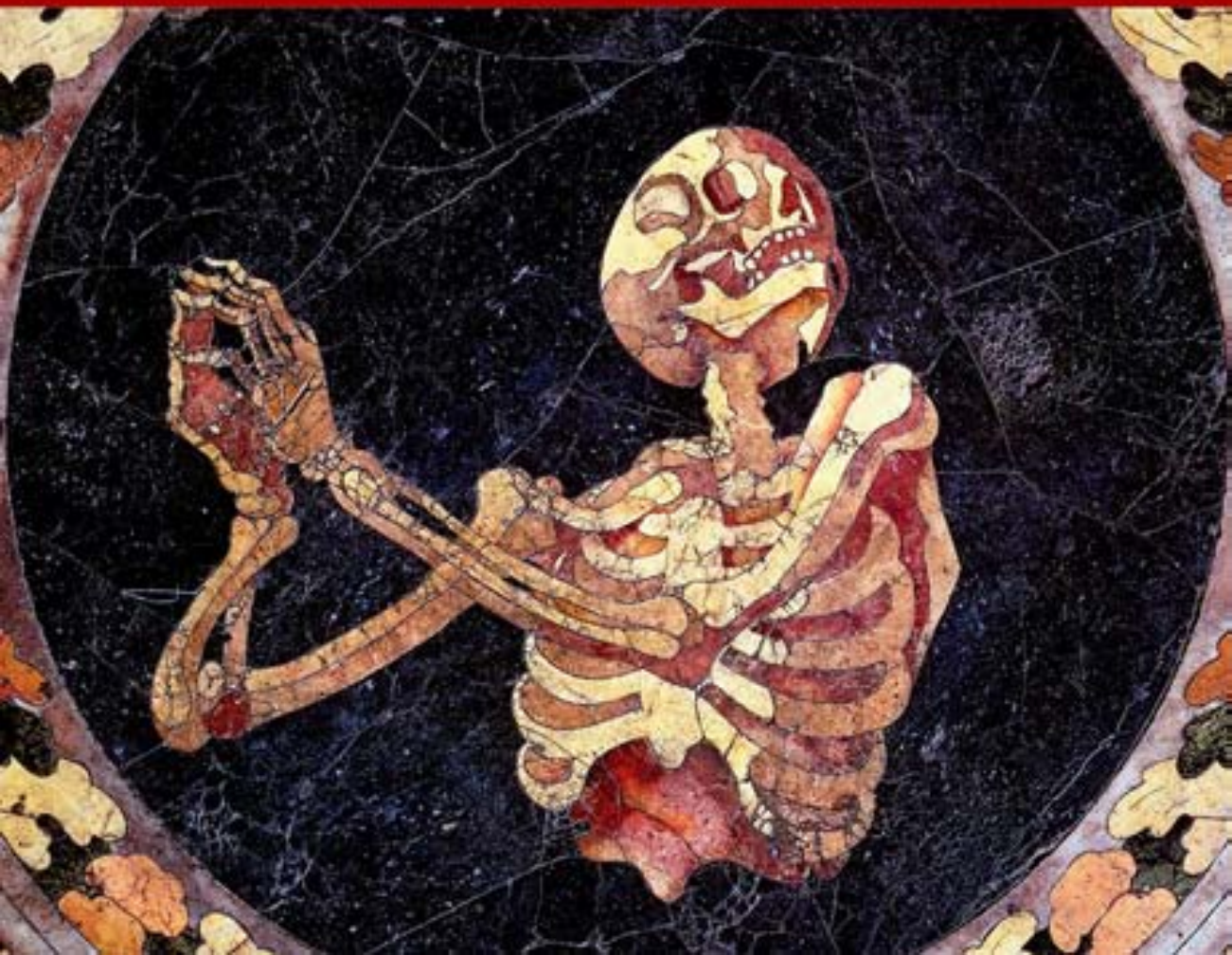
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AS A MEDICAL ART IN EARLY CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

Jonathan L. Zecher

OXFORD EARLY CHRISTIAN STUDIES



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Spiritual Direction as a Medical Art in Early Christian Monasticism

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
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First Edition published in 2022

Impression: 1

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022937050

ISBN 978–0–19–885413–5

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198854135.001.0001

Printed and bound in the UK by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

For Richard, who could well say

Tratto t'ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;
fuor se' de l'erte vie, fuor se' de l'arte.
(*Purgatorio*, Canto 27, ll. 130–2)

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Preface

If my first book began in a train car somewhere in the Romanian summer, this one began in a classroom in Houston, in what passes there for winter. I was teaching a new course, RELS 3366/HON 4301: "Medicine, Magic, and Miracles," which Prof. Helen Valier was allowing me to try out. Four years prior she had introduced me along with a couple hundred undergrads to the Hippocratic Corpus, and later to something called "health humanities." Thanks to her I ended up in a classroom in the Bauer Business School trying to explain to pre-meds why someone would theorize illness in terms of humors and/or demons, not to mention why wormwood and holy water could be considered therapeutic. As these students helped me puzzle through a morass of late antique literature, they also helped me hone the question that would inspire this book: Why did monastic writers use so much medical imagery?

Over the last five years I have tried to grapple with the connections between medicine, confession, demons, diseases, and their place in shaping early Christian thought. I have explored these issues with old friends like Climacus and new ones like Cassian, in an ongoing effort to understand what impact ancient medicine had on the lives and practices of early monastics. This book is the result of that effort. It is a sustained account of several Christian writers' application of the logic and pretensions of medicine to know and intervene on human subjects. It is likewise an argument that, if we are to appreciate what those early monastics thought they were doing in confession and penitence, we should read them with one eye on late antique medical literature.

I have written this with scholars of early Christianity in mind. I have, therefore, offered detailed introductions to the practice and social character of late antique medicine, as well as extensive bibliography, so that those who want to learn more about ancient medicine can do so. At the same time, I hope that scholars of ancient medicine can use this book to enter the thought-worlds of early Christianity. Our fields have much to discuss, and I hope that this book will contribute to a growing and fruitful conversation.

We all know that no book belongs to its author, really. It belongs to everyone around them, whose forbearance, insight, and unrequited kindness make it possible. This book—at least the good bits!—belongs to three communities.

It belongs first to the Honors College at the University of Houston: to Rita, Brenda, Julia, and all my colleagues on Teams Alpha and Omega. In many ways my education began when I joined the faculty there, and not just because Helen

Valier opened my eyes to the wonders of ancient medicine. Thanks to all those faculty members, particularly Chris, Hayan, Helen, Iain, Larry, and especially Robert Cremins. Each of them is present in these pages.

Second, this study belongs to the founders and Board of ReMeDHe. My sincerest thanks to Kristi and Heidi, for letting me participate in their good work as well as offering such generous feedback on my own. Thanks also to Andrew, Brenda, Brent, Chris, Julie, Lennart, Molly, Monika, and Susan, and their kindness, collegiality, and razor-sharp insight. This is a group that makes oddly timed online meetings worthwhile, and I can only reiterate my gratitude for all they've done for me—and encourage interested readers to join at www.remedhe.com.

And third, this book belongs to my colleagues in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at the Australian Catholic University. In 2017 I joined the ACU Research Fund project "Modes of Knowing and Ordering of Knowledge in Early Christianity," a five-year project with a phenomenal research team, including Lewis Ayres, Sarah Gador-Whyte, Michael Hanaghan, Dawn LaValle Norman, and Jon Simons. They've read chapters, chatted in the halls and online, asked questions and offered ideas. Alongside the rest of the team, I owe special thanks to Matt Crawford and Michael Champion, who have read this entire manuscript while tirelessly supporting me through the seemingly endless labor of its writing. All the MOKers have modeled collaborative scholarship, and I'm grateful to be part of the team.

Along the way, I have accrued other debts, too. Near the beginning, Niki Kasumi Clements had me out to present the project at Rice University, and I learned much from that day. In the final months, Ash Green's indefatigable editing and assistance have been invaluable. Catherine van Reenen offered fantastic comments on the first chapter. Time would fail me to speak of all those friends and colleagues who have contributed to this project. I can only hope that the product repays your generosity and efforts.

Despite the good efforts of everyone named, and many more unnamed, this book has had a hard journey to completion. It has been written first in the wake of my mother's death and then during the pandemic (mostly during one of Melbourne's many lockdowns). I would have given up long ago were it not for the unfailing support of good friends and a particularly patient family. Among these the Virtual Pub team stands out: Ben, Lexi, Michael, and Maddie made isolation bearable, and I am grateful for their friendship. Along the way, my dad, Rod, has kept me honest and kept me going, while my sister, Amanda, has kept me grounded—and they both did it over Zoom, which is quite an accomplishment. I owe Tatiana and Zoe more than words can convey. They've walked every step of this path with me and have helped me hobble on when I didn't think I could. To everyone here: thank you.

Finally, this book is dedicated to Richard Armstrong. He guided me "with intellect and art" at the University of Houston, taught me how to teach, pushed me to grow as a scholar, and eventually helped me find my way "past the steep and past the narrow paths" to antipodean shores. He is my mentor and friend, and this book belongs especially to him.

Jonathan L. Zecher

December 23, 2021

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Abbreviations

Primary sources are abbreviated according to multiple conventions. Greek Christian texts follow abbreviations in Lampe (1961), xi–xlv; Latin ones follow Blaise (1954), 9–31. Classical texts follow Hornblower, Spawforth, and Eidinow (2012).

Ancient medical texts present several complications. For Galen's works I have used the abbreviations adopted in Hankinson (2008), 391–8. Readers should be aware that there are other conventions used by editors of the *CMG* and the Budé series. Those interested in other texts and editions should consult Fichtner (2004). Hippocratic texts follow Markauskas (2018), 384–9.

This section contains only frequently cited sources. All others are found in Primary Sources in the Bibliography.

Selected Primary Text Abbreviations

Apophthegmata Patrum

Apophth. patr. A	*Collectio Alphabetica* (*Alphabetical Collection/Alphabeticon*)
Apophth. patr. N	*Collectio Anonyma (Anonymous Collection*)
Apophth. patr. S	*Collectio Systematica (Systematic Collection/Systematicon*)

Aristotle

DA	*De Anima (On the Soul)*
Div. somn.	*De divinatione per somnum (On Prophecy in sleep)*
EE	*Ethica Eudemia (Eudemian Ethics)*
EN	*Ethica Nicomachea (Nicomachean Ethics)*
Insomn.	*De insomniis (On Dreams)*
Mem.	*De memoria et reminiscentia (On Memory and Recollection)*
MM	*Magna Moralia*
PA	*De partibus animalium (On the Parts of Animals*)
Sens.	*De sensu et sensibilibus (On Sense and Sensibles)*
Somn.	*De Somno et vigilia (On Sleep and Waking)*

Basil of Caesarea

Ep.	*Epistulae (Letters)*
Reg. brev.	*Asceticon: Regulae brevius (Shorter Responses)*
Reg. fus.	*Asceticon: Regulae fusius (Longer Responses)*

[John] Cassian

Coll.	*Conlationes (Conferences)*
Inc.	*De incarnatione verbi (On the Incarnation)*

Inst.	*De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium uitiorum remediis (Institutes of the Coenobites)*

Chrysippus

Frag. mor.	*Fragmenta Moralia (Moral Fragments)*

Cicero

Div.	*De divinatione (On Divination)*
Fin.	*De finibus (On Ends)*
Inv. rhet.	*De inventione rhetorica (On Invention in Rhetoric)*
Off.	*De officiis (On Duties)*
Rhet. Her.	*Rhetorica ad Herennium (On Rhetoric, to Herennius)*
Tusc.	*Disputationes tusculanae (Tusculan Disputations)*

Evagrius Ponticus

Antirr.	*Antirrhetikos (Book of Responses)*
Cap. pract.	*Capita practica (Praktikos)*
Eulog.	*Ad Eulogium (To Eulogius)*
KG	*Kephalaia Gnostica*
Mal. cog.	*De malignis cogitationibus (On Thoughts)*
Or.	*De oratione (On Prayer)*
Sent. mon.	*Ad monachos (Sentences to Monks)*
Spir. mal.	*De octo spiritibus malitiae (On the Eight Wicked Spirits)*
Vit.	*De vitiis quae oppositae sunt virtutibus (On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues)*

Galen of Pergamon

AA	*De anatomicis administrandibus (On Anatomical Demonstrations)*
Aff dign.	*De proprium animi cuiuslibet affectuum dignotione et curatione (On the Diagnosis and Cure of Each Soul's Own Passions)*
Ars med.	*Ars Medica (The Medical Art)*
CAM	*De constitutione artis medicae (On the Constitution of the Medical Art)*
Caus. morb.	*De partibus artis medicativae (On the Parts of the Medical Art)*
Fac. Nat.	*De facultatibus naturalibus (On Natural Capacities)*
Indol.	*De indolentia (On Avoiding Distress)*
MM	*De methodo medendi (A Method of Healing)*
MMG	*Ad Glauconem de methodo medendi (A Method of Healing, to Glaucon)*
Opt. med.	*Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus (That the Best Physician Is also a Philosopher)*
Opt. med. cogn.	*De optimo medico cognoscendo (On Recognizing the Best Physicians)*
Pecc. dign.	*De animi cuiuslibet peccatorum dignotione et curatione (On the Diagnosis and Cure of Each Soul's Own Errors)*
PHP	*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis (On the Opinions of Hippocrates and Plato)*
Praen.	*De praenotione* (*On Prognosis*)

QAM	*Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequuntur (That the Capacities of the Soul Follow the Mixtures of the Body)*
San. tu.	*De sanitate tuenda* (*On Hygiene*)
Symp. caus.	*De symptomatum causis (On the Causes of Symptoms)*
Symp. diff.	*De symptomatum differentiis (On the Differences of Symptoms)*
Temp.	*De temperamentis (On Mixtures)*
Thras.	*Thrasybulus sive utrum medicinae sit an gymnasticae hygiena (Thrasybulus, or Whether Hygiene Belongs to Medicine or Gymnastics)*
UP	*De usu partium* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts*)

Hippocratic Corpus

Aer.	*De aere aquis locis (Airs, Waters, Places)*
Aph.	*Aphorismi (Aphorisms)*
De Arte	*On the Art*
Decent.	*De Decente Habitu (Decorum)*
Epid. I–VII	*Epidemiae I–VII (Epidemics)*
Flat.	*De Flatibus (On Winds)*
Ius.	*Iusiurandum (Oath)*
Ius. Christ.	*Iusiurandum christianum (Christian Oath)*
Medic.	*Medicus (Physician)*
Morb. sacr.	*De morbo sacro (On the Sacred Disease)*
Nat. hom.	*De natura hominis* (*On the Nature of Man)*
Praec.	*Praecepta (Precepts)*
Progn.	*Prognosticum (Prognostic)*
Vict.	*De Victu I–IV (Regimen)*

John [Climacus]

Past.	*Ad pastorem (To the Shepherd)*. In citations, Arabic numerals refer to divisions in Moore (1979), while bracketed Roman numerals refer to those in PG 88.
Scal.	*Scala paradisi (Ladder of Divine Ascent)*. Citations will include chapters ("rungs") as PG 88, and subdivisions introduced in Moore (1979). When citing Sophronios (1883), his subdivisions will be referenced.
V. Jo. Clim.	*Vita Joanni Climaci (Life of John Climacus)*

Nemesius of Emesa

DNH	*De natura hominis (On the Nature of Humankind)*

Oribasius

Coll. med.	*Collectiones medicae (Medical Collections)*
Eun.	*Ad Eunapium (To Eunapius)*

Philo of Alexandria

Decal.	*De Decalogo (The Decalogue)*
Ios.	*De Iosepho (On Joseph)*

Opif.	*De opificio mundi* (*On the Creation*)
Sacr.	*De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini (On the Birth of Abel)*
Somn.	*De somniis* 1–2 (*On Dreams 1–2*)
Spec.	*De specialibus legibus (The Special Laws)*
Φιλοκαλία	Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemos of Athos [vel, the Hagiorite], eds., *ΦΙΛΟΚΑΛΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΝΗΠΤΙΚΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ* (Venice: Antonio Bortoli, 1782; in 5 vols., Athens, 1891; repr. Athens: Aster, 1982). Cited as (1782), pg., (1891/1982), pg.

Plato

Grg.	*Gorgias*
Hipp. min.	*Hippias Minor*
Phdr.	*Phaedrus*
Prt.	*Protagoras*
Resp.	*Respublica*
Ti.	*Timaeus*
Stobaeus	Ioannes Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, Books 1–3 in Wachsmuth, Curt (1884). *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, vols. 1–2 (Berlin: Weidmann); Books 4–5 in Hense, Otto (1894). *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann).

A Note on Editions and Series

Karl Gottlob Kühn edited the closest thing to a complete edition of Galen, running to 2.5 million words across twenty volumes. Like many editions of that era, it is monumental, unreliable, and insufficient. Kühn included many spurious texts but none of the many authentic ones surviving in Arabic. The more manageable Hippocratic Corpus was edited and translated by Émile Littré in ten volumes. For many texts these are still the only editions available. However, most of the Hippocratic Corpus and a growing number of Galenic works are found in the *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, as are other medical writers of antiquity; their Latin colleagues are published in the *Corpus Medicorum Latinorum*. These are excellent and frequently include translations into German, Italian, or English. Where possible, I have relied on the top-notch editions and translations in the Collection Budé as well as Brill's Studies in Ancient Medicine.

Abbreviations for Editions in Established Series

CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CMG	Corpus Medicorum Graecorum
CMG Suppl. Or.	Corpus Medicorum Graecorum Supplementa Orientalia
CML	Corpus Medicorum Latinorum
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
Kühn	Kühn, Karl Gottlob (1821–33). *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, 20 vols., Medicorum Graecorum Opera quae exsistunt 1–20 (Leipzig: Libraria Karl Knobloch).
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Littré	Littré, Émile (1839–61). *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, 10 vols. (Paris: Baillière).
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
SCh	Sources Chrétiennes
Scripta Minora	Marquardt, Johan, Ivan Mueller, and Georg Helmreich, eds. (1884–93). *Claudii Galeni Pergameni Scripta Minora*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner).
SVF	von Arnim, Hans (1903–5), *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmentai*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner).
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen

Introduction

> But is he really a *doctor*, this ascetic priest?
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche[1]

> Western man has become a confessing animal.
>
> Michel Foucault[2]

This book asks how early Christian monastic writers conceived of, represented, and experienced spiritual direction, and its central argument is that they did so medically. In effect, it answers "yes" to Nietzsche's sneering question: the ascetic spiritual director was, in fact, conceived as a kind of physician and their art as a version of medicine as these were understood and practiced in late antiquity.

I. Rationale

Late antique monastic formation took place through asymmetrical relationships of governance and submission worked out in confession, discipline, and advice. These relationships—what I am calling "spiritual direction"—overflow the boundaries that would be erected in monastic rules, as well as later canonical and sacramental formularies and penitentials. Across late antique churches, "diversity was the norm and unity mostly a rhetorical construction," in penitential practices as in much else.[3] Ecclesiastical discipline under episcopal authority did emerge in late antiquity,[4] but monastic communities seem to have operated independently of this. Ascetic literature so valorized discernment and emphasized intimacy that confession and discipline "did not take place within a sacramental framework as it did in the Church. Rather, it was an integral part of the essential deeds which the monk was obliged to perform in order to shape his way of life."[5] If we want to make sense of the experience of early monastic spiritual direction, we need to interrogate the logic, expectations, and representations that governed its articulation.

The question, therefore, is what the men and women who lived in monastic communities and who were formed through spiritual direction thought they were

[1] Nietzsche (2007), 95. [2] Foucault (1978a), 59. [3] Meens (2014), 15.
[4] Rapp (2005), 242–52. [5] Bitton-Ashkelony (1999), 179.

Spiritual Direction as a Medical Art in Early Christian Monasticism. Jonathan L. Zecher, Oxford University Press.
 DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198854135.003.0001

doing. What models or conceptual frameworks did they carry into these peculiar relationships and what did they hope to achieve through them? This is an old question, which was being asked by church historians long before Michel Foucault began his genealogical study of self-disclosure and subjectivity in the *History of Sexuality*.[6] Foucault, however, challenged scholars to think differently about early Christians as much as about prisons, clinics, and dictionaries. Regimes of confession and repentance form a certain *kind* of subject, and so Foucault sought out those changes in the moral valuation of pleasure, together with institutional developments, that caused humans in Europe to feel compelled to give an account of themselves. Foucault expected to find the necessary conditions in canonical prescriptions of confession and penance. However, as Pierre Hadot and Peter Brown saw so well, late antique Christian practices and institutions in many cases emerged by reconfiguring existing ones, and so Foucault would eventually link Christian theologians to the philosophers, moralists, and physicians of Imperial Rome. Recent scholarly advances in ancient medicine, philosophy, and education have necessitated a more nuanced and complex appraisal of connections between Christian literature and those other late antique cultural productions. This has been particularly true of medicine, as the last decade has amply demonstrated how deeply medical knowledge was imbricated in moral theology, ascetic formation, and all manner of Christian productions. Considering this, there is good reason to think that early ascetic literature's frequent descriptions of directors as "physicians," passions as "illnesses," discipline, repentance, and prayer as "therapy" provided more than convenient illustrations. These terms are, instead, the surface indications of a deeper and more thoroughgoing engagement with late antique medical discourses, practices, and institutions. As readers, we cannot stop at noting the presence of medical imagery. If we are to understand its presence in ascetic literature, it is necessary to analyze the cultural and intellectual contexts of late antique medicine.[7] Such an analysis will complicate both a Foucauldian genealogy and a theological synthesis, while bringing us closer to understanding the experiences and thought-worlds of early monastics.

So then, what was the logic of early monastic spiritual direction? I will argue that early monastic writers construct and organize practices of spiritual direction as versions of medical arts, its practitioners as physicians, and its subjects as patients. The discourses, practices, and even institutions of late antique medical arts shape spiritual direction by providing 1) a logic of practice and 2) a means of representing expertise.

[6] E.g., Guy (1983), Dorries (1962), Hausherr (1990).

[7] Contra Ware (1989), 302–3; Chryssavgis (2004), 217; Larchet (2000) and (2002); Müller (2006), 218–27.

II. A Plan of the Work

In Part I, I argue that monastic authors draw a logic of practice from Galenic medicine, which was the predominant form of the art in the late antique Mediterranean. This logic is defined by four points: the goal of good health, a widely ranging theory of human nature, diagnostic strategies, and therapeutic techniques. Diagnostic strategies locate transient experiences of impairment and illness within theories of human nature, while therapeutic tactics intervene on body and soul according to the cause laid bare by diagnosis. All of these are oriented by the goal of good health. I will show that, as they deal with challenging and liminal phenomena of dreams and passions, monastic authors engage each of these four sight lines in the same kind of process as a Galenic physician would. Evagrius develops a symptomology of dream experiences (Chapter 2), while Cassian crafts a diagnostic schema of nocturnal emissions (Chapter 3). Both men provide readers with means of navigating physiological, mental, and spiritual domains of causation, and of applying therapeutic disciplines or regimens appropriately. When it comes to "passions," Cassian also modifies Evagrian and wider philosophical approaches to organizing these, in order to craft his own nosology of the tripartite soul (Chapter 4). John Climacus unites pathology with demonology to explain the progress of dysfunctional emotional states and their correction (Chapter 5).

In Part II, I show that spiritual directors claim the trust and obedience of those in their charge by cultivating expertise, for which they rely especially on the image of physicians. Representations of directors' expertise engage the sociocultural dimensions of late antique medical arts: the ethics of medical care, the centrality of rhetorical self-presentation, and the complexities of clinical communication. Physicians act and present themselves to earn and keep trust within a competitive marketplace of healing expertise and the fraught relationships between healer and patient, in which treatment is so often painful and counterintuitive. Spiritual directors grapple with the same challenges in monastic communities, are burdened with the same expectations for both character and competence, and respond with the same rhetorical and mannerly techniques. Basil of Caesarea pits directors against physicians in a competition for superior diagnostic knowledge and for better bedside manner (Chapter 7). Cassian uses ethics and manners to paint his ideal director, while he weaves the physician with the teacher and the judge in a therapeutically oriented hierarchy of coercive power (Chapter 8). John Climacus relentlessly describes directors as physicians and the monastery as clinic, while using interlocking images of shepherd and judge to navigate the dialectics of public and private discipline (Chapter 9).

I will read monastic and medical materials through two theoretical frames, which I will introduce properly in their own chapters at the beginning of each part, but are worth mentioning here. In Part I, I read the logic of Galenic

medicine through a "biopsychosocial" model of health and illness, coupled with Urie Bronfenbrenner's conception of "bioecology." Bodily, psychological, and social factors feature in the causation and experience of health and illness. The social dimension of health and illness implicates both the natural environment and the numerous interrelationships within which humans are always embedded and developing, which is to say, an "ecology." In Part II, I draw on Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, which attends to the cultural specificity of metaphors, to study representations of spiritual physicians.

Over the nine chapters of this study will emerge a picture of spiritual direction and directors that is not *like* medical arts, but a *kind of* medical art practiced on a rather specifically constructed patient. Indeed, while I use the singular for simplicity, Basil, Evagrius, Cassian, and Climacus construct directors and direction each in their own way, yielding not one but multiple versions of this spiritual-medical art. Each version remains embedded in late antique medicine and entangled with philosophy, education, and law. I am certainly not arguing that medicine is the *only* model that monastic authors utilized. Indeed, one could identify one or several of the same features in philosophical and rhetorical education, in courtrooms, or in other professions and institutions. Since Pierre Hadot scholars have accepted the connection between ascetic mental exercises and philosophical ones, and Sean Moberg's recent work has helpfully nuanced that relationship.[8] Likewise, scholars like Lillian Larsen and Samuel Rubenson have done much work in identifying the overlapping discourses and practices of classical and monastic *paideia*.[9] I rely on these studies and, indeed, we shall see that the image of physicians shades sometimes into that of teacher, sometimes into that of judge—but it is striking how the medical model predominates and defines even those other images. I will argue that this is because monastic authors are concerned not merely with authority or coercive power—in fact, they frequently show distaste for the latter—but with *expertise* over bodies and souls, and *trust* in that expertise. Medical logic and representations thoroughly imbue the complex economies of power at work in spiritual direction.

III. Scholarly Backgrounds

This book aims to contextualize ascetic authors' use of medical terms and images within the culturally specific medical arts of the late antique Mediterranean. It is not, therefore, much concerned with the history of penance or sacramental confession—though I hope this will contribute to both.[10] It is likewise focused away from elements of spiritual direction like "burden bearing," "charisms," or

[8] Hadot (1995), 129–40; Moberg (2016), 91–155.
[9] Larsen and Rubenson (2018).
[10] See especially Rapp (2005), 73–99.

even intercessory prayer.[11] Again, though, I think a better understanding of the logic of direction will demand and allow for new understandings of those dimensions too.

Instead, this study builds on and engages recent developments in our understanding of the complex relationship between early Christians and ancient medicine. No longer is Christianity considered simply a "religion of healing," as Adolf von Harnack once claimed.[12] Ann Elizabeth Merideth's groundbreaking study of Christian attitudes toward healthcare showed that, instead of rejecting medicine, Christians approached it differently depending on their conception of the meaning and value of suffering.[13] A decade later, Gary Ferngren constructed on this foundation a radical account of early Christianity as offering less a "cure" than "care," and he, along with Andrew Crislip and Peregrine Horden, helped to expose the participation and contribution of Christians to late antique public health.[14] Scholarship in the last decade, however, has exploded with studies of early Christians' *uses* of ancient medicine. Numerous publications have shown how Christians participated in discourses of anatomy and physiology, nosology, and therapy. This sea change owes much to the impetus of Heidi Marx and Kristi Upson-Saia, who in 2013 together founded ReMeDHe, a Working Group for Religion, Medicine, Disability, and Health in Late Antiquity.[15] These scholars have developed theoretically engaged cultural and contextual approaches to early Christian writings, which greatly inform the present study.

For monastic literature, findings have been especially rich. It has been more than two decades now since Theresa Shaw showed the intimate link between culturally contingent medical theories, monastic diets, and sexual psychology.[16] Since then, scholars have found that, in numerous ways, ascetic literature is health-oriented. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen argued that in John Moschus' *Spiritual Meadow*, the question of seeking medical care is determined by a more holistic, and eschatologically oriented, conception of health and its means of acquisition.[17] Sean Moberg has shown a similar dynamic in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.[18] In both cases, a conception of health is implied but not explicated, and the usefulness of illness fitted into this alternative conceptualization.[19] Alongside these, Andrew Crislip has studied the various means by which ascetic Christians evaluated and incorporated bodily illness into their own regime and how they might impart or enforce that evaluation to others.[20] Paul Dilley has recently read practices of education and contrition in Egyptian monasticism through the frame of

[11] Discussed in, e.g., Rapp (2005), 77–85 and Rapp (1999). [12] von Harnack (1892), 89–111.
[13] Merideth (1999), 153–80.
[14] Ferngren (2009), Crislip (2005), Horden (2008). Cf. Miller (1997).
[15] http://www.remedhe.com. See, e.g., Marx-Wolf and Upson-Saia (2015); Secord et al. (2017); Upson-Saia and Marx-Wolf (2018).
[16] Shaw (1998). [17] Llewellyn Ihssen (2014), 71–103.
[18] Moberg (2018), 591–9. [19] Clark (2005). [20] Crislip (2013).

cognitive neuroscience.[21] These approaches dovetail with the work mentioned above on educational and philosophical backgrounds, and together push us past the mere identification of medical terminology and analogical categories that defined much earlier scholarship.

Since one purpose of this book is to show how Christians participated in the wider culture of their day, I must join the growing chorus of scholars who reject "Christian exceptionalism" in late antiquity—the tacit belief that whatever Christians did or said was different by virtue of their *being* Christian. In this respect, therefore, my argument cuts against Irenée Hausherr's and Jean-Claude Larchet's magisterial studies.[22] Spiritual direction draws on medical relationships, philosophical ethics, pedagogical discipline, athletic training, judicial coercion, and so on. In none of these respects is it a novel enterprise. And yet, in each chapter, I will also show how authors' theological commitments lead to more or less radical transformation of the tacit assumptions of each of these discourses. At the heart of these is the goal of health—the tacitly normative and explicitly aesthetic model of ideal human existence. We shall see that monastic authors envision every dimension of good health differently from Galenic medicine, even as they share the same strategies and tactics of acquiring it. Emotional regimes are defined not by self-possession but by humility; the body is not well-fleshed but emaciated; the mind is fed not with Homer or Virgil but the Psalms. And at the center of it all is Christ, whose life and death hardly impressed Roman aristocrats, but became a Polycleitian *Canon* for monastics in search of the ideal human existence. So, while rejecting "Christian exceptionalism," I will also show specific, more or less radical, practical consequences of theological commitments.

IV. Approaching Spiritual Direction

The technical words that signpost confession in Byzantine and western Medieval canonical and liturgical literature are at best poor guides for the ascetic literature of late antiquity. There are two semantic groups in Greek most associated with confession: ἐξαγορεύω/ἐξαγόρευσις and (ἐξ)ὁμολογέομαι/(ἐξ)ὁμολόγησις. In Latin the terms are *confiteor/confessio.* All these have scriptural origins. In the Septuagint ἐξαγόρευσις is used exclusively for admissions of faults,[23] while ἐξομολογήσεις are proclamations of God's glorious, merciful, or saving actions.[24]

[21] Dilley (2017). [22] Hausherr (1990), 9; Larchet (2000).

[23] Lev. 5:1–6, 16:21, 26:40; Ezra 10:1; Pss. 31:5, 37:19; Job 31:33–4; Isa. 3:9; Sir. 4:26.

[24] Gen. 29:35; 2 Kgds 22:50 (= Pss. 17:50), 3 Kgds 8:33–5, 1 Para 16:4–34, 23:30, 29:13; 2 Para 5:13, 20:21, 23:12, 30:22, 31:2; Tobit 11:16, 14:1; 2 Macc. 7:37 ; Pss. 6:6, 7:18, 9:2, 17:50 (= 2 Kgds 22:50), 27:7, 29:5, 29:13, 32:2, 34:18, 41:6, 41:12, 42:4, 42:5, 43:9, 44:18, 48:19, 51:11, 53:8, 56:10, 66:4/6, 70:22, 73:19, 74:2, 75:10(11), 85:12, 87:11, 88:6, 91:2, 94:2, 96:12, 98:3, 99:4, 104:1, 105:1, 105:47, 106:1–31, 107:4, 108:30, 110:1, 117:1–29, 118:7, 118:62, 121:4, 135:1–26, 137:1–7, 138:14, 139:14, 141:8, 144:10, 146:7; Sir. 39:6, 39:15, 51:1, 51:10, 51:12; Job 40:14; Isa. 45:2; Jer. 40:11.

The two terms thus mirror each other. The Christian Scriptures use ἐξομολογέομαι (*confiteor*) to cover both statements of faith in Jesus and the admission of sins to the community.[25] Both word groups are used interchangeably in Byzantine monastic documents, though ἐξαγόρευσις seems to be preferred.[26] By contrast, ἐξομολόγησις is used in prayerbooks and sacramentaries for sacramental confession,[27] just as *confiteor*/*confessio* fixed the terms of confession in the west.[28] These terms for confession are matched by terms for "penances"—that is, the disciplinary sanctions placed on those repenting: ἐπιτιμία and *poenae*.

These terms came to be applied to confession within a sacramental framework. The semantic narrowing paralleled the gradual, and often fraught, restricting of places, forms, and sanctioned hearers, of confession in later Christian literature.[29] In late antique literature, however, descriptions of confession, advice, and spiritual direction do not abide these semantic or sacramental boundaries.[30] These stories point to a more capacious notion of "spiritual direction," of which the act of confession or self-manifestation is clearly constitutive. In this study, I do not rely on the language of confession or the equally fraught semantics of repentance and penitence. I am interested instead in the *logic* and *representations* of "spiritual direction" and, especially, of "confessional encounters" as these are portrayed, theorized, idealized, and prescribed, in early monastic literature.

Spiritual Direction

The term "spiritual direction" strikes a rather modern tone, having come into fashion in the latter twentieth century. Its root, ψυχαγωγία, however, is older than

[25] Matt. 3:6, 7:32, 10:32; Jas. 5:16, 1 John 1:8–9; etc.

[26] See, for example, the *Typicon* of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, Constantinople (1054), and the chapter discussing "ψυχόσωστις ἐξαγορευσις" (§7, ll. 242–317). This rule was cribbed by many others: John the Monk, *Typicon* for the Monastery of the Forerunner, the Terrible (1113), §14; Athanasios Philanthropenos, *Typicon* for the Monastery of the Holy Great Martyr Mamas (1158), 29–30; etc. The *Typicon* of the Monastery of Machairas, on Cyprus (1210), by Neilos, bishop of Tarasios, cribs Evergetis but sometimes substitutes ἐξομολόγησις for ἐξαγόρευσις: §§50–4. Monastic *typica* are scattered in all sorts of more or less critical editions. For simplicity, then, references here and throughout are to Thomas and Hero (2000), which offers English translations of these varied texts in a single volume.

[27] See, for example, §15, prayers 8–14 for confession: Goar (1730), 537–41; and now *ΜΙΚΡΟΝ ΕΥΧΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ Η ΑΓΙΑΣΜΑΤΑΡΙΟΝ* (1999), 162–71. So too throughout the *Protocanonarion* of John the Monk and Deacon (ninth century) and the *Deuterocanonarion* of Basil the Monk (twelfth century), both in Arranz (1993), 30–128 and 152–86, respectively.

[28] E.g., Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council: "Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter, saltem semel in anno proprio sacerdoti, et iniunctam sibi poenitentiam studeat pro viribus adimplere," in Giuseppe et al. (1973), 245. See also Goering (2008), 394–8 and the references there.

[29] As regards western Europe the literature is vast, but for helpful overviews see Meens (2014); Firey (2008); Bériou (1983); Goering (2008), 381–9 and the references there. For Byzantium there is comparatively little, but see Krausmüller (2016).

[30] On the informality but regularity of confessional practices, see Bitton-Ashkelony (1999).

Plato, who suggested that rhetoric would be a "soul-direction through words [ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων]" (*Phdr.* 261a). Without pretension to technical precision, I invoke the term as shorthand for the asymmetrical relationships that developed within monastic communities between those who were seen as authorities and those who submitted to them. The term could well describe the techniques of lay and episcopal leaders as well, as George Demacopoulos has argued.[31] Or it could be applied to the relationship of a single elder and disciple, as Irenée Hausherr did.[32] I limit my own study to monastic sources while accepting that these asymmetrical relationships developed within an ecology that included not only director and disciple but also monastic community, village, city, the wider church, and broader imagined communities.[33] I am most interested in what happens—or is thought to happen—in the encounter between director and disciple, but bounded by local and wider monastic and ecclesial communities, too. This relationship may be worked out in person or through letter, directly or through intermediaries, and is frequently impinged upon by clerical status, gender, or other social considerations. Like any such asymmetrical relationship, in which one person exerts power over another, or one submits to another, spiritual direction operates along a differential power gradient. Its manifestations in monastic literature frequently instantiate and reinforce existing social, gendered, even racialized, hierarchies.

At this point, the echoes of Michel Foucault's work on early Christianity are likely deafening. This study, like most in our field, is much indebted to Foucault on several fronts. However, because later chapters engage specific dimensions of his thought—especially those on Cassian—I will let those conversations wait for now.

Confessional Encounters

Spiritual direction hinges on encounters of self-exposure and submission taking place within an asymmetrical relationship with a director. Columba Stewart calls it a practice of "radical honesty about the self," and reminds us that as such "the practice is best described as manifestation of thought and not just confession of sins."[34] Confession means, therefore, *self-manifestation*. As such it is not bound by ceremonial or formulary procedures, but by the need to clarify for oneself and to another one's mental and emotional experiences, desires, daydreams, as well as habits and momentary actions. That process is at once hermeneutical and constructive, and, whatever else confession involves, at its heart is the task of translating oneself—or being translated by another—and so making "a clear and elegant edition of [one]self, as immaculate as possible, and readable for all."[35]

[31] Demacopoulos (2007), 1; cf. Chryssavgis (2000), 49–58.
[32] Hausherr (1990), 1–2.
[33] Bitton-Ashkelony (1999), 185–90; Ware (1989).
[34] Stewart (1990), 27.
[35] Kierkegaard (1985), 103.

The subject matter of spiritual direction is much broader than the running tally of good and bad deeds. Hermann Dorries put it well:

> If a man has fled from the world into the desert, it is not only his privilege, but his duty to knock at the door of holy men, to seek counsel…the young monk submits his habits to criticism and his plans and intentions to evaluation. For what is needed is the gift of being able to distinguish, to determine whether thoughts are pure or tempting.[36]

Self-exposure covers not only sins and failures but also other actions—in fact, we might ask whether one purpose of confession is to *discover* the moral valuation of actions. Then there are thoughts—this is a broad category of mental experience, incorporating positive as well as negative emotional and bodily aspects, which will receive much attention in this study. Basil suggests that physical illness is to be considered in confession. Evagrius assumes that dreams will be discussed, as does Cassian. John expects that one submits all thoughts for testing and response. These encounters may elicit a rebuke (ἐπιτίμησις), a penalty (ἐπιτίμιον, ἐπιτιμία, *poena*), advice (λόγος, ῥῆμα, *verbum*), or even consolation (παράκλησις, *consolatio)*.[37] Late antique monastic literature allows a wider range of response than can be covered by the word "penance" or "penitence," which terms I will avoid as much as possible.[38] This is especially important since "confession" in monastic literature does not necessarily mean "of sins," while "penitence" shades into "repentance," which as a theological category is more capacious than would be allowed by disciplinary activity. Rather, "confession" may be an admission of perplexity or even of some insight; and the response may range from harsh punishment to approbation, to a tap on the chest and a reminder to "watch yourself." In short, the self-disclosure of confession invites interpretation, and so it not only incorporates the good and the bad, and disciplines appropriate to each, but actually allows the determination of which is which.[39]

Toward a Medical Hermeneutic

Returning, then, to the question at hand, what were practices of spiritual direction thought to mean and to accomplish? Exploring the medical model will sharpen the hermeneutical elements of confession and sharpen our understanding

[36] Dorries (1962), 287–8.

[37] Dorries (1962), 297 falsely concludes that "The apophthegms do not permit an erring brother to be disciplined." While incorrect, he does capture the tenor of the *Apophthegmata*, wherein disciplines *imposed* give way to disciplines *chosen*.

[38] A point well made in Llewellyn Ihssen (2014), 87 n.104.

[39] On the breadth of confessional topics, see Guy (1983).

of how these encounters and the relationships within which they take place fashion monastic subjectivities.

In late antiquity, monastic practices of confession meant habits of self-exposure to another within a relationship of trust and obedience, predicated on the perception of hierarchies of expertise. The work of confession is hermeneutical, and the logic of spiritual direction is, therefore, to be found in the hermeneutics of confession and the constructive practices of repentance it generates. The hermeneutics that are developed to "read" ascetics' thoughts, emotional responses, and behavioral patterns follow Galenic approaches to diagnosis and prognosis. They presume the same interconnectedness and inter-affectivity of body, soul, and ecosystem that informs Galenic medicine. Practices of repentance are to be understood the same way. These refer to modifications and interventions: the dietetic, meditative, and cognitive practices by which ascetics are changed and refashioned. Not only is repentance modeled on medical therapy but also, in its dietetic and regimental forms, shares materially in medical arts. Finally, in command of diagnosis and therapy we see the figure of the spiritual director. They claim a physician's expertise, and their skill in discernment or direction is, really, skill in diagnosis and therapy. Thus, this study argues that, time and again, the expertise of spiritual direction and its application through confessional encounters are conceptualized and represented according to the logic and norms of Galenic medical art.

These schemata are used to interpret patterns of thinking, perceiving, and feeling; habits of dreaming; ways of relating to others. They construct monastics as objects of knowledge. However, these schemata are also used to prescribe new regimes and habits through which the somatic, affective, and cognitive dimensions of monastic life are developed. They also fashion monastic subjectivity. Categories of health and disease, diagnosis and therapy, contribute to the knowing and creation of monastic selves within layered and entangled relations with God and others.

V. Dramatis Personae

Having introduced the rationale, plan, and background of the book, it's time to meet its subjects.

Galen of Pergamon (129–post 210 CE)

Galen's life is fascinating,[40] and, to hear him tell it, epoch-making. Born in Pergamon in 129 to a wealthy family, he was given a first-rate education in the

[40] I take this from Hankinson (2008), 1–33. See also Nutton (1972) and (1973). See also Mattern (2013) and Nutton (2020).

liberal arts and was headed for a philosopher's career, until his father was persuaded in a dream to dedicate him to medicine. Galen studied that and nearly everything else, it seems. He studied in Smyrna, Corinth, and Alexandria. Returning to Pergamon in 157, he was given charge of the high priest's gladiators. In 161 he moved to Rome, where his star seems to have risen meteorically. He fled the city within a couple of years and returned to Pergamon, only to be summoned to Aquileia by the emperor Marcus Aurelius. He arrived there just ahead of the plague that broke out in the camp in 168–9. He joined the imperial retinue, but managed not to follow on the German campaigns, pleading an Asclepian dream-command as his excuse. He continued to work in Rome throughout the reigns of Marcus and Commodus. He suffered the loss of many of his own works in the fire that burned the Temple of Peace in 192. This event would inspire him to write his short treatise *On Avoiding Distress*, which will be of interest for this study. After that, we know little, but it seems likely that Galen survived to sometime between 210 and 217.

Basil of Caesarea (330–79 CE)

Basil of Caesarea lived barely fifty years, many of them in chronic illness and political turmoil.[41] Attempts at ascetic retreat from political and ecclesiastical life gave way, eventually, to ordination to the episcopate. He spent his years as bishop battling among Nicenes and their discontents, engineering episcopal elections, penning doctrinal treatises, even founding and overseeing a grand charitable complex in Caesarea called the Basileias. Basil took seriously the well-being of his flock in soul and body, providing in the Basileias medical and educational assistance as well as spiritual guidance in his sermons and letters. Thanks to his excellent education and long experience with illness, Basil developed an enduring interest in medicine, and he came to read the spread of heresy and disorder in his own intestinal miseries.[42] He would oversee multiple communities in his own Cappadocia and, perhaps, further afield. The literary fruit of those efforts, expended over twenty years, is commonly and collectively known as the *Asceticon*. This text is one of the most influential in Christian history and bears the marks of Basil's long editorial work on it and its own complex textual history in Greek, Latin, and Syriac versions.[43]

Across the various Greek recensions the *Longer Response* concerning medicine is always the last. It seems that, whatever their other differences, each editor felt

[41] Fedwick (1979a), 3–20 and Gribomont (1979), 40–3. See especially Rousseau (1998) and Silvas (2005).

[42] See, e.g., *Ep.* 232; For a complete list see Gain (1985), 397–8. Crislip (2013), 88–9, discusses Basil's reading of ecclesiastical ills in his body. See also Rousseau (1998), 156.

[43] Laid out in Gribomont (1953), updated Fedwick (1997), 3:1–175, and now Silvas (2005), 10–13.

that the fuller theoretical account of ascetic life and principles should conclude with a discussion of the place of medicine in Christian lives. Basil himself gave much thought to the question, as is clear from comparison of *Reg. fus.* 55 with *Reg. brev.* [314].[44] In the case of medicine Basil's attitude became a good deal more positive and welcoming, though, as we shall see, carefully guarded.

Basil did not write a "rule" for a monastery. His ascetic communities seem to be looser, more informal, perhaps even part of urban church communities. Only in the *Longer Responses* is something like a monastic community taking shape, with regular elections of leaders, and a bureaucracy capable of overseeing resources. Even then, Basil never speaks of "monks" or "monasteries" and his advice is always just that—advice, an answer to a question, not a piece of legislation such as we find in his canonical letters. Nevertheless, from Rufinus onward, readers in both Greek and Latin came to view Basil's work as a monastic rule. Founders like Benedict of Nursia and reformers like Theodore the Stoudite all applied Basil's advice as legislation. In this study I treat Basil's *Asceticon* as he intended it—questions and answers, rather than a rule. However, given its reception as a "rule," in both western and Byzantine monasticism, the conclusions reached here will help us understand the thought-world of later monastics as well, and will lay groundwork for historical study of their practices and discourses.

Evagrius Ponticus (*c.*345–99 CE)

As Basil was dying, his friend, Gregory, was going to Constantinople, where he would oversee the Council of 381, and spend some time as bishop of Constantinople, before abdicating and returning to his home of Nazianzus. With Gregory went a brilliant young man named Evagrius, whom Basil had already ordained a reader in 371. During their time in the city, Gregory made him a deacon, only to see him flee for the desert.[45] Evagrius, following an affair (if only in his own mind) with a noblewoman of the city, was visited by an angel in a dream and vowed to leave. He went to Jerusalem, where he joined Rufinus and Melania's community on the Mount of Olives. He fell ill and, after being coaxed to confession by Melania, was induced by her to take up the monastic life in Egypt on the mountain of Nitria, where he would remain until his death in (probably) 399. Evagrius brought immense learning and intellectual hunger to monastic practice, as well as a love of Origen's theology and approach to scriptural interpretation. Evagrius was by no means the only "Origenist" and "intellectual" in the Egyptian desert: whatever Athanasius would have people believe, Antony the Great was one such, as was his

[44] Gribomont (1953), 180–9. So Silvas (2005), 19.

[45] This account follows that of Casiday (2014), 9–27, though not the rest of Casiday's argument; as well as Sinkewicz (2006), xvii–xxi. The literature on Evagrius is vast and growing.

disciple Ammonas, and the great Alexandrian exegete Didymus the Blind. Indeed, the tenor of eremitic Egyptian monasticism, in contrast perhaps to the atmosphere in the Pachomian federation or Shenoute's White Monastery, was decidedly intellectualist, and Evagrius fitted in well.[46]

Evagrius' works present both linguistic and conceptual problems for modern readers. Because of his implication in the Origenist Controversy (400–1 CE), and again in the Second Origenist Controversy (*c.*520–53),[47] Evagrius came to be regarded as a heretic and many of his works were lost or attributed to the safe name of Nilus of Ancyra.[48] For present purposes, we can bracket out questions of Evagrius' doctrinal position and the validity of his condemnation, but his reception does color the texts under consideration. Evagrius wrote copiously, and his dense, epigrammatic treatises created new genres. He wrote with an educator's eye and an elitist's sensibility, so that there is a gulf between his "exoteric" works and his "esoteric" ones; yet he intended one to guide the reader to the other. Thus, Evagrius wrote a great trilogy—the *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, and *Kephalaia Gnostika—i*n which he crafts an educational system for monks, to guide them by detailed self-examination through practical virtue, natural contemplation, and finally, to contemplation of God, that is, theology. So too, *On Thoughts* is the second in a different trilogy culminating in *On Prayer*. In these trilogies, *On Thoughts* and the *Gnostikos* occupy the frontiers between "practical" and "contemplative." *To Eulogius* is a decidedly basic and exoteric text. Although Evagrian texts have frequently been dislocated from this pedagogical plan, I will attend to it in studying Evagrius on dreams.

Cassian (*c.*362–435 CE)

Cassian, a devotee of Evagrius whose life was far more eventful than he probably would have wished, had rotten luck in church politics.[49] He may have been born in Gaul, but it seems more likely that he hailed from Dacia, near the Black Sea coast in what is now Dobruja. He became a monk in Bethlehem around 380. At some point around 385 he took a life-changing trip with his friend and fellow monk Germanus to visit the eremitic centers of lower Egypt, especially Scetis. They remained there for fifteen years, and Cassian would later immortalize that time and his monastic heroes in his ascetic writings. Before writing those, however, he was caught up in the Origenist Controversy—he had, after all, been

[46] Evagrius' Egypt was intellectually and ecclesiastically diverse: Rubenson (1990), Goehring (1997), Sheridan (2002), Larsen and Rubenson (2018).

[47] For the First Origenist Controversy, see Clark (1992), for the Second see Hombergen (2001).

[48] In fact, this process had begun even earlier, and for reasons that remain unclear: Stewart (2016), 212–13.

[49] This biography follows Stewart (1998), 3–26. Cf., however, Rousseau (2010), 169–76.

deeply influenced by Evagrius, whether directly or through his writings. Cassian departed Egypt in or around 400, following Theophilos' attack on Origenist monks (Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* 1.6–7), and travelled to Constantinople, where he fell in with its fiery bishop, John Chrysostom. Though Cassian would later advise monks to avoid bishops and women, he was himself ordained deacon by Chrysostom. When Chrysostom became embroiled in conflict with Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria—Cassian's villain of the Origenist Controversy—and Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, Cassian took Chrysostom's part in the infamous Synod of the Oak in 403, and in 404 he took, with Germanus, the deposed Chrysostom's appeal to Pope Innocent I. They failed, and Chrysostom died in exile in 407. We do not know exactly what Cassian did next, but fifteen years later he appears in Marseilles, in Gaul. There he penned his two ascetic masterworks over the course of several years: first, the *Institutes* (after 419) and then the *Conferences* in three stages (420s). Cassian wrote both of these texts primarily for Gallic Christian monastics both on the mainland (especially at Lérins) and in the Stoechadian Islands (Îles d'Hyères), many of whom, including Eucherius, dedicatee of the second set of Conferences, came from aristocratic lives shattered by the political upheavals of the fifth century in Gaul.[50] The later *Conferences* (especially Thirteen) show Cassian debating with Pelagians and, implicitly, Augustine of Hippo, over the matters of grace and free will. These controversies lasted the rest of Cassian's life, though his reputation remained good and he was commissioned by then archdeacon Leo (later Pope Leo I) to write a Christological treatise against Nestorius, his *De Incarnatione* (430). He died sometime after 432. A century later, his views were condemned at the Council of Orange (529) as "Semi-Pelagian" and so, despite making Benedict's recommended reading list in the *Rule*, Cassian's legacy waned in the west. In the Byzantine world, however, he was revered as "Kassianos the Roman" and epitomes of his writings were quickly translated, widely circulated, and avidly read by ascetic writers,[51] among whom John Climacus and the polymath Photius single him out for praise.[52] Eventually

[50] On the composition of Cassian's audience see Goodrich (2007), 21–31. One can infer something of John's audience from his classical references and his sinuous Latin style, which he peppers with quite a few Greek terms (and even a few Coptic ones). On this, see Stewart (1998), 5–6, 35, and notes *ad infra*.

[51] There were five epitomes made in all, probably quite soon after Cassian's own life, from *Inst.* 1–4 ([Athanasius], *ep. Cast.* 1), *Inst.* 5–12 (*ep. Cast*. 2, titled "On the Eight Thoughts"), *Coll.* 1–2 (*ep. Leont.*, titled "On Discernment"), *Coll.* 7, and *Coll.* 8. These were published by *Δυοβουνιοτης* (1913), 51–65, 161–76, 225–43, on the basis of manuscript Meteora, *Metamorphosis* 573. Panayiotis Tzamalikos has more recently re-edited the dossier from the same manuscript: Tzamalikos (2012a). On the formation and reception of Cassian's Greek dossier, see Zecher (2018a), 687–90.

Tzamalikos's (2012b) claim that Cassian never existed, his works having been originally composed in Greek by a monk of Mar Saba, is sheer fiction. Dahlman (2020) attempts to nuance this, but relies on the assumption that amplification is more likely than excerption—which, to judge from florilegia, cannot be taken for granted.

[52] John Climacus, *Scal.* 4.105 (PG 88:717B); Photius, *Cod.* 197 (Bekker, 160–1).

two epitomes would be included in the *Philocalia*, enshrined forever alongside the great and good of Byzantine spiritual direction.[53]

Cassian inevitably chose the wrong side of ecclesial conflicts, except, perhaps, the Nestorian one. But his ascetic works breathe a calmer air, however much parts of them are informed or motivated by doctrinal debate. He wrote the *Institutes* to bring a vision of Egyptian monasticism to Gaul, though it is in many respects his construction of monastic rhythms and ethical development, rather than a catalogue of Egyptian practices. In the *Conferences*, Cassian delves deeper in the same soil, to discover the deepest wells of desire, the limits of human accomplishment, the power of God's grace, and the purpose of pure and unbroken prayer. Cassian announces at the outset of the *Conferences* that he is moving, as he puts it, from the "outer" to the "inner" person (cf. 2 Cor. 4.16).[54] In some Conferences, he maps this move onto a distinction between the life of practical virtue and that of contemplative virtue (*Coll.* 14) or coenobitic to anchoritic contexts (*Coll.* 18–19). However, the two works reached the same audience in southern Gaul and, while Cassian may extol the eremitic over the coenobitic, by the end of the *Conferences* he gives good reason for many, at least, to prefer the latter.[55] There is a deeper unity as well between what Cassian, following Evagrius, sets out as stages: practical and contemplative lives (*πρακτική*/*θεωρητική*, *actualis*/*contemplativa*). Columba Stewart writes that "monastic life is always both 'practical' and 'contemplative'; contemplation includes and situates action without eliminating its necessity."[56] Really, the differences between *Institutes* and *Conferences* seems to be the perspective Cassian takes on monastic life. The *Conferences* provide rich theoretical and theological reflection, intended to ground the practices laid out in the *Institutes*.

Cassian's intellectual connection to Evagrius is rich and well-documented. As regards the topics covered in the present study, a few debts—and, as we shall see, departures—stand out. Cassian most famously translates Evagrius' "eight wicked thoughts" into the "eight principal *vitia*" (Chapter 4), and the aim of *ἀπάθεια* into one of *puritas cordis* (Chapter 8).[57] Cassian also learns at least some dream-theory from Evagrius (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, as much as Cassian learned from Evagrius, he remained a critical, creative, and independent thinker. As Columba Stewart notes, "Cassian was certainly much more than…[the] popularizer of Evagrian spiritual theology. His development and departure from Evagrian

[53] *Φιλοκαλία* (1782), 61–76 ("On Discernment"), 77–87 ("On the Eight Thoughts"); (1891/1982), 1:61–80, 81–93.

[54] *Coll. Praef.* 1.5 (CSEL 13:4). [55] Compare *Praef.* 1.5 with *Coll.* 19.

[56] Stewart (1998), 54.

[57] The classic study is Marsili (1936). See also Chadwick (1950), 25–30, 82–107; Weber (1961), 62–85. Rousseau (2010) takes the connection for granted. More recently, Stewart (1998) and (2003a) has nuanced Cassian's relationship with Evagrian ideas.

thought is often as noticeable as his dependence on it."[58] Cassian has read a good deal more widely than Evagrius, showing interest in both philosophical and medical literature. Cassian's audience is also broader, at least in its imagined form. Instead of the intimate study circle around a charismatic lay leader, Cassian writes at the behest of bishops and, eventually, a pope, for coenobitic monks, dogmatic theologians, and perhaps even laypeople, in Gaul and Italy.[59] Cassian displays in equal measure his debts to Evagrius, his critical departure from the master, and his interest in more bureaucratized forms of monastic life in his relentless discussions of both wet dreams and the varieties of passion.

John Climacus (579–649 CE or 525–603 CE)

John of Sinai or "He of the Ladder" (*ὁ τῆς Κλίμακος*) is chronologically the latest author in this study, but it is difficult to say by how much. André Binggeli's edition of the *Narrationes* of Anastasius of Sinai (seventh century) would seem to have sealed François Nau's argument that John lived from *c.*579 to 649.[60] Recently, however, German scholars have argued that the *Narrationes* are a layered composition that took shape over a much longer period of time than Nau or Binggeli allow, and have further argued, on that basis, as well as a letter from Pope Gregory I to "John of Sinai," for the traditional dating of *c.*525–603.[61] Karl-Heinz Uthemann makes a good case—provided that the letter from Gregory is to *this* John, which is hardly certain. Absent any further evidence, this disagreement is likely to remain exactly that, and, in any event, does not significantly impact my reading of John.

John was a monk and eventually abbot of the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush ("Batos"), generally known now as St. Catherine's, in the Sinai. Tradition has him join the monastery at sixteen, spend three years apprenticed to the monk Martyrios, and then be tonsured at nineteen in the chapel atop Gebel Musa. These accounts also say that he lived four decades as a hermit in a cave near Tholas, not far from St. Catherine's. Finally, he allowed himself to be made abbot in his old age.[62] There is, however, little reason to trust the chronology or details.[63]

[58] Stewart (1998), 36; so too Casiday (2007), 5–6.

[59] Goodrich (2007), 21–31; see also Stewart (1998), 5–6, 35, and notes *ad infra*.

[60] See Caner (2010) for an excellent summary, on the basis of Bingelli (2001).

[61] Müller (2006); and, most recently, Uthemann (2015), 400–22.

[62] Pierre, Conticello, and Chryssavgis (2015), 197–211 is capacious but requires caution. See also Flusin (2006).

[63] All come from Daniel of Raithu, *V. Jo. Clim.*, on which see Müller (2002). The real value of the *Life*, I think, is as a witness to the readership of the *Ladder* since Daniel structures John's monastic life as an ascent up the *Ladder* he wrote.

John wrote two treatises: the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (sometimes called *Spiritual Tablets* or even *Ascetic Discourse*) and a companion piece, *To the Shepherd*. John certainly wrote the *Shepherd* in his later years, when he was abbot of St. Catherine's, and both were written for his fellow abbot, John of Raithu. It is likely that, if he composed the *Ladder* himself, it dates to the same period. From there, though, the *Ladder* (often, though not always, accompanied by *To the Shepherd*) became one of the most influential and wildly popular works of the Byzantine world and remains required Lenten reading in every Eastern Orthodox monastery.[64] Its influence is especially visible in the chapters of Byzantine monastic *typica* on confession. For example, in the *Typicon* of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, in Constantinople (*c.*1054):

> If we do thus, brothers, not only will we be redeemed from our own failures, but we will have a more secure disposition. For Climacus says, "Wounds revealed do not grow worse"[65] and again, "A soul contemplating confession is restrained from sinning, as by a bridle."[66] So revelation of our own failures is exceedingly beneficial. So let us all go eagerly to confession.[67]

John's influence can be read in passages like this throughout Byzantine monastic literature.[68]

I have generally followed scholars who discern in the *Ladder* a sophisticated mind at work in an elegant rhetorical structure—both within chapters (Johnsén) and across the whole treatise (Couilleau, Ware). Recently, though, Maxim Venetskov has raised serious questions about its composition and structure.[69] He has shown that the chapter divisions and the epigrams allegorizing chapter numbers are all variable across manuscript families, which suggests an underlying instability in the text, fixed in different ways by different copyists. Venetskov argues that the *Shepherd* was John's original response to John of Raithu's request. The *Ladder*, by contrast, began as a collection of occasional instructions, and was edited by monks at Raithu, not St. Catherine's.[70] Venetskov's hypothesis goes

[64] On the diffusion, influence, and readership of the *Ladder*, see Zecher (2015), 5–9.

[65] *Scal.* 4.10 (PG 88:681B); quoted also in Nikitas Stethatos, *Vita Symeonis novi theologici*, 5.65 (Greenfield [2013], 148); Antony III the Studite, *Catecheses* 1, 77 (Delouis and Leroy [2004], 37); Ignatius and Nicephorus [Kallistos II] Xanthopoulos, *Method and Precise Rule* 15 (*Φιλιοκαλία* [1782], 1027 [1891/1982], 4:208); [Antony the Monk], *Melissa*, 1.16 (PG 136:824B).

[66] *Scal.* 4.53 (PG 88:705C, 42–4); quoted also in Antony III the Studite, *Catecheses* 1, 80 (Delouis and Leroy [2004], 37); Mark the Monk, *Florilegium* 19.1 (CCSG 72:39), and *Typicon* 10, 21–4 (CCSG 72:165); Theognostos, *Thesaurus* 18.11 (CCSG 5:193).

[67] §7, ll. 306–11; verbatim in *Typicon* of the Monastery of the Theotokos, the Good Hope, 107; *Typicon* of the Monastery of the Forerunner, the Terrible, 14; *Typicon* of the Monastery of the Theotokos, Savior of the World, ll. 486–8; *Typicon* of the Monastery of Machairas, §52; *Typicon* of the Monastery of Lips, 6.12.

[68] Zecher (2022).

[69] Venetskov (2018) and (2019).

[70] Venetskov (2018), 380–3, building on suggestions in Pierre-Beylot (2011), 93–102.