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Discernment in St John Cassian and the Ascetic Tradition of the Fifth Century in Gaul

ABSTRACT

In my paper I will explore different aspects of St. John Cassian's teaching on discretion, which he regards as the source and root of all virtues. The "true discretion" (*vera discretio*), i.e. an ability or skill of distinguishing between different sources and causes of various human thoughts (*universas cogitationes*), and of discerning behind them different spiritual powers and of struggling against them, could be acquired by a monk on the way of genuine humility (*vera humilitas*) and of full confidence in judgments of experienced spiritual masters – the elders (*examen seniorum*). According to Cassian, discretion requires intense efforts of both reason and will of a monk, who needs to acquire perpetual vigilance and constantly observe what is going on inside his own heart; and at the same time it is the greatest gift of Divine grace (*divinae gratiae maximum praemium*), for which we need to seek ceaselessly. Thus discernment is a lamp of the body and soul (*lucerna corporis*), because it illuminates for us the way to the virtues and teaches us how to go along "the way of the king" (*via regia*), avoiding the extremes on both sides. I will also consider an impact of Cassian's teaching on discretion to the Gallic ascetic writers of the 5th century, such as Eucherius of Lyons, Julianus Pomerius, Faustus of Riez, Caesarius of Arles, who also viewed the discretion as a "light of the soul" (*lumen discretionis*), which illuminates our way to perfection.

ALL SPEAKERS