4. HUMILITY FREES FROM IMPURITY WITH A VIEW TO SANCTIFICATION

1. Our second struggle, according to the tradition of the fathers, is against the spirit of fornication. This savage war is longer than the others and of greater duration, and it is completely won by only a few. [...] Bodily fasting alone is not sufficient to procure and possess the purity of perfect chastity unless it is preceded by a contrite spirit and by persevering prayer against this most unclean spirit; then there must be constant meditation on Scripture, and to this should be added spiritual knowledge, as well as toilsome manual labour, which restrains and recalls the feckless wanderings of the heart; and before all else there must have been laid a foundation of true humility, without which there can never be a victory over any vice.

2. For the corrective to this vice comes principally from the perfection of the heart; it is there, according to the Lord's words, that the poison of this malady is produced. "From the heart," he says, "come forth evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness" and so forth. This, then, is the first thing to be rectified, whence the spring of life and of death is known to begin flowing, as Solomon says: "Guard your heart with all care, for there are the wellsprings of life." For the flesh is attendant upon the heart's will and command. [...]  

5. Hence, if it is in our heart to undertake the spiritual struggle lawfully along with the Apostle, we should strive with all our mind's energy to overcome this most unclean spirit, trusting not in our own strength (for human effort is unable to accomplish this) but in the Lord's help. For the soul cannot escape being attacked by this vice until it realizes that waging this war is beyond its own powers and that it cannot obtain the victory by its own toil and effort, without the assistance and protection of the Lord.

6. In truth, although grace and victory are the Lord's in all those who progress in virtue and in the conquest of every vice, it is abundantly clear, from both the words of the fathers
and the experience of purification itself, that there is a special
favour and gift of God accorded to those who have deserved to
gain it. For this is, to a certain degree, a departure from the flesh
for one who is dwelling in the body, and it is beyond nature for
one who is encompassed by fragile flesh not to feel the stings of
the flesh. And therefore it is impossible for a person, so to say,
to fly by his own wings to such a lofty and heavenly prize if the
Lord's grace has not brought him, thanks to the gift of chastity,
out of the earthly mire. For by no virtue do fleshly human beings
so nearly approximate and imitate the way of life of the angelic
spirits as by the deserts and grace of chastity, whereby those who
are still living on earth have, according to the Apostle, "their citizenship
in the heavens" and possess here in their frail flesh
what it is promised that the holy ones will have in the world to
come once they have laid aside their fleshly corruption. […]

14. And, passing over everything that has been put into
Holy Scripture in praise of this virtue (for it is not my purpose to
elaborate the praise of chastity but, following the traditions of the
fathers, to explain its character, how it is to be acquired and maintained,
and what its end is), I shall mention only one phrase of the
blessed Apostle, from which it will be clear how, when he was
writing to the Thessalonians, he preferred it to every other virtue,
commending it in words of great nobility.

15. "This is," he says, "the will of God, your sanctifica-
tion." And lest perchance we be in doubt about or find obscure
what he means by sanctification, whether it be righteousness or
love or humility or patience (for sanctification is believed to be
acquired in all these virtues), he says and clearly indicates what he
really means by sanctification: "This is the will of God, your sanctification
—that you abstain," he says, "from fornication, that each
of you know how to possess his vessel in honour and sanctification,
not in the passion of lust, as do the pagans who are ignorant of
God." See what praises he bestows on it, referring to it as the
honour of the vessel—that is, our body—and as sanctification.
Hence, on the other hand, the person who is in the passion of lust
stands in shamefulness and impurity and is a stranger to sanctification. In a third place, shortly thereafter, he refers to it again as holiness and says: "God has not called us to shamefulness but to holiness. And so the one who spurns this spurns not man but God, who has also given us his Holy Spirit." He joins an inviolable authority to this precept of his when he says: "The one who spurns this" (that is, what I said about holiness) "spurns not man" (meaning me who command this) "but God, who speaks in me," who has also designated our heart as a dwelling for his Holy Spirit.

You see with what simple and pure words and with what great commendations and praises he extols it. First he attributes sanctification to this virtue in particular; then he declares that, by it, the vessel of our body must be freed from uncleanness, and that, third, once shamefulness and reproachful behaviour have been cast aside, it will abide in honour and sanctification; finally he points out that in this way the Holy Spirit will dwell in our heart, which is the highest and perfect reward and the recompense of blessedness. […]

17. And, to the degree that the reward of chastity is lofty and heavenly, it is assailed by ambushes of adversaries that are all the more serious. Therefore it is to our advantage to cling not only to bodily abstinence but also, with frequent groans and prayers, to a contrite heart. It is thus that the furnace of our flesh, which the Babylonian king does not cease to heat up with the impulses of carnal suggestions, will be extinguished when the dew of the Holy Spirit descends into our hearts.

18. For, as the elders say that this cannot be grasped unless a foundation of humility has first been laid in our heart, so also do they declare that we cannot attain to the source of true knowledge as long as the root of the vice in question occupies the depths of our soul. Indeed, it is possible to find integrity without the grace of knowledge, but it is impossible to possess spiritual knowledge without integral chastity, because there are different gifts and because there is not one grace of the Holy Spirit that is given to everyone, but rather that which each person is worthy
and capable of, thanks to his own effort and toil. Although the virtue of integrity is believed to have been perfect in all the holy apostles, nonetheless the gift of knowledge was superabundant in Paul, because he made himself capable of it by his intelligent effort and toil.

JOHN CASSIAN, *Institutes*, Book 6, 1-18

33. *We* knew also Abbot Theodore, a man gifted with the utmost holiness and with perfect knowledge not only in practical life, but also in understanding the Scriptures, which he had not acquired so much by study and reading, or worldly education, as by purity of heart alone. […]

34. This man therefore, when some of the brethren were wondering at the splendid light of his knowledge and were asking of him some meanings of Scripture, said that a monk who wanted to acquire a knowledge of the Scriptures ought not to spend his labour on the works of commentators, but rather to keep all the efforts of his mind and intentions of his heart set on purifying himself from carnal vices: for when these are driven out, at once the eyes of the heart, as if the veil of the passions were removed, will begin as it were naturally to gaze on the mysteries of Scripture: since they were not declared to us by the grace of the Holy Spirit in order that they should remain unknown and obscure; but they are rendered obscure by our fault, as the veil of our sins covers the eyes of the heart, and when these are restored to their natural state of health, the mere reading of Holy Scripture is by itself amply sufficient for beholding the true knowledge.

JOHN CASSIAN, *Institutes*, Book 5, 33.34