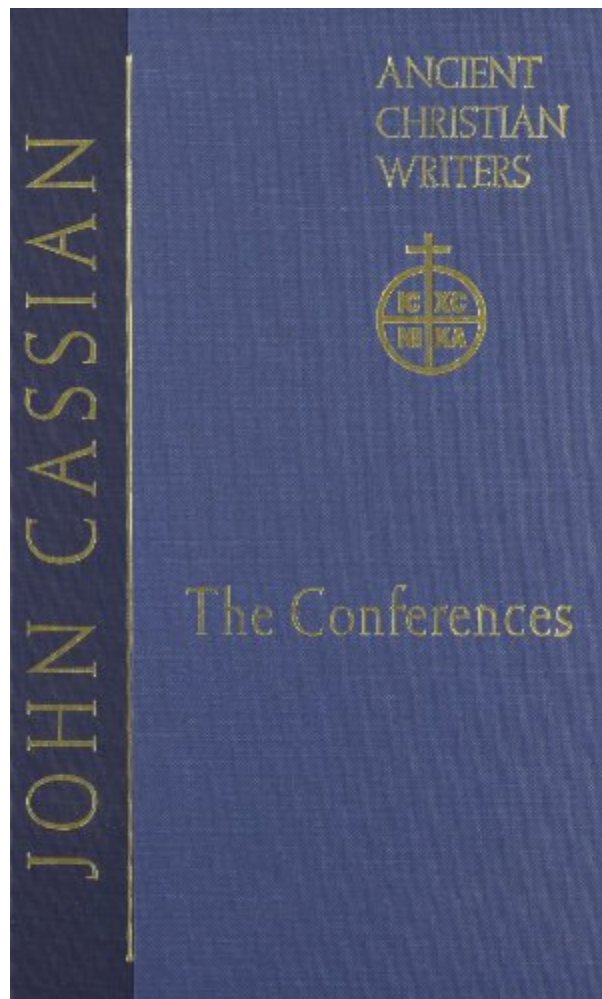
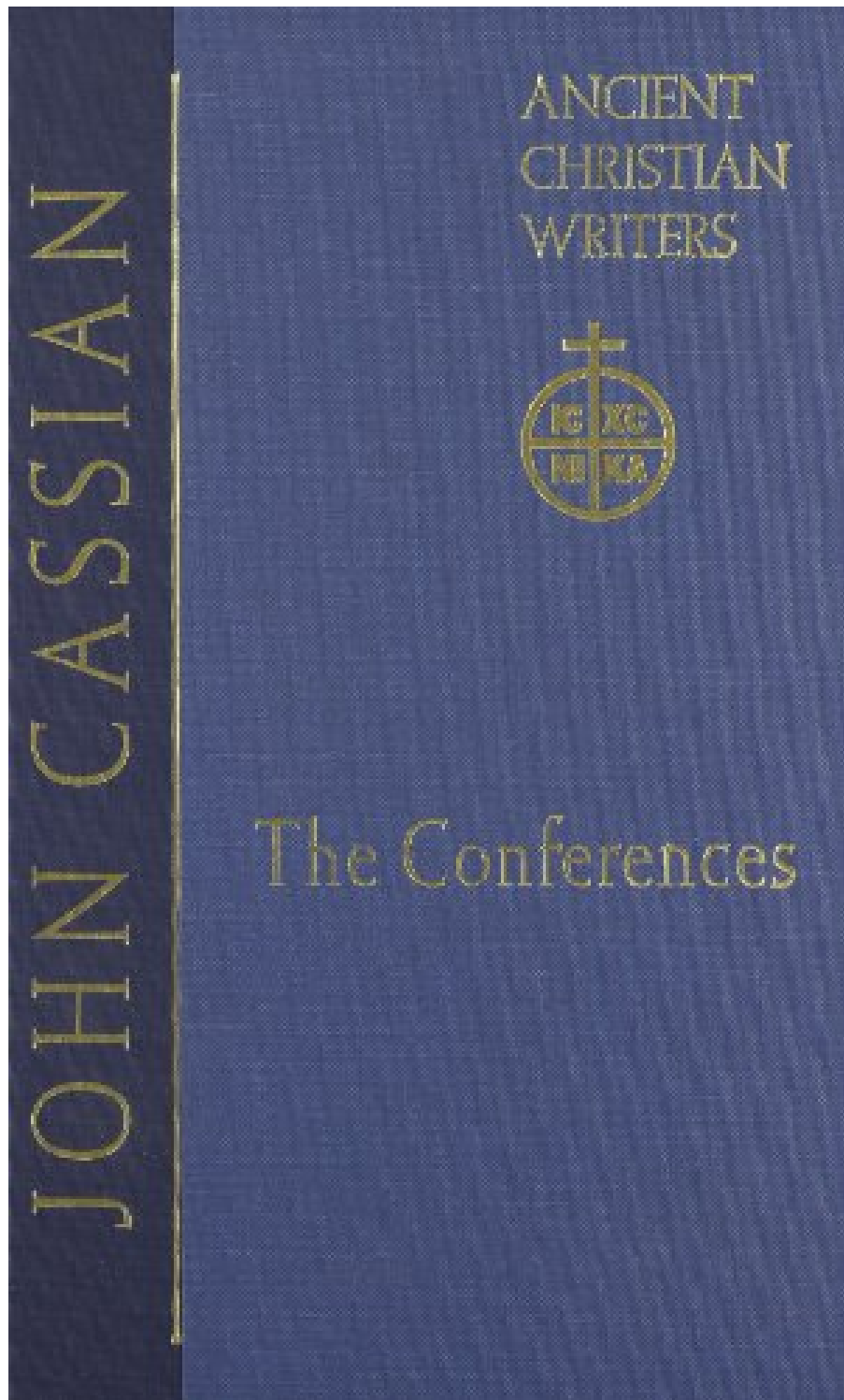


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(ANCIENT CHRISTIAN WRITERS SERIES,
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Since its inception in 1947, the Ancient Christian Writers series has become one of the world's premier patristic collections. Founded by the renowned scholars Johannes Quasten and Joseph Plumpe at The Catholic University of America, the series has grown to fifty-seven volumes over fifty years. Translations of the works of Augustine, Basil, Theodoret, Palladius, Chrysostom, Tertullian and, most recently, Justin Martyr are found amongst the thirty-six authors whose writings comprise the series. Widely recognized as the authoritative American patristic project, the Ancient Christian Writers series launches its second fifty years with the long-anticipated publication of John Cassian's *The Conferences*, translated and presented by Boniface Ramsey, O.P.

The first complete translation into English of *The Conferences*, Ramsey's rendering of Cassian is the only extensively annotated edition since the seventeenth century. Included are introductory essays, notes and a useful series of indexes. Popular for centuries in both the East and West, this work will now be available to a wider audience of scholars, students and spiritual seekers.

Anticipated in the next two years are John Cassian's *The Institutes* (completing the publication of his monastic and ascetical writings in the Ancient Christian Writers series), never-before-published correspondence of Popes Damasus and Liberius, as well as the catechumenate sermons of the North African, Quodvultdeus. As always, each volume will present the reader with a high quality English translation, notes and a scholarly introduction.

The Ancient Christian Writers series is currently edited by well-known scholar and homilist Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., John Dillon of Washington, D.C. and Dennis McManus of Paulist Press.

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Cassian Unsung Hero

By Theophan Edwards

John Cassian, *THE CONFERENCES*, Boniface Ramsey Translator. Ancient Christian Writers, No. 57. Newman Press, New York N.Y., 1997.

I remember the first time I discovered the writings of St. John Cassian with the freshness as if it were only yesterday. About 15 years ago I was almost done reading through the Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene

Fathers. St. Cyprian had my affection more than any of the other up to this point, then I began reading Cassian in series 3, volume 11 and discovered what I had been searching for. I have been reading the conferences once per year ever since as well as other times preparing for lectures on the conferences and Institutes.

Each time I read the conferences I fall in love with them all over again. I wish I could read them everyday all year long, but that would preclude me from reading anything else, since the Conferences are about 800 pages in this most recent for the first time in English complete publication.

Ramsay does an excellent translation into modern English. He keeps the flow while remaining true to the text as well as consistently translating particular technical words. Cassian was/is that living bridge between early Egyptian monasticism and that of Southern Gaul, Britain and Ireland. He and his friend Germanus spent about 14 years in Egypt interviewing and training under the most holy, and aged elders. From the abundance of wisdom, He chose to reproduce 24 of the conferences in order to help establish the "best kind of monasticism" in the west. Each conference focus' on a topic necessary to gain "Theoria," or divine contemplation through purity and integrity: in other words, through dispassion acquiring stillness and union with God. Cassian's works are profoundly clear and applicable to just about any situation we may find ourselves in. He writes of setting spiritual goals and objectives, discerning spirits, Biblical interpretation, prayer, patience, the 8 progenitor vices and their opposite virtues; of repentance and mortification of the will.

Not only does Cassian interview such spiritual giants as Paphnutius, Pinufius, Moses, Abraham and others we come across in other sources, but he quotes these elders quoting and sharing stories of their elders - the 1st century Elders such as Antony! Unlike other works of a similar content, Cassian purposely keeps narratives of miracles to a minimum. His primary interest was communicating the teachings of the Elders which serve for example of daily living, rather than wowing his audience with signs and wonders. That said, there is no lack of the supernatural, but only when necessary to drive home a point. He was a strong advocate of "Apostolic brevity."

Cassian is one of the unsung heroes of the faith. His influence, in my opinion is close to, or equals in some respects the blessed Augustine in the West and St. John of the Ladder in the East. Climacus gives due honor to Cassian in his Ladder and Cassian was the first to organize monasticism in the West and his works are found throughout the ancient Celtic Church, which, in turn, re-evangelized Europe after the fall of Rome. This is a long review, I know, but well-worth the read, if I encourage even one person to read even just the first Conference - for then you will be hooked.

Theophan.

74 of 75 people found the following review helpful.

Must read for all Christians

By Patrick O

This is the complete text of all 24 of John Cassian's Conferences, some of which are translated for the very first time. This text could be, and indeed was, considered the advanced text on living the Christian life. While the stories of the desert fathers may sound daunting, their thoughts, as transmitted (and certainly adapted) by John Cassian are surprisingly honest, refreshing, and inspirational. These were people who truly sought, and knew God. As Cassian writes in the preface, we can criticize them as being too extreme, but the evidence of their lives testifies on their behalf. Virtually every aspect of life is covered here in some way, as Cassian relates his "conferences" with various monks in the deserts of Egypt. This book is so refreshing and stirring, especially given the "junk food" spirituality that most modern Christian publishers pump out. This way is not simple or quick, but it does point to a fuller life. All those who say they follow Christ should give

this a read.

(...)

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My favorite book

By D. A. Johnson

Of all my books, this is my most important - the one I keep by my bed just to open up and read. It is filled with post-it tabs.

I agree with all said in other reviews. But for me, it is not the sort of book one reads cover to cover. It is a source for spiritual nourishment, guidance and encouragement on an as needed basis.

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