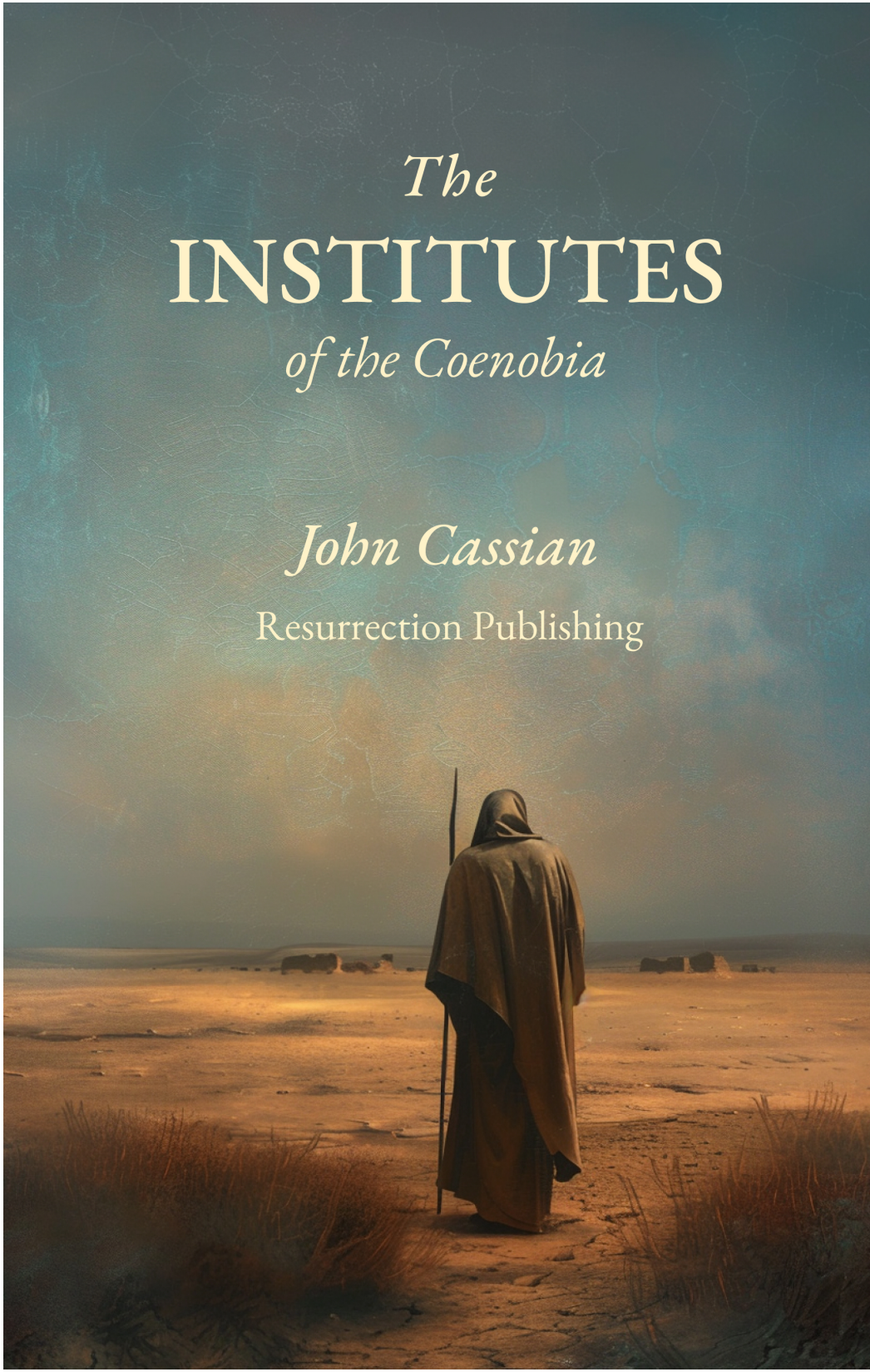
The
INSTITUTES
of the Coenobia
John Cassian
Resurrection Publishing

THE INSTITUTES OF THE COENOBIA

John Cassian

Member Edition sample · Resurrection Publishing

This free excerpt includes the Note on the Text and one chapter. It is not the full book.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Primary witnesses

The reading text of this Member Edition is a hybrid:

1. **Books I–V and VII–XII**, together with Cassian's preface to the *Institutes*, follow Edgar C. S. Gibson's English in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. XI (1894). The reading text was prepared from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library Unicode transcription (NPNF-211) and proofed against page images of the Internet Archive witness (`selectlibraryofn11schaff`). The PDF page images are the authority where transcriptions disagree.
2. **Book VI** (*On the Spirit of Fornication*) is a new English translation prepared for Resurrection Publishing from Michael Petschenig's Latin in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 17 (Vienna, 1888). Gibson left this book untranslated. The Book VI English aims at diction compatible with Gibson's surrounding books. Where Petschenig differs from the Migne *Patrologia Latina* 49 tradition in a way that affects sense, Petschenig is followed and a few such differences are marked in the chapter notes for Book VI. The Book VI English was prepared with large language models from Petschenig's Latin under Resurrection Publishing's editorial method. It is not a signed translation by a human Latinist. Resurrection Publishing is responsible for the English. A documented multi-agent fidelity audit of this English is open for human review.

Modern copyrighted English was not used as copy-text.

Scope

This edition is the complete *Institutes*: Cassian's preface and all twelve books.

The volume is the **Patristic (West)** voice in Resurrection Publishing's Theme "Dealing with sin," alongside John Owen's *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, Lorenzo Scupoli's *The Spiritual Combat*, and Isaac of Nineveh's curated *Ascetical Homilies*.

Spelling and punctuation

Spelling and punctuation are lightly modernized for contemporary readers (American orthography). Punctuation is modernized only for readability—quotation marks, dashes, and possessive apostrophes—without breaking Cassian's counsel into new claims. The serial (Oxford) comma is used throughout.

Paragraphing

Gibson's 1894 pages usually set each chapter as continuous type. This Member Edition inserts paragraph breaks only where Cassian's argument shows a clear discourse turn—enumerated steps, a new exemplum, or a strong sentence-initial turn. Breaks are not added for length alone and do not reorder or paraphrase the English.

Retained vocabulary and forms

Theological and ascetical vocabulary is retained: the names and counsel of the eight principal faults (including *fornication*, *accidie / acedia*, *vainglory*), *coenobium*, *chastity*, *continence*, *integrity*, *mortification*, and related monastic language. The archaic second person (*thee*, *thou*, *thy*, *thine*, *ye*) is preserved wherever Gibson (and the Book VI English in that register) addresses the reader directly.

Book VI does not soft-pedal Cassian's frank counsel on chastity; the Victorian omission is repaired, not repeated.

Scripture references

Scripture references are normalized to a consistent citation form (for example *Matt. 15:19*), while preserving each witness's chosen texts, wording, and order of citation. Quotations are not silently replaced with any modern Bible version.

Structure and chapter notes

Gibson's (and, for Book VI, Petschenig's) book and chapter divisions are preserved. Book titles and chapter arguments appear as paratextual extracts beneath headings.

Chapter notes are kept only when they supply interpretive or applicative context, or point the reader to Scripture or another connection worth pursuing. In Book VI, a small number of notes record Petschenig readings that affect sense.

Version identification

This first publication is `cassian-institutes-rp-2026.1` (on-sale August 1, 2026).

BOOK I

Of the Dress of the Monks.

Chapter I

Of the Monk's Girdle.

As we are going to speak of the customs and rules of the monasteries, how by God's grace can we better begin than with the actual dress of the monks, for we shall then be able to expound in due course their interior life when we have set their outward man before your eyes. A monk, then, as a soldier of Christ ever ready for battle, ought always to walk with his loins girded. For in this fashion, too, the authority of Holy Scripture shows that they walked who in the Old Testament started the original of this life,—I mean Elijah and Elisha; and, moreover, we know that the leaders and authors of the New Testament, viz., John, Peter, and Paul, and the others of the same rank, walked in the same manner. And of these the first-mentioned, who even in the Old Testament displayed the flowers of a virgin life and an example of chastity and continence, when he had been sent by the Lord to rebuke the messengers of Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, because when confined by sickness he had intended to consult Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, on the state of his health, and thereupon the said prophet had met them and said that he should not come down from the bed on which he lay,—this man was made known to the bed-ridden king by the description of the character of his clothing. For when the messengers returned to him and brought back the prophet's message, he asked what the man who had met them and spoken such words was like and how he was dressed. "An hairy man," they said, "and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins;" and by this dress the king at once saw that it was the man of God, and said: "It is Elijah the Tishbite:"[1] i.e., by the evidence of the girdle and the look of the hairy and unkempt body he recognized without the slightest doubt the man of God, because this was always attached to him as he dwelt among so many thousands of Israelites, as if it were impressed as some special sign of his own particular style. Of

John also, who came as a sort of sacred boundary between the Old and New Testament, being both a beginning and an ending, we know by the testimony of the Evangelist that "the same John had his raiment of camel's hair and a girdle of skin about his loins."[2] When Peter also had been put in prison by Herod and was to be brought forth to be slain on the next day, when the angel stood by him he was charged: "Gird thyself and put on thy shoes."[3] And the angel of the Lord would certainly not have charged him to do this had he not seen that for the sake of his night's rest he had for a while freed his wearied limbs from the girdle usually tied round them. Paul also, going up to Jerusalem and soon to be put in chains by the Jews, was met at Cæsarea by the prophet Agabus, who took his girdle and bound his hands and feet to show by his bodily actions the injuries which he was to suffer, and said: "So shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose girdle this is, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."[4] And surely the prophet would never have brought this forward, or have said "the man whose girdle this is," unless Paul had always been accustomed to fasten it round his loins.

---

[1] 2 Kings 1:1–8.
[2] S. Matt. 3:4.
[3] Acts 12:8.
[4] Acts 21:11.

Chapter II

Of the Monk's Robe.

Let the robe also of the monk be such as may merely cover the body and prevent the disgrace of nudity, and keep off harm from cold, not such as may foster the seeds of vanity and pride; for the same apostle tells us: "Having food and covering, with these let us be content."[1] "Covering," he says, not "raiment," as is wrongly found in some Latin copies: that is, what may merely cover the body, not what may please the fancy by the splendour of the attire; commonplace, so that it may not be thought remarkable for novelty of color or fashion among other men of the same profession; and quite free from anxious carefulness, yet not discoloured by stains acquired through neglect.

Lastly, let them be so far removed from this world's fashions as to remain altogether common property for the use of the servants of God. For whatever is claimed by one or a few among the servants of God and is not the common property of the whole body of the brethren alike is either superfluous or vain, and for that reason to be considered harmful, and affording an appearance of vanity rather than virtue. And, therefore, whatever models we see were not taught either by the saints of old who laid the foundations of the monastic life, or by the fathers of our own time who in their turn keep up at the present day their customs, these we also should reject as superfluous and useless: wherefore they utterly disapproved of a robe of sackcloth as being visible to all and conspicuous, and what from this very fact will not only confer no benefit on the soul but rather minister to vanity and pride, and as being inconvenient and unsuitable for the performance of necessary work for which a monk ought always to go ready and unimpeded. But even if we hear of some respectable persons who have been dressed in this garb, a rule for the monasteries is not, therefore, to be passed by us, nor should the ancient decrees of the holy fathers be upset because we do not think

that a few men, presuming on the possession of other virtues, are to be blamed even in regard of those things which they have practised not in accordance with the Catholic rule. For the opinion of a few ought not to be preferred to or to interfere with the general rule for all. For we ought to give unhesitating allegiance and unquestioning obedience, not to those customs and rules which the will of a few have introduced, but to those which a long standing antiquity and numbers of the holy fathers have passed on by an unanimous decision to those that come after. Nor, indeed, ought this to influence us as a precedent for our daily life, that Joram, the wicked king of Israel, when surrounded by bands of his foes, rent his clothes, and is said to have had sackcloth inside them;[2] or that the Ninevites, in order to mitigate the sentence of God, which had been pronounced against them by the prophet, were clothed in rough sackcloth.[3] The former is shown to have been clothed with it secretly underneath, so that unless the upper garment had been rent it could not possibly have been known by any one, and the latter tolerated a covering of sackcloth at a time when, since all were mourning over the approaching destruction of the city and were clothed with the same garments, none could be accused of ostentation. For where there is no special difference and all are alike no harm is done.

---

[1] 1 Tim. 6:8. The Greek is skepasmata, for which Jerome's version has "quibus tegamur." Sabbatier gives "victum et vestitum" as the rendering of the old Latin, but it is often quoted as "victus et tegumentum" by Augustine. "Alimenta et operimenta" must be Cassian's own rendering from the Greek. "Vestimenta," which he speaks of as being found in some Latin copies, is not given by Sabbatier at all, though Jerome quotes the text with "vestimentum" in Ep. ad Titum, III.

[2] 2 Kings 6:30.

[3] Jonah 3:8.

Chapter III

Of the Hoods of the Egyptians.

There are some things besides in the dress of the Egyptians which concern not the care of the body so much as the regulation of the character, that the observance of simplicity and innocence may be preserved by the very character of the clothing. For they constantly use both by day and by night very small hoods coming down to the end of the neck and shoulders, which only cover the head, in order that they may constantly be moved to preserve the simplicity and innocence of little children by imitating their actual dress.[1] And these men have returned to childhood in Christ and sing at all hours with heart and soul: "Lord, my heart is not exalted nor are mine eyes lofty. Neither have I walked in great matters nor in wonderful things above me. If I was not humbly minded, but exalted my soul: as a child that is weaned is towards his mother."[2]

---

[1] The hood, or cowl (cuculla), was anciently worn by children and peasants, and thus was said to symbolize humility. Compare the account of the Egyptian monks given by Sozomen, Hist. III. xiv.: "They wore a covering on their heads called a cowl to show that they ought to live with the same innocence and purity as infants who are nourished with milk and wear a covering of the same form."

[2] Ps. 130 (131):1, 2.

Chapter IV

Of the Tunics of the Egyptians.

They wear also linen tunics[1] which scarcely reach to the elbows, and for the rest leave their hands bare, that the cutting off of the sleeves may suggest that they have cut off all the deeds and works of this world, and the garment of linen teach that they are dead to all earthly conversation, and that hereby they may hear the Apostle saying day by day to them: "Mortify your members which are upon the earth;" their very dress also declaring this: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God;" and again: "And I live, yet now not I but Christ liveth in me. To me indeed the world is crucified, and I to the world."[2]

---

[1] Colobium (kolobion), a tunic with very short sleeves. Cf. Dorotheus (Migne, Patrol. Græca lxxxviii. 1631). To schema ho phoroumen kolobion esti, me hechon cheiridia, kai zone dermatine kai analabos kai koukoulion.

[2] Col. 3:5, 3. Gal. 2:20; 6:14. Cf. Sozomen l. c.: "They wore their tunics without sleeves in order to teach that the hands ought not to be ready to do evil."

Chapter V

Of their Cords.

They also wear double scarves[1] woven of woollen yarn which the Greeks call analaboi, but which we should name girdles[2] or strings,[3] or more properly cords.[4] These falling down over the top of the neck and divided on either side of the throat go round the folds (of the robe) at the armpits and gather them up on either side, so that they can draw up and tuck in close to the body the wide folds of the dress, and so with their arms girt they are made active and ready for all kinds of work, endeavouring with all their might to fulfil the Apostle's charge: "For these hands have ministered not only to me but to those also who are with me," "Neither have we eaten any man's bread for nought, but with labour and toil working night and day that we should not be burdensome to any of you." And: "If any will not work neither let him eat."[5]

---

[1] Resticulæ.
[2] Succinctoria.
[3] Redimicula.
[4] Rebracchiatoria.
[5] Acts 20:34; 2 Thess. 3:8, 10.

Chapter VI

Of their Capes.[1]

Next they cover their necks and shoulders with a narrow cape, aiming at modesty of dress as well as cheapness and economy; and this is called in our language as well as theirs mafors; and so they avoid both the expense and the display of cloaks and great coats.

---

[1] The mafors (maphorion or maphorion) is the monkish scapular, or working-dress. Cf. the Rule of S. Benedict, c. 55: "Scapulare propter opera." In form it was a large, coarse cape, or hood.

Chapter VII

Of the Sheepskin and the Goatskin.[1]

The last article of their dress is the goat-skin, which is called melotes, or pera, and a staff, which they carry in imitation of those who foreshadowed the lines of the monastic life in the Old Testament, of whom the Apostle says: "They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted; of whom the world was not worthy; wandering in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth."[2] And this garment of goatskin signifies that having destroyed all wantonness of carnal passions they ought to continue in the utmost sobriety of virtue, and that nothing of the wantonness or heat of youth, or of their old lightmindedness, should remain in their bodies.

---

[1] The melotes (melotes), a sheepskin garment hanging down on one side, was the usual dress of monks. S. Anthony bequeathed his, at his death, to S. Athanasius. Ath. Vita Anton, 91.

[2] Heb. 11:37, 38.

Chapter VIII

Of the Staff of the Egyptians.

For Elisha, himself one of them, teaches that the same men used to carry a staff; as he says to Gehazi, his servant, when sending him to raise the woman's son to life: "Take my staff and run and go and place it on the lad's face that he may live."[1] And the prophet would certainly not have given it to him to take unless he had been in the habit of constantly carrying it about in his hand. And the carrying of the staff spiritually teaches that they ought never to walk unarmed among so many barking dogs of faults and invisible beasts of spiritual wickedness (from which the blessed David, in his longing to be free, says: "Deliver not, O Lord, to the beasts the soul that trusteth in Thee"),[2] but when they attack them they ought to beat them off with the sign of the cross and drive them far away; and when they rage furiously against them they should annihilate them by the constant recollection of the Lord's passion and by following the example of His mortified life.

---

[1] 2 Kings 4:29.
[2] Ps. 73 (74):19.

Chapter IX

Of their Shoes.

But refusing shoes, as forbidden by the command of the gospel, if bodily weakness or the morning cold in winter or the scorching heat of midday compels them, they merely protect their feet with sandals, explaining that by the use of them and the Lord's permission it is implied that if, while we are still in this world we cannot be completely set free from care and anxiety about the flesh, nor can we be altogether released from it, we should at least provide for the wants of the body with as little fuss and as slight an entanglement as possible: and as for the feet of our soul which ought to be ready for our spiritual race and always prepared for preaching the peace of the gospel (with which feet we run after the odour of the ointments of Christ, and of which David says: "I ran in thirst," and Jeremiah: "But I am not troubled, following Thee"),[1] we ought not to suffer them to be entangled in the deadly cares of this world, filling our thoughts with those things which concern not the supply of the wants of nature, but unnecessary and harmful pleasures. And this we shall thus fulfil if, as the Apostle advises, we "make not provision for the flesh with its lusts."[2] But though lawfully enough they make use of these sandals, as permitted by the Lord's command, yet they never suffer them to remain on their feet when they approach to celebrate or to receive the holy mysteries, as they think that they ought to observe in the letter that which was said to Moses and to Joshua, the son of Nun: "Loose the latchet of thy shoe: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."[3]

---

[1] Ps. 61 (62):5; Jer. 17:16 (LXX.).

[2] Rom. 13:14.

[3] Exod. 3:5; Josh. 5:16.

Chapter X

Of the modification in the observances which may be permitted in accordance with the character of the climate or the custom of the district.

So much may be said, that we may not appear to have left out any article of the dress of the Egyptians. But we need only keep to those which the situation of the place and the customs of the district permit. For the severity of the winter does not allow us to be satisfied with slippers[1] or tunics or a single frock; and the covering of tiny hoods or the wearing of a sheepskin would afford a subject for derision instead of edifying the spectators. Wherefore we hold that we ought to introduce only those things which we have described above, and which are adapted to the humble character of our profession and the nature of the climate, that the chief thing about our dress may be not the novelty of the garb, which might give some offence to men of the world, but its honorable simplicity.

---

[1] Gallica.

Chapter XI

Of the Spiritual Girdle and its Mystical Meaning.[1]

Clad, therefore, in these vestments, the soldier of Christ should know first of all that he is protected by the girdle tied round him, not only that he may be ready in mind for all the work and business of the monastery, but also that he may always go without being hindered by his dress. For he will be proved to be the more ardent in purity of heart for spiritual progress and the knowledge of Divine things in proportion as he is the more earnest in his zeal for obedience and work.

Secondly, he should realize that in the actual wearing of the girdle there is no small mystery declaring what is demanded of him. For the girding of the loins and binding them round with a dead skin signifies that he bears about the mortification of those members in which are contained the seeds of lust and lasciviousness, always knowing that the command of the gospel, which says, "Let your loins be girt about,"[2] is applied to him by the Apostle's interpretation; to wit, "Mortify your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence."[3]

And so we find in Holy Scripture that only those were girt with the girdle in whom the seeds of carnal lust are found to be destroyed, and who sing with might and main this utterance of the blessed David: "For I am become like a bottle in the frost,"[4] because when the sinful flesh is destroyed in the inmost parts they can distend by the power of the spirit the dead skin of the outward man. And therefore he significantly adds "in the frost," because they are never satisfied merely with the mortification of the heart, but also have the motions of the outward man and the incentives of nature itself frozen by the approach of the frost of continence from without, if only, as the Apostle says, they no longer allow any reign of sin in their mortal body, nor wear a flesh that resists the spirit.[5]

[1] Sacramentum.
[2] S. Luke 12:35.
[3] Col. 3:5.
[4] Ps. 118 (119):83.
[5] Cf. Rom. 6:12; Gal. 5:17. S. Benedict's rule about the dress of the monks is as follows: "Let the dress of the brethren be adapted to the character of the place or climate in which they live, as more clothing is required in cold than in hot countries. Hence we leave this to the abbot to determine. However, in temperate climates we are of the opinion that it will be enough for each monk to have a hood and a frock, a rough one for the winter, and in the summer a simple or old one; a scapular also for work; and the cover of the feet, shoes and socks. And the monks are not to complain of the color or size of these articles, but to be satisfied with whatever can be found or got cheapest in the country where they live." Regula S. Bened. c. lv.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

Own the classic. Study with the Church across the centuries.

Hardcover $39 · Ebook $19

Available now · Official publication August 1, 2026

This sample ends here. To buy the hardcover or ebook, open:

https://resurrectionpublishing.com/books/cassian-institutes

Letters from Resurrection Publishing — personal notes from Harvey, our founder. Sign up:

https://resurrectionpublishing.com/l/s