VIRTUE AND VICE AT WORK

Ancient Wisdom for a Modern Age

RYAN TAFILOWSKI

Denver Institute for Faith and Work is an educational nonprofit dedicated to forming men and women to serve God, neighbor, and society through their work. Learn more at DenverInstitute.org.

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Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER felt tired of yourself? "I wonder if you, like me," writes Fleming Rutledge, with some exhaustion in her voice, "have grown weary of patterns in your own life. As I have grown older, I have recognized that there are certain impulses and tendencies in my personality that I have worked very hard to overcome, but they are still there, causing me — and others — no end of trouble."[1]

I can relate.

I am now solidly in mid-career, and my professional journey has been circuitous. I have worked as a shelf-stocker at a pharmacy, a batting cage attendant at a baseball training facility, a grunt in a catering business, a youth minister, an editor, a paralegal, a pastor, and a professor. I'd like to say that I've grown across these past twenty years, and in many ways I have. But, like Rutledge says, the same nagging patterns of thought and behavior have emerged again and again across my career. Changing jobs doesn't seem to help. Why? Because no matter what job I'm in, *I'm the one doing the job*. For better or for worse, when we come to work, we bring ourselves with us.

I won't speak for you, but I'm not yet the self I'd like to be. This vague and inchoate feeling of being tired of oneself captures something of what it's like to be trapped in a cycle of vice. In our culture, the

[1] Fleming Rutledge, "The Great BUT," in *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 183.

concept of "vice" has been cheapened and trivialized, made into a "guilty pleasure." We all have our "vices": we binge *The Bachelor* or *Survivor*; we sheepishly confess to an insatiable sweet tooth; we carve out one weekend a year to go to Las Vegas to indulge our "vices" — gambling or drinking or overeating or whatever. Nowadays, we use the vocabulary of "sin" mostly to talk about desserts. Perhaps we laugh at our vices to keep from crying. But in the Christian moral tradition, the vices are no joke. They are deadly — and their consequences are often fatal.[2] Everyone knows the so-called "Seven Deadly Sins" — Pride, Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Anger, Envy — but we are hopelessly inept at diagnosing them in ourselves, although we're keen to point them out in others.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our work. Work is a unique kind of crucible because sooner or later it will reveal what we're made of. Day after day, we wake up and bring our broken selves to work (whether in an office or on a Zoom call), and whom do we find there? Other broken selves. To put it another way, there is no context quite like work to remind us that we have no choice but to find a way to live with ourselves and with other people. And there is no context quite like work to remind us how difficult that is. Our daily work is a breeding ground for vice.

Our jealousy flares when Larry, who is lazy and incompetent, somehow fails his way into a promotion ahead of us. Our anger is kindled when new management elects not to pursue a project we've spent months building. We slide into sloth when we're stuck in a dead-end job that we don't find challenging or rewarding. Lust rears its ugly head when we try to manipulate and control or compete with others.

[2] For a helpful introduction to these themes, see Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009) and Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014).

VIRTUE AND VICE: PATTERNS OF FORMATION AND DE-FORMATION

The "Seven Deadly Sins" are dramatic, and they are lethal, but they rarely unveil themselves in their most malevolent form — at least not right away. Usually, they show up incrementally and take root gradually. The pressures of work — the tedium, the grind, the frustration, the failure, but also the success, the thrill, and the rush we get when we gain power and influence — can *malform* us in subtle ways and tempt us into vicious cycles.

And that brings us to the question of virtue and vice. What do we mean when we use these terms? The first thing to say is that, as Gilbert Meilaender has written, when we talk about virtue, we are in the realm of "*being* not *doing*."[3] In other words, virtue has to do with the kind of person we *are* and only then, secondarily, with the kinds of things that we *do*. "What kind of person am I becoming?" is a virtue and vice question. The behaviors we cultivate, often unconsciously, across long periods of time are shaping us. And when those behaviors are vicious, we in turn become vicious. For our purposes, we might define "vices" as those dispositions, actions, habits, and attitudes that *deform* us away from the image of Jesus Christ and which prevent us from becoming agents of flourishing in our work.

Conversely, we may think of "virtue" as those dispositions, actions, habits, and attitudes that *conform* us to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29) and which enable us to become agents of flourishing in our work. There is nothing more urgent than the formation of virtue because, unless we recognize our vices, name them, diagnose them, and counteract them through virtue, their momentum will pull us away from the life of God. Virtue, then, involves the ability to diagnose the ways that we have been continually distorted by sin and vice and to

[3] Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 5, emphasis original.

cultivate strategies and practices that make it possible to live stably with ourselves and with other people. We need virtue in every aspect of our lives, but perhaps especially in our work lives.

THE WISDOM OF THE MONKS: LEARNING TO LIVE WITH OURSELVES AND OTHERS

The crazy-making pressures of work — the long hours, the stressful commute, the inability to turn work off, the constant pinging of emails and texts — may seem like distinctly modern problems. Counterintuitively, we are going to try to address these problems by drawing on ancient Christian sources, particularly the writings of monks, including those who lived alone in the desert and those who lived together in monasteries. It's fair to ask, I think, how figures such as Jesus or long-dead monks with strange names like Evagrius can help us here. What could someone who spent his entire life standing on top of a pillar or fasting in a desolate cave possibly have to teach us about modern life? Jesus didn't have a mortgage. Evagrius didn't have to worry about saving for retirement. John Cassian wasn't drowning in Excel spreadsheets. All of that is true. And yet, I've become convinced that these monks know a lot more about human psychology than we do, even though they were writing some fourteen centuries before "psychology" even emerged as a formal academic discipline. Humans are humans, whether they live in the Egyptian wilderness or in the suburbs of Denver. And, although it's hard to believe, the experience of being a human really hasn't changed all that much over the last millennium.

These monastic writers are incredibly adept at interrogating their own interior lives — their motives, their ambitions, their fears. They are masters at understanding what makes people tick: why we do the things we do, why we have such a hard time taming our basest impulses, and

why it's so maddeningly difficult for us to live with ourselves and even more difficult for us to live with other people. This alone gives us an important insight into the nature of our daily work because, whether we live in the fourth century or the twenty-first, the trouble with work is that it is performed by humans who are twisted by vice in the company of other humans who are twisted by vice. And this dual emphasis on the self and the other represents the most critical contribution of the Christian monastic tradition when it comes to moral formation in the workplace.

To aid us in our pursuit of virtue, we'll be drawing on two distinct expressions of monasticism. The fourth century saw the emergence of *eremitic* monasticism (the root of our English word "hermit"), which refers to a movement in which individuals, disappointed with a lack of rigor in the Church after the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine, took to the deserts of Syria and Egypt to pursue a life of holiness.[4] While names like Anthony the Great, Symeon the Stylite, Pachomius, or Evagrius of Pontus may not mean much to us, their insights will prove invaluable for coping with the pressures of our work. Evagrius in particular shows us that the monastic cell in the Egyptian wilderness is not really so different than the cubicle in a modern office park. In both places, the Christian is besieged by what Evagrius called *logismoi* — "evil thoughts" or "demons" like boredom or restlessness or riotous ambition — which knock us off balance, throw us off task, and ultimately seek to deform and devour us.[5]

[4] For a brief overview of the origins of eremitic monasticism, see "Exiles from Life: Beginnings of Monasticism," in Bruce L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, ed. Marshall Shelley, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), especially 148-51.

[5] See Jeremy Driscoll's introduction to Evagrius's concept of *logismoi* in Evagrius Ponticus, *Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, Ancient Christian Writers 59 (New York, NY: Newman, 2003), 11-13.

As we will discover together, Evagrius offers resources for the formation of the kind of virtue we need to learn to *live with ourselves* at work.

Centuries later, monasticism took on a new shape in the West with the development of *cenobitic* monasticism, where monks lived and worked together in a common space called a monastery.[6] Through conversation with figures such as John Cassian, who founded the Abbey of St. Victor, a monastic community in fifth-century France, and Benedict of Nursia, whose manual of operations for the monastery at Monte Cassino in sixth-century Italy has become a classic in the Christian spiritual tradition, we'll see that the medieval monastery is not all that different from the modern office: they are both populated by other people whom we did not choose and who are not going away, even if we'd prefer it if they did.

As Rowan Williams has observed, the wisdom of Cassian and Benedict is sorely needed if we are going to figure out how to live stably with our coworkers, whom we see day after day, like it or not. "A great deal of our politics, our ecclesiastical life, and often our personal life as well" — and here we might add our professional life, too — "is dominated by the assumption that everything would be alright if only some people would go away."[7] Of course, we can't simply wish other people away any more than they can simply wish us away. Work forces us to share spaces — physical spaces, but also intellectual and emotional spaces — with other people, and this inevitably raises tensions, frustrations, and impasses. But the Christian life, for Cassian and other cenobitic writers, is about learning how to be the kind of person who can share spaces with other people peaceably and productively.

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[6] For more on this topic, see the chapter "Monasticism" in Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).
[7] Rowan Williams, The Way of St Benedict (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020), 27.

In short, these ancient voices can help us cultivate the kind of virtue we need to *live with other people* at work.

A ROADMAP FOR WHAT'S AHEAD

The goal these monks had in mind was total spiritual health, which they usually described with the word *apatheia*. Although it's the root of our word "apathy," *apatheia* has nothing to do with laziness or lack of motivation. On the contrary, *apatheia* is "an abiding sense of peace and joy that comes from the full harmony of the passions — a habitual state developed through discipline (*ascesis*), which is why we can refer to it in terms of virtue."[8] We would be hard pressed to find an environment less congenial to apatheia than the modern workplace, where toxic passions and our worst impulses often run amok: office politics sow discord and confusion, brimming calendars breed stress and anxiety, and the malaise of tedious work threatens us with a haunting sense of meaninglessness.

Ancient and medieval Christian writers did not typically use the language of "deadly sins." They preferred to call them "capital vices" because they spawn sub-vices, many of which are interconnected. It is not difficult to discern these capital vices in our work once we start looking. As I undertook the research for this project, it quickly became clear to me that I'm not plagued by a single vice in my work; I've got all of them in spades. So, although I could focus on all of them, I've elected to narrow the scope of the study to five: acedia, gluttony, lust, greed, and vainglory. As we'll see, these vices manifest in surprising ways in the workplace, some of which are so subtle that we may not even notice.

[8] Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, 4-5.

The work of virtue — the art of learning to live with ourselves and with others — begins by coming to grips with our vices. A skilled physician will do the slow work of diagnosis before she will even begin to consider prognosis — this means that the patient will have to be, well, patient. Accordingly, what follows will be long on diagnosis and short on prognosis. This project is designed mainly to help us recognize the nefarious ways in which the vices are distorting our work and obscuring the image of God in ourselves and in others. This means that we will spend the majority of our time learning to detect and root out our vices with the help of ancient Christian voices. With that said, each chapter will also gesture toward some practices, typically one "discipline of abstention" and one "discipline of engagement,"[9] to begin the long, hard labor of cultivating virtue. But if we are willing to subject ourselves to this kind of scrutiny, painful though it is, we open ourselves up to the transforming work of the Spirit, who holds the best version of each of us, the version that has been fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, in store. "Beloved," promises the Apostle John, "we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

[9] The categories are Dallas Willard's. See *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 9.

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Just One More Email

GLUTTONY

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED how often we use food metaphors to talk about work? "I bit off more than I can chew with this project." "You know sales — it's feast or famine." "She's trying to have her cake and eat it too." "I know I can get that promotion, I've just gotta stay hungry." Not only that; we think of money itself in terms of food: bread, dough, cabbage, salad, cheddar. We describe the purpose of our work as "bringing home the bacon" or "putting food on the table."

Are these merely figures of speech, or are they doing something more important than that? Philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suspect the latter. In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, they argue that "metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words … [o]n the contrary, human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical."[10] In other words, metaphors are not simply tools we use to describe reality, they are thought-structures we use to orient ourselves to reality — and that's why the language we use to describe our work matters. For example, what are we saying when we say that we've had a "taste of success"? The truth is we may not fully realize what we're saying, but the phrase "taste of success" suggests quite strongly that professional or

[10] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3, 6, emphasis mine. The authors note that food metaphors are one of the most dominant ways we make sense of our reality. See pp. 46-47.

financial achievement activates some kind of *appetite* in us in the same way that indulging in rich foods does.

Your office manager knows this. That's why modern workplaces feature food as one of the central amenities: artisanal snacks, beer and kombucha on tap, a stockpile of candy to ward off the 3:00 p.m. crash. Employers aren't doing this out of the goodness of their hearts. Gluttony can be made to serve the bottom line. How? Because the constant presence of food serves to keep us perpetually hungry — for snacks and for work. This is because human beings are psychosomatic creatures, hybrids of both body and spirit, which means that our physical appetites and our spiritual appetites are linked. Our appetites for food are generally a reliable index of our spiritual or emotional state, something that the Christian spiritual tradition has always emphasized.

This is where gluttony comes in. Most of these spiritual writers characterize gluttony as a "natural" vice, in the sense that our physical appetite for food is a standard feature of embodied existence. There is nothing inherently wrong with the drive to eat. The sin of gluttony, then, isn't about eating *per se*, but rather "the manner in which we consume food, involving inordinate desire and immoderate pleasure."[11] What this definition captures is that gluttony is really about unregulated desire; it is a loss of proportion when it comes to our appetites, of which our appetite for food is only one expression. In short, the vice of gluttony is present anytime we fail to regulate our appetites — for food, of course, but also for anything else, including work. Over-work is a species of gluttony, and that's because it's also a "natural" vice. We have to eat, and we have to work. But not only that; we are meant to enjoy work in the same way that

[11] Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 18.
[12] This is Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung's helpful summary of Augustine's teaching on gluttony. See her book *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 150.

we are meant to enjoy food: within limits, in moderation, and in ways that aid us in fulfilling our vocations.[12]

All of this is why there's a great deal at stake in the way that we think about, talk about, and engage our daily work. When we use food metaphors to conceptualize our work, the implication is that work is something to be *consumed*. And in a sense, it is, provided that our appetite for work is healthy and not gluttonous. But here's the trouble with appetites: so often the things we consume end up consuming us.

"THEIR GOD IS THEIR BELLY": GLUTTONY AT WORK

We tend to think of our relationship with food as "neutral" — that is, the things we put in our bodies and the ways in which we do it don't really reflect our spiritual health or unhealth, which is a matter of the heart. But that's not quite how the biblical writers saw it. For example, the Apostle Paul characterized "enemies of the cross of Christ" — perhaps the most serious charge he levels against any opponent — as fundamentally gluttonous in nature and conduct. "Their god is their belly," he explains, which is how he knows that they have their "minds set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). That is to say, when our physical appetites are disordered, it's a sure sign that our spiritual appetites are disordered, too. Our minds are set on earthly things.

Paul's reflections in Philippians 3 informed the Christian monastic tradition profoundly. Virtually all the writers of this tradition list gluttony as the first of the principal vices. John Cassian, for instance, considered "voraciousness of the belly" as the fountainhead of all other vices because it was literally the primal sin itself, "for it was by gluttony that [Adam] took the food from the forbidden fruit."[13] In his *Institutes*, an early handbook for organizing monastic communities, Cassian argued that the spiritual

[13] See John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 183-85.

athlete, whom he compares to a competitor in the Olympic Games, must conquer gluttony first if they are serious about moral perfection.[14] That's easier said than done, of course, not least because gluttony is a hydra: it takes many forms, it is not easily defined, and what is gluttonous for you might not be gluttonous for me. Even so, Cassian is able to discern three basic and discrete expressions of gluttony: "The first impels a monk to hasten to eat before the fixed and lawful hour. The second is pleased with a full stomach and with devouring any edibles whatsoever. And the third desires more refined and delicate foods."[15]

In this short taxonomy, Cassian has given us a workable checklist for diagnosing gluttony not only with respect to our physical appetites, but also with respect to our work. We often imagine gluttony exclusively as a carnal sin of food and drink, but it is not; it is a species of sin—a failure to regulate desire and, more than that, a means of anesthetizing ourselves from the pressures and stresses of life. Specifically, if we translate Cassian into a contemporary idiom, we might put it like this: gluttony distorts our sense of time; gluttony fosters an agitated, mindless compulsiveness in us; and gluttony escalates our tastes for more and more exotic fare.

Perhaps the first symptom of gluttony in its early stages is a warped sense of time. Gluttony has a way of bending our schedules, of dissolving ordered time into chaotic time. This would be especially clear in the life of a medieval monk. Mealtimes varied according to the time of year and the seasons of the liturgical calendar, but in all monastic communities, one thing was clear: there are set times for eating, at which food should be enjoyed in moderation and gratitude, but at all other times, the monk ought to be thinking about other things.[16] The demon of gluttony,

[14] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), 125.
[15] Cassian, *The Conferences*, 190.
[16] A good example of this kind of meal regimen can be found in chapters 39-41 of *The Rule of St. Benedict*, a manual for structuring monastic communities dating to the 6th century.

however, begins his work by sending small but perceptive pangs of hunger between mealtimes, "hastening the monk to eat before the fixed and lawful hour," as Cassian puts it. Over time, the pangs increase in severity and frequency; before long, the monk is constantly thinking about food instead of works of charity, prayer, and contemplation. You don't have to be a medieval monk to recognize this pattern. How many of us survive our workdays by counting down the hours until lunch and then, after lunch, starting the countdown over again, this time until happy hour?

Like all the capital vices, though, gluttony begins with a carnal symptom but doesn't stop there. Soon enough, over-indulgence can trap us in a (literal) vicious cycle, a gluttonous distortion of time, a kind of delirium where the only thing we care about is the next indulgence, even if it is obviously causing us pain and distress. "They struck me," mutters the confused drunkard in Proverbs 23:35, clearly unaware of the day or the hour, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink." It sounds extreme, but gluttony can turn is into that staggering drunkard at work in a few ways. Early on, we might be tempted, like the hungry monk desperate to make it to the next meal, to organize our entire life and schedule around work, structuring our time not by breakfast–lunch–dinner but by staff meeting–power lunch–client pitch. Eventually, we'll lose all sense of time and proportion. We'll find that we're unable to "shut off" work, thinking about it at all hours instead of fixed working hours. Gluttony will eventually blur the boundaries between work and the other dimensions of our lives. And like the glutton lying dazed in a gutter, we'll spend our Sunday evenings wondering when we get to start the cycle all over again, even though we profess to hate it.

In the second place, says Cassian, gluttony will manifest in a totally indiscriminate appetite, "devouring any edibles whatsoever." What Cassian has in mind here is the one who eats compulsively, like the

glutton of Proverbs 25:16 who gorges himself on honey to the point of vomiting simply because he has "found it." But if we look beneath the surface, we'll discover that this expression of gluttony isn't exclusively — or even primarily — about having too much of a good thing, although that certainly is a problem. The deeper issue is that, in its advanced stages, gluttony anesthetizes us by causing us to eat *mindlessly.* Even if gluttony isn't an acute problem for many of us, we can probably all identify with experiences of eating mindlessly. We do this for lots of reasons: e.g., to cope with stress or to comfort ourselves in moments of pain or disappointment. Probably the most common reason, though, is sheer boredom. Sometimes we eat things we don't even want simply because they are *there*.

This mindlessness of gluttony can poison our work, too. When we are in the throes of gluttony, our work can grow compulsive. That is, we take on project after project and answer email after email to the point that work is no longer pleasurable or purposeful, like honey souring in our stomachs. We use work to "feel full," cramming ourselves with empty calories to numb our stress, our fears of meaninglessness, or our unbearable existential boredom. We binge on work to the point of sickness, collapsing in a state of insatiable exhaustion. But perhaps the most pernicious form of work-gluttony in our cultural moment is what we might call "snacking" on work, a habit that has accelerated with the advent of remote working. We don't want the cookies that have been left on the table in the breakroom, but we eat them anyway simply because they are *there*. In the same way, we don't really want to work past 5:00 p.m. (and we know we shouldn't), but we snack on our work anyway, simply because our laptop is *there*.

All of that is bad enough, but it pales in comparison to gluttony's terminal stage, in which, according to Cassian, it activates our desires for "more and more delicate foods." Although it may seem paradoxical,

for the writers of the Christian spiritual tradition, overly-scrupulous and overly-fastidious eating is also the work of the demon of gluttony.[17] The result is a profound irony: American culture's obsession with fitness and wellness — "eating clean," "eating organic," "eating pure," or eating "whole foods" — can actually be an expression of gluttony. The last decade has seen the emergence of a new form of disordered eating, *orthorexia nervosa* ("neurotic righteous-eating"), which the National Eating Disorders Association describe as a fixation "on food quality and purity." But, as theologian David Zahl has argued, *orthorexia* isn't really about the food; it's about the sense of righteousness that comes with (the perception of) healthy and ethically-responsible eating.[18] In other words, this most pernicious vice has made us into gluttons by tricking us into thinking we're rejecting gluttony.

It was precisely this sense of self-righteousness that comes with scrupulous eating that Cassian saw as the most catastrophic consequence of gluttony: contempt for, rather than formation by, "Christ's utter deprivation."[19] To put it bluntly, left untreated, gluttony is fatal because it suffocates the most important Christian virtue: humility. Gluttony makes gods of our bellies not only through distorting our sense of time and compelling us toward mindlessness, but ultimately by giving free rein to our appetites for influence, achievement, power, and prestige. What does this look like at work? Gluttony can manifest as a refusal to take on "ordinary" tasks because we've had a taste of more glamorous projects. Gluttony could present as a fastidious obsession over our professional "diet," not because it makes us feel better, but because it makes us look better. Gluttony is behind every attempt to hoard work, resources, or

[17] See Okholm, Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins, 18-19 and Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 142.
[18] See David Zahl, *Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), ch. 7.
[19] Cassian, *The Conferences*, 190.

opportunities or to take on more work than we can ingest just so others cannot have it. Gluttony is the inability to resist any opportunity which promises professional advancement or esteem. It is behind frantic vows to finally take some time off "As soon as I finish this next project" or "As soon as I make $XYZ per year." In the end, the demon of gluttony deludes us into thinking that we are gods on which everything depends; gluttony is disdain for the way of Jesus Christ.

TEMPERANCE: THE REMEDY FOR GLUTTONY

As we have seen, food metaphors are one of the foundational ways that human beings make sense of the world.[20] Is it any wonder, then, that in Paul turns to a food metaphor to express what it's like to have a share in the divine life by the power of the Holy Spirit? The last of the fruit of the Spirit is perhaps the most important for conquering the demon of gluttony, but it's also the most difficult to cultivate: self-control (Galatians 5:22). The one who lacks self-control, the Scriptures tell us, "is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). To put it another way, without self-control, no virtue is possible, since we will be left without defenses against the various vices that snuff out the life of God in us.

But how to get it? The tragic paradox of sin is that we cannot simply will ourselves to the virtues we need to escape patterns of sin. This is how we end up in vicious cycles. As Paul explains in Galatians 5, self-control is ultimately a fruit of the Spirit's work in us. However, the philosophers and theologians of the virtue tradition have argued that there are indeed practices which we can undertake to pursue the virtue of *temperance* or *moderation*. Of course, the pursuit of a kind of detached *apatheia* through dietary simplicity can be found in

[20] See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 46-47.

non-Christian thinkers,[21] but it is unique to the Christian tradition to stress the spiritual dimension of what Dennis Okholm has called "the psychological serenity that comes with moderation and simplicity."[22] The writers of the Christian monastic tradition knew that gluttony is, above all else, an expression of inordinate and often inarticulate desire, a sort of *Sehnsucht* which is difficult to verbalize and even more difficult to diagnose and treat. They also knew, however, that gluttony does have its remedies. But be warned: this medicine is a strong tonic.

Fasting: "Integrity of mind is closely connected with an empty stomach."[23] Unfortunately, there's no two ways about it: overcoming gluttony starts with the practice of fasting. The reasons for this, of course, are not too difficult to understand: if we are going to stand any chance of refusing the impulses of our more destructive appetites, then we'll need to begin by saying "No" to our fleshly appetites, even if only in small ways. The good news is that we can — and must — start small when engaging the discipline of fasting. Even ultra-rigorous monks like John Cassian caution against too much fasting too soon. After all, he says, some people can tolerate more deprivation than others. And, if pursued too vigorously, fasting can actually be counter-productive, eroding self-control rather than cultivating it. If you are new to fasting, Cassian offers a helpful rule of thumb: "Better is a reasonable and modest daily repast" — that is, one modest meal per day — "than harsh and lengthy fasts every now and again."[24] It's worth remembering that a regimen of regular fasting isn't just about re-orienting our relationship to food (although that's part of it), but also

[21] See, for instance, the works of the Roman stoic philosopher Seneca, such as "On Tranquility of Mind," in *On the Shortness of Life*, trans. C. D. N. Costa (New York, NY: Penguin, 2005).
[22] Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, 17.
[23] Cassian, *The Institutes*, 122.
[24] Cassian, *The Institutes*, 122.

re-training our appetites toward ultimate satisfaction in Jesus Christ and the sort of temperate moderation which reflects his humility.

The Rule of Life: Freedom through structure. At the root of gluttony — and a good many of the other vices — is a fundamental misunderstanding of freedom. Culturally, we tend to think of structure as something that inhibits our freedom, but it's no coincidence that the vices thrive where structure is lacking; the vices are born of chaos and they create chaos. We fall into the vices at least partially because they offer (what appears to be) freedom to do as we wish. But, in biblical perspective, that is not the way to flourishing. "I will walk in freedom," sings the psalmist, "for I have devoted myself to your commandments" (Psalm 119:45 NIV). The biblical writers knew something that we all too often forget: the way to perfect freedom is through *more* structure, not less.

That's why monastic communities have always organized themselves according to a "rule of life," a framework to "regulate" (the Latin for "rule" is regula) the common life of the community, dictating everything from guidelines for silence and speech to mealtimes to work schedules and appropriate dress.[25] Although the rule of life was originally designed to be practiced in religious communities, it can be readily adapted for use in a family, a workplace, or by individuals.[26] The main purpose of the rule of life was to train monks to inhabit the world in such a way as to recognize their utter and total dependence on God's abundance and grace. One of the key ways of doing this was through regular intervals of feasting and fasting, designating appropriate times for each.

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[25] Examples include John Cassian's *Conferences*, written to structure the life of monasteries in Roman Gaul in the fifth century, and Benedict of Nursia's Rule, which served as the handbook for monks at Monte Cassino in the sixth century.

[26] For more on framing a rule of life for personal use, see Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012).

As it happens, this is perhaps the most important insight for diagnosing and overcoming gluttony, because, as Evagrius of Pontus observed, gluttony is most fundamentally an expression of fear. Gluttony is born of a mindset of scarcity:

> The thought of gluttony suggests to the monk that he give up his ascetic efforts in short order. It brings to his mind concern for his stomach, for his liver and spleen, the thought of a long illness, *scarcity of the commodities of life* and finally over his edematous body and the lack of care by physicians. These are depicted vividly before his eyes.[27]

We can't stop responding to email for the same reason we cannot stop eating: because we are afraid that God won't provide our next meal. But if we slowly come to structure our days, weeks, months, and years to the rhythms of God's abundant grace and provision, we'll also come to recognize that we don't have to stuff ourselves. He will supply our daily bread. It is only through the cultivation of a temperate, well-ordered life that we can reject a frantic obsession with the "scarcity of the commodities of life." And only then can we truly "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).

[27] Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 17, emphasis mine.

Questions for Reflection

- Where do you most see gluttony present in your work?
- How do you understand the connection between food-gluttony and work-gluttony? How does this comparison help shed light on the habits of your heart and appetite?
- Ryan helpfully pointed to the mindset at the core of gluttony: scarcity. How do you experience fear of scarcity as a driver in gluttonous acts (OR habits) in your life?
- Choose a small way to begin fasting either daily or weekly. Bring the Holy Spirit into prayerful discernment of this.
- Prayerfully consider boundaries or structures that you may need to put in place to check your appetite for work.

2

My Way or the Highway

LUST

IN EVERY SINGLE FINANCE MOVIE — *Wall Street* (both the 1987 classic and its forgettable 2010 sequel), *Boiler Room*, *The Big Short*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, whatever; it really doesn't matter which one you pick — you'll find some combination of three things: piles of money, piles of women, and piles of collateral damage (ruined marriages, professional betrayals, broken friendships). The "Don Draper" type has become a dominant trope in American pop culture: a fat wallet, an affair with the secretary, and a cocktail in hand. These movies are sensationalized, sure, but they're also not too far off base. Why is it that where we find inordinate wealth and power, we often find inordinate sexuality? Well, as every Hollywood producer knows, wherever there is money, sex and power aren't far behind and wherever there is sex, power and money are usually lurking in the background.

Why? Because they share a common root: what Thomas Aquinas called *luxuria*.[28] This term is most often translated into English as "lust," but this translation has resulted in an identification of lust solely with disordered sexual desire. And it's broadly correct that, centuries before Aquinas, most spiritual writers usually did think of lust almost exclusively in sexual terms. The desert fathers and mothers, for example, mostly thought

[28] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II/I, Q. 84, art. 4.

of luxuria as a demon that "impels one to lust after bodies."[29]

That description does ring true, as everyone knows from experience. However, as Augustine (who knew a thing or two about the struggle with the demon of lust, detailed powerfully in his *Confessions*) saw, although lust perhaps most commonly manifests in sexual desire, it may have many objects.[30] What he called the *libido dominandi* — the "drive to dominate" — may express itself through demeaning and crass joking about women at the water cooler, but it's just as likely to motivate power politics and rivalry in the office.

There is no easy way to disentangle the toxic passions unleashed by the *libido dominandi*: lust, greed, *acedia*, and pride may all be coming from the same place. That's why Christian theologians have preferred to speak of the "seven capital sins" rather than the "seven deadly sins." They are "capital" vices not in that they warrant capital punishment, but because they are fountainheads of other vices. To capture this nuance, it may be helpful to translate *luxuria* a bit more broadly: *possessive excess*. So, we often imagine lust exclusively as a sexual vice, but it is not. It is a species of vice — a genus of misdirected and excessive desire that seeks to possess and control others in ways that deny their agency and dignity. This destructive possessiveness is obvious in pornography, say, but it can be harder to spot (but no less present) in a staff meeting. To resist lust in the office is not simply to cease regarding your colleagues, clients, and vendors as sexual opportunities and sexual objects (although that's certainly a good place to start); it is also to cease regarding them as means to your own ends and objects of your own ambition to be manipulated, controlled, and possessed.

So, if I don't ogle and leer at my colleagues but I still see them as

[29] Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 17. See also John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsay, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), 153-54.
[30] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), I/1, 3; cf. XIV/15, 419.

pawns to be moved around the board for my own professional gratification or as impersonal abstractions that are impeding my plans or blocking my advancement, I'm in the grip of *luxuria*.

THE ORIGINAL WOLF OF WALL STREET: ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

There's a scene in *Wall Street* where Gordon Gekko, played by a perfectly cynical Michael Douglas, is riding in the back of a limo with a protégé when he spots the first building he ever bought. "You see that building? I bought that building ten years ago. My first real estate deal," he muses. "Sold it two years later, made an $800,000 profit. It was better than sex. At the time I thought that was all the money in the world. Now it's a day's pay."[31] He's bragging, of course, but there's also a world-weariness in his voice. He has so much money (and so much sex), he's lost all sense of proportion. One can almost hear the jaded voice of the Preacher — Solomon, the most prosperous of the kings of Israel. Solomon, too, had more money than he knew what to do with. During his heyday, silver had become as common as stone (1 Kings 10:27). Like a Wall Street trader, Solomon denied himself nothing; he gave free rein to every impulse of *luxuria*: "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure" (Ecclesiastes 2:10). We might think of Solomon as the original wolf of Wall Street.

But by the end of his life, as with Gordon Gekko, the thrill was gone. That's because, at least in part, lust — for money, power, or bodies — is often born of "sheer boredom and discontent," as Dorothy Sayers has observed.[32] In Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon gives a vivid account of the diminishing returns of possessive excess, of what it looks like to give in fully to our appetites, to indulge our drive to dominate, whether

[31] *Wall Street*, directed by Oliver Stone (20th Century Fox, 1987).
[32] Dorothy Sayers, "The Other Six Deadly Sins," in *The Whimsical Christian* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1978), 158.

through sex or professional ambition. In this passage, we see the escalating and interconnected nature of the various expressions of the *libido dominandi*: lust for possessions and lust for people — both born of lust for power.

"I made great works." Solomon isn't boasting. He's lamenting. "I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. … I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-7). Eventually, as Solomon recalls, his possessions came to include people, too: "I *bought* male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. … I *got* singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man" (2:8b). We should note the possessive, clinical, dehumanizing language here: Solomon "gets" men and women (including a harem of concubines seven hundred strong) in the same way that he "gets" houses and vineyards and silver and gold. To put it another way, his lust has turned people into commodities. What's interesting, though, is that the impulse toward possessive excess manifests in a desire for possessions *before* it manifests in sex, which suggests that "lust" is not simply a flare of hormones, but something more deeply rooted and more insidious. It is in the nature of *luxuria* to objectify and dehumanize.[33]

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem" (2:9a). In the end, it wasn't really about possessions, it wasn't really about money, and it wasn't really about women. It was about power and prestige; it was about competition. In other words, behind

[33] This is especially true of erotic desire, but can apply to all expressions of the drive to dominate. On the demonic character of indiscriminate and inordinate sexual desire, see Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2012), 268-70.

all the accumulation and manipulation was the *libido dominandi*, a perverse impulse to control others born of a corrupted and perverted self-love.[34] For a time, Solomon did find pleasure in this toil (2:10), but as he goes on to explain, this is not the deep satisfaction of hard work and healthy relationships. No, this kind of pleasure turned out to be "vanity" (*hevel* in Hebrew) in the end. *Hevel* is usually translated "vanity," but it's literally the word for "smoke" or "haze." It's a suggestive image because it works on a number of levels: like lust, haze creates confusion, it blurs our vision, it clouds our judgment, and ultimately it dissipates, leaving nothing of substance behind. This is perhaps the cruelest thing about self-love: pursue it long enough, and there'll be no one else around to love.

LEAVING GRAIN ON THE MARGINS: THE REMEDY FOR LUST

As we have seen, *luxuria* is an appetite that can't be sated by possessing others; it's a thirst that can't be quenched controlling the people around us. That doesn't stop us from trying, of course. Lust isn't just a problem in the most lurid recesses of the internet, it is a problem anytime we treat other human beings as means to an end. And that means that lust is a problem at work. The *libido dominandi* rears its ugly head every time I am tempted to see other people as objects to be controlled, dominated, or even eliminated. It shows up every time that I insist on my own way on a project or when I can't bring myself to hand over control of a team or a program or consider another's creative vision. It's in the background when I accumulate accomplishments, accolades, or possessions out of a sense of competition or rivalry, when I have things simply to have them or accomplish things simply to accomplish them. It's lurking every time I take on more work than I can

[34] Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV/28, 430.

handle just so others cannot have it. The drive to possess others shows up every time I undermine a colleague, manipulate a client, or mislead a vendor. "My way or the highway" is the symptom. The underlying illness is an unruly appetite to control.

Is there any way to resist the drive to dominate? Yes, but it will take the hard work of forming an entirely new disposition which recognizes the inherent dignity and agency of other human beings. Historically, Christians have called this hard work "chastity." However, just as lust ought to be defined broadly enough to include any impulse to control others, we also need a more expansive definition of chastity. Chastity is a dirty word in our culture. Chastity, so it is thought, is for puritans and prudes; it hampers our freedom and demonizes sex. However, it may be helpful to reframe chastity as a humanizing regard for others, as Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung has done:

> Chastity is not something you need only when dating or surfing the Internet; it is a quality of one's character, evident in all areas of life. Chastity is a positive project, a project of becoming a person with an outlook that allows one to selflessly appreciate good and attractive things — most especially bodies and the pleasures they afford — by keeping those goods ordered to the good of the whole person and his or her vocation to love.[35]

We cultivate chastity when we embrace relationships that are not transactional or dehumanizing in nature, but our appetites still need to

[35] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 178.

be trained to resist our possessive impulses. How? Through practices of self-denial and celebration.

Chastity as Self-Denial: First, the hard part. Humanizing regard for others must start with denial of self, which is why Christian spiritual writers often recommend *fasting* as a first strategy to curtail the *libido dominandi*. The monk Evagrius of Pontus puts it memorably: "Weight your bread on a balance and drink your water by measure and the spirit of fornication will flee from you."[36] To translate it into a contemporary idiom: If we practice saying "no" to our physical appetites in small ways — by practicing moderation in what we eat, say, or by practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting regularly — we'll gradually improve in our ability to resist our more destructive physical appetites. Paradoxical though it seems, this negative dimension of chastity, which *appears* to limit our autonomy, is actually the first step toward greater freedom — the freedom to relate to another person without constantly calculating whether they represent a sexual opportunity or a professional conquest.
Chastity as Celebration: Solomon tried "getting" things — possessions, people, and power — and ultimately concluded that *luxuria* couldn't back up its allure with anything of substance. To treat everything and everyone as a commodity is to grab hold of *hevel*. The good news is that there is another way. Chastity starts as self-denial, but it doesn't end there. It has a positive dimension: celebration. In terms of our work, the surest way to curb the *libido dominandi* is to "leave grain on the margins" through the biblical practice of *gleaning*.

Buried in a complex of laws in the book of Leviticus is one half of "the greatest commandment": "You shall love your neighbor as

[36] Evagrius of Pontus, *Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, Ancient Christian Writers 59 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2003), 59.

yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). That sounds good in the abstract, but how were the people of Israel supposed to actually do this? According to the Law of Moses, they were to love their neighbor, in part, by *sharing the dignity and satisfaction of their work*: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God" (19:9-10). At first glance, this doesn't seem to be connected to lust. However, if we consider it more deeply, we will see that the gleaning command is a provision designed to domesticate the possessive excess of *luxuria*.

When human beings share their work instead of hoarding it, they also implicitly recognize the dignity and agency of other human beings. This is reflected, for example, in Boaz's humane treatment of Ruth, who as a widow and an immigrant was acutely vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation (Ruth 2). In this respect, gleaning is an exercise in *chastity* because it resists the impulse to control everything and, more than that, it is a way of celebrating the value of other people by sharing power with them.[37] So, if you feel the nagging urge of the *libido dominandi* in your workplace, try handing off a project to a peer, paying attention to the ideas of your colleagues, or sharing your workload (and the credit and prestige that come with it). To be chaste is to let the people around us to flourish by being who they are. It is to be able to behold and celebrate the beauty and brilliance of another person without needing to *have* it.

[37] For creative applications of the biblical concept of gleaning to postindustrial contexts, see Andy Crouch, Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 247–52.

Questions for Reflection

- How does lust tend to manifest in your work?
- Do you tend to lust after money, sex, or power most? What does this look like in your heart (internally) and in your actions (externally)?
- How have you tended to dehumanize others to obtain what you desire?
- What are two practical ways might you begin to practice chastity, first by saying "no" to something, and second by providing for or celebrating others in a specific way?

3

The Most Sensible Vice

GREED

WHAT COMES TO MIND when you hear the words "wealthy" and "greedy"? Do you think of Ebenezer Scrooge frantically tracking his accounts in a frigid office while his clerk shivers for lack of coal? Maybe you think of the "titans of industry" of America's gilded age: John D. Rockefeller, who once claimed "God gave me my money," or Cornelius Vanderbilt or Henry Ford. Perhaps our minds go immediately to the tycoons of the digital economy, the sorts of people who are literally traveling to space because there's nothing else left for them to buy on earth — Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos. As a child of the 1980s, the image that sticks with me most is of Scrooge McDuck launching off of a diving board into a pool filled with gold doubloons.

The point is this: whatever or whoever we might think of when we think of greed, we almost certainly do not think of ourselves. And that's partially because the definition of "wealthy" is fluid and subjective. Studies have shown that, for almost all Americans across every tax bracket, the definition of "rich" basically equates to "slightly more than I have." The journalist Danielle Kurtzleben, summarizing these studies for *Vox*, puts it bluntly: "Americans are often described as individualistic, but we are also remarkably prone to defining ourselves into the vast middle of the economic pack. The people above us — wherever we

are on the income scale — are the truly rich people, how we see it." [38] That's the trouble with defining "greed," especially in comparison to the other capital vices. When it comes to wrath, say, or lust, you know it when you see it. But with greed, unless you are Elon Musk, there's always someone else above you on the ladder. Even when we are objectively, unquestionably wealthy, we can always make the (quasi-) plausible claim that we are not *really* rich, comparatively speaking.

And this is precisely what makes greed one of the most insidious vices; we simply don't see ourselves as wealthy, and certainly not greedy. No, greed is a vice for *other* people. When a corporate executive or a powerful politician finagles their finances to avoid paying income tax, *that's* greed. When we scheme and scrape and scrimp, even when it makes us negligent of or cold toward the needs of the people around us, that's merely frugality or fiscal responsibility. We are not being greedy, we tell ourselves, we're simply being sensible. And that's the rub. Greed is the most *sensible* of the vices because it can masquerade as prudence, a fact which is not true of the other vices.

As the great monastic writers of the Christian tradition well knew, we can easily justify greed precisely because it seems so reasonable. For example, here's John Cassian describing the greedy monk: "Once [avarice], then, has possessed a monk's lax and lukewarm mind, it begins by making him concerned about a very small sum and sets out for him certain justifiable, so to speak, reasonable grounds for holding money back and keeping it for himself."[39] After all, the monk may think to himself, what if I get sick and have nothing set aside for my medical expenses? Evagrius of Pontus identified the same impulse in the desert:

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[38] Danielle Kurtzleben, "How Americans define 'rich,' in one chart," *Vox*, March 2, 2015, https://www.vox.com/2015/3/2/8125629/middle-class-rich-US.
[39] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), 171.

"Avarice suggests to the mind a lengthy old age, inability to perform manual labor (at some future date), famines that are sure to come, sickness that will visit us, the pinch of poverty, the great shame that comes from accepting the necessities of life from others."[40]

We should notice that both Cassian and Evagrius describe greed in terms eerily similar to "paying into my 401(k)" or "building up my HSA" or "having a plan for when I can no longer live independently." We do not typically regard saving for retirement, securing insurance for unexpected accident or loss, or the pursuit of financial independence as *vicious* choices — and perhaps they aren't.

But they can be, and that's why any thoughtful Christian must interrogate their motives for the pursuit of financial security and, more than that, their entire posture toward money in general. Because the truth is, when Paul warns that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Timothy 6:10), he's not talking to someone else, someone higher up on the ladder. He's talking to us.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVILS: GREED AND CHRISTIAN MIS-FORMATION

Greed can take on dramatic proportions — Enron executives frantically selling their shares while ordinary employees are unwittingly losing their retirement savings, for example, or lobbyists working so that tobacco companies can sell e-cigarettes to children — but it rarely does. For most people, greed is much more subtle than that, as John Cassian observed in his monks some fifteen centuries ago. Typically, said Cassian, greed takes three basic forms:

[40] Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publishers, 1972), 17. See also Cassian, The Institutes, 172.

> There are three kinds of avarice. The first does not permit the renunciant [that is, those who have taken monastic vows] to be deprived of their wealth and property. The second persuades us by a still greater covetousness to take back what we have dispersed and distributed to the poor. The third demands that we long for and acquire what in fact we did not possess before.[41]

Although you and I don't live in a monastery or a convent, it won't take too much imagination to recognize these three forms of greed in our daily work: the refusal to let go of what we have, the temptation to take back what we've given, and the craving to acquire things we don't have and don't need. It is because greed is a hydra — many-headed, taking on different forms in different people and contexts. It is at the root of all kinds of evils, threatening to mis-form us away from the image of Jesus Christ.

We can be sure that greed has taken root in us, says Cassian, when we feel an intractable resistance to being separated from our wealth. Greed, in other words, often manifests as a tenacious tightfistedness, a reluctance to part with even modest sums of money. This is greed of the *miser*, although it doesn't always look like Ebenezer Scrooge, cruel and contemptuous. It can also look like the rich young man, who walks away from Jesus not angry, but sad, since he's unwilling to surrender his possessions (Mark 10:17-22). What does this look like at work? It could show up, for example, in an ability to hand over projects to other people (particularly if there's a commission involved).

More broadly, greed is at work anytime we feel a compulsion to keep working because we're worried about what we'll lose, whether it's

[41] John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 191.

a bonus, financial security, or a promotion.

As Jesus warned, serious discipleship involves counting the cost (Luke 14:25-33). Sometimes we are simply unwilling to pay the cost, and sometimes we miscalculate it. And that brings us to Cassian's second species of avarice: the temptation to take back what we've already given. Now, only the most brazen penny-pincher would literally ask to recoup money or possessions already dispersed. But, as Cassian explains, there is a *cunning* to greed, a craftiness often disguised as shrewdness in business. This second manifestation of greed is the greed of the *shark*, and it can be characterized broadly as any kind of shady dealing that deceives or takes advantage of others. As with all the capital vices, greed gives birth to a whole brood of sub-vices; its offspring, says Cassian, include "lying, fraud, robberies, perjuries, false witness, violence, and inhospitality."[42] So if, for instance, I am ruthless at work — scheming, calculating, manipulating — I'm in the grip of greed, just as I am if I find myself bending the truth or misrepresenting the facts in order to gain a material or financial advantage in my work. And if I find that I am creating an inhospitable work culture, the culprit is most likely avarice.

Probably the most obvious expression of greed is the third: a craving to acquire that which is not, and never was, ours. In its terminal stages, greed looks not so much like a sulking young man unwilling to part with his riches, but like a hardened and cynical king Ahab, seizing the ancestral land of a common peasant (1 Kings 21:1-16). Why? Simply because he wants Naboth's vineyard and simply because he can take it. You and I are not ancient monarchs who can simply confiscate property by fiat, but we are prone to the same impulses toward comparison, covetousness, and acquisitiveness. This is the greed of the

[42] Cassian, *The Conferences*, 198.

mogul, and it calcifies us into a posture of competition — constantly comparing the size of our companies, our annual salaries, our revenue, our reach and influence. It exhausts us through "grinding" in all of its forms. It turns us into human calculators who think transactionally, where even human relationships are subject to a cost/benefit analysis. It drains our work of intrinsic vitality, as we perform only when there is sufficient financial incentive to do so. It lures us into the grievous sin of partiality (James 2:1-9), with preferential treatment going to "important donors" or "important clients" or "important partners."

BREAKING THE SPELL OF MAMMON: THE REMEDY FOR GREED

To make matters worse, in a society whose economy needs unchecked consumption and accumulation as its fuel, greed is quite often elevated as a virtue. "Greed is good!" declares Gordon Gekko in his most iconic scene.[43] This perverse confusion of vice and virtue signals that greed isn't simply a matter of malformed habits (although it is that); it's enslavement to a foreign god. The remedy will not involve making some minor tweaks to our habits; it will require a complete overhaul of our relationship to wealth.

"No one can serve two masters," taught Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Jesus' radical teachings on money are rooted in a central paradox: *We tend to think of money as a servant, but Jesus thought of it as a master*. In other words, we think we are using our money but, according to Jesus, it's much more likely that our money is using us. Jesus personifies money as Mammon — a pagan god of unquenchable consumption and the embodiment of what we

[43] *Wall Street*, directed by Oliver Stone (20th Century Fox, 1987).

might today call commercialism or materialism. While the origins of the Greek term are somewhat unclear, "Mammon" is probably related to the Aramaic for "that in which one trusts."[44] In other words, a god. Jesus doesn't see money as "neutral," as we so often do. He sees it as a slave-driver.

"Those who make idols become like them," says David in Psalm 115. Like any false god, Mammon has incredible power to remake us in its image — to make us cruel and small and tightfisted and paranoid. As it happens, this is a fair description of how greed mis-forms us. Theologian Karl Barth once described Mammon as a "lordless power": a product of human culture that has somehow gotten too powerful for us. Barth captures the poisonousness of greed, which is an attempt to secure our identities through accumulation: "A person's money, as the symbol of his ability, is for himself and others, by a conventional fiction, his measurable economic capacity. Economically speaking, he is worth what money he either has, or earns through his work, or has prospects of (e.g., by inheritance). In short, he is to the degree that he can pay, that he is credit-worthy."[45] To put it another way, Mammon is "enchanting." It casts a spell over us. Is there any way to break it?

It will not be easy. In his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and in the entire shape of his ministry and mission, Jesus is not simply giving us some ideas for how to be nicer people. He is inviting us into the very life of God, whose nature it is to share himself with others. Jesus is offering a vision of something beyond the Gospel of Mammon, a way of radical freedom through radical sacrifice. The way to abundant life, the kind of life that participates in the life of God himself, lies through the hard practices of generosity and gratitude, as we shall

[44] Friedrich Hauck, "μαμωνάς," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:388.
[45] Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 313.

see below. But first, we must allow Jesus to radically reframe the way we regard the world.

Musing over the billowing smokestacks of the industrial revolution, which was making some rich and many very poor, British philosopher Thomas Carlyle warned that England was growing increasingly "spell-bound" by a "horrid enchantment" with what he called "the Gospel of Mammon."[46] Jesus, if we have ears to hear, offers a way of breaking the spell, of trading what Eugene McCarraher has called the "misenchantment of Mammon"[47] — a sort of *dys-angelion* peddling false promises of salvation through accumulation — for a true enchantment with God's good world. Greed views the world through a lens of scarcity, which is a way greed tempts us to hoard. But that's not how Jesus saw the world. For him, the world is a place not of scarcity but abundance, teeming with life and beauty.

Jesus is carefree in a way that is inconceivable to those of us who scramble each month to pay our mortgage, stash money for retirement, and buy things we want but don't need. He lives in an almost preposterous trust that the world is positively *enchanted*, absolutely suffused with the good gifts of the Creator God, whom he called his Father. And his Father will not give his children a scorpion when they need an egg (Luke 11:11). "Look at the birds of the air," he says. "They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." And what about the lilies of the field? "They neither toil nor spin." Well, fine. But birds and lilies don't have to be sensible.

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[46] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915), Book III, Chapter II.
[47] Eugene McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2019), 5.

They don't have life insurance policies and they don't have to send their kids to college. Is it possible for a human being in the twenty-first century to live like a wildflower in the first? Now the hard part.

Generosity: The way to the life of God, according to Jesus, is through generosity, which requires, in literal terms, adopting practices that separate us from our money. "To displace Mammon and dethrone his power," writes Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, "involves an agenda of hope and love, rejecting the idea that we only value what we measure, or that we hang on to what we have, keeping it from others."[48] Another way to say it, as Dennis Okholm has done, is that we must learn to "profane money" by denying "its power and sacred character," destroying it by grace.[49] One of the ways that we overcome the vice of greed is by "profaning money," and we do that by refusing to be *enchanted* by it. We make it ordinary. And we make it ordinary by giving it away, using less of it than we need, by refusing to look to it to meet our every desire and insulate us from our problems.

Gratitude: Of all the ways to describe the pernicious effects of sin (and there are many), Martin Luther offers perhaps the most vivid. Living as we do under the curse of Adam and Eve's rebellion, "our nature is so *curved in upon itself* at its deepest levels that it not only bends the best gifts of God toward itself in order to enjoy them ... [but even] 'uses' God in order to obtain them, but it does not even know that, in this wicked, twisted, crooked way, it seeks everything, including God, only for itself."[50] Another way to say it is that we are supposed to be "convex" creatures — curved outward so that the blessings we receive

[48] Justin Welby, *Dethroning Mammon: Making Money Serve Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 6-7.
[49] Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 90.
[50] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 159, emphasis mine.

from God are reflected out into the world around us — but, through sin, we have become fatally bent into "concave" creatures — curved *inward* so that we use all things, including God, for ourselves. Greed is, in the final analysis, a heart bent in on itself.

How do we become un-bent? Gratitude is a good place to start, because gratitude displaces the self from the center of existence by naming gifts for what they are: sheer grace, not something that we have earned, not something to be controlled and accumulated. Even small practices, such as keeping a journal in which we express our gratitude to God or hand-writing notes where we express our gratitude to others, can begin the process of un-bending. And when we start to practice gratitude, generosity will slowly begin to come more naturally.

And why do generosity and gratitude matter in the end? Because the practices of generosity and gratitude as envisioned by Jesus aren't just nice things to do, although they are that. And they're not simply an index of our discipleship, although they are that, too. Generosity and gratitude are ways that we enter into the very life of God. They are practices of divine "trickle-down" economics, where God's ludicrous abundance showers onto us, overflows the bounds of our narrow concerns and professional interests and ambitions, and cascades into the lives of our colleagues and workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our communities. Above all, the practices of generosity are a glimpse into a future in which Mammon has been dethroned. It's a future the prophet Isaiah foresaw long ago, where "everyone who thirsts can come to the waters; and he who has no money can come, buy, and eat. Where all can come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

Questions for Reflection

- How does greed differ from the other vices? Why is it easier to hide or to justify greedy motives and actions?
- Rather than seeing greed as relative and based in "comparing up," how might you redefine greed at the level of the heart?
- Where do you see greed present in your work posture or habits?
- Choose an action you can take this week or before the end of the month that promotes generosity and a loosening of your grip on money, possessions, or security.
- Spend a few minutes each morning, before lunch, before dinner, and before bed practicing gratitude. Notice what happens. Do you feel yourself becoming less concave and more convex?

4

When the Workday Drags

ACEDIA

IF YOU'VE EVER HAD a job that consists mainly of staring at screens and generating vague business reports, chances are you're a fan of Mike Judge's *Office Space*, released in 1999. Although *Office Space* disappointed at the box office, it has gone on to achieve cult status over the decades, in part, I think, because it captured the disillusionment, cynicism, and sheer tedium of work during the dot-com era. The protagonist of the film — if one can call him that — is Peter Gibbons, a disaffected programmer who spends his days in his cubicle mindlessly crunching code for a bland corporation called Initech. In one memorable scene, a pair of hapless business consultants, both named Bob, ask Peter to describe his typical workday. Peter struggles to explain what he actually *does* in his job:

> I generally come in at least fifteen minutes late. I use the side door — that way, [my boss] can't see me. After that, I just sort of space out for about an hour. Yeah, I just stare at my desk. But it looks like I'm working. I do that for probably another hour after lunch, too. I'd say in a given week, I probably only do about fifteen minutes of real, actual work.

[51] *Office Space*, directed by Mike Judge (20th Century Fox, 1999).

But he's quick to qualify that he's not just a slacker. "The thing is, Bob, it's not that I'm lazy; it's that I just don't care."[51]

As the film unfolds, we learn that Peter's laziness is just the tip of the iceberg; his real problem lurks much further beneath the surface. In a session with his therapist, he openly fantasizes about being lobotomized, asking whether there is some kind of pill that will simply "zonk him out" during the workday. The reason? "Ever since I started working," he explains, "every single day of my life has been worse than the day before it. So that means that every single day that you see me — that's on the worst day of my life."

Peter eventually goes berserk, demolishing his cubicle, openly defying his boss, and ultimately refusing to come to work at all. *Office Space* is funny, but it's also not. And that's because it's true. Ostensibly, Peter is a symbol of what the ancients called acedia (the vice of "sloth" or "laziness"[52]), but only in a superficial sense. The genius of *Office Space* is that it knows that Peter's physical sloth is just an outward symptom of a much more serious sickness of the soul: what theologian R. J. Snell has called "metaphysical boredom."[53]

Of all the capital vices, *acedia* poses the most serious threat to our work. That's because, in the words of Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *acedia*, at its root, is "resistance to the demands of love."[54] When we are in the grip of *acedia*, even our most basic commitments — showing up for work on time, staying on task while we're there, taking out the trash, changing diapers — seem intolerable. *Acedia* saps us of our strength, drains us of our motivation. But, paradoxically, it can also produce a

[52] Although the Greek word *acedia* literally means "not caring," it has come into English as "laziness" or "sloth." While these translations capture some dimensions of acedia, they leave others out, as I will demonstrate below.
[53] See R. J. Snell, *Acedia and Its Discontents: Metaphysical Boredom in an Empire of Desire* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015).
[54] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 91.

kind of frantic hyperactivity and perpetual distraction. Unproductivity at work — scrolling the Internet, say, or watching YouTube on the clock — is a symptom of *acedia*, but so is the insatiable drive for professional achievement and recognition. Strange as it sounds, *acedia* can come upon us like a fever that makes us too exhausted to sleep.

How can we learn to diagnose *acedia* in our work? What are the signs and symptoms? And when is it time to call a doctor? To answer these questions, we'll need the wisdom of the desert, of monks and nuns with a lifetime of experience of dealing with what they called the "noonday demon" of sloth. As we'll discover, maybe the cubicle isn't all that different from the monastic cell.

"THERE'S A LION IN THE STREETS!": ACEDIA AS LAZINESS

As it happens, anyone who has read the Bible has met Peter Gibbons before; only, he goes by a different name in the book of Proverbs: "the sluggard." "As a door turns on its hinges," we're told in Proverbs 26:14, "so does a sluggard on his bed."

Have you ever felt like this? There are many workdays when I simply don't feel like getting out of bed at all — and I suspect I'm not the only one. If the sluggard does finally manage to get up and crawl to work, he finds that, like a lost puppy, his *acedia* has followed him to his desk.

We all know what this is like. The workday begins to drag, and we find ourselves constantly glancing at the clock, dispirited to see that only eleven minutes have passed. Monks knew the feeling, too. Here's Evagrius of Pontus, one of the spiritual leaders of a band of hermits who devoted themselves to a life of prayer in the Egyptian wilderness in the fourth century, describing an attack from the "noonday demon":

> The demon of *acedia* — also called the noonday demon — is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour [3:00pm, the customary dinner hour for monks], to see if perhaps [one of the brethren appears from his cell].[55]

If we swap out "cell" for "desk," the parallels between the agitation of a desert monk and our own boredom at work are uncanny: hitting a wall between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., interludes of catatonic staring out the window, compulsive refreshing of our email inbox, inability to focus on tasks, frequent trips to the water cooler to see if anyone else is also not working, counting down the minutes until 5:00 p.m.

All of this describes what Jean-Charles Nault has called the "temporal dimension" of sloth, the experience of the workday as interminable, which is an initial symptom of early-stage *acedia*.[56] This is bad enough, but Proverbs warns that the sluggard's physical laziness is really a sign of much more serious spiritual unhealth. "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!'" (26:13). Like Peter Gibbons, the sluggard is a farcical character, and the author

[55] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 18-19.
[56] Jean-Charles Nault, O.S.B., *The Noonday Demon: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of Our Times*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2015), 30.

of the proverb intends for us to laugh at him … but only to keep from crying. Notice how absurd the image is — lion attacks in central Jerusalem are about as common as bear attacks in downtown Denver (*possible*, I suppose, but just barely) — and notice, too, how preposterous an excuse this is.

But what is the sluggard really afraid of, and from what is he really excusing himself? He is not afraid, it seems to me, of failure; he's afraid of success. And he's just not excusing himself from work, but from the very expectation of rising to the challenge of living a fully human life. A distaste for work is only the symptom; the underlying illness is what Søren Kierkegaard termed "the despair of weakness," which he described as a failure to even try to explore the full range of one's abilities. *Acedia*, says Kierkegaard, convinces us to stay in the basement of a magnificent, multi-leveled house God has built for us to occupy.[57] Have you ever resisted taking on a professional project because of the responsibility it would create? Have you gotten comfortable in a basement office when your skills would be better used in a larger role? Have you grown content doing the bare minimum required of you by your job? These are signs that *acedia* is starting to progress.

"YOU ARE DISTRACTED AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS": ACEDIA AS DISTRACTION

Acedia is the most paradoxical of the vices, and that's because it can show up in our lives and in our work both as physical laziness and as the exact opposite: hyperactivity. "Not only can *acedia* and ordinary diligence exist very well together," explains Josef Pieper, "it is even true that the senselessly exaggerated workaholism of our age is

[57] See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 43, 49-67.

directly traceable to *acedia*."[58] That's not as strange as it sounds. Why do we fidget with our hands, click our pens incessantly, tap our feet, or check our phones several times a minute? Because we are bored, and when we are bored, we can't sit still. Why do we cram our schedules full of work meetings, take on more projects than we can handle, and constantly update our resumes? It may be because we are driven, of course, but it may also be because we are bored. *Acedia*, in its terminal stages, is above all the inability to sit still.

This kind of restless boredom was something the desert monks knew better than most. Not only does the "noonday demon" make the workday feel fifty hours long, says Evagrius,

> it further instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labor. … This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities, more readily find work and make a real success of himself. … [The demon] leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight.[59]

In the same vein, John Cassian, who oversaw a monastic community in early-medieval France, described *acedia* as a kind of spiritual wanderlust, tempting the monk with romanticized dreams of "far-off and distant monasteries more suited to progress and more conducive to salvation."[60]

[58] Josef Pieper, *On Hope*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1986), 54-55.
[59] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, 19.
[60] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), 219.

In short, *acedia* ultimately makes us resent our work because it makes us *hate our place*. *Acedia* tempts us to think if we were just somewhere else — a different position, a different company, a different industry — then we would finally begin to flourish. What these monks are describing is a kind of frantic overactivity devised to distract us from our dissatisfaction with our current station in life. So, paradoxically, sometimes we throw ourselves into our work as a way of escaping from it. If the sluggard of Proverbs 26 is the face of early-stage *acedia*, then Martha the sister of Lazarus is the face of late-stage *acedia*. In Luke 10, we find Martha rushing around the house, "distracted with much serving," resentful of her sister, who is simply sitting quietly at Jesus' feet. As we will learn with the death of her brother in John 11, chronic busyness was a persistent problem for Martha. Martha uses work as a drug, a palliative to numb her to her disappointment, anxiety, and grief. Martha is so frenzied, says Jesus, because she is "distracted and troubled about many things."

There is a Martha in each of us. That's why we need to pay attention to the story our resume is telling. Are you restless to pursue other professional opportunities, especially opportunities that are new and exotic? Do you make frequent career changes? Is your resume dotted with a long series of short stops? Are you obsessed with achievements and promotions? Do you find that you can't stop to enjoy your accomplishments before moving on to the next challenge? Do you leave a trail of half-finished projects in your wake?

If you answered "yes" to most of these, *acedia* has entered its terminal stages. It's time to call a spiritual physician.

SITTING STILL: THE REMEDY FOR ACEDIA

The desert monks considered *acedia* the deadliest of the vices, capable of even more destruction than lust or wrath or greed. They

also considered it the most difficult to overcome. What should we do when the "noonday demon" sinks its claws into us in the middle of a meeting, the middle of a workday, the middle of a career? There are at least three virtues and practices we can cultivate to withstand the onslaught of sloth in our work.

Courage: Stay in the fight. John Cassian describes the "noonday demon" as having two principal strategies: he wants to make you *sleep* and he wants to make you *flee*.[61] In other words, *acedia* tempts us to drop out of the fight either by doing the bare minimum and going through the motions at work ("sleeping") or by giving up on our vocation altogether ("fleeing"). How should we respond? By staying in the fight. The ancients called this *hypomonè*, which in Greek literally means "to bear under it." We might translate it as steadfastness or perseverance. To exercise to *hypomonè* is to "stay in your cell": to literally stay at your desk until the task is done. *Hypomonè* may mean staying at your company or in your industry through a season of dissatisfaction or unfulfilling work. *Hypomonè* is the courage to bear under the circumstances in which you find yourself in this season of life. Stay in the fight. Resist the urge to flee through quitting or through hyperactivity.

Stability: Learn to sit still, physically and spiritually. Many writers in the Christian tradition have noted that *acedia* often manifests physically, since restlessness of body often mirrors restlessness of spirit. What does that look like in our work? In the time since I've begun writing this paragraph, I've gotten up to look out the window (twice), wandered over to the fridge to see if any new snacks have been added since I checked thirty minutes ago (they haven't), checked my email

[61] John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 192.

an unreasonable amount of times, and stared at my calendar app for a while. I can't sit still because I can't get my thoughts together; sometimes, overcoming *acedia* means sitting physical still *until* our thoughts come together.

This is a clue to the deeper spiritual value of "sitting still": what the monk Benedict of Nursia called "stability." Theologian Rowan Williams has defined this kind of stability as "learning to sit still with whatever company arrives."[62] One remedy for *acedia* in our work is precisely this discipline of simply sitting still with whomever or whatever it is waiting for us when we get to work on Monday morning: an irritating coworker, an unfinished project we've been dreading, an inbox brimming with emails that need our attention. To put it another way, stability means being more like Mary and less like Martha. Take a breath. Sit still.

Celebration: Pay attention to moments of joy in your work. The "noonday demon" wants to "bleach" your life and your work: to drain it of energy, beauty, vibrancy, color.[63] When we are in the grip of *acedia*, even the things that once brought us satisfaction, like a professional accomplishment or solving a problem at work, seem dull. I still remember what I felt when I first saw something I had written appear in print: *nothing*. Although I had worked very hard on the piece, agonized over it, the "noonday demon" swept in and stole the joy and pride I should have felt in completing it.

It's counterintuitive, but *acedia* cannot be overcome with more work, although that's our first impulse. It's critical for us to recognize that laziness is only a superficial symptom of this vice; the root cause of the illness is a loss of joy in the goodness of God's world. We often feel

[62] Rowan Williams, *The Way of St. Benedict* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020), 6.
[63] The image of "bleaching" is R. J. Snell's. See *Acedia and its Discontents*, chapter 4.

exhausted by over-activity because we've been using the wrong remedy, which actually exacerbates the symptoms: "The opposite of acedia is not industry and diligence, but magnanimity and that joy which is a fruit of the supernatural love of God."[64] According to Genesis 1-2, work is a gift of the wise Creator God, and it is meant for human flourishing. Now, because our world is marred and ravaged by sin, we don't always experience our work in this way. But even in the midst of our toil, there are flashes of divine grace. *Acedia* doesn't want you to see them, so you need to be consciously looking for them. Stop to celebrate an achievement before moving on to the next project. Name and record moments where God has met you through your work. Remind yourself constantly that God is sending you into your workplace as an ambassador to bring his joy, peace, and reconciliation.

[64] Pieper, *On Hope*, 54.

Questions for Reflection

- Where/How do you most experience *acedia* creep into your workdays?

- What is a recent accomplishment you achieved in your work or personal life—how did you feel about it once it was completed? How did you respond to completing it?

- When *acedia* manifests in your work, do you tend more toward inactivity or hyperactivity?

- Sit still for 5-10 minutes in prayer and reflection. How do you sense the Holy Spirit is asking you to respond to this chapter?

5

The Signature Vice of Saints

VAINGLORY

OF ALL THE VICES, the demon of vaingloriousness is perhaps the most paradoxical. For a start, as many writers in the Christian tradition have noted, it is the one vice that primarily targets those who are already virtuous. In other words, it is the signature vice of saints. "It is a most savage beast," explains Cassian, "fiercer than all those previously mentioned, greatly trying the perfect and ravaging with its cruel bite those who are nearly established in the perfection of virtue."[65] This in itself tells us something important about pride: it is a snare that lies only in the path of virtue. And not only that: it is also perilously easy to mistake it for a virtue.

This, of course, is precisely what has happened in American work culture. In that world, pride goes by many names: assertiveness, decisiveness, confidence, boldness, determination, aggressiveness, self-reliance. This lionizing of vaingloriousness, to which Dennis Okholm has given the facetious label "self-esteemia,"[66] has become commonplace in our culture over the past several decades, but it has deep roots in the Western intellectual tradition. According to some

[65] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 58 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 2000), 255.
[66] Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 160.

of the philosophers who have most influenced modern thought in the West, from Aristotle and Seneca to David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche, the virtuous person will carry themselves with a kind of swagger that distinguishes them as superior to "regular" people.

For example, Aristotle taught that the man of virtue must possess "magnanimity" — literally "largeness of mind" — which is a kind of self-assurance that is not much interested in praise or criticism because it doesn't take the trivial opinions of ordinary people seriously.[67] These themes resurface over 2,000 years later in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, who regarded humility as a ploy of the weak to hamstring the strong. "It is absurd to ask strength not to express itself as strength," he wrote, "not to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master ...."[68] I don't know whether Nietzsche is on the syllabus in many MBA programs, but his "survival of the fittest" ethic would be right at home in the hyper-competitive marketplace. In the moral universe of the marketplace, then, humility is no virtue; on the contrary, it actually prevents great people from giving free rein to their greatness. But it's not just that. As the Scottish philosopher David Hume argued in the 18th century, the "monkish virtue" of humility is, to put it crudely, a career-killer:

> Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment?[69]

[67] On magnanimity, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 1124a9.
[68] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.13.
[69] David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.1.1.

If Hume were writing today, he might well ask: *Humility: What is it good for? It doesn't bolster your LinkedIn profile. It doesn't pad your résumé. It doesn't instill confidence from your team. It keeps you from living the good life. And worst of all: it makes you an absolute bore at a cocktail party.*

Or, if you prefer more contemporary philosophers, here's Green Day: "Nice guys finish last."

It's hard to argue. Just take a look at Jesus' pathetic business career. He never owned a home. Never got a promotion. People walked all over him. He died a penniless loser. And yet, if the Scriptures are to be believed, *his* is the kind of life that we are meant to emulate.

The great Christian bishop and theologian, Augustine of Hippo, once received a letter asking him the most important virtue in following the way of Jesus. In his response, Augustine noted that there is not one key virtue, but three: "In that way the first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility."[70] But where does this leave us? In a culture where nice guys finish last, humility looks like weakness and foolishness. How do we work with confidence without falling into vaingloriousness? For the beginnings of an answer, we'll have to return to the original architects of the "monkish virtues" — the monks themselves.

VAINGLORY'S ROTTEN FRUIT: OBSESSION WITH APPEARANCES AND CONTEMPT FOR COLLEAGUES

As they do with the other vices, the monastic writers of the Christian tradition usually distinguish between two kinds of vainglory. We find this distinction, for instance, in John Cassian, who differentiates between "spiritual pride," which is pridefulness before God, and "carnal pride," which is pridefulness before human beings.[71]

[70] Augustine, Epistle 118.3.22, in *Letters*, trans. Wilfried Parsons, The Fathers of the Church 18 (New York, NY: Fathers of the Church, 1953).
[71] See Cassian, *The Institutes*, 267.

However, although it's not terribly difficult to draw a conceptual distinction between these two species of pride, they can be much more complicated to untangle in practice. For instance, Cassian explains, we might be "inflamed with the desire for empty praise" — a professional accolade, say, or public recognition from our boss — because we really are superficial and vain, and that's all there is to it. But it's also possible that we genuinely are virtuous and accomplished and competent and therefore secretly wish that other people would catch a small glimpse of how impressive we really are.[72] That's precisely what makes the demon of vainglory uniquely vicious. As Evagrius points out, spiritual pride typically ensnares those who already possess a large measure of hard-won virtue, achieved through disciplined struggle against the other vices.

The catch, says Evagrius, is that pride "leads them to make their struggles publicly, to hunt after the praise of men." To make matters worse, he continues, pride can actually twist our victories over vice into a perverse source of pride, perpetuating the vicious cycle.[73]

So, the demon of vainglory is full of nasty tricks. But perhaps its nastiest trick of all is its power of *delusion*. This delusion takes at least two expressions. In the first place, as Rebecca Konyndyk-DeYoung has articulated so well, vaingloriousness is not so much concerned with virtue as it is with the *perception* of being virtuous: "Rather than wanting to be excellent — like the prideful — or to be honored for our worthiness — like the ambitious — in vainglory we seek only the '*manifestation* of excellence,' that is, we want more than anything to be well known and widely known."[74]

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[72] On this theme, see Cassian, The Conferences, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 192.
[73] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 19, 24.
[74] Rebecca Konyndyk-DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 63, emphasis original.

It is not enough, then, to do good work; we must be *recognized* for our good work. It is not enough to discover a new idea; our new idea must be *published* in the top journals. It is not enough to serve our company and our community anonymously; we must be *seen* serving our companies and our communities. The demon of vainglory tempts us to believe that image really is everything and fosters a compulsive obsession with keeping up appearances.

It gets worse. In the parlance of the monks, all that concern for appearances — the fishing for compliments, the need to be praised — is merely "carnal pride." It's dangerous, to be sure, but treatable. If left unchecked, though, the demon of vaingloriousness will move to the next phase of delusion by sowing all kinds of rotten seeds that will eventually yield pride's most noxious fruit: *contempt*. If we are constantly seeking the kind of adulation that tells us we're better than other people, we'll eventually start to believe that we're better than other people.

Both Evagrius and Cassian warn that, in the end, vaingloriousness will make us cruel and contemptuous. The prideful monk, according to Evagrius, sooner or later "gets a big head in regard to the brethren, considering them stupid because they do not all have this same opinion of him."[75] Cassian puts it even more vividly, suggesting that, before long, the prideful monk will grow disgusted with the people around him and the tasks he's assigned to perform. "All of this," he will begin to think to himself, "is beneath me":

[75] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 20.

> He longs to live in a solitary cell or else, as if he could be of use to many others, to build a monastery, and he strives to gather together those whom he can teach and instruct — a bad disciple becoming an even worse master! ... He will be devoid of patience, without love, quick to inflict abuse, slow to accept it, reluctant to obey except when his desire and will anticipate the matter, implacable in receiving exhortations, weak in restraining his own will, very unyielding when submitting to others, constantly fighting on behalf of his own opinions but never acquiescing or giving in to those of others.[76]

To sum up, the pernicious vice of vainglory will slowly make an otherwise virtuous person impossible to get along with: arrogant, impatient, caustic in speech, slow to follow directions, prone to insubordination, inflexible, unresponsive to feedback, unwilling to collaborate, closed off to the ideas of other people, opinionated — basically, the worst coworker you can imagine.

The trouble is, each of us is vulnerable to the delusions of vaingloriousness, especially in our work. So, now is a good time to take stock of our posture as we bring ourselves to our work. Do I find that I don't have the ability to work (or work diligently) without the prospect of recognition? Do I have an unhealthy obsession with how I am perceived in the guild? Do I spend an inordinate amount of time cultivating my public reputation? Do I have an unruly appetite for accolades and awards? Am I unwilling to do certain kinds of work because they are "beneath me"? Am I grudging in my praise of others? Do I find that it's bitter and difficult for me to recognize the work of others in my company, field, or industry? Do I bristle any time I receive

[76] Cassian, *The Institutes*, 271-72.

critique, criticism, or feedback, even if it's constructive?

These questions bring others in their wake. If all of this is true, then is it really possible to build a career and yet remain virtuous? Can I build a résumé, own my accomplishments, and populate my LinkedIn page without falling prey to vaingloriousness? How do I advance my professional prospects without self-promotion and self-aggrandizement? And where is the line between confidence and hubris?

DROP THE ACT: THE REMEDY FOR VAINGLORY

As we have seen, both Evagrius and Cassian regard the demon of vainglory as the most formidable of the vices because it tends to waylay spiritual pilgrims who have nearly ascended to the summit of virtue. In fact, as Cassian explains, the vice of pride is so tenacious that, ultimately, humans are no match for it. No, God himself must be its adversary, and only the humility of Jesus Christ himself, who emptied himself into the form of a slave, can vanquish this champion of vices.[77] So, how is vainglory overcome, then? The answer is simple, but not easy: humility. In the words of Gregory the Great, warning prospective pastors of the great danger of pride in the sixth century: "For our enemy [that is, Satan], who shared his condition with all other things, desired to be seen as superior to them, but our Redeemer, who remained greater than all things, condescended to become small like his creation."[78] To put it another way: we are never more like our adversary, the devil, when we desire to be seen as superior to everyone around us, and we are never more like our Lord, Jesus Christ, when we "become small," almost shrinking out of view.

Okay, but how? Gregory himself acknowledged that cultivating

[77] Cassian, *The Institutes*, 258–59.
[78] Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. George E. Demacopoulos, Popular Patristics Series 34 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 132.

the humility of Jesus Christ is more art than science, especially since an unhealthy obsession with forgetting oneself can devolve into yet another vice — what Gregory called "fickleness."[79] What he means is a kind of indecisiveness born of an overly-low self-estimation. Obviously, fickleness will not help us to image Jesus faithfully in and through our work. So, the question becomes: How can I emulate the profound humility of God manifested in the person of Jesus Christ without becoming fickle, self-deprecating, and ineffectual in my work? The key to the kind of confident humility Gregory has in mind lies in the right combination of professional competence, secrecy, and gratitude. In other words, humility does not demand that we refuse to explore the full range of our capabilities so as not to grow conceited; it does demand, however, that we do the very best work we can regardless of whether anyone will ever see it.

Drop the Act: Secrecy. The humility of Jesus Christ takes expression through the Christian discipline of *secrecy*, which Dallas Willard defines as "learn[ing] to love being unknown."[80] Secrecy — this "learning to love being unknown" — appears to have been one of Jesus' obsessions, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. In that teaching, which we may understand as the founding charter for life in God's Kingdom, Jesus again and again emphasizes that true Kingdom work is done when no one is looking. When you give, says Jesus, don't sound any trumpets or slap your name on a plaque (Matthew 6:1-3). And when you pray, he continues, go into your room, close the door, and commune with your Father *who is in secret* (Matthew 6:5-6). There are few things that Jesus despises more than public religious

[79] Ibid, 134.
[80] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 172.

hypocrisy. When we hear the word "hypocrisy," we think of people who say one thing and do another, but that's not its original meaning. In fact, the word "hypocrite" is simply the Greek word transliterated directly into English. In Greek, hypocrite is the word for "stage actor" — someone who is putting on a performance for other people to see (and who, in ancient theater, always wears a mask, which means that the audience is never seeing the actor for who they really are). Once we know this, Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount takes on new shades of meaning.

For example, when Jesus warns against the religious hypocrite who loves to pray out loud at the street corners (Matthew 6:5), he may be saying more than we realize. The word Jesus uses here, *plateia*, is the generic word for "street corner," but in Jesus' time it was also the proper name for a colonnaded street in nearby Sepphoris where street performers would line the boulevard busking for money.[81] The image is intentionally absurd: it is both comical and pathetic to think of a religious hypocrite offering a long and loud prayer as a street performance. But the problem is not that the Pharisee is praying; the problem is that the Pharisee wants to be seen praying. Likewise, the problem is not *that* we do excellent or commendable work; the problem is that we want to be *seen* doing excellent or commendable work. Jesus' advice to us is simply this: drop the act.

"What do we say?": Gratitude. Anyone with young children will tell you that it's a struggle to get our kids to follow any code of social etiquette. And there are two phrases in particular which have to be coaxed out of children with a formula that will be familiar to any parent: "Now, what do we say?" We have to train our children to say "please" and "thank you" for the same reason. As theologian Miroslav

[81] See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 142.

Volf has put it, even as children, we have an "almost inborn reluctance to express gratitude" because "it is often humiliating to receive [from others]."[82] As Volf points out, saying "thank you" is an intrinsically humbling act; it means that we acknowledge the value of something that someone else has done and that their act somehow puts us in their debt.

We don't like saying "thank you" as children, and, unfortunately, we don't like it any better as adults. But this small habit of simply saying "thank you" to our colleagues, our employees, and our superiors will slowly begin to shape us into less vainglorious creatures. And, if we practice it often enough, one day we might find that we're able to do our work without anyone saying "thank you" to us. And when we can do that, we'll find ourselves a little bit closer to true greatness, which is the humility of God himself.

[82] Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 46.

Questions for Reflection

- How is vainglory unique among the vices?
- Where/How do you see the vice of vainglory creeping into your heart posture at work?
- How does it feel to do excellent work without receiving recognition? How does it feel to watch a coworker receive accolades while you receive none (but feel deserving of some)?
- What has been your perception of humility up to this point? How has this chapter caused you to think differently about it?
- Prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to be appropriately "secretive" in your work (not seeking recognition, etc.). Reassess after a week or two—how does it feel to do excellent work "under the radar"?
- Seek ways of building others up at work. Show gratitude to at least one person or team per day—say thank you, and mean it.

Conclusion

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY

SOME OF THE KEY IDEAS IN THIS BOOK were born in quarantine. In the spring of 2020, I, like everybody else, had grand ambitions of getting into shape during the lockdown. Maybe you had the same idea. And everyone *was* motivated … for about a month. And then our vices set in. On day one of quarantine, we were making ourselves kale protein shakes and going for a run. On day thirty-one, we were binging Netflix and eating an entire pint of ice cream by ourselves. It's easy to dream up vague and theoretical ideas about getting into shape. It's much harder to resolve to do it through a concrete plan — and it's even harder still to *actually* do it. That's why our culture is always trying to advertise ways of exercising through marketing designed trick us into thinking that we're not exercising.

Just listen to the names of some of the workout equipment on the market: the "Ab Glider," the "Ab Roller," the "Gazelle Glider" — as if you can just sort of glide and roll your way to the perfect body. But nothing beats the "Ab Lounge." That's actually the name of it. It basically looks like a poolside recliner crossed with a medieval torture device. And, so the theory goes, all you have to do is lay back, strap in, and lounge yourself to six-pack abs: "Scientifically designed to make the crunch as we know it a thing of the past," the commercial

promised. Well, that's not how it works, of course. There's a reason you see a lot of these gimmicky fitness machines at garage sales. Because here's the thing: there really are no shortcuts to serious physical fitness. Just so, there really are no shortcuts in the spiritual life, either.

That doesn't stop us from trying, though. We're constantly exploring shortcuts and quick spiritual fixes. *Maybe I'll try to read the Bible for a couple of minutes a day*, we think to ourselves. *And, if I can't fit that into my schedule, maybe I'll catch part of a sermon or a spiritual podcast*. We tell ourselves that we'll pray in bed as we're falling asleep. One of these days we'll get around to taking our discipleship regimen seriously: we really will make time for worship and service and the spiritual disciplines. One of these days.

Here's the sad truth. "The general human failing," in the words of Dallas Willard, "is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy. … We intend what is right, but we avoid the life that would make it reality."[83] In our heart of hearts, we know that we won't lose the weight we want to lose unless we do the boring, painful work of changes to our eating and exercise — including real, actual crunches. But, when we don't see the results we want — bulging biceps or slender thighs — within a couple of days, we give up. And we probably know, deep down, that we won't shake off the vices that have plagued us for years by spending a few minutes on the spiritual equivalent of an Ab Lounge. Conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, which is another way of describing virtue, doesn't just happen. According to the ancient voices of the Christian faith, we need to strain after it, press on toward it, train for it. We need to agonize for it.

[83] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 6.

ASKESIS OR NOTHING: THE BOXER

From the earliest days, Christians have been using athletic metaphors to describe the character and quality of the Christian life. Training metaphors are a special favorite of the Apostle Paul, who returns to the image of a race in places like 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Timothy 4. But, as we conclude our expedition out of vice and into virtue, I want to focus on 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, where we find Paul's most brutal metaphor for capturing the intensity of the Christian experience: the boxer.

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

We have domesticated this metaphor. It's true enough that we speak, as does Paul, of "fighting the good fight of faith." But what we don't see is that what Paul has in mind is the savage boxing of the ancient Greco-Roman world: no headgear, no rounds, no time limit. Roman boxers laced their leather gloves with metal studs of iron or lead. There were no weight classes. Bouts were drawn at random, so a fighter might be expected to go toe-to-toe with a much larger opponent.[84]

The word translated "athlete" in verse 25 is *agonimenos* in Greek. A rigid translation would be something like "everyone who struggles"

[84] See Erich Sauer, *In the Arena of Faith: A Call to a Consecrated Life* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1955), 53-54.

or "everyone who suffers." The Greek verb for "to compete in athletics," *agōnizomai*, literally means "to fight" or "to experience anguish"; as you can probably tell, it's the root of our English word "agony." The writers of the later monastic tradition picked up on these themes in their emphasis on askesis ("discipline"), which they saw an indispensable to Christian formation. For them, the Christian life is about learning how to take a punch. And no boxer worth his salt would dare step into the ring without having undergone months of rigorous askesis. Ask any of these writers — Evagrius, Augustine, Cassian, Aquinas — and you'll get the same answer: there is no way from vice to virtue but through the boxing ring. But, if like a fighter in training, you can hang in there, if you can endure the agony of askesis, we come to experience the ecstasy of being transformed into "a place where God happens for somebody else."[85]

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

According to Evagrius, it is the sinister tactic of the *logismoi* — the "evil thoughts" that manifest themselves as vices — to come at us in waves, raining down blows upon us until we're beaten into submission. Each of the vices packs a punch, but their strategy is not so much to knock us out with one uppercut but to wear us down as the rounds drag on. We spend our days and months and years being battered by anger and jealousy until, eventually, we are tempted to give up the fight altogether. And that is why, as most of the ancient monks agree, acedia is the final foe in the gauntlet of vices: "[The demon of *acedia*] leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to *drop out of the fight*. No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one, but only a state of deep

[85] This is the central motif of Rowan Williams's masterful study of the desert fathers and mothers: *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another* (Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2007), 24.
[86] Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 19, emphasis mine.

peace and inexpressible joy arise out of this struggle."[86] More than anything else, *acedia* wants you to quit, to stay down, to slip away into the unconsciousness of your concussed boredom. Like Mike Tyson, *acedia* wants to put you to sleep.[87] But when we stand toe-to-toe with the vices, says Evagrius, we'll find that, eventually, it is they and not we who will throw in the towel. Askesis is the grit and tenacity it takes to stay in the fight, to go the distance. It is the kind of exercise it takes to cultivate virtue and resist vice — it takes flexing our moral muscles again and again, even to the point of burnout.

For years, my imagination has been captured by a haunting work by the Greek sculptor Apollonius, who was active during the first century BC. It is titled simply "The Boxer," and it depicts a Roman pugilist at rest after a bout (Google it. Stop reading and Google it). There is a weariness to the boxer, whose body sags with a palpable fatigue and exhaustion. But there is also a defiance to him — hardened muscles and leather-bound fists. And there is, most of all, a resilience in his face: he's taken his lumps, but he's still here, still game for the fight.

I have often wondered if Paul Simon was gazing at Apollonius' sculpture as he penned some of his most famous lyrics: "In the clearing stands a boxer and a fighter by his trade / and he carries the reminders of every glove that laid him down / and cut him 'til he cried out in his anger and his shame / 'I am leaving, I am leaving,' but the fighter still remains."[88]

How do you and I become that boxer? How do we develop the kind of persistence and determination and endurance it takes to escape the deadly grip of the vices? Through askesis and training, of course. But the ultimate answer is a cliché, because it's true: the gospel of Jesus

[87] John Cassian warns that *acedia* tempts the monk to sleep, both physically and metaphorically. See *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 192.
[88] "The Boxer," track 1, side 2 on Simon and Garfunkel, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, Colombia, 1970.

Christ. At the end of the day, *grace* — and grace alone — is what allows us to get off the mat each time our vices knock us down to the canvas:

> Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. … It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes, at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, 'You are accepted. You are accepted ….'[89]

Beloved brother or sister, when you are racked with disgust for yourself, when you succumb to the same old compulsions, when you relapse into those all-too-familiar vicious cycles, when you've had about as much as you can take, remember this: *You are down, but not out*. Get off the mat. Stay in the fight. You are accepted.

[89] Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 161-62.

EVER SINCE THE FALL, WORK HAS BEEN PAINFUL.

While literal "thorns and thistles" aren't a risk for most jobs, the manifestation of sin in our work is all around us, from selfish ambition to laziness and from maximizing profit above all else to using people as a means to our own ends.

But what if our work was a way to cultivate virtue, rather than a conduit of vices? What if work was actually a way to love God and serve others?

In *Virtue and Vice at Work*, Dr. Ryan Tafilowski explores five classical vices — lust, acedia, gluttony, greed, and vainglory — and examines how they distort our everyday work. Each chapter also outlines practices to support the cultivation of virtue and transform the way we see our work, our colleagues, and our organizations.

Virtue and Vice at Work combines theological study, historical context, and practical application to redeem our work as a way to pursue renewal and shalom. Dr. Tafilowski writes,

"There is nothing more urgent than the formation of virtue because, unless we recognize our vices, name them, diagnose them, and counteract them through virtue, their momentum will pull us away from the life of God."

ABOUT RYAN TAFILOWSKI

Ryan is Assistant Professor of Theology at Denver Seminary and lead pastor at Foothills Fellowship Church in Littleton. For the past three years, he also served as theologian-in-residence for Denver Institute for Faith & Work. He holds a Th.M. in ecclesiastical history and a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Edinburgh. He has published in the areas of inter-religious dialogue, historical theology, and Christian ethics.

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